



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: September 24th, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama met with his Greek counterpart Kyriakos Mitsotakis where they briefly discussed Albania's accession to the EU, ahead of the European Council's meeting in October, which is to decide whether Albania will open accession negotiations with the EU. The meeting took place at the sidelines of the 74th UN General Assembly, in New York. Rama said little concerning the talks with the newly-elected counterpart, writing on social media that they had a *"friendly introduction and an open discussion."* Meanwhile, Mitsotakis underlined Albania's steps towards the EU in relation to the country's bilateral relations with Greece and its stand on Greek minority issues, which has become a turning point in the Greek foreign policy since Mitsotakis came to office. *"We discussed Albania's accession path and steps towards meeting the conditions set by the EU, focusing on the issues of the Greek ethnic minority,"* he wrote. In particular, Mitsotakis has spoken about the issue of self-determination and the property rights of the Greek ethnic minority in Albania. In this context, according to Greek sources, Rama expressed his readiness to cooperate with Greece on issues of particular interest to the country. The Greek Prime Minister stressed that he is in favor of the Western Balkans' accession prospects, provided all the conditions set by the EU are met. Albania is looking forward to a positive vote on opening accession talks with the EU by all countries at the October meeting of the European Council, although Germany has already announced it will agree to opening negotiations under some pre-conditions. Like every other EU member state, Greece has a veto power in the Council. Three weeks ahead of the decision, it

seems that the Greek government has at this point no clear position regarding Albania next step in the EU integration process. Although chances for a Greek veto are very low, public statements by the new Mitsotakis Government are worrisome for Albania's EU integration, as Greece has previously unconditionally supported Albania's EU accession. Mitsotakis has also kept a similar approach before when he was in opposition and as Prime Minister. Two weeks ago, he reportedly stated that Greece will not support EU accession talks with Albania until it shows *"tangible"* results in its treatment of the Greek ethnic minority. The statement marked a change in the Greek foreign policy toward Albania, after the center-right Government of Mitsotakis replaced the socialist government of Alexis Tsipras in July. When he was in opposition, back in March, Mitsotakis reportedly said he wanted to send a *"clear message to the Albanian Government, [...] that it is not possible to start the process of Albania's EU accession when there is absolutely no respect for the rights of the Greek ethnic minority."* His comments came following reports that the Albanian Government had prepared a draft-law that would allow for the expropriation of land to be used for strategic investments. The initiative would have also affected the Greek minority, which comprises about 2% of the Albanian population. The Albanian Government later withdrew from the initiative. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- September 27th, the German Bundestag (Federal Parliament) approved the conditions placed by the center-right Christian Democratic CDU/CSU, which agreed on Tuesday to vote in favor of a conditional opening of accession talks with Albania. Among the conditions placed for

Albania, some include long-standing ones like the functionality of the Constitutional and High Courts and the drafting of an electoral reform, while two are completely new; the punishment of anyone who has participated in vote-rigging and a final decision on the legality of the June 30th, 2019 local elections once the Constitutional Court starts working again. The Parliament's final decision on Germany's definite position in the European Council is expected to be adopted without any big changes, within two days. The conditions for Albania have been categorized in two groups, those that need to be met before the Intergovernmental Conference, which formally marks the opening of the process for states, and other conditions that must be met before concrete chapters can be opened. In Albania's case, these chapters are expected to be Chapters 23 and 24, related to the Rule of Law (the justice reform and fundamental rights), and basic rights and freedoms, such as security and justice. The launch of talks on concrete chapters is conditioned by a greater number of issues. First is the implementation of the law on the initiated electoral reform, then comes the initiation of criminal proceedings against judges and prosecutors who did not qualify in the vetting process due to the punishable conduct and the initiation of criminal prosecution and eventually of lawsuits against those involved in vote-rigging during elections, and serious and speedy prosecution of proceedings. Fourth comes the commitment of the special structure to fight corruption and organized crime (SPAK) and its ability to work and the solid progress in creating a steady success in the fight against corruption and organized crime at all levels, including initiating and completing proceedings against civil servants and high-level politicians. These include

proactive investigations, eventually prosecutions and convictions related to corruption and organized crime. Sixth comes a tangible progress in administrative reform, including the review of the positions of senior officials and directors, also in the light of constant irregularities and a final ruling on the legality of the June 30th, 2019 local elections by the Constitutional Court, once it becomes functional again. Following the publication of this decision, Socialist Prime Minister Edi Rama thanked in a social media post *"all the CDU/CSU Deputies who finally voted in favor of opening the talks. Those who voted against it will be convinced at every step by the fact that Albania deserves the opening of talks. Thank you Angela for the unwavering support for Albania."* Head of the resigned opposition Lulzim Basha also acknowledged that *"increased conditions and demand for resolving the political crisis express sincere concern about the steps Albania has taken since June 2018. These conditions and demands reflect the failures of the Albanian Government, not the people. In particular, the new requirements for the arrest and criminal prosecution of people involved in vote rigging and the requirement to rule on the legitimacy of the June 30th farce process clearly reflect that Edi Rama's failure and responsibility to open the negotiations lies with nobody else."* He added that *"the CDU/CSU and SPD's decision to open negotiating terms helps Albania overcome the severe political crisis, conduct free and fair elections and establish an independent justice system that punishes corrupt and criminal politicians."* (www.tiranatimes.com)

- September 27th, *"The President of Albania violated the Constitution when he canceled the elections and decided to postpone them without*

having any such competence,” says the conclusion of the Venice Commission opinion obtained exclusively by Top Channel. “Cancelling the elections and postponing them has violated the citizens’ right to vote,” the opinion underlines. “The President has surpassed his Constitutional competence by canceling the local elections and then by postponing them. It is up to the Parliament and the Constitutional Court to decide whether this is a severe violation or not. The local elections can only be canceled for emergencies, but even in this case it should be done in full accordance with the Constitution, and the President doesn’t have this power,” the opinion says. “The President’s decision to cancel the election wasn’t preceded by a political agreement to create an ad-hoc legal solution. The President has exceeded his constitutional competence by canceling and postponing the elections without basing it on special constitutions,” the opinion says, giving a series of elements to determine the significance of this constitutional violation. But could this be enough to remove the President from his power? The Venice Commission says that the Parliament is the institution that has the power to decide on this. This procedure is a legal and political process and it is up to the Parliament to decide about the nature of the violation and whether it could make it legitimate to remove the President from his post. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Albanian political crisis has affected its European route and is a turning point for the most EU member states. It is rather difficult to see a positive decision regarding Albania’s talks with the EU in coming October. German Budenstag in a rather strict decision is in favor of opening of accession talks but with hard preconditions.

France and Holland also are extremely skeptical in greenlight Albania’s start of negotiations with the EU. Although, top EU officials send encouraging messages it is rather in question if the country will get a positive answer. Such situation deteriorates domestic politics, while most critical reforms have stuck. The country has entered in an endless crisis undermining its democratic function according to the European values and standards. In other words, Albania is under a political and constitutional chaos. Rama’s Government collapse and snap elections is a possible scenario, especially if the country will not get a date of opening accession negotiations with the EU. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of “Albanian mafia” in the country and its influence in state’s politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state’s problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a “mother nation.” The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

September 25th, at the Training Center in Zaluzani near Banja Luka, the newly formed Gendarmerie of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republika Srpska was officially presented. The Head of the

Republika Srpska Gendarmerie Unit, Dragoslav Banovic, handed the report to Republika Srpska President Zeljka Cvijanovic. BiH Presidency member and Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) party leader Milorad Dodik said RS was not giving up forming a reserve Police force.



RS President Zeljka Cvijanovic during the official presentation of Gendarmerie Unit
(Photo source: www.mup.vladars.net)

“As soon as we know, we will consider and wait for the opportunity to form a reserve force. This is the best way to safeguard and defend the territory. All that RS does is condemn political Sarajevo and part of the International Community without even getting into the essence,” Dodik said. He pointed out that the newly formed Gendarmerie unit can be used for various challenges and is mobile. *“We are developing a modern Police force modeled on what we see in the west. As the challenges multiply, the Police organization must adapt. I have received commendable messages from ordinary people because this brings a sense of security,”* Dodik said. Cvijanovic said everything was being done for the future, Klix.ba news portal reports. Interior Minister, Dragan Lukac pointed out that the Gendarmerie Unit is ready to intervene and defend any citizen from any attack against his life

or property, and that that is the only purpose of its establishment. The establishment of the Gendarmerie Unit was the result of reorganizing the Support Unit of the RS MoI, for the purpose of fast and efficient response to security challenges. (www.sarajevotimes.com, www.mup.vladars.net)

