



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

**SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

**AT A GLANCE**



**SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE**

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

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

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

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**ALBANIA:** December 19<sup>th</sup>, Thursday marked the establishment of the Special Anti-Corruption Unit, also known as SPAK, with the first eight members swearing in during the day before President Ilir Meta. It is expected that the High Prosecutorial Council will also decide on the future Head of this institution, which, together with the Special Court, will have as its object scrutinizing the work of senior officials, corruption and organized crime. The appointment of members of the Special Court were concluded yesterday by the High Judicial Council, with five members on the Appeals, and 13 interim judges in the first instance Courts. With the establishment of the Special Prosecutor's Office and the Court of Justice, the path to the creation of the National Bureau of Investigation, which will operate according to the American FBI model, is opening. Welcoming the establishment of the SPAK, the US Embassy in Tirana emphasized that *"as of today, Albania has a body of Prosecutors committed to identifying, investigating and bringing to justice past or current officials and crime bosses – individuals who have been previously considered as untouchable."* The Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) also welcomed the establishment of SPAK. ([www.tiranatimes.com](http://www.tiranatimes.com))

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, the Socialist majority approved on Wednesday its anti-libel draft law with 82 Parliament votes in favor. 13 MPs voted against, 5 abstained and 5 of them did not vote. Dozens of journalists, representatives of various media organizations, as well as representatives of civil society and political parties gathered in front of Parliament on the same day to protest the so-called *'anti-libel package.'* They wore black

scarves in their mouths and slogans like *"Don't touch our word"* and *"Rama, you can't shut our mouths."* In a joint statement, on behalf of some media organizations, the Government was requested to withdraw the two bills, stressing that *"there can be no administrative regulation regime for online media, but such regimes are acceptable but not mandatory only for audiovisual media"* and that *"an administrative institution such as the AMA (Audiovisual Media Authority) cannot substitute Courts for reviewing complaints against the content of a publication."* Journalists said the Government is setting up censorship institutions and is trying to crack down on free speech. But the Socialists claim that they are trying to regulate the online media market and avoid fake news. While the Socialist-majority was in Parliament discussing the anti-libel package, reporters were protesting outside in unison. The Head of the Union of Journalists Aleksander Cipa said that *"with the new laws, the Rama government is setting up a censorship agency, so journalists are very concerned."* For his part, Prime Minister Edi Rama, in a speech held in Parliament, rejected any claim that the legal changes are intended to affect freedom of speech. ([www.tiranatimes.com](http://www.tiranatimes.com))

- December 21<sup>st</sup>, high-level representatives of four Balkan countries, Albania, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Serbia met in Tirana to attend the third Western Balkans Regional Meeting to enhance economic co-operation between them. Prime Ministers of Albania Edi Rama and North Macedonia Zoran Zaev, and Presidents of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic and Serbia Aleksandar Vucic said they have discussed openly working together to implement previous agreements and any new economic benefits.

Rama stated after the meeting that the countries participating in the initiative are “trying to pool energy to speed up EU integration processes and standards through the freedom of movement of people, goods, capital and services.” He thanked the participants for the assistance their countries provided Albania after the November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 earthquake, and then emphasized that this initiative is comprehensive, open, unconditional and not imposed on anyone, given Kosovo’s continuous refusal to participate in these meetings. On Friday, the unofficial part of the “mini Schengen” began, where only Zaev and Vucic participated. Montenegro’s President also joined the three Balkan leaders, while Kosovo refused again to participate; an attitude that Prime Minister Edi Rama considered wrong, because, according to him, “Kosovo is choosing to isolate itself.” The Tirana meeting, the third after the one in Serbia’s Novi Sad and Ohrid in North Macedonia, initially saw the leaders visiting some of the quake-affected areas of Durres. On Friday, the meeting in one of the hotels of the capital was accompanied by protests by activists of the Self-Determination Movement in Albania, against the presence of the Serbian President, whom they described as “war criminal.” (www.tiranatimes.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Albania hosted the third session of the so-called “mini Schengen” with the participation of the Prime Minister of North Macedonia and the Presidents of Montenegro and Serbia. There are questions of this initiative and mainly about its objective. It is noticeable that Albania condemned Kosovo’s refusal to join the initiative with the Prime Minister Edi Rama speaking about “Kosovo’s isolation.” Warming of Albanian –*

*Serbian relations is coming in a rather difficult period for regional stability provoking reactions mainly by Albanian nationalists. The controversial law over setting rules and control on online media has been passed by the Parliament but is strongly criticized not only by the journalist unions, but also by the European Commission. There are concerns that the ruling PS tries to control and censor media. Political crisis in the country continues and it is assessed that the country moves rapidly towards early parliamentary elections since it is estimated that Rama will hardly remain in power. Reforms should continue more intensively if the state seeks to get an accession negotiation date with the EU. Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively. Establishment of anti-corruption agency (SPAC) is considered as an important step towards the fight against special crimes such as the forementioned above. Relation between Albania and Kosovo with a potential new Government under Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister is a good question. However, Albania continues to act as the “motherland” of all Albanians around Southeast Europe.*



## BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

December 17<sup>th</sup>, Denis Zvizdic, Chairman of the College of the House of Representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Parliament, said that a session of that House at which a new convocation of the Council of Ministers should be confirmed could be held on December 23<sup>rd</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. These dates were discussed at session of the Joint Collegium of both PSBiH Chambers on Tuesday

and there is unanimous agreement to hold the session on December 23<sup>rd</sup> if the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) complete the verifications for ministerial and deputy candidates. If the checks are not completed by that date, then the session will be held on December 30<sup>th</sup> for the BiH Council of Ministers to be appointed before the New Year. Zoran Tegeltija, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of BiH should forward the remaining names for Ministers and Deputies to the CEC and SIPA, but this has not yet been done. Ministers and Deputy Ministers in the state Government have been nominated by a total of nine political parties. The new convening of Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH's) Council of Ministers, headed by Tegeltija, is due to be appointed by the end of the year, and a day after the appointment to NATO headquarters, a Reform Program adopted by the BiH Presidency will be sent, Klix.ba news portal reports. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's adopted a budget in the amount of 4.954.392.401 BAM (2.5 billion euro) which will enter into force after the document is published in the Official Gazette. The House of Peoples of the Federal Parliament has adopted the budget for 2020 after it was adopted in the House of Representatives of Federal Parliament. Compared to 2019, the adopted budget is higher by 83% or 2.25 billion BAM, and the main reason for the increase is the integration of the Federal Institute for Pension and Disability Insurance (PIO Institute) into the Federal budget, which financial plan for 2020 amounts to about 2.4 billion BAM, according to Federal News Agency. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, opposition parties from Bosnia's Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) entity have made the 'Reform Program' which Bosnia is sending to NATO instead of the Annual National Program (ANP), available to journalists, Friday. Bosnia was initially supposed to send its Annual National Program (ANP) to the Alliance, which would be the next step toward NATO membership and would activate the country's Membership Action Plan (MAP). But Bosnian Serb leadership, most of all the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) and its leader Milorad Dodik, opposed any further steps toward Bosnia's NATO membership being made. The document states that it will be submitted to NATO HQ in Brussels "*without prejudice to the decision on NATO membership, the adoption of which will require additional decisions from the Bosnian Presidencies and Parliamentary Assembly.*" It further states that "*Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to an active, international, political, economic, military and security co-operation and will make additional efforts to pursue its strategic interests in joining and institutionalizing relations with relevant international structures. Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy is focused on maintaining and improving lasting peace, security and stable democratic and secular state development and contributing to international peace and stability.*" When it comes to the country's participation in peace-support operations, the three Presidency members agreed to Bosnia's active participation in "*peace support operations, [and the] present NATO-led 'Resolute Support' mission in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.*" As a NATO partner country, Bosnia and Herzegovina is interested in further developing its relations with NATO, "*including*

