



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

This ambitious newsletter aspires to become an informative “tool” for anyone who is interested in the region and wishes to have knowledge of the non-stop current developments and challenges. “HERMES” Institute is not a news agency and it is not one of its ambitions to become one but it is strongly believed that today’s events provide the necessary material to understand the future and to analyze situations that may affect in peace, stability, and growth of the region.

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

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ALBANIA: November 5th, Sander Lleshi will lead the Interior Ministry, despite President Ilir Meta's refusal to sign the decree. The Prime Minister Edi Rama decided to appoint him as the Deputy Interior Minister and delegating him the affairs of the Interior Ministry. *"The Parliamentary Group agrees to ratify Meta's decision to remove former Interior Minister. Sander Lleshi will lead the Interior Ministry as Deputy Minister,"* wrote Rama on social media. It is claimed the President has not given any argument for his decision, which the Prime Minister considers *"Anti-Constitutional."* *"There is no doubt for our support to Lleshi, who has Top-Cosmic certification, the highest in NATO,"* Rama said. (www.top-channel.tv)



The newly appointed Deputy Interior Minister,
Sander Lleshi

(Photo source: www.kryeministria.al)

- November 5th, Minister of Economy and Finance, Arben Ahmetaj announced that the 2019 state's budget will be increased by 5.9%. Ahmetaj made his announcement during the Parliamentary

Committee on Economy session adding that there will be a salary increase in some sectors as well as investments and support in health, agriculture, education, and infrastructure. *"Fiscal package aims at reducing the combined fiscal budget on companies. It foresees changes to the income's tax. There will be no Value Added Tax (VAT) in imported agricultural vehicles in line with the Council of Ministers decision. Moreover the VAT in transportation by public buses will be reduced,"* Ahmetaj said. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- November 9th, 52 Greek citizens who attended the funeral of the Albanian-Greek citizen Konstantinos Katsifas were declared non-grata in Albania. Newly appointed Deputy Interior Minister, Sander Lleshi announced the decision claiming that these people endangered sovereignty of Albania and made provocative statements against constitutional order, national security, and public peace of the country. The Minister said that 52 Greeks will not be allowed to enter Albania for the time given by the law. According to Lleshi actions of these people were vulgar, very dangerous, unnecessary, and unacceptable. *"No foreigner will break the law and leave untouched without consequences,"* the Minister said. Greek supporters of Katsifas joined his funeral on November 8th, 2018 in the village of Bularat, holding Greek flags, and shouting slogans *"Konstantinos you are alive, you lead us,"* or *"Northern Epirus is Greek."* Prior to the funeral dozens of Greeks were detained at the borders and banned from entering Albania to attend the funeral. 11 Greek citizens were prosecuted for racist actions and for blocking a national road. (www.albaniandailynews.com, top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government and Prime Minister Edi Rama found a “smart” way to overcome President’s Meta refusal to appoint Lleshi as the new Interior Minister, appointing him as Deputy Minister. Rama re-established government’s stability, but it was confirmed the political rivalry between Rama and Meta. According to the opposition the Government carries the burden of having links with organized crime. Opposition raises questions over the power of “Albanian mafia” in the country and its influence in state’s politics.. It is assessed that Xhafai’s resignation will be followed by new actions and incidents against Rama’ Government causing rapid political developments. The main conclusion is that corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state’s problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU next year. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a “mother nation”. It is estimated that Albania will fully comply with the EU and U.S “line” for territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo if it is necessary for a mutual accepted solution. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of “protector” of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

November 6th, the general election campaign in Bosnia & Herzegovina amplified the negative trends and defined the overall political dynamics in the country, Bosnia’s High Representative Valentin Inzko said in his 20th regular report to the UN Security Council on the situation in the country. Report covers the period from April 22nd to October 15th, 2018, and it said that the atmosphere of the election campaign was reflected in continued stagnation in the pace of reforms at all levels of Government and particularly in a new level of divisive and provocative rhetoric from some senior political figures. Inzko further stated that the country’s aspirations for the EU integration remained firmly on the agenda despite the difficult political environment. “A rare piece of good news in the rule of law came in September, when after several months of disagreement, Bosnia’s Parliamentary Assembly, with the assistance of the wider International Community, finally adopted long-outstanding amendments to the State Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) in a compromise agreement acceptable to nearly all political parties,” he said. However Inzko claimed “During the reporting period, statements continued challenging the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia, with RS President Milorad Dodik again being the most frequent exponent of such proclamations.” He also said that some senior political figures continued to deny and belittle the genocide committed in Srebrenica in 1995, which was confirmed by two international tribunals, and to insult the victims with “outrageous conspiracy theories.” The Government of the Federation of B&H entity, he added, worked consistently throughout the reporting period, holding 19 regular and nine

extraordinary sessions. It adopted 26 new laws and nine sets of amendments to existing legislation. *“With continued political disputes and pressure from frequently protesting war veterans, the Federation Parliament delivered only one new law and four sets of amendments to existing legislation,”* Inzko said. According to the High Representative, the low legislative output reflected the stagnation in the Federal B&H Parliament. Speaking about the Election Law, Inzko said the responsible political parties could not reach an agreement to enact amendments to the State Election Law that would enable the holding of local elections in the City of Mostar, where there have been no local elections since 2008. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 7th, the EU is willing to continue keeping its armed forces in Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) under a renewed UN mandate, the Head of the EU Delegation to the United Nations Joao Vale de Almeida told the UN Security Council. He said that the EU continues to support the presence of its troops in Bosnia, Operation *“Althea”*, which has *“Refocused on its core mandate while retaining the elements of capacity building and training deemed to be still necessary.”* The EU forces (EUFOR) are ready to continue to *“Support Bosnia and Herzegovina’s authorities to maintain a safe and secure environment, under a renewed UN mandate,”* Vale de Almeida said. EUFOR’s mandate is being renewed every year by the Security Council. The mission succeeded NATO’s IFOR and SFOR troops that were deployed in Bosnia end of 1995 to stop the war. The number of foreign soldiers on the ground shrunk over the years from 60,000 to several hundred. The EU expects *“All leaders to engage constructively in Government formation at all levels”* following the October 7th, 2018

election, Vale de Almeida said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 9th, the Republika Srpska (RS) entity’s Coordination Body discussed the possible establishment of the RS *“National Security Agency,”* said the outgoing RS President Milorad Dodik. Dodik noted the RS Government tried to protect the entity’s vital interests *“The Government’s migration measures were good. We wanted to protect the citizens’ and the RS’ vital interests,”* Dodik said. He added *“They are not satisfied with the work of the State’s Intelligence and Security Agency (OSA).”* *“We ask the (State) institutions to implement a zero asylum policy and not to grant asylum to anyone until the regulations are amended,”* he concluded. The RS has neither accommodation capacities nor it is ready to accept any migrants, said the RS Prime Minister Zeljka Cvijanovic, who also attended the meeting. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. It is under question if the general election held on October 7th, 2018 will bring political stability in the country. It is estimated that formation of Government would be a very difficult issue. Croats do not accept the electoral results claiming that Croatian community did not elect its representative in the tripartite presidency. There is a feeling of injustice among Croat people. Election of ultra nationalist Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia’s EU and NATO integration. Dodik is a person who does not

actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote his own political agenda. Bosnia has become a field of influence's rivalry; Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests. High Representative Inzko expressed in the UN Security Council his disappointment and pessimism over Bosnia's future. Major concerns over security situation and political stability in the state.



