



**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.

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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*Kosovo declared unilaterally its independence from Serbia in 2008 but it is not a UN member state.

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ALBANIA: January 10th, the Prime Minister, Edi Rama announced that there is a change in the funding of the construction of the Porto Romano, Durres port. According to Rama, the project will be fulfilled with domestic funds instead of foreign ones, due to the NATO engagement in the project. Rama claimed that the Government does not want dependencies from foreign investors in this specific project. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- January 11th, the Chairman of the Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha, responded to Prime Minister Rama, who, based on the opposition's lack of will to sit at the work table of the bipartisan Electoral Reform Commission, emphasized that the majority will continue working alone, or by looked for other ways. (www.top-channel.tv)

- January 12th, Democrat MP, Gazment Bardhi after the meeting of the Parliamentary Group of the Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), expressed his determination to continue the protests in the Parliament, like those that have often interrupted sessions in past weeks. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The debate on electoral reform might become source of tension between the ruling Socialists and the divided opposition. As long as the main opposition party, DP remains divided, it cannot achieve an effective presence in the Parliament. Of course this fact contributes in the reduced control of the Government's actions by a strong opposition. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama made small changes in the Government's structure

seeking to strengthen its efficiency mainly because of the accession talks with the EU and the opening of negotiation chapters. The establishment of Ministry of Public Administration and Anti-corruption signifies not only the problem the Albania faces in these two fields, but also the commitment of the Government to proceed with the necessary reforms and measures. The “Belery” case not only strains the Albanian – Greek relations, but also poses obstacles in Albania's accession talks with the EU. The country should focus on fighting corruption and organized crime, establishing rule of law and public transparency, eliminating state officials' immunity and modernizing public administration.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 8th, at the meeting of the parliamentary parties whose seat is in Republika Srpska, held without representatives of the opposition, the determination to pass the entity election law in the RS was confirmed. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 9th, Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are “mentally integrated” with Serbia and would support the eventual independence of Republika Srpska (RS), said RS President Milorad Dodik in an interview with France Presse. (www.n1info.ba)

- January 9th, executive powers of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (“Bonn powers”) should be used only as a measure of last resort against irreparable unlawful acts, the EU said commenting on the envoy's announcement of possible imposing of changes to the electoral legislation. (www.n1info.ba)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Maintaining his nationalist and secessionist rhetoric, Republika Srpska's President, Milorad Dodik openly said in an interview that Bosnian Serbs seeks independence which eventually will come. Actually, it is not only rhetoric but actions too such as the new electoral law for RS and the issue of state property. The international community namely the US and the EU keep sending strong messages to RS that they will not allow any violation of the constitutional order and the sovereignty of Bosnia in accordance with the Dayton peace accords. The flight of US F-16s fighter jets over the RS skies on January 9th – which the authorities in RS mark as the Day of RS – was an unusual but strong message to Bosnian Serbs that they should be very careful with their secessionist thoughts. Under these circumstances, instability and uncertainty reign in BiH. The state politics are hostage of the ethnic interests and pursuits of the entities. Although the Dayton Peace Agreement terminated a bloody war, it appears outdated, maintaining a non-functional state. Under these circumstances, there is fertile soil for ethnic disputes which could escalate tension into a conflict. Russian influence remains high in Republika Srpska. In December 2023, the European Council decided it will open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved. Political instability, poor economic performances and non-functional state institutions contribute in absence of rule of law, shortages in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit, high levels of corruption and social distress.



BULGARIA: January 10th, the Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov highlighted, regarding the upcoming cabinet rotation in March, the Government's firm stance on maintaining the Council of Ministers' composition despite negotiations with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Движение за права и свободи - DPS). (www.novinite.com)



The Bulgarian Prime Minister, Nikolai Denkov

(Photo source: www.gov.bg)

- January 12th, Defense Minister Todor Tagarev paid a visit to Washington where discussions centered on critical military cooperation and defense strategies. Notably, the US did not put forth additional requests for military assistance to Ukraine during these talks. (www.novinite.com)

- January 12th, during a parliamentary question time, Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov declared that Bulgaria's target for joining the euro area is set for January 1st, 2025. Denkov emphasized the adherence to the Maastricht criteria, integral to EU treaties, as a crucial aspect of the process. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The ruling coalition appears stable and currently seeks to get support by the Turkish minority party

