



**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.

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

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ALBANIA: January 15th, the Albanian acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj, reacted after Top Channel reported that two Iranian diplomats were expelled from the country. Cakaj stated that the diplomats, Mohammad Ali Arz Peimanemati and Seyed Ahmad Hosseini Alast, were declared ‘persona non grata’ for conducting activities that went against their status. *“The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs has decided that the representatives of the Iranian Islamic Republic in Albania, Mohammad Ali Arz Peimanemati and Seyed Ahmad Hosseini Alast, are declared ‘persona non-grata’ for conducting activities that go against their status and against the principles of the Vienna Convention for Diplomatic Relations. The two Iranian representatives were asked to leave the territory of Albania immediately,”* Cakaj declared. Top Channel reported earlier that these two people had direct ties to the former Quds Supreme Commander, General Qassem Soleimani, who was killed by the USA. Albanian Secret Service and intelligence agencies, assisted by foreign partners, have obtained information about their intentions to attack the US Embassy in Baghdad, as planned by Soleimani, which confirms the reasons that led to his killing. Seyed Ahmed Hosseini Alast was in Albania as a cultural attaché, but he served as a member of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, which was declared *“a terrorist organization”* by the US State Department. He has been very active with plans to organize destabilizing terror acts against the coalition forces in the Middle East. He used his diplomatic status in Albania to cover an activity that undermines the country’s national security. Mohamed Peimanemati was in Albania as an advisor to the Iranian Embassy, but in fact,

he was a member of Iran’s intelligence organization, MOIS, and responsible for several terror acts in EU countries. In December 2018, Albania declared as *“persona non grata”* the Iranian Ambassador, Gholamhossein Mohammadnia and Mostafa Roudaki. Two Iranian citizens were detained under suspicion of plotting to carry out a terror attack during a Bektashi religious holiday. (www.top-channel.tv)

- January 16th, the country’s main political forces reached an agreement on Tuesday to carry out the electoral reform by March 15th, 2020. A group of four members representing the three main parties – Damian Gjikhuri [Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS)], Rudina Hajdari (independent), Oerd Bylykbashi [Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD)] and Petrit Vasili [Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI)] agreed to adopt the electoral reform in a transparent, inclusive and consensual way among political parties. They agreed to discuss and draft the reform outside Parliament, at the political parties’ table, and the meeting’s consensual product to be adopted without amendments by the Commission and Parliament. Representatives of the united opposition, leaders of the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform, as well as representatives of parliamentary groups in the Parliament, attended the Political Council set up between the Government and opposition. In addition to the OSCE / ODIHR recommendations, the parties agreed to discuss any other electoral issues that serve to achieve international election standards. Meeting between Socialist and Democratic representatives took place shortly after the resigned opposition leader Lulzim Basha

declared alongside other allies that *“resolution of the political crisis will come through early parliamentary elections on the same day as local elections, with an electoral code addressing the problems of vote buying, voter intimidation, pressure on the electoral administration, depoliticization of the State Police, electoral infrastructure, ID cards, civil status register, address register, media freedom, non-voting secrecy and a political instrument that guarantees the political will to enforce any existing law or to be amended by the consensus of all political forces, with transparency and civic inclusion.”* For his part, Prime Minister Edi Rama welcomed the inter-party agreement. *“Beyond more than a year lost in the path of conflict leading to the extreme irrationality, this rational return to the Dialogue Roundtable on Election Reform should be commemorated, where all OSCE/ODHIR recommendations will be integrated into the Electoral Law,”* wrote Rama on social networks. The US Embassy to Albania welcomed the parties agreeing to work together on electoral reform, an important step to fully address the ODIHR recommendations. The agreement between the main political forces was also welcomed by the European Union and OSCE. Opposition has long been demanding early elections through many protests and believes that electoral reform can bring them closer, while the Socialists think electoral reform should be tried out through regular elections. It remains to be seen whether the parliamentary opposition MPs will react if they vote unanimously on the reform drafted in good faith at a political table outside Parliament. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- January 16th, acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj, met with political

representatives from the Presheva Valley, Serbia. This meeting focused on the establishment of a joint list of Albanian political parties that will run for the next parliamentary elections in Serbia. The parties, whose program is still unclear, will be called *“The Albanian Democratic Alternative – United Valley.”* After the meeting, the parties signed an agreement which allows the Party for Democratic Action, the Alternative for Change, the Democratic Party, the Reform Movement, the Democratic Progress Movement to act all under the same program each time the national principles of the Presheva Valley will be put into question. This agreement unties the parties and guarantees a higher representation, by creating a stronger position in the parliamentary elections of Serbia. (www.top-channel.tv)



Meeting of acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj with political representatives from the Presheva Valley (Photo source: www.punetejashtme.gov.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

An encouraging step towards resolving the ongoing political crisis was made last week by the establishment of political council for the electoral reform. The council includes members from the ruling PS and main opposition forces facilitating dialogue between them. It seems that Albanian political forces under the EU and US pressure have decided to compromise and sit on the same table for discussions. Of course there is a long

way until an agreement on electoral reform to be achieved and moreover to be implemented. Political instability may have direct impact in investments and opening of EU accession negotiations. Reforms should continue more intensively if the state seeks to get an accession negotiation date with the EU. Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively. The EU top officials keep sending encouraging messages for Albania (and North Macedonia) regarding opening of accession negotiations in coming EU summit on March 26th – 27th, 2020. Although it is claimed that France and the Netherlands will change their stand, it is still questionable if they will do it finally. Albania keeps acting as the center of Albanians all over the region seeking to influence neighboring countries politics. In this context, Representatives of ethnic Albanians in Presevo Valley in Serbia were met in Tirana with the state's Foreign Minister and agreed to unite forces for the coming Serbian parliamentary elections. Relation between Albania and Kosovo with a potential new Government under Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister is a good question.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 13th, citizens of the Serb-majority region in Bosnia will decide on whether to join NATO in a referendum and the right to do so was affirmed in the Reform Program the country sent to the Alliance recently, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik said on Monday. Bosnia sent the document in December 2019, ending a deadlock between the three members of the country's Presidency which kept the country from forming a new

Government for more than a year after the October 2018 election. According to earlier decisions, the country was supposed to send the Annual National Program (ANP) to the Alliance, which would represent the next step toward membership. But NATO remains unpopular with Serbs in both Serbia and in Bosnia's Serb-majority semi-autonomous entity of Republika Srpska (RS) since the alliance launched airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs during the 1992-95 Bosnian war and against the Serbian military in 1999 during the conflict between Belgrade and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Dodik was opposed to sending the document, while his Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Bosnian Croat colleagues insisted on it. The three finally reached a compromise and the country sent a “*Reform Program*” instead of the ANP. Bosnian Serb opposition parties immediately criticized Dodik, arguing that the Reform Program is the same as the ANP and accusing him of pushing the country into NATO. “*The RS has the intention to have any decision regarding the military integration with NATO be the subject of a referendum for the people to decide,*” Dodik said during his speech at an event at the Kozara barracks for Orthodox Christmas. He reiterated the RS decision on military neutrality. The Reform Program which Bosnia recently sent to the Alliance “*affirms the right to decide on the issue and that no decision on integration will be made without the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Parliamentary Assembly,*” he said. “*We did not have that in any other document,*” he added. Dodik explained that there are several reasons for his opposition to NATO membership, with the primary one being that Serbs had a “*negative experience*” with the Alliance. “*If we would forget that they bombed us, then we would justify it,*” he