BULGARIA: November 8th - 9th, Bulgarian Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov said he had asked the National Assembly to strip six MPs of their parliamentary immunity. The request aims to pave the way for criminal proceedings against Elena Yoncheva and Georgi Mihaylov from the main opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP); the leader of the populist opposition Volya (Воля) party with three MPs; Veselin Mareshki, Krastina Taskova, and Plamen Hristov, and Boris Karchev from the ruling Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB). Elena Yoncheva is suspected of laundering money from the bankrupt Corporate Commercial Bank through an offshore company and her own TV company. Georgi Mihaylov is accused of deliberate mismanagement. According to the prosecutors, during his tenure as director of the Haematology Hospital in Sofia from 2015 to 2017, he signed unprofitable contracts that resulted in a hospital's debt of almost 12.5 million euro. Veselin Mareshki as co-owner of Pharmnet OOD and Krastina Taskova and Plamen Hristov as regional managers will be investigated for extortion and threatening pharmacy owners into

buying medicinal products only from Pharmnet OOD at unfavorable prices. GERB MP Boris Karchev faces charges of large-scale tax evasion. As director of BBC Cable OOD he did not pay in 2015 almost 164,000 in VAT, filling in fake information in his VAT return. However, on November 9th, 2018 four of the six investigated MPs said they would give up their immunity voluntarily. Only Volya's leader Veselin Mareshki and the MPs from his party Krastina Taskova have not decided yet. They, however, consider themselves innocent and see political interference in the actions of the prosecutor's office. (www.novinite.com)

- November 8th, calls for proposals to supply the Bulgarian Army with a new infantry combat vehicle will be sent out by the end of November 2018, Land Forces Commander Major General Mihail Popov said. Popov said that expectations were that the process of evaluating the bids and awarding a contract would be completed by May 2019. The armored vehicle acquisition project envisages getting 150 vehicles for three infantry Battalions, as well as systems, additional equipment and training. The estimated cost is 749 million euro (including VAT) and it was approved by Bulgarian Parliament on June 8th, 2018. Popov said that in addition to the major military modernization projects that attract the most attention, a further 12 projects were developed this year. Supply equipment for the engineering and artillery corps, provision of night vision devices, unmanned air vehicles, radar equipment are among other the General said. It was expected that the projects would be implemented in the next five to seven years as part of the national plan to increase Bulgaria's defense spending 2% of GDP by 2024. Popov said that the main problems faced by Bulgaria's Land Forces are

maintenance of equipment and shortage of military personnel. However, he expressed his confidence that the Defense Ministry's new recruiting drive would pay off. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- November 9th, a delegation led by Azerbaijani Agriculture Minister Inam Karimov took part at the 5th meeting of the Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria in Sofia. Addressing the event, Bulgarian Energy Minister Temenuzhka Petkova briefed on the agenda of the meeting. The Bulgarian Minister noted that the Bulgarian-Azerbaijani relations reached the level of strategic partnership. She stressed that Bulgaria supports the territorial integrity, sovereignty and immunity of the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan and spoke about the possibilities of developing mutually beneficial Azerbaijani-Bulgarian cooperation in the field of energy. Touching upon cooperation in the energy sector, Petkova said that it is an important part of the economic ties between the two countries. She underlined the importance of the Southern Gas Corridor initiated and implemented by Azerbaijan for ensuring European energy security. The importance of transporting Azerbaijani gas to Europe within the framework of this project and in this context, providing Bulgaria with natural gas via the Greek-Bulgarian gas pipeline was emphasized. In turn, Karimov pointed out that both countries closely cooperate within the framework of international organizations, Bulgaria constantly supports the fair position of Azerbaijan, based on the norms of international law, in the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. During the meeting it was noted that numerous documents have been signed between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria in various

fields, including in the economic sphere, and there has been a positive trend in the trade turnover. In addition, it was noted that there are great opportunities for expanding trade and investment cooperation. Speaking about the economic importance of infrastructure projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the Baku International Sea Trade Port, implemented as part of the economic reforms carried out by the Head of state, Inam Karimov expressed the possibility of cooperation with Bulgaria within these projects. Both countries are members of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Bulgaria maintains relative political stability although ruling coalition faces several challenges threaten its sustainability. President Radev strengthens his rhetoric and criticism against the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting their different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and tabling a new motion of no confidence. However, there is little possibility of Government's collapse and early parliamentary elections. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed

Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: November 6th,

Minister of Foreign Affairs Marija Pejcinovic Buric said she was *“Disappointed with the reaction from the President's office”* regarding the Ministry's failure to properly inform the public on the details of the Marrakesh Agreement. She said that she did not know the source of the President's frustration. *“At the same time, we have yet to find out exactly what part of the document the President finds controversial. Because for us, nothing about it is controversial. This is important for us to know because this document is the first of its kind since the existence of the UN that attempts to regulate the issue of migration,”* said Pejcinovic Buric. The Marrakesh Agreement, of which Croatia is a signatory country, has become the subject of political controversy after the President announced earlier that she would not attend the intergovernmental conference in Morocco at which the agreement is set to be adopted next month. The President believes the Foreign Ministry failed to properly inform the public of the details of the agreement on “regular” migration. In the Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandrokovic weighed in, saying outside forces are attempting to drive a wedge between the President and the ruling coalition. *“What I'd like to know is who, or what group, is generating these controversies and conflicts? Someone is generating these conflicts on purpose between the President and the Government. We must find out who is behind this, why they are doing this, and what their goals and intentions are,”* she said. (www.glashrvatske.hr/hr)

- November 7th, Croatia is prepared to share its know-how and assist Kosovo on its Euro-Atlantic

path, just as it had assisted Montenegro, and just as it is now helping F.Y.R.O.M and Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatian Defense Minister, Damir Krsticevic, said after meeting the Minister of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), Rrustem Berisha. Berisha said Croatia is a friendly country and a strategic partner to Kosovo, adding that his country could learn a lot from Croatia. *“With this meeting, we want to boost cooperation, which is in the interest of both of our countries, but also in the interest of peace and stability of the entire region,”* Berisha added. In the meeting it was also discussed the process of transforming the lightly armed KSF into a standing national army, which Kosovo Parliament voted for last month in spite of opposition from its ethnic Serb minority deputies. Berisha briefed Krsticevic about three draft bills intended to allow the transformation of KSF into a 5,000 strong army, adding that they are all *“In accordance with the Kosovo Constitution, with the new KSF mandate intended to be in the interest of all of its citizens.”* During his visit to Croatia, Berisha also visited “HS Produkt”, a Croatian firearms manufacturer which is the EU's second largest exporter of handguns to the US market, second only to Austria's Glock, and also produces assault rifles used by the Croatian Army. The two Ministers also discussed good cooperation in the education sector. Krsticevic said that over the last five years, a total of 40 Kosovo Security Force members have been trained at a Croatian military academy. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- November 9th, the Government's proposal for the 2019 budget has been met with lukewarm reactions from analysts, opposition politicians, and business leaders, all of whom said more decisive reforms were needed to spur stronger economic growth. Economic analyst Damir

