



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” (ISSN: 2654-0304) is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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

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ALBANIA: February 18th, a day after speaking out about a coup d'etat and issuing strong accusations against the Judicial Council leader Ardian Dvorani, calling him part of a mafia scenario for capturing the Constitutional Court, the Albanian President Ilir Meta summoned today in a meeting the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) Chairman Lulzim Basha. In a statement, the Head of state told that he had acquainted Basha with the unconstitutional attempts of the Socialists for a coup and urged him to inform about it other allied leaders. PD head Basha immediately responded to Meta's request and summoned the allies to the party headquarters, where he informed them of the President's stance, namely that he would do everything to “shatter” this “*coup d'etat*.” In addition the President filed with the Special Anti-corruption Prosecution an additional criminal report against Dvorani. Meta then warned the Socialists through his Spokesman, that the Parliament would be dissolved by the people, while the Head of state would only implement the latter's will. (www.top-channel.tv)

- February 19th, formerly a close associate of Ilir Meta when leading the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) for Integration party, Spartak Braho shares opposing views with his former boss. The former LSI MP is now entrenched on the socialists' ranks and has unequivocally criticized Meta's stance. “*I am surprised that accusations of the opposition or the Head of state that Edi Rama is leading a coup! It is absurd. Why should Edi Rama need coup to seize power?? He already has it! It is not only ridiculous, but also a kind of excuse. I am a long-serving MP and have been present twice*

when Sali Berisha attempted a coup. A coup means taking power by force, and the majority cannot do that against itself,” stated Braho. (www.top-channel.tv)

- February 19th, Albanian Foreign Minister Gent Cakaj paid today an official visit to Kosovo where he was received by his counterpart Glauk Konjufca. At a joint press conference following their meeting, Cakaj stressed that his visit comes at a time when the new Government in Kosovo is formed and aims to give a new impetus to the relations between the two countries. He thanked Kosovo for the help shown after the devastating earthquake of November 26th, 2019 while he emphasized the idea that cooperation between the two countries should be maximized, and conveyed his wish that the formal border between the countries should be abolished. Konjufca on his part thanked Cakaj for the efforts made by Albania in stopping the Serbian campaign to withdraw the recognition of the state of Kosovo. Cakaj said that they agreed with Konjufca that the next meeting between the two Governments will be held in coordination between the two Foreign Ministries. During his visit to Pristina, Cakaj also met with President Hashim Thaci, the Parliament Speaker Vjosa Osmani and Prime Minister Albin Kurti. This was Cakaj's first visit to Kosovo after assuming the post of Foreign Minister. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Albania has slipped since 2019 into a deep political, institutional, constitutional and social crisis. Without an independent and functional justice system the country is incompetent to provide the basic constitutional rights to its citizens; they are not able to address the state's

top Courts, the Constitutional and High Court. Apart from that there are serious concerns over judicial independence in the country since the “vetting process” has become more or less a measure of pressure against judges. The President, Ilir Meta appears as a leader of a campaign against the Government aiming to mobilize opposition in strong protests. President’s accusation that the Prime Minister, Edi Rama prepares a coup is a very serious one. Opposition pushes the Government to be resigned and an interim Government to be established guaranteeing fair and free elections. Corruption, smuggling (weapons, drugs, people etc), money laundering and link between organized crime and politics are dominating in the country and the state’s authorities are not very keen on fighting them. On October 18th, 2019 the EU rejected the opening of accession negotiations of Albania (and North Macedonia) which actually shocked the Albanian Government and society. But if Albania seeks to get a positive recommendation in 2020 (March or May 2020) it should work intensively to restore a transparent and credible justice system, to establish rule of law and to strengthen fight against corruption and organized crime. The Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj visited Kosovo confirming the close relations between Albania and Kosovo. He spoke for open borders which is a long request of Kosovo. However, it is not clear yet the relation between the new Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti and the Albanian Government.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

February 17th, the European Force (EUFOR) in charge of preserving peace in Bosnia is carefully monitoring situation in the country and recent

events have not threatened peace and stability in the region, EUFOR told N1 on Monday, responding to announcements from Bosnia's Serb-majority part that they would block the state-level decision-making process. “The EUFOR will continue to monitor situation in the country in line with its mandate, which implies supporting the safe and stable environment in Bosnia. So far, political events in the country have had no security or stability effects,” the EUFOR told N1. On Wednesday, the authorities of the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) entity announced they would not take part in the decision-making process at the state level. The reason for this was the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the appeal of several Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims) MPs in the RS who appealed against the RS Law on Agricultural Land and the RS Law on Inland Navigation, stating that the RS is usurping state competencies and taking the land which belongs to the state. The Court ruled in favor of the Bosniak MPs' motion, declaring several articles from those laws unconstitutional. EUFOR concluded that it has the exclusive responsibility to provide support to Bosnia's state authorities in maintaining a safe and stable environment. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- February 19th, as announced earlier, Bosnia's institutions entered into a new crisis and the tripartite Presidency was the first to experience the blockade after Serb Presidency member Milorad Dodik rejected all but one item from the Wednesday session agenda and accused Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Croat members Sefik Dzaferovic and Zeljko Komsic of conspiring against him. “We will send a letter to the President of the European Court of Human Rights explaining to him that he was deceived by

Komsic,” Dodik said regarding the appointment of a new foreign Judge by the EU Court for Human Rights for Bosnia's Constitutional Court. Namely, the local media wrote earlier this week that the EU Court for Human Rights appointed a new Judge to serve in Bosnia's Constitutional Court, as it is stipulated in the country's Constitution. Dodik, however, claims he was never notified of this nor did the Presidency ever agree to this. On the other hand, Dzaferovic and Komsic clarified that the Presidency's role is only advisory and that the institution can in no way affect or prevent the appointment of foreign Judges to Bosnia's Court. The Constitutional Court is composed of nine Judges - two Bosniaks, two Serbs, two Croats and three foreigners. According to the Constitution, their function is to prevent judges from any two constituent peoples from outvoting Judges from a third people. *“The foreign Judges are part of the concept of the disintegration of the Dayton Peace Agreement and Republika Srpska entity because they are only working in the interest of Bosniaks. The Constitutional Court is an occupational Court for Serbs, and inquisition Court contrary to the Constitution and the Dayton Peace Agreement,”* Dodik said. Last week, the Constitutional Court decided that Article 53 of the RS Law on Agricultural Land, as well as Articles 3 and 4 of the RS Law on Inland Navigation, are unconstitutional. RS leaders decided to boycott the decision-making process in State institutions by attending the sessions and meetings but not taking part in the voting process. They said they would continue to do this until Bosnia adopted a law which would expel the foreign judges from the Constitutional Court. *“The FBiH's decision on state property says the property belongs to the FBiH, the property in Brcko District belongs to Brcko, only the property in the RS does not*

belong to the RS,” Dodik argued. He confirmed that he only voted in favor of one agenda item and that he was against all other items, including the one on the donation to the RS for the construction of highways. *“We do not need anything else until we solve this issue,”* he said, adding that *“We will either agree on this or appoint only the local judges, or Bosnia will be no more.”* Responding to Dodik's claims, Dzaferovic called on all Serb representatives and the RS to think carefully about what they are doing, to protect the Dayton Peace Agreement dearly and to respect all its articles, because the Agreement is not a buffet to take what they like and reject that they dislike. *“The Presidency was unanimous about the decision to reject pardon plea for pardon of two convicts. All other items were rescheduled for the next session,”* Dzaferovic said and explained that this is nothing else than obstruction of the work of state institutions. *“Generally speaking, we can see that this is an obstruction of the functioning of Bosnia's institutions. How else would you call the voting against the ratification of 19 different agreements which went through all the verifications? The same thing happened with all the other items. It's an obstruction of the Dayton Peace Agreement and an obstruction of the functioning of Bosnia's state institutions,”* the Bosniak Presidency member stressed. He added that RS politicians are looking for a solution which would lead to Bosnia's disintegration, but this will never happen. *“it is no accident that the three foreign judges in the Constitutional Court can never be judges from neighbouring countries. It was purposefully made that way so that the country can function. Looking for blockades, obstructions and threatening with secession unless the foreign judges are expelled is nothing else but a path to Bosnia's disintegration. Bosnia*

will not disappear,” Dzaverovic said and reiterated his earlier claim that Bosnia will not be blackmailed. He then clarified that one of the Judges' mandate is ending on April 25th, 2020 and that all three Presidency members had a chance to react to that. He confirmed that he too got the Constitutional Court President's letter which was sent to the European Court of Human Rights that appoints foreign Judges in Bosnia. Bosnia's Croat Presidency member and Chairman of this institution Zeljko Komsic said this was Dodik's attempt to prevent the appointment of foreign judges through his own interpretation of procedures but that he was prevented from doing so. *“If someone thinks that people in this building are naive and that they will be able to prevent the appointment of foreign Judges than they are gravely mistaken,”* Komsic said. *“In a way, I understand Dodik – he is coming from a part of Bosnia where his word is the law. He has to get used to reading the documents and coming to work. He could have asked for anything but he obviously missed this,”* Komsic added. Speaking about Dodik's announcement of voting against the bill on temporary funding, Komsic said this was Dodik's problem. *“I do not know what people around him are doing. He is not the one in charge of this. If he is ready to take that risk, he should answer to people employed in state institutions why they are not getting their salary. I would not play with that if I were him,”* Komsic told the reporters. When asked about Dodik's call for him to resign, Komsic said he will not argue with the Serb Presidency member about things he has no say in. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- February 23rd, Bosnian Serbs accept Bosnia and Herzegovina the way it was created by the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement and reject the

unconstitutional changes made mostly by foreigners, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik told N1 in an interview published on Sunday. Dodik said that, thanks to foreign interventions, Bosnia now has an Army although its Constitution does not foresee its existence. It also has indirect taxes and a state Prosecution Office and Court, although none of this exists in the Constitution, he explained. This is why the Serb majority semi-autonomous entity in the country, Republika Srpska (RS), has been contemplating secession, he said. *“Secession is an option we do not exclude but we do prefer the Constitution and everything it contains,”* Dodik said. The Bosnian Serb leader said he is convinced that time will show that Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot exist. *“That is neither my caprice nor my hatred, that is my analysis,”* he said. Dodik said he was wondering why the US were supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina when neither the Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) are happy with it because they did not get everything they wanted, nor the Serbs are satisfied, and the Croats are *“politically devastated.”* He said, however, that nobody is planning to secede although the Bosnian Serbs are not excluding that option. *“Not because we want to but because Bosnia is impossible,”* Dodik said. *“I am advocating action that will create something sustainable, something that will end the conflict. Despite enormous interventions of the international community, Bosnia and Herzegovina was never turned into a functional country,”* he said. *“Now what? Should I waste my entire life listening to liberals from all over the world telling me that I have to stay here?”* Dodik asked. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bosnia has entered into an institutional and constitutional crisis considering as a potential source of instability in the whole region of Southeast Europe. Although the Bosnian Serb leader, Milorad Dodik tried to de-escalate tension last week claiming that secession is not Republika Srpska's objective, the other two entities (Bosnian Muslims and Croats) and the EU and US administration have strongly reacted in Dodik's actions. However, Bosnian Serbs have blocked the decision making process in the country creating an institutional paralysis. One could claim that "Bosnia is a captured state due to Dayton peace agreement." It should be underlined that Russia, Serbia and Croatia will play a crucial role in current crisis enjoying the power of influencing the ongoing situation. 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. Furthermore, nationalistic rhetoric and actions from the three entities creates certain conditions of mutual mistrust and work as a factor of potential destabilization. At 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.



BULGARIA: February 19th, I hope that if Bulgaria and Russia show political will, mutually-beneficial prices and conditions for natural gas supply from Russia to Bulgaria will be achieved. This is what the Head of State Rumen Radev said in a telephone call initiated by him with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin regarding bilateral negotiations held about the prices of Russian natural gas supply to Bulgaria. Radev voiced contentment that his talks with the Russian President at the Economic Forum in St. Petersburg in June 2019 have given a strong impetus in this direction. Vladimir Putin noted that he expects a positive development and a mutually-beneficial solution in these negotiations, the presidential office reported. Radev accepted Putin's invitation to participate in the marking of Victory day in Moscow in 2020. Radev further noted that thousands of Bulgarians took part in World War II and contributed to the defeat of Hitlerism and proposed that an invitation be sent also to Bulgarian veterans to participate in the ceremony marking Victory day. (www.novinite.com)

- February 19th, the Bulgarian Government has provided 500.000 leva (256.000 euro) for financing projects for Bulgarian communities in Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Ukraine, Moldova, and North Macedonia. The funds will be paid from the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' budget for the year 2020, announced this Ministry. "This solution should help organizations to strengthen their structures, to create possibilities to expand their activities and for keeping the Bulgarian identity in the communities in foreign countries. It is a confirmation of the Bulgarian Government's policy for guaranteeing and accomplishment of

the rights and the interests of Bulgarian communities abroad and at the same time obeying the local laws and the norms of international law,” a press release said. At the same time, the Bulgarian Government is granting 635,000 leva (325.000 euro) for 10 projects in North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Vietnam as irrevocable financial aid. (www.meta.mk)

- February 21st, the Spanish Police confirmed that they are investigating Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov but said that until the investigation is concluded, they could not give further details, news website Segal said. This follows allegations in the el Periodico newspaper that Police in the Catalonia autonomous region in Spain were investigating whether Borissov was linked to an “international money laundering scheme.” Over three pages, el Periodico detailed allegations regarding Borislava Yovcheva and her father, and two companies said to have received more than five million euro since 2013 from “non-Spanish natural people.” The report alleged that Yovcheva’s “possible relationship with Borisov is being carefully examined.” It outlined allegations regarding a villa in Barcelona and a Porsche Macan that Yovcheva reportedly had been seen driving. Yovcheva and her father had not specified legal income on the basis of which they could afford such a standard of living, the article claimed. Police in Catalonia had asked the Prosecutor’s office to investigate the incomes, tax payments and banking records of Yovcheva, her father and five others, the report said. It said that the investigation had begun following allegations made to the Spanish Police by the Boets civic movement in Bulgaria. Borissov, who repeatedly has denied claims of ownership of a luxury

property in Barcelona and has threatened Court action regarding allegations in this connection, told journalists that he neither owned a house nor any other real estate in Barcelona. “I have said this a hundred times so far, and I am saying it again. I do not know why my name is involved,” Borissov said. He said that he must have been to Barcelona about 15 years ago, when he was Mayor of Sofia. “I have nothing to do with these companies. Some people I have not seen for 20 years. No service, authority, Prosecutor or Police has sought me out to ask if these things are true,” Borissov said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Spanish Police investigation on potential involvement of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov in a money laundering case is an “awkward” situation. It is not very usual to see the Police of one country to investigate the Prime Minister of another one for criminal charges. Nevertheless, Bulgaria enjoys political stability despite political struggle between the President, Rumen Radev and the Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov. 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. 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: February 18th, Zoran Milanovic became Croatia's fifth President on Tuesday, taking the oath of office at the Presidential Palace in a modest ceremony.



President, Zoran Milanovic during the inauguration ceremony

(Photo source: www.predsjednik.hr)

In his speech Milanovic said, in carrying out his duty, he would act not as a corrective but a constructive political factor and called for solidarity in society. The new President thanked all of his predecessors, saying they had all performed their duties in good faith and to the maximum of their ability. Milanovic is no newcomer to politics. He was leader of the social democrats and served as Prime Minister from 2011 to 2016. The inauguration ceremony was a modest affair, with only around 40 guests. Milanovic broke with tradition, opting to hold the ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Pantovcak, instead of the St. Mark's Square. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- February 19th, German MEP from the Alliance 90/The Greens Party, Erik Marquardt, spoke to N1's Domagoj Novokmet on Wednesday on the Croatian Police's handling of migrants on the country's border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, saying that migrants on the border were not given the opportunity to apply for asylum. Marquardt

visited Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on multiple occasions, and spoken to Croatian officials, as well as the Ombudsman. There is a lot of evidence showing that migrants on Croatian borders are not given the opportunity to apply for asylum, he said, adding that a lot of problems could be solved if the actions of the Croatian Police on the border were monitored by an independent body. He also warned that the attitude of some Croatian MEP's, who regularly dismiss the accusations of Police brutality against migrants as lies, could create difficulties in the process of Croatia's joining the passport-free Schengen area. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- February 20th, at the proposal of the Government, the Parliament's Committee for Defense has given support to the naming of Robert Hranj as the Croatian Armed Forces Chief of General Staff. Hranj should assume the position on March 1st, 2020 replacing General Mirko Sundov, whose four year mandate expires on February 29th, 2020. Now that the support of the Committee has been gained, the Government will send the proposal to the President Zoran Milanovic who appoints the Chief of Armed Forces General Staff. Responding to reporters, the President of the Republic and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces said that he agrees with the choice of Hranj as the Croatian Armed Forces Chief of General Staff. He confirmed that he did discuss the issue with the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and announced that he will discuss about the leader of the Security Intelligence Agency with him as well as other issues. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

Zoran Milanovic with political roots from the opposition SDP took office as the new President of Croatia. Ruling coalition remains stable in the country ensuring political stability. Croatia currently holds the EU Presidency seeking among other to bolster Western Balkans European perspective. Croatia – Slovenia border dispute remains active and it should be noticed that Croatia needs Slovenia's support regarding its accession in the Schengen Zone and OECD. Under these circumstances, Croatia is forced to start thinking of dialogue and compromise since its stance has repercussions in state's national interests. 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: February 18th, France assured Cyprus on Tuesday of its full solidarity in countering Turkey's illegal activities in the island's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and would contribute decisively towards preserving international maritime law in the eastern Mediterranean. The assurances of France's solidarity came from the country's Defense Minister Florence Parly who met on Tuesday morning with President Nicos Anastasiades and subsequently with Defense Minister Savvas Angelides, and after the publication of an

interview with the Bloomberg news agency with the President who said France was the only country had taken an active role in the region. He told Bloomberg that Turkey was taking advantage of worsening relations between Russia and NATO to increase its influence in the eastern Mediterranean and most other countries had failed to react. *"Turkey feels unrestrained given US efforts to keep the country in the western alliance,"* Anastasiades said, adding that the international community has not acted to rein in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan either in Syria, or on Libya, in Cyprus' EEZ, nor in relation to the closed-off town of Varosha in Famagusta. *"There is no decisiveness from countries to take appropriate measures and this raises the danger of conflict,"* Anastasiades said. France was the only country that had taken an active role in the region, he said. *"The strong French presence brings hope that the EU will take a more active role in eastern Mediterranean issues,"* Anastasiades said. In statements following her meeting with him at the presidential palace, Parly said *"It was an opportunity to express our solidarity regarding Cyprus which is under strong pressure from an international perspective. France is a friend of Cyprus and I reiterated our solidarity. That was my main message,"* she said. Parly said this solidarity was manifested in many ways. *"We have a strong bilateral cooperation with Cyprus. Cyprus welcomes regular port calls from our Navy and we are very grateful for that, and it participates in the efficiency at the aircraft carrier strike group operation, and we also express our solidarity regarding, for instance, on what goes on in the EEZ."* Cyprus and France began on Monday their third joint military exercise off the island with forces from the National Guard and the crew of the French

aircraft carrier “*Charles de Gaulle*” which is in the region and is expected to dock in Limassol on Friday for five days. Parly headed to the vessel after her meetings with Cypriot officials in Nicosia on Tuesday before leaving the island. It was announced after the meeting with Angelides that it had been decided that the French Navy would continue to be present in the region, and that mechanisms for the participation of other countries in joint exercises would also be activated. This was to send a message to anyone creating conditions of instability in the region and violating international maritime law, which is covered by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which Turkey is not a signatory. Parly and Angelides also reviewed bilateral cooperation and discussed military cooperation, expressing their mutual will to enhance it. According to the French Ministry of Armed Forces on Monday, questions of maritime sovereignty would be at the heart of discussions in Cyprus. Her visit to the Eastern Mediterranean is part of the naval air group currently taking part in Operation “Chammal,” the French contribution to the international coalition against ISIS. *“By visiting the aircraft carrier, the Minister of the Armed Forces wishes to send a clear message; the fight against terrorism is France’s priority,”* it said. *“This visit will provide an opportunity to take stock of and discuss the prospects for the excellent and growing bilateral relationship between France and Cyprus,”* it added. The air and naval group is currently made up of the “*Charles de Gaulle*,” an air group composed of 20 RAFALE fighter jets and two Hawkeye aircraft, the frigates “*Chevalier Paul*,” “*Auvergne*,” “*Bretagne*” and “*Surcouf*,” the tanker “*Var*” and a nuclear attack submarine, which left Toulon on January 21st, 2020 for the “*Foch*” mission, which will last three months. It is

currently integrating an American and a Greek frigate. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- February 19th, Defense Minister Savvas Angelides on Wednesday slammed reports that parts of Cyprus had been turned into an air base for the US to wage war on Middle Eastern countries and said it was irresponsible in the current climate to create a false picture when it comes to defense and security. Opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - AKEL) mouthpiece Haravghi reported on Wednesday that a fully equipped unit of 500 Americans had been installed at the “*Andreas Papandreou*” base in Paphos. It is also said that construction works were underway at the British base of Akrotiri to relocate the Incirlik US base from Turkey to Cyprus. Angelides slammed the report and referred to statements by the Government on January 8th, 2020 confirming that Cyprus had given a positive response to a US request to temporarily station a rapid response unit in Cyprus for the sole purpose of evacuating personnel working in US diplomatic missions in the region, as well as US citizens, if needed. It has nothing to do with launching military operation. At the time, the Government said the request that was submitted clearly had to do with a humanitarian operation and this was why Cyprus’ response was positive within the framework of its long-standing policy. Cyprus often facilitates humanitarian operations following requests by both EU and non-EU member states as a standard practice. *“As the Republic of Cyprus, we intend to continue all our efforts to enable our country to provide humanitarian facilities to third-country or EU countries,”* Angelides said. This was an established role Cyprus has had in the region.

“The status and mission have not changed at all,” said Angelides. *“We have to be careful with such headlines that create a false picture and confuse the issues related to defense and security,”* he added. In 2018, it emerged that the US did have a base in Cyprus between 2013 and 2017, which the Government, which appeared to have not been aware of its existence, said at the time was probably used for humanitarian purposes. President Nicos Anastasiades would neither confirm nor deny whether the Cyprus Government knew about the US operation. The story emerged in late 2018 when ABC News, citing a US Government document, said the US State Department spent some 70 million US dollars on a base in Cyprus that was *“quickly set up and served little clear purpose before its quiet closing last year (2017).”* ABC said the base, established in September 2013 and closed in August 2017, hosted five helicopters and approximately 40 Government contractors at a cost of about 20 million US dollars per year, according to a report from the US State Department Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The OIG report stated that the base *“provided the department a regional contingency capability with a focus on air bridge support to Embassy Beirut and assisted in the transportation and (if needed) the evacuation of COM personnel from the Embassy.”* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- February 22nd, President Nicos Anastasiades said Cyprus will not bow to Turkish pressure to suspend its natural gas exploration program as that would be a blow to the island’s sovereignty. *“Suspending our energy program amid the threats would be what Turkey sought,”* Anastasiades said in an interview with Euronews. *“This would be a*

blow to the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus,” he added. Contrary to international law and the United Nations Law of the Sea, Turkey, which does not recognize Cyprus, insists that the island has no Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), something which is established through the international agreements Cyprus has struck with Egypt and Israel, and a deal with Lebanon is close to the end, the President said. Turkey considers that Cyprus’ EEZ, or part of it, belongs to an “inexistent state” which only Ankara recognizes, Anastasiades said of the breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in the north of the island. *“Consequently, the threats, the provocations are obvious and the objectives equally obvious,”* he said. According to Anastasiades, the effort was to create a grey area or have the program suspended until the Cyprus problem is resolved. He said Cyprus will persist, through a series of diplomatic and legal measures, with the solidarity of the EU *“to the extent it (EU) can afford to be honest”* but also the UN, friendly countries, and the parties licensed to carry out exploration, *“to protect the program and the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus.”* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkish provocations continue in Cyprus by violating Cypriot sovereign rights with research vessels within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Lately, Cyprus is trying to promote the “hard power” perspective of the country. In other words, Cyprus is paying attention to strengthen its military capabilities not only through defense agreements with neighboring countries but also with armament sales. Cypriot administration claims that upgrade of defense capabilities is a top priority of the country. However, it should be

noted that the US lift of arms embargo is not unconditional; on the contrary it is up to the US President decision after evaluating several preconditions which actually raises questions even for Cypriot sovereign rights. For instance, the National Defense Authorization Act on the issue foresees “the Government of the Republic of Cyprus has made and is continuing to take the steps necessary to deny Russian military vessels access to ports for refueling and servicing.” Violation of Cypriot sovereign rights by Turkish research vessels has become “normality” and nobody speaks about it; it is a routine. Only France seeks to get a more active role by sending its aircraft carrier “Charles de Gaulle” but it is rather unlikely to see the French Navy blocking the Turkish drillships from the Cypriot waters. The Turkish goal is to deter international energy giants from investing in Cypriot fields and starting research activities. End of March or beginning of April the ENI – TOTAL consortium schedules a drill in block 6 and this will be a strong test for Cypriot energy plans. 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: February 18th, Athens rebuffed comments by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu who referred to the Muslim minority in Western Thrace as a “*Turkish minority*.” “*In Greece, which is the historical cradle of democracy but also a modern European democratic state, there is... only one minority: the Muslim minority*,” diplomatic sources said, adding that the members of the community live as equal citizens under the law. “*One only has to read the Treaty of Lausanne to realize this*,” the source said referring to the 1923 agreement that set out the modern borders between Greece and Turkey. Cavusoglu had earlier criticized Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos for speaking of the area’s Muslim minority during a visit to Thrace on Sunday. “*Whatever you say, Western Thrace’s Turkish minority has been Turkish for centuries, it will remain Turkish..!*” he wrote on social media. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 19th, the Greek Government is determined to proceed with a decision to construct closed type hosting facilities for refugees and migrants, Alternate Migration Minister Giorgos Koumoutsakos said in an interview with Praktoreio FM on Wednesday adding that plan will be to the benefit of local residents. Regarding the Ministry’s decision to delay for a week the announced expropriation of land for the creation of the new detention camps on five Aegean islands, after facing strong opposition from local communities, Koumoutsakos said that the Government had shown good will and would hold further talks with residents and local administration officials. However, he pointed out that the original decision had not been overturned. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 19th, at the foot of Mount Olympus, Army Aviation forces from Greece and the US are taking part in a live-fire exercise with attack helicopters, marking deepening defense ties between the two countries. Greece is ramping up military cooperation — and procurements — from allies France and the US, wary of worsening relations with neighbor Turkey over disputed sea and air space boundaries and drilling rights in the East Mediterranean. Wednesday’s training exercise, watched by the Greek Army General Staff Chief, Lieutenant General, Haralampos Lalousis and the US Ambassador to Greece, Geoffrey Pyatt was held three weeks after the two countries finalized a landmark defense agreement giving American forces expanded access to Greek military bases. After a financial crisis that lasted nearly a decade, the Greek military is upgrading its F-16 fighter fleet and modernizing its Navy, while seeking stronger military ties with traditional allies as well as Turkey’s regional rivals, including Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. “Greece is already involved in enhancing and upgrading its defense capability with critical procurement decisions,” Panagiotis Tsakonas, a Professor of international relations and security studies at the University of Athens, told The Associated Press. “The rule is to make the best use of limited resources — to get the most bang for our buck, and that is something that we are continuing to do,” he said. The revised Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement between Greece and the US was signed in October by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a visit to Athens and ratified last month. It provides for increased joint US - Greece and NATO activities at Greek military bases and facilities in Larissa, Stefanovikio, and Alexandroupolis, in central and northern Greece, as well as infrastructure and

other improvements at the Souda Bay US naval base on the island of Crete. “*The US - Greece relationship is stronger than it has ever been,*” Pyatt said. “*Our defense ties and our defense cooperation is an essential component of that.*” (www.ekathimerini.com)



A Hellenic Aviation A-64A “Apache” helicopter launches a 70 mm rocket during the Greek – US live fire exercise

(Photo source: www.geetha.mil.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Tension remains in Greek – Turkish relations, not only in rhetoric level but also in military provocations. Turkish fighter jets keep on violating Greek airspace and flying low over Greek islets. On rhetoric level, Turkish top-officials continue to challenge Greece by provocative statements against its sovereign rights. Greece is implementing a strategy of military deterrence and intensive diplomatic action against Turkish behavior. However, Turkey threatens Greece with hydrocarbon drills in the Eastern Aegean Sea and more specific in the region South of Rhodes island in the Kastelorizo region. Moreover, Turkey appears determined to activate the maritime zones delimitation agreement with Libya and to conduct oil and gas drills within the Greek Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In such a case tension will rise rapidly and

a “hot” incident or a low level armed conflict could not be excluded. Illegal migration flows continue to challenge Greek security. Eastern Aegean islands are frustrated with the Government’s plans to establish new closed reception centers for migrants and refugees in an effort to control the entrance of thousands of people in the Greek territory. Greece cannot address the problem alone and seeks to gain the EU countries support. Migration problem is a complicated situation that it cannot be solved within the Greek capabilities. Migrants will continue to enter Europe through the Greek sea borders and Greece will continue to remain the main gate from Middle East to Europe. Under the current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea Greece is obliged to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. Currently, Greece focuses on naval units, upgrade of fighter jets, UAVs and follow on support agreements.



KOSOVO: February 18th, Matthew Palmer, the US Secretary of State’s Special Envoy for the Western Balkans told the EUobserver on Tuesday that it was *“up to the parties to establish the parameters of the dialogue,”* adding Washington would *“like to see mutual recognition between Serbia and Kosovo as the outcome of the process,”* the Beta news agency reported. *“What we support is the parties finding a way to return to the negotiating table, putting the issues of concern on the negotiating table, and finding a path towards normalization of their relationship, ideally with mutual recognition as the centerpiece,”* he told the Brussels website. The website recalled the statement by the White House Security Advisor

John Bolton who at the peak of discussion on a possible territory swap between Kosovo and Serbia said the US policy was *“that if the two parties can work it out between themselves and reach an agreement, we do not exclude territorial adjustments.”* EUobserver further wrote that the Brussels' institutions echoed Bolton, even though Germany, the chief EU protagonist in the Western Balkans, said the idea could cause friction in a region where changing borders on ethnic lines led to wars 20 years ago. The website added that *“the land-swap plan remained popular in US circles, with the US President Donald Trump’s Special envoy for Kosovo - Serbia talks, Richard Grenell, continuing to promote the idea of a ‘quick deal’ on recognition last year.”* Grenel responded to the EUObserver article, saying it was fake news. *“I am focused on economic development, not politics,”* the Ambassador wrote on social media. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- February 19th, a group of opposition parties is rallying support from MPs to call a special session of the Kosovo Parliament and try to prevent the Government from revoking the 100% tariffs on goods from Serbia, Pristina daily Gazetta Express reported. The parties, once rallied around the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës - PDK) and Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK), said they oppose the revoking of the tariffs and added that the outcome of the special session of Parliament will not stop them from resorting to other measures to keep the tariffs in place. Gazetta Express recalled that this is the first post-election agreement between the opposition parties. Kosovo’s new Prime Minister Albin Kurti said earlier that the tariffs might be revoked in

exchange for reciprocity in relations between Pristina and Belgrade but has not specified what that means. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- February 21st, Kosovo's President, Hashim Thaci said that “populist decisions” like the idea to replace import taxes on Serbia's goods with reciprocity measures, “allegedly punishes Belgrade but alienates us from Washington and Brussels,” the BETA news agency reported. Speaking to BBC in Serbian, Thaci said that every Kosovo's success was a merit of its institutions, but also a result of cooperation with partners in the US and Europe. “I cannot imagine Kosovo's progress without collaboration with our partners,” he said. Thaci added that confrontation with Serbia did not help Kosovo in its relations with Washington and Brussels and that the only solution which would be beneficial for all was to reach “a final agreement between the two countries.” Commenting on current situation regarding dialogue with Belgrade Thaci said that “if something happens, it will happen this year. If not, I am afraid we will lose decades.” He added that the last year of the US President Donald Trump’s mandate was the best time for an agreement in the Balkans. “The renewed US attention to our region is God’s gift for both Kosovo and Serbia, and we must use it,” Thaci said, adding that neither Kosovo nor Serbia could count on the EU membership without a final agreement. “If that chance is lost, we will cry outside Brussels gates, but no one will care,” Thaci added. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Newly formed Kosovo Government and the Prime Minister, Albin Kurti have to address not only domestic opposition, but the US (and EU)

administration regarding relations with Kosovo. It should be underlined that the President, Hashim Thaci and Kurti are at odds and it seems that Thaci is in full line with the US policy in the region. On the other hand, Kurti appears as radical threatening the long harmonic relation with the US. However, Kurti has shown that he easily changes political ideas and thoughts so it is estimated that it is too early to evaluate his cooperation with the EU and US. Nevertheless, the US have expressed their annoyance with Kurti with US officials refusing to meet Kurti. On the other hand, Kurti seeks to restore constitutional order by exercising his legal competencies restricting the President in his duties, mostly ceremonial. This will be the real challenge Kurti has to deal with. The Prime Minister should take into consideration that his coalition partner (LDK) “plays” its own political game seeking to get the US approval and favor. Kurti has not unveiled his real political intentions yet although he has expressed so far radical views regarding dispute with Serbia (reciprocity measures instead of 100% tariffs, to sue Serbia for genocide etc). However, expectations for a spectacular progress on Kosovo – Serbia dialogue should not be expected since Serbia is entering in pre-electoral campaign and elections are scheduled for April, 26th, 2020. Fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering and trafficking, establishment of rule of law, accountable and transparent state institutions, and functional public administration are the main challenges for Kosovo towards its European path.



MOLDOVA: February 17th, Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Chicu regarded as unserious the proposals heard from the

Transnistrian administration concerning the need to increase the strength of the Russian peacekeeping contingent on the Dniester by 10-fold - up to 4,200 men. Chicu stated to journalists after the Monday's weekly working meeting with the President and Parliament Speaker *"Tiraspol has made such statements for many years, so I do not think that this question deserves even discussion. We have heard so many declarations of such kind, and not only from Tiraspol. We do not discuss this question because there is no need whatever in increasing the contingent's strength."* Answering journalists' questions about the opposition-proposed vote of no confidence in Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Aurel Ciocoi, the Premier stated he cannot see any sound reasons for dismissing the Minister. The vote idea was put forward last week, after Aurel Ciocoi had stated that Russia had stopped the bloodshed on the Dniester River in 1992. His words caused strong discontent of conflict veterans. *"The Minister's words were misinterpreted. He meant Russian peacekeeping forces, which acted in conformity with the 1992 Agreement signed between Chisinau and Tiraspol. And that is all!"* stated the Prime Minister. Last week, information appeared in the Russian and Transnistrian press that the Transnistrian administration is proposing to restore the number of Russian peacekeepers stipulated in the documents of the Joint Control Commission (JCC, the supervisory body for the Joint Peacekeeping Forces), reported the Transnistrian JCC Co-Chairman, Oleg Belyakov. (www.infotag.md)

- February 20th, lawmakers who left on February 19th, 2019 the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova -

PDM) have created the Pro-Moldova faction. MPs Andrian Candu, Sergiu Sirbu, Eleonora Graur, Corneliu Padnevi, Vladimir Cebotari and Grigore Repesciuc announced today that they have set up a distinct Parliamentary Group in Moldova's legislative body. The parliamentary faction will be called Pro-Moldova and will be led by Candu, the Secretary of this group, Sirbu, said. On other hand, the Head of the Democrats' faction, Dumitru Diacov, said that those six MPs today morning had been excluded from PDM. Svetlana Rotundu replaced Cebotari in the office of the Democrats' Deputy leader and Igor Vrenea became Secretary of PDM. (www.moldpres.md)

- February 20th, the simple motion against Foreign Affairs and European Integration Minister Aureliu Ciocoi has not been allowed to legislative procedure. At the today's Parliament meeting, Parliament Speaker Zinaida Greceanii did not put the simple motion against Ciocoi to vote on grounds that it had not undergone the legislative procedure. Deputy Parliament Speaker Alexandru Slusari and the Head of the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS), Igor Grosu, said that they did not understand the legal arguments for which the motion had not been accepted. *"The standing bureau took the decision. The motion is not allowed in legislative procedure,"* Greceanii said. In retort, lawmaker Sergiu Litvinenco said that *"motions included on the Parliament's agenda, are discussed and are put to vote. It is inadmissible for a parliamentary majority to empty the constitutional provisions of their content."* The simple motion registered by the ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate -

PAS]] bloc comes after Minister Ciocoi said that Russia's Army had ceased the bloodshed during the military clashes at Dniester. (www.moldpres.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. 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: February 18th, Defense Minister Predrag Boskovic said the Law on Freedom of Religion has been used to wage a crusade against Montenegro. The protest processions, he said, have nothing to do with the law, but are motivated by intention to present Montenegro as a Serbian state, which independence voted in the 2006 referendum would be annulled. Boskovic based this claim on the iconography that can be seen during the protest processions, but also on the Serbian motives drawing throughout Montenegro. *"The protests have nothing to do with the law, because if that was true, the law would be applied, so we would see if it threatened anyone's rights. We see*

that this is not the case. We see the iconography at protests, we see the designation of the territory of Montenegro as part of a Serbian state, we see the drawing of Serbian motives," Boskovic said in an interview with Radio Montenegro. The law, Boskovic said, was used to wage a crusade against Montenegro by a theocratic organization that wants to represent Montenegro as a theocratic state. The intention, he said, is also to present Montenegro as a Serbian state, and to annul state independence and return our country under the sway of Serbia, so that the fate of Montenegro can be decided outside our borders. He also said that there is no force that can transform Montenegro into a theocratic state. (www.rtcg.me)

- February 19th, Montenegro is not on the brink of war and there is no fear that institutions will not be able to maintain internal peace and stability, said Montenegro's Ambassador to Croatia, Boro Vucinic, commenting on the current situation in the country. He reiterated that the Government's intention was to regulate another area that has been in disorder for a long time. *"The previous law regulating this area was more than four decades old and thus became anachronistic. We needed the new one which would also regulate the status of religious facilities in Montenegro,"* Vucinic explained. He added that only the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral opposed the law and *"does not want this law to be implemented."* Commenting on the series of religious processions in Montenegro, as a way of protesting against the Law, Vucinic said there were people whose religion is true but there were also those who had intentions that did not correspond to Montenegro's sovereignty. Vucinic said that Metropolitan's statement that *"Montenegro shall not register the Church, but it*

should be vice versa” is pretty strange. “*Strange and little funny. We cannot play with the state, its independence must be respected,*” Vucinic stressed. However, the Ambassador believes that finally the Metropolitan will let everything go. Commenting on the statements made by Serbian officials that Montenegrins in Serbia should reject the Law if they want to enjoy rights as real Serbian citizens, Vucinic said that such divisions and conditions do not exist in Montenegro. Commenting on Serbian Defense Minister, Alksandar Vulin’s visit to Montenegro, Vucinic said that authorities acted well when they forbade his delegation to enter the country in uniforms. According to him, Serbia cannot come to terms with the fact that Montenegro is an independent country. (www.cdm.me)

- February 21st, Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic will meet today, within the Alliance for Europe initiative, with representatives of the Center for Monitoring Center (CEMI) and the Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations (CRNVO). According to the Government, Markovic has initiated a dialogue with relevant political and social actors to discuss all issues that will help overcome divisions and find a common denominator in the interests of citizens and Montenegro’s European perspective. As part of the Alliance for Europe initiative, the Prime Minister and members of the Government spoke earlier with representatives of the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT) and the Civic Alliance (GA). The Government said it received more proposals and initiatives from non-governmental organizations in order to strengthen credibility of the institutions and public confidence in their work, as well as to strengthen the electoral system. The Union of Municipalities

of Montenegro has supported the Prime Minister’s initiative and the invitation for dialogue on topics crucial for the successful completion of the process of European integration of Montenegro, addressed to all relevant political and social actors. “*For the success of this process, it is essential that we, as a state and as a society as a whole, put into operation all our political, social and institutional capacities,*” the Community of Municipalities said. (www.rtcg.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government appears determined to lower tension on the controversial law on religious freedom. It has started a dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox Church trying to overcome dispute. Nevertheless, the state continues to support the idea that Serbia is using the subject for its own political reasons. It is true that Serbia interferes in the Montenegrin politics using the Serbian population in Montenegro and the Serbian Orthodox Church influence. It is assessed that Serbia has never gave up the idea that Montenegro is the “natural extension of Serbia” and its (smooth) independence is nothing more than an abnormality. Besides, Serbia enjoys support in Montenegro by a strong pro-Serbian opposition. In this context, the Serbian factor could be under certain conditions to act destabilizing. The complicated relation between Montenegro and Serbia and the Russian factor which is favored in the latter attracts the NATO attention in the region. Corruption, smuggling (especially cigarettes) and money laundering are dominated in the country setting significant obstacles and risks for every investor. Such situation has strongly affected progress of

accession negotiations with the EU. 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. The coming elections in the country should be seen as a democratic stress test. 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:

February 17th, the Parliament unanimously voted in favor of dissolving the Parliament ahead of the announced snap parliamentary elections scheduled for the April 12th, 2020. Previously, the MPs adopted the Law on Public Prosecution in a second attempt. Before the implementation of the voting for which 80 votes were secured, there was one voting, when 74 MPs voted in favor of while 32 voted against. The Parliament's President, Talat Xhaferi annulled this voting because previously MP Lilana Popovska has asked to address the MPs, and part of the MPs complained that their votes were not evidenced. The Law on Public Prosecution was not supported by Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity's (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) MPs and since the first voting was annulled, they requested from President Stevo Pendarovski not to sign the decree that will let the law to enter into force. They requested that the Law on changing and amending the Law on

Council of Public Prosecutors be annulled because during its adoption the Bandeter's principle was not obeyed during its adoption. Before dissolving, the Parliament also adopted the Laws on Public Prosecution and the amendments of laws of the Council of public Prosecutors and defense. (www.meta.mk)

- February 21st, during his recent visit to Probishtip, the EU Ambassador Samuel Zbogar said that the forthcoming period is of key importance for North Macedonia including the report about the country's advancement, but also including the forthcoming elections. Zbogar said that the methodology of enlargement has been published and that is a step ahead. *“This document is a process of discussion between the member countries. We are hoping that this precondition, the obstacle in the road, will soon be removed,”* Zbogar said. The EU Ambassador reminded that the country has still a lot to do. *“There are so many things that your country has to deliver and this is why the process of enlargement or accession process exists. This is the reason why you cannot be a member of the EU; because firstly your economy, your society, living environment, state institutions; all of them to be prepared to implement the EU's standards,”* Zbogar said. Regarding the forthcoming elections, the EU's representative said that the past election cycles have imposed higher expectations regarding the organizing of fair and democratic elections. *“The Parliament just got dissolved and we are entering an election period. What we have seen during the past election cycles have raised expectations very high because all of them were implemented perfectly. As a result, we, the EU, do not expect anything less than these expectations of*

how past elections were implemented,” Zbogar said. (www.meta.mk)

- February 22nd, President Stevo Pendarovski thinks it is legitimate to change the “*Prespa*” agreement with a two-thirds majority in Parliament and reiterated that there is no mechanism in NATO with which North Macedonia could be expelled from if it returns its name. Pendarovski explained on TV Kanal 5 “*Samo intervju*” show the difference between NATO and the EU in terms of non-possibility of revoking membership. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country has officially entered in the pre-electoral period and elections will be held on April 12th, 2020. Political situation is calm so far although it is expected a polarization of the atmosphere during the pre-electoral campaign. Nationalistic rhetoric is expected to dominate during the parties’ rallies. Challenging the “Prespa” agreement provisions by the state’s top-officials may harm North Macedonia’s European process. 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, public administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process.



ROMANIA: February 18th, local elections in Romania, in which city Mayors and

country representatives will be elected, will most likely take place on June 14th, 2020 acting Prime Minister Ludovic Orban said on Monday Agerpres reported. He explained that May 31st and June 7th are Christian holidays and May 24th is a tight deadline given the time needed for the electoral campaign. Orban reiterated that the National Liberal Party’s (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) wishes to call early elections, because it is “*very difficult to maintain a normal relationship*” between the Government and a Parliament that “*is ready to vote whatever might bring votes.*” At the same time, he argued that it would be better to hold local and general elections at times close to each other, but he admitted that there might be constitutional obstacles in this regard. “*There was a decision of the Constitutional Court on this topic and we must analyze the constitutional context. However, it is best to have them as close as possible [the dates of the local and parliamentary elections], so we can run one single election campaign for both polls,*” he explained. (www.romania-insider.com)

- February 20th, Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) decided, in the Executive Committee meeting to boycott the joint sitting of the Parliament for voting the new Government of Prime Minister Ludovic Orban. The confidence vote on the new Government is scheduled to take place on Monday, February 24th, 2020. The PSD boycott could prevent the Parliament from reaching the necessary quorum for voting the Government, which would delay the schedule for organizing early elections, according to G4Media.ro. On Tuesday, the Senate, where PSD holds the majority of seats, rejected the bill for enacting an emergency ordinance adopted by the Orban cabinet that sets new rules for

organizing early elections, including a shorter schedule. The Constitutional Court is also expected to rule if the ordinance is constitutional or not. PSD explained in a social media post why the liberals want to organize early elections *“They want the Romanians’ votes before the bills have been exploded!”* According to PSD, one of the first measures taken by the Liberal Government was to overrule the provisions of the emergency ordinance (OUG) 114 adopted by the former PSD Government in December 2018, which introduced extra taxes for banks, energy companies and telecoms, and capped energy and gas prices for households. Meanwhile, PSD does not want early elections because it estimates that it would lose. The party now holds close to a majority of seats in the Parliament, won in the December 2016 elections. This is why the Liberals and President Klaus Iohannis agreed in January to trigger early elections instead of waiting for the term elections that are scheduled to take place in November or December 2020. Moreover, the Liberals hope that early elections would help them secure a majority in the Parliament to support deeper reforms and, possibly, a review of the populist measures passed by the PSD majority, including a 40% increase in pensions and a doubling of the allowances for children. (www.romania-insider.com)

- February 21st, while attending the CEO Forum of the American Chamber of Commerce in Romania on Thursday, the new American Ambassador in Bucharest, Adrian Zuckerman praised Romania’s economic and regional potential, while also slamming corruption and *“politically-connected oligarchs and barons.”* *“I look forward to continuing the close relationship the Embassy has with AmCham to strengthen the US - Romania strategic partnership as we work*

together to improve Romania’s business climate, creating a common sense, transparent, and predictable business environment. Romania is on the brink of shedding the last shackles of communism and corruption. You, the leaders of the business community, have the opportunity to help Romania become economically strong and socially vibrant, a society respecting the rule of law,” Zuckerman said at the beginning of his speech. The US diplomat underlined the current American administration and the Embassy are *“committed to work with President Iohannis, the Government of Romania and with all of you, to make this the year of the Romanian Renaissance.”* Zuckerman has criticized the local barons and oligarchs that are controlling the economy through politics. *“The ability of politically-connected oligarchs and barons to control business interests and limit free market competition must end. Communism has destroyed every country unfortunate enough to have been subjugated to this evil. Communism does nothing to help the poor and underprivileged, it benefits only the few elite of the ruling class. It creates and sustains an endemic system of corruption. The revolution that started 30 years ago has to be brought to a successful completion now. Romania has suffered for too long and you can help end that suffering,”* the Ambassador said. In the Ambassador’s view, to achieve economic growth *“Romania must ensure a reliable and transparent judicial and criminal system.”* (www.romaniajournal.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Political instability and uncertainty continue in Romania due to strategies and tactics of the parties in the struggle for power. PNL seeks to call for early parliamentary elections, while PSD

works on delaying snap elections. Due to these tactics the country does not have a strong Government to forward the necessary reforms regarding fight against corruption and modernizing public administration. President, Klaus Iohannis gave a new mandate to the former Prime Minister, Ludovik Orban to form a new Government. The plenary vote for the new Government will take place on February 24th, 2020. However, PSD decided to boycott the whole procedure delaying PNL's plans. 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. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: February 17th, Sergey Shoygu, the Defense Minister of the Russian Federation, came to Belgrade for one-day visit on Monday upon the invitation from his Serbia's counterpart Aleksandar Vulin, and the two discussed cooperation in the area of defense agreeing that both countries wanted that collaboration to additionally be improved. Shoygu, whose visit to Belgrade is his first trip abroad since reappointed Defense Minister, was greeted by his country's Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Bocan-Harcenko and Serbia's Defense Ministry representatives. *"Serbia wants strong military,"* Vulin said, *"since it is a guarantor for peace and neutrality, but also the country's progress."* He thanked Shoygu for the Russian military-technical aid, especially in equipping the Armed Forces of Serbia. Shoygu was quoted as

saying he was happy about the level of cooperation between the two countries in the area of defense, adding the joint military exercises were the proof of that. *"Realization of six exercises of the two Armies showed a high level of professionalism and top training of all participants. Also, the friendship was demonstrated on the ground,"* Shoygu said. He invited Vulin for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's meeting in June 2020. Some media reports suggested that Shoygu would announce the delivery of Anti-aircraft "Pancir" S-1 System which Serbia had bought for 600 million US Dollars according to the Russian media. After his meeting with Vulin, Shoygu had lunch with the President Aleksandar Vucic. Vulin and Shoygu are later due to pay wreaths to the monument of the Liberators of Belgrade and the Monument to Red Army soldier. The University of Defense presented Shoygu with an honorary doctorate. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Visit of Russian Defense Minister, Sergey Shoygu in Belgrade

(Photo source: www.mod.gov.rs)

- February 18th, Serbia's President said a large and powerful European country has asked Pristina to impose fees on Serbia, with the aim of forcing Serbia to disrupt dialogue. According to Vucic, dialogue was moving towards a compromise

solution. *“It was said that Serbia was going out of dialogue and that any plan for Serbia to gain something would be overthrown,”* Vucic explained on TV Happy show *“Cyrillic”* last night. He reminded that the idea of demarcation could be the outcome of a dialogue in which Serbia would get something. *“I did not know it right away, now I know it all. It is one significant and powerful country in question,”* Vucic said. He recalled that the whole world rebelled against tariffs, Americans louder than Europeans, because, as he pointed out, one European country wanted it. He believes that it is not a coincidence that officials in Montenegro said they have to have their own Church. Vucic explained that they first attacked Serbian Church and Amfilohije, but that the essence is again Serbia and Vucic, and finally, they have NATO support. He also said that one country insists on an energy agreement with Pristina, just to get money, because it is important to them, not the Community of Serbian Municipalities. He reiterated that he respects Bosnia-Herzegovina, adding that he did not rendered the decision of the Constitutional Court of BiH to the detriment of Republika Srpska. Vucic also noted that Milorad Dodik, when he was Chairman of the BiH Presidency, could never go to Brussels alone, but all the Presidency members were invited - Dodik, Zeljko Komsic and Sefik Dzaferovic, and now that Dodik is not Chairman - only Komsic is invited. He also referred to Dodik's statement on RS and BiH after meeting with the Serbs from the region in Belgrade, and said that after the meetings, they did not agree on what anyone would say, but Dodik said what he thought appropriate. *“Serbia has its own army today, it has a good reputation. More importantly than the military, it has more money, stable public finances, faster economic*

growth. They cannot forgive me that success, together with the Government, and all those who run Serbia today. That is why this kind of campaign is implemented, and that is what people in Serbia clearly understand and see,” Vucic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- February 22nd, the first two of a total of six Russian anti-aircraft systems *“Pantsir”* S1 Serbia ordered from Moscow arrived on Saturday at the *“Pukovnik-pilot Milenko Pavlovic”* airport near Belgrade, the Russian outlet *“Sputnjik”* reported. On its way from Moscow, the plane that carried the equipment avoided the Ukrainian airspace and flew over the Black Sea and Bulgaria to Serbia. Bulgarian media reported a few days ago that the Government had approved the flight. The same type of cargo plane, An-124 *“Ruslan,”* previously delivered helicopters and MIG fighter planes from Russia, as well as the S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system for the *“SLAVIC SHIELD 2019”* exercise. Serbia and Russia signed an agreement last year on delivery of one Pantsir set which consists of six systems. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia is moving towards the April 26th, 2020 parliamentary and local elections which would be a strong stress test for the country's future. Political conditions in Serbia show that the country's transition towards a modern and stable democracy has not been completed. Such situation is responsibility of all political stakeholders following Milosevic regime. It is expected a polarized atmosphere during the pre-electoral campaign, while Europeans push opposition to join elections. Of course the Government carries the burden and responsibility to improve electoral procedure, strengthen media

freedom and ensure free and fair elections but it is assessed that from the very first moment the opposition did not actually seek to join the elections. Serbia needs political stability since it has a lot of diplomatic, security and economic challenges ahead. Kosovo new Government has a lot of internal problems to resolve before becomes ready for dialogue with Serbia. Nevertheless, no progress is expected until the Serbian elections in late April. Montenegro – Serbia relations are in low level lately due to the Montenegrin law on religious freedom which is considered by Belgrade as a direct attack on Serbian Orthodox Church and consequently on Serbian population in Montenegro. Serbia is considered by Montenegro as a direct threat of destabilizing the country. Finally, Serbia is engaged with one way or another to the latest crisis in Bosnia where Bosnian Serbs claim that secession may become a possible choice for the entity. The country has developed very close relations with Russia, especially in the field of defense. Russia keeps supplying Serbia with weapons, while both countries conduct common military exercises. Serbia is trying to balance between the west, namely the EU and the US on one side and Russia on the other implementing the doctrine of “neutrality.” 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: February 17th, the Secretary General of the Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB) Jernej Pavlic rejected speculation that SAB was considering joining a potential center-right Government. “Talks on entering a Janez Jansa Government never took place and we will never engage in them,” he said, adding SAB's Deputy Group stood united in this respect. Pavlic added that SAB, a center-left party with 5 MPs which was part of the recently disbanded coalition, would not abandon its priorities, which include pensioners, public education and public healthcare. (www.sta.si)

- February 18th, the parliamentary Commission for Intelligence and Security Services Oversight (KNOVS) performed an unannounced inspection at the National Bureau of Investigation on Tuesday, investigating suspicion that that outgoing Prime Minister Marjan Sarec and his State Secretary Damir Crncec had abused intelligence and security services to “influence, threaten and extort MPs and leaderships of parties of the potential future coalition,” said KNOS Vice President Zan Mahnic, a member of the Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS), which is trying to form the coalition. The Police released a strong-worded response, denying the media reports that raised these suspicions. (www.sta.si)

- February 18th, The Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) called for an emergency session of the parliamentary Public Finance Oversight Commission to examine a cooperation memorandum signed last September by the state-controlled energy company PETROL with a

Russian company subject to US sanctions. The memorandum with T PLUS was signed as part of a visit to Moscow by outgoing Prime Minister Marjan Sarec and envisages cooperation with the T PLUS Group and SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC RUSSIA in the field of energy efficiency. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

It seems rather difficult to see a new coalition Government in Slovenia, despite continuation of consultations between parties. Opposition SDS, the biggest political force in the Parliament is working hard to form a coalition Government. It is assessed that early elections will prevail finally. On Slovenia – Croatia dispute the latter has started on calling for dialogue but it is doubtful what Slovenia will finally decide to do. Besides, Slovenia could push Croatia on this case taking into consideration that Croatia needs Slovenia's support to enter the Schengen zone and OECD. 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 White Book on Defense presented a rather ambitious program of improving operational capabilities of the Armed Forces. It foresees an 8,000-strong professional military force and a 2000-strong standing reserve by 2035, up from 6,400 and 700, respectively. Slovenia's defense budget will finally

reach 2% of GDP (a NATO requirement) by 2035.



TURKEY: February 17th, Turkey's "Maarif" Foundation is the "antidote" against the "poison" injected by the "Gülenist Terror Group" (according to Turkish authorities (FETO) into Turkey and the whole world, Vice President Fuat Oktay said on Monday. The "Maarif" Foundation opened on Monday its eighth Country Representative Consultation Meeting in Istanbul. Speaking at the event, Oktay said "This is actually not just a poison within Turkey or against Turkey. Wherever they operate, they inject this poison into that country. Unfortunately, they continue to do so in countries they are currently active in." Oktay underlined that it took the "Maarif" foundation only three-and-a-half years to build official contact with 104 countries, open representation offices in 51 and operate in 66 countries. "In 19 countries, 213 FETO-linked schools have been taken over by our 'Maarif' Foundation and protocols have been signed with 40 other countries for the transfer of these schools. In this rapid success, the contributions of the 'Maarif' administration and country representatives have historical importance." Speaking at the same event, "Maarif" Foundation Chair Birol Akgun underlined that the foundation has a comprehensive education network serving nearly 40,000 students with its 323 educational facilities and 42 dormitories in 43 countries. It currently has nearly 7,000 employees. "We serve world peace by educating virtuous and good people and building friendly relations between our nation and other nations. We are aware that the world needs this," he said. Akgun also said that they know that the best weapon to defeat

terrorist groups like FETO, the PKK and DAESH, and international threats like racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and discrimination is to increase the number of good people with education worldwide. The foundation's eighth Country Representative Consultation Meeting was held on February 17th – 21st, 2020. The Turkish Government set up the Turkish “*Maarif*” Foundation soon after the FETO-orchestrated (according to the Turkish authorities) 2016 defeated coup, to administer overseas schools linked to the “*terrorist*” group. The foundation has also established schools and education centers in various continents, from Africa to Asia, since its establishment in 2016. FETO and its U.S.-based leader Fetullah Gulen is considered by the Turkish authorities as the orchestrator of the defeated coup in Turkey, which left 251 people dead and injured nearly 2,200. FETO also has a considerable presence outside of Turkey. It runs a chain of private schools that serve as a revenue stream for the “*terrorist*” group. These schools abroad are being transferred to the Turkish state-run “*Maarif*” Foundation. FETO was also behind a long-running campaign to overthrow the Government through the infiltration of Turkish institutions, particularly the military, police and judiciary. (www.dailysabah.com)

- February 19th, if a fair agreement cannot be reached in international talks, Turkey will support Libya's legitimate Tripoli administration in taking control of the whole country, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Wednesday. Speaking at the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - AKP) group meeting in capital Ankara, Erdogan said Turkey continues to side with Libya's legitimate Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. Referring to the EU's

recent statement on Libya, Erdogan also said the EU has no authority to make decisions on Libya. The EU this week decided to launch a new naval and air mission in the Eastern Mediterranean to stop more weapons from reaching the warring factions in Libya. Since the ouster of late ruler Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, two seats of power have emerged in Libya; one in eastern Libya supported mainly by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates and the other in Tripoli, which enjoys UN and international recognition. Putschist Field Marshal Haftar's eastern-based forces aim to capture the capital, Tripoli, through the backing of Egypt, the UAE, Russian mercenaries and some African troops. Turkey, meanwhile, backs Fayez al-Sarraj's internationally recognized GNA. Touching upon the situation in the Mediterranean, Erdogan said “*We have been shifting the balance in the Mediterranean in favor of our country since we signed the maritime deal with Libya. Thanks to our determined stance on the issue, the status we declared in the Mediterranean has started to be accepted by regional actors, including Greece.*” On November 27th, 2019 Turkey and Libya's Tripoli-based GNA signed a bilateral memorandum after a meeting between Erdogan and al-Sarraj in Istanbul. The deal enables Turkey to secure its rights in the Mediterranean while preventing any fait accompli maneuvers by other regional states. (www.dailysabah.com)

- February 23rd, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said he will meet leaders of Russia, France and Germany next month to discuss situation in northwest Syria, where a military push by Moscow-backed Government forces against the last opposition-held enclave has displaced nearly a million people. His comments on Saturday came as the Turkish Defense

Ministry said a Turkish soldier had been killed in Syria's Idlib province in a bomb attack by Government forces, becoming Turkey's 16th military death during a month in which talks between Ankara and Moscow have failed to de-escalate a recent spike in fighting. Speaking to reporters in Izmir, Erdogan did not specify where the March 5th, 2020 meeting would be held. He added, however, that Turkey is “*determined on our road map*” for Syria after calls on Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron. “*I expressed our determination clearly*” to them, said Erdogan, who last week threatened an “*imminent*” operation against Syrian forces in the region. Turkey has sent thousands of troops and equipment to the region just south of its border to head off the Government forces' campaign driven by Russian air raids. Already hosting some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, it says it cannot handle another wave and has closed its borders. Macron and Merkel on Friday expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in Idlib and urged an end to the conflict, while the Kremlin said it was discussing the possibility of holding a four-way summit. The Turkish President told Putin over the phone on Friday that the solution was to return to the Sochi agreement they signed in 2018, which allowed Turkey to establish military posts across Idlib designed to prevent a Syrian Government assault. That deal has been increasingly set aside as Russian-backed Syrian forces advance steadily into the region, the final stronghold of rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Government during a nine-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions. The UN warned on Friday that an escalation in fighting could end in a “*bloodbath*”

and called for an immediate ceasefire. Nearly 900,000 people, more than half of whom are children, have fled their homes since December 1st, 2019 when the Russian-backed Syrian Government forces pressed ahead with their military offensive. Separately, Turkey's Defense Ministry said its forces retaliated to the “*despicable*” bomb attack that killed the soldier, destroying 21 Syrian Government targets. It said the soldier was a tank mechanic who died when transferred to hospital. The incident came two days after two Turkish soldiers were killed in an air raid in Idlib, which Ankara blamed on Syrian Government forces. Earlier this month, 13 Turkish soldiers were killed in Syrian attacks, prompting Erdogan to say Turkey will attack Syrian forces “*anywhere*” in Syria if another soldier was hurt. Syrian troops have reconquered swathes of Idlib and retaken the strategic M5 highway connecting the country's four largest cities, as well as the entire surroundings of Aleppo city for the first time since 2012. On Saturday, the highway opened for public use for the first time in nearly eight years, the Transport Minister said. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Syrian Idlib is evolving into an “open sore” for Turkish Armed Forces. Syrian Army is advanced backed by the Russian Air Force increasing casualties for Turks. Turkey is at odds with Russia over Syria claiming that the Sochi agreement is violated. It is very difficult for Turkey to maintain its presence in Syrian territory securing its national interests without either support from NATO allies or Russian withdrawal from backing the Syrian forces. However, it is assessed that Russia will not abandon Syria since it is securing its presence in the Middle East and

East Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, it is very difficult to see NATO troops to fight for Turkish Armed Forces in Syria. Under these circumstances, Turkey is forced to solve the problem by itself and a new military operation which may lead in an open war with Syria is not the best option. Furthermore, Turkey is threatened by almost a million of Syrian refugees to enter its territory; hosting already almost 3.6 million refugees Turkey will not afford more refugees in its soil. The continuous military campaigns in several fronts have a direct impact in the already “wounded” economy. Due to the latest situation in Idlib, Turkish Lira faces pressure and it has weakened while inflation is rising. In general, 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. Erdogan made clear publically 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, Somalia is explained by this doctrine. The country combines both diplomatic means and “hard” power aiming to achieve its goals. It has conducted hydrocarbon drills in Mediterranean Sea within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and presents its aeronautical power against Greece and Cyprus questioning their sovereign rights. In the east Mediterranean front, Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in the region and is expected to react violently if balance of power is jeopardized. The Turkish – Libyan agreement on delimitation of maritime


zones gives to Turkey a central role in Eastern Mediterranean cutting the Greek, Cypriot and Egyptian EEZs in the middle. Tension will break out when Turkey will try to exercise its rights in the declared EEZ. 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. 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. 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. Without any question, Turkey has the characteristics of a regional superpower and it tries to act like one.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

 *Major concerns over stability and security. Significant security risk in specific regions. Low tension incidents.*

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

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