DPS in order to widen its parliamentary power. The Government is working on the already agreed rotation scheduled for March 2024, but the Prime Minister, Nikolai Denkov has clarified that it will not be extensive in order to maintain the governmental cohesion. However, the governmental rotation might become a source of limited intergovernmental tension without threatening the ruling coalition stability. Denkov has set clearly that accession of Bulgaria by January 1st, 2025 is the milestone strategic goal of the country and the ruling coalition will focus on this area seeking to achieve the criteria. Moreover, Sofia is currently working on its readiness to join the Schengen area by air and sea in March 2024. Expectations for the country's 2024 economic growth are high, despite that the World Bank slightly lowered last week the forecast for the Bulgarian economic growth (2.4% instead of the 2.8% June 2023 forecast). Although Bulgaria seeks to upgrade its military capabilities, the military operational capability is questioned especially in the Air Force. It is highlighted that Bulgaria enjoys an upgrade in NATO strategic planning due to the Ukrainian war.



CROATIA: January 10th, the Homeland Movement (Domovinski Pokret - DP) party MP, Mario Radic proposed the introduction of a form of military training in schools, similar to a former subject called Defense and Protection. (www.n1info.com)

- January 12th, the Government adopted a proposal to establish a commission for the evaluation of the candidates for the post of State Attorney-General to be proposed to the parliament. The commission will include the

Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic and seven Ministers, who will interview the four applicants. (www.n1info.com)

- January 13th, Croatian Defense Minister Ivan Anusic cancelled a meeting with his Montenegrin counterpart because, he said, his statements on the "Morinj" Prisoners Of War camp memorial plaque and the ownership of the "Jadran" training ship are totally opposite to Croatia's positions and leave no room for talks. (www.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

Croatia enjoys political stability and favorable conditions for economic growth and a more attractive environment for investments. The Government seeks to promote social and economic reforms. Open issues from the past affect bilateral relations between the former Yugoslav republics creating unnecessary tensions. The Croat Government seeks to support Croats living abroad and especially in neighboring countries, but sometimes it is recorded an effort of instrumentalization of these people. Croatia is strengthening its military capabilities by the acquisition of modern armaments having the aspiration to become a strong - in defense terms - country.



CYPRUS: January 8th, the President Nikos Christodoulides replaced four of his Ministers in a partial reshuffle. Effective from Wednesday, Vasilis Palmas will take over from Michalis Giorgallas as Defense Minister; Maria Panayiotou from Petros Xenophontos as Agriculture Minister; Marios Hartsiotis from Anna Procopiou as Justice Minister; and Michalis Damianos from Popi Kanari as Health Minister.

Moreover, Nikodemos Damianou was appointed Deputy Minister of innovation, research and digital policy. He will replace Philippos Hadjizacharias. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 10th, a mass departure of Russian companies from Cyprus is underway and is likely to continue, according to Cypriot media reports. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 11th, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus Spokesman, Aleem Siddique said that any construction being undertaken by Turkish forces in the Denia area is currently outside the buffer zone. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political stability, while economic forecasts in the short term are very encouraging. The President, Nikos Christodoulides announced a partial reshuffle seeking not only to boost the Government's effectiveness, but also to balance between the parties that support the cabinet. Migrants' flows mainly from Syria put pressure in Cyprus due to its proximity with the Middle East. Despite the appointment of a new "personal envoy" by the UN Secretary General for the Cypriot question, conditions are not encouraging and optimistic for any positive step or productive initiative in 2024. Turkish Cypriot activity in buffer zone raises concerns for escalation of tension, but it seems that situation is currently stable. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps size). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an

existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: January 11th, a Hellenic Navy officer will visit the US naval base in Manama, Bahrain early next week to help plan Greece's role in the operation "Prosperity Guardian" in the Red Sea. Just before the end of the year, Greece announced it would send a frigate. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 12th, the Greek Government's plans to legalize same-sex civil marriage received a major boost after the left-wing opposition leader, Stefanow Kaselakis pledged his party's backing in Parliament. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 13th, the National Security Governmental Council (KYSEA) appointed Lieutenant General Dimitrios Choupis, until now the Commander of Special Warfare Command, as the new Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA), replacing General Konstantinos Floros.



