



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: October 29th, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama stated that during a meeting with Kosovo's Self-Determination Movement (Vetevendosje) Albin Kurti, who won the October 6th, 2019 parliamentary elections, he will propose separate Ministries for both Albania and North Macedonia to improve relations between the two. Rama said these Ministries would serve as institutions to address the challenges between the two countries. The scheduled meeting between Rama and Kurti was announced by KosovaPress, while member of the Vetevendosje Movement Albulena Haxhiu was the one to speak about Rama's idea, saying Vetevendosje has not yet formally accepted the proposal, but that it welcomes it. Haxhiu said strengthening relations between Kosovo and Albania will be a priority of the Kurti Government. According to her, the Government led by Kurti will focus on vitalizing and implementation all the agreements signed between Kosovo and Albania through the years. Former Head of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce Safet Gerxhaliu has urged Rama to be more serious in the implementation of Albania's obligations deriving from the Stabilization and Association Agreement. KosovaPress has also contacted the Chamber of Commerce in Albania regarding Rama's statement for a special Minister between Kosovo and Albania. By phone, Chamber of Commerce Chairman Nikolin Jaka, while not commenting on the idea, said private-Albanian-Kosovo entrepreneurship forums would come out in December with a joint platform that would address both Governments. *"Albania-Kosovo private entrepreneurship forums will come out in December with a 'Albania-Kosovo, a reality of an economy' platform, addressed to our*

two governments. What Governments and Prime Ministers do is their job," Jaka said on the phone. Otherwise, a series of intergovernmental cooperation agreements have been signed between the Governments of Kosovo and Albania in many areas, but their implementation has not yet happened. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- October 29th, the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, attended the International Forum for Economic and Political Dialogue. After that, he and the Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis had a meeting that lasted 55 minutes. Top Channel's journalist in Athens, Artur Bibe, uncovered the discussion points of this meeting. *"Greece is happy with the progress of the agreements so far, after being updated with the stalemate created with the properties in Southern Albania."* Rama asked Mitsotakis to intervene about the War Law, a relict, which, according to Rama, is withholding the relations between both parties. (www.top-channel.tv)



Meeting of Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama with his Greek counterpart, Kyriakos Mitsotakis
(Photo source: www.kryeministria.al)

- October 30th, Yuri Kim, the new appointed US Ambassador to Albania, spoke to the Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington on Tuesday afternoon in a confirmation hearing. Kim, who was appointed by President Donald

Trump in June this year, said that if confirmed she will pursue some priorities in her job as an Ambassador. She said she would encourage Albania to achieve a 2% level of defense spending by 2024. She also said she would urge the country's leaders to resolve the current political stalemate in order to strengthen the prospect of opening EU membership negotiations. Kim added that she would also encourage Albania to fully implement justice reforms, including inspecting the image of Judges and Prosecutors and establishing special structures for the fight against corruption and organized crime. She said she sees technical assistance to Albania in investigating, prosecuting and punishing transnational corruption and organized crime as a priority. Albania, Kim said at the hearing, has a bad name for organized crime, trafficking in human beings, especially women, and narcotics across borders. Kim said that if confirmed, she would also work to boost US exports and investments in Albania. Responding to a question from Senators about Russia's potential influence in the region, Kim said that fortunately, Russia's efforts in this regard have not had much effect. For this reason, Kim said, *"it is our duty to keep friends such as Albania close at times like this."* It is important, she said, to help Albanians strengthen institutions so they are more resistant to Russia's efforts and to China's economic penetration. (www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition strengthens its voice against the Government to resign and early elections to be held. For Rama who carries the burden of failure towards the country's European future it would be much more difficult to remain in power. The ongoing political crisis is expected to become

deeper strengthening instability and uncertainty. Violent protests could not be excluded especially if Rama refuses to listen public demands and use Police violence against civilians. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. What really needs the country is political stability and constitutional order for moving ahead with reforms. Election of Albin Kurti as the new Kosovo Prime Minister is a new challenge for Albania. Besides, the state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

November 1st, nobody can make Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia's Serb-majority region, change its decision on its military neutrality and agree to Bosnia's NATO membership, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik said on Friday. The statement is the latest in the back-and-forth between the leader of the main Bosniak party in the country, Bakir Izetbegovic, and his Serb counterpart Dodik over Bosnia's NATO membership path and the deadlock over forming the Government. Bosnia's new Government - officially called the Council of Ministers - has still not been formed, more than a year since the election. The reason is a disagreement over whether Bosnia should send the Annual National Program (ANP) to NATO, which would be the

next step toward the country's membership in the Alliance. Although Dodik's Party of Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) agreed to the country taking over obligations toward NATO years ago, including sending the ANP, the party has since changed its mind. In line with neighboring Serbia, the semi-autonomous entity of Republika Srpska adopted a Declaration on Military Neutrality in 2017. It means the entity does not want to be a member of any military alliance, including NATO. But for the Council of Ministers to be named, all three members of Bosnia's Presidency must approve the naming of the Ministers, and the next Chairman is supposed to come from Dodik's party. The Bosniak (Nuslim Bosnians) and Croat Presidency members refuse to greenlight the SNSD's candidate until the ANP is sent to NATO in Brussels. Dodik has accused Izetbegovic's Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) of using the ANP as a condition for forming the Government and implementing the will of the voters. *"Nobody can make the RS breach a decision by the Republika Srpska National Assembly. That is more important to us than Bosnia and Herzegovina. I represent Republika Srpska, not Bosnia and Herzegovina,"* Dodik said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 1st, a bilateral Military Cooperation Plan for year 2020 was signed in Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH's) capital Sarajevo on Thursday aiming to enhance cooperation with the US Ministry of Defense, BiH's Ministry of Defense stated in the press release the same day. During the signing ceremony in the premises of BiH's Ministry of Defense, it was mutually agreed that 129 joint activities will further enhance the capabilities of BiH's Armed Forces.

On behalf of BiH's Ministry of Defense, the Assistant to Minister of Defense for the International Cooperation Zoran Sajinovic, emphasized that the US is the number one strategic partner for BiH. *"In this cooperation, the two countries work together to maintain stability in the country and in the world, both through military projects in BiH and through participation in regional initiatives and international peace support missions,"* Sajinovic said. Sajinovic continued by praising the great assistance provided by the US Embassy's Office for Defense Cooperation (ODC) and the Maryland National Guard in the military equipment, services and financial resources of the BiH's Armed Forces. For his part, US Defense Attaché to BiH Michael Tarquinto noted that the Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan for 2020 is based on successful projects from this and previous years. The program is implemented through mutual visits, participation in exercises such as practice disaster response mechanisms, exercise capabilities, and demonstration of each nation's ability to work together effectively in emergency crisis response operations such as rescue operations, flood response, and response to chemical incidents. Especially successful was the four-day *"Silver Arrow"* military exercise held in September in Tuzla, where members of BiH's Armed Forces, the National Guard of Maryland and US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) trained to direct planes and helicopters for combat and tactical field operations. Earlier, BiH's Armed Forces did not have this capability, which is applicable in developed armies of the world. The BiH-Maryland Partnership dates back to 2003 and has been established to increase understanding and interoperability between the two countries and to provide assistance and support to BiH's

democratic institutions and Government bodies. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- November 2nd, lateness in Government formation and poor cooperation between agencies and institutions hamper the adoption of stronger measures and the fight against terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the US Department of State says its annual report on terrorism around the world in 2018, as carried by Bosnian media on Saturday. *“Slow Government formation after the October 2018 elections continues to delay the adoption of new measures,”* the report for Bosnia says. *“Law enforcement cooperation continued to suffer from interpersonal and institutional infighting,”* the report says. The Department of State says that despite amendments, the criminal policy remains very lenient towards terrorism suspects. *“Bosnia closed some legislative loopholes through amendments to terrorism provisions in its criminal code, although lenient sentencing remained a challenge,”* it is written in the report. *“In May, the Bosnian Parliament adopted amendments to the criminal code to increase the minimum sentence for certain terrorism-related crimes from five to eight years, eliminate the ability of convicted terrorists to pay fines rather than serving time, and prohibit terrorists from securing provisional release,”* the report says. It notes that three new crimes were introduced to the Bosnian criminal code *“travelling and residing abroad for terrorism, misusing information technology or cyber technology for terrorist purposes, and forging documents for the purposes of terrorism. The draft amendments also strengthen an existing criminal code provision on training for terrorist activities.”* *“Few Bosnian citizens attempted to travel to foreign battlefields in 2018, although*

dozens remain in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine,” the report says. *“Extremist ideology and regional nationalist groups remained potential sources of terrorism in Bosnia,”* it notes. *“While little progress was made on rehabilitation and de-radicalization, the BiH Ministry of Security and the Interreligious Council made notable efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism,”* the report concludes. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Lack of state’s Government since October 7th, 2018 elections is an insurmountable obstacle which undermines stability and growth of the country. Not only that but it creates “fertile soil” for emerging ethnic tension and nationalistic rhetoric which is detrimental for Bosnia’s sustainability. Dayton Peace Agreement has been put into question by almost everybody including Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) threatening peace, stability, and coexistence of ethnic entities in the country. It is not a secret that political situation in Bosnia is alarming and at the moment it is considered as the most dangerous for a violent turbulence or a conflict in the region. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia’s internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to “penetrate” in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Finally, NATO is rather difficult to allow a Western Balkan country to remain out of its collective security structures. Taking this into consideration, it will not be a surprise to see rapid political or even security developments in the country. As already “HERMES” has assessed

Bosnia with no Government, no state budget, and no growth sliming slowly but steadily towards interethnic tension conflict. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.



BULGARIA: October 28th, nine major cities in Bulgaria saw first-round victory of Mayors in the local elections, according to interim results. There will be second round of elections in the other big cities, BNT reported. The processing of ballots continues. The October 27th, 2019 local elections did not produce a clear winner in many major cities in Bulgaria including Sofia, Plovdiv, Rousse and several other places. A second round will be held on November 3rd, 2019. In Sofia, the ballots have been processed at 40.72% showing that there will be a run-off. The current Mayor Yordanka Fandakova [Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България - GERB)] who won 36.38% of the votes and Maya Manolova (socialist-backed independent) with 27.28% will compete in the second round of the elections. (www.novinite.com)

- November 1st, a Russian spy who has tried to recruit a Director of a Bulgarian service with access to classified information expelled from Bulgaria, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said in an interview with BTV. According to Borissov, the Bulgarian employee himself informed him of the attempt for recruitment, after which appropriate actions were taken by Bulgarian

authorities, BNR reported. It should be recalled that the Russian diplomat accused of espionage in Sofia has already been declared a persona non grata. Refusing to comment on the case, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the principle of reciprocity remained valid in diplomacy. (www.novinite.com)

- November 3rd, On November 3rd, 2019 Bulgaria holds second round of local elections. The same rules for voting apply as in the first round, BNT reported. The polling stations open at 07.00 and close at 20.00. If there are queues, voting can be extended by an hour. Second round will be held in 105 municipalities, 441 town halls and 31 regions. Nine district cities elected their mayors in the first round on October 27. Run-offs will be held in the remaining 18 district cities, including Sofia. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces "structural" problems, the Government is stable. Second round of local elections was held on November 3rd, 2019. Taking into consideration exit polls and first preliminary results it seems that ruling GERB was the winner of the election but weakened compared to last parliamentary elections. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. Another espionage case is shaken relations between Bulgaria and Russia. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military

operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: October 30th, the proposed 2020 budget will be presented at tomorrow's cabinet session. Junior coalition partner the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka – Liberalni Demokrati - HNS-LD) had been threatening to boycott the budget unless it included a pay raise for the striking teacher's. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and HNS leader Ivan Vrdoljak appear to have reached an agreement following meetings between coalition partners and the inner cabinet, as well as a one-on-one meeting between the two. According to statements given by senior Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) officials and Vrdoljak himself after the meeting, the proposed budget will remain the same, adhering to a previous Government offer of a 2% pay raise in three installments. However, the Prime Minister has promised to accelerate work on drawing up an ordinance regulating salary coefficients in the education sector. *“That ordinance has to be completed by June 30th. Meaning that the Prime Minister's announcement, that he wants a 2% plus 2% plus 2% model for next year and that the issue of an ordinance regulating salary coefficients is completed in short order,”* HDZ Secretary General Gordan Jandrokovic said. The deal comes with a measure of security for HNS leader Ivan Vrdoljak. *“Insomuch as the entire solution for the salary coefficients and salary analysis is not completed by June 30th, coefficients for teachers will rise by 2% on the very same day.”* Earlier in the day President Kolinda Grabar

Kitarovic commented on the tensions in the coalition Government *“I believe that everyone is aware of the fact that stability is absolutely crucial for the country at this time. Not just because we will be presiding over the EU, but also because of the fact that we need to maintain these positive macroeconomic trends, which ultimately need to be reflected in the lives of our citizens.”* (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- October 31st, Croatia looks set to purchase two UH-60M *“Black Hawk”* helicopters from the US for an estimated cost of 115 million US dollars after the sale was approved by the US State Department. According to information published on the website of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) *“This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a NATO ally. The sale of these UH-60 helicopters to Croatia will significantly increase its capability to provide troop lift, border security, counterterrorism, medical evacuation, search and rescue, re-supply/external lift, and combat support.”* Croatia intends to use the new cutting-edge defense equipment and services to modernize and expand its Armed Forces in order to provide multi-mission support in the region as well as combat terrorist threats. The move will also go towards reaching the Government's goal of spending 2% of the GDP on defense, a NATO requirement. The US agency also noted that Croatia would have no difficulty absorbing the *“Black Hawk”* helicopters into its Armed Forces. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- November 2nd, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on the Euronews television network on Friday that he believed Slovenia would not stand

in the way of Croatia's accession to the passport-free Schengen Area despite their ongoing border dispute. *“First of all the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia is an open issue that we have had on the agenda for the last thirty years. Had this been a condition for either of the two countries to join the EU or Schengen, Slovenia would not have entered either,”* said the Prime Minister. Plenkovic said that Schengen membership should be completely separated from a bilateral border issue between the two countries, and expressed confidence that they would reach a satisfactory and timely solution. Croatia recently received a green light from the European Commission for joining the border-free bloc when they ruled that Croatia had fulfilled all the necessary criteria. Plenkovic added that decision of the college of the European Commission in Strasbourg last month was the result of four years of hard work. The Prime Minister said that despite Croatia's long coastline, including 1,300 kilometers of border with non-EU countries, special measures were already in place to protect the entire border. *“Croatia has very much invested in the capabilities of our Police force. We have 6,500 Police Officers fully trained and equipped to guard the EU's external border,”* said Plenkovic. He added that Croatia was cooperating well with the Police services of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political stability despite the short disagreement between the main ruling HDZ and coalition partner HNS. The latter has threatened that it would not vote in favor of the 2020 state budget, while the Prime Minister sent

the clear message that by not supporting the budget, HNS would be expelled from the ruling coalition. However, it seems that a potential political crisis was avoided in a challenging period for the country. Croatia received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: October 28th, President Nicos Anastasiades said on Monday representations should made to Turkey so that it stops setting conditions for participating in reunification talks, as he reiterated that the Greek Cypriot side's aim was to continue talks on the same basis they had been held to date. Anastasiades said the internal aspects of the Cyprus problem would be dealt with by the leaders of the two communities, but there was also the integral role of the guarantor powers.

“Despite this, I see one of the guarantor powers, Turkey, setting terms regarding the conditions that would make its participation in a dialogue possible,” the President said. He said he hoped the UN Secretary-General was aware of this, and eventually the necessary representations would be undertaken *“so as some people return back to earth.”* Of his planned meeting with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci next month, Anastasiades said talks were of Cypriot ownership *“and under this condition it is always implied that issues relating to the internal aspects would be dealt with by the leaders of the two communities.”* The Secretary-General on Friday called the leaders to an informal tripartite meeting in Berlin on November 25th, 2019 which could lead to a five-party conference in December that would include the guarantor powers Turkey, Greece, and Britain. *“The international aspect of the Cyprus problem is of course part of the Cyprus problem and relates to the guarantees, the presence of the occupation army, etc; it also relates to the existing guarantor powers. Our objective is to continue on the same basis,”* Anastasiades said. He said the common objective was to create the conditions that would allow the Republic of Cyprus to evolve into a European, functional state that ensured everyone’s human rights and the conditions of peaceful coexistence. *“Not turning it into the protectorate of any third power,”* he said. On Sunday, Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said It remained to be seen whether the Turkish side would abandon its intransigent stance by the time the leaders meet in Berlin. *“The President will proceed on November 25th with clear political will and willingness to create the conditions for the resumption of negotiations. This, however, depends on the Turkish side and mainly on*

Turkey.” Asked what the next steps might be he added *“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Fortunately, the Secretary-General’s initiative is still in progress and we look forward to the fact that Mr Guterres will proceed accordingly.”* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 29th, both Turkey and Cyprus have issued NAVTEX notices for exercises in the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) this week, Phileftheros reported without official confirmation. According to the report, Ankara issued two notices for exercises near its Yavuz drillship, which is stationed in block 7 where French company TOTAL and Italian firm ENI have drilling concessions. Its second NAVTEX ‘reserved’ areas within blocks 1,2,6 and 7. Then Cyprus issued two notices for multinational exercises west and south-east of the island. The first will take place on November 6th,11th,13th,14th and 16th. The second NAVTEX concerns a large marine area including blocks 2,3 and 13. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 2nd, the Defense Ministers of Cyprus, Greece and Egypt will hold a trilateral meeting on Tuesday, November 5th, 2019 in Athens during which they will discuss developments in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the cooperation of the three countries on defense and security issues. Defense Minister Savvas Angelides will fly to the Greek capital on Tuesday for the meeting with his Greek and Egyptian counterparts, Nikos Panagiotopoulos and Mohamed Zaki. On November 6th, 2019 the three Ministers will be in Crete to watch part of the joint military aeronautical exercise of Greece, Cyprus and Egypt “Medusa 9” that got underway on Friday and will wrap up on November 8th, 2019. This is the fourth consecutive year that

Cyprus is taking part in the exercise with its Armed Forces. Cyprus is participating in the drill with the Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) IOANNIDES, an Underwater Demolition Team and military staff officers. The Hellenic National Defense General Staff has announced that the aim of the exercise is to further enhance the cooperation of the Armed Forces of the participating countries, noting that observers from other countries were invited to watch the drill. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Although invasion of Turkish drillship Yavuz in Cypriot EEZ continues challenging the state's sovereignty, Cypriot authorities focus on restarting of peace talks. It is obvious that the lack of military power and more specifically aeronautical power is critical for Turkish uncontrolled actions. Cyprus continues to work by diplomatic means on resolving the crisis but the fact is that Turkey has consolidated its presence in the Cypriot waters. UN Secretary General has announced an informal tripartite meeting for November 25th, 2019. Current situation has not only political and diplomatic repercussions, but also economic ones. Turkey rejects any possibility of unilateral (by Cyprus) exploitation of hydrocarbons within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without equal participation of the Turkish Cypriot community. The presence of Turkish drill ships accompanied by warships forced oil companies to reconsider their activity in Cypriot waters due to safety reasons. Despite Turkish provocations, Cyprus appears ready for talks under the UNSG auspices with Turkish Cypriot community for resolving the Cyprus question. Bi-communal and bi-zonal federation is

the basis for a negotiation, according to Cypriot officials. It should be noted that there is a joint Turkish and Turkish Cypriot effort to question Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci legitimacy to lead talks with the Greek Cypriot side. This fact is strongly related with the latest Akinci's statements which did not support Turkish action in Syria. 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: October 29th, Greece will continue to "closely monitor" North Macedonia's "full compliance" with the conditions set in the Prespes accord, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said on Tuesday, after the country's Premier Zoran Zaev warned that part of the deal which ended a decades-long dispute with Greece might be at risk, because some articles are linked to his country's EU accession prospects. "Mr Zaev is once again taking advantage of the inherent problems of the Prespes agreement which we knew and had already warned about. The deal has already yielded results and Northern Macedonia reaps benefits as the road to NATO integration has been opened," he said in a statement Tuesday. "Our aim is to solve problems and mitigate the negative consequences of the agreement through the European path. For this reason, we will continue to monitor closely our neighbors' full compliance with their

responsibilities,” Dendias said. Dendias also criticized main opposition Coalition of Radical left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA), which signed the deal with North Macedonia in 2018, to “*consider its responsibilities for a problematic erga omnes which it continues to present as an accomplishment.*” Speaking in an interview with Euronews, Zaev said there is a link between the implementation of the name deal and the opening and closing of accession chapters. “*Especially for internal use in some cases,*” he was quoted as saying by Euronews, adding that part of it will freeze because it cannot be implemented. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- October 30th, nearly 800 migrants reached the islands of the eastern Aegean in the space of 48 hours, according to official figures made public on Wednesday. A total of 795 migrants arrived on Lesbos, Chios and Samos on Tuesday and Wednesday, as human traffickers continue to exploit the good weather to intensify their activity. Of the total arrivals, 230 landed on Lesbos where the notorious Moria reception center is already sprawling into adjacent olive groves, with 360 reaching Chios and 205 arriving on Samos. According to figures from the Citizens' Protection Ministry, a total of 16,658 migrants are currently on Lesbos - 14,427 of them at the Moria center - with 4,980 on Chios and 6,202 on Samos. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- October 31st, seismic research conducted by Hellenic Petroleum (HELPE), the country's biggest oil refiner, has indicated the possibility of the existence of a large reserve of natural gas in Greece, similar to Egypt's gigantic Zohr gas field in the Eastern Mediterranean. In a presentation on Wednesday, Yiannis Grigoriou, HELPE's

General Manager for exploration and production of hydrocarbons, said that seismic depictions of the Zohr field bear similarities to an area that HELPE is exploring. He did not reveal which region of the ones HELPE is exploring he was referring to. If these indications are confirmed by drilling activities, then the potential quantities may be 280 billion cubic meters, which would be able to cover Greece's needs for 70 years. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greece enjoys political stability. Establishment of a special investigative Committee to investigate allegations of political interference in the “Novarty's” case raised political tension between the ruling ND and opposition SYRIZA. The issue will remain in the central political scene in the near future as a source of tension. At the moment, migration is the main security problem of Greece. Good weather contributes in maintenance of a stable flow from Turkish coasts towards Greek islands. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. The Government focuses its efforts on relieving the islands of eastern Aegean Sea (Lesvos, Samos, Chios) from a burden that it may come out of control threatening law and order in these small communities. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. The

critical question is “how Greece would react if a Turkish drillship would appear in its territorial waters.” Turkey has targeted the wider area of Kastelorizo (and Northeast Aegean Sea) issuing several NAVTEXs for naval exercises with live fires. Moreover, Turkish fighter jets massively violate Greek airspace, while Turkish drones fly over Greek islands or islets. Turkey keeps upgrading provocations against Greece with a “hot” incident always to be in the foreground. Lately, Greece has changed its stance towards Cyprus by sending fighter jets over the Cypriot sky in a strong message that Greek Armed Forces are present in the island at any time to support its defense. Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Currently, Greece is in talks with France for purchasing two advanced frigates BELHARA. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: October 30th, Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) leader Albin Kurti said on Wednesday that the next Kosovo Government has to remove the Kosovo Serb fears of Belgrade. *“We have 130,000 Serbs in Kosovo now. More than two thirds of them live south of the Ibar river,”* he told the Kosovo state TV (RTK) adding that the Community of Serb Municipalities (CSM) is not the wish of the Kosovo Serbs but something the authorities in Belgrade want. *“The moment that made me realize that we have perhaps disregarded the*

issue of the local Serbs was on December 23rd, 2015 when the Constitutional Court ruled that the CSM is unconstitutional. There were no Serb protests the next day. So they did not want the CSM, Belgrade did. They are just scared,” Kurti said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 31st, Avdullah Hoti, Coordinator of the working group of the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) said negotiations with Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) on forming new Government will be concluded soon. Kosovo held early parliamentary elections on October 6th, 2019 after former Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, resigned in July following a summons for questioning by the Specialist Prosecutor’s Office in the Hague for his role as wartime Commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Hoti, who is member of the LDK’s Chairmanship, said the LDK is close to reaching a deal on creation of new Government with the winners of elections – the Vetevendosje. He also said that leaders of both parties – Albin Kurti of Vetevendosje and Isa Mustafa of LDK will seal the deal on co-governance. Hoti has not excluded the possibility for the new Government to be created in November, but he criticized the Central Elections Commission (CEC) for delaying publication of the final results of elections. *“It is meaningless for the CEC to take almost one month to publish final results of elections,”* Hoti stated. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 1st, Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, has received on Friday the US Special Representative for the Western Balkans, Matthew Palmer, Gazeta Express reported. The President’s Office announced that Thaci and Palmer discussed on the Western Balkans and

emphasized swift creation of new institutions of Kosovo after October 6th, 2019 elections. “Kosovo is a consolidated democracy, proved with the recent elections. It has strong independent, professional institutions,” Thaci said. US Special Representative, Matthew Palmer, talked on how Kosovo can pave the way towards peace through a comprehensive agreement with Serbia. Thaci said Kosovo remains committed to implementation of reforms, rule of law, and strengthening of the Euro-Atlantic integrations, democratic reforms and will engage in reaching of a comprehensive agreement with Serbia, which as Thaci said, would strengthen peace not only between the two countries, but the entire Western Balkans. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

Winners of the October 6th, 2019 early parliamentary elections, Vetëvendosje and LDK are still on talks to form the new Kosovo Government but very close to an agreement. Central Election Committee delay on announcing the official final election results delays the announcement of Vetëvendosje and LDK agreement. A new era has come to Kosovo since traditional political forces of President's Hashim Thaci PDK and outgoing Prime Minister's AAK were defeated. In other words, former KLA militants who formed the political elite after war lost power and control of the entity. Kurti is a nationalist hardliner and it is assessed that dialogue with Belgrade will not be facilitated in the near future. Not only that, but it seems that Kurti's strategic choice is to force Kosovo Serbs to cut lines of communication with Serbia and Kosovo authorities to fully control north. Such opinion is dangerous since the balance of co-

existence between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is very sensitive. Deployment of security forces and the newly established Kosovo Army in the north may become a reason for turbulence and an armed conflict. Besides, Kurti advocates unification of Albania and Kosovo; a view which will threaten peace and stability not only in Kosovo – Serbia but in the whole Western Balkans. International community namely the US and EU strengthen their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections. It seems that the US pays special attention in Kosovo problem by appointing Ambassador Richard Grenell as special envoy for Kosovo – Serbia dialogue; together with special envoy for western Balkans Matthew Palmer. In this context, Palmer visited Kosovo where he had meetings with President Hashim Thaci and Kosovo Serb parliamentary party Serbian List representatives. Palmer emphasized that it is time for a comprehensive agreement between Kosovo and Serbia resolving the problem. His visit to Serbian List officials shows that there is fear and nervousness due to Kurti's repeated statements. Restart of bilateral negotiations could not be expected before December 2019 or beginning of 2020 provided that Kosovo will revoke tariffs imposed to Serbian goods. Increased tension is expected in North Kosovo by Kosovo Serbs if Serb List representatives will be excluded by the new Government. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors

for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard.



MOLDOVA: October 31st, Moldova President Igor Dodon believes that at the present time, there are no conditions for Transnistrian conflict settlement, but nevertheless the Chisinau-Tiraspol dialogue needs to be continued, he stated on the Moldova-1 public television channel on Wednesday night. Summing up the results of his October 29th, 2019 meeting with Transnistria leader Vadim Krasnoselsky, Dodon called it “*very good, and our dialogue was good. That was our 6th meeting over last 3 years. Previous meetings usually lasted an hour and a half or 2 hours. But last Tuesday, we talked 4.5 hours. We need this dialogue. If we want to solve things, we have to meet and discuss all problems.*” The President admitted with regret that at the present time there are no proper conditions for a lasting settlement of the Transnistrian conflict by equipping the region with a special legal status. “*One cannot speak about a political settlement of the problem at the moment because there is no consensus between different political forces and power structures in Chisinau necessary for this. Without such a consensus, the Transnistrian problem cannot be resolved. But there are other problems – ones pertaining to citizens’ everyday life, and these have to be tackled,*” stressed the Moldovan President. In his words, Tiraspol also needs dialogue “*because Transnistria cannot be independent.*” “*I understand that they [Tiraspol administration] hope for acquiring independence. But this is impossible. They will not be independent. We are together in the same boat. Without Moldova, Transnistria cannot survive. Presently, 70% Transnistria-made goods go to*

Moldova, from where, with Chisinau’s assistance, they are exported to the European Union. This has to be taken into account – always. Together, we will be only stronger,” the President said. He underlined that the sides have already solved at least 6 out of the 8 problems included into the “*Berlin Plus Package*” two years ago, and the rest ones are being worked on. “*We have a vision of how to solve the problem of restoring telephone communication between the two parts of the country. On October 29th we discussed that and agreed that by March 1st, 2020 a decision shall be taken. Current situation just cannot be tolerated any longer; we live nearby, but a telephone call from one bank of the Dniester River to the other one costs more than to phone to America,*” Dodon said.



Moldovan President, Igor Dodon’s visit to his Transnistrian counterpart, Vadim Krasnoselsky
(Photo source: www.president.gospmr.org)

Speaking about this year’s only round of 5+2 format negotiations held in Bratislava earlier this month, Dodon expressed regret that the Final Protocol of that meeting have not been signed yet. Dodon voiced hope that the Protocol would be signed next week, when the discussion will be continued at the informal Bavaria conference on confidence-building measures on the Dniester. (www.infotag.md)

- October 31st, Moldova President Igor Dodon stands up for preserving the incumbent governing Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) - ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc and against dismissing the Government of Premier Maia Sandu. Speaking on the Moldova-1 public television channel on Wednesday night, the Head of state said that the creation of a coalition between the Party of Socialists and the right ACUM bloc “*was a correct step, and we must preserve this coalition in order to fulfill the projected work program and the agreement we all have signed.*” Answering a question about the draft Parliamentary Resolution on a vote of no confidence in the Sandu Government, which was put forward by the parliamentary Democratic faction in mid-October, the President said the Party of Socialists will not support this draft Resolution. Dodon admitted that he cannot agree with the Government on all issues and cannot feel fully happy about its work results “*because they fail to meet citizens’ expectations.*” In his words, there are misunderstandings and differences in the governing coalition related to three problems. “*The first problem presenting a risk to coalition preservation is the inadequate behavior of some leaders. We will draw a final line after the election. And this will be a very serious talk. With some people, we shall never more sit at one table. I can state this with full confidence from now on. The second serious problem is the inefficiency of certain Ministries. And the third one is the package of social initiatives, put forth by the President and Party of Socialists, but which would not be supported by*

the Government,” said the President. Dodon reminded that the governing coalition’s constituent parties have signed two coalition agreements and undertook to fulfill them. Concerning the inadequate behavior of some coalition leaders, Dodon said he meant ACUM Co-Chairman Andrei Nastase, who is currently running for Chisinau Mayor. “*In the desire to win the second round [of the Chisinau mayoral election on November 3], Nastase is violating the signed accords, and is slashing the Socialists and our candidate for Chisinau Mayor, Ion Ceban. He is behaving so as if unaware that we voted together for the incumbent Government and for his appointment as a Deputy Premier of this Government, and for his appointment as Minister of the Interior! And what have we received? Over its whole history, Moldova has never had an Interior Minister weaker than the current one, under whom problems would not be solved, but crime rate would grow. With friends like that, who needs enemies? By acting independently, he would not poll even 5%,*” Dodon stated. The President stressed that he supports Premier Sandu and her Government, that he has a full understanding with the Prime Minister, and will be doing all in his powers to prevent an early resignation of the Sandu Cabinet. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- November 3rd, citizens with voting right from 384 localities in Moldova, including those in Chisinau, are expected on Sunday, November 3rd, 2019 at the ballot boxes to elect their Mayors in second round of general local elections (ALG). There have applied 768 people for 384 positions of Mayor. About 647,000 citizens voted till 21:00, the voter turnout being 40.34%. Under the legislation in force, the polling stations close at

21:00; yet, the leadership of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has earlier informed that the term of voting might be extended for some polling stations if not all people willing to vote managed to do this. The last general local elections took place on June 14th, 2015. At that time, the voter turnout was of 49%. Following the closing of the polling stations, the electoral contenders held news conferences and thanked the voters for support. (www.moldpres.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

“Battle of Chisinau” will send significant political messages. November 3rd's second round on local elections will determine if capital's Mayor will be from PSRM or ACUM block with several future repercussions. However, local elections have shown that opposition PDM maintains a dynamic despite its defeat in previous parliamentary elections. Furthermore, ruling ACUM block got third place after PDM and PSRM. Although Prime Minister Maya Sandu has rejected any possibility of cooperation with PDM, one should not exclude a future replacement of PSRM from PDM. Coexistence of pro-western ACUM block and pro-Russian PSRM is becoming more difficult since disputes in high level are more often. President Dodon did not hesitate to emphasize the problems of PSRM – ACUM block coalition underling that he is in favor of implementation of mutual agreements, but adding that there are “red lines.” However, cooperation will continue between the two parties (not for too long), because both sides are not interested at the moment to lose power. The agreement signed by the Government's partners – ACUM block and PSRM – strengthens political stability despite their different views. Besides, EU, US, and Russia

support this “unconventional” coalition for their own interests. It is already known that Moldova is a field of rivalry between the West and East, between the US, NATO, and EU on the one side and Russia on the other. Transnistria is a case which concerns Moldova and withdrawal of Russian troops is a priority for the Government. It should be noted that Russia closely follows political developments in Moldova and it will not allow any overcome of its “red lines” such as Moldova's integration in NATO or EU. Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. It is assessed in the near future Moldovan Government will strengthen its calls for withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: October 30th, it is still uncertain whether Montenegro will open negotiating Chapter 8 (Competition policy), by the end of this year. Owing to the current circumstances in the EU, and especially after the opening of membership talks with North Macedonia and Albania had been delayed, the question is “What will happen with the enlargement process?” Montenegro has made considerable progress in the accession process and is seen as the next EU member. However, there's still a lot to be done. As far as Chapter 8 is concerned, Montenegro has already done what it was asked to do. It is EU members' turn now. “Considering current situation in the EU, it would not be very appropriate to predict when negotiations in Chapter 8 will start,” Biljana Jakic, Director General of the Directorate for Internal Market and Competition in the Ministry

of Economy and a negotiator in chapter 8 said. She claimed it is important that Montenegrin institutions have been fulfilling defined tasks responsibly and devotedly and that all initial criteria for opening new chapter have been established. *“European Commission has set five criteria for opening this chapter. Those criteria refer to the changes in the legislation in the area of state aid; formation of an operationally independent body which will have all the necessary competences and resources required for the full application of state aid rules; harmonization of fiscal assistance schemes- Law on Corporate Income Tax, Law on Personal Income Tax, Law on Free Zones, programs of enhancement and promotion of business zones; list of all state aid measures and establishment of the action plan for the harmonization with other assistance schemes or other equivalent measures seen as incompatible with the duties stipulated in the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The last criterion referred to the adoption of the plan on restructuring Aluminum Plant Podgorica. It is not relevant anymore, since Aluminum Plant has gone bankrupt,”* Jakic said. She added that, in relation to the set criteria, a whole set of legislative and institutional reforms have been implemented. All the activities Montenegro has undertaken in this chapter indicate its readiness and commitment to meeting the requirements of the European agenda. *“The ball is in the EU court now. We expect those results to be recognized and validated with the opening of this last chapter in the negotiation process,”* Jakic added. (www.cdm.me)

- October 30th, for the second year in a row, at the invitation of the Montenegro’s Government, elite team of American cyber experts will be working

on combating malicious cyber actors together with their Montenegrin counterparts. As American Embassy reported, operations of the Command of the American cyber team are part of the American efforts to counter opponents in cyber space, through joint work with reliable partners and allies. Those defense operations also show insight into the cyber threats in the run-up to the forthcoming American and Montenegrin elections. *“Both the USA and Montenegro have benefits from our close partnership in the domain of cyber defense, which helps us protect our common values and interests,”* said American Ambassador to Montenegro, Judy Rising Reinke. She said that working with Montenegro was a clear example of how free world *“cooperates in widening security.”* *“We are looking for adequate ways and resources to protect democracy in the Western Balkans from those who would like to see this part of Europe shattered,”* said Montenegro’s Defense Minister, Predrag Boskovic. While defending important infrastructure and resources, American and Montenegrin cyber experts investigate capabilities and means of acting against malicious cyber actors. Just like US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, said recently, thanks to direct cooperation with Montenegro in the field of cyber security, the USA managed to provide means of protection from the latest Russian malware. (www.cdm.me)

- November 1st, Montenegro is exposed to hybrid threats, which are a global challenge. In cooperation with NATO allies, the state tries to fight those threats and establish normative and strategic framework in this domain, said in the Parliament today Minister of Interior, Mevludin Nuhodzic. *“Hybrid threats are contemporary security challenges, a global challenge. Our*

ability to resist those threats has been considerably enhanced with NATO membership, where in cooperation with 28 allies, we protect our country and our citizens,” Nuhodzic said answering the question asked by Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF) member, Predrag Bulatovic. Minister said that global security circumstances were characterized by numerous and dynamic security challenges, coupled with fast and unpredictable changes. He reminded that National Security Strategy had identified the need for the development of the capacities for protection from hybrid threats and ways of responding to them. *“As NATO members and candidate country for the EU membership, Montenegro has defined strengthening cooperation with its allies as one of its priorities, in order to make its contribution to NATO and EU collective efforts put in countering hybrid threats,”* said Nuhodzic. The Minister announced that strategic framework for combating this challenge would be established by the end of this year, with the adoption of countering hybrid threats strategy. The Minister said that Montenegro’s Government had pushed through the Proposal for the Law on the Establishment and Protection of Critical Infrastructure, since endangering elements of critical infrastructure could have direct impact on the national security. *“Particular emphasis has been put on the enhancement off capacities for identifying and understanding hybrid activities, raising awareness of the problem through education of young people and strengthening critical infrastructure, society and institutions,”* Nuhodzic said. In May 2019, Montenegro became member of the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, which enables

exchange of experience with NATO and EU members. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided strengthening ruling DPS’s power. A possible boycott by opposition of the next parliamentary elections will have negative impact in country’s political stability, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters into a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. In this context, it is still doubtful if EU will proceed with opening of Chapter 8 in accession negotiations with Montenegro. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Russian influence continues to be considered as a “threat” against state’s national security. Moreover, Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that

Montenegro is the “natural extension of the country.” The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment .



NORTH MACEDONIA: October 30th, Parliament of North Macedonia will dissolve on February 11th, 2020 before Speaker Talat Xhaferi calls early parliamentary elections, set to take place on April 12th, 2020. In accordance with the Constitution, the elections should be held within 60 days after the dissolution of Parliament, Xhaferi told a press briefing on Wednesday. If Parliament dissolves on February 11th, 2019 the elections should take place within 60 days and a temporary ad hoc Government should be elected within 100 days. According to him, a proposal of the composition of the caretaker Government should be sent to Parliament by late December in order the Speaker to schedule a session to elect the new Government on January 3rd, 2020. This Government, Xhaferi said, will function only in technical manner to make sure that all pre-election conditions are met, such as no employments, no promotions, and no investments, among other things, ahead of the April snap elections. The existing election model will be used for the 2020 elections. As regards ratification of the NATO Accession Protocol, Xhaferi said Parliament cannot be assembled once it is dissolved. The document will be ratified by the newly-elected members of Parliament. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- October 30th, North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev has rejected all speculations that North Macedonia had been invited to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) during a press conference today. “It seems there is a protective

wall around the Government and we have not received such an invitation. We are not looking to get one, either,” Zaev said in response to a reporter’s question about an alleged invitation for North Macedonia to join EAEU, after failing to get a start date for EU accession negotiations. A day earlier, on October 29th, 2019 Russia’s Permanent Representative to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov addressed an invitation to Albania and North Macedonia to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) during the Eurasian Economic Forum in Verona, Italy on Friday. Albania and North Macedonia will find understanding sooner within the EAEU than in the EU, the Russian diplomat noted. “I am sure that the countries, which are candidates for EU membership and have recently been ‘put on ice’ by Brussels, could find more understanding in the Eurasian Economic Union,” Chizhov said. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- November 1st, Zoran Zaev, North Macedonia’s Prime Minister, said on Friday his country might postpone the early elections called for April 12th, 2020, because of the procedure of formal membership to NATO, the Beta news agency reported. He said the Government could not leave the country without the Parliament when there was a possibility of ratifying the document on NATO membership, which would make North Macedonia the 30th member states of the Alliance. “We should keep the April 12th date, but we nevertheless must leave the possibility of changes because of NATO,” Zaev told reporters. He added that all 29 member states should ratify the entry protocol and that Skopje had to do the same because of what North Macedonia should have the Parliament. For the April 12th, 2019 election, the Parliament should be dissolved in February,

before Spain, as the last country that had not yet ratified the protocol on Skopje's NATO membership do that. Zaev's ruling coalition with the opposition consent decided to go for an early vote after the EU had failed for the third time to set a date for opening accession negotiations with Skopje. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Repercussions of EU rejection to open accession negotiations continue to shaken North Macedonia. Prime Minister Zoran Zaev's announced early parliamentary elections on April 12th, 2020, while an interim Government is expected to be formed on January 3rd, 2020. The rein of ruling SDSM and Prime Minister Zoran Zaev are in question due to the failure to start accession talks with the EU. North Macedonia has entered in political uncertainty and instability, while we have not witnessed yet the reaction of North Macedonia's Albanians in this failure. Zaev's announcement that early elections may be delayed due to NATO ratification process is interpreted as a spasmodic political move which may cause tension in domestic politics. Election day could not become an issue of negotiation since it has been officially announced. Furthermore, could be seen as an expression of ruling SDSM that opposition VMRO-DPMNE is coming to power. Russia is obviously trying to take into advantage the EU rejection of opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia by calling both countries to join Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Actually Russia uses EAEU as a vehicle to penetrate in Southeastern Europe increasing its influence in the region. It should be noted that the dilemma EU opening accession negotiations or Russian

influence is not e realistic one since the country has already entered NATO (the process is almost to be concluded) which is a major step towards the full integration into the western security system. North Macedonia should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. Besides, North Macedonia's politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals undermining not only country's political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as "Extortion", "Empire", "Racket", "Titanic", "Monster" are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state's function.



ROMANIA: October 28th, Prime Minister-designate Ludovic Orban has announced his Cabinet is counting on the votes of 234 MPs. 233 votes are needed for the Government to be established. 225 votes come from National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR), People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) and from national minorities, with Orban adding he has promises from nine more lawmakers, most probably from Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) and PRO Romania (PRO România - PRO). However, PRO leader Victor

Ponta has recently stated they will not vote the Orban Cabinet following disagreement on several issues. *“We will continue talks with Pro Romania to convince them not to join the PSD boycott,”* Orban said. Asked if talks will also include Ponta, the Prime Minister-designate replied *“To the extent he is open for talks as well.”* PMP’s Chairman Eugen Tomac has announced in the weekend they will vote the Orban Government, with certain conditions. USR leader Dan Barna has also said that all USR MPs will vote for the Orban Cabinet in Parliament, regardless of their discontents. USR is expected to sign a political agreement with the Prime Minister-designate on Monday. *“There are some complaints regarding one or two nominated Ministers, but if we look to all votes USR has assumed in Parliament, one can see we have always been consistent and we have kept out promise. We have a political agreement with the premier-designate. We will endorse the investiture of this Government. If there are any objections, we will discuss them within the committees. It is important that the Prime Minister-designate Orban has the necessary majority,”* Barna said. UDMR has also signed a collaboration protocol with PNL to support Orban Cabinet, while national minorities have also vowed to endorse the Liberal Government. Some Social Democrats might indeed vote for the Orban Cabinet. For instance, PSD leader Paul Stanescu, former Deputy Prime Minister of Dancila’s Government has made a surprising statement today *“For me, as a politician and citizen, this Government must be formed,”* Stanescu said. The vote on approval of the new Government in the plenary session of the Parliament will take place next Monday, on November 4th, 2019. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- October 30th, Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission President-elect expects Romania to urgently nominate a candidate for the position of European Commissioner, said the EC Spokesperson Mina Andreeva, as quoted by politico.eu. *“It is urgent and she would expect, once there is a Government in place in Romania, to send a candidate as swiftly as possible, and she is in contact with her counterparts in Romania on that front,”* Andreeva stated. The EC Spokesperson added that until *“the confirmatory vote [on the whole Commission] occurs, we will not know when the new Commission enters into force,”* yet the assumption remains for December 1st, 2019. The term of the current EC led by Jean-Claude Juncker is scheduled to end on October 31st, but its mandate will be probably extended by one more month as the new Commission is incomplete due to the European Parliament’s rejection of France’s, Hungary’s and Romania’s candidates. Romania proposed Dan Nica after the first nomination, Rovana Plumb had been denied, but Nica has not been officially accepted yet due to the change of Governments in Bucharest following the success of the censure motion against Dancila’s Government. However, today the outgoing Prime Minister Viorica Dancila confirmed that her Cabinet is to submit a third EC Commissioner proposal to the EC, to be sent to Brussels on Tuesday. Asked to comment information that Victor Negrescu, former Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Minister for EU affairs, Dancila said *“Yes, Victor Negrescu is an option for the European Commissioner seat, considering his expertise; he was MEP, former Minister for European Affairs.”* However, Brussels would have rejected Negrescu, too, with the EC President-elect arguing his candidature does not meet the necessary criteria,

meaning the proposal has not been made following an agreement between the Government and the Presidency and has not been approved by the Parliament in Bucharest. President Klaus Iohannis has promptly retorted though, warning Dancila to stop advancing any proposals for the Commissioner seat, arguing the outgoing premier has not more legitimacy to make such a proposal. Iohannis has also slammed PSD's attempts to delay procedure in Parliament that prevent the new Executive from being voted, arguing these attempts "are hurting even more the credibility of our country, which had already been affected by Dancila Government." (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- October 30th, seven out of the eight Minister candidates heard by the Romanian Parliament's expert Committees were endorsed, and only the candidate for the Finance Minister post, Florin Citu, was rejected. After his hearing in the expert Committee, MP Florin Citu declared that the vote was given on political grounds and furthermore the President of the Committee has interpreted the tie vote (19 members supported him and 19 voted against him) as a vote against him. The Parliament's expert Committees started hearing the Minister candidates proposed by Prime Minister-designate Ludovic Orban, on Tuesday, October 29th, 2019 and will complete the process on Wednesday. Marcel Bolos (proposed as EU Funds Minister), Victor Costache (Health Minister), Nicolae Ciuca (Defense Minister), Marcel Vela (Interior Minister), Bogdan Gheorghiu (Culture Minister), Nechita-Adrian Oros (Agriculture Minister), and Costel Alexe (Environment Minister), were all validated by the expert Committees. The Minister candidates need to be endorsed before the final vote on the cabinet is given next Monday, on November 4th, 2019.

However, Orban can choose to keep in his team all Ministers, including those who fail to get the committees' endorsement. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Consultations continue between PNL leader, Ludovic Orban and other opposition parties in order a PNL interim Government with Orban as the Prime Minister to get confidence vote in the Parliament. Orban announced that he has secured 234 votes (233 are needed for the Government to get confidence vote) but it is not clear yet which MPs will support the Government. However, it is estimated that Orban will achieve to form a Government on Monday, November 4th, 2019. However, it will be a weak minority Government and it is doubtful if it will achieve to handle serious state's issues such as the 2020 budget. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of ruling party. Under these circumstances, political uncertainty and instability are reign in Romanian politics. Presidential election scheduled for November 10th, 2019 and November 24th, 2019 (second round if necessary) is another political challenge for the country. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: October 28th, Rasim Ljajic, Serbia's Trade Minister said on Monday his country was not entering the Euro-Asian Economic Union (EAEU), adding an agreement concerned only trade and that *"there is no politics in it,"* the Beta news agency reported. Speaking to the state RTV from the northern city of Novi Sad, Ljajic said that *"no one invited us there."* *"Not a word in the negotiations on that agreement was about politics. We are not joining the EAEU; no one invited us. The EU is our political priority,"* he said, adding that 65% of Serbia's trade was with the bloc, while with EAEU it was only 7-8%. Ljajic described criticism of the agreement as *"colossal ignorance or immensely malicious."* *"I read in the press today that we entered the EAEU, meaning we gave up the EU. This agreement protects 743 companies which export to the Russian market and which now can place their products in other Union's markets,"* Ljajic said. He said Serbia's most significant economic interest in the deal was that the country would still have a free trade agreement under which Serbia exported 99% of goods to Russia and would now be able to do in the EAEU markets with no customs duties. Ljajic added the agreement was suitable for foreign investors as well, adding the current free trade contracts with Russia and Turkey proved that. *"Out of the ten largest exporters to the Russian markets, eight or nine are companies owned by foreign investors like Tigar Tyres, Tetrapak, Hemofarm..."* Ljajic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 30th, the Air Force and Air Defense pilots of the Serbian Armed Forces and their counterparts from the Russian Aerospace Forces launched the joint "BARS - 2019" Tactical

Exercise flying MiG-29 fighter aircraft and Mi-8 helicopters in Russia, the Serbian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday. The press release said that the "Brotherhood of Aviators of Russia and Serbia 2019" (BARS) exercise will train air crews from the two Air Forces to work together in prevent escalations of armed conflicts in border areas and in search and rescue operations. The Serbian Air Force detachment is headed by Colonel Brane Krnjajic, Commander of the 204th Air Brigade. His counterpart at the Privolzhskiy airbase is Colonel Aleksei Vladimirovich Rotko, Commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces 185th Combat and Flight Personnel Training Center. BARS 2019 is the fifth exercise in which Russian and Serbian pilots exchange experience and knowledge in the field of combat use of aircraft applying armaments of both Armed Forces. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Joint tactical exercise "BARS – 2019"

(Photo source: www.vs.rs)

- November 1st, speaking for RTS, referring to the mediation of the European Parliament in talks between the Government and opposition regarding electoral conditions and standards, Tanja Fajon, a MEP and co-Chairperson of the European Parliament (EP) Delegation to EU-Serbia Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee claims that OSCE

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights - ODHIR's recommendations for fair, democratic and free elections do exist. *“Of course, the boycott we have on the one hand - the boycott of opposition and some of the group's Deputies in the Parliament is not good. I would always, as an MP, request that this dialogue be realized in the National Assembly and not on the streets. I understand some of the arguments. Still, I would prefer a situation where opposition would be strong enough to participate in the elections because it is good for democracy,”* Fajon said. Asked what key conditions for fair elections are, she said that most often she heard from opposition that the crucial condition is freedom of media. *“When it comes to media freedom, we know what the European Commission's latest position was - that Serbia has made no progress in the field of media freedom,”* she said. Fajon also said that she wants to help Serbia as much as possible in the enlargement process, as well as being aware that in Serbia, pessimism prevails for the moment due to some negative decisions. *“This time, I am really highly critical to the decisions of EU, France or some other countries, because we failed to act on our promises. On the other hand, when I talk to young people in Serbia who are leaving or looking for a better perspective, more or less - all of them are traveling to the West, to Europe. So the system of European values is present,”* Fajon concluded. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS. A potential boycott of the elections by opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. A MEP and co-Chairperson of the European

Parliament (EP) Delegation to EU-Serbia Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee, Tanja Fajon underlined that EU expects from Serbian opposition to participate in political dialogue and join coming elections. However, she did not miss to emphasize that Serbia should focus on media freedom. Serbia advocates equal friendly relations with the US, EU, Russia, and China. However, it is a common “secret” that it is considered by the west as a close “friend and ally” of Russia. Lately, this “secret” is becoming more formal; Serbia signed a free trade agreement with Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Russian advanced Anti-Aircraft systems (S-400 and Pantsir) were deployed in Serbia due to a joint military exercise, and a joint military exercise is taking place in Russia this week. This “warm” relationship between Serbia and Russia especially in economic, diplomatic and defense sector could not stay unnoticed by the western stakeholders, namely the EU and NATO. Furthermore, the existing “Russian Humanitarian Center” in Nis (Central Serbia) is considered as a Russian “base” in Serbia with disputable activity. In other words, Serbia could be the “Trojan Horse” of Russia in Southeastern Europe. Elections in Kosovo have created a totally new landscape by the win of the nationalist party Vetevendosje. Its leader (and potential Kosovo Prime Minister) Albin Kurti is a hardliner. It remains to see if he will abolish the 100% taxes on Serbian goods giving the green light for restarting dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. However, his hardline to forbid any participation of the elected members of the Serb List is of great concern for peace and security in northern Kosovo. Additionally, a permanent presence of Kosovo security forces in Serb majority north Kosovo would bring tension and

turbulence. Pressure from the US and EU is increasing towards both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections on spring 2020. However, Serbia insists that taxes should be revoked for joining dialogue. US special envoy on Southeastern Europe, Matthew Palmer sent a direct message to Belgrade during his visit to Pristina; no EU without resolution of Kosovo issue. Tension remains between Kosovo and Serbia and none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: October 28th, Prime Minister Marjan Sarec and his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban called for strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries. Also commenting on the Koper rail track project, Orban said Hungary had decided to invest in the rival port Trieste, but was still willing to consider participating in the Koper-Divaca rail track “*if situation in Slovenia changes.*” The pair meanwhile urged for the continuation of EU enlargement, while also touching on migration. Orban said Hungary had the back of the Visegrad Group should Turkey trigger a migration wave, while Sarec argued migration needed to be addressed at its root. (www.sta.si)

- October 29th, the Slovenian Bank Association said that the pending new consumer lending restrictions would have wide ramifications if the state failed to provide alternative financing sources. Assessing lending will drop by 70 million euro a month, it said more that 300,000 people, in particular pensioners and low-income workers would be left without access to loans and that growth would suffer too. Slovenian Bank announced restrictions to consumer and housing loans strating from November 1st, 2019 as a result of what the Central Bank assessed to be unsustainable lending growth. In the meanwhile, Prime Minister Marjan Sarec issued a scathing criticism of the restrictions. Echoing the views of the Bank Association, Sarec spoke of a poorly thought through measure that would harm people and the state. He urged a “*more humane and realistic*” approach. Sarec announced he would call on representatives of the Bank Association to a meeting scheduled for November 15th, 2019 with key stakeholders “*to reconsider and find a better solution that will be to the benefit of all people and at the same time secure financial stability.*” (www.sta.si)

- October 29th, Foreign Minister Miro Cerar met Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar bin Mohammed Gargash on day two of his working visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), discussing with him further cooperation and situation in the Middle East and Western Balkans, the Foreign Ministry said. In the afternoon, Cerar officially inaugurated in Abu Dhabi Slovenia's first Embassy in a Gulf country, which has been operating since 2018. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although there are disputes between the five parties of the ruling coalition and opposition Left party which supports the minority Government it is assessed that Government's collapse and early parliamentary elections are not very likely. The Left party obstacle could be overcome by the support of the opposition SNS, while coalition parties are not in favor of snap election for their own reasons. Consequently, Marjan Sarec Government enjoys relative political stability, but with a lot of compromise in its agenda. Banks restrictions on loans may cause some dissatisfaction in citizens affecting the Government's popularity. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the "Schengen Zone card" in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an "underworld war" is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed

Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end. However, the 2020 and 2021 budget foresees increased funding for defense sector.



TURKEY: October 31st, heavy fighting between Syrian army troops and Turkish forces erupted near Ras al-Ain as Turkish-backed forces seized villages surrounding the border town. Turkish-backed rebels said there were intermittent clashes between the two militaries in recent days south of the town, which Turkey seized from Syrian Kurdish-led forces earlier this month. Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra, reporting from the border town of Sanliurfa, said thousands of people were fleeing the fighting near Ras al-Ain and Tal Tamr towns. Turkish-backed Syrian opposition fighters - known as the Syrian National Army (SNA) - launched an offensive and took over areas previously under control of Kurdish fighters south of Ras al-Ain, he said. As fighting intensified, Syrian troops deployed reinforcements from Derbasiyah to Tal Tamr. "The SNA took over western parts of the town. People have had enough each time someone controls the area and ends up being worse than the previous armed group," one Tal Tamr resident told Al Jazeera. As part of Turkey's deal with Russia, Syrian troops have with the agreement of Kurdish forces headed north to take up positions near the border, a region Damascus has not controlled since early on in the country's eight-and-a-half-year-old war. In Ankara, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey

has information that YPG forces have not completed their pullout despite assurances from Russia on Tuesday they had left before the deal's deadline. Kurdish forces rejected a call on Wednesday from the Syrian Army and Police to join their ranks following Turkey's cross-border incursion. *"The general command of the Armed Forces is ready to welcome members of SDF units which are willing to join its ranks,"* said a Defense Ministry statement carried by state news agency SANA. It said all Syrians, including the Kurdish minority, were confronting *"one enemy."* Syria's Interior Ministry said it was willing to provide Police services to residents of the northeast, calling on members of the Kurdish internal security services, known as *"Asayish"* to join its ranks, SANA reported. (www.aljazeera.com)

- November 1st, without explanation, the Turkish oil-and-gas drilling ship *"Fatih"* left waters in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ,) where it had been searching for energy in defiance of the island's legitimate Government, Greece, the United States and defying soft European Union sanctions. The vessel had been deployed west of Akamas peninsula since last April and seemed to be heading back to Turkey but destination was unclear, said Kathimerini Cyprus. Its presence in the EEZ had ramped up tension, fears of a conflict and was undermining any hopes of resuming reunification talks, with Turkey occupying the northern third of the island since a 1974 invasion. It is not clear why the vessel is leaving the area and whether it will remain in the eastern Mediterranean, the paper said, as it departed six months after entering Cypriot waters, leading Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades to complain to the United Nations, which ignored him. Turkey

has another drillship, *"Yavuz"* to an area off the west coast of the island, in Block 7 of the island's EEZ, which Cyprus has already licensed for exploration to the French-Italian consortium of TOTAL and ENI, with the Italians saying they would leave if a conflict seemed imminent. In a recent interview with Kathimerini, Turkey's Ambassador to Greece Burak Ozugergin had said the drill ships and seismic research vessels would not leave Cypriot waters unless the Cypriot Government included Turkish-Cypriots in the licensing of foreign companies but one did and there was no report he said anything about that. (www.the.nationalherald.com)

- November 1st, Turkish and Russian troops began their first joint ground patrols in northeast Syria on Friday under a deal between the two countries that forced Kurdish fighters to evacuate from a so-called *"safe zone"* on the Syrian side of the border. Turkey and allied Syrian rebels launched a cross-border offensive on October 9th, 2019 against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), dubbed *"terrorists"* by Turkey, seizing control of 120km-long (75 miles) and 30km-deep (19 miles) strip of land along the frontier. Russia has told Turkey that the YPG left the strip on Wednesday, a week after Ankara and Moscow agreed to remove the YPG fighters from the area. Turkish armored vehicles on Friday drove through country roads across the border to join their Russian counterparts, according to Reuters television footage filmed from the Turkish side of the border. Ground and air units were involved in the patrol in the area of the Syrian border town of Darbasiya, the Turkish Defense Ministry said on social media, showing photographs of four armored vehicles and soldiers studying a map. The 110-km joint patrol with

Russian Military Police, consisting of nine military vehicles, starts at Darbasiya and travels west along the border, the Russian Defense Ministry said. Overnight, Turkey's Defense Ministry said Turkey had handed over to the Russians 18 “*regime elements*” believed to be Syrian Government soldiers. On Wednesday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey had information that the YPG had not completed its pullout. He said Turkey's joint patrols with Russia were starting on Friday at a depth of 7km (4 miles) within Syria, less than the 10km set out in the October 22nd, 2019 Ankara-Moscow deal. Russia is the Syrian Government's most powerful ally and helped it turn the tables in the country's civil war by retaking much of the country from rebels since 2015. The Turkish-Russian deal last week allowed Syrian Government forces to move back into border regions from which they had been absent for years. Ankara launched its offensive against the YPG following US President Donald Trump's abrupt withdrawal of 1,000 US troops from northern Syria in early October. The YPG had helped the US defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) group in Syria. Erdogan said on Thursday night that Turkey planned to establish a “*refugee town or towns*” in a “*safe zone*” between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain, part of a project which state media have said would cost 26 billion dollars. He was meeting United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday morning and said he would ask him to call for a donors' meeting to help finance Ankara's plans for the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the region. Ankara has said it plans to resettle in Syria up to two million of the 3.6 million Syrian war refugees that it hosts. According to plans Erdogan presented at the United Nations General Assembly in September,

Turkey would resettle some 405,000 people between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain. Erdogan said leaders at the General Assembly had viewed the plans positively but declined to offer financial support. He strongly criticized international reaction to the Syrian refugee issue. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey and Russia have started to implement the agreement on Syrian “safe zone” by deploying joint military patrols. Turkish led forces engaged in sporadic fire exchanges with Syrian Armed Forces but it is assessed that there is no concern for a wider armed fight between Turkish – Syrian forces. Besides, both countries enjoy their privileges from the Turkish – Russian agreement. Undoubtedly, Turkey was one of the winners in Syrian conflict. It achieved to establish a 32 kilometers “safe zone” and to force Syrian Kurds to withdraw their forces from an area of 120 kilometers in Turkish – Syrian borders. In other words, Syrian Kurds are no longer a threat to Turkish security since they are not able anymore to conduct and support operations within Turkish soil. The Turkish plan will be concluded by relocation of almost 2 million Syrian refugees within the “safe zone” diversifying population’s composition in north Syria. Turkey continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its


doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey continues to dispute Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by sending its Yavuz drillship in a sea field (code number 7) which has already been licensed to Italian ENI and French TOTAL. Moreover, it raises tension with Greece and Cyprus by announcing several naval exercises with real fires in the Aegean Sea and within Cypriot EEZ. It seems that Turkish strategic plans are targeting the maritime area around the island of Kastelorizo, southeast of the Aegean Sea. Turkey is determined to protect its interests and would not hesitate to use force against Cyprus or Greece. With zero cost so far Turkey achieved not only to consolidate a situation in which Turkish drill ships could enter within Cypriot EEZ whenever they wish accompanied by Turkish navy vessels but also to put the hydrocarbon issue on the table of negotiations, to force oil and gas companies to reconsider their engagement in a sea which is not stable and secure, and to directly question the Cypriot sovereignty. So far, so good for a country which is already in a military operation in another country. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.

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NOTE

-  Stable situation. No security risk.
-  Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.
-  Major concerns over stability and security. Significant security risk in specific regions. Low tension incidents.
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.