said. The RS will not allow for a NATO border to be set up on the Drina river, which is the border with Serbia, he said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 14th, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sarajevo today dismissed as baseless information published in some media in Bosnia-Herzegovina and attributing “*unfounded accusations to the hero of the fight against terrorism and the symbol of victory over ISIL to General Qassem Soleimani.*” In a statement, they denied the published speculation, referring to “*certain tendentious and false foreign sources*” and expressed the expectation of greater adherence of the media to the principle of honesty in informing and avoiding the publication of unfounded and tendentious information. They emphasized that the fundamental policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is respect for international laws and support for the independence, security and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, its laws and the coexistence of all its peoples, and work on bilateral relations within the common interests of the peoples of the two countries. Earlier, it was stated in the media that the US Congress has sent a resolution to Republican Senator Ted Cruz to pay tribute to members of the US military and intelligence agencies who have prepared a plan and executed the assassination of Qasem Soleimani as part of a military mission. Cruz reportedly pointed out that Soleimani has planned or supported numerous deadly terrorist attacks in the US and its allies. The resolution mentions that on December 31st, 2019, Soleimani led the attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad, and that he planned to attack in Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Turkey and many other countries. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 17th, the Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia, will be changed, it must, top international administrator in Bosnia, Valentin Inzko, said for N1 on Thursday evening, at the Orthodox Christmas reception organized by the Metropolitan of Dabar-Bosnia Hrizostom Jevic. “*There were several attempts to change the Dayton (Peace Agreement), four of five I think. None of them successfully. The last one was the Butmir process 10 years ago. James Steinberg did that. But the Dayton Constitution must change because we have the Sejdic-Finci verdict,*” Inzko said. According to him, this would mean that all Bosnian citizens would have the right to run for Bosnia's House of Peoples or the Presidency, in the future. “*Bit not just the minorities like Mr Sejdic and Mr Finci, but also people who were born in the wrong part of the country. Why cannot Serbs from Sarajevo run for these positions or Bosniaks [Muslim Bosnians] from Banja Luka? This need to be amended and this would be a change of the Dayton Agreement. But, as I said, there were many attempts and none was successful,*” Inzko said. The Dayton Peace Agreement officially ended the four-year war in Bosnia and Herzegovina organizing it as a state of three constituent peoples and others, and two entities – the Bosniak-Croat shared Federation (FBiH) and the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS). The main actors in the peace negotiations were ultimately the signatories to the Agreement - President of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina Alija Izetbegovic, President of Croatia Franjo Tudjman and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, on December 14th, 1995, at the Elysee Palace in Paris. It also contains the Constitution of the country which stipulates that Bosniak and Croat officials can only run from the FBiH and Serb officials from the RS, for offices

in the Presidency and the state House of Peoples. The Agreement consists of 11 annexes of which Annex four is the country's Constitution. It prescribes the state level and entity competencies and ways how the Constitution can be amended. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The High Representative of Bosnia, Valentin Inzko has publically introduced question of amending the Dayton Peace Agreement. "HERMES" has repeatedly assessed that the accord is rather a source of problems than stability establishing a complicated political system and state's decision making process. However, talks of reforming Dayton Agreement may destabilize not only Bosnia, but the entire region. Political instability, poor economic performances, entities' rivalries, and problematic framework of state's structure (due to Dayton Accord) have left Bosnia far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU. NATO is a feasible goal but only due to geopolitical and geostrategic reasons (mainly because of the Russian threat of penetration in the region) and not because of achieving the Alliance's standards. Nevertheless, Bosnian Serbs strongly reject the idea of NATO accession and this is a significant obstacle towards Bosnia's full accession in the Alliance. Despite the Council of Ministers establishment political situation in the country remains unstable due to the complicated decision-making and governance system, which blocks almost every political action due to entity's special interests. Furthermore, nationalistic rhetoric and actions from the three entities creates certain conditions of mutual mistrust and work as a factor of potential destabilization. At

the moment Bosnia is considered as a potential source of instability in the whole region of Southeast Europe. 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. Lately, there were reports that Iran was preparing terrorist attacks against Bosnia (and several other European countries), but Iranian Embassy in Sarajevo denied such accusations.



BULGARIA: January 13th, Bulgarian Air Force flight crew training ahead of the acquisition of US-made F-16 fighter jets began at Georgi Benkovski air base, the Ministry of Defense said. A solemn ceremony was held as the initial training course on Aero L-39 Albatros jet trainers for the flight crews assigned to the F-16 training began. The ceremony was attended by Bulgarian Air Force Commander Major-General Tsanko Stoykov, the Head of the "Georgi Benkovski" air base Colonel Petar Bankov and senior aeronautical engineering and aviation personnel. The theoretical and practical training will be conducted entirely at "Benkovski" air base, using the experience gained from the intensive flight training courses conducted in 2014 and 2016. Pilots will undergo theoretical training for one month and will be admitted to flying activity after successful exams. The lecturers have been selected from the aviation engineering, technical and command staff of the air base. Course is being led by Lieutenant Colonel Plamen Kovachev, Deputy Flight Training Commander at "Benkovski." Under his guidance, instructors Major Petko Dimitrov, Major Plamen Ivanov,

Major Petar Mukov and Captain Yancho Hristov will conduct the flight training on the L-39 ZA aircraft. After successfully completing the pilot course, students will continue their training in the United States in connection with the acquisition of the new multi-purpose F-16 fighter, Bulgaria's Defense Ministry said. In August 2019, Bulgaria's Ministry of Defense transferred to the US the entire amount of 1.2 billion US dollars under international Government procurement contracts to acquire eight F-16 Block 70 aircraft and related equipment and armaments. The Ministry said at the time that the first aircraft is to be delivered at the end of 2022, to be used for training Bulgarian Air Force pilots. The remainder will arrive gradually in the years 2023 and 2024. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- January 15th, Emil Dimitrov is the new Ecology Minister. This happened after the National Assembly has accepted resignation of Neno Dimov with 111 votes in favor, 96 against and no abstentions. Dimitrov has been discussed as the new Minister of Environment and Water. He was the Head of the Customs Agency during the Government of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. He is currently an IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement or IMRO-BNM (VMRO – Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie) Deputy. Dimov who is in custody pending trial on charges of criminal mismanagement in connection with the water crisis in the town of Pernik resigned from his position. (www.novinite.com)

- January 15th, *“the real breakthrough in the political contacts between Bulgaria and Egypt that we have made over the last two years can give new practical expression to our co-operation in all spheres,”* Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-

Sisi in talks, a Bulgarian Government media statement said. Borissov said that thanks to the constructive political dialogue from 2018, a new page of enhancing bilateral co-operation in all spheres – political, economic, energy, cultural, educational, tourism – has been opened. The Prime Minister said that Bulgaria would continue to support Egypt in its fight against terrorism and religious extremism. In his words, expanding co-operation in this area also means more security for the Middle East and the Balkans. *“We appreciate the very positive role played by Egypt, both as President of the African Union and its leading role in the League of Arab States,”* Borissov said. He welcomed Egypt's serious efforts to help find peaceful solutions to crises in the region and through dialogue, the parties to these conflicts to reach compromise, the Government statement said. *“A lasting peace will allow the economic and social development of societies,”* he told Sisi. Borissov said that bilateral co-operation in the field of energy is of particular interest to Bulgaria, given the gas resources of Egypt on the one hand and the implementation of a number of projects in the sector in Bulgaria. *“This will allow us to be both a consumer and a transit hub for significant quantities of natural gas from countries in Asia and the Middle East to Europe,”* Borissov said. He stated that the first meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission is expected to be held in 2020 and new high-level visits will be held. Bulgaria and Egypt already have agreed bilateral agreements, the signing of which will extend and enrich co-operation in areas of mutual interest, the statement said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Boyko Borissov's Government is stable. The "lack of water" crisis in the city of Pernik is to be resolved but had a negative impact on Government's efficiency and led in resignation of the Minister of Environment and Water, Neno Dimov. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy security developing several projects. In this context, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov visited Egypt and had talks with its President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi focusing on energy cooperation. 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: January 14th, addressing the European Parliament (EP) plenary session on Tuesday, leader of the European Greens party, Ska Keller, asked the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic about the reports of alleged violence and abuse committed by the Croatian Border Police against migrants on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Keller said that even though reports claimed migrants' belongings were destroyed, they were beaten and even shot at, the Croatian Government has not stopped this nor investigated the accusations properly. That is not acceptable for any member of the EU or any other country, Keller said. Croatia's borders are Europe's borders, whatever happens there is responsibility of all of us, we will not look the other way, she concluded. Plenkovic responded

that in its treatment of migrants, Croatia respected all Croatian and European laws and international conventions and that not one of those accusations should be taken for granted. "I say that as someone who has visited that border area between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, I completely understand what sort of terrain that is and what the conditions are," Plenkovic said and added that all complaints regarding Police behavior were being properly investigated. The loudest criticism of Croatia's migrant policy came from the Greens and the Left, including Malin Bjork of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left, who said that she had visited the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia and witnessed 25 examples of pushbacks, adding that only in 2019 more than 25,000 pushbacks had occurred there without any administrative procedures being undertaken. Croatia will not become an informal hotspot for migrants, Plenkovic underlined. The solution is to protect the external border, particularly between Turkey and Greece where the eastern-Mediterranean and western Balkan routes begin, said Plenkovic, adding that Europe can act in crisis areas with its humanitarian aid, economic strength, conflict mediation and other tools. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 15th, the letter issuing invitation to tender for multi-purpose combat aircraft for the Croatian Air Force, signed by the Commission in charge of procuring the jets, was delivered to seven countries on Wednesday, the Government said in a press release. Invitations for the potential purchase of new aircraft were sent to the United States, for its F-16 jets, and to Sweden for the JAS "Gripen" aircraft. Five other invitations for used aircraft were sent to France for Rafale, Italy for Eurofighter, and Norway, Greece, and Israel -

the latter three all for their own F-16 jets. The new tender is Croatia's second attempt to update its aging air force, launched 12 months after the agreed deal to purchase twelve F-16 C/D "Barak" fighter jets from Israel, worth some 477 million US dollars, had fallen through in January last year. Although the sale had been agreed with Israel, the sale was blocked by the US before a single aircraft was delivered because the Israeli jets had after-market Israeli-made equipment installed. The US, as the original manufacturer, must sign off on any deal before the aircraft are passed on to any third party, and it is US policy not to approve second-hand sales unless avionics installed are returned to their factory condition. Croatia's Air Force is in dire need of modernizing its fleet, as its inventory currently consists of only eight fighter jets, all of which are the outdated Soviet-made MiG-21s originally manufactured in the 1980s - with only four believed to be in operation. Offers from interested countries for the fresh tender are expected to come in by May, after which a Government Commission is expected to spend three months reviewing offers before issuing its recommendation by August 2020. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 17th, Croatian Foreign and European Affairs Minister Gordan Grlic Radman met with the Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Angel Gurría, in Paris on Thursday, for talks on Croatia's accession to that organization, the Foreign and European Affairs Ministry said. Croatia's accession is being blocked by Slovenia because Zagreb is refusing to implement an international arbitration ruling on the two countries' border. Until recently, the country's accession was blocked by Hungary which claimed

that Zagreb was not honoring a decision by an international arbitral tribunal in the INA-MOL case. Budapest has in the meantime lifted its blockade. Also, OECD members have still not agreed on further enlargement, and decisions on further enlargement are made by consensus. Gurría commended Croatia's commitment to drawing closer to OECD membership by intensifying its participation in various working bodies and accessing OECD instruments. "Croatia has been working with commitment to meeting the criteria for OECD membership, which is very useful for development and reform implementation, and that is one of our most important national priorities," Grlic Radman said. After the meeting with Gurría, Grlic Radman also took part in an OECD forum on migrations and integration challenges. The OECD is an international economic organization that brings together 36 more developed countries. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability. Croatia, a Western Balkan country, runs the EU Presidency and this is very important for EU enlargement in Western Balkans. Croatian top officials have repeatedly stated that the country will support the region's states for accelerating their route towards the EU. The country received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the

Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. Croatia insists that the arbitration rule is not valid and the dispute should be resolved through bilateral negotiations; a position which is unacceptable for Slovenia. A similar situation is ongoing in OECD where Croatia's accession is currently blocked by Slovenia. Under these circumstances, Croatia should start thinking of dialogue and compromise since its stance has repercussions in state's national interests namely accession in "Schengen Zone" and OECD. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Top officials do not hesitate to openly interfere in Bosnian domestic affairs in the name of Bosnian Croats. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Currently, the Ministry of Defense has restarted its efforts for acquiring 12 modern fighter jets since Croatia is a NATO member without operational Air Force.



CYPRUS: January 15th, Justice Minister Giorgos Savvides said Wednesday the state aimed to have a package of bills designed to reform the island's justice system passed by Parliament by Easter. The Minister was speaking after the House Legal Affairs Committee finished discussing the most important bill of the package, that of dispensation of justice. Savvides said this was the most crucial and bulkiest bill that concerned all the structural changes in the Courts, namely the composition of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Constitutional Court and the Court

of Appeals. The bill defines their jurisdictions as well as who appoints Judges at all levels. It also includes most issues concerning the structural changes of the reform, he said. *"The goal is to have these bills approved before Easter,"* Savvides said, adding that the Government is placing great importance on the reform of the Courts. According to the Head of the House Legal Affairs Committee, Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός – DISY) Giorgos Georgiou, the next step would be amending the Constitution, a necessary action so that the reform laws are legit. Discussion on the constitutional amendment will begin at the Committee's next session, he said, expressing hope that examination of the package and the ensuing vetting would be completed as soon as possible. Savvides said after the constitutional amendment and some amendments to the law on the Courts, *"we will be able to carry on, at least to a large extent, with the legislative change that needs to be made for the Courts to function in their new form."* He added that the laws on the Commercial Court and the admiralty would follow. Cyprus ranks among the slowest countries in the world in terms of delivering justice, a conference in Nicosia heard last March. While the EU average required to complete a case is eight months, Cyprus needs more than 2,500 days. Civil lawsuits often take a decade to complete, especially if appeals are involved. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 16th, in a move hailed as *"historic,"* Cyprus on Thursday joined six other countries in signing a Memorandum of Understanding to formally establish the East Med Gas Forum (EMGF) as an international organization. The ceremony took place in Cairo and was attended by the Energy Ministers of Cyprus, Egypt,

Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine. The forum's stated aim is to develop the region's gas market. France asked to join the EMGF, and the USA requested permanent observer status once the forum formally comes into being. The seven current participants – eight, were France to join – initialed a founding charter. The actual signing of the forum's charter – left to a later date – will signal its official launch. This is expected to occur sometime over the next few months. Speaking at a press conference, Energy Minister Giorgos Lakkotrypis cited the forum as an example of *“how countries, even under difficult circumstances, can form alliances for the benefit of the peoples in the region.”* He referred to the progress made on a mooted subsea gas pipeline connecting Cyprus and Egypt, noting that if all goes well the project could be finished by the year 2025. The EU will be covering the forum's financing over the next two years via a 500,000 euro grant. At the gathering, Ministers viewed a presentation prepared by World Bank consultants laying out the region's energy potential as well as forecasted natural gas discoveries over the next 20 years. Presentation also discussed ways in which the countries of the southeast Mediterranean can compete in the global natural gas market. For his part, Egypt's Petroleum Minister Tarek El Molla said the signing of the charter constitutes *“a cornerstone in our region's history which will lead us to cooperate for the benefit our peoples.”* Greece's Energy and Environment Minister Kostis Hadzidakis spoke of a *“historic moment”* for the entire Mediterranean. The participating countries agree that natural gas resources can be used as an instrument for peace rather than a point of contention, he said. The Greek Minister stressed that the EMGF is not averse to Turkey joining, on one condition; that Ankara respects

international law. Both, he and Lakkotrypis referred to Turkey's recent actions in the eastern Mediterranean, such as an accord between Ankara and Tripoli delimiting their respective marine zones – a move dismissed as null and void by both Athens and Nicosia as it ignores their own Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Hadzidakis explained that the forum's charter was initialed only as it needs to be vetted by the EU to ensure it is consistent with EU law, given that three of the participants – Cyprus, Greece, and Italy – are members of that bloc. It is understood that once the EU gives the green light, as a matter of routine the cabinet in Cyprus will pass a decision on joining the forum. It was not clear, however, whether the cabinet will also be promulgating a ratifying law for the same purpose. Ratifying laws are required only where treaties are concerned. The forum was holding its third preliminary meeting after being set up last year as part of efforts to transform the eastern Mediterranean into a major energy hub. Among other things, the forum aims to lower infrastructure costs and secure competitive prices for gas from the region. Thursday's meeting in Cairo comes days after Cyprus, Greece and Israel signed an intergovernmental deal for the construction of the EastMed pipeline, seen as a response to a maritime deal between Turkey and Libya. Earlier this week, Egypt started importing Israeli gas for possible re-export to Europe or Asia. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 19th, the Cyprus Government condemns new illegal drilling planned by Turkey within its EEZ and continental shelf, a statement by the presidency said on Sunday morning. *“Continuing to defy repeated calls from the international community, and in particular the European Union*

to immediately stop its illegal activities, Turkey is again trying to carry out illegal drilling within, this time, the southern EEZ/continental shelf of Cyprus, in block 8, which has been licensed to the European companies ENI and TOTAL,” the statement said. The presidency stresses that the new threatened drilling, will once again violate the sovereign rights of the island and the UN law of the seas and the relevant international law, ignoring the international demarcation agreements in force between Cyprus – Israel and Cyprus – Egypt. *“Turkey is developing into a pirate state in the Eastern Mediterranean. In contradiction to the energy synergies that have been created in the region, Turkey insists on walking the path of international lawlessness,”* it continued. The Presidency adds that Turkey, justifies its activity in the Cypriot EEZ by saying it is defending the rights of Turkish Cypriots, while it claims 44% of the Cyprus EEZ. *“Any claim that the drilling activity is carried out for the benefit of the Turkish Cypriots is baseless and any alleged ‘authorization’ by the so-called ‘Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC)’ is illegal and invalid, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions and international law,”* it stressed. It also stated that the interests of the Turkish Cypriots are fully safeguarded within the framework of the overall settlement of the Cyprus problem, as is also apparent from the relative convergences reached at the negotiating table, as well as from the occasional proposals by the President. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Developments in East Mediterranean are rapidly evolved that monitoring ongoing situation is a difficult issue. Engaged countries are making

careful moves in diplomatic and military chessboard aiming to secure their national interests. Signing of a MoU by Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine aiming to formally establish the East Med Gas Forum (EMGF) has provoked Turkey’s reaction which announced new drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf. Turkey once again will send its drillships and perhaps its Navy vessels to violate Cypriot sovereign rights knowing that the country lacks aeronautical power and nobody will defend its sovereignty. Of course, all international stakeholders have condemned Turkish provocative statements, but the fact is that Turkish vessels are free to operate in Cyprus territorial waters. Cyprus tries to establish defense relations with other countries aiming to balance its military deficit, but as already has aforementioned, it is rather unlikely to see a foreign military force or coalition to defend Cypriot sovereign rights. Turkey is determined to establish its presence in the region and especially within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claiming the Turkish Cypriot community rights. It maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. As long as tension remains in eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed “hot” incident or a conflict. 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.



GREECE: January 17th, within a day of nominating Council of State President Katerina Sakellariopoulou for the country's next President, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis appeared to have secured the broad consensus required to secure her appointment by Parliament next week. Mitsotakis' proposal secured the support of Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Δημοκρατικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) and the center-left Movement for Change Κίνημα Αλλαγής - KINAL), bringing backing for Sakellariopoulou to 266 in the 300-seat House, comfortably above the minimum of 200 votes required for the motion for President to pass in the first vote. His initiative put SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras in a tough position as it would have been difficult for the latter to oppose the candidacy of the woman that his own Government appointed to the helm of the country's highest administrative Court. Tsipras said SYRIZA would back Mitsotakis' nomination as *“an act of responsibility.”* *“We will allow the new President to be elected with a wide majority, as this is appropriate for anyone who takes on the heavy responsibility, under the Constitution, of expressing the unity of the people and our democracy,”* Tsipras said. However, he also accused Mitsotakis of making a *“major mistake”* by not renewing the term of incumbent Prokopis Pavlopoulos. In an interview on Alpha TV, Mitsotakis expressed respect for Pavlopoulos, describing him as *“a good President.”* *“But I could only choose one person,”* Mitsotakis said. KINAL also backed the nomination, saying however that this did not denote broader support for Mitsotakis' Government. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 17th, the agreement on maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean signed between Turkey and the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) is in violation of international law and is therefore invalid, Libyan military Commander, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar said after a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens on Friday. He said that the Government of Fayeze al-Sarraj did not have the legitimacy to sign a memorandum of that sort. According to Government sources, Haftar bemoaned the counterproductive impact of outside interference on a military and political level. He said that people of Libya should be free to decide about their future through an inclusive, nationwide assembly. During the 40-minute meeting, Mitsotakis urged Haftar to take a constructive stance at the upcoming conference on the Libya crisis in Berlin. Greece has not been invited to the talks. Haftar met with Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias earlier in the day. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 19th, Greece and Turkey have traded barbs a few hours ahead of the meeting on the situation in Libya in Berlin. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan again indulged in aggressive remarks early Sunday, before departing for Berlin. He claimed that Greece has *“gone crazy”* over not being invited to the Berlin meeting, and said Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is taking *“the wrong steps”* by inviting Field Marshal Khalifa Belqasim Haftar, who is fighting against the UN-recognized Libya Government at the head of the Libyan National Army, for talks in Athens. Erdogan added that Mitsotakis is taking a wrong tack in bilateral

relations with Turkey, despite being “talked to” by himself at the recent NATO Summit. Greece’s Foreign Ministry replied soon after to Erdogan “as for taking the right steps, it is at least paradoxical, that the habitual violator of international law in our region tries to give lessons. A constant concern for Greece is taking the steps that ensure security and stability in the region and not policymaking through groundless and provocative remarks,” the Foreign Ministry added. Greece has warned the EU that it would veto any decision taken in Berlin if the summit did not explicitly denounce a deal between the Libyan Government and Turkey delineating maritime borders between the two non-neighboring countries in the Mediterranean. The deal has been criticized by, among others, the EU, Egypt, Russia and the US, as well as Haftar, who has the backing of Libya's National Assembly. It appears, though, that the Berlin meeting will not deal with the maritime borders issue, focusing instead on a peace deal in Libya. Greece also seems to have backed off from its veto threat, alluding that an expression by the EU of its disapproval of the deal could be enough. Turkey has been asserting its right to exploit the Mediterranean for gas and oil reserves, contesting Cyprus' right to do so, at least within the present borders of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone. It has sent drilling ships in the area, accompanied by warships. This led Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades to label Turkey “the regional pirate” in comments he made Sunday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greece enjoys political stability focusing on strengthening economy and imposing law and

order. The Prime Minister, Kiriakos Mitsotakis secured this political stability of the country in a period of important national challenges by proposing as the next President of Hellenic republic a person – the President of Council of State, Katerina Sakellariopoulou - which achieved broad consensus required to secure her appointment by Parliament next week. In a different way, the Government could collapse and early elections could be called. At the moment, the country faces several diplomatic, security, defense, economic and energy challenges. Migration could be considered as a major security issue which threatens internal stability of the country. Greece is in the forefront of the migrant flows which continue to arrive in the Greek islands of eastern Aegean Sea. The Government introduces a new law on migration and asylum seekers aiming to control the problem, reduce arrivals and improve migrants living conditions. Local communities strongly react in construction of new facilities claiming that migrants change demographic balance of their place, increase criminality and create conditions of local turbulence. It is not expected that situation will improve in the near future and illegal migration remains an unsolved problem. In this context, Mitsotakis announced the establishment (or reestablishment) of the Migration Ministry aiming to tackle more effectively the problem. The Berlin summit for the Libyan problem is in the forefront of current developments. Greece was denied to join the summit and it this was not only disappointing but rather embarrassing for a country that shares common maritime borders with Libya and faces a direct threat against its national interests and security by the actions of Turkey and Libya. However, with a rather impressive secret

diplomatic move Athens achieved to bring Field Marshal Halifa Haftar for a visit from which both parts were benefited. Greece appeared as a stakeholder which exercise influence in Haftar, while the latter got somekind of legitimacy by visiting an EU member state and is accepted by the country's top-officials. It is assessed that the Berlin summit will end without tangible results. However, Greece is concerned about the MoU signed by Turkey and Libya regarding delimitation of maritime boundaries. Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to send his drillships southwest of Crete for drills. This could be a reason for a crisis or a conflict. Moreover, Turkey appears determined to escalate tension by sending vessels to Eastern Aegean Sea or within Cypriot territorial waters. Turkish fighter jets continue to violate Greek airspace overflying islets in the Aegean. Turkish rhetoric has not changed and remains highly provocative regarding Greek sovereign rights. It is assessed that it is more possible a narrow incident in an islet (Greece has thousands of them) instead of an excessive war. Besides, the armed conflict will take place in limited time (no more than 72 to 96 hours) engaging a large number of land, naval and air forces and weapons in a rather narrow operational field. It is assessed that Turkey will avoid engaging troops in big Greek islands for several civil-military reasons. In a rather impressive move, Greece announced that it has agreed with Saudi Arabia to deploy Anti-Aircraft systems "PATRIOT" in the latter's territory. It is obvious that the country tries to expand its influence in regional level due to several security challenges it faces. In the meanwhile, the KYSEA, the Greek top security institution decided last Friday the change of Armed Forces leadership. The new Chief of Armed Forces General Staff,

General Konstantinos Floros, the new Chief of Army General Staff, Lieutenant General, Charalampos Lalousis, the new Chief of Navy General Staff, Vice Admiral Stylianos Petrakis, and the new Chief of Hellenic Fleet, Vice Admiral, Panagiotis Limperis are broadly respected for their professional qualifications and it is assessed that the Government took into consideration the current geopolitical situation in the region for its choices. Under the current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea Greece is obliged to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. The Greek Defense Minister, Nikos Panagiotopoulos announced that the country will purchase a squadron of 5th generation fighter jets F-35 (20 to 24 aircrafts) aiming to change balance of air superiority in the Aegean Sea. Currently, Greece focuses on naval units, upgrade of fighter jets, UAVs and follow on support agreements. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ and eastern Mediterranean in general, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: January 16th, Kosovo's largest political party, Self-Determination (Vetevendosje), has rejected a final offer of partnership with the second ranked Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK), deepening political crisis in Kosovo. However, the LDK Chairman said the Vetevendosje letter is not "official" and expressed readiness to conclude a deal on new Government. The two parties held talks for three months after a general election in October 2019 produced a hung

Parliament, in which no party won enough seats to govern alone. The Vetevendosje leader and candidate for Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, sent an official letter on Thursday to the LDK confirming its final offer to get the post of the Parliament Speaker – which Vetevendosje already took and was voted also by LDK MPs – is unacceptable. The LDK sent a letter to Vetevendosje on Wednesday and proposed getting temporarily the Speaker's post until their nominee is elected President after mandate of current President expires in 2021. The LDK asked the Vetevendosje MPs vote their nominee for President proposing return the post of Speaker to Vetevendosje once the President is elected. Their letter was a reply to an early letter of Vetevendosje sent on Tuesday proposing increase of number of Ministries in new Government only to accommodate the requests of the LDK which rejected such an arrangement. The letter further complicates negotiations between the two parties and potential partners in new Government and plunges Kosovo into a political crisis. The two parties are negotiating for more than three months now and held several meetings which ended without any deal. The LDK Chairman Isa Mustafa convened its party after Kurti's letter and is expected to come out with an answer. Entering the meeting Mustafa said Kurti's letter is "unofficial" adding the LDK is interested to conclude the negotiations process. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 18th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci hinted Saturday that the Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) despite winning October elections in Kosovo is not the only address in efforts to form new Government. Asked whether he is ready to give the mandate to form Government to

the second ranked party, Thaci said that "there is not only one address" in forming Government. According to Kosovo legislation only the party which won the elections has the right to nominate a candidate for Prime Minister and ask for President's decree. Thaci said that Kosovo has stalled in forming new institutions adding that he will look into all political options and modalities aimed at respecting the will of citizens, but also legal and constitutional responsibilities. "The vote of citizens needs to be respected," Thaci said and highlighted that he will not focus "only in one political address." Thaci held a meeting on January 6th, 2020 with the Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti who has not nominated a candidate for Prime Minister. Kurti told media on Friday that he will present a nominee and ask a President's decree as soon as they reach a deal with the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK). The Vetevendosje which won October elections lacks majority in Parliament and has failed to reach a deal with the party ranked as second – LDK - on Government formation. Technically Kosovo is functioning with a caretaker government for six months now. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 18th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci says Kosovo and Albania will have a joint future without borders. He made the comments attending the solemn academy "Thank You Albania" remembering 21th anniversary of the Kosovo citizens' exodus in Albania in 1999. Thanking Albania for their hospital after almost one million Kosovo Albanians were expelled from their homes by Serbian police and military in 1999, Thaci said that Albania and Kosovo will soon

have a joint future without existence of a border dividing them. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo faces a long political uncertainty since no Government has been formed yet. If an agreement is reached within next few days between Vetëvendosje movement and LDK Kosovo politics will slide towards a crisis. It seems that the main point of disagreement is the Kosovo President post and Parliament Speaker. LDK leader Isa Mustafa seeks to get both positions for his party, although Vetëvendosje's Glauk Konjufca has already appointed as the Parliament Speaker enjoying support from LDK too. It is assessed that the two parties have not reached an agreement yet due to LDK's "brinkmanship" aiming to gain as much as it can. If Kurti does not achieve to establish a Government then new elections is very likely to be held. There is some tension lately between Kosovo and Albania due to the latter's participation in the "mini-Schengen" scheme and cooperation with Serbia. Thaci urged the Albanian Prime Minister to abolish borders between the two countries, but Rama has rejected the idea raising concerns in Pristina. Although there are several agreements between Albania and Kosovo regarding bilateral trade, custom controls and free movement of people and goods Albania is reluctant to fully implement them facing complaints by the Kosovo side. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue it is assessed that it is rather difficult to restart in the near future since Serbia is entering in pre-electoral period. It is possible to see a couple of "reconnaissance" meetings between the two sides but without tangible results. Besides, potential Prime Minister, Kurti has stated that he seeks to re-

negotiate all previous agreements signed with Serbia; a view that may cause several troubles in the negotiation process with Serbia. In general, Kurti has a total different approach in talks with Belgrade which is not necessarily negative. Besides, nothing has achieved so far. Although he expresses nationalistic views he looks ready to compromise and it is assessed that his statements are more or less populist tricks to gain citizens' support. However, his statements regarding Kosovo Serbs have raised concerns for stability in the north. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish rule of law and modern functional administration in the country. 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.



MOLDOVA: January 14th, the political party called Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) has called "all democratic forces in Moldova to consolidate efforts and nominate a common candidate for the forthcoming presidential election," due to be held at the end of 2020. The PPDA leadership said in a press release on Tuesday that "an extremely grave political situation" has developed in Moldova after President Igor Dodon, "by means of lies and treachery, has seized power and is steering the country to a social instability and international isolation." PPDA therefore believes that it is vitally necessary to work out a responsible and serious approach to the electoral process to prove to citizens that national interests are above party or personal interests. PPDA emphasized that its

leader Andrei Nastase constantly demonstrates his political maturity and a firm desire to unify all anti-oligarchic reformist forces. The PPDA leadership referred to the example of the 2016 presidential election, when the party decided not to nominate its own candidate – all for the sake of opposing to incumbent authorities, “*who have impudently captured the country.*” “*Currently, we have been in a similar situation. So, to achieve success, it is necessary to consolidate efforts again – this time not in the interests of an individual political party, but of the whole republic and for our European future. That is why we are calling all real democratic forces to nominating a common and politically non-affiliated presidential candidate. We will thus show that we really care about the country, and that we are able to sacrifice our political pride and to prove that the promises we give to citizens are not just purely electoral pledges,*” PPDA said. (www.infotag.md)

- January 15th, the Chisinau and Tiraspol Political Representatives – Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister for Country Reintegration Alexandru Flenchea and Transnistrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vitaly Ignatiev met at the Tiraspol Office of the OSCE Mission to Moldova on Tuesday and discussed the priorities of the Transnistrian negotiation process agenda. Moldova’s National Bureau for Country Reintegration reported that the Sides negotiated their work priorities for the nearest future to continue dialogue and determine viable solutions. They considered the drafts of protocol decisions present on the negotiation agenda. They also outlined the problems, which Moldovan economic agents are coming across in the Transnistrian region and in the Security Zone “*after Tiraspol had introduced some unfounded*

mandatory payments.” Negotiators underscored the need to invigorate the work of profiled expert groups, particularly in the spheres of railroad and automobile transport, economy, pharmaceuticals, veterinary, phytosanitary services etc. “*Chisinau’s Political Representative, Deputy Prime Minister Alexandru Flenchea emphasized the need for continuing of interaction in various negotiation formats to meet all commitments and overcome the difficulties that influence very badly on the populations of both Dniester River sides,*” wrote the Bureau for Country Reintegration. According to the document, Flenchea raised the question of human rights observance in the Transnistrian region, highlighting the cases of Moldova citizens Alexander Rjavitin and Oleg Horjan. (www.infotag.md)

- January 16th, Moldova needs to hold a snap parliamentary election because the incumbent Parliament “*is not a reflection of the people’s will,*” but is merely the product of the mixed election system imposed on the nation by Vlad Plahotniuc specially for the February 24th, 2019 parliamentary election, believes the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) Chairperson, ex-Prime Minister Maia Sandu. Speaking on the local television on Wednesday night, she stated evasively “*It is necessary to invent a method to provoke a snap election,*” without elaborating on how she is going to achieve this. In her words, “*An analysis of future actions is already under way*” and “*If you have good intentions and are insistent and persistent, you can achieve anything.*” Sandu is convinced that “*Dodon and his Socialists will fall sooner or later.*” “*As for the Democratic Party, with which help it is theoretically possible to provoke a snap election,*”

Sandu remarked that *“So far, that party has not yet got sufficiently cleansed of corrupt personalities, who are quite many there.”* Answering a direct question if the PAS is holding any discussions with the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM), Maia Sandu replied negatively. *“Democrats do not give grounds to believe that they are purging their party. They had a real chance to prevent the previous [her] Government’s dissolution. But instead of that, the Democrats demonstrated they can agree to any bargain with Dodon,”* said the PAS leader. Commenting on the forthcoming presidential election, Sandu reaffirmed that her party’s main goal is *“to spare the country of Dodon.”* *“We stand ready to discuss any well-grounded arguments,”* said Sandu, who does not think that a presidential candidate should necessarily be politically neutral, as the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnităte și Adevăr - PPDA) called on Wednesday. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys relative political stability since the President Igor Dodon achieved to establish his own Government putting aside the pro-western ACUM block. The country definitely follows a pro-Russian orientation, although it declares that it seeks to join the EU (some day). The US and EU watch carefully the countries orientation and already Romania has expressed concerns over Moldova’s European path. Due to its strategic geographic position, Moldova has become a field of rivalry between Russia and the US and NATO. The country lacks economic growth, while corruption is in high rates. Russia

maintains troops in Transnistria which are considered by pro-western forces as violating Moldovan sovereignty. The frozen conflict of Transnistria is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: January 13th, *“Everything that has been going on in Montenegro recently shows that specific structures just refuse to accept the fact that Montenegro is an independent state, internationally recognized state that administers its state and social order independently, in accordance with the Constitution and rules of international law. As a sovereign state, Montenegro adopts laws that are verified in the Parliament. That happened with the Law on Freedom of Religion which was adopted in the lawful and justified procedure,”* Milan Markovic, Dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences said. Markovic pointed out that all are obliged to obey the Constitution and respect citizens’ rights. *“Montenegro, as independent and sovereign state, got the possibility to establish its legal order in hierarchical way, independently from anybody else. However, specific structures are having hard time with coming to terms with that fact and now they are taking every opportunity they have to come to stage,”* pointed out Markovic. It was not long time ago when Western Balkans paid through the nose for the absence of political dialogue and strengthening nationalism. *“Having in mind that experience, it is incredible that something like this is happening. I want to believe that this will stop. Nobody needs that,”* Markovic said. According to him the role of academic

community in educating young people is crucial. (www.cdm.me)

- January 17th, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee (MC), Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, said that the Alliance was facing Russian hybrid attacks, the reason why they had decided to send a counter-hybrid team to Montenegro. In the session of the MC, which was held yesterday in Brussels, Marshal Peach said that the Alliance had engaged the first NATO counter-hybrid team in Montenegro. *“The first NATO counter-hybrid team has been deployed to our ally state, Montenegro, with the aim of helping to strengthen Montenegro’s capacities and deterring hybrid challenges,”* said Marshal. He added that defense spending continued to increase. *“NATO data shows a 4.6% increase in 2019. That is the fifth consecutive year of growth. By the end of this year, allies will have invested over 130 billion US dollars,”* Marshal Peach said. US Army General Mark Milley, the highest military officer and military adviser to the President, Minister of Defense and US National Security Council, said that *“it is evident that Russia has been trying to divide NATO and make it weaker.”* Representatives of Montenegro’s Defense Ministry have said recently that NATO counter-hybrid team visited Montenegro in November last year. The forthcoming parliamentary elections were the main reason for its deployment. *“This visit was the first such engagement in one of the allies, and it was an important experience for Montenegro. Montenegro wants to enhance its capacities and focus of NATO team was on strengthening legislative framework in this domain and its implementation,”* said Ivica Ivanovic, Director General for Defense Policy. (www.cdm.me)

- January 19th, *“No one is going to seize churches. Montenegro will not withdraw the Law on Freedom of Religion,”* noted Montenegro’s President, Milo Djukanovic, in an interview for the Tanjug news agency, adding that mass rallies against the law, which he saw as entirely political though *“dressed”* in Church attire, with a prominent Serbian sign, cannot threaten neither the Government nor the policy it has been implementing. He told the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic there is an open invitation for him to come to Montenegro. *“The State of Montenegro is not seizing property of the Serbian Orthodox Church, because that property is actually the property of the state of Montenegro usurped between 1986 and 2000,”* is the key argument of the Montenegrin President *“defending”* the religious freedom law. Djukanovic is also convinced that restoration of the autocephaly of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church will contribute to overcoming misunderstandings and disagreements within the Orthodox corpus of Montenegro. *“If we thought the law should be withdrawn, we certainly would not have passed it. We have heard all the arguments against the law over the past four years,”* Djukanovic told the Tanjug news agency. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although Montenegro has a strong Government, the country lives political uncertainty and instability. The Parliament does not work effectively since opposition boycotts its works, politicians are imprisoned and media are fully controlled by the ruling party. The new law on religious freedoms has deteriorated situation provoking harsh reactions by Serbian Orthodox

Church; the large religious group in the country. Montenegro promotes a stable and ideal investment environment, but the truth it is not so “bright”. Corruption, smuggling and money laundering are dominated in the country setting significant obstacles and risks for every investor. Besides, such situation has strongly affected progress of accession negotiations with the EU, which avoided opening a new chapter in the process. Montenegro 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. That is why NATO has sent to Montenegro a special team against hybrid threats aiming to secure coming elections. 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.” The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment and reducing the average age of its military personnel (currently 37 years old).



NORTH MACEDONIA: January 15th, we need successful elections and progress on the agenda French Ambassador Christian Thimonier said, talking about the start of North Macedonia’s accession negotiations with the EU. According to him, there is a methodology, but there is also an agenda of reforms in the political agenda as well as the law on the Prosecutor’s Office. “I know the Commission’s proposal

should be received by the end of this month. This is not decided unilaterally. There is a consensus on our proposals. I do not expect complications because our suggestions were based on arguments that take time. I think we will be ready by the time of the Zagreb Summit,” Thimonier said. (www.republika.mk)

- January 15th, the Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists’ Safety that consists of more than 8.000 members has condemned threats and insults towards Meri Jordanovska, an editor of A1on.mk and the TV Alfa editor, Iskra Koroveshovska. Both journalists received threatening messages from Emil Jakimovski and he was reported to the Police. The President of the Association of Journalists of [North] Macedonia, Mladen Chadikovski condemned these threats and has called upon the authorities to investigate this case. He said that this pressure on women journalists is a serious obstacle for the freedom of speech, freedom of media and citizens’ right to be informed. The Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists’ Safety supports the Association of Journalists in [North] Macedonia in its efforts to protect the journalists and the freedom of speech, and is condemning the threats and insults issued towards the journalists. We call upon institutions to react accordingly and to condemn the threats. (www.meta.mk)

- January 16th, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) party leader Ali Ahmeti said that he received offers to partition North Macedonia along ethnic lines, but rejected them, considering the high toll the move would exact on the country. Ahmeti was the commander of the terrorist UCK/NLA organization which sparked a civil

war in the country in 2001, killing hundreds. Ahmeti said that the offer was made to him by “high officials.” “Any partition would be very harmful for the Albanians but also the [Slav]Macedonians. There would have been minorities left on the other side here and there and new wounds would open. We did not accept this, and now we have our national symbols and language and we achieved our goals,” Ahmeti said making a pitch to the Albanian voters ahead of the April 12th, 2020 elections. In an earlier interview in 2014, Ahmeti said that the offer included giving Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Kicevo and Lipkovo to the Albanian entity, which would lead to removing 60.000 Slav-macedonians from these cities. Ahmeti is trying to present the latest concessions given to him by Zoran Zaev as major victories for the Albanian cause in North Macedonia, while opposition ethnic Albanian parties insist that more could be gained. The DUI leader rejected the idea of a pre-election coalition with Zaev’s Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) party, who is now competing with him for the Albanian vote. (www.meta.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country is on the way for early parliamentary elections scheduled for April 12th, 2020. Political parties are preparing for the pre-electoral campaign in which it is expected to see a tense political atmosphere. Failure of opening accession negotiations with the EU, scandals and corruption cases, and the “Prespa” agreement is expected to be the main issues for dispute. In general it is assessed that the pre-electoral period will have a nationalistic character since VMRO-

DPMNE will try to mobilize and rally the voters. Due to coming elections it is noticed a trend of SDSM and Zoran Zaev (who signed the “Prespa” agreement) to skip the word “North” in country’s name. It is a strong sign that pre-electoral campaign will turn into a nationalist competition. The EU monitors the pre-election process and, as the French Ambassador to Skopje claimed, successful elections will be decisive for North Macedonia’s opening of accession negotiations. At the moment, North Macedonia has political uncertainty and next day of election it needs a strong Government to proceed with necessary reforms and securing opening of accession negotiations with the EU within 2020. The country should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process.



ROMANIA: January 16th, the world’s largest weapons manufacturer, the US military technology giant Lockheed Martin, has expressed interest in developing new research projects in Romania, including in the field of new technologies such as artificial intelligence. The announcement was made this week by the company’s Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Marillyn A. Hewson, who met Romania’s Foreign Minister, Bogdan Aurescu, during a visit to Bucharest. The US Ambassador to Romania, Adrian Zuckerman, took part in the meeting. According to the Ministry, Lockheed Martin wants to intensify cooperation with Romania, where the company has been present since 1997, with “projects dedicated to maintenance and modernization in the field of aviation” and “in the

field of research.” Hewson also expressed Lockheed Martin’s interest in involving Romanian researchers in these projects, after it *“highlighted the existence in Romania of a talented and well prepared workforce and of a solid industrial base.”* The Minister noted the importance of US military cooperation for Romania’s security needs as a Black Sea country. He also reaffirmed Romania’s commitment to maintaining a US military presence in the country. Romania has been a NATO member since 2004 and is a staunch ally to the US. It contributes 762 soldiers to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, which makes Romania the fifth largest contributor after the US, the UK, Germany and Italy. Romania is also one of the few European countries to allocate at least 2% of its GDP to defense, as both the Alliance and Donald Trump have called on all its members to do – largely in vain. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- January 17th, Romania’s Government will assume responsibility in the Parliament for a bill aimed at changing the way Mayors are elected, namely introducing two rounds of vote instead of one, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban announced at the beginning of the Government meeting. *“PNL [National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL)] supports the election of Mayors with 50% plus one of the votes of citizens. Two years ago, we initiated a draft law to transpose people's will to improve the way of choosing Mayors by imposing the obligation for the Mayor to be elected with 50% plus one. The project was put on ice in Parliament by the former electoral committee, in order to prevent its adoption by the Chamber of Deputies. As such, we made the decision to take responsibility for the draft law on the election of Mayors in two rounds,”* Orban

said, according to G4media.ro. Such a procedure, that the Liberal Government has used recently for passing the 2020 budget and several other important bills, is quicker than the adoption of a regular law by the Parliament and more powerful than a Government ordinance. However, it opens the way for the opposition to file a no-confidence motion, which the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) has already announced it would do. Orban and President Klaus Iohannis announced last week that they agreed to trigger early parliamentary elections, which would require for the Orban Government to fall or resign first, followed by two failed attempts to appoint a new Government. Thus, the Government’s initiative for changing the electoral law could be just a pretext to trigger snap elections. However, PSD leader Marcel Ciolacu said that the fall of the Orban cabinet will not trigger early elections as his party will form a new majority in the Parliament with the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR), which also opposes the two-round election of Mayors. *“They are firmly convinced that from this moment forward we will enter a scenario of early elections. We will not. We will demonstrate that we have the capacity to create a new parliamentary majority,”* Ciolacu said, local Hotnews.ro reported. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 17th, Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis commented at the annual meeting with diplomats accredited in Bucharest, that *“Romania has continued in the Republic of Moldova only the projects directly benefiting the citizens”* and urged the new Government in Chisinau to pursue visible reform, especially in justice and anti-corruption,

in order to unblock full cooperation, local G4media.ro reported. This comes several days after Romania's Prime Minister Ludovic Orban also questioned the orientation of the new Government in Chisinau. The change of Government in Moldova last November is "a step backwards," said Orban in Brussels on January 8th, Radio Free Europe reported. Since November, the new Government in Moldova has been headed by a former adviser to pro-Russian President Igor Dodon, Ioan Chicu, who replaced pro-EU Prime Minister Maia Sandu after the fragile ruling alliance in Chisinau broke to prepare the ground for an minority Government informally supported by a third political force, the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM). Iohannis reiterated that "the European path" is the only and the safest way to deeply reform institutions, which can bring tangible benefits to Moldovan citizens. "Unfortunately, we are not at all convinced that the current Government in Chisinau has this goal. Therefore, we will continue to support only the projects that are dedicated directly to citizens, projects with local impact and strategic interconnection projects. We will resume full cooperation only when we see at the governmental level concrete action aimed at furthering the European path, the reform process, especially in areas such as justice, administration and combating corruption, which can ensure a democratic path and predictability," Iohannis said. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister, Ludovik Orban upon consultations with the President, Klaus Iohannis announced two weeks ago that early elections will be held in Romania. PNL minority Government is

pushing for snap elections forcing opposition PSD to file a no-confidence motion. It is assessed that PNL leaders decided to call for early elections due to favorable conditions for their party to win. PSD is in a transition process and even its Chairman is an interim one. The fact is that Romania needs early elections in order a strong Government with new mandate to come in power ensuring political stability of the country. Besides a strong Government will forward reforms regarding fight against corruption and modernizing public administration. 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 and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security. In this context, Romania expressed concerns over Moldova's pro-Russian orientation announcing restriction in full cooperation with Moldova. In other words, Romania expressed what is rumored in the EU and NATO. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: January 13th, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic told his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping that Belgrade considered Taiwan as a part of China and that it was against its independence, condemning any attempt of endangering Chinese unity, the FoNet news agency reported on Monday. In a letter to Jinping, Vucic said that "Serbia supports the preservation of Chinese territorial integrity and sovereignty, the policy of 'One China' and Chinese efforts in peaceful unification of the country." Vucic thanked Jinping for China's support to Serbia

regarding the issue of Kosovo and said the “*friendship of steel*” between the two countries would further improve as would the strategic partnership in all areas. “*I am looking forward to your visit to Serbia,*” due this year, Vucic wrote. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 13th, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic told the state Radio TV Vojvodina (RTV) that relations with Montenegro are very bad following the introduction of the law on freedom of confession. “*Anyone who tolerates that is betraying his country but the problem is that these are interest groups,*” he said adding that he was talking about “*a moral obligation*” for people from Montenegro living in Serbia. “*That empire needs to be broken up, those agents of the Montenegrin (secret) service working against the Serbs. It is normal for us to defend our people. Do the Montenegrin authorities have a single Serb? I do not know anyone,*” he said asked if he was reviewing the origins of people. “*Whoever condemns me should first condemn [Montenegrin President] Milo Djukanovic,*” the Foreign Minister said. He rejected accusations from Podgorica and the signatories of the so-called Appeal of 88 that Belgrade was destabilizing Montenegro. “*We never said that we want Montenegro together with Serbia in one state... People in Montenegro are constantly claiming that Serbia wants to be in the same country with Montenegro. It is not that we do not want to, it is a closed book,*” Dacic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 15th, opposition leader Dragan Djilas said on Wednesday that the Alliance for Serbia (Savez za Srbiju) will not take part in the coming parliamentary elections. Djilas, leader of the Party of Freedom and Justice, presented his party’s Serbia 2020 plan under which Serbians

would have better living standards and have their dignity restored six months after (President Aleksandar) Vucic falls from power. He said that this could be achieved this year. He also said that some two billion euro are paid out of the Serbian budget for unnecessary projects. According to Djilas, doctors starting their careers will have salaries of 1,000 euro a month instead of the current 650 and teachers will have a starting salary of 700 euro once the current authorities are replaced. Steps like that will bring a chain reaction of changes with more purchases, higher employment and the citizens will no longer be just numbers for the authorities as they are now. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Serbia has a strong Government, but political uncertainty dominates due to opposition protests and accusations against President Aleksandar Vucic and ruling SNS that he has established an almost authoritarian regime which restricts freedom of expression and violates human rights. Taking into consideration the aforementioned situation the country moves towards snap elections scheduled for the end of April or beginning of May. However, there are concerns that opposition will boycott the elections claiming that they will not be fair and free. Serbia needs political stability since it has a lot of diplomatic, security and economic challenges ahead. First of all, the Kosovo case and dialogue with it. Pristina is going to have a new Government and negotiations could restart, but it is not very likely since Serbia is also to have elections. However, Belgrade “keeps an open eye” in Kosovo and most specific to the north where Kosovo Serbs are located. Any provocation against them may

activate Serbia's reflexes and a crisis or conflict may be emerged. In general, Kosovo is a very sensitive issue and could become a factor of destabilization at any time. Moreover, Serbia is engaged in several Balkan regions such as Bosnia, Montenegro and Croatia where a significant Serb population is located. Belgrade never gave up the idea that these territories are the natural extension of its territory and keeps intervening in internal affairs of these states. The country has developed very close relations with Russia, especially in the fields of defense. Russia keeps supplying Serbia with weapons, while both countries conduct military exercises. In other words, Serbia is trying to balance between the west, namely the EU and the US on one side and Russia on the other. The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: January 14th, partners in the ruling coalition led by the List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Sarca - LMS), Modern Center Party (Stranka Modernega Centra - SMC), Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB), Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati - SD) and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) denied speculations that tentative talks are already under way on the formation of possible alternative

coalition after Janez Jansa, the leader of the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS), said that such talks were already ongoing. The coalition is nevertheless in a precarious position, as DeSUS holds an election congress on Saturday and Prime Minister Marjan Sarec has indirectly backed an opponent of the current party President. DeSUS Deputy Group leader Franc Jursa said Sarec “*may be opening too many fronts at once.*” (www.sta.si)

- January 16th, opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) put forward an amendment to reinstate compulsory military service. The party says the proposal enjoys cross-partisan support, so it expects it to push through the first parliamentary reading. They propose male citizens enter the draft aged 18 and start performing compulsory military service at the age of 19 or after graduating from university. Women would not be required to serve. Military service would take six months, while alternative civilian service would last a year. (www.sta.si)

- January 18th, Agriculture Minister Aleksandra Pivec surprisingly defeated Defense Minister Karl Erjavec for the presidency of the coalition Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS), prompting Erjavec to announce his resignation as Minister. Pivec, won 145 votes to Erjavec's 80 to end his 15 year tenure at the helm of the party, having ran an insurgency campaign that offered an alternative vision of the party's future in a desire to make it more inclusive and collaborative, and broaden its appeal beyond its core constituency. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

Marjan Sarec's minority Government continues to enjoy support in the Parliament. Opposition SDS leaked some rumors that talks for a new ruling coalition are underway, but Prime Minister Marjan Sarec rejected such allegations. Change of leadership in ruling coalition partner DeSUS led in Defense Minister Karl Erjavec's resignation since he lost party leadership. However, it is assessed that the coalition coherence will not be affected. Although the Prime Minister is reassuring for the Government's stability and sustainability there are questions over its effectiveness. The possibility of snap elections is rather unlikely, however it is not certain what it will happen since the Government bases its viability on opposition support. 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. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. 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: January 14th, Turkish Prosecutors have ordered the detention of 176 members of the Armed Forces over suspected links to a network blamed by Ankara for a 2016 coup attempt, according to state media. Suspected followers of the US-based religious leader Fethullah Gulen have been swept up in a sustained crackdown since the failed coup in which some 250 people were killed. Operations against the network of Gulen's network are still routine in Turkey. State-run singled out news agency said on Tuesday the latest Police operation on Tuesday was coordinated from the western city of Izmir and singled out people in 49 provinces. It added that those facing arrest included 143 Lieutenants, 97 of them serving, and 33 junior Lieutenants, 11 of them serving. Six F-16 warplane pilots were among those set to be detained, the agency added. Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, has denied any involvement in the attempted coup. In the subsequent purge, tens of thousands of people have been jailed pending trial and some 150,000 civil servants, military personnel and others sacked or suspended from their jobs. Turkey has been condemned by its Western allies and rights groups over the crackdown, purges and erosion of judicial independence following the failed coup bid three years ago. Critics accuse the Government of using the incident as a pretext to silence opposition in the country. The Government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says that the purges and detentions are in line with the rule of law and aim to remove Gulen's

supporters from state institutions and other parts of society. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 16th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country will start exploring for gas in the eastern Mediterranean this year, comments certain to further upset neighboring nations. *“We will start search and drilling activities as soon as possible in 2020 after issuing licenses for the areas,”* Erdogan said during a two-hour speech in the capital, Ankara. He added Turkey's seismic exploration vessel Oruc Reis would soon be deployed. Ankara angered neighboring countries in the Mediterranean with an agreement signed with the Tripoli-based Government in Libya in November, which claimed extensive areas of the sea for Turkey to explore. Greece said the deal fails to take into account the island of Crete, while Turkey has already upset Cyprus by sending ships to search for oil and gas off the divided island. Erdogan said it was *“no longer legally possible”* for any search and drilling activities by other countries or a pipeline without Libya's or Turkey's approval. Earlier this month, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel signed a deal to construct a pipeline to ship gas to Europe, despite Turkey's vehement opposition. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 19th, participants of the Berlin conference on the crisis in Libya have agreed to uphold a UN arms embargo and end military support for warring factions. *“We have received commitments from all of the participants not to give any further support to these warring parties so that the UN arms embargo is respected and the truce holds,”* German Chancellor Angela Merkel said at a news conference following the conclusion of the conference on Sunday. She said leaders had agreed upon a detailed plan for the

country. Sources said that the agreement was not officially signed by the parties, but verbally agreed upon. Merkel also noted that Turkey said it will not send additional weaponry or ammunition to Libya during this process. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the news conference that there can be no military solution in Libya, adding that all parties pledged not to intervene militarily in the country. *“First, we must have a cease-fire. All parties today committed to supporting the cease-fire,”* Guterres said. *“Second, we must have monitoring,”* he continued, stressing that the monitoring should involve several international organizations and must be accepted by the factions in the conflict. He said a military committee of delegates from Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's forces and the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) would convene in Geneva in the next few days to continue negotiations. Merkel clarified that Haftar and GNA Prime Minister Fayeaz al-Sarraj were not in the same room during the talks in Berlin, but were spoken to separately. They did not directly participate in the conference, she said. *“We, the participants, note the Co-Chair's statement on the political, security and humanitarian situation in Libya of the meeting at Foreign Ministers' level convened by France and Italy on the margins of the 74th General Assembly of the UN in New York on September 26th, 2019. We reaffirm our strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya. Only a Libyan-led and Libyan owned political process can end the conflict and bring lasting peace,”* a press release said after the conference. *“We commit to refraining from interference in the armed conflict or in the internal affairs of Libya and urge all international actors to do the same. We recognize*

the central role of the United Nations to facilitate an inclusive intra-Libyan political and reconciliation process,” the press release added. *“We welcome the marked reduction in violence since January 12th and the negotiations undertaken in Moscow on January 13th as well as all other international initiatives aimed at paving the way towards a cease-fire agreement,”* the participant countries added in the press release regarding the cease-fire. *“We call on all parties concerned to redouble their efforts for a sustained suspension of hostilities, de-escalation and a permanent cease-fire.”* Ankara is joined by Italy and Qatar in supporting Prime Minister Sarraj's legitimate Government in Tripoli. Meanwhile, the rival force based in the east is supported by France, Russia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, alongside other key Arab countries. (www.dailysabah.com)



The Berlin Summit

(Photo source: www.bundestkanzlerin.de)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey exercises a multilateral, multifaceted, dynamic external policy ensuring its national interests. Enjoying a pivotal geographic location is engaged in several regional challenges. Despite that, enjoys special relationship with great powers such as the US and Russia. The Preseident Recep Tayyip Erdogan made clear publically last week that “Turkish security is

beyond its borders.” This statement summarizes the security doctrine of Turkey; Turkey will be engaged in regional challenges, conflicts and cooperation to ensure its security. Turkish engagement in Syria, Libya, Cyprus is explained by this doctrine. The country combines both diplomatic means and “hard” power aiming to achieve its goals. Turkey achieved so far to establish a safe zone within Syria eliminating the Kurdish threat. Moreover, it launches several military operations in Southeast Turkey and Eastern Iraq against PKK. It conducts hydrocarbon drills in Mediterranean Sea within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and presents its aeronautical power against Greece and Cyprus questioning their sovereign rights. Finally, it sends troops in Libya aiming to have a “say” in North Africa developments. In this context, Turkey had a very energetic role in Berlin Summit aiming to find a solution on Libya conflict. Of course it is a NATO member and enjoys a special relationship with Russia. Without any question, Turkey has the characteristics of a regional superpower and it tries to act like one. It is assessed that its relations with the US will never reach a “zero point: since Turkey is an integral and critical part of the western security architecture. Under these circumstances an armed conflict or a “hot” incident could not be excluded in the Aegean Sea, the Cypriot territorial waters or southeast of Crete. Definitely Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in the region and is expected to react violently if balance of power is jeopardized. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, 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. 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.

www.hermesresearch.eu

email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas

NOTE

-  *Stable situation. No security risk.*
-  *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*
-  *Major concerns over stability and security. Significant security risk in specific regions. 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.*