



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” (ISSN: 2654-0304) is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. 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 9th, the Netherlands suggests that Albania and Northern Macedonia should be treated differently as regards the opening of EU accession negotiations, a decision that is expected to be taken by October 15th, 2019 at the Council of Ministers. Top Channel reported that reaction of the Dutch Foreign Ministry, distributed by the Dutch Embassy in Tirana, underlines that Albania should do more in fight against organized crime and corruption. (www.top-channel.com)

- October 10th, France told its EU peers this week it is against launching membership negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania for now, diplomatic sources told Reuters, casting a shadow over the countries' ambition to integrate with the West. More than half of the EU's 28 member states, as well as its top officials in Brussels, are pushing to reward the two Balkan states for reforms by agreeing to start accession talks. They warn of Russia, China or Turkey taking advantage of a "strategic vacuum" in the troubled region should the EU fail to maintain tangible prospects for the countries there. But Paris says the EU faces too many challenges right now to let in two more states from the Balkans, a region still scarred by wars fought in the 1990s and struggling with crime and corruption. France says the EU needs to reform from the inside first to tackle with greater vigor and unity such challenges as climate change and migration, and that the two hopefuls must carry out further reforms before the start of talks can be approved. "They are not there yet. We are asking them to make additional efforts," a French official said. "Negotiation cannot be opened in October 2019, we will need to reassess situation somewhere in

2020." Unanimity among the 28 member states is required to launch accession talks. EU Ministers will discuss the matter again in Luxembourg on Tuesday before national leaders meet in Brussels for a summit on October 17th – 18th, 2019. The move was already delayed repeatedly. "This is very frustrating for most of the member states. Our credibility is at stake," said a diplomat from a country willing to open the doors to the Western Balkan candidates. "North Macedonia and Albania have done a lot. Yes, a lot more remains to be done but opening membership talks is just the first step, the process would take years and they would have to fulfill all criteria before they are allowed in." Sources said the Netherlands and Denmark are also clearly opposed to Albania's bid when EU Ambassadors discussed the matter behind closed doors in Brussels on Thursday, though the Dutch have signaled potential flexibility on North Macedonia. Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok said on Tuesday Skopje needed to pass legislation to set up an independent public prosecution body. "For the Netherlands that would have to pass in order to open accession talks," he said. (www.reuters.com)

- October 12th, the Venice Commission (VC) approved on Friday a final opinion on President Ilir Meta's decision to cancel June 30th, 2019 as an election date. In a statement, the VC notes that its experts are of the opinion that although the President may have acted beyond his constitutional powers, his actions do not justify his dismissal. Following the plenary hearing of Albanian President Ilir Meta's case on cancelling the election date, the statement mainly focuses on whether or not to dismiss Meta, as the Parliament has already set up a Special Investigative

Commission inquiry. *“While the President may have acted beyond his constitutional powers, there are indications that his actions may not have been of such a nature as to justify his dismissal,”* the statement said, referring to expert conclusions. According to the statement *“in response to the political crisis in the country and an election boycott by some major political parties, the President initially canceled and then postponed the local elections.”* The draft opinion gave a more detailed explanation of this, given that the opposition boycott was one of Meta’s arguments to cancel June 30th, 2019 as the main opposition forces did not participate in those elections. And according to experts, *“the boycott of elections by political parties, even if they represent a significant part of the electorate, cannot hinder the conduct of regular elections. Otherwise, these parties would take the power to completely hinder any elections.”* Referring to Parliament’s ruling on the case, the statement notes that *“even if the Parliament was to find that the President exceeded his powers, the Venice Commission questions whether the action was of such a character as to prove a ‘serious violation’”* while further adding that *“even if the Assembly were to determine the seriousness of the violations, this should not necessarily lead to dismissal, taking into account the power of the plenary session to consider other constitutional purposes, such as safeguarding of checks and balances and stability in the country.”* While noting that the President’s decree was not challenged before a Court, in Friday’s statement, it is underlined by the Venice Commission that *“if Parliament were to favor dismissal, it would ultimately be up to the Constitutional Court, which currently does not function, to confirm whether the President’s decisions are ‘serious’*

violations that would justify his dismissal.” On Friday, Meta’s Spokesperson Ted Blushi issued another statement, blaming the Socialist government of *“misusing”* the VC draft opinion in order to wrongly inform Albanians of the Commission’s opinion of Meta’s legitimacy and breach of the constitution. *“I will let you know and confirm with the utmost responsibility that the Venice Commission reiterated that the President of the Republic has not violated the Constitution of the Republic of Albania. The Venice Commission has also highly praised the President’s calls for dialogue and his efforts to reach a compromise between the parties that were instrumental in resolving the crisis,”* Blushi’s statement said. (www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Messages from specific EU member states are not encouraging and by taking into consideration that unanimity is necessary for the opening of EU accession talks it is estimated that time has not come yet for Albania. France, the Netherlands, and Denmark are among the states which are opposing a positive decision on Albania’s ambition. According to French officials Albanian request should be reassessed by 2020. Such a decision will bring chain reactions in domestic politics. It is assessed that Rama’s Government will not be able to survive after such a failure. Besides it is expected that opposition will harden its stance after October 18th, 2019 when EU leaders will confirm a negative decision regarding Albania. New protests are expected in Albanian streets and if Rama’s Government insists on its refusal to withdraw things may become violent. Snap elections is a very possible scenario but it remains to see if it will be decided with national consensus or it will happen through

violence. Under these circumstances Albania is an unstable country politically with a risk of violent domestic turbulence. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of “Albanian mafia” in the country and its influence in state’s politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state’s problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. What really needs the country is political stability and constitutional order for moving ahead with reforms. Besides, it is more than obvious that opening of Albania and North Macedonia accession talks will be rather a political decision based on geopolitical and geostrategic criteria instead of technical ones. Supporters of a positive decision raise the Russian, Chinese, or even Turkish threat to penetrate in the region if the EU leaders do not greenlight the accession talks in the coming summit. Albania’s role regarding Kosovo may change due to nationalist Albin Kurti’s election as the new Prime Minister of Kosovo. Besides, Rama’s move to meet Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev talking for a “mini Schengen zone” in Western Balkans was negatively criticized by Pristina. The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

October 10th, outgoing European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn urged authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to reach an agreement on the Government formation in order to start addressing priority issues as soon as possible, N1 news portal reports. Hahn met with the President of Republika Srpska entity, Zeljka Cvijanovic, and the Government formation was among the topics the two officials discussed in the meeting. “My message to all BiH leaders one year after elections; agree on the formation of Governments to start addressing priorities of EC Opinion on EU membership application and implement socio-economic reforms,” Hahn wrote on social media. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- October 11th, Bosnia and Herzegovina is leading the way in the withdrawal of European funds for infrastructural projects, according to Head of the EU (EU) Delegation in Sarajevo, Johann Sattler. Addressing the media in the northern town of Gradiska on Friday, Sattler said that over 200 million euro was invested over the past four years in the road, railway and other infrastructural projects in Bosnia. “I believe this is opposite to a cliché about Bosnia and Herzegovina lagging behind everything and everyone because in this area it is, indeed, leading the way,” he added. The Ambassador said it is possible to do a lot more and that many projects are in the preparatory stage, many of which concern the road links on the Corridor 5C. “Unfortunately, these projects are on hold and one of the reasons for that is the lack of Government formation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of this, I call on all politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina to make

resolute steps towards a solution because Brussels is impatiently awaiting results in order to resume cooperation,” said the Ambassador, following the ceremony marking the beginning of construction of the bridge, which will connect the territories of Bosnia and Croatia. He thanked political representatives in both countries for enabling this project, especially European Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc, who was in Gradiska on Friday too. *“EU makes results, brings people close and fulfils its promises. Owing to such projects, the movement of more than half million residents of the region will be easier as well as the lives of the locals in Gradiska, which is congested with current traffic frequency,”* he added. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 13th, the EU plans to discuss the issue of opening accession negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania, on Tuesday, in Luxembourg, after several months of delays and objections by France and Germany, N1 learned on Sunday. The news comes just days after EU leaders including current European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, European Council President Donald Tusk and future European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen urged EU leaders to make a decision on the matter. If the decision is confirmed, the start date of the talks could be known at the end of the week when the European Council plan to meet at the level of heads of states and governments of the European Union in Brussels. Bosnia, however, will not be on the agenda of the Tuesday meeting or the one at the end of the week. N1's sources in the European Commission said that there are no concrete developments regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina. *“We cannot speculate on when new steps will be taken regarding Bosnia and*

