



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: February 3rd, the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, in a joint press conference with the European Parliament President David Sassoli emphasized on Monday the importance of the anti-crime legal package and got the EP Head backing for the country's accession to the EU membership. *"Criminals who cannot justify their wealth will not only be seized their assets but will also be put under investigation. We set up the special structure because the matter could not be left to the Prosecutors,"* Rama stated. The EP President Sassoli, expressed satisfaction that this package has an Italian spirit but also reminded Rama that special care must be taken. *"The package adopted at the end of the week had some specific remarks on the fight against crime, in adapting some standards and confronting the organized crime. This will increase security in the country and the cooperation capacities. I am happy that this reform has an Italian spirit. We have some decades fighting crime. The result will be huge and significant,"* Sassoli stated, adding that Albania must manage to open the accession process, which in turn means undertaking reforms to achieve European standards. *"The European Parliament, the European Commission and leaders of EU member states are in favor of Albania and North Macedonia to open EU accession negotiations. We will not give up on this,"* Sassoli said. Further on the EP President urged the Albanian youth not to lose hope. *"We want you to become part of the European Family. Together we can make this happen,"* he said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- February 6th, the Parliamentary Committee on Laws considered today two bills of the Justice

System Reform with the aim of providing a new unlocking mechanism in cases when there is a stalemate in the oath-taking and admission of constitutional Judges, such as was recently the matter of the Judge Arta Vorpsi. MP Alket Hyseni said that based on US and EU practices, the written oath is entirely sufficient. The other bill gives more capacities to the senior Justice Inspector in acting swiftly for the dismissal or suspension of problematic Judges or Prosecutors. Socialist MP Bashkim Fino urged to go beyond sporadic improvements to justice reform law. *"We need not intervene in the law whenever there are problems ... but when we get a detailed analysis of the functioning of the justice system reform,"* Fino said. Former Justice Minister and Justice Reform Architect Fatmir Xhafaj said he had not thought or predicted evil in the justice system had these dimensions. *"Proactive stances are required by the HJC and HJC These bodies should have reacted strongly about the Kruja judge there is definitely a need for analysis of what went wrong the justice reform,"* Xhafaj stated amongst other things. (www.top-channel.tv)

- February 8th, international ratings giant Standard & Poor's has warned the Albanian Government to urgently improve the business climate as the economy is threatened by falling investments. In its latest assessment report, the agency notes that the small number of investment projects on the horizon increases the risks to the Albanian economy and will slow the country's growth. *"For the 2020-2023 we predict that the Albanian economy will grow an average of 3.5% annually,"* it was announced. But this outlook is prone to changes by falling investments and slowing economic growth in partner countries *"such as Greece and Italy,"* states the report. Last year,

total investments in the Albanian economy by the state budget and private sector consisted in 23.4% of national production. But according to Standard & Poor's, in the next four years investments will be in constant contraction and down to 19.9% by 2023. This decline is largely attributable to the completion of two major investments, the TAP pipeline and the Devolli dam, while there is no other project in sight as a replacement. The agency experts underline that the only way for the Albanian economy to emerge from this, is to improve the business climate in order to attract more foreign investment. This warns Standard & Poor's, will be critical to Albania's economic outlook and increased income levels for citizens. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Albanian Government is strengthening its efforts to show tangible results in fight against corruption and to speed up justice reform. The EU keeps an eye on Albania regarding rule of law, fight against corruption and organized crime, and justice reform. If Albania seeks to get a positive recommendation on EU May summit it should focus on these areas. Besides, the long political crisis which has generated uncertainty and instability affects the business and economic climate. Standard & Poor's suggests more investments but who is going to invest in a country which does not enjoy political stability, rule of law and has high rate of corruption? Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively. The EU top officials keep sending encouraging messages for Albania (and North Macedonia) regarding opening of accession negotiations in

coming EU summit in March 2020. Although it is claimed that France and the Netherlands will change their stand, it is still questionable if they will do it finally. Albania keeps acting as the center of Albanians all over the region seeking to influence neighboring countries politics. Relation between Albania and Kosovo with the new Government under Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister is a good question.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

February 4th, the Serb member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) Presidency, Milorad Dodik, has supported the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) party's demand that the country's election law be amended because he believes that the situation in which Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) elect Croats' political representatives must not happen again. "You cannot ignore the Croats' right to authentically choose their political representatives. It is not good that Bosniaks elect anybody of authority for Croats. How can the HDZ BiH trust the (Bosniak) Party of Democratic Action (SDA), which has elected Zeljko Komsic to the post of the Croat member of the BiH Presidency. He is a Croat... but he was not elected by Croats but by Bosniaks," Dodik said in an interview with the Tuesday issue of the Sarajevo-based Oslobodjenje daily. He added that this was one of the fundamental issues that would have to be solved in the coming period and announced that his Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) party would support any election model that would enable Croats to elect their legitimate political representatives. Dodik also believes that

Bosnia and Herzegovina's relations with Croatia have been affected by the “*Komsic case*.” “*Communication between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia has been reduced due to (Croatia's) dissatisfaction with Komsic's election as the Croat Presidency member*,” said Dodik, noting that this was why meetings had not been held on outstanding issues such as the construction of a radioactive waste disposal site at Trgovska Gora in Croatia, near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The HDZ BiH and the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) have been trying to agree on an electoral model that would be acceptable to all but there are no indications that a possible compromise is near. The leading Bosniak party considers as a priority the creation of conditions for the implementation of local elections in Mostar in October, while the HDZ BiH insists that that be a part of a legislative set that would also regulate the election of Deputies to the Houses of Peoples of the national Parliament and the Federation entity Parliament, as well as members of the BiH Presidency. Election law changes are one of the 14 tasks the European Commission has set for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a precondition for obtaining the status of a candidate country. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- February 5th, Montenegro is a friendly and brotherly country but it would be inappropriate for its President Milo Djukanovic to visit Bosnia at this moment, said Milorad Dodik, the Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency who refused to give consent for inviting the Montenegrin President for an official visit. Djukanovic had a chance to visit Bosnia earlier but he did not do that, he added. “*Montenegro*

was and is a friendly, even a brotherly country and there is no reason it does not stay like that in the future,” Dodik said. Bosnia's State Presidency agreed on Monday to extend an invitation to French President Emmanuel Macron for a visit, but the three reached no consent on inviting the President of Montenegro to Bosnia. Speaking to reporters after the session, Dodik said they avoided “*problematic*” topics, explaining that he refused to give consent for Djukanovic's visit because of the current situation in Montenegro; the neighboring country that is facing tensions over the recently adopted Law on Religious Freedoms which the Serbian Orthodox Church opposes. Commenting on this, the President of Montenegro said the lack of invitation did not provoke a spiteful reaction in him. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- February 6th, during his visit to Brussels this week, High Representative Valentin Inzko met with European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders to discuss the current state of affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina's judiciary, and the lack of respect for the rule of law in the domestic political arena. “*In its first article, the Annex 4 of the GFAP clearly states that BiH shall be a democratic state operating under the rule of law. However, this is hardly complied with. The rule of law must be dramatically strengthened, and the fight against corruption should become a real priority if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to become a stable and prosperous democratic country built on solid foundations. These are the areas where the politicians' sincerity should be judged when it comes to their declared commitment to the EU accession path*,” said the High Representative. The High Representative used this opportunity to outline the key problems related to the rule of

law, including the disrespect of rulings by domestic and international judicial institutions. He also mentioned the continuous attacks on the BiH Constitutional Court; a state judiciary body firmly grounded in the Dayton Agreement and the longstanding failure to implement the BiH Constitutional Court's ruling on Mostar, as well as the European Court of Human Rights' ruling in the "Sejdic-Finci" case. "Tens of thousands of citizens are being deprived of their civic rights, as they cannot vote in Mostar or run for election for a number of state offices. If Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to move forward and stop the drain of its population, it has to vigorously tackle the challenges related to the rule of law," added the High Representative. The interlocutors also discussed the suggested new rules for enlargement, the situation around the HJPC, and the Priebe Report. On Wednesday the High Representative also had the opportunity to meet Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency Vera Jourova, and mention to her that members of ethnic minorities such as Jews and Roma are unable to run for the BiH House of Peoples or the BiH Presidency, despite the repeated rulings of the European Court of Human Rights to the contrary. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Rhetoric over the amendment of Dayton peace agreement is increasing in Bosnia and more politicians and analysts admit that in fact that the accord is rather a source of problems than a source of stability establishing a complicated political system and state's decision making process. Besides, the Dyaton accord violates basic human rights principles by several Bosnian

citizens from accessing state institution's positions. For instance a Bosnian Roma cannot become member of the country's tripartite Presidency. However, talks of reforming Dayton Agreement may destabilize not only Bosnia, but the entire region. Political instability, poor economic performances, entities' rivalries, and problematic framework of state's structure (due to Dayton Accord) have left Bosnia far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU. NATO is a feasible goal but only due to geopolitical and geostrategic reasons (mainly because of the Russian threat of penetration in the region) and not because of achieving the Alliance's standards. Nevertheless, Bosnian Serbs strongly reject the idea of NATO accession and this is a significant obstacle towards Bosnia's full accession in the Alliance. Despite the Council of Ministers establishment political situation in the country remains unstable due to the complicated decision-making and governance system, which blocks almost every political action due to entity's special interests. For instance, the Bosnian Presidency rejected an invitation for visit to Bosnia by the Montenegrin President because the Serb member, Milorad Dodik blocked it. Furthermore, nationalistic rhetoric and actions from the three entities creates certain conditions of mutual mistrust and work as a factor of potential destabilization. At the moment Bosnia is considered as a potential source of instability in the whole region of Southeast Europe. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.