*the participation in joint military exercises and crisis response.”* The document also discusses Bosnia's military budget and its distribution, security issues, human rights, justice sector, anti-corruption, border security, EU relations, regional cooperation and other matters. NATO remains unpopular by Serbs in both Serbia and in Bosnia's Serb-majority semi-autonomous entity of RS since the Alliance launched airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs during the 1992-95 Bosnian war and against the Serbian military in 1999 during the conflict between Belgrade and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The issue was at the center of a deadlock which prevented the country from forming a Government for more than a year after the October 2018 election and produced a political crisis in the country. The crisis ended in November when Dodik, who is the Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency, agreed with his Bosniak and Croat counterparts to form the Government and send a different document, the Reform Program, to NATO. Bosnian Serb opposition parties then accused Dodik of betraying Serb interests, arguing that the Reform Program and the ANP are the same. Dodik, however, argued that the Reform Program does not predict Bosnia's membership in the Alliance. (www.hr.n1info.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Consultations for forming the new Government have almost concluded and on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 (or December 30<sup>th</sup>) it will be officially established. Allocation of Ministries has been agreed between the coalition partners and it is a technical matter if convocation of the Council of Ministers would be held on December 23<sup>rd</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The country is on the path of political*

*normality by getting a new Government after more than a year of the last parliamentary elections (October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018). State institutions will become functional again allowing the country to move forward with major reforms and economic growth. However, international community keeps sending warning messages regarding state's function underlying that Bosnia is too far from opening of accession negotiations with the EU due to lack of democratic rules, human rights, corruption and lack of functional free market. Political situation in the country remains alarming and at the moment Bosnia is considered as a potential source of instability in the region. It is not a secret that all entities question the Dayton Peace Agreement aiming to set their own political agenda. Cooperation with NATO remains a sensitive issue in the country threatening political stability. Republika Srpska insists on neutrality rejecting any possibility of joining the Alliance, while the other two entities, the Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims seek accession to NATO. It is assessed that the issue will become source of tension in the near future since there is also pressure from external stakeholders the country to proceed with its NATO membership. The issue will bring also tension within Republika Srpska's politics since it is estimated that there is somekind of “underground talks and compromise” between ruling SNSD and “western powers.” It should underlined that the “special weight” of geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the region will not allow Bosnia to stay out of the Alliance giving space to Russia for increased influence in the country. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a*

*permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to “penetrate” in Bosnian affairs through Republika Srpska maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. As it was forementioned EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.*



**BULGARIA:** December 16<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria and North Macedonia, as well as the other countries in the Western Balkans, should focus on the things that unite us and direct efforts towards building a better future for the citizens, Euro-Atlantic Security Center (EASC) Head Tsvetan Tsvetanov told a conference in Skopje. Tsvetanov was participating in an international conference “*Opportunities for regional integration into the EU,*” organized by the Union of “*European Federalists of Macedonia*” on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Skopje. Speaking on the topic of the role of the NGO sector as generator of innovative political solutions, he said that it is critical that NGOs work for the preservation of Euro-Atlantic values that are the foundation for rights, freedoms, and prosperity. “*Rational political elements should also join those efforts with a positive tone and a constructive approach to the issues that could cause disputes in the region,*” he said. The speakers’ list at the conference includes the President of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Dimitrov, the Vice President of the Union of European Federalists

Christopher Glueck, members of the Parliament of North Macedonia and the European Parliament, representatives of the diplomatic corps, media, and NGO sector. An EASC statement said that main messages of the event were centered on the idea of regional integration initiatives as assisting integration into the EU and not as an alternative to it. There was consensus at the conference that there was no alternative to the Euro-Atlantic path of North Macedonia, the statement said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- December 18<sup>th</sup>, Ivan Geshev was sworn in as Bulgaria’s Prosecutor-General on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in a ceremony brought forward by three weeks after his predecessor Sotir Tsatsarov stepped down early in order to take the job as the new Head of the Commission for Combating Corruption and Confiscation of Illegally Acquired Property, the Government’s anti-corruption body. Geshev, who was lead Prosecutor in several high-profile cases, most notably the trial on the collapse of Corporate Commercial Bank (CCB), has risen quickly through the ranks in recent years, reaching the position of Deputy Prosecutor-General. That, coupled with the fact that he was the only nominee for the job and received very public support from Prosecutor offices throughout the country, has prompted critics to level accusations that he was hand-picked as the next Prosecutor-General by Tsatsarov and the current majority in the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), which has a track record of voting for Tsatsarov’s suggestions. The lack of other nominees for the job prompted President Roumen Radev to decline signing the appointment decree at the first time of asking, sending the pick back to the SJC, which promptly voted to confirm its earlier decision. As required by law, Radev made the



appointment after the re-vote, but said that he would start a “*wide public debate*” on the Prosecutor’s office functions, structure and place in the judicial system. In their first statements after the ceremony, both Geshev and his predecessor spoke against any attempts to remove the Prosecutor’s office from the judiciary branch, arguing that a transfer to the executive branch would make it more susceptible to political influence. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- December 19<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria’s Energy Minister Temenouzhka Petkova said that five companies have been shortlisted in the tender to pick a strategic investor for the restart of the Belene Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). Three companies are in the running as potential strategic investors; Russia’s nuclear corporation ROSATOM, China National Nuclear Corporation and Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power, Petkova said during a hearing held by Bulgarian Parliament’s Energy Committee. Talks with France’s Framatome and General Electric will focus on their stated interest to supply equipment and participate in securing the funding for the project, she said. Petkova said that the shortlisted companies will be invited, by end-January 2020, to submit their binding offers. She said that it was possible for the five companies to hold talks and submit joint offers. Bulgaria froze the Belene project in May 2012 over concerns about ballooning costs, with an HSBC report estimating total spending as likely to exceed 10 billion euro, after failing to sign a final contract with ROSATOM subsidiary ATOMSTROYEXPORT amid disputes over cost-escalation clauses. State-owned electric utility NEK was left holding a number of assets, including the site, where more than one billion euro was spent to prepare for construction, and

equipment delivered by ATOMSTROYEXPORT, picked to build the two 1000MW reactors, which Bulgaria had to take at a cost of more than 600 million euro after losing an arbitration suit in 2016. These assets will be spun off into a separate company that the strategic investors will buy into. In exchange for the assets, NEK plans to keep a minority stake large enough to block shareholder decisions on “*certain issues*,” according to the ministry’s current plans. Those plans are also predicated on Bulgaria’s key condition for restarting the project, namely that it must be carried out on a “*market principle*,” that is to say without any state investment guarantees or long-term electricity purchase contracts. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Boyko Borissov Government is stable. There is an ongoing struggle between the Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov and the President Rumen Radev due to their opposing political affiliation. 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:** December 18<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic’s Government has rejected an opposition motion for a vote of no-

confidence against Education Minister Blazanka Divjak, as had been expected. Under the rules governing Parliament, the Government had to respond to the motion and they have chosen to reject it, despite the fact that the Prime Minister had scuffled with Divjak over her support of teachers' unions. *"We absolutely reject all allegations in the motion, including the claims about the protests by education sector employees and the allegations about the educational reform,"* said Plenkovic at the start Wednesday's cabinet meeting. The Government's response also said it was committed to improving the status of teachers and other employees in the education sector. Divjak said opposition's motion was not propped up by good arguments. *"I think it is quite clear from this poorly argued motion, which is mired in politics, power relations, and calculations about how which politicians will respond, that it does not address the heart of the matter and that is the work that has been done,"* she said. Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) leader Davor Bernardic said *"I just want to see how the hypocrites in the HDZ will defend Minister Divjak during the debate. These same people were attacking her and saying she should go just yesterday,"* he said. The motion, initiated by the SDP, was signed by 31 opposition MPs. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- December 18<sup>th</sup>, deals for the financing of projects fostering the return of Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina to their pre-war homes were handed out in the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing on Wednesday. Croatia has secured 3.8 million Kuna (half million euro) for 35 projects this year. To date Croatia has set aside 62 million Kuna (8 million euro) for