- September 27th, US Special Representative for the Western Balkans, Matthew Palmer, congratulated the Chairman of Bosnia’s tripartite Presidency, Zeljko Komsic, for his efforts to maintain Bosnia’s path toward membership in NATO when the two met on Friday during the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. Komsic and Palmer spoke about political situation in Bosnia and stability in the region, as well as an initiative to form a regional trade union which they agreed would improve relations among the countries and improve the living standard of all citizens, a Presidency press release said. Komsic thanked Palmer for the US’s consistent and clear support for Bosnia and its Euro-Atlantic integration process. The solution for the problems Bosnia is facing would be the country becoming a NATO and EU member, he argued. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- September 28th, the Chairman of Bosnia’s tripartite Presidency, Zeljko Komsic speaking at length about the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), shared his country’s enthusiasm about creating *“a self-sustaining environment that will benefit everyone.”* Speaking about regional issues, he said bilateral relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbors are at the top of the country’s foreign policy priorities and serve as the foundation for continuous cooperation improvement, *“based on mutual interest and the principal of equality,*

respect for one another and respect for State sovereignty and territorial integrity.” However, he pointed out that within his country borders, he “occasionally witnesses” neighboring states’ activities, which cause “unrest and a degree of destabilization” that do not contribute to good neighborly relations. Expressing concern over the ongoing escalation of world violence, Komsic called for “an end of combat” and more cooperation on peaceful solutions. “Bosnia and Herzegovina has the principal view that the protection of civilians, respect for human rights and humanitarian law are a necessary priority in international relations,” he said, adding that his country prioritizes lasting peace and security in “all parts of the world.” He singled out the importance of a world without nuclear weapons as the “ultimate goal,” saying that Bosnia and Herzegovina focuses on fulfilling its commitments with an emphasis on dialogue, and non-proliferation cooperation. Turning to peacekeeping, Komsic said that his country welcomes the UN’s commitment to support the participation of women in peacekeeping missions, pointing out “with particular pleasure” that Bosnia and Herzegovina is “one of the few countries that has been fulfilling its stated goals for a long time” with over 20% of women participating in peacekeeping missions.” (www.sarajevotimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Ethnic tension and nationalistic rhetoric are constantly maintained in Bosnia by one way or another. Republica Srpska (RS) officially presented its new Gendarmerie Unit, a light armored formation having the task to protect citizens’ security. However, the establishment of another armored group raises concerns over its

real purpose in a country which has suffered from violence and armed conflict mainly between paramilitary groups. Provocative actions by all entities in Bosnia demonstrate that actually none believes anymore in Dayton Peace Agreement promoting their own interests. It is time international community to re-confirm Dayton’s commitments by a conference under the UN auspices or ethnic tension and division will continue to be strengthened. The country remains without central Government for more than a year facing functional problems. In other words, Bosnia has reached a political stalemate undermining its sustainability, growth, and security. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia’s internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to “penetrate” in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Finally, NATO is rather difficult to allow a Western Balkan country to remain out of its collective security structures. Taking this into consideration, it will not be a surprise to see rapid political or even security developments in the country. As already “HERMES” has assessed Bosnia is a “captured” state with no Government, no state budget, and no growth sliming slowly but steadily towards interethnic tension conflict. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.



BULGARIA: September 24th,

Bulgaria and Iraq share the mutual ambition to start renewing the presence of Bulgarian companies on the Iraqi market in a number of industries in which they had been economic partners in the recent past. This was stated by President Rumen Radev after meeting with Iraqi President Barham Salih in New York. The two men spoke during the 74th session of the UN General Assembly. Good economic relations between Bulgaria and Iraq in the recent past are a good basis to resume the partnership between the two countries in the new conditions of democratic development, was the common position of the two Presidents. Bulgaria had a strong presence in the fields of construction, hydrotechnics, oil and gas exploration and production, medicine, and education. Iraq is open to partnerships in these areas and highly appreciates Bulgarian specialists and companies. *“I hope that with the increase of security in the country, Bulgaria will have its presence in Iraq,”* Radev said. During the meeting, Salih stated Iraq's interest in Bulgaria's attempt to move towards a transition to democracy. We will count on more Iraqi students to study at Bulgarian universities, President Rumen Radev said. During the meeting, the Head of State stated that Bulgaria will continue to support Iraq's efforts to stabilize and rebuild the country and is ready to assist in the process of its democratic reforms. Iraq needs support because re-stabilization of the country will affect Bulgaria's region both in terms of security and in terms of a sharp increase in migrant and refugee flows, Radev told reporters. (www.novinite.com)

- September 24th, President Rumen Radev has been reassured by his Moldovan counterpart, Igor Dodon, that the territorial-administrative reform undertaken by Moldova would not affect the status and integrity of Taraclia district populated by ethnic Bulgarians, said the presidential Press Office. The topic of the rights of the Bulgarian minority in Moldova was raised by the Bulgarian President during his meeting with Igor Dodon, which took place in New York on the sidelines of the 74th regular session of the UN General Assembly. The conversation highlighted the close friendship and active political dialogue between the two countries. The two Presidents underlined the positive contribution to the bilateral cooperation made by the large historic Bulgarian diaspora in Moldova, which is fully integrated. In Radev's words, maintaining the current status of Taraclia, home to 63,000 ethnic Bulgarians, is vital for them to preserve their national, cultural and linguistic identity. Radev was also assured that Moldova would do its best to transform the Grigory Tsamblak University of Taraclia into an affiliate of Angel Kanchev University of Ruse. Prior to Radev's planned visit to Moldova in 2020, a Bulgarian delegation will visit the school in order to clarify the details. Radev also brought up the topic of improving the study conditions at Taraclia University expanding the range of specialties and forms of training. (www.novinite.com)

- September 29th, the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the nationalist party IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO – Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie), Krassimir Karakachanov, has thrown cold water on support of North Macedonia's hopes of EU accession.

Statements by Karakachanov, came in response to reported comments by the President of North Macedonia, Stevo Pendarovski, about historical figure Gotse Delchev. Delchev is a sticking point in attempts by Bulgaria and North Macedonia to reach consensus on the shared history of the two neighboring countries. A joint Commission on historical issues has not reached agreement on how to place Delchev in their common historical narrative. Karakachanov, responding to a reported statement by Pendarovski that the joint Commission has no deadline to decide on Delchev, was in turn reported to have said that Bulgaria need not rush to greenlight EU negotiations on accession to the bloc of the former Yugoslav republic “*until all falsifications of history have been cleared up.*” (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces “structural” problems, the Government is stable. Political parties are entering the pre-electoral period of local elections scheduled for October 27th (first round) and November 3rd, 2019 (second round). Although Bulgarian Government reassures that it supports North Macedonia’s opening of accession negotiations with the EU, there are voices within the ruling coalition claiming that Bulgaria should not greenlight it until all open bilateral issues to be resolved, mainly historical disputes. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country’s development and should be addressed decisively. 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: September 23rd, eight out of ten Croatian Mi-171 helicopters of the multi-purpose Squadron of the 91st Air Base of the Croatian Air Force that underwent an overhaul were presented at “*Pukovnik Marko Zivkovic*” Military Air Base barracks at Pleso. The remaining two helicopters were dispatched immediately to join the NAO-led peace mission in Kosovo. At a cost of 28 million euro, the overhaul of the Russian made aircraft was conducted by the Aeronautical Technical Center with technical support from the Russian Helicopters Company. Russian Ambassador to Croatia Anvar Azimov was on hand for the unveiling. “*There is no political aspect to our military cooperation. We just want to be useful in strengthening the military capabilities of your beautiful country. And if we can help you in any other projects, feel free to call on us. We will do everything to be a friendly and useful partner,*” the Ambassador said. After participating in a test flight, Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic commented on the strengthening of the Army’s fleet of helicopters with American Blackhawks. “*As you know we have received from the United States two Black Hawks. By the end of this Government’s mandate we will have completed operational preparations. It will then take at least 2 to 3 years to select pilots, technicians and engineers,*” Krsticevic said. The Minister also commented on the process of acquiring new fighter jets for the Croatian Air Force. “*Government’s interdepartmental commission is leading the process, but new and used airplanes will be viewed differently. So, we*

will see when we get all of the offers what is realistic and affordable for Croatia,” the Minister said. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)



An overhauled Mi-171 helicopter
(Photo source: www.morh.hr)

- September 27th, even if Slovenia decides to veto Croatia's entry into EU's passport-free travel area, the block would not remain in place indefinitely, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Friday. Plenkovic was referring to Slovenian officials' recent statements which hinted that their support for Croatia's Schengen membership may be conditional upon Croatia agreeing to the border arbitration ruling which Croatia rejects. *“They cannot block indefinitely. We are a member state, we have enough mechanisms. That is all I will say,”* he told Croatian reporters in Brussels who asked him if Slovenia could stop Croatia's Schengen Area accession for a long time. Plenkovic was on a three-day visit to Brussels. He met European Commission Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue Valdis Dombrovskis and Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne, whose country is the current Council of the EU chair. Plenkovic said he was pleased with Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's guarantee that next month Croatia would receive a positive assessment on the meeting of the Schengen entry criteria, to be followed by a political debate at the