The new Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA), General Dimitrios Choupis

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

Lieutenant General Georgios Kostidis has been appointed Chief of the Hellenic Army General Staff (HAGS), Vice Admiral Dimitrios Kataras, formerly the Chief of Fleet of the Hellenic Navy, has taken on the position of Chief of the Hellenic Navy General Staff (HNGS), and Lieutenant General Dimosthenis Grigoriadis, the former Commander of the Air Support Command, took over as the Chief of the Hellenic Air Force General Staff (HAFGS). (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his conservative Government promote a progressive agenda of radical reforms seeking to resolve long- time political, social, and economic issues. Allowance of the introduction of private universities, postal voting, and same sex marriage are three reforms that the Government seeks to implement in the very near future. The latter topic has become a reason for internal tension not only in the conservative ruling party, but also in the leftist opposition party of SYRIZA. However, it is expected that all three draft laws will be adopted by the Parliament with or not the support of the opposition since ND fully controls the legislative body. Normalization of relations with Turkey is the main challenge in foreign policy and the Government is working towards this direction. The Greek Foreign Minister visited last week several Middle East countries seeking to upgrade the state's role in the region's conflict. Moreover, Greece has decided to join the international naval force in the Red Sea with a vessel aiming to promote the Greek interests and more specifically to protect the maritime lines of the commercial vessels. Greece implements an ambitious armament procurement program which includes

RAFALE and F-35 fighter jets, BELHARA frigates and other modern systems (MH-60R helicopters, SEAHAKE Mod 4 torpedoes, SPIKE NLOS guided missiles etc) seeking to maintain military balance with Turkey.



KOSOVO: January 8th, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the recognition of Kosovo passports does not in any way imply the recognition of Kosovo's independence. (www.kosovapress.com)

- January 11th, the US State Department has approved a potential sale of 246 "Javelin" anti-tank missiles to Kosovo for an estimated \$75 million, news agency reports said on Thursday. (www.kosovapress.com)

- January 11th, the Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti claimed that the establishment of the Community of Serb-majority Municipalities (CSM) is not a top priority regarding normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. According to Kurti, the two parts should first focus on the basic agreement and the implementation annex, and only then it can be discussed the CSM. (www.kosovapress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Security situation in Kosovo and especially in the North is considered as stable, although tension could escalate at any time. Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is not an easy task and it seems that both parts have not reached yet the necessary maturity to move forward with their mutual dialogue. Community of Serb-majorities Municipalities (CSM) is a commitment for Kosovo, despite its Prime

Minister, Albin Kurti's statements that CSM is not his top priority. Normalization of relations with Serbia and recognition of Kosovo as an independent state is critical for its future and this would not happen without compromise and cost. Kosovo should focus on institutional reforms especially in the fields of economy, rule of law, public administration, justice and democratic rule. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent "open sores" for Kosovo. Approval by the US of the sale of anti-tank missiles to Kosovo contributes in the transformation of KSF into a regular army, but it could trigger tension in the region.



MOLDOVA: January 10th,

the national referendum announced by the President, Maya Sandu which could take place simultaneously with the presidential election, must provide answers to the real questions that concern the citizens of Moldova today, said the leader of the Moldova Platform (Platformei Moldova) Irina Vlah, who considers that the first of these questions refers to the constitutional status of the permanent neutrality of Moldova. (www.ipn.md)

- January 10th, in a recent interview with the Kremlin-affiliated Tass news agency, the self-proclaimed President of Transnistria, Vadim Krasnoselski, addressed the possibility of Moldova joining the EU without the Transnistrian region. (www.moldovalive.md)

- January 11th, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Ambassador of Moldova to

Moscow, Lilian Darii, expressing a categorical protest against what the Russian authorities characterized as "unfriendly actions of the authorities in Chisinau." (www.moldovalive.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Moldovan President, Maya Sandu plan to hold a pro-European constitutional referendum has triggered political debate in Moldova. Opposition parties and political experts express their concerns for such an initiative and the expected goals. There are concerns that a potential amendment of the state's Constitution regarding its permanent neutrality could become a source of tension amidst a war in the neighboring Ukraine. It is assessed that Sandu seeks to change the permanent status of neutrality of Moldova in order to secure the pro-west orientation of the country. Its political opponents accuse her of trying to exploit the referendum for its personal political interests. There are fears that the referendum could trigger the Russian interference in state's internal affairs, while state top officials claim that the country has already faced an information warfare attack by Moscow. In Moldova there is a large number of pro-Russian supporters expressing their nostalgia for the Soviet era. Moscow is taking into advantage the activity of pro-Russian political forces in Moldova seeking to exercise influence in the country's internal affairs. The presidential elections scheduled for autumn 2024 will be crucial not only for the country's EU accession process, but for its pro-Russian or pro-west orientation itself. Transnistria could always become a factor of destabilization of Moldova. Moldovan territory is of vital strategic importance for Russia and NATO. It shares

borders with Ukraine and the NATO member, Romania.