Novotny said the budget would not bring about the kind of changes that are needed to bolster the economy. It signals more of the same from the Government, he said. *“We are continuing with a policy of increasing public spending, which is squeezing out private sector investment. That can't be good for the economy in the long run. We were hoping for a change, a reformist turn, but that is not reflected in this budget proposal,”* Novotny said. SDP's Branko Grcic said the tax reforms being touted by the Government are not true reforms. *“These changes will not result in higher salaries for a large number of people, but only for around 20 thousand of our highest earners. The SDP is not happy with this and we have offered a solution: rising of the non-taxable income limit from 3,800 to 5,000 kuna per month,”* Grcic said. Unions welcomed the plan to lower taxes on bonuses. *“This will allow those employers who can afford it to be more generous. Every kuna counts for workers when salaries are this low,”* said union leader Kresimir Sever. Davor Majetic of the Employers Association said his organization was especially pleased since they had proposed this measure. He did say, however, that the budget lacked true reforms and was still too heavy on the spending side, adding that this meant the economy would remain burdened by high taxes. (www.glashrvatske.hr/hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Croatia follows a tough external policy with neighboring countries. Although it has territorial disputes with Slovenia and Bosnia it does not hesitate to intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs in the name of Croatian entity living there. It is more than obvious that Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising

“local” power. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Although the President is a member of the ruling party, it is estimated that there is some kind of political distance between the President and Government. However, ruling coalition claims political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. Apart from that a new border conflict has emerged with Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding Peljesak Bridge. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: November 5th, as a drillship continued on its journey to Cyprus, Turkey was again warning its neighbors that it will defend its interests in hydrocarbons resources in the eastern Mediterranean. Late in the afternoon the Stena IceMax drillship, leased by ExxonMobil, was clearing the southern coast of Spain. Its destination is Limassol, where it is expected to arrive on November 12th, 2018. The vessel will be carrying out two back-to-back exploratory drills in Cyprus' offshore block 10, licensed to Exxon. The first target site has been dubbed 'Delphinos'. Built in 2012 at Samsung Heavy Industries shipyard, the Stena IceMax is a dual-mast drillship capable of drilling in water depths up to 3050 meters. Cypriot authorities have meanwhile issued a NAVTEX, or marine

advisory reserving an area around the drilling sites. The NAVTEX runs from November 10th to February 25th, 2019. Turkey, which does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, has repeatedly warned the latter against extracting hydrocarbons without taking into account the Turkish Cypriots on the island. Over the weekend, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said his nation would never allow *“Attempts at extorting natural resources in the eastern Mediterranean by excluding us and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.”* Speaking at a delivery ceremony for a Turkish warship, Erdogan said that those who thought they could take steps contrary to Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean or the Aegean have started to realize they made a “huge” mistake. *“We do not have an eye on countries’ rights, laws and territories. We only protect the rights of our country and brothers. Just like we let the terrorists in Syria have it, we will not allow the thugs in the seas to run free,”* Erdogan said. His remarks were understood as being directed at both Cyprus and Greece. Turkey and Greece have established a de facto moratorium on Aegean exploration, although politicians on both sides have at times made belligerent statements. Responding to Erdogan on Monday, Greece’s Defense Minister Panos Kammenos said the international community is fully aware which nation is playing by the rules. *“We all know who the pirates of the Aegean are,”* Kammenos said during a memorial service honoring the Greek navy. *“Greece is provoking no one, but neither shall we retreat a single millimeter. The borders of Greece are the EU’s borders as well,”* Kammenos said. Turkey’s claims on the island’s EEZ partly overlap with Cyprus’ blocks 1, 4, 6 and 7. Ankara also supports the north’s claims on blocks 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12 and 13, including within few kilometers from

the Aphrodite gas field in block 12. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 8th, Major General Cheryl Pearce of Australia has been appointed Force Commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). She succeeds Major General Mohammad Humayun Kabir of Bangladesh, who completed his assignment on October 6th, 2018.



Major General Cheryl Pearce

(Photo source: www.defense.gov.au)

Major General Pearce has had a distinguished career in the Australian Defense Force, most recently as Commandant of the Australian Defense Force Academy (since 2017), which provides undergraduate and postgraduate education as well as military training and education for future leaders of the Navy, Army and Air Force. In 2016, Major General Pearce was the Commander of the Australian Joint Task Force Group in Afghanistan providing training, advice and assistance to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces as part of the Resolute Support Mission of the NATO. From 2013 to 2016, she served as the Australian Army Headquarters Chief of Staff and,

from 2010 to 2012, as Director of Special Operations Support. She also held the positions of Commandant of the Defense Police Training Centre and Commanding Officer of the 1st Military Police Battalion. Major General Pearce was also the Australian Army's Provost-Marshal and a military observer with the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor in 2002. (www.cyprus-mail.com, www.unficyp.unmissions.org)

- November 7th, Cyprus and the U.S have agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in the area of security, according to a statement by the Cyprus Foreign Ministry, which said that the two sides have signed a Statement of Intent on security issues. The agreement refers to issues relating to combating terrorism, strengthening security at sea and borders and promoting regional stability. This comes as Cyprus Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides visited Washington for a meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Christodoulides also met with Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell and Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon. In statements after the meetings at the State Department, Christodoulides said the discussions with the two officials concentrated on three issues. *"First, our bilateral relations and the mutual desire to strengthen bilateral relations at all levels. The statement of intent was signed within this framework, as it sets the outline of cooperation and how we should proceed next,"* the Minister said. The second field, he added, is regional developments and the role of Cyprus can play through trilateral cooperation with neighboring states. It is important, he added, that the US acknowledge the work that is being done and the results that will ensue from trilateral cooperation

agreements and *"We hope that soon there will be developments as far as the US participating in these agreements,"* the Minister said. The third issue which was examined was the Cyprus issue, said Christodoulides, adding that the US expressed their support, both for the Secretary General's efforts and those of his envoy, Jane Holl Lute. The Cypriot Minister said they exchanged views on the security and guarantees aspect and the need for Cyprus to continue its role in the Eastern Mediterranean as a pillar of stability and security. Expressing the Government of Cyprus's satisfaction for the signing of the statement of intent, Christodoulides said the further strengthening of our strategic partnership with the US is not directed against any third country. *"We are working on a positive agenda and through positive approach to handle common challenges and problems,"* adding that this partnership is open to all countries that share the same values for the Eastern Mediterranean region. The US State Department has hailed the Statement of Intent to strengthen and develop bilateral security relationship between Washington and Nicosia. Spokesperson Heather Nauert said the Statement of Intent *"Will advance shared interests in combating terrorism, enhancing maritime and border security and promoting regional stability. The Secretary reaffirmed longstanding US policy on resources in the Republic of Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone and also said the United States continues to support Cypriot-led, UN-facilitated efforts to reunify the island as a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, which would benefit all Cypriots,"* the statement said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