Council of the EU. All member states must approve the accession. Plenkovic said it is not realistic to expect a decision to that effect during Croatia's EU presidency in the first half of 2020. *“We believe we have met the criteria. Now there will be a political debate, but not during our presidency. The Schengen entry criteria are objective, we have met them, and if there are some political issues, we will deal with them at the Council.”* Plenkovic said he does not expect problems from member states which now are against Bulgaria and Romania entering Schengen. Both have had a positive assessment of their compliance with the criteria since 2011. Plenkovic said that he and Dombrovskis talked about the implementation of Croatia's euro action plan and preparations for joining the European Exchange Rate Mechanism II. *“Commission is following in detail what we are doing, and we are doing it within the deadlines we have set, therefore the process is going well,”* he said, adding that a Commission delegation collecting data as part of the European Semester would visit Zagreb in October. *“I talked about those topics with Vice-President Dombrovskis and the Commission has a positive view of our reform efforts,”* Plenkovic said. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- September 29th, Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic's office on Sunday responded to a statement Bosnian Presidency Chairman Zeljko Komsic made on Saturday, saying that his unfounded anti-Croatian rhetoric confirmed that he was not only an illegitimate representative for Bosnian Croats but also an irrelevant interlocutor in international relations. *“Zeljko Komsic, the Presidency member imposed on Croats, is the personification of the outvoting of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* the President's office

said in a press release. According to a press release from his office on Saturday, Komsic told a UN official in New York that the Bosnian Serb entity “institutionally denies the genocide committed against Bosniaks [Muslim Bosnians] in Srebrenica and Podrinje,” and that in Croatia “the crime of genocide against Serbs, Roma and Jews” committed during WWII under the Nazi-aligned NDH (Independent State of Croatia) “is denied through the public and political activity of some individuals.” Grabar-Kitarovic's office said that Komsic, “lacking his own vision and ability to resolve the problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, additionally confirms with his constant, unfounded anti-Croatian rhetoric that he is not only an illegitimate but also an irrelevant interlocutor when it comes to international relations or anything else.” (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone and Schengen Zone goals. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. It does not hesitate to openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs criticizing its Chairman of tripartite presidency, Zeliko Komcic for anti-Croatian rhetoric and posing publically a question of his election legitimacy. The country has fulfilled all criteria for joining the Schengen area and it is expected to receive a positive assessment by the European Commission in mid-October. However, the final political decision by the Schengen Zone member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Croatia implements a policy of

Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. In this context, it inaugurated the arrival of ten overhauled Mi-171 helicopters which will strengthen the Armed Forces transportation capabilities. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: September 24th, Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - AKEL) MEP Niyazi Kizilyurek is pressing the EU to expedite procedures for the introduction of Turkish as an official EU language, it emerged on Tuesday. In a question to the European Commission submitted earlier in the month, Kizilyurek, referred to the letter President Nicos Anastasiades had sent in February 2016 to the Presidents of the Council, Commission and European Parliament, stating that Turkish is one of the official languages of Cyprus and asked for it to be introduced as an official EU language in accordance with Article 342 of the TFEU (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) on the rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Union. “*Turkish Cypriot citizens of the EU are certainly expecting their mother tongue to become an official language of the EU,*” Kizilyurek said in his question, published in the European Parliament's question section. Referring to his own election as MEP, he noted that in the 2019 European Parliament elections, a Turkish Cypriot MEP was elected for the first time, by both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The acclaimed academician had said last May prior to his election this would be one of his goals if elected,

arguing that this would help integrate Turkish Cypriots in EU institutions. Anastasiades' argument when he had submitted the request was that in view of the possibility of reaching a settlement on the Cyprus problem, the time had come to launch preparations to enable the Union to start using Turkish as an official EU language upon reunification. The Turkish Cypriot side at the time had welcomed the move with Mustafa Akinci's Spokesman, Baris Burcu, confirming the matter was discussed during a meeting between the two leaders. Cyprus had made the same request in 2002 during its accession talk but it was told not to insist due to the limited practical purpose and significant cost. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 26th, opposition efforts to undo key reforms to the foreclosures framework are undermining the hard-won gains in restoring macro-financial stability, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday. In its staff concluding statement for 2019, the IMF said Cyprus has made significant progress in recovering from the financial crisis but challenges remain in sustaining the relatively robust growth momentum, including the high stock of bad debts. The IMF said policies should focus on reforms to secure financial stability and raise the growth potential of the economy. *“Priorities are to steadfastly implement the strengthened legal tools to lower NPLs and private debt and to build bank capital buffers; to reduce public debt by ensuring strict spending discipline and improving the efficiency of public spending; and to increase productivity through institutional reforms and the promotion of technology adoption.”* The IMF said Cyprus' NPL ratio, despite its decline, remained among the highest in Europe at less than one-third

of total loans, and banks suffered from low profitability, constraining credit, and investment growth. *“In this context, the amendments to the foreclosure framework, which were recently approved by the Parliament but have not entered into effect and are currently being reviewed by the Supreme Court, are a setback creating uncertainties for NPL reduction and deleveraging of the economy,”* the IMF said. Longer-term economic growth potential is hindered by weak productivity growth, reflecting financial sector weakness as well as broader institutional bottlenecks and a slow pace of technology diffusion. Policies should thus focus on reforms to secure financial stability and strengthen growth potential by enhancing efficiency and productivity. The IMF said Cyprus suffers from low labor productivity growth and faces challenges to investment and economic efficiency. These include difficulties with access to finance, costly and lengthy judicial processes, inefficiency of Government administration, low investment in new innovations, and skills mismatches. Policies to support greater market diversification, competition, and technology adoption are needed to enhance competitiveness, it said. Greater investment in Information and Communications Technology infrastructure, intangibles such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics training, research and development innovation and easier access to finance are needed to facilitate technological diffusion. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 27th, one of Turkey's two drill ships in the eastern Mediterranean has completed operations in Karpaz, off the northeastern coast of Cyprus, Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said on Friday. In an interview with broadcaster

NTV, Donmez said the ship, Yavuz, is currently in port in Turkey's Mediterranean coastal province of Mersin and will depart for a new location in coming weeks. The second ship, Fatih, is continuing operations west of Cyprus, Donmez said. "The Yavuz ship has finished drilling in Karpaz. The data there is being evaluated," he said. "The ship is waiting in Mersin's Tasucu port for preparations, supply and checks for the next operation." Turkey disputes Cyprus ownership of fossil fuels in the area, arguing that Turkish Cypriots are entitled to a share of the resources. Ankara also has its own claims in the area. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey continues to implement its own policy regarding Cyprus questioning its sovereignty and territorial integrity. By showing its military power against a state which lacks naval and air force, Turkey aims at imposing its will. It concluded its hydrocarbon drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) withdrawing drillships, but on the other hand it continues to issue NAVTEXs for military exercises. In general, Turkey acts in a way of totally ignoring Cypriot sovereign rights. Cyprus has not achieved to protect its rights so far and it looks like watching Turkish actions within its EEZ. President Anastasiades expressed readiness not only for a tripartite (UN, Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders) meeting, but also for a 5 parts meeting (including Greece and Turkey) regarding Cypriot question. The problem is that Anastasiades is ready for dialogue, while Turkey continues to provoke with aggressive actions. In other words, it looks like Cyprus is forced to conduct talks under the pressure of Turkish drillships and frigates. There is a sense in the atmosphere that any kind of hydrocarbon

exploitation includes a resolution of the Cypriot problem in order the region to become secure and stable for oil and gas companies. Cyprus is trapped failing to act decisively and effectively for protecting its sovereignty. Actually, Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising deterrence. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. In this context, next trilateral meeting between Cyprus, Egypt, and Greece will take place on October 8th, 2019 in Egypt. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this situation. 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. A "hot" incident cannot be excluded during autumn.



GREECE: September 26th, the Greek Government reportedly sees Wednesday's first meeting between Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the sidelines of the United Nations Climate Change Summit in New York as a first step in the effort to reset Greek - Turkish relations. The two men pledged, during what was described as a cordial meeting, to work closely to build a climate of trust for the benefit of regional

stability. Mitsotakis tweeted that they had “*a candid discussion about all the big issues, from migration to Cyprus and bilateral matters.*” According to Government sources, Mitsotakis raised the issue of increased migration flows to Greece, saying that Turkey should play a more active role in limiting them by showing a spirit of cooperation at sea. Even though the issue concerns relations between the EU and Turkey – given the funding Ankara receives from Brussels to stem migrant flows – its bilateral dimension was also highlighted. To this end it was agreed that a meeting between Alternate Minister for Migration Policy Giorgos Koumoutsakos and Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly would soon be scheduled. Moreover, in a move to consolidate a positive climate, it was agreed that the Greece - Turkey Supreme Cooperation Council could be activated by the end of the year. Nonetheless, disagreements remain, not least over the Cyprus issue – concerning the resumption of peace talks and hydrocarbon rights. Mitsotakis expressed his support for a proposal by Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades to ensure the fair distribution of any proceeds from natural gas exploration between Cyprus’s Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. He also raised the issue of the reopening of the Halki Theological Seminary, which was shut down by a Turkish Court in 1971. For his part, Erdogan spoke of the rights of the Muslim minority in northern Greece and the state of two Ottoman monuments in Athens and Thessaloniki. He also revisited the issue of the Turkish servicemen that remain in Greece and whom Turkey wants extradited so that they stand trial for their role in the coup attempt there in 2016. The meeting was attended by Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and Government Spokesman Stelios Petsas, and Turkish Foreign

Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Defense Minister Hulusi Akar. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis and
Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan
meeting

(Photo source: www.tccb.gov.tr)

- September 27th, plans by the Citizens’ Protection Ministry aimed at tackling a burgeoning new refugee crisis foresee the transfer of some 10,000 asylum seekers from overcrowded camps on the islands of the eastern Aegean to less cramped facilities on the mainland among other measures, Kathimerini understands. The migrants in question have all been deemed as qualifying for refugee status and as such not being eligible for return to Turkey as part of an agreement signed by Ankara and Brussels in March 2016. More than 28,000 refugees and economic migrants are currently living in state-run reception centers on five eastern Aegean islands, with conditions on Lesbos and Samos of particular concern. On Lesbos alone some 13,000 people are living in and around the Moria camp, which was designed to accommodate a maximum of 3,000 people. Ahead of the anticipated transfer, Citizens’ Protection Minister Michalis Chrysochoidis is on Friday to chair an emergency meeting with the country’s regional governors; sources say he will ask them to share the burden of hosting the

asylum seekers from the islands. The Defense Ministry has reportedly compiled a list of out-of-use military facilities that could be revamped to serve as venues to host those migrants at a relatively low cost. Some behind-the-scenes diplomacy is under way too following an agreement reached by Germany, France, Italy and Malta to relocate migrants rescued at sea. According to sources, Greek officials are to broach the idea of a similar initiative involving Greece at a summit of Interior Ministers scheduled to take place in Luxembourg on October 8th, 2019. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 27th, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has called for greater burden sharing when it comes to immigration, in a thinly veiled criticism of the failure of some central and eastern European states to take in asylum seekers. “We are reaching the limits of our ability to tackle this problem,” Mitsotakis told the UN General Assembly in New York on Friday. “Greece cannot bear alone the burden of massive movements of people,” he said while speaking of a “European challenge that calls for European action.” In his first speech at the General Assembly, Mitsotakis deplored the “xenophobic agendas” of certain European nations that use the issue as a “weapon” for reasons of political expediency. The Greek premier also urged Turkey to respect an agreement with the EU to stem irregular migration flows. He added that the bloc needs to move fast to adopt new common rules for asylum seekers. In the same speech, Mitsotakis slammed Turkey’s “gunboat diplomacy” saying it undermines prospects to resolve the Cyprus issue. The island has been divided since 1974, when Turkey invaded the north in response to a brief Greek Cypriot coup

engineered by the military then ruling Greece. “Turkey’s illegal drilling activities undermine efforts to restart negotiations and dangerously escalate tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean,” he said while calling for a mutually-agreed comprehensive and viable solution in line with UN resolutions in order to “put an end to injustice.” He added that any unilateral actions by Turkey to reopen Varosha in the Turkish-occupied part of Famagusta would be against UN resolutions. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government focuses on facilitating country’s growth restoring Greece’s country profile. “Novarty’s” case may become source of political tension in the coming months, especially after Parliament decided to establish an investigative committee on former Deputy Justice Minister Demetrios Papaggeopoulos regarding his role in intervening and influencing Justice investigation. Arrivals of migrants from Turkey continue in increased rates. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU’s security. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey’s decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meeting in the sidelines of 74th UN General Assembly was nothing more than wishes for improvement of bilateral relations. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo

region. The critical question is “how Greece would react if a Turkish drillship would appear in its territorial waters.” It should be noted that situation may be escalated rapidly especially after the end of the touristic season (end of September – mid October). In this context, Turkish fighter jets keep on violating Greek airspace massively. Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the US upgrades Greece’s strategic role in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East as a western (US, EU, NATO) forward military base. Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Currently, Greece is in talks with France for purchasing two advanced frigates BELHARA. Taking into consideration the ongoing “NAVTEX war” in Southeastern Aegean and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: September 24th, leader of Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje) opposition party in Kosovo Albin Kurti said on Tuesday that introduction of reciprocity with Serbia would annul the international pressure on Pristina and accusations coming from political, diplomatic, European and world's sources regarding import tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia, and at the same time would show Belgrade it was not about a price, but about dignity and integrity, the FoNet news agency reported. He added that the 100% tariffs introduced last November were not his party's idea, but that it called for a boycott of Serbia's goods. In case he is elected on October 6th, 2019 early vote in Kosovo, Kurti told the

Pristina Koha daily, his Government would come out with an estimate what an impact the 33 deals between Pristina and Belgrade agreed upon in Brussels had on Kosovo's people. Earlier on Tuesday, the US Ambassador to Serbia told N1 TV that both Pristina and Belgrade should take steps towards a compromise, including lifting of tariffs. Pristina Government should lead dialogue on normalization of relations with Belgrade, Kurti said, adding that as a Prime Minister he would assemble “a principled negotiating team in cooperation with Brussels.” “We should have a dialogue about dialogue so that it is well prepared,” Kurti said, adding that he would start talks with Kosovo Serbs the first week in the cabinet if elected. “We are not against dialogue, but it has to be principled. At the same time, we will prepare a list of things we believe Serbia owes us, because no Government or Prime Minister has not mentioned the former Yugoslavia's succession issue, or war reparations,” Serbia would have to pay, he added. Commenting on the suggestion about the borders' changes in the Balkans, Kurti said the idea is still alive, but that the project had failed. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 27th, Kosovo’s outgoing Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj told the local Gazeta Express newspaper on Friday that Serbia requested 950 square kilometers of Kosovo’s territory in talks on normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade, the Beta news agency reported. Haradinaj, whose party is in a campaign ahead of the early general elections in Kosovo due on October 6th, 2019 also told the Gazeta Express newspaper that Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic is still advocating division and complaining inside different political circles that

Kosovo did not agree to such a deal. “Serbia precisely asked for 950 square kilometers. But the issue is not on the table any more, things have moved forward,” Haradinaj told the newspaper. He added that “they (the Serbs) are playing good-bad cop role. Vucic is good, while (Foreign Minister Ivica) Dacic is a bad cop. They work in coordination while we do not. [President Hashim] Thaci plays a good cop, but against his country. I am a bad cop, but I protect Kosovo,” Haradinaj said. (www.gazetaexpress.com, www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 29th, the Election Appeals and Appeals Panel (ECJ) fined the Serb List (Srpska Lista) with 30,000 euro for an election video which referred to Kosovo as part of Serbia, Pristina media reported. The institution found that the Serb List video – “When Serbia Calls I Give My Vote,” promoted interethnic hatred in Kosovo and was contrary to the election law, KTV reported. The video was not aired on Kosovo Radio Television, which found it violates Kosovo's public service law and general election law. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Pre-electoral campaign is in progress without major problems. International community (US, EU) has called for fair elections, while the EU will send monitors for the election day. Under these circumstances dialogue with Serbia comes in second priority. International community namely the US and EU will repeat their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections, assessing the new Kosovo political reality. Restart of bilateral negotiations could not be expected before December 2019 or beginning of 2020 provided that Kosovo will

revoke tariffs imposed to Serbian goods. During his visit in Kosovo and Serbia, the newly appointed US envoy on Western Balkans Matthew Palmer pushed both sides for restarting dialogue. Palmer's activity signals a change in US policy in the region strengthening its presence in a more active role. However, Kosovo insists on maintaining high level of tension with Serbia due to a series of provocative actions; ban of Serbian officials to enter north Kosovo populated mostly by Serbs, Police operation in the north arresting Serbs, 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war, establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs undermining any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. 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. The possibility of Kosovo Army presence in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence.



MOLDOVA: September 25th, Moldovan Prime Minister Maya Sandu believes there is a probability that Moldova may stop receiving Russian natural gas this winter namely from January 2020. Sandu said over the Moldova-1 public television channel last night that such

scenario will become a reality if Russia and Ukraine fail to reach an agreement on the Russian fuel transit through the Ukrainian territory. However, the Premier called citizens not to worry because *“the Government is already preparing to such a scenario.”* *“We have some technical solutions. One of them is to purchase gas from Ukraine and to store it in Ukrainian underground gas storage facilities. But the thing is: the storage volume, which Ukraine can offer, is insufficient for providing the fuel for the whole territory of Moldova,”* Sandu said. In her words, the Iasi-Chisinau gas pipeline construction works should be completed in the Moldovan territory by the end of this year, and the Romanian segment – by March 2020, *“so we should not count on the Romanian gas this winter.”* As was already reported by Infotag, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak, while on a visit to Chisinau last August, stated that *“there is no big risk for gas transit through Ukraine”* and *“we have enough grounds to say that the gas supply to Moldova will be continued all right.”* Moldovan President Igor Dodon stated shortly later that preliminary accords had already been reached between the Russian Gazprom and the Moldovagaz [Moldova-Russia joint company]. He also stated that Moldova should not buy gas and store it in foreign underground facilities because it is inefficient and will require to take credits. He voiced confidence that Russia and Ukraine will eventually bargain on the question of Russian gas transit to Europe through Ukraine and Moldova. (www.infotag.md)