Herzegovina, at this moment. What is known is that the Foreign Affairs Council's conclusions on the Althea mission are expected on Monday,” the European Commission source told N1. The issue of the candidate status award to Bosnia thus remains uncertain. The EU General Affairs Council reached a brief conclusion regarding the country, in June saying *“The Council takes note of the European Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership. The Council will continue to study the document in detail and will return to it later this year. The Council encourages Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue to form the Government without further delay, with the aim of continuing necessary reforms. Party policies and a lack of desire for compromise should not block the legitimate aspirations of Bosnia's citizens to move towards the EU.”* Bosnian authorities have repeatedly asked Brussels for the candidate status during the first half of this year, but that has not happened. The General Affairs Council, which decides on this matter, will hold two more summits by the end of the year, and the European Council will hold one more in December, leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina with limited opportunity for gaining candidate status. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Lack of state's Government since October 7th, 2018 elections is an insurmountable obstacle which undermines stability and growth of the country. Not only that but it creates “fertile soil” for emerging ethnic tension and nationalistic rhetoric which is detrimental for Bosnia's sustainability. Dayton Peace Agreement has been put into question by almost everybody including Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) threatening peace,

stability, and coexistence of ethnic entities in the country. It is not a secret that political situation in Bosnia is alarming and at the moment it is considered as the most dangerous for a violent turbulence or a conflict in the region. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to "penetrate" in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Finally, NATO is rather difficult to allow a Western Balkan country to remain out of its collective security structures. Taking this into consideration, it will not be a surprise to see rapid political or even security developments in the country. As already "HERMES" has assessed Bosnia is a "captured" state with no Government, no state budget, and no growth sliming slowly but steadily towards interethnic tension conflict. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.



BULGARIA: October 7th, acquisition of the F-16V Block 70 fighter jets is not just a purchase, but a long-term partnership that enables the Bulgarian Air Force to successfully meet the new challenges in the sector, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said at a meeting with representatives of Lockheed Martin, a Government statement said. Talks were focused on the long-term co-operation that will result from

the industrial partnership program, the statement said. This is part of the fighter acquisition process and is governed by a contract between Bulgaria's Ministry of Economy and Lockheed Martin. The contract provides for the aircraft to be maintained and repaired in Bulgaria, including Bulgarian specialists, the statement said. "Jobs will also be created and unique know-how will be introduced into the Bulgarian security and defense industry," according to the statement. At the meeting, between Borissov, Randy Howard, Director of F-16 Business Development, and Lisa Herman of International Business Development for Central Europe at the company, it was noted that the F-16 are the most successful multi-purpose combat aircraft for Bulgaria and fully covers the country's defense needs, as well as for fulfilling its tasks within NATO. The fighter is in service in 28 countries around the world, including Bulgaria's neighbors Greece and Turkey. Representatives of the US company emphasized to Borissov that in Europe alone there are more than 700 F-16 aircrafts and in the world more than 4000 aircrafts have been sold, making it the best-selling military fighter and the most used in real military action. "Bulgaria is successfully fulfilling its commitment to defense investment agreed at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales," Borissov said. He said that since the beginning of 2018, Bulgaria had been actively implementing the national plan to increase defense spending to 2024. "With the purchase of 8 F-16V Block 70 aircraft this year, this goal has already been achieved and by the end of 2019 defense spending is expected to exceed 3% of GDP," Borissov said. At the meeting, which was also attended by Finance Minister Vladislav Goranov, it was also discussed Bulgaria's industrial partnership with the US company developing talents in science and

engineering in the sector. Lockheed Martin is also scheduled to provide Bulgaria's Air Force Academy with state-of-the-art training for pilots and mechanics under programs designed by the US Air Force. This would allow Bulgaria to educate a whole new generation of pilots, which is one of the most important results of the country's partnership with the US company, the Government statement said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- October 9th, Bulgaria supports Northern Macedonia and Albania to launch EU membership talks. The official position came from the Government meeting. However, the country has conditions. Bulgaria wants Northern Macedonia to comply with what has already been agreed between the two countries; for example, Northern Macedonia has no claim that Bulgaria has a Macedonian minority and needs to change some of the texts in geography, history and literature textbooks related to certain national heroes or events. These include Gotse Delchev and the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising. Among other conditions are the recognition of the Bulgarian character of the Slavic population in Northern Macedonia, to condemn severely the repressions against the Bulgarians after the 44th year, to end the language of hatred in the media, to give rights to people who feel Bulgarians in Northern Macedonia. Bulgaria will monitor whether northern Macedonia adheres to the treaties before supporting for Euro membership at a later stage. (www.novinite.com)

- October 12th, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said that he would urge EU leaders to stop their “incessant invective” against Turkey. Borissov announced this in a video on social media, against the background of the criticism by

EU leaders of Turkey's military offensive in northeastern Syria against Kurdish fighters. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to respond to EU criticism by allowing millions of refugees to cross his borders into Europe. “I will insist that colleagues in Brussels stop this incessant invective, because Brussels is far away but the Turkish border is here, and there are nearly four million refugees there,” Borissov told journalists. “Brussels is far away, and Turkey – close – no fence, no measures can stop the migrants if they start letting them go,” he said. Borissov's remarks on Saturday were in line with his message the day before, claiming that Bulgaria and Turkey maintain good-neighborly relations and that he maintains cordial contact with Erdogan, against the reluctance of EU leaders. He said that Turkey is currently strictly adhering to its agreement with the EU about refugees and the migration pressure on the Bulgarian border was zero. Bulgaria has no plans to build new refugee camps to deal with a possible flow of refugees from across the Turkish border, Borissov said. “In this tense environment, we will rely on diplomacy and goodwill towards Turkey,” he said, urging his colleagues in Brussels to follow this path. Borissov said that he saw no point in building or preparing for camps, when solution lay in diplomacy, pressure, a ceasing of hostilities and bringing events in Syria under control. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces “structural” problems, the Government is stable. Political parties are focusing on the pre-electoral period of local elections scheduled for October 27th (first round) and November 3rd, 2019 (second round).

The country adopted a rather hardline regarding North Macedonia's opening of accession negotiations with the EU aiming to force North Macedonia to close all open bilateral disputes before the EU leaders summit on October 17th – 18th, 2019 where the former Yugoslav country's European future will be decided. With the issues Bulgaria has put on the table (mainly history and geography issues) is rather difficult for North Macedonia to fully compromise before the EU summit. Bulgarian Government refused to criticize Turkish invasion in Syria differentiated by the EU keeping an open eye in possible migrant flows. In other words, Borissov urged EU to stop provoking Turkey due to the latter's threat that it will send 3.6 million migrants to Europe (through Greek and Bulgarian borders). Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: October 10th, Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandrokovic, speaking in his role as the Secretary-General of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - HDZ), commented on a statement made by Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka – Liberalni Demokrati – HNS) President Ivan Vrdoljak that his party would leave the Government's ruling coalition if teachers' wages were not raised.

Education Minister Blazenka Divjak, herself a member of the HNS, has been a vocal supporter of a pay raise for teachers, saying that the salary increase was part and parcel of the Government's ambitious curricular reforms that went into effect just weeks ago. Jandrokovic would not speculate on whether the Government could survive to the end of their mandate without the HNS in the fold. He added, however, that while his party respected the positions of their coalition partners they would not accept an ultimatum, adding that contingency plans were in place for “*every possible outcome.*” Meanwhile, Bandic Milan 365 - Labour and Solidarity Party (Bandić Milan 365 - Stranka Rada i Solidarnosti - BM 365) President Milan Bandic, who is also the Mayor of Zagreb, called on Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on Thursday to raise teachers' salaries by 17% over the next fourteen months; 6% retroactively from September 1st; 4% on January 1st, 2020; and by a further 7% on January 1st, 2021. Speaking at a press conference, Bandic extended his party's full support for teachers and their right to strike. He said his party would not leave the ruling coalition because it continued to cooperate well with the Government, adding that he trusted the Prime Minister to do the right thing. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- October 11th, Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic has refuted accusations on alleged territorial aspirations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for which she was accused by the party of Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency Chairman Zeljko Komsic, after a statement on Croatia “*from Vis to Kupres.*” “*In Bosnia and Herzegovina the problem is not nonexistent territorial aspirations, but outvoting and violation of elementary democratic and constitutional*

rights of Croats as a constituent people,” said a reaction from the President’s office. “*Grabar-Kitarovic says that Croats have two homelands, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina,*” added the statement. Komsic sharply reacted to a statement by Grabar-Kitarovic, after a win by the Croatian national football team in Split “*I am overjoyed, naturally, with the result, but also for Dalic and his players and most of all for all the people that gathered here in Split. From Vis to Kupres, all of Croatia...*” The media deemed the statement scandalous noting that it brings into question overall relations between the two countries and see it as territorial aspirations of Croatia towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. They noted that, among other things, in a statement for the public, that they see no difference between Seselj’s statements regarding Virovitice and Karlobag and last night’s statements by the current Croatian President. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- October 11th, the Conflict of Interest Commission decided with a majority vote that Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic had violated the principle of conscientious and transparent conduct because he failed to declare that Igor Pokaz was his best man when proposing him for the position of Ambassador to the United Kingdom. In debating this issue, Commission Deputy Chair Davorin Ivanjek said that no one could be considered to be objective in personal matters and underlined three principles, “*declare, exempt and delegate,*” that the Commission has insisted on since being established. Plenkovic should have declared his connection with Pokaz, he added. Commission member Aleksandra Jozic-Ilekovic, however, had a dissenting opinion and claimed that Plenkovic was not in conflict of interest because he was not the only person to decide on