Government's plan to create sustainable conditions for the return of Croats to Bosnia and Herzegovina. State Secretary at the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing, Nikola Mazar said *"What makes me especially happy, is that the funds are earmarked for family farms, meaning the development of rural settings, and scholarships for students and aid for people with special needs and assistance for our youth."* *"This will boost the quality of life for those people that live in those areas. That is the story in terms of our relations with neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Croats are one of the three constituent peoples,"* concluded Zvonko Milas, the State Secretary at the Central State Office for Croats Living Abroad. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- December 19<sup>th</sup>, Gordan Bakota, Croatia's outgoing Ambassador to Serbia, said on Thursday his country would not block the neighbor's European efforts because of open issues that could be solved in a dialogue within the European context, the Belgrade Novi Magazine reported. He added he was convinced Croatia's EU Chairmanship from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, would intensify the Western Balkans' European path. *"The European context and values, as well as the transformation of society, can help to overcome the consequences of the events from 20-30 years ago (the wars in former Yugoslavia). If we look at the EU, as a union of values and a peace project, as a goal regardless open issues, it will be easier to solve difficult questions from the '90s,"* Bakota told Novi Magazine in an interview. Referring to the Serbo-Croatian relationship, Bakota said there was *"some progress"* in the area of the protection of minorities or the return of the cultural treasure, but that was not enough. *"We are not satisfied with meetings about missing people, which we*

*consider a humanitarian, not political issue. Regardless of the ethnicity or citizenship, it is both Croatia's and Serbia's obligation to solve the problem of missing people jointly,” he added. Bakota said the relations between Zagreb and Belgrade, as among other neighboring countries, especially in South-East Europe, “are in an intensive and dynamic period in which the efforts are made to resolve open issues,” adding Croatia fully supported the South-European countries on their EU road. (www.hr.n1info.com)*

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

*The country enjoys political stability, while it is moving ahead for the presidential elections, scheduled on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 (first round) and January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (second round if necessary). Incumbent President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic backed by the ruling HDZ is the favorite but former Prime Minister, Zoran Milanovic backed by SDP and independent Miroslav Skoro are not unlikely to enjoy the victory. It is almost certain that a second round will be held, while it is very interesting to watch who will enter the second round eventually. Croatia, the youngest member of the EU, is preparing to take over the EU Presidency from January 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The country received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses*

*confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. However, Croatia insists on claiming that the arbitration rule is not valid and the dispute should be resolved through bilateral negotiations; a position which is unacceptable for Slovenia. 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. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.*



**CYPRUS:** December 16<sup>th</sup>, the first Turkish drone aimed at aiding the search for hydrocarbons by Ankara in the Eastern Mediterranean landed at Lefkonkio (Gecitkale) airport in the north around 10am local time on Monday after a five-hour flight from Turkey's western province of Mugla. The move by the Turkish Cypriot authorities to designate Lefkoniko as a base for the drones has been widely condemned on the Greek Cypriot side. The “*Turkish Republic of North Cyprus [occupied part of Cyprus by Turkish forces] cabinet*” made the decision to allocate the use of the airport last Friday for the deployment of both unarmed and armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), stepping up its moves to hinder exploration and exploitation plans by the Cyprus Government. According to Reuters, on Monday, the Head of Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate Ismail

Demir said the first unarmed Turkish drone took off from an airport in Mugla and landed at Lefkoniko. It was later reported that the drone, Bayraktar TB2, had begun its first flight in the eastern Mediterranean. Ankara has already sent two drillships to Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone, the YAVUZ and the FATIH, a move that has been condemned by the international community, including the EU, most recently after Turkey and Libya's internationally recognized Government signed an agreement on maritime boundaries, angering not only Nicosia but also Athens, which accused Turkey of violating international law. Media reports in the north on Monday cite Turkish Cypriot "Prime Minister" Ersin Tatar saying "*Decisive steps are being taken with the Republic of Turkey. Mobility has been observed after Turkey's agreement with Libya. There was a demand from the Republic of Turkey. For security reasons, we have convened the Council of Ministers on the allocation of Gecitkale airport for the use of armed and unarmed aerial vehicles.*" This was decided in view of both Turkey's and "TRNC's" security in the Eastern Mediterranean, he said. "*Allocation was necessary because there is an urgent need for it,*" Tatar added. Asked about the existing lease agreement for Lefkoniko with businessman Asil Nadir, Tatar argued that the deal contained a "*force majeure.*" "*It is possible to take such a step by informing the other party [the businessman] in case of urgent need due to military and security issues. According to the opinion of the attorney general's office, it is possible, and the holder of the lease agreement did not object to it either,*" he said. Tatar said the UAVs would play a crucial role in providing support and reconnaissance for Turkish vessels in the region. "*It will be easier for the UAVs to operate from Gecitkale airport due to*

*the close distance to the areas where the vessels are operating,*" he added. Turkish Cypriot "Foreign Minister" Kudret Ozersay was quoted in media as saying "*We could not have allowed the balance to turn to our disadvantage. We have to be aware of the bigger picture. This is not an ordinary island.*" He said it was a necessary step for the safest progress of the drilling and seismic works in the area. On the Greek Cypriot side, political parties condemned what they called the latest Turkish provocations. The municipality-in-exile of Lefkoniko also issued a statement on Monday expressing its "*disgust for the latest provocative action of the occupying force.*" "*We call on the European Union to act appropriately to put an end to this and to other unlawful acts,*" it added. The Government condemned the drone move on Saturday calling it "*yet another destabilizing action.*" (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- December 16<sup>th</sup>, Nicosia on Monday sought to downplay an incident occurring a month ago when a Turkish warship instructed an Israeli research vessel to leave an area inside Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Speaking on the public broadcaster, Defense Minister Savvas Angelides confirmed an incident did take place on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. He did not specify where precisely, only that it occurred within the Republic's economic waters. The Minister said that an Israeli research vessel, commissioned by Ben Gurion University, was carrying out research with prior permission from Cyprus' Geological Survey Department. The Israeli vessel was hailed by radio by a Turkish ship, which instructed it to abandon the area. The captain of the former complied and headed on to another location, where the vessel continued doing research. Cypriot authorities were informed. Angelides said

similar incidents occur throughout the world and that calling this particular one a ‘*standoff*’ or ‘*harassment*’ would be an exaggeration. The Minister attributed media coverage inflating the significance of the episode to possible ‘*hybrid warfare*’ being waged by certain parties. Unnamed Cypriot sources provided the Cyprus News Agency with a little more detail. They confirmed the Israeli ship was the BAT GALIM, belonging to the Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research Institute, and it was conducting an oceanographic survey to the west or southwest of the island. Its crew included a Cypriot geologist. A Turkish warship, said the same sources, warned the Israeli vessel that some of the areas in which it was conducting research were part of Turkey’s economic waters, and that it had to shift position. The areas in question are understood to have been inside Cyprus’ offshore blocks 4 and 5, the northern sections of which Turkey claims as falling within its “*continental shelf*.” The Israeli vessel contacted the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC), relaying what had happened. In turn the JRCC advised the vessel it was operating legally, having secured permission from the authorities of Cyprus. However the captain of the Israeli ship made a decision to reposition regardless, plotting a southward course where surveys continued. Having completed its work, the vessel finally departed Cyprus’ EEZ in late November. According to the sources, the survey had nothing to do with Cyprus’ energy exploration program and as such Cypriot authorities need not have taken further action. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- December 21<sup>st</sup>, the US President Donald Trump signed bills including the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, which

includes provisions for lifting an arms embargo on Cyprus. The bill includes provisions lifting the arms embargo, while prohibiting the transfer of F-35 fighter jets to Turkey due to the purchase of the Russian S-400 missiles. The White House raised, however, a series of objections in relation to various provisions of the spending act, some of which relate to the East Med Act, military aid to Greece, International Military Education and Training assistance to Greece and Cyprus, the participation of the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and possibly in the trilateral cooperation schemes. Similar objections were raised in relation to other countries, mostly Ukraine. Division 208 states that “*not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Energy, shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a strategy on enhanced security and energy cooperation with countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including Israel, the Republic of Cyprus, and Greece.*” A source from Congress said that the President’s objections do not concern the substance, but have to do with the right of the legislative power to impose on him certain issues which he considers to fall within his exclusive jurisdiction. The same source said that two years ago funds were allocated for International Military Education and Training assistance for Greece through the same legislation without any problems. Under the act, the US President will have discretion over the arms embargo on Cyprus which has been in place since 1987. The act allows for the conditional lifting of the embargo on Cyprus by requesting that the US President certify at least once a year that the island meets certain conditions. Previous US policy spelled out a denial for exports, re-exports,

and transfers of defense articles listed on the US Munitions List. Whereas the embargo shall remain in place, the act gives the US President the leeway to make an exception by certifying that Cyprus is satisfying Washington's criteria on money laundering regulations as well as thwarting Russian influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Unless the US President cites an exception on national security grounds, the act calls on Congress to confirm with the White House that the Cypriot Government continues to cooperate with the US in implementing anti-money laundering reforms and financial regulatory oversight. The bill also requires that the island continue to take steps to deny Russian military vessels access to ports for refueling and servicing. In late June, President Nicos Anastasiades expressed surprise at a last-minute amendment to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee bill requiring Cyprus to deny docking facilities to the Russian navy. At the time Anastasiades said he was "saddened" by the amendment which "affects the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus to a large extent." (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Cyprus remains calm in Turkish repeated provocations questioning its sovereignty. It uses diplomatic means in order to address Turkish activity, while it tries to establish defense relations with other countries aiming to balance its military deficit. Situation becomes more complicated and tense due to several facts; the upgraded Turkish military presence in the island by modern UVs (armed and unarmed), the lift of arms embargo by the US administration and the forward of the EASTMED pipeline between*

*Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel and Italy with the full support of USA. The agreement on EASTMED pipeline may increase tension rapidly taking into consideration the latest MoU between Turkey and Libya. A lot of actors, a lot of interests and a lot of power in a small area. Turkey continues its invasion in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with YAVUZ drillship challenging the state's sovereignty. Lack of military power and more specifically aeronautical power is critical for Turkish uncontrolled action within Cypriot EEZ. Turkey has consolidated its presence in the Cypriot waters (and this would be another "asset" during the negotiation process). 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. The USA lifted the arms embargo of Cyprus which is a considerable action in a difficult period of the island. However, criteria for implementing such a decision are rather tricky; Cyprus should forbid Russian Navy vessels to have access in its ports for refueling and servicing. A condition which may create reactions from Russian administration affecting their bilateral relations.*



**GREECE:** December 19<sup>th</sup>, Greek lawmakers approved on Wednesday the country's 2020 budget, which projects stronger growth driven by higher investment, improving domestic demand and tax cuts as the country recovers from

a decade-long debt crisis. A majority of 158 lawmakers in the 300-seat Parliament approved the budget that includes total tax cuts of 1.2 billion euro for corporations and individuals. The budget forecasts the economy will grow by 2.8% next year from a projected 2.0% this year and generate a primary surplus, which excludes debt servicing costs, of 3.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told lawmakers that the budget, “*sets a new national goal. Growth for all.*” Greece emerged from international bailouts in August 2018. But it still needs to meet fiscal targets, including a primary budget surplus of 3.5% of GDP up to 2022, which many consider unrealistic. Finance Minister Christos Staikouras told Reuters on Thursday the economy’s strong performance would help convince official lenders that Greece’s primary budget surplus targets can be reduced. Mitsotakis announced on Wednesday an additional 8% cut in real estate tax for 2020. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the East Med pipeline will proceed regardless of Turkey's objections, Greece's Energy and Environment Minister Kostis Hatzidakis said Saturday in statements to SKAI TV. “*We are determined to proceed on the basis of international law,*” he said. At the same time, Ministry sources have neither confirmed nor rejected reports that Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Italy will sign a deal early next year to promote the gas pipeline. Sources did confirm that the aforementioned countries are committed to the implementation of the project and referred to Hatzidakis' meeting with his Israeli counterpart Yuval Steinitz in Madrid, on the sidelines of UN meeting on the climate, during which both sides reiterated their support of East Med as well as for

the electric interconnection from Crete to Israel via Cyprus. At the same meeting, Hatzidakis had thanked Israel for its support over the recently signed memorandum of understanding between Turkey and the Government of Tripoli. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias is visiting Libya, where he is expected to meet with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, leader of the Libyan National Army fighting the UN-recognized Libyan Government, Arab media report. Dendias left earlier Sunday from the Elefsina military airport, headed to Benghazi. In divided Libya, Benghazi is the seat of the Libyan House of Representatives, to which Haftar is loyal. The Tripoli-based Government has signed a “*maritime borders*” deal with Turkey to which every other country in the eastern Mediterranean objects. Dendias has already visited Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey has promised military aid to the Tripoli Government, while there are reports that Russian mercenaries are fighting alongside Halifa’s army. The US Department of State yesterday expressed its concern over the escalation of battles in Libya and the increased Russian presence, adding that the US still recognizes the Tripoli-based “*Government of National Accord*” headed by Fayeze al-Sarraj. Greece has expelled the Libyan Ambassador to Athens in the wake of the al-Sarraj Government’s deal with Turkey. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Greece enjoys political stability. The 2020 budget adopted by the Parliament encourages investments and growth, while it cuts taxes relieving the burdened middle class. At the*



moment, migration is the main security problem of Greece. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. The Government announced strict measures aiming to control the problem but also seeks to the EU solidarity to address the problem. Ministry of Citizens Protection and Police implements their operational planning for restoring order in Athens by evacuating occupied buildings by anarchists. There were violent incidents last week between Police forces and anarchists but finally Police fulfilled its task. Situation in Eastern Mediterranean is evolving rapidly characterized by increased tension and uncertainty. There is a large number of internal and external actors involved in the ongoing situation and could easily be transformed into a crisis or armed conflict. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias toured the Middle East (Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia) in a diplomatic effort to inform his counterparts for the Turkish – Libyan Memorandum of Understanding and especially delimitation of maritime boundaries between the two countries. Apart from that Dendias visited surprisingly Libya aiming to meet General Haftar, leader of the Libyan National Army fighting the UN-recognized Libyan Government. It is definitely an impressive move by the Greek diplomacy which actually proves that situation is more complicated than it is considered so far. It is assessed that soon Greece will be forced to address Turkish provocation within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) South of Crete. Turkey declares readiness to start drills in the region and if drillships will appear then a crisis will be emerged including the threat of armed violence. Greek Government has sent a strong and clear message that if Turkey violates Greece's sovereign rights by

seismographic or drill ships it will use violence (according to the Government's Spokesman "we will sink it [the ship]) to stop them. Greenlight by the US administration for the EAST MED pipeline may also become a source of conflict since Turkey declares that the project could proceed only by its permission. Deployment of military forces or relocation of land, naval and air units (by all involved stakeholders) could be signs of escalation of situation and should be followed carefully. It should not be excluded a "hot" incident in the Aegean Sea or within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) since Turkish political and military leadership has the advantage of surprise. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. Turkey has targeted the wider area of Kastelorizo (and Northeast Aegean Sea) issuing several NAVTEXs for naval exercises with live fires. Moreover, Turkish fighter jets massively violate Greek airspace, while Turkish drones fly over Greek islands or islets. Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Currently, Greece focuses on naval units, upgrade of fighter jets, and UAVs. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



**KOSOVO:** December 16<sup>th</sup>, Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) Movement leader Albin Kurti said on Monday that he would meet officials of the Serb List (Srpska Lista) to discuss