- September 26th, Prime Minister Maia Sandu expressed concern about situation in the judicial system. The official came with a message to the magistrates on the eve of the General Assembly

of Judges, scheduled for September 27th, 2019. *“It is welcome that the judges began to discuss among themselves and want changes in the justice system, but the way in which the judges' meeting was convened reminds us of the odious practices of the last three- four years. Lack of transparency, shadow guidance, Court decisions issued with the speed of light. These coordinated actions seem to have only one purpose - to block the activity of the CSM. I am not alarmed by your intention to change the composition of the CSM, as long as in the CSM there will be honest people who support the reforms and the CSM will be functional. I am worried about the intention of some people to block the activity of the CSM and to block the reforms respectively,”* Sandu told a briefing held today in Chisinau. The premier said that on September 27th the whole country will follow up the judges' actions and the citizens expect them to be fair and equidistant. *“Do not believe us naive. Citizens see who's on the side of the law and who's on the side of the thieves in the battle you lead. We expect judges to be fair and equidistant. You have the obligation, the power and the ability to cleanse yourself of the shame and regain people's confidence. We also have to do everything we can to ensure that people have fair justice. People are watching you,”* Sandu said. She assured that the justice reforms will continue, *“regardless of the efforts of some people to defeat them,”* as *“the future of this country depends on the success of judicial reform.”* (www.moldpres.md)

- September 27th, in his speech delivered from the tribune of United Nations General Assembly Session in New York on Thursday evening, Moldova President Igor Dodon called the main geopolitical players to preserve their current

consensus with respect to Moldova. He said that since June 8th, 2019, Moldova is governed by a parliamentary coalition consisting of political parties that represent the vast majority of the country's population. *“It is a unique case for the Republic of Moldova, when two political forces with diametrically opposed doctrines and geopolitical preferences joined forces to govern and solve the country's pressing problems. However, what is important and unprecedented for our region is that this internal consensus is strengthened also by the common position of the main development partners of the Republic of Moldova and of the great world powers, including the Russian Federation, US, and EU. It is an exclusive case in the international politics, when geopolitical forces have united their efforts against a criminal regime, which had captured a whole state,”* said Dodon. *“This very rare situation and conjuncture of agreement both on domestic and external stage feeds our hopes for a real progress on the path of the very necessary internal reforms, such as the justice reform and the fight against corruption, as well as on the way of solving the Transnistrian problem. One of the consolidating elements of the current governing coalition in the Republic of Moldova is the awareness of the importance and the willingness to promote a balanced foreign policy with all strategic partners of the country,”* Dodon said. *“A distinguished place on our agenda is given to the relations with the two neighboring countries and friends of the Republic of Moldova; Romania and Ukraine. Faced with similar problems, we see in deepening our humanitarian, economic, political and social relations an enormous development potential for the benefit of citizens,”* he said. Dodon said that Moldova is a multi-ethnic country inhabited by representatives

of about 125 ethnic groups. One-third of the population consider themselves Russian-speaking. The Russian language, one of the six official languages of the United Nations, has the status of a language of interethnic communication in Moldova. *“We will be friends and will interact with all our partners. The ‘either-or’ policy, which in recent years has been pursued by a number of major powers with respect to the Republic of Moldova, has clearly shown its fallacy and inadequacy,”* Dodon said. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister Maya sandu seeks to get as much financial aid as she can from the US and EU in order to implement ambitious projects for the country. The agreement signed by the Government's partners – ACUM block and PSRM – strengthens political stability. Transnistria is a case which concerns Moldova and withdrawal of Russian troops is a priority for the Government. It should be noted that Russia closely follows political developments in Moldova and it will not allow any overcome of its “red lines” such as Moldova's integration in NATO or EU. Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: September 23rd, the right to free access to information is an important benchmark for EU accession negotiations and a tool for ensuring Government's accountability, said the Head of the EU Delegation to Montenegro, Aivo Orav. He delivered a speech at the roundtable on the Draft

Amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information, organized by the Ministry of Public Administration. *“We are aware, now more than ever, that information is power, and free access to public information enables citizens to be active participants in the democratic process,”* Orav said. According to him, secrecy provides fertile ground for corruption. *“Effective and citizen-oriented administration should provide access to relevant documents to everyone, especially interested organizations and journalists, who otherwise would not be able to do their jobs professionally in the interest of citizens,”* Orav said. As he said, the latest European Commission report on Montenegro called on Montenegrin institutions to ensure greater transparency and accountability, especially in areas prone to corruption and in sectors dealing with the allocation of large portions of the state budget or assets. He said it was of the utmost importance to amend the Law as to take into account all relevant recommendations in the EC report, as well as other relevant EU expertise, including the recent EU expert mission on free access to information and data protection held in July. Orav said he hopes Montenegro would adopt and implement a new law that is in line with international and European standards and will provide greater transparency and greater responsiveness of public institutions to citizens' needs. *“Montenegro now has a chance to prove that it remains the leader in the region by taking this important step in reforming the rule of law,”* Orav said. (www.rtcg.me)

- September 26th, the US will continue to support further improvement of Montenegrin defense system and invest in constant enhancement of bilateral cooperation and strategic partnership of

the two countries, said Deputy Assistant US Secretary of Defense, Lora Cooper during the meeting with Director General of the Directorate for Policy and Planning Defense, Mr Ivica Ivanovic. As it was said in the Ministry, Ivanovic said that he was satisfied with the dynamics of the development of defense cooperation between the USA and Montenegro. He pointed out that they had successfully adopted conclusions drawn during bilateral consultations in held in Pentagon. Ivanovic firmly believes that cooperation between Montenegro and the USA will continue to develop. *“Ministry of Defense remains committed to modernizing Montenegrin defense system and investing in strengthening interoperability of the Armed Forces of Montenegro,”* Ivanovic said. He touched on the current cooperation between the Armed Forces of Montenegro and the National Guard of the State of Maine, which is still stable. Cooper praised the efforts of the Ministry of Defense concerning successful modernization of the existing defense capacities. She highlighted significant contribution Montenegro has made to the collective defense system. (www.cdm.me)

- September 27th, the Government has done everything necessary to enable opposition to come up with an optimal model that will guarantee everyone a regular election process, said Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic. In an interview with the Voice of America (VOA) he said that opposition's request to form a technical Government was in fact a request to review the results of the 2016 election. He said that the improvement of electoral legislation is on the agenda in Montenegro. He also believes that as a Government, *“they have done everything necessary to give opposition, as partners in Montenegro's political life, the opportunity to*

come up with an optimal electoral model that will guarantee everyone a regular electoral system, a regular electoral environment, and that the election results will reflect the free democratic will of citizens.” “In parallel, there are some ideas that have little to do with improving the electoral system - the requirement to form a technical Government is a request for review of the 2016 election results. Then we had elections that the OSCE/ODIHR assessed as elections that reflect the free will of the citizens of Montenegro,” Djukanovic said. One should act responsibly with the civic trust, he said, “and not give up on it or distribute it beyond the will of the citizens of Montenegro. That is why we believe that there is no need for a transitional Government, no need for us to continually experiment with some new models in Montenegro. When we know of another such example in the world, for someone to give up one quarter of the mandate given to it by the citizens because of some very dubious experiment - because we have a negative experience from four years ago - then we will probably be ready to talk further on the subject. Not at this moment, but we are absolutely ready to discuss all forms of dialogue that will lead to further improvement of the electoral system in Montenegro,” Djukanovic said. (www.rtcg.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided in Montenegro strengthening ruling DPS’s power. Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling

detailed research. Montenegro enters into a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. 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.