appointing Pokaz. The appointment of an Ambassador is confidential Jozic-Ilekovic said and added that there was no reason why Plenkovic had to declare his personal relationship with Pokaz. The Commission unanimously decided not to launch proceedings against former public Administration Minister Lovro Kuscevic, who had been reported for making negative statements about the “*People Decide*” and the “*Truth about the Istanbul Convention*” referendum initiatives while heading the institution that checked the signature petition lists. The Commission, however, did decide to open a case against a member of the management board of the Dubrovnik airport, Frano Luetic. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■■■ :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone and Schengen Zone goals. Although teachers request for wage increase and their strike have shaken the ruling coalition it is assessed that Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic will resolve the problem without consequences. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Latest statement of the President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic in which she included Bosnia’s lands within Croatia was rather inappropriate, but as already has been assessed Croatia does not hide its ambition to interfere in Bosnia’s internal affairs as well as to express territorial claims. Besides, Croatian representative of the Bosnian tripartite presidency Zeliko Komcic is considered by Croatian authorities as an enemy of Croatian interests in Bosnia and Croatian community in the country. The country has fulfilled all criteria for joining

the Schengen area and it is expected to receive a positive assessment by the European Commission in mid-October. However, the final political decision by the Schengen Zone member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: October 7th, the Turkish drillship Yavuz will begin drilling for oil and gas southwest of Cyprus on Monday or Tuesday, Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said, in a move which has intensified tensions between the two countries. Ankara said on Thursday it had sent the ship to the area where the Cyprus Government has already awarded hydrocarbon exploration rights to Italian and French companies. Cyprus has accused Turkey of a “*severe escalation*” of violations of its sovereign rights. “*All preparations have been completed, and it (Yavuz) will start its first drilling in the area either today or tomorrow,*” Donmez told an energy conference on Monday. Turkey has already drilled wells in waters to the east and west of the island, triggering strong protests from Nicosia and the EU in recent months, including EU sanctions. The latest development is the first time the two sides have targeted the same area. The US has warned Turkey not to engage in “*illegal*” drilling activity in the area. On Monday, Yavuz was located about 50 nautical miles (90 km) southwest of Cyprus. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 12th, a French frigate was confirmed to be in Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on Saturday as part of naval exercise between the two countries, as Turkish drillship Yavuz remains positioned in block 7, which is licensed to French company TOTAL and Italy’s ENI. Hours after the Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos told media on Friday night that a French frigate was heading for block 7, on Saturday, a Government source speaking to CNA, confirmed the presence of the frigate in Cyprus’ EEZ, underlining at the same time that Nicosia’s aim was not militarization of the issue. The same source said that Nicosia was coordinating closely with EU member states, such as France and Italy. In an interview with the Greek TV channel Skai on Friday night, Panagiotopoulos said his French counterpart Florence Parly informed him that Paris had sent a frigate. They discussed the possibility of Italy also sending one. “*French and Italian companies have been granted a license for exploratory drillings in block 7,*” said Panagiotopoulos, while adding that Europe must protect its “*red lines,*” which are being violated by Turkey. ENI CEO Claudio Descalzi said on Thursday his company would not drill off Cyprus if it meant having to deal with warships. On Friday, ENI told the Cyprus Government it was committed to the exploration of the island’s EEZ and its contractual engagements with the country. In reply to a Reuters request for comment on ENI’s position, Descalzi added the group was planning a joint exploration campaign in the first half of 2020 together with its French partner TOTAL. At the same time on Saturday, it was officially announced that a French - Cypriot naval exercise was underway off the coast, with the Cypriot Government underlining the drill’s importance for bilateral cooperation with Paris, as

well as in relation to the messages it would send about Cyprus' sovereign rights in its EEZ. The drill was announced by the French Defense Minister, who wrote on social media that French - Cypriot naval exercises were being held in Cypriot waters within the framework of the "excellent cooperation" between the two countries. "We wish to allow Cyprus, an EU member state, to be able to ensure its responsibilities in its sovereign waters," Parly added. Cypriot Defense Minister Savvas Angelides told CNA that "the naval drill is important, in the framework of Cypriot - French cooperation, while it is also sending a message in relation to exercising the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus in its EEZ. At the same time, we remain committed to our efforts to terminate Turkish illegal activities through political, diplomatic and legal means." Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou also referred to the French - Cypriot naval drill, saying it was part of the close cooperation between the two countries. "France reinforces the Republic of Cyprus is exercising its sovereign rights, in line with the unanimous stance of the EU," Prodromou wrote on social media. Turkey positioned its drillship, Yavuz – accompanied by two warships – within block 7 over a week ago which has been widely condemned by the EU and the remainder of the international community including the US and Russia. EU Council President Donald Tusk was in Cyprus on Friday and called on Turkey to refrain from drilling in Cyprus' EEZ. The EU is expected to put Turkish drilling activities on the agenda of the Council meeting next week. Cyprus hopes concrete measures will be taken against Ankara. Block 7 was licensed to ENI and France's TOTAL in an agreement signed in Nicosia last month. Turkey claims that

approximately a third of block 7 – southwest of Cyprus – falls within its continental shelf. ENI has already had run-ins with Turkish naval presence off Cyprus. In February 2018, a drillship leased by the company was prevented from reaching a drilling target in block 3, southeast of the island. The vessel was blocked by Turkish warships, on the pretext they were conducting war games in the area. After a two-week standoff, the drillship withdrew and returned to port. ENI cancelled the operation and moved on to its next project in Egypt at the time. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 13th, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday slammed Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci for comments he made on Ankara's military offensive in Syria. Akinci had posted on social media on Saturday night after being criticized for staying silent on Turkish operation but following more criticism from Ankara over what he said, restricted the post from public view by Sunday after it sparked the fury of Ankara. Akinci had essentially said situation was not black and white, and had only posted a comment due to the anger over his silence. Erdogan, during a news conference on the Syria offensive on Sunday publicly called out Akinci for his comments saying the Turkish Cypriot leader had gone beyond his limits and needed to know his limits. He wondered if there was any other country in the world besides Turkey that had fought for the "TRNC state" as Turkey had done. "No. He must know his limits. The seat he sits on is not something he acquired. It was won by the intervention of the Turkish Republic, a favor from Turkey," said Erdogan. "I believe that people of the TRNC will give him the lesson he needs," Erdogan added. Earlier, Turkish Vice

President Fuat Oktay had written in social media *“I condemn [Mustafa] Akinci who ignores the fact that Operation Peace Spring is taking place against the bloody terrorist organisation PKK/PYD for the stability of region. Our struggle in the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation which was carried out with the aim of bringing peace and prosperity to the region and the struggle for Operation Peace Spring in Syria today are being carried out with the same spirit.”* According to Anadolu news agency, Oktay said Akinci’s *“unfortunate remarks”* do not reflect the opinion of Turkish Cypriots. Also on Sunday, Turkish Cypriot *“Prime Minister”* Ersin Tatar joined in the chorus saying Akinci’s views did not reflect those of the Turkish Cypriots and raised the question of whether he would ask the *“ruling party”* to request Akinci’s resignation. He said he would discuss the issue with them on Monday in an extraordinary session. *“I would like to say that these statements should not have been made, it was very wrong,”* he said, adding that these were not the views of people in the north. *“Our prayers are with the Turkish people,”* he added. Turkish Cypriot *“foreign minister”* Kudret Ozersay, who is seen as *“Ankara’s man”* in Cyprus, also posted online, calling Akinci’s comments *“unfortunate.”* *“Mr Akinci went through the Cyprus negotiations and the words he always had on his lips was security. This is not only about the security point of view but also from the economic, political and diplomatic point of view as to which country always stands beside us,”* Ozersay was quoted as saying. NGOs and *“Government Ministers”* also criticized Akinci except for the Turkish Cypriot Trade Union Platform. It said in a statement that *“insults and threats”* that Akinci had exceeded his limits could not be accepted. *“Any attack on Mr Akinci is regarded by us as an attack on the*