the constitutional obligation of handing them one of the Ministries in his future cabinet. Kurti said that he would meet with the party that he said was Belgrade's long arm in Kosovo because there are no other Serb MPs. *"We were hoping that some other Serbs would have won a seat in Parliament up to the final election results. My problem with the Serb List is not that it is Serb,"* he said. The Serb List won all 10 Parliament seats reserved for the Kosovo Serb community at the recent elections. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, a meeting of Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) leader Albin Kurti with Isa Mustafa of Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) failed to produce a breakthrough in forming new Government. Gazeta Express has learned from its sources within the LDK that during Friday's meeting Mustafa offered Kurti six out of ten ministerial posts in exchange of LDK getting the President's position. *"Yes, we have made the offer to give the Vetevendosje an additional Ministry after the President is elected in 2021,"* a source told Gazeta Express. Parties have also agreed to continue communication in coming days. Kurti - Mustafa meeting came a day after the visit of German members of Bundestag, and calls of the EU Office in Kosovo, British and US Embassy who urged them to form the Government as soon as possible. The two parties which won October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 elections have agreed to have an equal share of ministerial posts, with two additional Ministries headed by minorities whereas the Vetevendosje will get the Prime Minister's position and LDK the Parliament's Speaker position. However, LDK have asked also the President's post after current mandate of incumbent Hashim Thaci expires in 2021. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci has refused to participate in the third meeting of the so-called *"mini Schengen initiative"* led by leaders of Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia Aleksander Vucic, Edi Rama and Zoran Zaev respectively which will take place in Albania's Durrës on Friday and Saturday. Thaci wrote on social media on Thursday that he had to refuse Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama's invitation for the same reasons he had done so twice before. The *"mini Schengen initiative"* was launched in October, following Albania and North Macedonia's failure to start EU accession talks. Kosovo politicians have questioned the benefits of such an initiative under current circumstances. The initiative also created frictions between the Albanian Government and leaders in Kosovo, who claimed Rama did not consult with Kosovo in advance. In their second meeting in November, Rama, Vucic and Zaev signed a nine-point joint statement in Ohrid, North Macedonia, which explained that achieving the objectives of this initiative – free flow of goods, people, services and capital – will be a step toward the EU integration of the region. Thaci stated on Wednesday that Kosovo could not participate in a regional initiative started by Serbia, whilst the latter is actively engaged in undermining his country's statehood, which it is still to recognize. *"Serbia has committed genocide against the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo and today not only it denies the crimes committed, but continues to deny the existence of our state,"* he said. Thaci added that such regional initiatives are *"meaningless"* as long as Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina refuse to recognize Kosovo's independence. *"There cannot be progress in regional cooperation as long as there will not be mutual recognition between these countries,"*

Thaci argued. Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina were invited since the second “mini Schengen” meeting in Ohrid, North Macedonia and, whereas official Podgorica and Sarajevo initially said they would think it through, Kosovo downright refused. Thaci wrote last time that he is refusing Kosovo’s participation in the “mini Schengen” for several reasons. “First, Kosovo was deliberately bypassed by Serbia at the First Summit of this new regional initiative. Second, Kosovo’s only vision remains EU and NATO membership. Therefore, we do not want in any circumstances to replace our Euro-Atlantic perspective with any regional initiative. And thirdly, this regional initiative is meaningless as long as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina do not recognize Kosovo’s independence,” Thaci wrote. He wrote on social media that Kosovo is committed to good neighboring relations and removing obstacles from the free movement of goods and people. Head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) Isa Mustafa, one of the largest political forces in Kosovo, also said the ‘mini Schengen’ looks like a Yugoslavia in the making. “We, who have lived through Yugoslavia, do not want to experience it again. We also do not want those who have not lived through it to experience it,” Mustafa said. LDK Deputies who also spoke about the initiative argued that Rama is undertaking this initiative to avert attention from the internal crisis happening in Tirana and within his own circle. (www.tiranatimes.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**      :

*Vetëvendosje and LDK have not reach an agreement yet to form the new Government; so consultations will continue next week. It seems*

*that the two leaders have fully agreed in details regarding the Government formation but the point of disagreement is focused on the position of the Kosovo President claimed by the LDK leader. Although Vetëvendosje leader and potential Prime Minister, Albin Kurti sent the message that if an agreement is not reached with LDK he will ask for new elections, it is assessed that a successful agreement will be reached eventually. Although, Kurti keeps sending worried messages for future dialogue with Serbia, he stated last week that he will meet MPs from Serbian List regarding ministerial posts. It is a noticeable change in Kurti’s rhetoric welcoming his turn in realistic politics. It seems that Kurti’s strategic choice is Kosovo authorities to fully control north. Such opinion is dangerous since the balance of co-existence between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is very sensitive. Possible deployment of security forces and the newly established Kosovo Army in the north may become a reason for turbulence and an armed conflict. Although international community namely the US and EU push both sides (Kosovo and Serbia) for reaching a mutual accepted agreement, it is assessed that negotiations restart and an agreement is too far. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard.*



**MOLDOVA:** December 17<sup>th</sup>, the Chief negotiator of the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic and Minister of Foreign Affairs Vitaly Ignatiev expressed regret that the meeting with his Moldovan colleague Alexandru Flenchea, held in the Chisinau Office of the OSCE Mission to Moldova on Monday, ended without a result because the sides failed to sign the final Protocol of the 5+2 format meeting held in Bratislava yet last October. According to the Transnistrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website, Ignatiev explained that *“Transnistria agreed to the formulation proposed by the OSCE, and during the Monday's meeting with Flenchea the parties were trying to work out variants that would reflect the objective reality that has taken shape in the sides' dialogue. We stand ready to sign a document stipulating concretely which problems we discussed and on which questions we want to see our movement forward. Unfortunately, we have no results, so far, and we will be continuing this work till the end of the year,”* Ignatiev said. During the Monday's meeting, he proposed to the new Chisinau Political Representative to sign three draft accords at the 1+1 level on admission of trailers to registration letting them to take part in the international road traffic; on removing technical barriers to trade; and on safety guarantees for officials' travels. *“However, the Moldovan side refrained from signing under artificial pretexts, thus continuing its negative practice of ruining the existing negotiation mechanisms, which was launched by Moldova's previous Political Representative,”* reported the Transnistrian Foreign Ministry. The Transnistrian side also inquired up-to-date information about the realization by Chisinau of the agreement reached

in the telecommunication field, including the protocol decision and the road map, as well as concerning the closing down of criminal litigations against the sides' officials and an exchange of the list of people concerned. The Tiraspol delegation raised also the question about opening of Transnistrian economic operators' accounts in Moldovan banks. A separate question discussed by the sides was the importation of goods to Transnistria, particularly of medicines, in the light of the joint border/customs control of the Moldova - Ukraine border. ([www.infotag.md](http://www.infotag.md))

- December 18<sup>th</sup>, Chairman of the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitare și Adevăr - PPDA) Andrei Nastase made it clear in an interview to the Unimedia news portal that the ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitare și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] political bloc has ceased its existence after the local elections. *“The ACUM bloc was created by the PPDA and the PAS for joint participation in parliamentary elections. After that, the bloc's functioning was extended till local elections. It has been 4 years since we agreed with the PAS on joint actions while then – on bloc creation. Now, this political cycle has been completed,”* Nastase said. He stressed that the PPDA party was standing for creation of a single faction both in the Parliament and in the Chisinau Municipal Council (CMC). *“Within the election campaign we promised that the bloc will preserve unity and we will have a joint faction. However, colleagues from PAS decided differently. The same happened in case of CMC. There are two factions. We took note of it and are moving forward. Our colleagues in the Parliament and the CMC communicate with*

*each other, but do not act together, as a team. This happened not because of the PPDA. You cannot force someone to like you,”* Nastase said. According to him, his party has not decided yet about the participation in presidential elections. However, the PPDA leader made it clear he may run for President and does not regard it an obligation to support Maia Sandu as it was in 2016. *“Each time there was such a need, we made compromises, we made concessions at our own expense, never pretended for posts, demonstrating political altruism. Thus, Andrei Nastase renounced participation in 2016 presidential elections, never insisted on any posts in June 2019, the PPDA had only 8 MPs of 26 mandates in the Parliament...,”* Nastase said, making it clear that the period of concessions from the side of the PPDA has ended. Answering to the question about relations with Sandu, he said that they do not consult at decision making. The same happened in case of the decision on Sandu Government’s taking of responsibility, which led to Cabinet dismissal. Nastase said that back then the PPDA had another solution. *“Now, my relations with Sandu are relations between two party leaders. Each with his (her) own party,”* Nastase said. (www.infotag.md)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, Moldovan Parliament Speaker Zinaida Greceanii received Gianni Buquicchio, President of the European Commission for Democracy through Law, better known as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, who has arrived in Chisinau on her invitation. Greceanii stated to the high guest that the Moldovan leadership shall implement the justice reform with a due account for the Venice Commission's opinion and recommendations. In her words, her invitation for the Commission