NORTH MACEDONIA:

September 24th, Foreign Affairs Minister Nikola Dimitrov stated for Portalb.mk that North Macedonia’s process for a fully fledged NATO membership should be over by April 2020 and that NATO cannot intervene in the Protocol’s process. “Neither NATO nor our country have any authority and capability to interfere in this procedure,” Dimitrov said. The April deadline, as he explained, is based upon the plan for the implementation of the accession process, prepared by NATO’s services and was to North Macedonia on August 1st, 2018 containing the indicator “or the time frame for the accomplishment of the accession process.” According to Dimitrov, regarding December 2019, when the NATO leaders meeting will take place in London where the 70th anniversary of the Alliance will be marked can be used to promoting the policies of the Alliance’s open doors, including the importance of North Macedonia’s accession into

NATO. “*If one country fails with the ratification process and the process is accomplished next year, it has to be looked upon as a technical issue about our country which should be NATO’s 30th member,*” Dimitrov said. Similar to Dimitrov, the December deadline was characterized by Defense Minister Radmila Shekjerinska as symbolic and that she described the fully fledged membership as a technical issue and a matter of time. She does not expect any obstacles in the protocol’s process on part of NATO’s member countries. The number of countries which have verified North Macedonia’s NATO accession protocol is 22. Seven others remain to ratify it. (www.meta.mk)

- September 25th, North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. At the meeting, Mitsotakis voiced his support for the opening of accession negotiations with the EU and noted that consistent and timely implementation of the Prespa Agreement is crucial to boosting relations and securing North Macedonia’s European perspective, Government press service said. Zaev said that Government of North Macedonia is fully committed to constructive approach in building mutual partnership based on friendship and common interest for prosperous region in the interest of the citizens of the two countries. Zaev emphasized that the Government is ready to fully implement the action plan for intensifying and enriching cooperation between the two countries, as foreseen by the “*Prespa*” Agreement, which he noted is a historic step and significant agreement on building good neighborly relations, closer cooperation and constructive and positive relations between the two countries. Zaev

expressed his respect towards Greece for being the first NATO member state to ratify North Macedonia’s NATO accession protocol, which is to be finalized soon. He briefed Mitsotakis on efforts to boosting the implementation of the ongoing reforms aimed at opening EU accession talks, for which a positive decision is expected in October. At the meeting they concluded that the promotion of economic cooperation, increase of trade exchange and direct investments are of mutual benefit for the citizens of both countries, press release reads. According to Greek media, Mitsotakis said he would have not have signed the Prespa Agreement if he had been in power in 2018 when the deal was inked. However, since it was ratified by the Greek Parliament in January this year, the agreement is now part of international law and therefore the Government will respect it. The meeting was also attended by Foreign Affairs Ministers Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Dendias, Deputy PM for European Affairs Bujar Osmani, Government Spokesperson Stelios Petsas as well as Alexandra Papadopoulou, foreign policy advisor to Greek Prime Minister. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- September 27th, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) reported that North Macedonia will receive a “*full green light*” for the start of accession negotiations, while the Bundestag will give a “*dark green*” light to Albania. According to the newspaper, the decision of the Bundestag for North Macedonia will grant the start of negotiations without additional conditions, while Albania will have to meet a series of requirements. In its decision on the country, the Bundestag urges the German Federal Government in the course of negotiations to ensure that the continuation of reforms is

guaranteed and that the country will have to continue making “*significant additional efforts*” to meet the membership criteria, especially in the areas of rule of law, including respect for the fundamental rights and effectiveness of the Special Prosecutor’s Office with a new organizational set-up, then in the fight against corruption, organized and financial crime and money laundering, as well as strengthening institutions and promoting human rights. The Bundestag is demanding that both the European Commission and the European External Action Service regularly report on the progress of reforms during accession negotiations. According to German lawmakers, EU accession negotiations should start with chapters 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and 24 – Judiciary, Freedom and Security, setting out action plans for these chapters with clearly defined deadlines and goals, implementation of which will be a prerequisite for opening new chapters. The Bundestag demands that the focus of membership negotiations be on the topics of functioning democratic institutions, public administration reform, economic development and competitiveness, good neighborly relations and regional cooperation, freedom of press and media, rights of the most vulnerable groups and members of minorities, and active civil society. German lawmakers said the country will need to fully meet the political and economic criteria for membership before adapting its laws to European law and adhering to European stability provisions and the Maastricht Treaty criteria, meaning the country cannot get a date for joining before the end of negotiations. The Bundestag urges the German Government to keep it informed of the progress of accession negotiations. Progress on the road to membership should not only be evaluated by the European

Commission, but also regularly by the (German) Federal Government, including its diplomatic missions, reads the document. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

A positive climate is establishing regarding North Macedonia’s opening of accession negotiations with the EU. Decision of German Parliament (Bundestag) to fully support North Macedonia on its European path created an atmosphere of euphoria in the country. The EU Council will decide about it on October 15th, 2019 and EU member states’ leaders will approve or not the EU Council’s suggestion on October 17th – 18th, 2019. It is estimated that the country will get the green light for opening of accession talks but with strict conditions. There are several European voices calling North Macedonia to focus on judicial reforms, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration reform, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. Although, North Macedonia’s politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals it seems that there is a “moratorium” of words and actions between the state’s political parties with the EU decision ahead. However, such scandals undermine 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 is assessed that no matter what the EU will decide on North Macedonia’s accession talks,

snap elections will be called after the EU decision; either under positive conditions for Zaev (in case the country gets a date), or under negative conditions (North Macedonia will not get a date for accession talks with the EU).



ROMANIA: September 24th, Romania's Defense Ministry plans to rebuild the "Mihail Kogalniceanu" military base close to the Black Sea coast according to NATO standards and increase its capacity. The costs of this project are estimated at over 2.5 billion euro over a period of 20 years and will be covered from the state budget, according to reports by Adevarul and Profit.ro based on official documents. The base should accommodate Romania's fleet of F-16 fighters as well as F-35 fighters in the future. It will also accommodate Romanian and NATO troops. Details about this investment surfaced as Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila went on a visit to the US this week. President Klaus Iohannis was also in the US recently, where he had a meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House. The new facilities will include a new runway for military planes, hangars and platforms for aircraft repair, fuel storage capacities, a firing range and administrative buildings. The base will also include a mini-city for the troops that will be stationed there, including dwellings for soldiers, officers' clubs, a supermarket, two kindergartens, two nurseries, an elementary school, two military hotels and a hospital. The base will also have a sports base with indoor pool, green areas and playgrounds, according to Adevarul. The city will be powered by a photovoltaic park or a power plant and will have an autonomous water supply system. Military experts estimate that the base

will be able to host up to 8,000 troops, maybe even 10,000 during peak moments. The "Mihail Kogalniceanu" airbase in Eastern Romania has been used by American troops as a transit base during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. After Russia's annexation of Crimea, the base has been hosting rotation American and NATO troops and has been used for NATO air police missions in the Black Sea region. The Pentagon recently postponed a 22 million dollars investment at the "Kogalniceanu" military base in Romania as it directed 3.6 billion dollars to build the wall at the US border with Mexico. (www.romania-insider.com)

- September 25th, Romania's National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), the author of the no confidence motion against the Social Democrat Government led by Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, announced that it collected over 233 signatures in support of its motion, parliamentary sources told G4Media.ro. This should secure a majority of votes in the joint chambers of the Parliament for overthrowing the Dancila cabinet. Some MPs of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) have also reportedly signed the motion, the sources told G4Media.ro. In order to have the motion passed, the opposition parties need a minimum of 233 votes. PNL decided to file the no-confidence motion against Dancila and her Government on September 27th, 2019 G4Media.ro reported last week. Meanwhile, other dates were also mentioned (September 30th). The other opposition parties have repeatedly called on PNL to file the motion sooner rather than later, before PSD restores its majority in the Parliament by convincing MPs from other parties to join its group. But PNL replied that they wanted to make

sure that the Government's dismissal is supported by at least 233 MPs. Notably, it remains highly unclear what will happen after the supposedly successful motion. Victor Ponta, the head of a small party; PRO Romania (PRO Romania - PRO) that separated from PSD, said that he would rather not support a Government led by the opposition. Speaking in an interview for B1TV on September 23rd, 2019 he said that the alternative would be a Government formed by Pro Romania, ALDE and “*the good part of PSD*” (meaning those not supporting Dancila). (www.romania-insider.com)

- September 26th, The European Parliament’s Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) decided on Thursday to send a letter to the European Commission (EC) informing it that Romanian MEP Rovana Plumb cannot be appointed as European Commissioner because of a conflict of interests, official sources told local G4media.ro. Plumb borrowed 170,000 euro from another person (Elena Loghin), which she gave to her party; the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) for financing the campaign for the European elections. The Committee decided that due to this conflict of interest, Plumb cannot take over as European Commissioner for Transport and asked the new President of the European Commission to come up with a solution, as this is the first time when such a situation appears, according to G4media.ro. The Legal Affairs Committee took this decision after hearing Plumb for a second time on Thursday. The Committee called for this second hearing to clarify the inconsistencies in Plumb’s wealth statements submitted in Romania and Brussels. Of the 23 members of the Committee that attended the hearing, 15 voted

against Plumb’s appointment as Commissioner, 6 voted in her favor and 2 abstained. Apparently, the moment that tipped the vote against Plumb was when the Committee asked her what she would do after the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP) decided not to reimburse PSD’s expenses in the campaign for the European elections worth 716,000 euro, which means that Plumb will lose the 170,000 euro she borrowed to the party. Plumb reportedly said she did not know about the AEP’s decision which the Committee members did not believe, Romanian MEP Siegfried Muresan told G4media.ro. Plumb, a former Environment Minister, was one of the two candidates supported by the Romanian Government for the European Commissioner post in the team of Ursula van der Leyen, the other one being MEP Dan Nica. MEPs representing Romanian opposition parties criticized the two nominations due to the legal problems both Plumb and Nica had in the past. A couple of years ago, Plumb was targeted by a corruption investigation related to the illegal privatization of an island on the Danube, which ended up being controlled by a construction company associated with former PSD leader Liviu Dragnea (the “*Belina*” case). However, the Parliament voted against the Prosecutors’ request to allow them to pursue the investigation against Plumb.