F.Y.R.O.M: November 6th, in an interview to the German daily Welt the EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn praised the agreement between F.Y.R.O.M and Greece regarding the “name” dispute. Hahn claimed that resolution of this conflict not only opens the way for F.Y.R.O.M to the EU and NATO, but also it could lead the small country to a breakthrough in the accession process of the Western Balkans. *“This was a very important step that initiated the process of constitutional change.*

I am grateful to all Members who have fulfilled their responsibilities and put the interests of the country before the party political agenda. This is especially true for the MPs of the main opposition party, who voted against the party line and for that faced consequences, namely the party exclusion,” Hahn said. Moreover, the Commissioner expressed his confidence that the Greek Parliament will ratify the agreement *“as the Greek Government has recently reaffirmed its support [to the agreement],”* Hahn said. The Commissioner stressed that the implementation of the agreement could spread an important message that reconciliation in the Western Balkans is possible. *“In this respect, it could also have an invigorating effect on resolving the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo, ultimately leading to a breakthrough in the accession process of the Western Balkans,”* Hahn said. He explained that the EU countries argue that EU accession by the Western Balkan countries only makes sense if all six countries could be included. Under this prism, a solution for F.Y.R.O.M makes this scenario much more likely. Moreover Hahn claimed there is some kind of positive competition in the Balkans about who makes the fastest progress. *“For a long time Serbia and Montenegro were the so-called front runners in the accession process, but now it could be Albania and Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M],”* the Commissioner claimed. According to Hahn 2025 is a realistic year for Western Balkan countries to enter the EU, but only if they implement all membership requirements before joining. (www.welt.de)

- November 9th, the Committee on Constitutional Issues continued debate on the draft-constitutional amendments. On November 8th, 2018 it endorsed the first draft of the constitutional amendments by ten “Yes” votes and five “No”. This draft

proposed change of the state's name from "Republic of Macedonia" to "Republic of North Macedonia" in every Constitution's article except article 36 where there is a historical aspect. Opposition accused the ruling coalition of a non-transparent and without consensus procedure of changing the country's name and Constitution. Opposition also claimed that referendum result was not respected by the Government. However, on November 7th, 2018 the Government's spokesperson Mile Bosnjakovski announced that Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) declaration remains in the Constitution's preamble and it will be mentioned twice instead of once. He also stressed that that there will be no changes in state's national anthem. (www.republica.mk)

- November 9th, the Criminal Council from the Basic Court Skopje rejected the appeal of the convicted former Prime Minister and honorary President of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), Nikola Gruevski. He had appealed against his conviction whereby he was sentenced two years in Shuto Orizari prison for acquiring personal gain and stimulating the commitment of a crime regarding procurement procedure of a new vehicle worth more than 600,000 euro ("Tank" case). "After receiving several questions from the media, we would like to inform the public that the Criminal Council of the Department for Organized Crime and Corruption at the Basic Court Skopje 1, acting on complaints raised by the defense and the defendant in the case KOK no. 59/17, from the Prosecutor's Office

designated as "Tank", filed against the judge's decision to execute sanctions, today held a meeting where, after examining the facts and evidence in the appeals, the Criminal Council issued a decision rejecting the appeals and confirming the ruling of the judge for execution of sanctions. The decision was sent to all parties in the case and will be executed immediately upon arrival," announced the Basic Court Skopje 1. This decision will be sent to Gruevski, after which he will immediately have to surrender himself serving a two years sentence. If Gruevski does not appear then the police have to arrest him and escort him to prison. (www.meta.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

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



GREECE: November 6th, responding to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who spoke about “sea bandits” in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos hit back on November 5th, 2018 saying “*We all know who the pirates of the Aegean are.*” “*The only ones who were never pirates, over the centuries, as you know, are the Greeks,*” Kammenos said, following a meeting with the US Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt at the Defense Ministry. “*It is the United Nations Security Council that judges who the pirates are,*” he said. Erdogan was speaking at a ceremony to mark the commissioning of a third home-built Turkish corvette on November 4th, 2018 when he said that Ankara “*Will not leave the scene to the bandits of the sea*” and warned that they will pay the price, as “*the terrorists in Syria*” were made to do. He added that Turkey “*Will not tolerate attempts to seize*” natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean that would exclude Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots. Analysts have linked Erdogan’s incendiary rhetoric to planned drilling operations in plot 10 of Cyprus’s Exclusive Economic Zone on November 15th, 2018 by energy company Exxon-Mobil. Nicosia considers this particular drilling operation to be very significant, as estimates point to large reserves of natural gas in the area. In his comments on Monday, Kammenos said “*Greece is not provoking anyone but neither will it yield an inch of the rights granted to it by international law and international treaties.*” He added that the borders of Greece are those of the European Union. “*As a result, any violation of the sea, land or air borders of Greece are also a violation of those of the EU,*” he said. Ankara has already made its presence felt in the Eastern Mediterranean with exploration activities from its seismic research vessel Barbaros Hayreddin Pasa.

In the meanwhile, the Air Forces of Greece and Israel held a joint twelve-day exercise based at the 110 Combat Wing of the Larissa Air Base until November 2nd, 2018 as part of the defense cooperation program of the two countries. Purpose of the exercise was to increase combat capacity and to optimize the level of cooperation between Greek and Israeli Air Force personnel in air-to-air and air-to-ground missions in mixed formations. The Israeli Air Force participated with eleven F-16 fighter jets, one radar plane G550H and staff. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Greek and Israeli fighter jets co-training

(Photo source: www.haf.gr)