Head to come is a part of the Moldovan leadership's efforts to reform the national judiciary system, for Chisinau regards as extremely important the Venice Commission's experience and the assistance it renders to Moldova in reform implementation. *“The justice reform shall be carried out, and our joint work will necessarily bring success. We have created a coalition with the people of the Republic of Moldova, and we want to restore the people's trust in Moldovan state institutions and in the judiciary. Unfortunately, we have lost much time, and due to the talking and actions by certain politicians, our state institutions were discredited in the public's eyes. Therefore, the reform concerned must make the judiciary fully functional and efficient and bring it back onto the Moldovan people's service,”* Greceanii said. The Parliament Speaker pointed out that the Moldovan law enforcement agencies are working to return the billion US dollars stolen from Moldovan banks, and to punish the culprits, *“but all this has to be done without populism or politicians' pressure on judiciary.”* Buquicchio reaffirmed his and the Venice Commission's openness to cooperation. On Thursday, he held meetings with the members of the parliamentary Standing Committee for Legal Issues, Appointments and Immunity, with the Ministry of Justice leadership, and with the representatives of Moldovan parliamentary factions. (www.infotag.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

*Leader of PPDA (a constituent of the ACUM block), Andrei Nastase revealed that the political cooperation with Maia Sandu's PAS is in a difficult period. He expressed his view that collapse of Sandu's Government should have*

*been prevented emphasizing that his party worked on that direction proposing several solutions but in vain. Nastase has complains from Sandu's political stance not only for the ruling period, but also for her support in the local elections. Lost of power brought in the surface PPDA and PAS cooperation problems. Newly formed Government, fully controlled by the President, Igor Dodon has become functional trying to control state's institutions and powers. The new Government strengthens relations with Russia changing Sandu's policy, although Dodon and Prime Minister, Ion Chicu claim that Moldova will continue its pro-EU orientation. After Chicu's recent visit in Russia it was Dodon's turn to visit Moscow on December 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Russia is closely following political developments in Moldova as it is considered a pivotal country for Russian national security. It could be assessed that Russia fully controls political developments in Moldova. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** December 20<sup>th</sup>, today's session of the Defense and Security Council was dedicated to the consideration of the Decision on the Engagement of the members of the Armed Forces of Montenegro in order to support administration authority in charge of protecting state borders from illegal migrations. The session, which was held in Cetinje, was presided over by the President Milo Djukanovic. *"After consideration, the Decision was adopted. In 2020, Armed Forces of Montenegro will deploy its members in seven international taskforce. The decision was adopted on the basis of the assumed NATO responsibilities, EU accession process,*

*regional initiatives, bilateral cooperation plans and needs of the Armed Forces for specific training sessions and exercises, with the aim of further developing military capacities in 2020,"* said representatives of President's Office. Members of the Council are familiar with the activities Montenegro undertook in countering hybrid threats in 2019 and the Information on the cyber activity performed by Montenegro in 2018 and 2019. The Council concluded that competent Ministries should continue to develop protection capacities to respond adequately to cyber and hybrid threats. (www.cdm.me)

- December 21<sup>st</sup>, *"a Balkan union cannot replace the EU. No thanks. Our goal is Montenegro as an EU member state. We do not need any substitute, but we back all regional initiatives that bring us closer to this goal,"* Montenegro's President Milo Djukanovic said during the Western Balkans Regional Meeting held in Tirana, Albania, while discussing the "mini Schengen." *"We want to be part of the EU and we have been working hard on that for years. We are not ready to change the course. Nothing is staggered us on the road to the EU,"* Djukanovic said. He emphasized that Montenegro has been fully committed to the regional cooperation and that the "mini-Schengen" initiative should align with other initiatives as well. This is an opportunity to boost trust and foster cooperation beneficial for all the countries, added Djukanovic. *"In this way we are strengthening capacities for the EU membership,"* he concluded. The Montenegrin President participated at the Western Balkans Regional Meeting upon the invitation of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. The meeting was organized as part of the trilateral initiative by Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, initiated by

Serbia's President Vucic and Prime Ministers Edi Rama and Zoran Zaev. ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

- December 21<sup>st</sup>, thousands of people braved the rain to join an open-air council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Niksic on Saturday, accusing the Montenegrin Government of trying to “steal” the Church's property through a new law on religious freedom. The Church Council comes after the Government in November adopted a draft law on religion that includes a register of all religious objects and sites that it claims were once owned by the independent kingdom of Montenegro before it became part of the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918. Under the new law, religious communities can only retain ownership of their property if they can produce clear evidence that it belongs to them. This point has triggered accusations from the Serbian Orthodox Church that the Government plans to dispute many of its holdings. The Government denies having any plan to strip any faith denomination of its property. On Saturday, at the council, held in front of the main Orthodox Church in Niksic, Bishop Joanikije read out a statement claiming the bill was a “*Law against Orthodoxy in Montenegro*” that will “*legalize discrimination*” of Church positions in the country. It also contained a list of four demands, which are for the unconditional legislative or contractual recognition “*of the existence of centuries long historical continuity*” of Church positions in Montenegro, a contract with the Government of Montenegro to regulate questions of common interest equally, a bill on restitution and legal resolution and respect of the autonomy of churches and religious communities in the country. Ahead of the council, President Milo Djukanovic accused the Serbian Orthodox

Church (SPC) the largest denomination in the country, of trying to “*maintain a religious monopoly*” and called for the “*renewal*” of the independent Montenegrin Orthodox Church that was closed down after 1918, when Montenegro was folded into Serbia. “*We have a lot more on this side, who has given everything in our lives so far to correct historical injustice and restore the Montenegrin state,*” Djukanovic said on Thursday. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has added his voice to the chorus of protesters, criticizing the law. “*It is not easy for me to talk about things that are happening in another country, but since it is in the interest of our people, I am not at all pleased because it concerns the vital interests of our people and the SPC,*” Vucic told journalists on Friday. According to the latest 2011 census, around 71% of Montenegro's population is members of the Orthodox Church. Ethnic Serbs make up about 29% of population. Muslims and Catholics are the next largest religious communities. ([www.balkaninsight.com](http://www.balkaninsight.com))

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**  :

*Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition's request. Opposition appears divided strengthening ruling DPS's power. A possible boycott by opposition of the next parliamentary elections will have negative impact in country's political stability, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. The EU expressed its concern for the long political crisis which does not fit with “a state that seeks to join the EU.” The Government promotes state's political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal*



*investment environment. However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Russian influence continues to be considered as a “threat” against state’s national security. Moreover, Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that Montenegro is the “natural extension of the country.” Dispute between the Government and the Serbian Orthodox Church due to a controversial law regarding religious freedom may become a source of turbulence if the law is come in effect. It is assessed that Montenegro Government approaches the Church as a “long hand” of Serbia and Russia in the country and so it tries to cut it out. 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). The Defense and Security Council decided last week to reinforce security forces in the borders with the Armed Forces aiming to address illegal migration properly.*



#### **NORTH MACEDONIA:**

December 18<sup>th</sup>, President Stevo Pendarovski in his first annual addressing at the Parliament stressed that it is extremely important to organize fair and democratic elections this spring. “The forthcoming parliamentary elections, simply cannot be under the level of the presidential elections according to two essential components; firstly, the democratic ambiance with free media

and employees in the administration freed from pressures and secondly, a political rhetoric and culture that respects the opponent and congratulates the victory at the end of the election day,” Pendarovski said. He stressed that his main goal was and still remains, to be independent and to be a President to all and not a party servant and apologetic to some transitional oligarch. He sees in front of him a lot of work since citizens’ division is still deep. (www.meta.mk)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, the name of the interim Prime Minister will be revealed by the end of next week, after meetings of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) Executive and Central Boards, said Prime Minister Zoran Zaev on Friday. “We postponed the decision until the end of next week for tactical reasons. You will understand us because here it is about an agreement between the Government and the opposition. We would not want to rush it with any measures. We have enough time to think. It is about the election of a Prime Minister for 100 days from January 3<sup>rd</sup> until the elections and the formation of the next Government. It is about two additional Deputy Ministers with veto power at the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, but also about filling the vacant position of Vice President for Economic Affairs. The economy is very important and we want the office to be staffed with the right person,” Zaev said. (www.republika.mk)