Turkish Cypriot community, which is the one that elected him leader,” the Platform said. *“Mr Akinci’s statement was very clear that ‘no Turkish Cypriot wants Turkey to have problems within its territory or with the security at its borders.’ And, like Mr Akinci, we are of the opinion that this issue will not be resolved by bloodshed but through negotiations.”* Akinci had taken to social media on Saturday night to address criticism at home and in Turkey about his silence with regard to Syria. *“I do not think there is anyone who does not want the good of Turkey and to get rid of the problem of terrorism,”* Akinci wrote. *“As I have said before, even the 1974 [Cyprus] peace operation was a war and what was running was blood. That is why my greatest hope is for diplomacy to be mediated immediately and for a dialogue to start,”* he added. Staying silent, Akinci said, sometimes does not mean there are no words to say and sometimes situations are so confusing it is difficult to come out with a simple yes or a no. *“And if what someone says will affect situation, you may need to remain silent,”* he said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkish provocations continue testing reactions of region’s stakeholders. This time Turkey improved its action by entering within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in a sea field (under code number 7) already drilled by Cyprus and licensed to an Italian (ENI) and French (TOTAL) company. As usual, Cyprus strongly reacted in verbal way, but it did not show any power to protect its sovereign rights. Yavuz drillship remains almost 90 kilometers southwest off Cyprus accompanied by two Turkish Navy warships. Greece remains reluctant in sending

any Navy ship in the region. However, France decided to send two frigates for naval exercises with Cyprus. It is the first decisive action by a member state which shows actively its solidarity. Of course, it is not enough to make Turkey to respect international law and Cypriot sovereign rights. Tension remains in high levels in Eastern Mediterranean and there is always a high risk of an armed conflict. However, Cypriot President Nikos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci express their willingness for restarting negotiations. It seems that Turkish Cypriot leader faces problems with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who directly threatened him with “a good lesson” due to his refusal to support Turkish military operation in Syria. A potential political crisis in Turkish Cypriot side would eliminate any chances for dialogue at the moment. Cyprus has called Turkish vessels to seize activity within its waters but Turkish officials were very clear; as long as Turkey and Turkish Cypriots are not included in the “energy game” tension will not be decreased. However, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu expressed recently Turkish diplomatic aspiration saying that “Turkey would prefer a common path.” Italian ENI confirmed that Turkish actions are effective since it announced that as long as warships are present in its licensed fields no exploitation will happen. Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising deterrence. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region

considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty. A “hot” incident cannot be excluded during autumn.



GREECE: October 7th, Cyprus, Greece and Egypt called on Turkey on Tuesday to “end its provocative actions” in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, including exploring for oil in Cyprus’ territorial waters, which they called “a breach of international law.” On Thursday, Turkey said it had sent a drilling ship to the area where Greek Cypriot authorities have already awarded hydrocarbon exploration rights to Italian and French companies. “The Heads of State and Government expressed their grave concern over the current escalation within the maritime areas of the eastern part of the Mediterranean, condemning the continuing Turkish actions in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus and its territorial waters, in violation of international law,” Cyprus, Greece and Egypt said. Their joint statement was released after Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades met Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo. The three countries expressed concern at “new attempts to conduct illegal exploration” in Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone, the statement said. In July, Greece accused Turkey of undermining security in the eastern Mediterranean by drilling for oil and gas around Cyprus. Earlier that month, Turkey said it rejected Greek and EU assertions that Turkish drilling for gas and oil off Cyprus was illegitimate, and said they showed the EU

could not be an impartial mediator on the Cyprus problem. (www.reuters.com)



Leaders of Cyprus, Egypt and Greece
(Photo source: www.sis.gov.eg)

- October 9th, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias has slammed Turkey's activity in the Eastern Mediterranean saying that Ankara is questioning Cyprus' sovereignty. *"We are playing on the chessboard of international law. It would be an act of absolute folly to return to time of 19th century gunboats,"* Dendias told Proto Thema radio station on Wednesday. Tensions between Cyprus and Turkey over offshore drilling for oil and gas have intensified after Ankara sent its Yavuz drillship to an area already licensed by Nicosia to Italian and French energy firms. Asked about increased migrant flows to Greece, Dendias accused Ankara of exploiting the crisis for its own ends. *"People who are in Turkey deserve our help, but we cannot allow Turkey use migration crisis to blackmail the EU."* (www.ekathimerini.com)

- October 11th, Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos signaled Greece's willingness to launch talks for the acquisition of two new navy frigates in talks with his French counterpart Florence Parly in Paris. The Ministers signed a statement of intent for the acquisition by the Hellenic Navy of two Belharra-class frigates, Panagiotopoulos said, adding that there was "a

long way to go" before an agreement is reached on the required *"technical aspects"* of the vessels. Another point of discussion was some pending issues relating to the maintenance of French Mirage fighter jets, he said. The two Ministers also discussed Turkey's offensive in Syria and developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey continues its illegal prospecting for hydrocarbons in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In comments to reporters after his meeting with Parly, Panagiotopoulos referred to French and Italian vessels in the area, saying that they served to underline the *"presence of the European Union"* and its objections to Turkey's continuing transgressions in Cyprus' waters. Those comments were widely reproduced in a misleading way, however, particularly in Cypriot media, with many reports appearing to suggest that Panagiotopoulos had requested the presence of foreign vessels in the area. The misrepresentation of the Minister's comments was widely seen as evidence of the rising tensions in the area over Turkey's increasing transgressions. However, developments in the area in recent days also appear to have created some confusion. For instance, Nicosia requested a joint exercise in Cyprus' EEZ with French and Italian forces, an overture that was rejected by both Rome and Paris. Also Panagiotopoulos' discussions did reportedly touch on the prospects for a naval cooperation between Greece and France but that was a response to the aid requested by the French for patrols in the Horn of Africa. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The Government focuses on facilitating country's growth restoring Greece's country profile. "Novarty's" case may become source of political tension in the coming months, especially after Parliament's decision to establish an investigative committee on former Deputy Justice Minister Demetrios Papaggelopoulos regarding his role in intervening and influencing Justice investigation. Arrivals of migrants from Turkey continue in increased rates. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. The critical question is "how Greece would react if a Turkish drillship would appear in its territorial waters." It should be noted that situation may be escalated rapidly especially after the end of the touristic season. In this context, Turkish fighter jets keep on violating Greek airspace massively, while Turkish NAVTEX's in Aegean Sea are issued on constant basis. Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the US upgrades Greece's strategic role in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. In this context, Greece and US have signed an advanced defense agreement which actually transforms Greece into a forward military base. Greece provides port of Souda (Crete island) and Alexandroupolis (North Greece) and airbase of Larissa and Volos for NATO troops. Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a

fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Currently, Greece is in talks with France for purchasing two advanced frigates BELHARA. Taking into consideration the ongoing "NAVTEX war" in Southeastern Aegean and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: October 7th, Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje) party leader Albin Kurti told N1 on Monday that he would start talks with Kosovo Serb politicians as soon as he takes over as Prime Minister but added that he would not be talking to the Belgrade-backed Serb List (Srpska Lista). Kurti's Vetëvendosje won the largest number of votes at Sunday's parliamentary elections but cannot form a Government on its own. It is expected to form a coalition with the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK). He said talks with that party would start immediately. According to Kurti, procedures to form a new Government will take some time because the final results of the elections cannot be declared until all the votes, including postal, have been counted. Kurti said that the coalition would include Serb political parties except the Serb List which he said is not a political party but a state. "Our Constitution says that at least one cabinet Minister has to be from the Serb community but it does not say that it must be from the Serb List. We will focus our priorities towards minorities as communities not as parties," he said. Kurti would start talks with the new European Union High Representative as soon as he takes office. "We need a dialogue about the [Belgrade – Pristina]

dialogue. We have to prepare dialogue well because we cannot have another failure which will cost us a lot. We will also review the 33 agreements that we had between 2011 and 2017, what has been implemented and what has not and their effects on Kosovo people lives and we will start the dialogue with Serbia which has to have solid principles,” Kurti said. He said that the 100% tariffs on goods from Serbia are not his party’s policies, adding that he advocates reciprocity in all areas as a principle of good neighbor relations. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 9th, the US President’s special envoy Ambassador Richard Grenell held talks behind closed door at the US Embassy in Pristina with several Kosovo officials on Wednesday. Grenell met separately with President Hashim Thaci, Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) leader Albin Kurti, former Prime Minister and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) Isa Mustafa and outgoing Prime Minister Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK) leader Ramush Haradinaj. The only meeting open to the media was with Thaci and no statements were made to the media after the meetings. A press release from the President’s cabinet said that Grenell expressed his hope that Kosovo and Serbia would find a solution. It added that Thaci and Grenell said that an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia would help the development of Kosovo and the region. *“Kosovo will be constructive in the search for a solution which would open the door to development and the active participation of the US will be decisive,”* the press release said. Vetevendosje said in its press release that Grenell told Kurti that the fact that there is no agreement between

Kosovo and Serbia is the biggest obstacle to foreign investments and quoted Kurti as saying that the main obstacle to investments is the high level of corruption in the Government. Kurti also told the Ambassador that content and process are more important than deadlines in reaching an agreement. Grenell was appointed by US President Donald Trump as his special envoy to the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue alongside career diplomat Matthew Palmer. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 9th, Albin Kurti, the most likely new Kosovo Prime Minister, said on Wednesday that unification of the Albanians could not happen in the EU, but an idea on confederation could exist, the Beta news agency reported. Kurti's Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination) came out as the strongest single party in Sunday's general elections and as likely Prime Minister, he advocates an integration of Kosovo and Albania into a federation similar to Germany, with decentralized institutions. *“I cannot say that the national unification happens in the EU. We join Danes, Austrians and Spaniards there. It is here that our union must happen. I would use a statement by Arbën Xhaferi ‘The Albanian historical advocacy for unification’,”* Kurti said. His idea includes the Historical Institute in Kosovo’s southern town of Prizren, Mining Faculty in Mitrovica in the north, Tourism Faculty in Albania, in either the town of Valona or Durrës and the Constitutional Court in Shkoder, also in Albania. Kurti also said that if he became the Prime Minister, he would respect Kosovo’s symbols despite some remarks about them. But, in the meetings with Albanian representatives, *“it will not be seen whose side the national or state flag is.”* *“We will not have meetings with Albania for photo opportunity, but*

for the implementation of, let's say, common market, joint civil register of companies, joint governmental commissions for foreign affairs and other issues," Kurti said. He earlier announced the revision of all agreements which Pristina and Belgrade signed during the dialogue on normalization of relations held under the EU auspices which had been on hold since last November, following Pristina's decision to introduce the 100% import tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia, which are still in place. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo witnessed a political change by the clean victory of Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) party. Its leader Albin Kurti expressed in the past disputed views such as unification with Albania, abolishment of Kosovo Serbs' privileges, and adoption of Albanian flag. Although he appeared somekind compromised after his victory aiming to gain EU and US acceptance he did not hesitate to speak about a federation with Albania (and not unification), adoption of the Albanian flag, review of all past agreements signed with Belgrade, and denial to accept in his Government members of the Serb List. It is assessed that if Kurti becomes the new Prime Minister, Pristina – Belgrade talks will face new obstacles since he follows a hard nationalistic line. Former KLA warriors Hashim Thaci and Ramush Haradinaj are the big losers of these elections. International community namely the US and EU will strengthen their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections. It seems that the US pays special attention in Kosovo problem by appointing Ambassador Richard Grenell as special envoy for Kosovo – Serbia dialogue;

together with special envoy for western Balkans Matthew Palmer. Restart of bilateral negotiations could not be expected before December 2019 or beginning of 2020 provided that Kosovo will revoke tariffs imposed to Serbian goods. Increased tension is expected in North Kosovo by Kosovo Serbs if Serb List representatives will be excluded by the new Government. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. The possibility of Kosovo Army presence in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence.



MOLDOVA: October 9th, the Iasi-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline will become operational 100% next spring. The statement was made today in Chisinau by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania Ramona Manescu at a joint conference with Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova Nicu Popescu. Manescu said that discussions initiated in Bucharest on strengthening the strategic partnership with Moldova will continue in Chisinau. "Romania aims to support Moldova's European integration and reforms that will increase the living standard of citizens. Today, we will also sign a roadmap on cooperation in strategic areas," said Manescu. Popescu said that

today they discussed topical issues on the bilateral agenda, including the stage of implementation of priority projects in the energy, telecommunications, public finances and environmental protection. *“We made an analysis of the gas pipeline construction process, a project in which significant progress is being made and which will allow us to enter a new historical phase. We also discussed the construction of several bridges, including the one that would unite Ungheni with Romania. The agenda also included topics related to the cancellation of roaming tariff,”* the official said. (www.moldpres.md)

- October 9th, the Chisinau Appeals Court [second-instance] has recognized as valid the result of the June 2018 snap election of Chisinau Mayor that was won by Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitare și Adevăr - PPDA) leader Andrei Nastase. Having cancelled the first-instance Court’s decision on annulling the results of both rounds of the mayoral election held on May 20th and June 3rd, 2018, the Chisinau Appeals Court has also confirmed that Andrei Nastase then became Mayor of Chisinau. This CAC decision may be yet challenged with a higher instance – the Supreme Court of Justice. As was already reported by Infotag, at the early Chisinau mayoral election of 2018, Andrei Nastase polled in the second round 52.7% votes, while his Socialist rival Ion Ceban – 47.43%. However, on June 19th, 2018 the first-instance Court invalidated the election results thus meeting the Socialists’ complaint, who claimed that during the election campaign, propaganda for Nastase was run by a number of renowned European and Romanian politicians, whereas such canvassing by

foreigners is prohibited by the law. Besides that, the Court recognized as *“canvassing on election day”* the candidates’ [including Nastase’s] appeals to voters not to sit at home but go to the polls. That scandalous invalidation of the election results in Chisinau was resolutely condemned not only by PPDA but also by many human-right organizations and Western international institutions. (www.infotag.md)

- October 11th, a new ordinary round of 5+2 format negotiations on Transnistrian conflict settlement was completed in Bratislava on Thursday without signing a final Protocol, Ambassador Claus Neukirch, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, announced at a news conference held in the capital of Slovakia today. The news conference was live transmitted by video communication at the OSCE Mission's Chisinau Office. *“We held complicated but result-oriented negotiations. We discussed the realization of the Berlin Protocol of 2017 and the Rome Protocol of 2018 as well as of the Berlin+ Package. We also discussed further actions to consolidate trust measures,”* the OSCE official said. The diplomat stressed that the parties held very constructive negotiations on various questions, including infrastructure development projects, and *“Both sides [Chisinau and Tiraspol] demonstrated a constructive approach and readiness to continue discussion to eventually arrive at solutions for the good of the people residing on both Dniester River sides.”* In his words, negotiations were hard but constructive. *“We worked two days in Bratislava, but there was no time enough for agreeing upon a protocol decision. In the nearest days or weeks we will continue working over the final document of the Bratislava meeting. I hope we will agree upon the*

Protocol text so as to impart an impulse to the talks and achieve progress,” the OSCE Mission Head said. Answering journalists' questions, Neukirch refused to disclose details of the Protocol being discussed. He said *“Our main principle is that we cannot speak about details before the Protocol has been agreed on and signed by the Sides. We are working over a final version of the document that will be made public after its signature.”* Neukirch said that no other documents had been signed, either. *“We will continue working in subsequent weeks and months to work out compromise solutions of the questions, which we failed to discuss in Bratislava for lack of time,”* the OSCE Mission Head said. Neukirch failed to answer when the next round of talks will take place. *“We did not discuss this question here, either. It will be agreed upon later between the negotiation participants either this year, under the Slovakian OSCE Presidency, or next year under the presidency of Albania,”* Neukirch said. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Coexistence of pro-western ACUM block and pro-Russian PSRM is becoming more difficult since disputes in high level are more often. However, cooperation will continue between the two parties (not for too long), because both sides are not interested at the moment to lose power. The agreement signed by the Government's partners – ACUM block and PSRM – strengthens political stability despite their different views. Besides, EU, US, and Russia support this “unconventional” coalition for their own interests. It is already known that Moldova is a field of rivalry between the West and East, between the US, NATO, and EU on the one side and Russia on the other. The

Prime Minister seeks to get as much financial aid as she can from the US and EU in order to implement ambitious projects for the country. In this context Mogherini announced that the EU will allocate to Moldova 14 million euro in October and 22 million euro in November. Transnistria is a case which concerns Moldova and withdrawal of Russian troops is a priority for the Government. It should be noted that Russia closely follows political developments in Moldova and it will not allow any overcome of its “red lines” such as Moldova's integration in NATO or EU. Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. It is assessed in the near future Moldovan Government will strengthen its calls for withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: October 7th, while opposition is still talking about a technical Government, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) says that, for them, it is not a topic. Dialogue is always an option, say DPS members, but as long as it is held in the Committee on Further Reform of Electoral Legislation. Sergej Sekulovic, an analyst, says that the EU should increase pressure on both the Government and opposition. Technical Government has once again been launched by the opposition. Proposal made by the United Montenegro (Ujedinjena Crna Gora - UCG) as a way out of current situation is unnecessary for Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora - DCG), as the joint strategy already exists; in the Agreement on Future. *“That agreement defines*

the Government of civil union composed of one third of the Government, one third of opposition and one third of civil sector. Nobody from DPS must be the Head of such Government. That is the only model Democrats will support,” Zdenka Popovic said. However, DPS disagrees. *“Talking about the Government of civil union or technical Government composed of three groups is an absurd,”* Andrija Nikolic, from DPS said. DPS members think opposition’s requests are unreal. *“We will not negotiate on any reconstruction of this Government or creation of a new one. Such requests are a political show,”* added Nikolic. To sum up, no news at Montenegrin political stage, says Sekulovic. *“The only solution I see is the EU increasing pressure on both sides,”* Sekulovic said. (www.cdm.me)

- October 9th, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) will advocate for the renewal of Montenegrin Orthodox Church, says the proposal for the new political program of this party that is to be adopted at the Congress scheduled for November 30th, 2019. *“We will be working on the renewal of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, as inseparable part of Montenegrin state and national identity. It is our duty to strengthen Montenegrin national identity and protect it from those who are constantly denying it with their paternal approaches and by negating the need for Montenegro’s existence,”* it is stated in the proposal. The new program brings significant changes into the political program of DPS, especially when it comes to the way this party treats church issue, bearing in mind that, at the last congress, in their political agenda, they wrote that they would advocate for one Orthodox church in Montenegro. (www.rtcg.me)

- October 10th, the Democratic Front (Demokratski front – DF) Presidency has decided to permanently leave the Comprehensive Electoral Reform Committee. The DF has announced that its members of the Committee – Strahinja Bulajic, Branka Bosnjak and Predrag Bulatovic - will resign from their membership. *“In making this decision, the DF was driven by the notorious fact that the DPS so far did not want dialogue and that poor electoral laws were fundamentally altered through this Committee. Confirmation of this are ten months that have been spent without dialogue and simultaneous work within the parliamentary majority, with the cooperation of NGOs and representatives of the academic community, defining unilateral solutions,”* the DF said. The special reason for leaving the Board is, as they say, the Basic Court’s prison sentence for the leaders and officials of the DF for a verbal incident in the Assembly after the February 15th, 2017 session, when the parliamentary majority made an unconstitutional and illegal decision to order custody of Andrija Mandic and Milan Knezevic. The DF Presidency recalls that they *“expressed their readiness for serious work and dialogue for substantive and comprehensive electoral reforms, but also for changing the environment in which the elections have take place so far. Considering all the actions regarding establishment of the Committee, the semi-annual unilateral work of the DPS and its partners and representatives of NGOs and academic community, as well as the apparent intention of the DPS to manipulate and not to conduct substantive dialogue leading to solutions at this point, the DF, by leaving permanently the Committee, notes that in this way it indicates that this body does not have the credibility to adopt solutions that would overcome*

the crisis. Also, we do not want to give DPS our legitimacy,” the DF said. They stated that they will present their solutions guaranteeing free, fair and equal elections to the public. (www.rtcg.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition's request. Opposition appears divided in Montenegro strengthening ruling DPS's power. Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters into a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. The Government promotes state's political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Russian influence continues to be considered as a "threat" against state's national security. Moreover, Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that Montenegro is the "natural extension of the country." In this context, ruling DPS's proposal for renewal of Montenegrin Church will become a new field of rivalries with Serbia.



NORTH MACEDONIA: October 8th, “all top state officials, including myself, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, have always said that both countries need to start EU negotiations,” President Stevo Pendarovski said Tuesday after it was reported that the Netherlands today will define its position on the matter. According to a Reuters report published this past weekend, Germany proposes North Macedonia and Albania be “uncoupled” in an attempt a compromise to be reached by all EU members on October 15th, 2019. Although a skeptic over the enlargement process, the Netherlands has been supporting the opening of talks only with North Macedonia, but not with Albania. “In some of my public remarks, I have said that we must not push aside the other countries in the Western Balkans, namely BiH and Kosovo... I have been always saying this, both at home and abroad – if all Western Balkan countries are not members of the EU one day, our region will become a problem,” stressed Pendarovski. According to him, the position is clear; “Both countries should start negotiating and issues will begin to be solved fast as part of the negotiating process, because it is an entirely different thing when you negotiate and you have to try to fulfill the obligations required of you to do.” All the signals coming from the Hague indicate that a positive decision on North Macedonia will be reached, the President said. Asked about France's position and whether he had contacted President Emmanuel Macron, Pendarovski said that both Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov and Deputy Prime Minister Bujar Osmani in the past couple of months had had meetings with top officials of the French administration, including aides of the French President. “In this aspect, I believe we did

everything what was asked from us, we delivered,” he noted. Any reservations on France’s part, according to President Pendarovski, have to do with their demands for reforms within the EU first. *“It has nothing to do with our file,”* the President concluded. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- October 8th, early parliamentary elections will take place by the end of October 2020, namely 45 days prior to the regular elections, said North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev. Zaev said the Government’s intention was to demonstrate the benefits and the impact of EU and NATO for the economy, growth and jobs. *“The final decisions will be made in the course of this month, as well as December, January or February, depending on Spain’s ratification of the NATO Accession Protocol,”* Zaev told reporters in Veles. He noted that Bulgaria, Croatia or Romania were *“on their honeymoon”* when joining NATO and opening the EU accession negotiations, a once-in-a-time experience. *“This is a period that cannot be repeated in the future and that is why we believe that elections should take place in their regular slot,”* said Zaev. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- October 13th, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the President of France Emmanuel Macron are set to meet on Sunday, which diplomats see as the last chance to convince Paris to change its position on blocking the start of EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. *“We hope Paris will reconsider its position and not allow being isolated in Europe because of internal political reasons,”* a diplomat in Brussels told dpa, adding that the one hindering the accession process would be responsible for a possible destabilization in region. The German government believes North Macedonia and

Albania have met all conditions that the European Commission has set. The block would especially hurt North Macedonia, which agreed to change its name in order to unstick its EU integration process. The agency says Germany is not the only country to disagree with the French move, with many other EU members sharing its position. France wants to file a proposal over a new methodology in EU accession negotiations at the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg, which could result in a third postponement of the decision for the opening of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Monday’s meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives will attempt to reach consensus ahead of the General Affairs Council the following day. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Support messages arriving from all over the world literally regarding the opening of accession negotiations with the EU establishing a positive climate for a positive decision of the EU Heads. However, France, Bulgaria, and Greece by the one or another way have expressed concerns of setting a date for the Balkan country due to a variety of reasons; France is skeptical due to lack of rule of law, corruption, and human rights, Bulgaria threatens North Macedonia because of historical disputes, while Greece has called it to fully implement the “Prespa Agreement” or the “veto card” could be used. The EU Council will decide about it on October 15th, 2019 and EU member states’ leaders will approve or not the EU Council’s suggestion on October 17th – 18th, 2019. French skepticism is the most important obstacle threatening North Macedonia’s positive decision. There are several European voices

calling North Macedonia to focus on judicial reforms, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration reform, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. Although, North Macedonia's politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals it seems that there is a "moratorium" of words and actions between the state's political parties with the EU decision ahead. However, such scandals undermine not only country's political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as "Extortion", "Empire", "Racket", "Titanic", "Monster" are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state's function. It is assessed that no matter what the EU will decide on North Macedonia's accession talks, snap elections will be called after the EU decision; either under positive conditions for Zaev (in case the country gets a date), or under negative conditions (North Macedonia will not get a date for accession talks with the EU). There are signs that the two main parties have already been engaged in pre-electoral preparations.



ROMANIA: October 8th, former Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta expressed hopes that his once fellow Social Democrats would follow him and form a center-left ruling coalition after the cabinet of Prime Minister Viorica Dacila is overthrown by no-confidence motion on Thursday. Ponta added that a new parliamentary majority, formed by Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) and Pro Romania PRO Romania (PRO

Romania - PRO) as implied by his statements, would emerge on Thursday. As for the Prime Minister, he will propose "a Prime Minister who comes neither from Pro Romania nor from PSD." "We know him, we all support him, a person who worked in Governments," Ponta said. Asked who he considers for Prime Minister, Ponta said "I will tell you on Thursday night. (...) I already have two or three names that we have to discuss with PSD, and with President Iohannis, because we need his support as well. They are normal people, professionals, pro-Europeans, who are not party member as of today," G4media.ro reported. Ponta served as Prime Minister of Romania from may 2012 until November 2015, when he resigned following massive street protests after the "Colectiv" club tragedy. Ponta left PSD in 2018, after disputes with former party leader Liviu Dragnea and formed a new party - PRO Romania, which has managed to draw several PSD MPs to its ranks over the last year. In August, Ponta convinced the leader of PSD's junior coalition partner ALDE, Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, to leave the coalition and form an alliance with PRO Romania. (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 10th, Romania's Parliament on Thursday voted a no-confidence motion against the Social Democrat Government led by Prime Minister Viorica Dancila. The motion passed with 238 votes for, 5 more than the minimum required (233 votes). It is for the first time since May 2012 and for second time in the last 30 years when the opposition manages to overthrow a Government by no-confidence motion. Negotiations around the no-confidence motion have been intense in the weeks before the vote and the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), as well as the opposition, tried to convince

as many MPs as possible to support them. The outcome was uncertain until the votes were counted and the result was announced. While the PSD instructed its MPs not to vote at all and reached out to opposition MPs who initially signed the motion to change their minds, opposition parties had to make sure that all of their MPs would be present for the vote and tried to convince even PSD MPs to vote for the motion. An MP for the People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) even postponed a scheduled surgery and came from Cluj-Napoca by ambulance to vote for the motion. A total of 245 MPs expressed their vote and 242 votes were valid, of which 238 were for the motion and 4 against. The Government is now officially dismissed and President Klaus Iohannis has to name a new Prime Minister to form a new Government. *“The nightmare that Romania has been going through in the last three years has ended. Today, Romania's Parliament dismissed the PSD Government that has mocked Romania,”* said Ludovic Orban, the leader of National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) - the main opposition force in Romania, and the initiator of the no-confidence motion. Orban thanked President Klaus Iohannis for his involvement in the success of this motion. The PNL leader has a high chance of being appointed by Iohannis to form a new Government. Meanwhile, outgoing Prime Minister Viorica Dancila asked Iohannis to name a new Prime Minister as soon as possible, *“even today.”* She added that she would not resign from the helm of PSD and will continue in the presidential race. (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 11th, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis believes that the country needs a new

Government as soon as possible, and thus he intends to name a new Prime Minister early next week. The Government led by Viorica Dancila fell on Thursday, October 10th, 2019 following a no-confidence vote in the Parliament. Iohannis invited political parties to consultations on Friday, October 11th, 2019 but the Social Democrats decided to decline the invitation. After consultations, the President said that he prefers *“a political Government”* and that *“it is quite clear that we are heading towards a PNL Government or a Government around PNL.”* The National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) supports Iohannis for a new term as President of Romania, as the country will hold presidential elections next month. The Liberals also initiated the no-confidence motion against the Dancila's cabinet. Iohannis also said that he would no longer name a Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Prime Minister. *“We urgently need a Government not only because the Dancila's interim Government should be replaced quickly, but also because we need a Government that ensures the correctness of presidential elections. We need a Government to prepare the budget for next year, for 2020. We need a Government to be responsible for closing the budget for 2019,”* Iohannis explained. Talking about early elections, the President said once again that he favors this solution, but after the presidential elections. He explained that the Constitution makes it very difficult to trigger early elections; *“To be clear, the Constitution says very clearly that the Parliament can be dissolved only if two successive Prime Minister proposals or two successive Government proposals fall in Parliament. Such conditions are difficult to meet,”* the President said. *“The second reason why this discussion cannot be held now if -*

I repeat – two of my proposals fall then this Dancila’s interim Government would remain in office, which is unacceptable and unimaginable, and it would remain - attention! – until those early elections would be organized, namely sometime in the spring. This scenario cannot be taken into account, as it would deepen Romania in a crisis and in an indescribable chaos,” Iohannis added. Thus, he intends to keep having consultations with the political parties represented in the Parliament and name a new Prime Minister *“on Monday, at the latest on Tuesday.”* A transition Government, possibly led by PNL leader Ludovic Orban, with weak support in the Parliament, seems the most likely scenario. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition achieved to topple the Socialist Government of Viorica Dancila, but Romania’s political future it is not certain since the Constitution is a quite complicated in this issue. Early elections are not a natural consequence if the Government collapse; consultations and Parliament’s votes are necessary before new elections are held. Opposition looks divided and not ready to manage the new political situation. A PNL based Government is very possible to be formed as a “weak” transition Government to conduct the coming presidential elections and to prepare the 2020 state’s budget. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of ruling parties. Under these circumstances, political uncertainty and instability are reign in Romanian politics. Presidential election scheduled for November 10th, 2019 and November 24th, 2019 (second round if necessary) is another political

challenge for the country. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: October 7th, President Vucic and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed confidence that bilateral relations between the two countries will be even better in the future. At the beginning of the face to face meeting, Vucic expressed his hope that Erdogan's second visit to Serbia would be even more fruitful. Serbian President thanked the Turkish Head of state for very good bilateral relations, to which Erdogan also referred in an interview with Serbian media, calling them the best in modern history. *“We are happy to be able to host you in Serbia. Make yourself at home,”* Vucic said. Erdogan thanked Serbian President for his hospitality. He also reiterated that Serbia and Turkey are marking 140 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 9th, the Head of Serbia’s Parliamentary Committee for Kosovo Milovan Drecun said on Wednesday that the most likely new Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti was a huge obstacle to the resumption of the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations on hold since last November, the Beta news agency reported. Drecun said Kurti, whose Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) party emerged as the strongest single party in Sunday’s general elections, acted

irresponsibly and gave extreme statements. Speaking to the state RTS TV, he said Kurti violated Kosovo Constitution by saying he would never have a Minister from the Serb List (Srpska List), party supported by Belgrade and responded to Kurti he would never make Serb people to recognize Kosovo as a state. *“It is now up to the US representative to move Kurti towards a rational political behavior,”* Drecun said ahead of the Richard Grenell, the US President Donald Trump trustee's visit to Pristina and Belgrade. He added Kurti wanted Serbs who appeared in the campaign speaking Albanian to the ministerial post belonging to the Serb community in Kosovo despite their election's debacle. *“The election will of the people must be respected here,”* Drecun said and added Kurti would create big problems in dialogue. *“He is now a huge obstacle for the resumption of the talks,”* he said. Drecun said that Grenell started his mission in a new political ambience since the party of Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci lost the elections. *“I think that the first step is to continue talks,”* Drecun said and added he believed the US would not allow *“the waste of time”* and that Washington wanted the continuation of the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue as soon as possible. Kurti also said he was not in favor of abolishing the import tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia last November, and if elected Prime Minister, he would lead the Kosovo side in negotiations with Belgrade. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 10th, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said in the northern city of Novi Sad on Thursday he signed a joint Declaration which included four key EU freedoms with Albanian and North Macedonian Prime Ministers Edi Rama and Zoran Zaev respectively, N1 reported. Those

four freedoms include the flow of goods, capital, services and people, Vucic said. He added Declaration was meant for the benefit of the people who, as he put it, deserved better future, higher living standard and lower unemployment rate. *“We aim to create conditions for people to use only national IDs for crossing borders by 2021,”* Vucic added, referring to the so-called *“mini Schengen”* visa regime which was the main reason for organising the trilateral meeting. He said that lorries in the Western Balkans were losing 26 million hours every year on border crossings, adding that the removal of those barriers would enable huge savings. Vucic announced the next meeting in North Macedonia, on the Lake Ohrid, on November 10th, 2019 when *“the most concrete measures”* would be agreed on. He added he expected the EU to open accession talks with Tirana and Skopje. Rama said that *“we have a chance to learn how to do more, instead of waiting for others to give us more.”* He mentioned that there were some open issues in *“the heart of the region,”* but that they should not prevent the agreements concerning the entire regional population. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS. A potential boycott of the elections by the opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. Serbia advocates equal friendly relations with the US, EU, Russia, and China. However, it is a common “secret” that it is considered by the west as a close “friend and ally” of Russia. Elections in Kosovo have created a totally new landscape by the election of nationalist Albin Kurti as its new Prime Minister. It remains to see

if the newly elected Kurti will abolish the 100% taxes on Serbian goods giving the green light for restarting dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. Pressure from the US and EU is increasing towards both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections on spring 2020. Tension remains between Kosovo and Serbia and none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. Initiative between Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia to sign an agreement regarding free move of people and goods demonstrates that regional cooperation is possible in a region which was tested in the past facing armed conflicts and bloodsheds.



SLOVENIA: October 10th, the coalition agreed to adopt the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije – DeSUS) amendment for an exceptional adjustment of pensions in 2020 as the coalition-sponsored amendment, while pledging not to submit any new amendments to budget documents. DeSUS upset coalition partners last week by submitting an amendment to the bill on public wage measures in 2020 and 2021 proposing a 1% indexation of pensions in case of economic growth exceeding 2.5%, rather

than 3% as proposed in the Government bill. Deputy Group Head Brane Golubovic of the List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS) said the adjustment of pensions would only cost between 5 million and 6 million euro because it would only apply in December 2020. Furthermore, the coalition announced it was temporarily suspending talks with the Left (Levica) on the opposition party's plan for the abolition of top-up health insurance and would instead pursue its own proposal. Golubovic said that the coalition-backed proposal would likely already be on the table at the beginning of November. The idea is to abolish the current scheme in two steps, the first being to transfer the collection of all contributions to the public health insurance fund ZZZS. The second step would be drawing up a scale for the collection of health insurance contributions in a progressive manner, which could happen next summer. (www.sta.si)

- October 11th, the Parliamentary Defense Committee discussed the state budgets for 2020 and 2021, when funds for the national defense system will nominally rise. In 2020, the Defense Ministry will get 545.85 million euro and in 2021 561 million euro. The latter figure is nominally higher but not if measured as a share in GDP, Defense Minister Karl Erjavec told the MPs. Major General Alenka Ermenc, Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, said funds would be enough to improve the Army's readiness and consolidate the achieved level of development, but not *“for the much needed development breakthrough.”* (www.sta.si)

- October 11th, Rajko Kozmelj, director of Slovenia's Intelligence and Security Agency (SOVA), will not step down, SOVA said as it responded to yesterday's call by opposition

Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) leader Janez Jansa for Kozmelj to resign.



SOVA Director, Rajko Kozmelj
(Photo source: www.gov.si)

The call came after SOVA refused to give the parliamentary Intelligence Oversight Commission certain information on its staffing practices, arguing it feared further leaks of classified information. SOVA said Kozmelj would continue to focus his efforts on “implementing the strategic goals of SOVA's development.” It also said that under Slovenian law, its staffing practices can only be checked by the Public Administration Inspection Service. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Although there are disputes between the five parties of the ruling coalition and opposition Left party which supports the minority Government announced that it would end cooperation with it, it is assessed that Government's collapse and early parliamentary elections are not very likely. The Left party obstacle is overcome by the support of the opposition SNS, while coalition parties are not in favor of snap election for their own reasons. Consequently, Marjan Sarec Government enjoys relative political stability, but with a lot of compromise in its agenda. Slovenia –

Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the “Schengen Zone card” in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an “underworld war” is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end. However, the 2020 and 2021 budget foresees increased funding for defense sector.



TURKEY: October 10th, Turkish forces began a ground offensive in northeastern Syria hours after fighter jets bombarded the border region as Ankara finally

unleashed a long-threatened assault on the Kurdish-held territory. In a statement late on Wednesday, Turkey's Defense Ministry said troops had crossed into bordering Syria east of the Euphrates River alongside allied Syrian rebel forces. The ground push came hours after aerial and artillery bombardment, with the Turkish military saying it had hit 181 “*terrorist positions.*” Announcing the operation on Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Ankara's goal was to “*prevent the creation of a terror corridor across our southern border and to bring peace to the area.*” Erdogan wants to drive the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) away from the border region. SDF is the United States's main ally in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) armed group but its fighters are viewed as “*terrorists*” by Turkey due to the group's links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The Turkish President also wants to create a so-called “safe zone” stretching some 30 kilometers (20 miles) deep into Syria, in which some of the 3.6 million refugees currently living in Turkey can be resettled. Some 14,000 Syrian rebels belonging to the Free Syrian Army have travelled from the country's northwest to aid Turkey's push, Turkey's Demiroren news agency (DHA) reported. But Ankara's military action caused alarm among world powers, while aid agencies warned the operation could spark a new humanitarian crisis and further displacement of people in the area. US President Donald Trump, whose recent decision to pull troops from the area paved the way for Turkey's offensive, called the operation a “*bad idea.*” Amid sharp criticism at home and abroad over his pullback decision, Trump threatened to wreck Turkey's already-struggling economy if its forces went “*off-limits.*”

The UN Security Council is expected to discuss Syria behind closed doors on Thursday, diplomats told the Reuters news agency. Exposed by Washington's troop withdrawal, the SDF meanwhile appealed on Wednesday to the US and its allies for a “*no-fly zone*” to protect it from the Turkish attacks, which the group said had killed five civilians and three of its fighters. The SDF, which holds the largest expanse of Syria after Russia and Iran-backed President Bashar Al-Assad had earlier pledged to defend the land it controls “*at all costs*” despite the departure of the US forces. Several SDF military positions and villages in Tal Abyad, Ras al-Ain, Qamishli and Ain Issa were hit by the Turkish air raids, the group said adding “*dozens*” of civilians were injured in the attacks. SDF Spokesman Mustafa Bali said Kurdish fighters had however managed to repel a Turkish troop advance at Tal Abyad. Al Jazeera's Charles Stratford, reporting from the Turkish town of Akcakale, said there was “*fear and tension*” on both sides of the border over the unfolding events, which threaten to open a new chapter in Syria's devastating eight-year-long war and worsen regional turmoil. “*The big question is what kind of humanitarian crisis could such an operation cause,*” Stratford said. “*There are hundreds of thousands of people on the Syrian side, many of whom we understand are now fleeing towns and villages that SDF forces are based in and are being targeted in,*” he added. “*A... terrifying experience is unfolding for many people.*” (www.aljazeera.com)

- October 11th, Turkey's indigenous battle tank Altay will be used by the nation's Armed Forces on the ground 24 months later, the head of the producer company BMC said on Thursday. Altay tank and all sub-products - including engine - will

also become completely indigenous within 48 months, Ethem Sancak told the 10th Istanbul Finance Summit (IFS'19). BMC produces different types of military vehicles including tanks and armored cars as well as commercial cars, busses and trucks. Sancak said the rate for indigenous products was around 20% in the Turkish defense industries before 2000s, while it reached 65% currently. Also addressing Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria, Sancak said Turkey can fly its warplanes with its defense systems. *"Turkey has projects worth 70 billion euro in defense industries such as aircraft carrier, national battle plane, space studies, and electronic battle methods,"* he underlined. He added that Turkey will also start to produce nuclear inter-continental ballistic missiles within 5-6 years. *"Defense industry is a value-added sector. It also improves other sectors such as software, information technologies and automotive,"* he highlighted. Turkey's defense expenditures reach 18.2 billion dollars. (www.yenisafak.com)

- October 13th, the Syrian Army will deploy along the length of the border with Turkey in an agreement with the Kurdish-led administration in northern Syria to help repel a Turkish offensive, the Kurdish-led administration said on Sunday. The Army deployment would support the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in countering *"this aggression and liberating the areas that the Turkish Army and mercenaries had entered,"* it said, in reference to Turkey-backed Syrian rebels. It would also allow for the liberation of other Syrian cities occupied by the Turkish Army such as Afrin, the statement said. The Turkish Army and its Syrian rebel allies drove Kurdish forces from Afrin in 2018. The

agreement follows last week's surprise move by the US to pull a group of its forces from a section of the border, opening the path for Turkey's incursion. The SDF, a vital US ally in the campaign against Islamic State, has called Washington's move *"a stab in the back."* *"In order to prevent and block this (Turkish) assault agreement has been reached with the Syrian Government - whose duty is protect the borders of the country and to protect Syrian sovereignty - for the Syrian Army to enter and deploy along the length of the Syrian-Turkish border,"* the statement said. Kurdish-led forces have established control over swathes of eastern and northern Syria since the country descended into civil war in 2011, setting up their own Governments but always saying their aim was autonomy rather than independence. Despite mutual enmity between these Kurdish groups and Damascus, where the Baathist Government systematically persecuted Syrian Kurds, the SDF has seldom clashed with the Syrian Government during the war. The sides have also at times appeared to coordinate military campaigns against shared enemies, notably the Turkey-backed rebels taking part in the offensive with the Turkish Army. (www.reuters.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey has launched the military operation "Peace Spring" against Syria aiming to establish a safe zone within Syrian territory and eliminating the Kurdish threat. Operation is going well at the moment with Turkish forces to strike targets by Air Force and artillery, while ground forces are rapidly deployed reinforced by pro-Turkish Free Syrian Army (FSA). Turkish Army has started to control strategic points in Syrian territory. Things may become complicated during

next hours since Syrian Kurds have reached an agreement with Syrian Government and Syrian Army is deployed to the north borders. A direct armed conflict between Turkish and Syrian regular armies is imminent totally changing situation for Turkey. UNSC failed to condemn Turkish aggression due to US and Russia blockade of such a resolution. This is considered as a diplomatic victory of Turkey which actually achieved to bring in the same “playground” the US and Russia. Turkey remains a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO). Due to its geopolitical and geostrategical aspects Turkey has the ability to achieve its national goals and protect its interests either by diplomatic means or by the threat of use or use of force. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey continues to dispute Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by sending its Yavuz drillship in a sea field (code number 7) which has already been licensed to Italian ENI and French





TOTAL. Turkey is determined to protect its interests and would not hesitate to use force against Cyprus. With zero cost so far Turkey achieved to put the hydrocarbon issue on the table of negotiations, to force oil and gas companies to reconsider their engagement in a sea which is not stable and secure, and to directly question the Cypriot sovereignty with no real answer. So far, so good for a country which is already in a military operation in another country. The state issued a NAVTEX starting from October 7th, 2019 until January 2020 showing that winter will be “hot” in Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.

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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. Low tension incidents.
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.

■ *Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.*