- November 8th, in an interview in the tv station “Alpha” the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said Greece will be announcing 10,000 new state sector jobs in 2019. According to Tsipras a tentative deal with the Church of Greece (reached on November 6th, 2018) which aims to change the way clerics are paid and resolve a long-standing property dispute, some 10,000 clerics will be moved off the state payroll. Speaking on November 7th, 2018 the Government spokesman Dimitris Tzanakopoulos said the move will “free up” space for another 10,000 public servants. Speaking on Alpha TV Tsipras said that the Government will secure that there is one hiring for every departure in the public sector. “*In 2019, we will have 8,000 departures and an equal*

number of hirings through the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection (ASEP), plus an additional 7,500 hirings for which we have the funding,” he said. Also in 2019, he said, there will be 8,000 departures and an equal number of hirings, plus 10,000 positions freed up by departure of clerics. Referring to SYRIZA’s proposed changes to the Greek electoral system, Tsipras said that a party would need at least 44-45% of the vote to form a single-party government. Regarding the name deal between Greece and F.Y.R.O.M Tsipras expressed his certainty that it will be ratified by the Greek Parliament. “The deal will be approved for one reason: Everyone down to the last citizen understands that despite the difficulties, despite the problems, this agreement is to the benefit of the country – particularly North Greece and Thessaloniki,” Tsipras said. Speaking about Turkey’s reaction to Greek plans to expand the country’s territorial waters, the Greek premier said that Ankara would have to abide by international law. “This is not a bilateral issue,” Tsipras said. “Greece is a threat to no one and it will not stand for threats from anyone. We must proceed with a substantial dialogue [with Turkey] without giving up any of our sovereign rights. We will not tolerate any threats with regard to the timing of the expansion of our territorial waters,” Tsipras said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 9th, Greece has urged Albania to abstain from actions that fuel tension on bilateral relations after the Foreign Ministry in Tirana labeled 52 Greek nationals “persona non grata” and banned them from entering the country. The 52 people were among hundreds who attended the funeral on November 8th, 2018 of the ethnic Greek Konstantinos Katsifas who was fatally shot in a gun battle with Albanian Police last month.

“At this sensitive juncture we expect Albania to refrain from statements and actions that strain our relations,” the Greek Foreign Ministry said in a statement, adding that it expected Albanian authorities to clarify the reasons for their decision. “We remain dedicated to building bonds of trust; however we expect the same of our neighbors,” the announcement said. In a related development, 12 Greek nationals who had been detained by Albanian authorities after the funeral on Thursday on suspicion of instigating “racist violence” were released early Friday morning. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition of SYRIZA – ANEL intensifies its efforts to reverse political atmosphere since the country enters gradually in a long pre-electoral period. Tsipras and Kammenos try to gain political time planning to relief society with social care measures. Taking into consideration that measures will start to be voted next month it is assessed that early election may be called in May 2019 together with local and European election. Ruling coalition believes that it is enough time so people to enjoy relief measures reversing political climate. Of course there is always the alternative scenario of parliamentary election in autumn 2019 when actually mandate of current Government expires. Greece (and Cyprus) enters in a risky period of tension with Turkey. A navy frigate is already closely monitors the Turkish drilling ship “Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha” while several Turkish NAVTEX in the Aegean Sea for aeronautical exercises establish conditions of tension and possible crisis. Coming days will be critical to see if Turkey keeps maintaining a war of words or it will escalate situation.



KOSOVO: November 6th, the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said that Kosovo would impose tariffs of 10% for goods coming from Serbia and Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H). *“For first time we have taken protection measures. The Government took a decision for imposing tariffs on goods imported from Serbia and Bosnia,”* Haradinaj said. The Deputy Prime Minister Enver Hoxhaj said that Serbia distributes large amount of money to harm Kosovo’s sovereignty. He said that the Government of Kosovo took the measures to counter Serbia’s campaign against Kosovo. According to the Agency of Statistics of Kosovo (ASK) Serbia continues to be the biggest exporter of goods in Kosovo. Over the last weeks Serbia has started an aggressive campaign against Kosovo’s statehood claiming that certain countries have withdrawn their recognition of Kosovo, but officials of Foreign Ministry in Pristina refuted claims of Serbia’s Foreign Minister saying that no country has taken decision to annul Kosovo’s independence. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 7th, Kosovo Parliament Speaker, Kadri Veseli, said that he expects Austria which currently holds the EU’s presidency, to proceed to the EU Council the visa liberalization for Kosovo citizens. In a press conference, Veseli said that Kosovo citizens are unjustly being kept isolated. *“Until now we were told that visa liberalization is not a political issue, but purely technical. Now we are hearing voices that this is a political issue,”* said Veseli. According to him Kosovo will keep insisting on its rights and they will keep lobbying until visas are lifted for Kosovo citizens. *“We will not give up, but be more optimistic. Otherwise this can be considered as extreme racism,”* Veseli said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 8th, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, called Belgrade and Pristina to tone down their aggressive rhetoric, after Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and his Kosovo counterpart Hashim Thaci exchanged angry statements following a meeting as part of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. The meeting came a day after Kosovo's Government decided to impose a 10% customs tariff on all Serbian and Bosnian products, saying the move was in retaliation for Belgrade’s efforts to thwart recognition of its former province. In Brussels, a visibly angry Vucic said that talks with Pristina will continue when it cancels its *“illegal decisions.”* *“When somebody threatens to send troops to the north, it introduces tariffs of 10% and it violates the CEFTA agreement, ten years after signing it, how can one expect us to agree on anything?”* Vucic said upon leaving the meeting. He said he does not want to talk about the conditions for continuing the dialogue, but stressed that *“None of our people will appear in Brussels until Pristina withdraws all illegal acts.”* Thaci told journalists that the meeting was tense, with many confrontations. *“It remains to be seen in the future how things will move, but it is not an easy challenge to face this Serbian apparatus,”* he said. *“The Serbian discourse was aggressive and arrogant, and our discourse was with arguments to achieve a balanced agreement that would mean mutual recognition and joining UN and replacement of Resolution 1244,”* he added. Mogherini's office replied with a press release saying that the EU expects Serbia and Kosovo to swiftly deliver on their commitment to the dialogue given the direct link between comprehensive normalization of relations between them and the concrete prospects for their EU aspirations. Kosovo and Serbia should

“Refrain from words, actions and measures that are contrary to the spirit of normalization,” the press release of the EU External Action Service read after the meeting. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although Kosovo – Serbia dialogue has entered in a critical phase it seems that Pristina obviously undermines its normal evolvement by unilateral actions. Announcement of the establishment of Kosovo Army and impose of an extra 10% tariff in Serbian (and Bosnian) imported products definitely are not proper actions before bilateral meetings. Furthermore, President Thaci have to address with his opponents within the country which actually question his mandate to negotiate territorial changes. In other words, Kosovo appears not well organized for such a level of dialogue. The question of border exchange or simply change continues to divide Kosovo political forces and population. However, it could be estimated that if Kosovo keeps on acting in such way it may be isolated on the table of international negotiations. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) has a leading role in the background pushing for the idea of territorial change (or exchange). Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. A mutual accepted agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is the critical point for the country in order to start approaching the Euro-Atlantic integration. Kosovo army issue is a case which may cause tension with Serbia and it seems that the state seeks to accelerate actions towards transformation of KSF into a regular army.