- December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Transportation Minister Goran Sugareski said that the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) will select its coalition partners after the April 2020 elections. Sugareski was responding when asked if SDSM is still

working on a pre-election coalition with its current partner DUI. *“We are now focused on having democratic elections on April 12<sup>th</sup>, and we are convinced that SDSM will win. Regarding the future coalition, it will be decided later,”* Sugareski said. SDSM was openly eager to form a pre-election coalition with Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI), which could be the first time two major parties join forces before the elections. This should help SDSM close the gap with Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), which it is trailing especially badly among ethnic Slav-Macedonian voters. (www.republika.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Early parliamentary elections are scheduled for April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, while an interim Government is expected to be formed on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. However, it is not still certain that ruling SDSM and Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev will follow the forementioned timetable, citing the need for a functional Parliament to ratify the NATO accession process. Opposition will not accept a postponement of the interim Government and elections without reactions. SDSM most probably will not cooperate with Albanian DUI during the early elections and it is considered as a result of the language law which have not implemented yet by the ruling SDSM. Undoubtedly, North Macedonia has entered in political uncertainty and instability. 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. North Macedonia’s politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals undermining not only country’s political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as “Extortion”, “Empire”, “Racket”, “Titanic”, “Monster” are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state’s function. It should be noted that Justice moves slowly towards full investigation of these scandals. VMRO-DPMNE declares that if it will be the winner of the parliamentary elections it will investigate political aspects of the forementioned scandals.*



**ROMANIA:** December 18<sup>th</sup>, the Government is taking responsibility in Parliament on the 2020 draft budget, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban announced in the Government sitting today. *“We decided to take the responsibility for three draft laws; the State Budget Law, the Social Securities Law and the Law revising the GEO 114, which caused devastating effects on the Romanian economy. Taking responsibility in parliament is a responsible and necessary decision to meet the target of having a state budget by December 31<sup>st</sup>, a budget based on the economic realities and capable to provide every Romanian, every company or local authority the possibility to know what to expect next year,”* Orban said. The Prime Minister argued that a normal debate in Parliament on the state budget law would mean a delay in adopting the budget. *“It would be difficult to adopt the state budget and*



*the social security budget by the end of this year under the regular debate,”* he added. President Klaus Iohannis had stated yesterday that he would endorse the Government’s taking responsibility over the budget in Parliament. Iohannis said the 2020 budget is a good draft that allows the continuation of the positive policy on salaries and pensions. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, President Klaus Iohannis has announced that Romanian Ambassador to the US, George Maior, will be recalled. In an informal talk to the journalists Iohannis said he will take a decision on recalling Maior early next year. *“We will recall Mr. Maior, it is not such a hurry. We will make an assessment early next year,”* he said. The Head of state explained that there is no need for reciprocity, as the United States have just sent a new Ambassador, but an assessment of Maior’s activity will be definitely made. Asked if Ana Birchall could be an option to become Romania’s Ambassador to the US, Iohannis said he had not taken any decision in this regard. Iohannis also said that Ludovic Orban will remain the premier even in the case of early elections. Asked who is going to be the Prime Minister if early elections took place, the President replied *“It does not matter; he will still be the Prime Minister. Early elections scenario is 50% realistic.”* (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, Daniel Constantin, a former Deputy Prime Minister in the Government led by former Prime Minister Victor Ponta, Sorin Cimpeanu, a former Education Minister in the same cabinet, and 14 other MPs of PRO Romania (PRO România – PRO) left the party led by Ponta on Thursday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019. They motivated their gesture saying that the party has changed its doctrine and ideals. *“Initially, the Pro*

*Romania project was based on a centrist ideological component, but we have noticed a sustained evolution towards another direction, and a change in the doctrine and ideals. Since we entered politics, we have supported social-liberal ideas, because Romania needs policies and measures that put first the freedom and the rights of the citizens, but which also include the social aspects,”* reads a social media post by Constantin, who was one of the founders of PRO, alongside with Cimpeanu and Ponta, in 2017. The departure of the 16 MPs from PRO was expected since they had a decisive role in the installation of the Liberal Government led by Ludovic Orban, as they voted for the new cabinet despite Ponta’s decision that PRO should not support the new Government. The Orban cabinet would not have passed the vote in the Parliament without these votes and many expect the group to join the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL). At the beginning of December, former Prime Minister Mihai Tudose also left PRO, after a public conflict with Ponta. The former Prime Minister accused Tudose that he negotiated behind his back for PRO MPs support to the Orban cabinet. Tudose, who gained a seat in the European Parliament on PRO list, following the May 2019 elections, did not rule out returning to the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD). (www.romania-insider.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

*The Government forwards important draft laws in the Parliament such as the state budget Law, Social Securities Law and the Law revising the GEO 114 through the “responsibility process” claiming the need these Laws should have been adopted before December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019. PNL’s minority Government did not want to follow the*

*normal parliamentary process claiming time pressure. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of former ruling party. However, political rearrangements are ongoing since the parties are prepared for the pre-electoral period. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.*



**SERBIA:** December 18<sup>th</sup>, the Serbian Defense Ministry announced a public procurement order for anti-aircraft artillery, the eKapija portal said on Wednesday. President Aleksandar Vucic said during a visit to Serbian and Russian forces on a joint exercise in Serbia late in October that official Belgrade had ordered the Russian PANTSIR anti-aircraft system (NATO reporting name SA-22 Greyhound). The eKapija portal did not specify the exact type of weapon in the public procurement announcement. The Defense Ministry's Department for Defense Technology, which is conducting the public procurement procedure, said that this is a negotiation procedure without a public invitation for offers. The ministry will send an invitation to a producer who holds a license to make weapons and military equipment and is on the list of companies making products and offering services of importance to the defense of Serbia, the announcement said. (www.rs.n1info.com)



PANTSIR-S1 Anti-Aircraft System

(Photo source: www.roe.ru)

- December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Foreign Minister and Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička Partija Srbije - SPS) leader Ivica Dacic said he suggested to President Aleksandar Vucic joint participation of his own and Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) in the upcoming elections. *"I suggest that we run in elections together to avoid problems and to show that there is no reason for anyone to suspect me of running (in elections) with the opposition,"* said Dacic, responding to allegations that the SPS is not a loyal partner to the SNS and would like to join with the opposition parties. Serbia is likely to see its parliamentary elections either at the end of April or the beginning of May 2020. SPS has been a partner to the ruling SNS since 2012, but the two parties never took part in an election together. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- December 22<sup>nd</sup>, President Aleksandar Vucic said Serbia would like to build good relations with Croatia but that it will not put up with any humiliation. Asked to comment on the presidential election taking place in Croatia on Sunday, Vucic refused saying anything, noting that he does not want to interfere with the internal affairs of another country. However, he said he

was not so convinced about the forecast of which candidate is closer to election victory. According to the President, his conclusions after the candidates' face off, were different from what "the rigged media said." "But, that is none of my business, we will build good relations but we will never put up with humiliation of the Serb people or Serbia," said Vucic. Nearly 4 million eligible voters will elect new President of Croatia among 11 candidates, while two will have a chance to enter the second round. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Serbian political crisis is at its peak with opposition hardening its protests. Elections should be expected late April or beginning May 2020. Any further delay may cause problems in the country. However, it is a big question if opposition will join the elections. On the other hand, opposition should become more productive because to reject everything "is not a political stance." General elections were scheduled for April 2020 but under latest developments it is still doubtful when they will take place eventually. Serbian – Russian close relations continue despite latest incident of spy case. Serbia was the only Southeast Europe country which supported Russia against a UN resolution on Crimea. It is assessed that Russian influence and presence has been established in Serbia through various routes including economic, cultural, defense and diplomatic cooperation. Russia is the most valuable ally for Serbia especially in the Kosovo case. However, one could claim that it is the West which has sent the country in the Russian arms. 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. Regarding Kosovo, Serbia is waiting to see initiatives and actions of the new Government which will be formed (most likely) with Vetevendosje leader, Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister. A possible deployment and permanent presence of Kosovo security forces in Serb majority north Kosovo would bring tension and turbulence. However, the US and EU are increasing pressure on both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections but it is very unlikely to see this happens. Serbia insists that taxes should be revoked for joining dialogue. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.*



**SLOVENIA:** December 16<sup>th</sup>, the Government appears prepared to making construction of a new nuclear reactor a cornerstone of Slovenia's plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 in line with EU goals. "The fact is ... that if we do not build a second reactor at the nuclear power station and if we close coal-fired power stations, we will not achieve environmental goals," Prime Minister Marjan Sarec said during questions' time at the National Assembly. (www.sta.si)

- December 20<sup>th</sup>, Lidija Ivanusa, an MP for the opposition Slovenian National Party (Slovenska

Nacionalna Stranka - SNS) defected to the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) a move that could further complicate the operational ability of the minority Government as the SNS has helped the coalition out in Parliament in several key votes. Ivanusa said on social media the SNS's willingness to help the Government was the reason she decided to leave. "The SNS's recent acts do not reflect the goals and values laid out in the party's manifesto," she claimed. SNS leader Zmago Jelincic said the defection must have been in the works for a while, while the SDS rejected having actively courted her and said other like-minded MPs were welcome to join them as well. (www.sta.si)

- December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Slovenia is one of the 15 NATO member countries involved in the acquisition of the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system, which is to provide state-of-the-art intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability. The system comprises five NATO RQ-4D remotely piloted aircraft and the associated European-sourced ground command and control stations. According to the defense Ministry, Slovenia's contribution is about 7 million euro. (www.sta.si)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Marjan Sarec's minority Government continues to enjoy support in the Parliament. Although the Prime Minister is reassuring for the Government's stability and sustainability there are questions over its effectiveness. The possibility of snap elections is rather unlikely, however it is not certain what it will happen since the Government bases its viability on opposition support. As the Prime Minister said a lot of compromise is needed. Opposition SNS (and NSi)*

*offered their parliamentary support in the Government, but it seems that at least to SNS it has affected the party's cohesion. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the "Schengen Zone card" in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an "underworld war" is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end. However, the 2020 and 2021 budget foresees increased funding for defense sector.*



**TURKEY:** December 18<sup>th</sup>,

Turkey has warned that the US's move to lift a decades-old arms embargo on Cyprus would be a “*dangerous escalation*” as relations deteriorated further between the NATO allies. The US Congress voted on Tuesday to end the embargo on the island, which was imposed in 1987 to avoid an arms race and encourage the conflict's resolution. The American decision “*will have no outcome other than hampering efforts towards a settlement on the island and creating a dangerous escalation,*” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement late Tuesday. The US measure was approved as part of a large defense spending bill that passed both chambers of the US Congress, with President Donald Trump expected to sign it into law. Relations between Ankara and Washington are at one of the lowest points in recent history. There are multiple disagreements causing tensions including US support for a Syrian Kurdish militia viewed by Turkey as “*terrorists,*” and Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system. The US has threatened further sanctions over the S-400 deal after removing Turkey from its F-35 fighter jet program earlier this year. The Turkish Foreign Ministry promised to respond to “*initiatives against Turkey,*” saying “*The language of threats and sanctions will never dissuade Turkey from resolutely taking steps to ensure its national security.*” (www.aljazeera.com)

- December 21<sup>st</sup>, hundreds of people staged a march Friday in Istanbul to protest human rights violations in “*East Turkistan.*” The “*Silent Scream*” march, organized by Turkey's Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), urged Muslims to raise their voices against China

systematic campaign against Uighur Muslims. China is accused of carrying out repressive policies against the Turkic Muslim group, and restraining its religious, commercial and cultural rights. Gathering in front of the Fatih Mosque in the district carrying the same name, demonstrators marched to the Beyazit district carrying Turkish and “*East Turkistan*” flags in Uighur sky blue. They chanted slogans, including “*East Turkistan is not alone,*” “*Tyrants will surely account*” and “*Muslims, do not sleep, protect your brother.*” Banners that read “*Chinese Invaders Get Out of East Turkistan,*” “*Independence For East Turkistan,*” “*Close the Concentration Camps*” and “*Freedom for People of East Turkistan*” were also carried. IHH head Bulent Yildirim, thanked the crowd for not leaving “*East Turkistan*” alone. “*How could East Turkistan be freed? How could the persecution of people there be averted? We all will work together. Our way is not short but is not long as well,*” Yildirim said. The main cause behind the Chinese persecution is economic concerns as East Turkistan is situated along the ancient Silk Road and 70% of China's underground resources are in “*East Turkistan,*” he said. Calling on Muslim countries to take a joint step against China, he said, “*Oh, Muslim ummah, do not sacrifice East Turkistan for trade.*” “*Turkey has always stood by East Turkistan and will hopefully continue like this,*” the IHH head added. “*Uighurs, worried about their lives under the long-standing Chinese occupation, are trying to survive without their most basic needs,*” according to a written statement said by the IHH. Up to 1 million people, or about 7% of the Muslim population in the Xinjiang region, have been incarcerated in an expanding network of “*political re-education*” camps, according to US officials and UN experts. Human Rights Watch



accused Beijing of carrying out a “*systematic campaign of human rights violations*” against Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, in a report last September. (www.yenisafak.com)

- December 21<sup>st</sup>, Turkey's Parliament on Saturday approved a security and military cooperation deal signed with Libya's internationally-recognized Government last month, state media reported, an agreement that could pave the way for military help from Ankara. Turkey has been backing the Libyan Government led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj as it fights off a months-long offensive by renegade Commander Khalifa Haftar's forces based in the east of Libya. Ankara has already sent military supplies to Libya, according to a report by United Nations' experts, as reported by the Reuters news agency earlier this month. The two sides signed the deal in November to boost military cooperation, along with a separate accord on maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean that has enraged Greece. There is an arms embargo on Libya imposed by the UN. On Saturday, the state-run Anadolu news agency said Turkey's Parliament voted 269-125 in favor of the security accord after Sarraj's Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) ratified it on Thursday. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Turkey could deploy troops to Libya in support of the GNA but no request has yet been made. He said on Friday that Turkey could not remain silent over Russian-backed mercenaries backing Haftar's forces. Russia, meanwhile, said it was very concerned about the possibility of Turkey deploying troops in Libya and that the security deal raised many questions for Moscow. Erdogan will discuss Ankara's potential troop deployment to Libya with Russian President Vladimir Putin during talks in Turkey

next month, the Kremlin said on Tuesday. Speaking on Saturday, Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said the accords with Libya were historic for Turkey, adding that Ankara was ready to evaluate possible troop deployment. The GNA said in a statement on Thursday that its cabinet had “*unanimously approved the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on security and military cooperation between the GNA and the Turkish Government signed on November 27<sup>th</sup>.*” Haftar's forces in April launched a campaign to wrest control of the capital, but have been unable to break through the GNA's defenses. Haftar said last week that a “*decisive battle*” to capture the city would commence imminently. (www.aljazeera.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Situation in East Mediterranean has become extremely complicated and tense. Turkey is in the “heart” of current political, defense, security, and energy developments which actually is understandable. Turkey was isolated by Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, and Israel enjoying support by the US, France and Italy. Consequently, Turkey took action trying to enter the security and energy game in the region. It questioned the Cypriot sovereign rights to explore and exploit undersea hydrocarbons within the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by invading within it with drillships accompanied by Turkish Navy vessels. Moreover, it announced the sign of a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN-recognized Libyan Government delimitating bilateral maritime boundaries violating the international sea law and the Greek rights in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. It is more than obvious that Turkey will not accept “fait*

*accomplis” in a region which is considered as vital not only for its national security, but also for its energy security. However, one should pay attention in the “wider picture”; The US – Turkey relations are in the worst level they have ever been. It is questioned the Turkish orientation; does still belong to the west? Such questions are fake. Turkey definitely belongs to the West and in NATO. Without Turkey the whole western security system based on NATO could collapse bringing global anarchy, instability and armed violence. Turkish reactions could be described as reactions of a “spoiled baby” seeking to get more gains. What are these? Advantaged and upgraded role in the region enjoying the benefits of a regional superpower. It is assessed that its behavior is absolutely controlled and rational within the current international and regional system. However, an armed conflict or a “hot” incident could not be excluded taking into consideration that power and war are integral part of international politics correcting or solving problems and disputes where politics and diplomacy cannot work. In conclusion, “temperature” is rising dangerously in the region and several actions and statements forebode a potential crisis. Turkey 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. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts*


*while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. 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.