MONTENEGRO: January 11th, the Government of Montenegro will strive to complete the negotiation process with the EU by the end of its mandate, said the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Filip Ivanovic. (www.vijesti.me)

- January 14th, Defense Minister Dragan Krapovic stated that the position of Montenegro is that the ship “Jadran” is a completely legal and legitimate property of Montenegro and it will not change. (www.vijesti.me)

- January 14th, the Chief negotiator of Montenegro with the EU, Predrag Zenovic, said that he believes that dialogue will be the solution to the current disagreements between Montenegro and Croatia. (www.vijesti.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Montenegrin Government has set as its main strategic goal the conclusion of the EU integration process of the country within its mandate namely in the next three and a half years. According to the ruling coalition’s top officials the Government enjoys cohesion and stability and is able to focus on its main task. Russian and Serbian influence is present in Montenegro affecting its political stability and its reliable presence within NATO. Long-running disputes (ownership of the ship “Jadran”, border dispute of Prevlaka peninsula) between Croatia and Montenegro emerged in the surface last week triggering tension in diplomatic level. The Croatian Defense Minister canceled his scheduled visit to Montenegro due to his counterpart

statements regarding the “Jadran” ship issue. The country faces strong challenges such as the need for concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability.



NORTH MACEDONIA: January 9th, the opposition coalition of ethnic Albanians parties European Alliance for Change has decided to boycott the Parliament’s works due to its failure to elect its candidate in the State Election Commission (SEC). (www.mia.mk)

- January 9th, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) leader, accused the Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti of interfering in the internal affairs of Albanians in North Macedonia. (www.mia.mk)

- January 11th, the Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani commenting the statement of Dutch Ambassador Dirk Jan Kop during a meeting with DUI leader Ali Ahmeti that North Macedonia’s commitment to EU membership is threatened by the steady decline of the rule of law in the country, said that the blockade of North Macedonia’s EU path is the main reason for the inability to reach European rule of law standards. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

North Macedonia’s political forces have started consultations on preparations for the coming presidential (April 24th, 2024 the first round and May 8th, 2024 the second round if needed) and parliamentary (May 8th, 2024) elections. According to the plan, on 22nd to 28th January, 2024 procedures for the resignation of the Prime

Minister and the Parliament Speaker and the establishment of a caretaker Government will take place, signaling the beginning of the pre-electoral period. It is expected a gradual polarization of political atmosphere; in this context, the coalition of ethnic Albanian parties “European Alliance for Change” has announced that it will boycott the Parliament due to its failure to elect its own representative in the State Election Committee. The country needs tangible reforms on public administration, rule of law, justice, political impunity and fight against corruption and organized crime. Especially it is recorded decline in the rule of law; a fact that was highlighted by the Netherlands regarding North Macedonia’s path to the EU.



ROMANIA: January 10th, the World Bank estimates Romania’s economy decelerated to a 1.8% growth in 2023 from 4.7% in 2022, a significant 0.8 percentage points (pp) revision from its past projection dating from last June – according to the January issue of the Global Economic Prospects. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 11th, the two airports that serve the Romanian capital city, namely “Henri Coandă” International Airport and “Băneasa Aurel Vlaicu” International Airport, are 100% prepared for operation on separate Schengen/non-Schengen flows, officials of the Bucharest National Airports Company (CNAB) announced in a press release. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 11th, Romania has joined the Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO), becoming the 15th member state of the Alliance’s naval command group, the Ministry of Defense announced.

STRIKFORNATO is a maritime-focused NATO Force Structure Command, which encompasses very high strike capabilities such as carrier battle groups, expeditionary groups, and strike groups consisting of cruisers, destroyers, and frigates. (www.romania-insider.com)



The Chief of the Romanian Naval Forces, Vice Admiral Mihai Panait during the ceremony of raising the national flag of Romania at the STRIKFORNATO’s headquarters
(Photo source: www.navy.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Romania has announced its readiness to implement its partial accession – in the air and maritime domains - in the Schengen zone starting from March 2024. The country should remain focus on reforms in public administration, rule of law, tax administration and sustainability of public finances. Romania is considered as one of the forward bastions of NATO in the eastern flank with upgraded role due to the war in Ukraine. NATO troops and weapons are stationing in Romania. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air and sea defense missile systems etc) is a top priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.