MOLDOVA: November 7th,

Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM) Deputy Chairman Vladimir Cebotari stated that President Igor Dodon continues the practice of refusing to promulgate some laws, even if the Constitution obliges him to do so. Cebotari believes that too many violations have already been accumulated, and necessary conditions have been set up for the Head of state to be prosecuted for *“The usurpation of power in the state.”* *“I have several questions to the President, to the presidential institution, which I respect. It seems that I respect President Dodon as well, at least I used to. However, sometimes I do not understand some things. How one behaves in this way towards the presidential institution? How can one make such shows? I do not understand,”* Cebotari said. The Vice-President of PDM made a parallel between Igor Dodon and the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis. *“Nor does the President of Romania like to sign some decrees, but he knows that it’s his obligation according to the Constitution. He tries to negotiate, find political compromises, but fulfills his obligations. I do not even know how many times this circus will repeat,”* Cebotari added. *“These cases could be investigated, and then the President to be held accountable. That’s what I think as a lawyer,”* concluded the PDM Vice President. (www.moldova.org)

(www.infomarket.md)

- November 8th, a draft law was adopted in first reading by Parliament regarding electoral procedures. According to the law, on election day no electoral agitation will be allowed within the polling station or within 100 meters of the polling station. Also, the new regulations stipulate that on the day of voting, people which will make

electoral agitation within the polling station or in the range of 100 meters will be sanctioned with fines. For people with responsibility or for the electoral candidates the fines will be higher. The draft was drafted following the recommendations of the Commission of legal issues, appointments and immunities, which on October 31st, 2018 approved the Report on analysis, examination and evaluation of electoral legislation which underpinned the invalidation of new local elections in Chisinau. (www.moldpres.md)

- November 9th, Moldovan Defense Minister Eugen Sturza stated that he had talks with the NATO for a joint military exercise on the territory of Moldova. The exercise could take place at Bulboaca Training Center. Sturza believes that the Bulboaca Center is becoming an ultramodern center with state-of-the-art application infrastructure and that the Moldovan participation in military exercises could be massive. The Minister says he is having talks with his partners in order to extend geographically Moldovan Armed Forces' participation in international military exercises making Moldovan soldiers interoperable with other country's military. According to him, it's necessary for Moldovan soldiers to gain experience from the states that participated in armed conflicts. (www.moldova.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political life is "hostage" of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the

country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability and democratic values. Invalidation of local elections in Chisinau by the Constitutional Court badly affected state's profile and mainly relations with the EU. Moreover, the Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. By autumn the state has entered in pre-election period although elections are scheduled for February 24th, 2019. The "Transnistria case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: November 5th, the Montenegrin language, being the official language in Montenegro, represents a fundamental constitutional determinant which has to be further elaborated and determined by a special law, as it has been done with other identity matters, the President of the Constitutional Committee in the Parliament of Montenegro and the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) MP, Miodrag Vukovic said. He recalled that he recently asked the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the political system in the Government of Montenegro, Zoran Pazin, about the legal order of the official language – Montenegrin, emphasizing that in practice there have been many cases of ignoring the constitutional provision, as well as underestimation of the language by public administration, especially when communicating with the public, but on behalf of the state. "This is not just about the incidents, but they can lead to

various forms of language vulgarization and the constitutional provision discredited,” he said. According to Vukovic there are justified reasons, political and factual ones, for solving the language and script issues through a specific law. This is a very sensitive matter, which does not mean the state has no obligation to regulate it. (www.cdm.me)

- November 8th, Charles Tannock, the European Parliament rapporteur on Montenegro, welcomed the idea of setting up the Parliamentary Committee for the reform of electoral and other laws, noting that he has been disappointed in the decision of the Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora - DCG) and Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena Reformska Akcija - URA) not to take part in the work of this body. *“I welcome establishment of the Committee for the reform of electoral and other laws in the Parliament of Montenegro, which will be implementing the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Even though the existing law backs all fundamental freedoms, elaborates the exact dates of the election campaign, ensures further transparency in terms of financing and use of state funds, ensures greater consistency in decision-making process by the State Election Commission, it will also contribute to greater voters’ trust. It’s obvious that I’d like to have all the parties included in the work of the Committee for the reform of electoral legislation, so I’m quite disappointed to find out that the Democrats and URA decided not to be involved in this process, still intending to boycott the parliament,”* Tannock said. On October 30th, 2018 the Parliament of Montenegro adopted the decision on establishing the Committee for further reform of electoral and other legislation, proposed by the

MPs of the ruling coalition, Branimir Gvozdenovic and Genci Nimanbegu. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



ROMANIA: November 7th, Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis criticized ruling party leader Liviu Dragnea for promoting fake news after Dragnea tried to deflect public attention from a scandal linking to him to older scandals involving Iohannis. *“A felon, Dragnea, has reached the top of the state and he is progressing not in rule of law but in fake news. What he presented yesterday is fake news,”* Iohannis said. He added that Dragnea is desperate and that’s why he is trying to manipulate public opinion. Dispute started after Rise Project, a local investigation journalist platform, announced on Saturday that it came into possession of a suitcase with sensitive documents belonging to managers of local construction company Tel Drum, which is at the center of a corruption and EU fund fraud investigation also targeting Dragnea. The journalists claimed that the respective documents

had been hidden from the anticorruption prosecutors. On Monday, Liviu Dragnea came to the Parliament with two suitcases. One contained donuts, Dragnea's way of saying Rise Project's revelations were lies, and the other one had mock-files referencing to past scandals involving President Klaus Iohannis. Dispute between the ruling party and Iohannis entered a new phase after Justice Minister Tudorel Toader asked for the dismissal of Romania's General Prosecutor Augustin Lazar and suggested that the President appointed him for this position in 2016 after Lazar closed a case involving Iohannis himself. However, it turned out that another prosecutor named Cristian Lazar had closed the respective case, according to local media reports. Iohannis also made the first statement yesterday about the request to dismiss Augustin Lazar. He said that Justice Minister Tudorel Toader has been acting *"besides the law"* both in the matter of the General Prosecutor's dismissal as in the matter of the nomination he made for the position of Chief Prosecutor of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA). Toader sent Iohannis the nomination of Adina Florea for Head of DNA although the Superior Magistracy Council (CSM) advised against it. (www.romania-insider.com)