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Romania enters in political uncertainty due to the no confidence motion scheduled to be filed on September 30th, 2019 by the main opposition party PNL. Claiming that it enjoys support of 233 votes in the Parliament, PNL’s motion will succeed to topple the Government if it will be filed eventually. However, it is not certain what will be the next day in Romanian politics since opposition

parties look divided and not willing to adopt a common stance. Additionally, it should be underlined that the political struggle between the Presidency and the Government is detrimental for the country's political stability, while both parties act on the edge of constitutional order. Under these circumstances early parliamentary elections are estimated to be inevitable (estimated to be held on June 2020). Even if PSD Government achieve finally to continue as a minority one it will not a functional Government blocking any major reform in the country. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. In this context, Romania announced transformation of the "Mihail Kogalniceanu" military air base into a modern base according to NATO standards able to host almost 10,000 NATO troops being an advanced base of the Alliance. 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: September 24th, Rasim Ljajic, Serbia's Trade Minister, said on Tuesday his country would not join the Euro-Asian Economic Union (EAEU), but would only sign a free trade agreement with Russia, Belorussia and Kazakhstan, the Beta news agency reported. His comment came after the EU's officials expressed concern about Serbia's links with countries outside the bloc and those that the Union had a different approach to, while at the same time negotiating the EU membership. *"The deal will be the same as we have with Turkey and (Central*

European Free Trade Agreement) CEFTA," Ljajic told the Belgrade pro-government Politika daily. He added that EAEU had spread to Armenia and Kyrgyzstan and decided to adjust the free trade agreement with third countries, including Serbia. *"It is not any kind of a new (Stabilization and Association Agreement) SAA (which Serbia has with the EU),"* Ljajic said, adding there is no politics, just trade. *"If we said we did not want to sign, our existing free trade agreement with Russia would be jeopardized,"* the Minister added. Belgrade will sign the deal with EAEU, which will replace all existing deals and include a broader list of customs-free products, on October 25th, 2019. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 25th, Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia's President, confirmed his country is ready to resume the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations as soon as Kosovo lifted the 100% import taxes on goods from Serbia and Bosnia introduced last November, the FoNet news agency reported. In a meeting with Matthew Palmer, the US special representative to the Western Balkans and Philippe Ricker, Assistant Secretary of State, at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York, Vucic reiterated his country sincerely wanted a sustainable compromise in solving the Kosovo issue, a statement from the President's office said late on Tuesday. *"Such compromise should take into account and respect the interests of the Kosovo Serbs as well as the preservation of Serbia's state and national interests,"* the statement quoted Vucic as saying. The three also discussed situation in the Western Balkans and agreed that peace and stability are essential for political and economic progress and the region's

European path, the statement added. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 26th, after meeting Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in New York, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic told reporters it is good for his country to have Russia as a reliable friend and ally in all of the important issues for Belgrade, the Beta news agency reported on Thursday. He described the meeting as "very, very good, honest and friendly." "Russia will always stand by Serbia, and these are President Vladimir Putin's words that Lavrov conveyed to us" regarding the Kosovo issue solution, Vucic said. He added that meetings' topics included the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that he stressed the respect of the Dayton Agreement, which ended the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia, is important for Serbia. According to Vucic, Lavrov said the Agreement is an international legal document, and should not be violated and that if anyone would breach it, they could count on negative consequences. The two are among officials from around the globe who take part in the UN General Assembly meeting. Vucic said that Russia's Prime Minister Dimitry Medvedev would take part in marking the anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade on October 1944 during the WW II which the Red Army took part in. He also announced that on October 25th, 2019 Prime Minister Ana Brnabic would sign a trade agreement with the Euro-Asian Union. Ivica Dacic, Serbia's Foreign Minister, said that a number of countries which would suspend or withdraw the decision on recognition Kosovo's independence would grow, adding Vucic and he met many foreign leaders in New York. The US advised Serbia to stop its campaign to open the door for resumption of the dialogue on

normalization of relations with Pristina. At the same time, Washington reiterated its demand to Kosovo to suspend or lift the 100% import tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia to unlock dialogue. Pristina has been refusing to do that so far. Despite the warning to Belgrade, Dacic said it could be expected that the number of the countries that had recognized Kosovo as an independent state would fall below half of the UN member states. He also said that "if there is voting in Interpol, they (Kosovo) will not get the majority." Pristina blamed Belgrade's "aggressive diplomatic campaign" for Kosovo's last year failure to join Interpol, and has introduced the taxes in return. The move put dialogue on hold since November 2018. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension continues in Serbia. A potential boycott of the elections by the opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. Serbia advocates equal friendly relations with the US, EU, Russia, and China. However, it is a common "secret" that it is considered by the west as a close "friend and ally" of Russia. This reconfirmed during the latest meeting between the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic and the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov. Pressure from the US and EU is increasing towards both sides to restart dialogue. At the moment, there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock since Kosovo has called for early parliamentary elections on October 6th, 2019, and Serbia is preparing for elections on spring 2020. Security situation is complex and uncertain. None could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation

including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: September 23rd, an international military exercise in electronic warfare, dubbed “Ramstein Guard 2019,” got under way in Slovenia today. Lasting until Friday, the exercise will feature units and commands that are part of NATO’s Air Command and Control System, the Slovenian Armed Forces said. The activities will focus on operations involving electronic interference, meaning training units to recognize electronic interference, reduce its impact and operate effectively despite interferences in operation of radars, means of communication and systems of command and control. (www.sta.si)

- September 26th, the National Assembly passed the Resolution on National Security Strategy with 46 votes in favor and 29 against. The resolution was passed after two opposition parties succeeded in throwing out an expansion of powers of the intelligence service to fight home-grown terrorism. Defense Ministry State Secretary Natasa Dolenc noted that the currently valid resolution had been passed a decade ago. Meanwhile, security situation has been changing and worsening since 2013, she said, identifying hybrid threats, cyber threats and migration as new risks. (www.sta.si)

- September 26th, Slovenian Prime Minister Marjan Sarec said on Thursday he was unhappy with the outgoing European Commission’s decision to put on the agenda the question of whether Croatia met the technical requirements for joining the Schengen Area, to which Slovenia has reservations. “Slovenia knows how challenging it is to have the external Schengen border, and I am worried because Croatia has not resolved its border issue with practically any state. How can we then bypass these questions and automatically determine that someone is adequate to join Schengen?” he told Slovenian reporters covering his visit to New York. Sarec said he feared the Commission might adopt a “political decision” to the effect that Croatia met the Schengen requirements although, he added, they were very strict and demanding and Croatia still had not met them. “We are primarily concerned about security and it seems flippant to me to put this issue on the agenda just before the end of the Commission’s term,” Sarec said. Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said earlier today he expected the Commission, whose term ends on November 1st, 2019 to recommend that Croatia met the requirements for joining the Schengen Area. The Commission should have the item on its agenda in mid-October. Its President Jean-Claude Juncker said in Zagreb in June the Commission would give a positive recommendation by the end of its term. Sarec said that if the Commission made a “political” decision and gave Croatia the green light to enter Schengen, Slovenia too would act “politically.” Asked if Slovenia would veto Croatia’s Schengen membership because of their border arbitration dispute, he would not give a direct answer. “We will act in the proper way and in Slovenia’s interest, not just Slovenia’s but also in the interest

of the rule of law,” Sarec said. He reiterated that Slovenia's stance on the border arbitration ruling is clear and familiar. *“The Court delivered the ruling and we are willing to keep waiting. The law is on our side and it is time European institutions understood this too,”* Sarec said. Slovenian Foreign Minister Miro Cerar recently said Slovenia could not let Croatia join Schengen before it implemented the border arbitration ruling. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Minority Government of Marjan Sarec enjoys relative political stability. 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, 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.



TURKEY: September 27th, Turkey is not satisfied with the current status of Syria safe zone efforts with the US, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Friday in New York, where he is attending the 74th session of the UN General Assembly. Cavusoglu noted that there are different opinions among US officials regarding the depth of the safe zone and that Turkey has conveyed its concerns to the US regarding the matter. He detailed the safe zone should have an operation center, joint patrols and should clear the area from terrorists and the establishment of facilities for residents. It should also ensure the return of Syrian refugees. *“It will be deceptive to look at the issue just in respect of Syrian refugees. It is an issue of national security for us as the terror groups here pose a threat to Turkey,”* said Cavusoglu, as he warned Turkey may face *“bigger threats”* if terror groups are not cleared of the region. Cavusoglu also addressed the issue of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder in Istanbul nearly one year ago. He acknowledged Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)'s claim this week of responsibility for the murder *“because it happened under my watch,”* but said Turkey expects more from the Kingdom. *“The perpetrators should be held accountable,”* Cavusoglu told reporters, stressing that those responsible must face the Court and justice must be served. *“Turkey expects close cooperation from Saudi Arabia”* on this process, he said, emphasizing the importance of transparency. He