SERBIA: January 9th, the member of the German Bundestag Josip Juratovic told N1 that Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic's regime will suffer consequences over election irregularities, and announced concrete steps by Germany and the EU once OSCE submits its final report on the Serbian December 17th, 2023 elections. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 10th, the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said during his visit to the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Belgrade that he is disappointed by the British Foreign Secretary David Cameron's statement, who called Serbia "Russia's proxy." (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 13th, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic said that Kosovo is forming extremely strong forces and that the process is managed by America, contrary to international law and the UN resolution 1244, stressing that because of this, Serbia must drastically strengthen its armed forces. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The President, Aleksandar Vucic and his party, SNS continue to be accused of electoral fraud and irregularities in the December 17th, 2023 parliamentary elections, by the opposition and international organizations, and observers. It is assessed that when OSCE publishes its final report on the Serbian elections, internal and international pressure will be intensified towards the ruling coalition. Decision by the US administration to sell to Kosovo anti-tank missiles strongly condemned by Belgrade as a decision which raises tension in the region. It is assessed that such a decision would "legitimate" an

armament race by Serbia citing the military strengthen of Kosovo. Besides, the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic openly claimed that his country is surrounded by NATO member states implying that the Alliance poses a threat against his country. Belgrade maintains a close relationship with Moscow frustrating the western powers. The UK Foreign Minister, David Cameron did not hesitate to say in public that "Serbia is a proxy of Russia"; a statement that was rejected by Belgrade. Corruption, organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability, media freedom, and social reforms are the main internal challenges for the country.



SLOVENIA: January 11th, Slovenia will participate in proceedings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over Israel's alleged violations in the Palestinian territories that were initiated based on a 2022 resolution by the UN General Assembly, but cannot join yet South Africa's case against Israel at the same court, Foreign Minister Tanja Fajon said. (www.sta.si)

- January 12th, Slovenia's decision to pick German manufacturer Diehl Defence as a medium-range air defense system supplier became final, the Defense Ministry confirmed for the STA, announcing the company will deliver one IRIS-T surface-to-air missile system. The price, including all support elements and missiles is EUR 146.82 million. (www.sta.si)

- January 12th, the National Assembly appointed Mateja Calusic new Agriculture, Forestry and Food Minister to replace Irena Sinko, who was dismissed in mid-October. MPs agree that the new Minister faces many challenges, and farmers are open to cooperation and ready to get down to

business. Calusic has already been sworn in. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia suffers from social unrest. Several social and labor groups protest and strike demanding improvement of working conditions and salaries. Justice sector has slowed down its works due to a two weeks strike, while the healthcare sector is planning its own protests. The center-left Government of Robert Golob seeks to balance between social discontent and political initiatives to improve situation. However, it is assessed that the Government has failed to implement its ambitious project of reforms. A remarkable shift in Slovenia's Middle East foreign policy is recorded due to the country's decision to back the proceedings before the ICJ initiating by the resolution of the UN General Assembly, regarding Israel's humanitarian violations in Gaza. Slovenia is strengthening its military capabilities by the purchase of modern armaments.



TURKEY: January 11th, top defense officials of Turkiye, Romania and Bulgaria signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Istanbul, establishing the Mine Countermeasures Naval Group in the Black Sea (MCM Black Sea), which will oversee demining operations amid the Russia - Ukraine conflict endangering their territorial waters. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 12th, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the U.S. and British airstrikes on Yemen's Houthi rebels, saying the attack would turn Red Sea into a "bloodbath." According to Erdogan the strikes

constitute "disproportionate use of force." (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 12th, nine Turkish soldiers were killed in action, four others were injured in an attack by the PKK terrorist group in Operation "Claw-Lock" in northern Iraq, the Defense Ministry announced. Clashes broke out after the terrorists attempted to infiltrate the area. (www.dailysabah.com)


COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :


Main political forces in Turkiye have started their preparations for the coming local elections, scheduled for March 31st, 2024. Currently, opposition appears divided since CHP, IP, and YSP will run the elections with their own candidates. Taking this fact into consideration, AKP focuses on the electoral battles in Ankara and Istanbul, seeking to regain control of the two biggest Turkish cities. Economy remains as the main vulnerability of Tyrkiye. Extremely high inflation and weakness of Turkish Lira increase population's poverty and social instability. Turkiye maintains a leading role in condemning Israel's war in Gaza. Apart from that, Turkiye exercises an active foreign policy in Africa enjoying a privileged role in several countries such as Ethiopia, Libya, and Somalia. In short, Turkiye is behaving as a regional power, exercising a multilateral foreign policy. The main characteristics of this policy could be considered skillful adaptation and flexibility. PKK constitutes a serious threat against the Turkish national security long time ago and its elimination is of critical importance for Ankara.


The HERMES Team
www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu


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.*