- November 7th, the European Parliament (EP) is *"deeply concerned"* about the changes to the justice laws and the criminal codes in Romania, which could weaken the rule of law, according to the draft resolution on the rule of law in Romania. The document will be discussed in the Thursday meeting of the European Parliament. If there is an agreement, the resolution will be voted in the EP's plenary sitting on November 14th, 2018. The draft resolution on the rule of law in Romania, consulted by local publication says that the EP *"Is*

deeply concerned about the reformed legislation on the Romanian judicial and criminal law, especially with regard to its potential to undermine the independence of the judiciary in a structural way and its ability to effectively combat corruption in Romania, as well as to weaken the rule of law." The EP thus urges the Romanian parliament and the Government to *"Fully implement recommendations of the European Commission, GRECO and the Venice Commission and refrain from any reform that would jeopardize the rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary."* According to the same draft resolution, the MEPs invite the Romanian authorities to *"Set up safeguards to ensure a transparent and legal basis for any institutional cooperation and to avoid any interference that goes beyond the verification and balancing system."* They also call for *"Strengthening parliamentary control over intelligence services."* The EP also urges the Romanian authorities to *"Counter any measures that would decriminalize corruption in office and implement the national anti-corruption strategy."* The document also condemns the *"Violent and disproportionate intervention of the police forces"* during the August 10 street protest in Bucharest. The protest ended violently after a brutal intervention of the riot police and gendarmes. They used tear gas and water cannons to clear the square, with peaceful protesters, journalists and even tourists being injured during their intervention. Resolution to be adopted in mid-November comes after the debate in the EP plenary session on October 3rd, 2018 which focused on the latest reform of Romania's judicial system. The Romanian Prime Minister also held a speech during this debate, in which she criticized the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) reports. (www.romania-insider.com)

- November 10th, Romanian Minister Delegate for European Affairs Victor Negrescu handed in his resignation less than two months before his country is set to take over the European Council six-month rotating presidency on January 1st, 2019, ahead of Brexit and the European elections. According to various Government sources Negrescu resigned after a very tense cabinet meeting on November 9th, 2018 where Ministers discussed how ready Romania is to handle the EU Council Presidency. Romania is to take over the EU presidency from Austria. Negrescu was in charge of coordinating the EU Council presidency preparations. Minister for European Funds Rovana Plumb confirmed Negrescu's move for news channel Digi 24. *“I understand that this resignation has happened. I spoke to Mr. Negrescu yesterday during the Government’s meeting about how ready we are in principle to take over the EU Council presidency,”* she said.



Minister Delegate for European Affairs, Victor
Negrescu

(Photo source: www.gov.ro)

Finance Minister Eugen Teodorovici also confirmed Negrescu's move. *“It’s an act I do not understand. Why to do this when you have a unique chance to coordinate such a presidency reveals political immaturity,”* he said. Negrescu

was appointed as the Minister Delegate for European Affairs under the Romanian Foreign Ministry in June 2017. He was an MEP during 2014-2017. He is a member of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) and also the national coordinator of the Romanian network of the European Socialist Party. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government continues in the field of Justice. The EU through several channels expresses its concerns over political situation in Romania hardening its rhetoric. The Venice Commission expressed its concerns over independence of state’s judiciary taking into consideration the promoted amendments on judicial legislation. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government’s plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state’s justice. Resignation of the Minister Delegate for European Affairs adds a new governmental crisis, while the country is preparing to take over the EU Presidency in the first half of 2019. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia.



SERBIA: November 6th, Ragmi

Mustafa is the new President of the Albanian Minority National Council in Serbia. *“Presevo Valley”* is the informal name of a region in the southern part of central Serbia that has ethnic Albanian minorities in three of its largest towns: Presevo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja. According to Pristina-based, Albanian language media outlet

Koha, Mustafa said he *“Didn't think that the idea of Presevo valley joining Kosovo is of the President Hashim Thaci but rather a legitimate ambition of the citizens of the valley.”* *“We have always felt as citizens of Kosovo,”* Mustafa said, according to Tanjug, which quoted UMMIK's Media Observer. (www.b92.net)

- November 9th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has said that the dialogue in Brussels will continue when Pristina withdraws its unlawful decisions. Vucic - who was in Brussels on Thursday for his EU-mediated meeting with Kosovo President Hashim Thaci – said that *“No Serb representative will appear in Brussels until that happens.”* *“To the citizens of Serbia I want to say that difficult days are ahead of our country, in the political sense. In the past days, we received the decisions of the Pristina authorities that, unlawfully in regard to the (regional trade) CEFTA agreement, increased the tax on goods from Serbia. No one from Europe was particularly excited, other than a statement from (Federica) Mogherini,”* he said. Vucic also warned of Pristina's intention to form an army and send a garrison towards the north (mostly Serb populated part of Kosovo) *“Which is contrary to the Brussels agreement and the agreement we have with NATO.”* *“What is happening tomorrow (Friday) is the third thing - Europeans are trying to throw us out of the energy network for northern Kosovo, unlawfully. In the draft, the proposal for the energy dispute, it was clear that the ZSO (Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo) must be formed, and those two mixed companies in the north would have been the transfer to the Albanian operator. Since the ZSO has not been formed, for which Pristina is to blame - they are now trying to get rid of us, to grab away from us the right to electricity, to make us lose power*

lines to Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M], Albania and Montenegro,” Vucic said. According to him, against such a decision are Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Croatia, the Netherlands, while Serbia's stance is represented by Spain, Slovakia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. *“We fight as much as we can, but the chances are small,”* he said. (www.b92.net)

- November 9th, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov assessed that the EU's efforts to mediate between Belgrade and Pristina have failed. According to Lavrov, the United States is also *“Forcing the issue of establishing a Kosovo army.”* *“It is obvious that the EU's efforts have failed, because Pristina refused to implement all the agreements that have been reached so far,”* Lavrov said. The Russian Minister specified that this, above all, refers to the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities (ZSO) in Kosovo. *“Pristina's efforts to form its own army represent the crudest violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. In addition, Pristina is being pressured from the outside, and above all by the United States,”* Lavrov said. After his meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Union of the Comoros Mohamed El-Amine Souef (who was in Belgrade on Thursday) Lavrov stressed that Russia welcomed that country's decision to withdraw its recognition of Kosovo. *“Of course, we welcome this. Russia will continue to comply with the decisions taken by the (UN) Security Council in the future, and above all I am referring to Resolution 1244, which requires that Kosovo is a part of Serbia. All steps must be taken in accordance with that resolution,”* Lavrov said. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Relative security stability. Serbia's path towards the EU and NATO goes through Kosovo dispute resolution. Although dialogue has started in Brussels is full of obstacles which undermine establishment of confidence and good will between two parties. Serbia is conducting a hard and aggressive effort to cancel Kosovo recognition from international community achieving so far ten countries to repeal recognition. However, Vucic's statements show that Serbia is ready to compromise recognizing that it cannot gain everything through negotiations. Actions of ethnic minorities in Serbia such as Albanians in south Serbia or Muslim Bosnians in Sandzak region touch the sensitive issue of national security of the state. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance. Russia is getting involved in Kosovo case by supporting actively Serbian stance.