said Turkey has been fully cooperative with the Kingdom's requests but has not received the same in return. Cavusoglu also said the US is actively mulling re-admitting Turkey to the F-35 jet program, from which it was removed in July. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 28th, the Greek Cypriots and Greece's policies in Eastern Mediterranean are contrary to international law, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hami Aksoy said in a statement Saturday. Ankara rejected the “*baseless claims*” about Turkey mentioned in a joint statement of a recent trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt. “*The latest efforts of Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration to involve the countries in the region, in addition to the EU countries, in their maximalist national policies do not serve peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean,*” Aksoy said in statement. “*Countries in the Eastern Mediterranean neither have authority, nor responsibility nor a word to say concerning the Aegean problems and the Cyprus issue,*” he noted. The trilateral statement, which came after Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt's Foreign Ministers met in New York on September 27th, 2019 “*condemned*” what it said were Turkey's “*unlawful*” actions in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, calling its drilling activities in the region “*illegal.*” Rejecting the “*baseless claims,*” Aksoy stressed “*it is also insincere on part of Greece to make baseless claims against Turkey at a time [when] it extends messages of cooperation to us.*” “*We invite these countries to face the political, economic and geographic realities of the region, and to pursue policies of cooperation in conformity with these realities. There is no other way for stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, and for a just and lasting*

settlement of the Cyprus issue,” the Spokesman said. He also underscored that steps with political expediencies aiming to isolate and ignore Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots in the Eastern Mediterranean “*have no chance of success.*” “*Projects which do not include Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots in this region will never be efficient and effective,*” the official noted. He also reiterated Turkey's determination to continue to defend resolutely both its and Turkish Cypriots' rights in the Eastern Mediterranean. According to Turkey, tension in the Eastern Mediterranean is based on the Greek Cypriot administration's unilateral actions that ignore the rights of the island's Turkish population. The Greek Cypriots unilaterally declared a total of 13 so-called fields in the Eastern Mediterranean as its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and allowed international oil and drilling companies to operate in these areas, which are anticipated to hold rich hydrocarbon reserves. However, the majority of these fields clash with the EEZ declared by the “*Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*” (occupied North Cyprus) with the Greek Cypriot administration ignoring the fundamental rights of the Turkish Cypriot community to a share of the island's resources. Turkey, which is also authorized by the Turkish Cypriot “*government,*” is currently running hydrocarbon exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean with its drilling vessels; Fatih and Yavuz. In addition, the country's two other seismic vessels, Barbaros Hayrettin Pasa and MTA Oruc Reis, operate in the same region. Turkey has consistently contested the Greek Cypriot administration's unilateral drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, asserting that the Turkish Cypriot community in Northern Cyprus also has rights to the resources in the area. Since this spring, Ankara has sent two

drilling vessels - Fatih and most recently Yavuz - to the Eastern Mediterranean, asserting the right of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots to the resources of the region. The Turkish-flagged drillship Fatih launched offshore drilling operations this May in an area of 75 kilometers (42 nautical miles) off the western coast of the island of Cyprus. Athens and Greek Cypriots have opposed the move, threatening to arrest the ships' crews and enlisting EU leaders to join their criticism. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 29th, during the commissioning ceremony of the fourth domestically produced corvette TCG “*Kinalhada*” and the steel-cutting ceremony for the first MILGEM-class (National Ship) ship to be sold to Pakistan, the President Recep Tayipp Erdogan said Turkey has become one of the 10 nations able to develop, build and maintain a warship using exclusively domestic means. The MILGEM project was initiated in 2000 to locally design and build a fleet of multipurpose corvettes and frigates that will replace older ships. Turkey has built four corvettes so far within the framework of the program, namely the TCG “*Heybeliada*,” TCG “*Buyukada*,” TCG “*Burgazada*,” and TCG “*Kinalhada*,” while the fifth vessel is under construction. The country's goal is to build eight corvettes within the scope of the program. The construction of all four ships of the ongoing Ada class – named after Istanbul's Princes' Islands – was undertaken by the Istanbul Navy Shipyard Command of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). Erdogan said TCG “*Heybeliada*” was launched in 2011, TCG “*Buyukada*” in 2013, and TCG “*Burgazada*” in 2016, adding that with years of experience in the MILGEM project, the locality rate was increased up to 70%. More than 50 local

companies served as subcontractors in TCG “*Kinalhada*,” whose platform systems and design services were provided by Turkish defense firm STM, weapon and sensor systems by ASELSAN, and combat management system by HAVELSAN. While the design, construction and integration activities of TCG “*Kinalhada*” were carried out at Istanbul Naval Shipyard Command, numerous simultaneous projects within the scope of design, research-development, supply, and service procurement required for these activities were undertaken by the Defense Industries Presidency (SSB) in accordance with the domestic and national facilities. Unlike the first three of the MILGEM Ada Class Corvettes, Erdgogan said, TCG “*Kinalhada*” is equipped with Turkey's first domestic maritime missile ATMACA, developed by ROKETSAN. It also uses the US-made HARPOON naval missile supplied from abroad. Meanwhile, Advent, a Network Supported Combat Management System developed jointly by HAVELSAN and Turkish Naval Research Center Command (TNRCC), is being used for the first time on this vessel. The 99-meter-long and 14.4-meter-wide TCG “*Kinalhada*” is a single hull displacement boat developed to meet the speed, maritime and stability demands of the Turkish Navy. With a displacement of 2,400 tons and a draft of 3.6 meters, the ship has an unlimited operational capability at sea state five and limited capability at sea state six and over, while the main propulsion system consists of a gas turbine and two diesel engines. While TCG “*Kinalhada*” can reach a maximum speed of 29-plus nautical miles, it has the necessary platform, hangar and extensive support equipment for a 10-ton helicopter and can perform helicopter flight operations up to sea state four. Equipped with advanced technology sensors, electronic warfare,

navigation, and communication systems, most of which have been developed with domestic facilities, TCG “*Kinalıada*” has also been designed with defense, deception, mixing and elimination systems for asymmetrical, surface, air and underwater threats. The President further stressed that Turkey is resolved to reach heights domestically in all areas including ships, artillery, missiles, torpedoes and electronic systems. “*We will soon build our own warplanes just as we have developed our own unmanned aerial vehicles, ATAK helicopters and satellites. If they woke the sleeping giant, they will suffer the consequences,*” Erdogan said, alluding to F-35 fighter jet dispute between Turkey and the US. The President said Turkey aims to become self-sufficient in terms of defense needs by 2023. “*We have covered important ground by decreasing external dependence of the defense industry from 80% to 30%... The research and development expenditure in the defense industry has approached \$1.5 billion,*” Erdogan said. He noted that 700 various defense projects were being carried out in Turkey, adding that in terms of project volume, a size of 60 billion dollars has been reached in the industry. Exports of the defense and aerospace industry totaled nearly 2.5 billion dollars as of the end of last year, the President added. Yesterday's event also marked the start of construction on a ship to be sold to Pakistan's navy. In July last year, Ankara won a multibillion-dollar tender to supply four corvettes to the Pakistan Navy – a deal dubbed the highest export deal in the history of Turkey's defense industry by then-Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli. According to the agreement, two ships will be built in Istanbul, while two others will be built in Karachi. The first pair of the corvettes is expected to join the inventory of Pakistan's naval

forces in 2023, while the remaining two will be handed over in 2024. Erdogan expressed hopes that Pakistan, a nation friendly to Turkey, will also benefit from the ship. (www.dailysabah.com)



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the commissioning ceremony of corvette TCG “*Kinalıada*”

(Photo source: www.tccb.gov.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey insists on complaining about the “safe zone agreement” with the US emphasizing in the latter’s hesitation to fully implement it. Furthermore, Turkey accuses the US of continuing to armor the Syrian Kurd militants. Under these circumstances, Turkey keeps threatening with a unilateral military operation; an action strongly rejected by the US and if it happens it will make situation extremely complicated. It should be noted that Turkey has adopted a dynamic civil – military strategy emphasizing its contribution in re-building Syrian territories suffered from war; it implements a fancy project of building schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure. On the other hand, Turkey keeps sending Syrian refugees to Europe canceling in fact the EU – Turkey agreement on the matter. As long as the 32 kilometers safe zone is not established, Erdogan will keep the gates to

Europe open for refugees. Of course, refugee flows is a way for Erdogan to get extra money from the EU. Nevertheless, Turkey remains a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO). Due to its geopolitical and geostrategic aspects Turkey has the ability to achieve its national goals and protect its interests either by diplomatic means or by the threat of use or use of force. The US obviously does not seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on improving bilateral relations. Undoubtedly, the US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. In this context, Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that it is very likely Air Force to join again the F-35 project from which it has been expelled in July 2019. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey withdrew its drillships after it concluded its offshore drills within Cypriot Exclusive


Economic Zone (EEZ). It could be assessed as a successful action for Turkish interests as it gained several benefits with zero cost. Cyprus and Greece only watched the Turkish activity without taking action, while international community remained only in verbal accusations of Turkish activity. Turkey not only achieved to put the hydrocarbon issue in the Cypriot question talks, but also sent a strong message that it is present in energy developments in the region. It should be underlined that Turkey showed determination in its objective without hesitating to escalate tension in the region including armed violence to secure its interests. 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.*