BULGARIA: February 4th, in a live televised address to the nation Bulgarian Head of state, President Roumen Radev said that he was officially withdrawing his confidence in the Government. He claimed that the Government was not acting in the interest of the citizens and was responsible for what Radev called the “*acute crisis in Bulgarian society.*” Radev, in office for just more than three years after being elected on a ticket backed by the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP), has been a frequent critic of the coalition Government headed by Prime Minister Boiko Borissov, which took office in May 2017. “*This Government and administration are leading to the collapse of the state and depriving us of our future as a nation. All of this must be brought to an end. As of today, I am officially withdrawing my confidence in the Government, which is not acting in the interest of Bulgarian citizens and is responsible for the acute crisis in our society. For three years, I have been calling on the Government to act responsibly and effectively in the interest of Bulgarian citizens,*” Radev said. He said that he did not do so as a political opponent, but as a Head of state due to his thought and concern for Bulgaria. “*Today we are witnessing an acute crisis in governance at all levels, a lack of will to reform and fight corruption,*” he said. Radev cited the water shortage crisis in the town of Pernik, for which he said the cabinet refused to take political responsibility. Entire systems and institutions in Bulgaria were in paralysis, he said. Radev accused the Cabinet of quietly pushing for reform of the Currency Board – the mechanism put in place in July 1997 that pegs local currency the lev to the euro – while poverty and inequality were deepening. “*Even sovereignty is being*

traded for the sake of personal political survival,” Radev said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- February 5th, the Bulgarian Armed Forces should not be used for political purposes, this country’s Minister of Defense Krasimir Karakachanov said, BNR reported. “*In the past two years and nine months when I have been serving as Defense Minister I have not allowed myself to involve politics in the activity of the Army,*” Karakachanov further said. Karakachanov’s appeal came after President Roumen Radev, who is former Commander of the Bulgarian Air Force, announced that he was withdrawing his confidence in the Bulgarian Government. Shortly before the sharp reaction of the Bulgarian Head of state, the Bulgarian Prosecutor’s Office released wiretaps between Radev and the current Chief of Bulgaria’s Air Force Major General Tsanko Stoykov. They were discussing a request from the anti-corruption body for documents related to the appointment of a civilian PR officer for the Bulgarian Air Force in 2014 who subsequently became Radev’s wife. (www.novinite.com)

- February 7th, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeisko Razvitiie Balgariya - GERB) will not proceed with the President’s impeachment procedure. This decision was taken by the Executive Committee of the ruling party, saying that it did not wish to divide the society even more. “*We made the final decision that we, as a party and group, should not initiate or support impeachment proceedings. We do not want any tension or war between institutions. Bulgaria needs normal functioning institutions. We do not want to invest in political opposition and do not want to contribute to the division of*

society,” Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev said on behalf of the party leadership. “The war between the institutions was not on our initiative, but we could not help but respond to the challenge,” GERB Parliamentary Group leader Daniela Daritkova explained. In her words, such a war is not for the benefit of anyone - neither citizens nor society and parties. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

In a rather symbolic action, the Bulgarian President Roumen Radev announced through a TV message that he is withdrawing his confidence from the Government. It is considered as an surprising and spasmodic move of the President against the Boyko Borissov’s Government due to the scandal has broken up two week ago involving Radev and his wife. The fact is that the Government enjoys the Parliament’s confidence according to the Bulgarian Constitution and the President’s confidence has nothing to do with the executive power of the state. Besides, confidence of the Government was confirmed a week ago due to the no-confidence motion filed by the opposition BSP. Taking all these facts into consideration, it was a rather an unfortunate moment of the President. Borissov reacted cleverly showing political maturity and generosity; he announced that his Government will not will not proceed with the President’s impeachment procedure aiming to preserve the “society’s unity.” Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country’s development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy security developing several projects. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are

ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: February 4th, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic has warned that EU member countries’ leaders should reach a political agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027 as soon as possible, so that the legislative part of the work could also be completed as soon as possible. One should bear in mind that having a political agreement on the negotiating framework at the European Council is not enough, it is necessary to negotiate with the European Parliament the legislative part of the work as well, Plenkovic said in an interview with the politico.eu website during his visit to Portugal this past weekend, where he attended a meeting of the Friends of Cohesion informal group. The meeting in Portugal was held three weeks ahead of an extraordinary meeting of the European Council, called by its President Charles Michel in an attempt to help reach a compromise on the EU's new seven-year budget. The extraordinary summit, to be held on February 20th, 2020 will give new political impetus to attempts to reach an agreement but it is too early to say if it will result in one, Plenkovic said. Michel is in charge of preparing a draft agreement on the MFF, which Plenkovic says is good for Croatia as the country currently chairing the Council of the EU as it gives it more room to defend its own national interests. Plenkovic repeated that for Croatia cohesion policy was extremely important, notably in light of the fact that Croatia was the youngest EU member and

had so far used cohesion funds for a much shorter period of time than other members. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- February 5th, the Defense Ministry on Wednesday denied claims by a commercial broadcaster about the poorly performed overhaul of the Mi-171SH helicopters, and countered the allegations giving *“concrete data and statistical figures on the use of Mi-171SH army helicopters in the implementation of tasks and missions.”* For the purpose of providing the general public with accurate information, the Ministry feels obliged to respond to the reports made by the Nova TV television on Monday and Tuesday about this topic and it also dismisses the reports prepared by reporter Ivana Pezo Moskoljev as *“tendentious and incorrect.”* The Ministry said that the overhaul of the helicopters concerned was performed in a professional manner by the Aeronautical Technical Centre (ZTC) in Velika Gorica and by the *“Russian Helicopters”* company from Russia. The Ministry also noted that the Russian partner selected by the ZTC center is certified for this type of task. The Ministry said that of the 10 Mi-171SH helicopters that were overhauled, five are operational, three are undergoing periodical maintenance, and two are in the process of removing identified defects during the warranty period. The overhauled helicopters have registered over 1,000 flight hours in a year. The fact that three of the overhauled helicopters are now in for regular maintenance only confirms the fact that the helicopters are being kept in a good mechanical condition and that they have been in constant use, which is why they now need to undergo regular maintenance, says the Ministry. Since the overhaul, those types of helicopters have been sent to the island of Krk

to be on 24-hour duty. In 2019, they were used for 693 flights for medical purposes and 279 patients were transported aboard. In January 2020 alone, they performed 54 medical flights, the ministry underscores. Furthermore, the helicopters are available for rescue operations. In November 2019, two Croatian Mi-171SH Army helicopters flew to Albania to be included in providing humanitarian assistance to quake-hit areas. The helicopters were also used for the KFOR mission in Kosovo where they performed 50 flight hours, the Ministry said, adding that they are also used in strategic transport as support during military exercises. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- February 6th, speaking at Thursday’s Cabinet session the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic touched on the recent decision from the European Court of Justice, in which it deemed that it does not have jurisdiction over Slovenia’s border claims against Croatia. Slovenia’s dissatisfaction with the demarcation of its internationally recognized shared border with Croatia continues to hamper relations between Zagreb and Ljubljana. Slovenia is insisting that Croatia honor a 2017 ruling by an ad-hoc arbitration tribunal, which gifted Slovenia large swaths of Croatian territory, including access to the open seas through Croatian waters. However, Croatia withdrew from the arbitration process in 2015 after Slovenia was caught in a material breach of the provisions of the arbitration agreement, namely engaging in backroom deals in order to secure a favorable verdict. *“This is a win for our legal arguments. I would point out once again, that we handled this entire situation very calmly, courageously, protecting our national interests, protecting Croatian sovereignty and Croatia’s territorial integrity. But we did all of*

this in a calm and dignified manner, in cooperation with our legal experts at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, our experts for European law and international law, as well as foreign legal experts who assisted us in this process,” Plenkovic said. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Croatia enjoys political stability. Croatia currently holds the EU Presidency seeking among other to bolster Western Balkans European perspective. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decision that it has no jurisdiction on Croatia – Slovenia border dispute is considered by the Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic as a “victory” but Croatia needs Slovenia’s support regarding its accession in the Schengen Zone and OECD. Under these circumstances, Croatia is forced to start thinking of dialogue and compromise since its stance has repercussions in state’s national interests. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Top officials do not hesitate to openly interfere in Bosnian domestic affairs in the name of Bosnian Croats. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces’ modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Currently, the Ministry of Defense has restarted its efforts for acquiring 12 modern fighter jets since Croatia is a NATO member without operational Air Force.



CYPRUS: February 4th, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon was in Cyprus on Tuesday for a

round of contacts with Cypriot officials, in a move the Government described as a “*political signal*” to Turkey. During his three-day visit Fannon will meet the foreign and energy Ministers, Nicos Christodoulides and Yiorgos Lakkotrypīs respectively to discuss the situation in Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). On Wednesday, Fannon will attend a meeting of the Cyprus, Greece, Israel and US Energy Planning Working Group established by a decision taken at the first-ever Energy Ministerial Conference involving the four countries, which took place last August in Athens. The group discussed preparedness and response to emergencies related to offshore oil and gas activities. Lakkotrypīs and Fannon will meet on the sidelines of Wednesday’s meeting, and he will meet Christodoulides on Thursday before leaving the island. Government Spokesman Kyriacos Kousios said later in the day Fannon’s visit was very important. “*It is a confirmation of Cyprus’ upgraded relations with the US, a testament to the US interest in the energy developments of the region and his presence here I believe should be interpreted as giving some political signals,*” he said. Asked about Cyprus’ drilling plans, the Spokesman said they were progressing. A scheduled drill by Cyprus in block 6 – licensed to ENI and TOTAL – was recently delayed when the lead drillship Tungsten Explorer, operating in Egyptian waters, had been scheduled to drill at the Kronos site in block 6 in late January or early February. Kousios said the rig had finished its work in Egypt and would go to Lebanon, after which it would come to Cyprus. “*The drilling rig is expected to come to Cyprus at the end of March or early April,*” the Spokesman said. Late last month Turkey issued a marine advisory by which it reserved for drilling operations an area inside Cyprus’ offshore block

8. The advisory stated the Turkish drillship “Yavuz” supported by other vessels, would be carrying out drilling until May 24th, 2020. The reserved area is located at the southeast corner of block 8, which the north says falls within its own waters based on a “*continental shelf delimitation agreement’ signed with Turkey in 2011.*” It is the third time that Turkey will be conducting illegal drilling activities in Cyprus’ EEZ, but the second time it is drilling in acreage already licensed by the Cyprus Government. It is the first time, however, that Turkey is drilling in an area claimed not by itself, but rather by the Turkish Cypriots. (www.cyprus-mail.com)



Energy Minister, Yiorgos Lakkotrypis with the US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon
(Photo source: www.mcit.gov.cy)

- February 7th, the Defense Ministry confirmed on Friday reports in French media that it has purchased 240 million euro worth of military equipment from France. Reports originated from the French newspaper La Tribune. An announcement from the Defense Ministry stated that the procurement of arms is simply part of upgrading the National Guard’s military capabilities. “*Due to the sensitive nature of this issue and its relation to national security, no further details will be made available at present,*” the announcement said. According to La Tribune Cyprus signed contracts with the

European company MBDA for the supply of MISTRAL and EXOCET missiles at an estimated cost of 240 million euro. EXOCET are listed as anti-ship missiles (ground to surface missiles) and Mistral are ground (or surface)-to-air missiles. MBDA reportedly works with over 90 Armed Forces worldwide. The arms sale comes at a time of heightened tension in the Mediterranean over natural gas reserves. Last week the French aircraft carrier “*Charles de Gaulle*” sailed through Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) block 8, close to the Turkish drill ship “Yavuz.” Block 8 has been licensed for drilling by Italy’s ENI and France’s TOTAL. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- February 7th, President Nicos Anastasiades on Friday rubbished suggestions he favored partition of the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), questioning who stood to gain from revisiting such an “*unfounded claim.*” The issue emerged during Thursday’s TV debate between the leaders of ruling Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός - DISY) Averof Neophytou and main opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - AKEL) Andros Kyprianou. Kyprianou accused the President of proposing partition of the EEZ, kicking off a war of words that continued on Friday. “*Everyone should wonder which expediency is served and who really benefits by regurgitating the unfounded claim regarding supposed thoughts of mine to partition the Cypriot EEZ at a time when Turkish drills and warships act as modern pirates,*” Anastasiades said in a written statement. The President listed a number of initiatives and “*battles*” he had given to defend the island’s sea rights, including submission to the UN of EEZ coordinates north and west. “*On my initiative, we had also invited Turkey to a*

dialogue repeatedly on delimitating an EEZ between us and in case of disagreement to jointly seek recourse at the International Court,” the President said. “The same people who criticize me today over supposedly pondering two EEZs, are the same people who criticize me for saying we have safeguarded our EEZ politically and legally,” he said. Anastasiades said he knew well that these actions could not prevent Turkey, nor did they solve the Cyprus problem. “But they bolster our statehood, deepen our bonds with neighboring states, and create conditions that make our country useful in long-term international and European energy plans.”

Kyprianou issued a response later in the day, which included a quote by the President in January 2018, and challenging him to say how it was distorted. *“If they choose to protect the rights of the Turkish Cypriots in a separate, independent entity, then they must restrict themselves to what is inside the Exclusive Economic Zone of the particular illegal entity,”* the President was quoted as saying. *“Consequently, they have no reason to dispute the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus. “Every effort by M. Anastasiades to blame AKEL for misrepresenting his statements is an insult to himself and the institution he serves,”* Kyprianou said. As regards the rest of the President’s statement, Kyprianou said the result of his handlings fell far short of the long-term objectives the Greek Cypriot side had set. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey continues to provoke Cyprus by violating its sovereign rights and sending research vessels within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) maintaining an atmosphere of tension. Cyprus is

trying to block Turkish activity by diplomatic means but neither the US calls, nor the EU threats for sanctions are effective so far. Only France seeks to get a more active role by sending its aircraft carrier “Charles de Gaulle” but it is rather unlikely to see the French Navy blocking the Turkish drillships from the Cypriot waters. Furthermore, Cyprus announced arms purchase from France aiming to strengthen its military capabilities. It is a very important move by Cyprus for several reasons. It was leaked that Cyprus has bought ground to surface missiles EXOCET and ground to air missiles MISTRAL. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks aeronautical forces it is noticed that it invest in weapons that could destroy hostile aeronautical units. In fact, EXOCET is a lethal weapon against ships. The US continues to support Cypriot energy plans and in this context, visit of the US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources, Francis Fannon in Cyprus was a move with strong messages. The Turkish goal is to deter international energy giants from investing in Cypriot fields and starting research activities. End of March or beginning of April the ENI – TOTAL consortium schedules a drill in block 6 and this will be a strong test for Cypriot energy plans. Turkey is determined to establish its presence in the region and especially within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claiming the Turkish Cypriot community rights. It maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. As long as tension remains in eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed “hot” incident or a conflict. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus

remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: February 3rd, Police on the eastern Aegean island of Lesbos clashed with protesters on Monday as they sought to prevent a march of some 2,000 migrants and refugees from the Moria camp from reaching the capital Mytilini. The march started at around 10.30 a.m. on Monday and was organized to protest appalling living conditions at the state-run camp, which is hosting many times the population it was built to accommodate. The refugees and migrants are also angry at the slow pace of processing, which is keeping them trapped at the camp. Local media on Lesbos reported that Police used tear gas to disperse groups of protesters trying to break through a cordon set up on the main road leading from Moria to Mytilini and that clashes were continuing as the march pushed forward to reach the island's capital. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 5th, Government Spokesman Stelios Petsas confirmed on Tuesday that Greece will be providing Saudi Arabia with “Patriot” anti-aircraft missiles, as reported by Kathimerini last month. In comments to reporters, which came a day after Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis conducted an official visit to Riyadh, Petsas said the move “*promotes our country to a pillar of security in the region and strengthens our ties with Saudi Arabia.*” Petsas added that the missiles do not constitute a threat to any third country, noting that both the US and France had undertaken similar initiatives. According to

sources, 80 members of the Hellenic Air Force will be posted in Saudi Arabia for as long as the missiles are operational. Meanwhile Mitsotakis completed a two-day visit to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, aimed at boosting bilateral ties as well as sounding out potential investors. On Tuesday he also met with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 8th, commenting on the contentious agreement on maritime boundaries signed between Turkey and Libya's internationally-recognized Government, US Ambassador to Greece, Geoffrey Pyatt said, in an interview published on Saturday, that Greek islands are on the same footing as the mainland when it comes to continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Speaking to Greek daily Ta Nea, he also added that issues relating to the delimitation of maritime zones must be resolved through dialogue between the parties concerned, not with “*unilateral actions,*” noting that the US want the Eastern Mediterranean to be a “*zone of cooperation and stability.*” In the same spirit, he described a plan between Greece, Israel and Cyprus to build an undersea pipeline to carry gas from new offshore deposits in the southeastern Mediterranean to continental Europe as a “*positive example.*” Pyatt also welcomed the approval by the Greek Parliament of a revised Greek - US defense agreement called (Protocol of Amendment to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement) signed by Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Athens in October 2019, saying that Washington views cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean region as “a central element” of its strategy. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension with Turkey is maintained in high levels due to Turkish provocative rhetoric. Turkish fighter jets continue to violate Greek airspace overflying islets in the Aegean. Turkish statements that Turkey will conduct hydrocarbon researches in Kastelorizo sea region raises concerns of escalation but it is assessed that it is a scenario that has already been analyzed in diplomatic and military level. Due to latest tension with Turkey, Greece has activated its diplomatic and military reflexes promoting a very active presence in both fields. However, a “hot” incident is always in the forefront of Greek – Turkish relations. It is assessed that it is more possible a narrow incident in an islet (Greece has thousands of them) instead of an excessive war. Besides, the armed conflict will take place in limited time (no more than 72 to 96 hours) engaging a large number of land, naval and air forces and weapons in a rather narrow operational field. It is assessed that Turkey will avoid engaging troops in big Greek islands for several civil-military reasons. Migration could be considered as a major security issue which threatens internal stability of the country. Greece is in the forefront of the migrant flows which continue to arrive in the Greek islands of eastern Aegean Sea. Latest protests of migrants in the island of Lesvos have raised concerns for instability in regions with migrants. Under the current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea Greece is obliged to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. Currently, Greece focuses on naval units, upgrade of fighter jets, UAVs and follow on support agreements. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation

in Cypriot EEZ and eastern Mediterranean in general, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: February 4th, two Kosovo Serb Ministers in Albin Kurti’s Government on their first day of work said their party – Serb List (Srpska lista) – is not part of ruling coalition. The Serb List members, Ivan Milojevic and Dalibor Jevtic, took ministerial posts in Kurti’s Cabinet although their party refused to enter a coalition with the Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) and Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) which formed new Government. Milojevic and Jevtic said they won Government posts thanks to votes on October 6th, 2019 elections and applicable laws of Kosovo, on reserved positions for Serbian community. Milojevic and Jevtic said that as representatives of Serbian community they will work in interests of those who voted Serb List and they will try to do their best to improve lives of Serbian community and other citizens in Kosovo. Jevtic has been appointed as Minister of Communities and Return, whereas Milojevic as minister of Regional Development. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- February 4th, Albin Kurti, Kosovo’s new Prime Minister was formally instated on Tuesday, a day after the Parliament endorsed his Cabinet. Former First Deputy Prime Minister, Behgjet Pacolli, handed over duties to the Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) leader in a ceremony involving a parade of the ceremonial guard of the Kosovo Security Force. Following the handover ceremony procedures Kurti convened his cabinet congratulating all 15 Ministers of assuming duties and urged them to work for the benefit of citizens.

Kurti said his Government will face many challenges in its first months of work and pledged to work on fulfilling all promises given during election campaign. On Tuesday afternoon Kurti hosted in his Office the US Ambassador to Kosovo, Philip Kosnett. This was the first official to visit Kurti after assuming his office as new Prime Minister of Kosovo. Kosnett was among the first Ambassadors to congratulate Kurti on Monday after the Parliament endorsed his Cabinet. The US Ambassador has visited on Tuesday morning also the newly appointed Speaker of Assembly, Vjosa Osmani. A day earlier, Kosovo's Parliament voted in the new Government with Kurti, as the Prime Minister, with 66 Deputies in favor and ten abstentions. Later on Monday, Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci congratulated his country for forming a new Government after last October's general vote. (www.gazetaexpress.com)



The new Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti's official ceremony for assuming office
(Photo source: www.kryeministri-ks.net)

- February 6th, Prime Minister Albin Kurti said it is not impossible for Kosovo to reach an agreement with Serbia within this year but added that he would not hurry to finalize the dialogue. In an interview for Voice of America, Kurti said that he does not expect any substantive dialogue or swift results as Serbia is approaching

elections. Speaking about the possibility of talks being finalized this year, Kurti said it was possible but he added that it was not up to him and that he could not foresee such a thing. *"It is possible but I would not be able to foresee it now,"* said Kurti. *"Now I can express my willingness for open and principled dialogue,"* he added. However, Kurti said that talks between Kosovo and Serbia have never been suspended as *"talks have never stopped because at various international tables and conferences there have been meetings of Government, Kosovo leaders with those of Serbia,"* he said. *"This will go on and on. I do not think any instant substantive dialogue and swift results can be expected. I am not in favor of delays but I am not in a hurry,"* he claimed. He also said that although the US has appointed Richard Grenell as special envoy for the Kosovo - Serbia dialogue, this does not mean the EU's role in talks will be diminished. The EU has set a comprehensive agreement as a condition for Kosovo and Serbia in order to continue their path towards integration. Kurti talked about reciprocity with Serbia and the abolition of the 100% tax on Serbian goods. He said that tax will be lifted as soon as possible but not without reciprocity against Serbia. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo formed its new Government four months after the October 6th, 2019 elections. Albin Kurti of Vetëvendosje is the new Prime Minister, while his party has reached an agreement with LDK. Each party has six Ministers in the new Government, two ministerial posts have been taken by Serb List members and one Minister comes from the Bosniak (Muslim Bosnian)

minority in Kosovo. There is fresh political air in Kosovo since the new Government ends the political tradition of former KLA members in highest political posts. Citizens ask for improvement of their ordinary life, better health system, education, and economic growth. Kurti said that these are his priorities. He announced that he will lift the 100% tax on Serbian goods but reciprocity measures will follow. It is a question what could be these measures. However, expectations for a spectacular progress on Kosovo – Serbia dialogue should not be expected. Besides, Serbia is entering in pre-electoral campaign and elections are scheduled for April, 26th, 2020. First signs of Kurti's intentions are controversial. Although he announced tax revoke he claimed reciprocal measures. Moreover, he abandoned his initial idea of not assigning members of the Serb List in ministerial posts, avoiding further escalation with the Kosovo Serb community. However, he publically announced his plan for filing a lawsuit against Serbs for genocide and war crimes in the International Court of Justice. The new prime Minister and the Government needs some time to unveil their strategy and approach of the Kosovo – Serbia normalization of relations. The new Government should ensure political stability and work hard in resolving critical challenges for Kosovo's sustainability. Fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering and trafficking, establishment of rule of law, accountable and transparent state institutions, and functional public administration are just a few of the challenges the new Government should address effectively.



MOLDOVA: February 3rd, new Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin has confirmed his country's intention to support “*the positive evolution of bilateral relations and trade with Moldova.*” On Friday, Mishustin held a meeting with Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Chicu in Alma Ata (Kazakhstan), where the Governmental Council of the Eurasian Economic Union [of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, EAES] held its enlarged session. Interlocutors touched on a range of priority topics on bilateral agenda such as e.g. possibilities for building up Moldovan exports to the Russian Federation, simplification of accesses to the two countries' markets, the problem of applying import duties etc. Premier Chicu asked his Russian colleague to support Moldova in its request to become a member of the Eurasian Development Bank and Mikhail Mishustin reacted positively. Chicu said “*We are glad that Russian companies show interest to the Moldovan market. We have already met with the Bank leadership representatives in Chisinau and discussed the possibility of financing the construction of a major agri-industrial center and other projects in Moldova.*” (www.infotag.md)

- February 5th, an early parliamentary election is desired primarily by the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) and Republican Socio-Political Movement Equality (Mișcare Social-Politică Republicană Ravnopravie - SOR) Party, maintains Moldova President Igor Dodon. Speaking on the Moldova-1 national television last night, Dodon said “*Maia Sandu constantly talks about that desire of hers in public and thus wants to get rid of Andrei Nastase [DA Platform leader]. And Ilan Shor Party*

realizes that if the present-day political stability continues, the authorities will investigate the one-billion-dollar bank fraud, and the Chisinau airport concession and many other things, so the Shor Party vitally needs a reboot.” The President believes that a snap election possibility at the current stage “*is extremely small. Later this month, the incumbent Parliament will mark its 1st anniversary [February 24]. Do we really need to change Parliament every half-year and to spend millions on this?! It is better to use the 80 million lei [the approximate cost of one election campaign] for, say, street illumination in rural localities. We have calculated: this sum is sufficient for building illumination networks for 1 kilometer of streets each in 600 villages.*” The Head of state maintains there is no coalition of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) and the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM), and that the Chicu Government works without a parliamentary majority’s support. “*The Democrats have started internal reforms in their party, and this work is advancing somewhere successfully and somewhere not very. However, some Democrat MPs make statements and praise those who had grabbed the Chisinau airport away from the State. It is strange and unnatural to speak about a coalition in such conditions, when I, and the Government, and PSRM colleagues are firmly convinced that the concession was unlawful and that the airport must be returned into the State ownership. Meanwhile, some Democrats think the other way round. But those involved in the billion-dollar bank fraud and in the airport concession scheme must bear responsibility before the law. There is nothing to talk about with them, the more so about coalitions,*” Dodon said.

The President emphasized that the Party of Socialists stands constantly ready for any snap elections, “*but this scenario should better be avoided. And those who want to provoke it must assume responsibility for this.*” (www.infotag.md)

- February 6th, European integration is remaining the Republic of Moldova’s priority number one, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Aurel Ciocoi stated at a news conference on Thursday, stressing that the incumbent leadership of Moldova are regarding the Euro-integration as “*a means and possibility to modernize the country and improve the nation’s living standards.*” “*Yet another essential priority for us is the implementation of the EU - Moldova Association Agreement as an instrument for achieving high living standards as well as for the functioning of democratic institutions in the country, which work is being done in parallel with the resumption of strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and other partners from the FSU area,*” Aurel Ciocoi said. Answering journalists’ questions about a possible timing of Moldova’s accession to the EU, the Minister replied that it is still premature to speak about this. In his opinion, delays in the reform plan implementation were due to the lack of political will in Moldova and due to political crisis. “*That is why we now have to work in a fire-fighting regime in order to liquidate the arrears – not for a victorious reporting in Brussels, but for using all available possibilities for our country modernization,*” the Moldovan Foreign Minister said. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Moldovan President, Igor Dodon and the Government have initiated a well coordinated

campaign to promote a pro-European or pro-western profile of the country in order to secure EU's financial support. After pro-western Maya Sandu's collapse the EU appeared skeptical in its relations with Moldova. In fact, Romania was appeared the hardliner of such political attitude. The country enjoys relative political stability since the President Igor Dodon achieved to establish his own Government putting aside the pro-western ACUM block. The country definitely follows a pro-Russian orientation, although it declares that it seeks to join the EU. Due to its strategic geographic position, Moldova has become a field of rivalry between Russia and the US and NATO. The country lacks economic growth, while corruption is in high rates. Russia maintains troops in Transnistria which are considered by pro-western forces as violating Moldovan sovereignty. The frozen conflict of Transnistria is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: February 4th, Milo Djukanovic, Montenegro's President, said on Tuesday he believed that the country's Prime Minister Dusan Markovic and Amfilohije, the Head of Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) in the coastal republic, Bishop of Montenegro and the Coast, would start a dialogue over the disputed Law on Religious Freedom because that, as he put it, was the only way since the state would not allow a blackmail, the Beta news agency reported. In an interview with the Montenegrin state RTCG TV, Djukanovic said that those who think they would make the state to capitulate by perseverance in organizing processions could not be more wrong, adding that neither safety nor

stability in the country was endangered. Djukanovic referred to protest gatherings in Montenegro that had been going on since the Law on Religious Freedom was adopted in December. Critics, including the SPC and Belgrade officials, claim that the authorities want to seize SPC properties. Montenegro's President said that SPC clergy should be responsible for their behavior and that there was no share of responsibility. "Maybe I could call on some people to gather and to explain to them how Montenegro is in danger, but I do not do that. Anyone who starts something must know how to end it and not to transfer responsibility to someone else," Djukanovic said. Amfilohije said on Monday he was ready to talk with Markovic about the withdrawal of the Law or its discriminatory parts in line with the country's Constitution, as he put it, and then about an agreement between the Government and SPC. The Bishop called on Markovic to set the date, but the Prime Minister had not yet responded. The Parliament Speaker Ivan Brajovic reiterated on Tuesday that the Law would not be withdrawn and that its implementation would be an issue, not any other demand. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- February 7th, accepting the call for dialogue is not an option, Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF) members have said, commenting on the Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic's call for dialogue aimed at overcoming divisions. DF member, Slaven Radunovic, said that the call for dialogue was seen as a desperate attempt of man who "is aware that he is embarked on the Titanic." "Only completely incompetent person could accept Mr Markovic's call and give some oxygen to his Government," Radunovic said. Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (Socijalistička Narodna Partija Crne Gore - SNP)

representatives reiterated to be ready for the dialogue, provided that Church issue is the first item on the agenda. United Montenegro (Ujedinjena Crna Gora -UCG) is willing to talk, Goran Danilovic pointed out, but added that there had to be certain order. Assistant CEO of Dan, Nikola Markovic, said he would accept the call and added it should have happened much earlier. Markovic said he would state objections to media ambiance. He stressed that the country was obliged to provide free and safe work of the media. President of the Board of Directors of Vijesti, Zeljko Ivanovic, said in his letter to the Prime Minister that he would come to the meeting. (www.cdm.me)

- February 9th, recent events related to the Law on Freedom of Religion escalated rapidly into a political clash with the State and its sovereign right to solve the internal issues, Montenegro Defense Minister, Predrag Boskovic, told in an interview with Pobjeda, a daily. Minister Boskovic noted that despite all that, the Government of Montenegro will not tolerate the escalation in protests or any other kind of threats. According to him security situation in Montenegro has been stable. Relevant state bodies, primarily the National Police and its staff, are closely monitoring situation and will do everything to make every citizen of this country, regardless of their religious, national or political affiliation, feel safe in doing their everyday activities. Boskovic emphasized that the current state of affairs between Montenegro and Serbia is not satisfactory, mostly due to the inappropriate messages coming from the highest representatives of the Serbian authorities in Belgrade. “Montenegro is always ready for talks in order to maintain good neighborly relations, just as was

the case so far,” he claimed. The Minister said that Montenegro is currently facing a series of a quite intensive disinformation campaign from Serbia, backed by radical elements at the political and religious stage of Montenegro “*and that is why we required the expert support from our partners. Our aim was to strengthen the national capacities for detecting and understanding threats, and more efficient coping with them. Experts from NATO member states gave some very useful advice and guidelines that will help us in further strengthening of the institutional capacities for dealing with hybrid threats, as well as in drawing up the relevant legislative framework in this area.*” Finally, Boskovic unveiled that the Government sets up an interdepartmental team comprising the representatives of competent state bodies. The aim of the team is to monitor and coordinate the activities related to strengthening the institutions for understanding and dealing with hybrid threats. The interdepartmental team will be cooperating with NATO in order to share best practice. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Human rights, media freedom and democratic order are under alert in Montenegro. The state’s authorities arrest politicians, politicians’ family members, journalists and activists in the name of “hybrid threats hysteria.” Law on religious freedoms has opened the “Aeolus bags of wings” for the ruling DPS. What opposition failed to achieve so far will succeed it via the religious factor. However, there is a sense that the Government seeks now to lower tension and soon there will be dialogue with the Head of Serbian Orthodox Church. Serbia keeps an eye in

Montenegro trying to capitalize tension in the country in the name not only of the Serbian Orthodox Church but also of Serbs live in Montenegro. The Serbian factor could be under certain conditions to act destabilizing. Corruption, smuggling and money laundering are dominated in the country setting significant obstacles and risks for every investor. Besides, such situation has strongly affected progress of accession negotiations with the EU. Montenegro needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment and reducing the average age of its military personnel (currently 37 years old).



NORTH MACEDONIA:

February 3rd, The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia's (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) President, Zoran Zaev said that it is very important for the Law on Public Prosecution to be adopted at the Parliament underlying that in a different way the Parliament will not be dissolved. *“For me, it is very important the law to pass at the Parliament which means that when there is a vote, it may be adopted or not, as there is no other option. If the opposition tries to undermine this i.e. to block the adoption in any possible way then the Parliament will not be dissolved until the process of passing the Law on Prosecution is completed including the NATO accession protocol or the Law on Defense and similar laws. Part of the agenda that we all agreed upon was that all of these processes*

should be adopted until the dissolution of the Parliament and the scheduling of parliamentary elections,” Zaev said. Despite a meeting between political parties regarding the Law on Prosecution scheduled for today there will not be a meeting because Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) will not submit amendments and will not take part in. Justice Minister Renata Deskoska will be having single meetings with minor MP groups regarding the Law on Prosecution where the MPs will be giving their final amendments about the law. (www.meta.mk)

- February 5th, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity's (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) leader Hristijan Mickoski announced that his party has submitted an initiative for the Parliament to be dissolved on February 12th, 2020. *“We call upon all political parties in the state including SDSM to take part in the initiative and to support it, and on the 12th of February as was previously scheduled, the Parliament to be dissolved,”* Mickoski said. He holds the opinion that a qualitative Law on Public Prosecution can only be made by experts and stressed that his party will not support the proposal which is in parliamentary procedure since the draft law is not as close as what it should be. (www.meta.mk)

- February 7th, Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi, who is on a Western Balkan tour, said in Podgorica that North

Macedonia should not hope for a date for negotiations in coming March. Although the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia's (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) expected a date before the elections and Deputy Prime Minister Bujar Osmani accused the EU of not giving a date before the elections would mean interference in the election results or support of VMRO-DPMNE, Varhelyi said the May summit in Zagreb and not the one in March is the key moment when a step forward could be made. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

As long as elections are coming closer political confrontation between SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE is getting tougher. Former Prime Minister and SDSM leader, Zoran Zaev said that the law on Public Prosecutor should be adopted before dissolution of the current Parliament threatening that in a different case the Parliament will not be dissolved and elections could be postponed. VMRO-DPMNE leader, Hristijan Mickoski is opposing in the draft law proposing a new draft by a group of experts. It is assessed that the law will not pass eventually but the Parliament will be dissolved on February 12th, 2020. In a different case, political stability of the country could be threatened. Postponement of elections is out of question since it could become source of turbulence. The fact is that political situation in the country could easily be escalated and polarized. EU Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi sent a clear message to the country that the elections is a "stress test" for North Macedonia's opening of accession negotiations in the EU summit on May rejecting any idea of a positive recommendation on the March summit. Zaev is

pushing for a positive assessment on March, just a few days before the elections aiming to use it as a benefit in his pre-electoral campaign but the EU rejected such possibility. At the moment, North Macedonia has political uncertainty and next day of election it needs a strong Government to proceed with necessary reforms and securing opening of accession negotiations with the EU within 2020. The country should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process.



ROMANIA: February 4th,

Romania's Government has drafted an emergency ordinance that aims to offer the National Agency for Mineral Resources (ANRM) the authority to refuse signing new concession agreements for oil and gas perimeters and cancel ongoing concession agreements on national security grounds, Profit.ro reported. The project also allows the Government to control who can take over existing concession agreements or companies holding such licenses. The change is aimed at "avoiding unpredictable situations, which may arise in the situation of transfer to another legal person of the rights and obligations assumed by oil agreements, with the consequence of changing their essential conditions, which, depending on the regional geopolitical dynamics, will affect the national security," according to the explanatory notes quoted by Profit.ro. The Government's initiative is connected to US group EXXONMOBIL's intention to sell its 50% stake in the Neptun Deep offshore gas perimeter, the biggest such concession in Romania's Black Sea section by the size of gas reserves, according to G4Media.ro.

One of the investors interested in EXXON's stake is Russian group LUKOIL, which already holds rights over a smaller offshore gas perimeter in the Black Sea. Romania's Prime Minister Ludovic Orban has already expressed his preference that the investor or investors who take over EXXON's stake should come from the area of Romania's partnerships. Romanian state-owned gas producer ROMGAZ is also interested in taking over part of EXXON's stake and may submit an offer together with Polish group PGNiG and Romanian group OMV PETROM, which already holds a 50% stake in the Neptun Deep project, according to local media reports. (www.romania-insider.com)

- February 5th, Romania's Parliament passed a no-confidence motion against the Liberal Government led by the Prime Minister Ludovic Orban only three months after being established. The motion initiated by the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) and it was supported by 261 MPs, 28 more than the minimum 233 votes it was required. PSD filed its no-confidence motion after the Government took responsibility in the Parliament for a bill that changes the electoral law so that Mayors get elected after two rounds of vote instead of one. The PSD and the ethnic Hungarian party Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) oppose this change that could potentially reduce their number of Mayors in the local elections scheduled for the coming summer. Some analysts believe that the Liberals passed this change to the electoral law with the exact purpose of having their government overthrown and trigger early parliamentary elections. Moreover, Orban and the President Klaus Iohannis had a meeting in January after which

they announced they decided in favor of triggering early elections. However, for this, they first needed the Government to resign or be dismissed. The second step is to have the Parliament reject two proposals for new Government formation. Only after that, the President can dissolve the Parliament and call for snap elections. The Liberals said recently that early elections could be organized together with local elections. On February 4th, 2020, one day before the vote on the no-confidence motion, the Liberal Government adopted an emergency ordinance that brings important changes to the way parliamentary elections are organized. One of the most important changes is reducing the legal term for announcing the elections from 90 to 50 days, although the Constitution provides a 3-month period for organizing the elections, according to G4Media.ro. Two more changes target Romanian voters abroad. Romanians in the diaspora will have three days to vote in the parliamentary elections, similarly to the presidential elections in November 2019, as opposed to one in the parliamentary elections in December 2016. Moreover, the Government doubled the number of MPs that will represent Romanians abroad in the next Parliament. These changes will likely favor the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) and their informal partners from the Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) - Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (Partidul Libertății, Unității și Solidarității - PLUS) alliance, given that the votes cast by Romanians abroad in the elections for the European Parliament in May 2019 largely went to these two parties. However, parties such as Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), UDMR and the People's

Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP), which voted for the Orban cabinet in November 2019, have criticized these changes to the electoral regulations and could oppose the scenario of early elections, which would not bring them any benefits. After the no-confidence motion was adopted, the Government led by Orban is considered dismissed and will continue to work but with limited powers. It will not be able to issue any more ordinances, for example, which is why the Government rushed to adopt 25 such ordinances on the day before the motion. Iohannis will call the parliamentary parties for consultations for naming a new Prime Minister. PNL and PSD will likely make proposals. PNL has already announced it would propose Orban for a new term while PSD said it was looking to create a new parliamentary majority and propose a leftist intellectual for the Prime Minister's post. (www.romania-insider.com)

- February 6th, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis nominated the President of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), Ludovic Orban for Prime Minister at the end of consultations with parliamentary parties. Orban's Cabinet was dismissed by a no-confidence motion the day before. "After consulting with all the parties and parliamentary groups, I appoint Ludovic Orban to form a new Government," Iohannis announced. In his speech, Iohannis blamed once again the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), which still has the highest number of MPs, for opposing democratic reforms, such as the election of Mayors in two rounds of voting. Both, Iohannis and Orban made clear that their goal is to organize early elections, which requires that the Parliament rejects two designated Prime Ministers

within 60 days. It remains to be seen, however, how this will work out given that several parties that hold the majority of seats in the Parliament oppose early elections. Moreover, PSD controls the key bodies that set the agenda of the Parliament's two Chambers, and can thus delay the proceedings for voting a new Cabinet. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political developments in Romania are rapid since the country has entered in a period of fragile stability. Ludovic Orban Government collapsed after a no-confidence motion filed by the opposition PSD. The President, Klaus Iohannis gave a new mandate to Orban for forming a new Government. Liberals seek to call early parliamentary elections assessing that they are the leading political power in the country. However, Constitution and electoral system make situation complicated; snap elections it is not an easy thing in Romania. The first step concluded; collapse of the current Government. In the second step, two Prime Ministers designate should fail to form a Government. Then, the President has the right to call for early elections. It should be taken into consideration that opposition PSD still controls the main political bodies in the Parliament making Liberals life difficult for their future plans. It should be noticed that Orban's Government brought a lot of emergency ordinances seeking to change electoral rules. Iohannis and PNL seek to call for early elections med May – beginning of June 2020 together with the local elections. The fact is that Romania needs early elections in order a strong Government with new mandate to come in power ensuring political stability of the country. Besides a strong Government will forward reforms regarding fight

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



SERBIA: February 4th, the US Ambassador Anthony Godfrey said Serbia is important for stability in the Balkans and welcomed Belgrade and Pristina's decision to establish transport links. He said this in a discussion led with Serbian Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure Zorana Mihajlovic, the Ministry said. *“We are happy that things are going in a positive direction and we will continue to support the process. Serbia has a leading position in the region and is important for maintaining stability,”* Godfrey said. The Minister informed the Ambassador about the construction of the Moravian Corridor which is being implemented by the US engineering company BECHTEL. *“It is in Serbia's interest that one of the world's most successful construction companies realizes this important project,”* Mihajlovic said. The Minister said that Serbia was also moving towards the construction of the *“Highway of Peace”* Nis - Merdare, and assessed that it would *“contribute to regional stability,”* as well as the announced establishment of railway and air transport. (www.b92.net)

- February 5th, Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin told the pro-Government TV Pink on Wednesday that Kosovo's new Prime

Minister Albin Kurti is trying to prevent the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue from being resumed. According to Vulin, Kurti is doing everything possible to make sure negotiations do not continue. He said the Kosovo Albanians used to say that they should negotiate and are now turning away from talks and setting conditions such as the 100% tariffs on Serbian goods, a military, war crimes and other things. He said that Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic is fighting hard for the rights of Serbs in Kosovo but is viewed by the Albanians as conducting policies which are not good for them. *“It is in our interest to negotiate and we always win something for our people and our country,”* he said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- February 6th, Serbian opposition leader Dragan Djilas told the Thursday issue of Belgrade weekly Vreme that all relevant opposition parties that could win seats in Parliament will not take part in the coming elections. He said that election day *“will be just another day in the fight we started and which we will not give up. I am not saying that all the organizations which turn out for the false elections will do so because they have a deal with [Serbian President Aleksandar] Vucic, that they took money or something similar but I am saying that, consciously or not, they are working for Vucic's benefit and extending his hold on power,”* Djilas said. Leader of the Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode I Pravde - SSP) said that *“the fact is that representatives of people who really are opposed to this regime will not sit in Parliament because they are not making compromises with the current authorities.”* He added that whoever turns out for the elections cannot be viewed as the opposition. *“That is our red line because anyone who turns out for the elections in Serbia is doing that for himself... to*

keep their seats in Parliament or to win seats or to remain in power,” he said. According to Djilas, “Vucic will not be able to claim victory at the elections because he will be running against himself.” (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Parliamentary and local elections will be held on April 26th, 2020 but opposition has already announced it will boycott them. Latest opposition officials’ statements unveil that their political goal is clearly to deprive legitimacy from a new SNS rule. Opposition does not offer an alternative political choice for citizens but only rejection of any political process in accordance with democratic rules and institutions. Political conditions in Serbia show that the country’s transition towards a modern and stable democracy has not been completed. Such situation is responsibility of all political stakeholders following Milosevic regime. It is expected a polarized atmosphere during the pre-electoral campaign, while Europeans push opposition to join elections. Of course the Government carries the burden and responsibility to improve electoral procedure, strengthen media freedom and ensure free and fair elections but it is assessed that from the very first moment the opposition did not actually seek to join the elections. Serbia needs political stability since it has a lot of diplomatic, security and economic challenges ahead. Kosovo new Government sets new political and diplomatic scenery which should be identified. Messages coming from the new Prime Minister, Albin Kurti are controversial blurring future developments and assessments. It seems that Kosovo 100% tariffs on Serbian goods will be revoked as a positive move for Belgrade –

Pristina dialogue restart. However, Kurti announced the “reciprocity policy” towards Serbia which has to become more specific. The US and EU push both sides for a quick solution but it is doubtful if it will be achieved since the Serbian elections are ahead. Montenegro – Serbia relations are in low level lately due to the Montenegrin law on religious freedom which is considered by Belgrade as a direct attack on Serbian Orthodox Church and consequently on Serbian population in Montenegro. The country has developed very close relations with Russia, especially in the field of defense. Russia keeps supplying Serbia with weapons, while both countries conduct common military exercises. Serbia is trying to balance between the west, namely the EU and the US on one side and Russia on the other implementing the doctrine of “neutrality.” The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia’s effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: February 3rd, a week after Prime Minister Marjan Sarec resigned, leader of the largest opposition party, Janez Jansa of the Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS), invited all parliamentary parties to talks on a new coalition this Friday. He would like to meet each party separately, and if common ground is found, a second round of talks would be held on February

11th, 2020. Sarec's List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS) and the opposition Left (Levica) have already said they would not go to the talks, and the Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB) could do the same; earlier in the day, the SAB invited all parties but the SDS to form a "project coalition" which would be in office until electoral law is reformed and some urgent bills possibly passed. Initial reactions indicated the chances of the SAB's initiative are slim, with the SDS even mocking the very idea of SAB leading any talks. (www.sta.si)

- February 3rd, commenting on the Slovenia - Croatia border arbitration impasse following a recent ruling by the EU Court of Justice, Slovenia's European Commissioner Janez Lenarcic said that resubmitting the case to the Court together with Croatia would be a good option. Noting that the Court which ruled Slovenia's case against Croatia over the latter's ignoring of the arbitration decision inadmissible had proposed this step as part of its decision, Lenarcic said the two sides could confront the Court with a very simple question; is the arbitration decision binding on both sides or not. "The problem requires the consent of both sides," he added. (www.sta.si)

- February 6th, President Borut Pahor concluded the first round of talks with parliamentary parties by meeting the heads of the Deputy Groups of Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB), Slovenian National Party (Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka – SNS) and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS), as well as the Italian and Hungarian minority MPs. With all options still on

the table, the President said he might call another series of talks by the end of the month if a coalition could be formed once the parties make up their minds about how to proceed. A new coalition in the existing Parliament still seems more likely than an early election at the moment, with the Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) leader Janez Jansa launching talks with potential partners on Friday. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■:

A week after resignation of the Prime Minister Marjan Sarec and collapse of his minority Government consultations continue between parties. The largest opposition party SDS intensifies its efforts to reach agreements with other parties aiming to form a majority coalition. Parliamentary parties look like being surprised from political developments planning their next moves. There are parties which are in favor of a new ruling coalition while some other promote the early election idea. Consultations will continue next week and it is not very unlikely to see a new ruling coalition. On Slovenia – Croatia dispute the latter has started on calling for dialogue but it is doubtful what Slovenia will finally decide to do. Besides, Slovenia could push Croatia on this case taking into consideration that Croatia needs Slovenia's support to enter the Schengen zone and OECD. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed

Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. Announcement of White Book on Defense last week presented a rather ambitious program of improving operational capabilities of the Armed Forces. It foresees an 8,000-strong professional military force and a 2000-strong standing reserve by 2035, up from 6,400 and 700, respectively. Slovenia's defense budget will finally reach 2% of GDP (a NATO requirement) by 2035.



TURKEY: February 7th, the US has halted a secretive military intelligence cooperation program with Turkey that for years helped Ankara target Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê - PKK) militants, four US officials told Reuters. The US decision to indefinitely suspend the program, which has not been previously reported, was made in response to Turkey's cross-border military operation into Syria in October, officials added. The US officials, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said the US late last year stopped flying the intelligence collection missions that targeted the PKK, which both the US and Turkey classify as terrorists. The US military had carried out missions using unarmed drones, which one official said were flown out of Turkey's Incirlik Air Base, where the US military has a significant presence. The US drone flights that took place within the program, in place since 2007, often zeroed in on mountainous territory in northern Iraq near the Turkish border, another official said. A Pentagon Spokeswoman did not directly comment on any specific programs but noted that the US has designated the PKK a terrorist organization since 1997. *"We have*

supported Turkey in their fight against the PKK in many ways for decades. As a matter of policy, we do not provide details on operational matters," the Spokeswoman said when asked about a halt in assistance. A State Department Spokesperson said the US does not comment on intelligence matters. Officials from the Turkish Defense Ministry did not respond to a request for comment, but a Turkish official confirmed the program was stopped. *"This makes the anti-PKK campaign more difficult and more costly for Turkey,"* one of the four US officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, claimed, even though Turkey has proven self-sufficient in drone technology in recent years. It also adds to a laundry list of grievances between the US and Turkey, including Ankara's purchase of Russian air defenses and broader splits over US's support to terrorist groups in Syria, particularly PKK affiliate Syrian Kurd YPG/PYD, despite what appears to be a strong relationship between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his US counterpart Donald Trump. *"In recent years, Turkey has not been struggling to obtain the information it needs through drones it produces itself,"* the Turkish official said. *"However, as an ally, the steps taken on this issue do not contribute to ties between the two countries,"* he added. Since the inception of the secretive US intelligence cooperation program, Ankara has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to advance its own defense capabilities and significantly reduced its dependence on US and Israeli drones which it frequently used since the late 1990s. Turkey's privately-owned Baykar Defense has been working on developing Turkey's first drone fleet since the 2000s. Within a decade and a half, it has developed armed and unarmed drones and begun selling them to the Turkish Army as well as to

Ukraine and Qatar. As of July 2019, a total of 86 “*Bayraktar*” drones are in service with Turkey's security forces and some of those have been regularly used during Ankara's three Syria operations in 2016, 2018 and last October. Arda Mevlutoglu, a Turkey-based defense analyst said the recent advance has equipped Ankara with greater flexibility and freedom in its operational capabilities. “*Turkey's dependence on its allies, mainly to the US, significantly decreased, if not completely ended in real-time, high-quality intelligence gathering and surgical strike type operations,*” Mevlutoglu said. (www.dailysabah.com)

- February 9th, The Syrian Army has taken control of a strategic northwestern crossroads town, its latest gain in a weeks-long offensive against the country's last major rebel bastion. Saturday's advance on Saraqeb came shortly after Turkey sent additional troops into the region and threatened to respond if its military observation posts in Idlib, set up under a 2018 truce, come under attack. “*Army units now exercise full control over the town of Saraqeb,*” state television reported, showing footage of the town's streets, deserted after weeks of bombardment. Saraqeb is considered a strategic prize for the Government as it seeks to regain control of the M4 and M5 highways that meet in the town. The M5, Syria's longest highway, connects second city Aleppo to the capital Damascus and continues south to the Jordanian border. With Saraqeb recaptured, little more than half of Idlib province remains in rebel hands, along with slivers of neighboring Aleppo and Latakia provinces. Since December, Government forces have pressed a blistering assault against the Idlib region with Russian support, retaking town after town despite

warnings from Turkey, which is allied with the rebels, to stop. Violence has killed more than 300 civilians and has displaced approximately 600,000 people since, according to the United Nations. Witnesses at the border said convoys of Turkish military vehicles had been crossing into Idlib since Friday, delivering supplies and turning back to return with more. The conflict has disrupted the fragile cooperation between Moscow and Ankara. Turkey says the advances by Russia-backed Syrian troops and their allies threaten a fresh humanitarian disaster, driving another wave of potential refugees to its southern border, and has threatened to act if they do not pull back. Turkey already hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees. Turkey beefing up its forces in Idlib has failed to stem the advance by Syrian Government forces leading Ankara and Moscow to hold talks on Saturday about the offensive. According to Turkish state news agency, Anadolu, Ankara has sent more than 350 vehicles filled with commandos and ammunition to bolster its observation posts in Idlib since Friday. Officials from Turkey and Russia held three hours of apparently inconclusive talks in Ankara, agreeing to meet again next week. The two countries support opposing sides in Syria's nearly nine-year war but have forged a series of agreements since 2017 aimed at containing the bloodshed. “*Situation in Idlib was discussed,*” Turkey's Foreign Ministry said after the talks. “*Steps that could be taken to establish peace on the ground as soon as possible and advance the political process were evaluated.*” A Turkish security source said the troops' sole mission was to reinforce the country's 12 existing observation posts, established under a 2018 deal with Russia that aimed at preventing a major battle and an ensuing humanitarian crisis. Turkey says three of

its outposts, all in the southeastern part of Idlib, have been surrounded by the Syrian army and has threatened to respond if any of its posts come under attack. *“Our observation posts in Idlib continue their duties and are capable of protecting themselves with the weapons and equipment they possess,”* the Turkish Defense Ministry said on social media. *“In the event of a new attack, proper response will be given in the strongest manner, based on the right of self-defense,”* the Defense Ministry added. (www.aljazeera.com)

- February 9th, senior Turkish officials on Saturday condemned controversial remarks by Mustafa Akıncı, leader of the occupied north part of Cyprus; the so-called *“Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC),”* in a British daily. Condemnations came after Akıncı talked to The Guardian about the long-standing reunification efforts in Cyprus island. *“If this failed to happen, he (Akıncı) said, the north would grow increasingly dependent on Ankara and could end up being swallowed up, as a de facto Turkish province,”* The Guardian cited Akıncı as saying. Vice President Fuat Oktay said on social media *“I condemn the remarks that target the Republic of Turkey which stands with TRNC in all conditions and protects its rights and interests.”* It will not tolerate Turkey being used as *“a tool of an election campaign with political approaches that lack a vision,”* he stressed. Communications Director Fahrettin Altun also strongly condemned Akıncı's remarks, which he said reflect Akıncı's concern for personal survival. Altun said in a written statement that Akıncı does not deserve to sit in the chair of the presidency, which had cost the lives of Turkish Cypriots and Turkish soldiers. *“Turkey has no designs on the soil of any country,*

and it will not tolerate anyone to take advantage of Turkish soil,” he warned. Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul criticized Akıncı's remarks on Turkey, as well, which he said hurt the ancestors and martyrs. *“Ankara will continue to stand by Turkish Cypriot as it has done so far,”* he said. *“TRNC”* Prime Minister Ersin Tatar joined Turkish officials in condemning Akıncı's remarks. Tatar said Turkish Cypriots will punish Akıncı by not voting in favor of him in the presidential election slated for on April 26th, 2020. Tatar stressed that *“TRNC”* and Turkey will always remain close and will cooperate to solve the Cyprus issue. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey exercises a multilateral, multifaceted, dynamic external policy ensuring its national interests. Enjoying a pivotal geographic location is engaged in several regional challenges. Despite that, enjoys special relationship with great powers such as the US and Russia. The Preident Recep Tayyip Erdogan made clear publically that “Turkish security is beyond its borders.” This statement summarizes the security doctrine of Turkey; Turkey will be engaged in regional challenges, conflicts and cooperation to ensure its security. Turkish engagement in Syria, Libya, Cyprus is explained by this doctrine. The country combines both diplomatic means and “hard” power aiming to achieve its goals. Turkey achieved so far to establish a safe zone within Syria eliminating the Kurdish threat. Moreover, it launches several military operations in Southeast Turkey and Eastern Iraq against PKK. It has conducted hydrocarbon drills in Mediterranean Sea within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and presents its aeronautical power against Greece and Cyprus questioning their

sovereign rights. Finally, it sends troops in Libya aiming to have a “say” in North Africa developments. Of course it is a NATO member and enjoys a special relationship with Russia. Without any question, Turkey has the characteristics of a regional superpower and it tries to act like one. It is assessed that its relations with the US will never reach a “zero point” since Turkey is an integral and critical part of the western security architecture. Lately, Turkish plans in Syria face some problems which threaten its presence there. Syrian Army is advancing in Idlib threatening the Turkish outposts in the region. Turkey has reinforced its forces and the possibility of an open confrontation between the two Armies could not be excluded. In the east Mediterranean front, Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in the region and is expected to react violently if balance of power is jeopardized. Turkey has been outraged by the Cypriot, Egyptian, Greek and Israeli cooperation in the fields of energy and defense. It declares that any possible project in the Eastern Mediterranean should include Turkey or it will not be sustainable. The Turkish – Libyan agreement on delimitation of maritime zones was a major step which gives to Turkey a central role in Eastern Mediterranean cutting the Greek, Cypriot and Egyptian EEZs in the middle. Tension will break out when Turkey will try to exercise its rights in the declared EEZ. Under these circumstances an armed conflict or a “hot” incident could not be excluded in the Aegean Sea, the Cypriot territorial waters or southeast of Crete. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim


the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.


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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.