SLOVENIA: November 5th, publication of Slovenian pleas in law against Croatia in the Official Journal of the European Union reveals still protected elements of the Slovenian lawsuit for the Croatian refusal of the arbitration award. As explained in the past by Slovenian politicians, Slovenia sued Croatia for numerous violations of European law and the restriction of its own sovereignty. The EU Court of Justice has published a summary of Slovenia's action against Croatia for violating European legislation in the EU's Official Journal. Although the publication of a summary of the Slovenian lawsuit against Croatia for the continuation of the litigation against Croatia is not a particularly significant event, the content of the Slovenian lawsuit, which still holds the mark confidentially,

is for the first time officially disclosed. It follows from the pleas in law that the actions of Croatia are clearly presented as a violation of the European legal order. According to the representative of Slovenia in court, international lawyer dr. Maya Menard, a court ruling could be expected by 2020. Slovenia against Croatia presents six substantive and technical pleas in law. As is evident from the first plea, Croatia rejects, according to Slovenia, the respect for the rule of law as fundamental value of the EU, which is enshrined in the Treaty of the EU. According to Slovenia, this is because Croatia has failed so far to fulfill its commitments in the EU accession process; to respect the arbitration award and to set a certain limit in the verdict. In the meanwhile, Croatia continues to punish Slovenian fishermen for crossing the maritime border. The legal representative of Slovenian fishermen, attorney Ivica Senjak, claimed that in September and October 2018, 85 new offense orders were handed against Slovenian fishermen with a total value of around 40,000 euro, and complaints have already been filed against all of them. (www.dnevnik.si)

- November 6th, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the so-called presidential and parliamentary elections in Donetsk and Luhansk held on November 2nd, 2018. Slovenia did not recognize the elections as they were held contrary to Ukraine's law and contrary to the September Minsk Protocol. The latter stated that early local elections should have been held in accordance with Ukrainian law on local Government provisional arrangements in some areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, which Ukraine intended to implement on December 7th, 2018. Upon this occasion, Slovenia called on all parties to refrain from taking any action that would jeopardize the search for an overall and long-term

political solution to the Ukrainian crisis and to fully implement the agreements reached at the talks in Minsk on 5 and 19 September 5th and 19th, 2014 as soon as possible. (www.vlada.si, www.sta.si)

- November 9th, the Minister for Slovenians Abroad Peter Jozef Cesnik's first working meeting was an opportunity to look at all current minority issues. Discussions in Trieste, in which representatives from all sections of the minority community participated, confirmed a shared wish for closer cooperation between the minority and mother country, which will in turn contribute to a good neighborly relationship between Slovenia and Italy. Securing Slovene representation in national and regional Parliaments, the revival of Ljubljana-Trieste working panels, care for economic exchange and for the future of the minority media in Italy was only some of the current topics of talks. The Slovene minority expects the complete support of Ljubljana during the visit of the Slovenian leadership to Rome at the end of November 2018. (www.rtv slo.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



TURKEY: November 8th, Turkish and U.S. troops conducted their second round of

joint patrols in the northern Syrian city of Manbij, agreed on as part of a deal to rid the area of the People's Protection Units (YPG). Anadolu Agency (AA) reporters on the ground reported that the troops patrolled the area around Sajour River, which separates the Manbij frontline from the district of Jarablous, an area that falls under Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield. Turkish and U.S. troops began joints patrols on November 1st, 2018. Since June 18, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) has carried out 68 unilateral patrols in Manbij. As agreed on by the two NATO allies in June, Turkish and U.S. forces were carrying out separate patrols in Manbij. The joint patrols, however, are being seen as a way to tamp down any potential violence between the various groups in the area. The Manbij patrols are part of a road map that Ankara and Washington agreed on in June 2018 to defuse tension amid demands for the withdrawal of the U.S.-backed YPG terrorists from the region in order to establish stability. Ankara has long said it will not allow a Kurdish corridor along its borders and pressed for the acceleration in the implementation of the Manbij deal. (www.dailysabah.com)

- November 9th, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited the Turkish Task Force Command in Somalia in the capital Mogadishu. As part of his visit to the East African country, Akar and his delegation visited "African Eagles" the students who receive military training by the Turkish force. Akar also inaugurated the new fitness hall of the school, and stated that he is always with the brotherly Somalis. "Whatever we do for our brothers here is not enough. Our decision is to be with our Somali brothers and sisters not only today, but also tomorrow," he said. An important cooperation was realized in training of Somalia Armed Forces, Akar said, adding, efforts to train

officers and sergeants is ongoing. The Turkish Task Force Command in Somalia -- the only modern military training facility in the country -- was opened in 2017 by Akar, then - Chief of General Staff. Akar and his delegation, including Chief of General Staff General Yasar Guler, arrived in the country to hold bilateral relations and military talks. Akar also has visited Libya and Sudan for defense and security talks during his tour of the region. Turkey has been the biggest supporter of Somalia for years and has its biggest embassy in Africa in Mogadishu. On Turkish counterterrorism efforts, Akar said: *“More than 450 terrorists were neutralized over the last two months.”* He added that efforts in northern Syrian city of Manbij were ongoing and the joint Turkey-U.S. patrols were initiated as part of the agreed-upon road map and security principles. Turkish and U.S. troops began joint patrols on November 1st, 2018. Since June 18th, 2018, the Turkish Armed Forces have carried out 68 unilateral patrols in Manbij. The Manbij deal between Ankara and the Washington focuses on the withdrawal of YPG fighters from the city to stabilize the region, which is in the northeast of northern Syria's Aleppo province. *“At the end of this, all of the YPG will go east of Euphrates (River), the people of Manbij will take over the city...”* Akar said. (www.dailysabah.com)

- November 10th, the UN Security Council should be *“A more transparent, democratic, representative, and accountable body,”* Turkey urged member countries. The remarks by Turkey's UN Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioglu came during a Security Council panel titled *“Maintenance of International Peace and Security: strengthening multilateralism and the role of the United Nations.”* *“The more transparency the Council displays while*

undertaking its work, the more accountable it will be,” Sinirlioglu said. *“A more responsive Council to the UN membership will be better placed to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world,”* he added. *“Increased transparency and effectiveness will further enhance the legitimacy of this body. That, in turn, will only strengthen the UN's role in achieving peace, security and economic prosperity to the benefit of all, with a renewed commitment to multilateralism,”* he said. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has long advocated reforming the structure of the Security Council, using the motto: *“The world is bigger than five.”* (www.hurriyetdailynews.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Turkish – U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Although Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation, the EU sends messages of terminating the EU – Turkey accession talks. Turkish economy is under heavy pressure and at the moment is its “Achille’s heel” bringing the state on the edge of collapse. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq and in Syria as well. The state tries to show a leading role regarding Syria’s “next day” claiming that developments its in neighboring country are related to its national

security mainly because of the Kurds . Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Regarding Turkish interests in East Mediterranean Sea it seems that they are reaching a critical point since Cypriots are ready to start next week hydrocarbon drills in their Exclusive Economic Zone via the US energy giant ExxonMobil. Is Turkey ready to move from rhetoric to action? It is rather difficult to see a direct harassment against the drill ship (which is monitored by 4 U.S vessels), but none could exclude a “hot” incident in the Aegean Sea.

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NOTE

-  Stable situation. No security risk
-  Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
-  Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict