



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

**SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

**AT A GLANCE**



**SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE**

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

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

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy (“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE) is an independent, non – governmental, non – profit organization, consisting of scholars dedicated in the research and analysis of international affairs in regional and global level. The Institute aims at providing objective, scientific, and reliable research analysis through a variety of studies contributing effectively and constructively in the public dialogue and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

Copyright © 2021

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved





**ALBANIA:** January 19<sup>th</sup>, Greece and Albania signed a bilateral agreement yesterday that will create a customs and Police collaboration facility at the Kakavia border crossing in the South of Albania. (www.exit.al)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Edi Rama has again attacked the EU for “leaving out” the Western Balkans in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. This is one of several attacks levied against the EU by Rama in the last weeks. (www.exit.al)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, Foreign Minister Olta Xhaska has stated that Albania has met all the EU conditions needed for the start of accession talks, and is now waiting for member states to agree and the EU to keep its promise. (www.exit.al)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, Albanians and Serbs will be able to use only their ID cards when travelling the two countries. Passports will not be required starting from January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 although they can still be used. (www.exit.al)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Prime Minister Edi Rama visited on Friday the construction site of the Fier hospital, where work has begun on its construction. Rama reminded a Turkish engineer that the hospital should be completed within three months, as ordered by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. According to the statements of the Prime Minister, the hospital of Fier will be a public hospital and not a private one. It will be run by Turkish doctors for some time. (www.exit.al)



Works on Fier hospital have started  
(Photo source: www.kryeministria.al)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko has considered the expulsion of a Russian diplomat by the Albanian Government a “provocation” and “unfriendly step” and vowed that his country will respond accordingly. The Albanian Government declared the Russian diplomat “*persona non grata*” on Thursday for repeatedly violating COVID-19 restrictions, and asked him to leave the country within 72 hours. (www.exit.al)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, the Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecution (SPAK) is mulling whether there are grounds to launch an investigation regarding allegations suggested in the media on the Italian mafia attempts to launder money in Albania. (www.exit.al)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Amid institutional and constitutional disorder the country has entered more or less in pre-electoral condition. The ruling socialists seek to strengthen their internal position. In this context, the Prime Minister, Edi Rama does not hesitate to attack the EU for leaving Albania and other Western Balkan countries without COVID-19 vaccines. However, his attacks are considered as hypocritical aiming to hide the governmental inefficiency for vaccinating Albanian citizens. Besides, Rama's*

*attacks against Europe are linked with the latter's denial to start accession negotiations with Albania. It is assessed that Rama seeks to be appeared in Albanian citizens as a "hero" who fights for protecting his people's health without hesitating to confront with the EU. Moreover, the Government seeks to put the blame for the delay of the beginning of the intergovernmental talks between Albania and the EU on the latter aiming to hide the Government's inability to implement the fifteen conditions were set by the EU. Turkey increases its influence in Albania by constructing infrastructure in the country (built only by Turkish companies) such as the 500 apartments in the city of Lac which was hit by an earthquake and the hospital in the city of Fier. Moreover, Turkey provides military assistance to the country. Currently, Albanian – Russian relations are in crisis; Albania has expelled a Russian diplomat frustrating Russia which claimed that provocation will be answered. Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling, impunity and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

January 18<sup>th</sup>, the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) met with the Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic of neighboring Croatia on Monday to inform him of "worrying developments" regarding the local election in the southern Bosnian city of Mostar, where he claims there was "electoral engineering" which the Central Election Commission (CEC) was allegedly involved in. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 19<sup>th</sup>, Bosnia's Central Election Commission (CIK BiH) confirmed and published the Mostar local election results, almost a month after they were held in this south Bosnian city. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 19<sup>th</sup>, Bosnia and Herzegovina first needs to ensure mechanisms that would make the country functional and prevent political blockades and then, sometime in the future, the country should adopt comprehensive constitutional changes that would "return what the soul of Bosnia and Herzegovina is;" a multiethnic, integral country, the leader of Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), Bakir Izetbegovic, told N1. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, Germany on Wednesday nominated Christian Schmidt, a former Government Minister and lawmaker, to be the new international High Representative in Bosnia, whose office oversees the implementation of the country's 1995 peace accord. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Bosnia's tripartite Presidency Chairman and its Serb member, Milorad Dodik, urged the leader of Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), Bakir Izetbegovic, to apologize to the Serb people for his recent controversial statement with which he "humiliated not only Serbs but all the peoples that live in the Balkans." (www.ba.n1info.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Structural problems of Bosnia are the source of constant instability in the country. The Dayton Peace Agreement has created a state entity with*

*substantial problems of functionality and state's capacity. These problems create fertile soil for conflicts and hate rhetoric between the state's entities. It is not a secret that Dayton Agreement needs reform in order to make Bosnia a functional country. Entities' leaders understand that and discussion for reforming the agreement is currently open. However, a potential attempt to change the Dayton accord may become a factor of serious instability in the country and the region which could lead in an armed conflict. Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks seek to strengthen their position by controlling the state's institutions, while Bosnian Serbs advocate for secession. International stakeholders should approach Bosnia in the near future very carefully. Germany seeks to designate its own man as High Representative (Christian Schmidt) of international community which has its special semiology. Migration still remains a major problem for Bosnian authorities which could destabilize certain parts of the country. The country is in the middle of geopolitical games between the EU and NATO on the one side and Russia on the other. Currently Bosnia is the "weak link" among Balkan states for Russian influence.*



**BULGARIA:** January 20<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's Government approved Wednesday plans to add a new reactor at its Soviet-era nuclear power plant at Kozloduy, effectively ditching another project to build a new plant at Belene. The Energy Ministry expressed hopes that the new reactor can become operational in 10 years time. (www.novinite.com)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, day 200 of anti-government protests in Sofia drew thousands of dissatisfied

with Borissov's cabinet and Chief Prosecutor Geshev. Representatives of the "System Kills Us" initiative blocked traffic in the "Triangle of Power" while later on protesters were urged to enter the Council of Ministers building. Clashes broke out with the police guarding the building. (www.novinite.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

*Amid protests the country moves ahead towards parliamentary elections scheduled for April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Political situation is highly polarized not only because of protests but also because of the struggle between the Prime Minister, Boiko Borissov and the President, Rumen Radev. Bulgarian society appears highly disappointed from current political, economic and social situation in the country and only elections could defuse tension. Bulgaria seeks to secure its energy independence and in this context is investing in nuclear energy. According to the Energy Ministry the country plans to construct a new nuclear reactor in the Kozloduy factory. However, there are certain fears that Kozloduy (and Belene) nuclear plants could be a threat for regional people and environment protection due to their age. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively; besides these are the reasons for social reaction and unrest. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.*



**CROATIA:** January 19<sup>th</sup>, during the European Parliament's discussion on the humanitarian situation of refugees and migrants at the EU's external borders on Tuesday, a number of MEPs, mostly from left or centrist groups, strongly criticized Croatia's treatment of migrants at its border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, Croatia's Foreign Minister, Gordan Grlic-Radman, called on MPs to support a Government-sponsored amendment which would allow the agreement on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Adriatic to enter into force on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. (www.hr.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*The country still suffers from the 6.2 Richter scale earthquake in Sisak - Moslavina County (central-east Croatia) which has created an emergency situation. The Government of Andrej Plenkovic is strong enjoying stability. Treatment of migrants by Croatia in the border with Bosnia remains a question for the country which faces accusations of mistreatment of these poor people. The EU investigates the case and situation could harm Croatia's public image. The country pays special attention for Bosnian Croats seeking to protect their rights. Croatia appears ready to declare its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Adriatic Sea. Currently there are unofficial talks between Croatia, Italy and Slovenia for the issue. However, the issue of EEZ could bring tension between Croatia and Slovenia due to the unresolved dispute on Piran Bay status. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.*



**CYPRUS:** January 20<sup>th</sup>, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he intends to invite the rival leaders on Cyprus to an informal meeting "*as soon as practicable*," but he warns that this meeting must be different and help clarify "*the true extent*" of their common vision "*and outline steps necessary to chart a way forward*." (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, with 29 votes for and 26 against, the House on Thursday passed the revised state budget for 2021, unlocking hundreds in millions earmarked for coronavirus relief to businesses and households. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*The UN is preparing the ground for an informal meeting between Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot community, Greece, Turkey and UK. Tension has been reduced in the region lately since Turkey has been withdrawn its research vessels. Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades has declared his readiness to join talks for a potential resolution of the Cypriot question in the context of a bicomunal, bizonal federation with increased competencies in the constituent communities. On the other hand, Turkey and Turkish Cypriot community has hardened its stance by declaring that the only solution is two sovereign states. According to UN sources the informal five-party meeting is scheduled for February 2021. Despite talks regarding the Cypriot question, it is certain that Turkey will not accept "fait accompli" in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Approval of revised state budget following a consensus with opposition parties relieved the Government from an internal problem stabilizing economic situation of the country. Turkey*

*maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.*



**GREECE:** January 18<sup>th</sup>, Greece completed successfully on Sunday the first test run of an upgraded F-16 jet of the Hellenic Airforce to the F-16 VIPER level, the Hellenic Aerospace Industry (EAV) announced on the same day. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, with 284 votes in favor and 16 “*present*,” lawmakers approved legislation on Wednesday to extend Greece’s territorial waters along its western coastline from six to 12 nautical miles. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, as the bill for the extension of Greece’s territorial waters to 12 nautical miles in the Ionian Sea got Parliamentary approval Wednesday, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias insisted Tuesday that the expansion when it takes place in Crete will also affect its eastern part. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, an agreement between Greece and Bulgaria concerning the IGB natural gas pipeline project (Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria) was tabled in the Greek Parliament on Tuesday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, the living conditions at the migrant camps on the islands of Lesbos and Kos are under scrutiny by the European Court of Human Rights,

focusing in particular on the treatment of eight asylum seekers. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, as part of ongoing efforts to further strengthen bilateral relations, French Defense Minister Florence Parly will visit Athens on Monday and sign the agreement for the purchase by Greece of 18 Dassault-made RAFALE jets. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos Thursday announced that the length of compulsory military service for those serving in the Hellenic Army was being extended to 12 months from 9 months today. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, exploratory contacts between Greece and Turkey resume Monday at Istanbul’s Swissotel, with Athens having particularly low expectations of a substantial outcome due to the different agendas set by both sides. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**  :

*Greece is prepared for the exploratory talks with Turkey, scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Athens leaks that it has low expectations of these talks due to Turkish intransigence. Actually, Greece knows very well after 61 rounds of exploratory talks that Turkey will not agree for the agenda of dialogue setting the whole procedure not functional. Athens discusses only delimitation of maritime zones, while Turkey seeks to broaden the agenda including “grey” zones in the Aegean Sea, demilitarization of Eastern Aegean Greek islands, and the Muslim minority in Thrace. The Government highlights that these talks are informal and they are not negotiations in any*



case. Although tension in the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean has significantly reduced, Turkish fighter jets violated Greek airspace last week. Following escalation of tension with Turkey during last summer, Greece seeks to strengthen its Armed Forces. In this context, the French Defense Minister, Florence Parly is expected to Greece next week for signing the agreement of the purchase of 18 RAFALE 4<sup>th</sup> generation fighter jets. Moreover, the Hellenic Airspace Industry (EAV) concluded and presented the first upgraded F-16 to the VIPER level; the most sophisticated version of the F-16 modernization. Apart from that the French Minister brings an improved proposal for four French Bellhara frigates. Finally, compulsory military service has extended to 12 months from nine months today in an effort to resolve the manning issue of the Hellenic Armed Forces.



**KOSOVO:** January 18<sup>th</sup>, Serb List (Srpska Lista) leader Goran Rakic told Belgrade daily Vecernje Novosti on Monday that the Kosovo Serbs have to stand together with Serbia and its President Aleksandar Vucic. Rakic said that it's better for the Serb List to "fight for its citizens inside Pristina institutions" than in Serb-populated areas. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 18<sup>th</sup>, Ramush Haradinaj, the leader of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK) and a candidate for Kosovo's President, accused on Monday the EU with neglecting Pristina and pushing it to unite with neighboring Albania. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Kosovo's Central Elections Commission (CEC) has not certified the election

lists of Self-Determination (Vetevendosje), Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK), and Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA Social Demokrate – NISMA) to run in early general elections set to be held on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021 after they have refused to remove candidates from their respective lists who according to the Judicial Council are banned to enter election race having been found guilty of a criminal charge in the last three years. (www.gazeta-express.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Decision of Central Electoral Committee to not verify parties' list of candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections of February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021 it may increase pre-electoral tension in Kosovo. Vetevendosje has been affected by this decision since its leader, Albin Kurti is not allowed to run for the elections. In the meanwhile, leader of AAK, Ramush Haradinaj made some notable pre-electoral statements which may provoke reactions not only by neighboring countries but by the EU as well. He claimed that the EU is responsible for delaying the Euro-Atlantic future of Kosovo and the only future, the only solution is unification with Albania. Greater Albania and unification of all Albanian population in the Balkans under a single state is not something sounds acceptable in the region. Such ideas do not support peace and stability; on the contrary, it may become reasons of tension and instability. However, Haradinaj's statements are attributed to the pre-electoral campaign considered more or less as populist. Current uncertainty affects not only dialogue with Serbia but also state's reforms. Belgrade – Pristina talks have frozen due to the latter's snap elections. Kosovo lacks determination over its*

*critical reforms which will establish rule of law and modern functional administration. Moreover, corruption, organized crime, links between politicians and organized crime and inadequate justice system together with Kosovo unresolved status are significant obstacles towards the establishment of rule of law allowing Pristina to move ahead in its Euro-Atlantic path.*



**MOLDOVA:** January 18<sup>th</sup>, the Constitutional Court (CC) rejected the requisition concerning the self-disillusion of Parliament that was filed by the MPs of the Action and Solidarity Party (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS). (www.ipn.md)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, the mandate of the current composition of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia expired on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 when it was exactly four years of the convocation of its first sitting. Under the electoral legislation, the elections take place within three months of the expiration of the mandate. The elections were set for April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. (www.ipn.md)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, the common direct support framework for the next seven years and the assistance that Moldova could receive within the Eastern Partnership will be decided in Brussels the coming months, President Maia Sandu informed upon her return from Belgium, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, President Maia Sandu next week will come up with a solution for breaking the political deadlock experienced by Moldova. This week she will not nominate a candidate for Prime Minister and expects the MPs to undertake publicly that an eventual candidate proposed for

premiership will not be voted in by the legislature, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the MPs of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) said they will introduce again into Parliament a bill on the functioning of the languages spoken on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. After the relevant law was declared unconstitutional, the Socialists said harsh reactions will follow. A protest will be mounted in front of the Constitutional Court (CC) next week, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration has requested the Embassies working in Moldova and their personnel to show respect for the laws, regulations and institutions of the state to which they were accredited and to refrain from making comments that can be classed as interference in the internal affairs of the state. (www.ipn.md)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Political instability and uncertainty grows in Moldova due to the struggle for power between the newly elected President, Maia Sandu and the PSRM, PDM and SOR party which control parliamentary majority. Sandu seeks to dissolve the Parliament and to call early parliamentary elections, but constitutional procedures oblige her to nominate a candidate for Prime Minister who should be rejected it twice by the Parliament before elections could be called. On the other hand PSRM, PDM and SOR seek to delay elections aiming to strengthen their electoral power before the elections. Currently, Sandu and her party PAS enjoy increased rates in among the*

*electoral body and this is the main reason that she works intensively to call snap elections. As long as Sandu does not control the Parliament she will have limited powers failing to implement its political tasks and goals. During her visit in Brussels, Sandu sent the message that Moldova is seeking to strengthen its relations with the EU. It is obvious that the country is turning its stance in the external relations in a more pro-western approach. Sandu's visit to Ukraine, her statements on the Transnistrian case and her warm approach with the EU shows clearly her foreign policy tasks. Decision of Constitutional Court by which the law on spoken languages was declared as unconstitutional has brought more tension in the country since the Russian language was rejected as one of the official languages of Moldova. Needless to say that Russia was strongly reacted on this Court's act. Current political atmosphere in Moldova is not advantaged for Russia and this could become a major source for instability in the country. The country is considered in the Russian sphere of influence and potential changes in this relation could provoke the harsh reaction of Russia. Under current conditions with a country in a dramatic economic situation, high rate of corruption, weak public administration, problematic rule of law and justice, situation may become even worse for Moldovans. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Ministry of Capital Investments submitted to the Special State Prosecutor's Office (SDT) and the Montenegrin Parliament information on the

possible existence of criminal acts related to the purchase of ships for Montenegrin and BARSKA PLOVIDBA, as well as Government loans for loan repayment to the Chinese EXIM Bank, Mladen Bojanic said. (www.rtcg.me)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic has announced that he will sign a set of laws that the Parliament passed again on Wednesday, stating that he is bound by the Constitution. However, Djukanovic said that he would not sign proposals for the recall of seven Ambassadors, because, as he said, that would mean that he would participate in slandering those people. (www.rtcg.me)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Political tension is maintained in Montenegro due to the struggle between the new Government and President. Current situation could be described as the ultimate fight of the "old" system to maintain its control over the state's institutions. It is not a secret that institutions such as Judiciary, Diplomatic corps, the Armed Forces, security sector are under the President, Milo Djukanovic's control and influence. The Government's main task is to change officials of these institutions aiming to gain their control. Djukanovic is vehemently resisting on the Government's efforts moving on the edge of constitutional order. The ruling majority has slightly started to touch controversial cases with a "smell of scandals" of the former Government sending a strong message that it could push Djukanovic and his colleagues with judicial persecutions. The international community is watching discreetly current political situation in Montenegro. Western powers are supporting discreetly (almost secretly) Djukanovic, while Russia and Serbia enjoy*

*political change in the country but the keep low profile. Montenegro's President said that the country needs snap elections but the ruling majority is gaining political time to strengthen its position and currently elections are not an option. Turbulence and political provocation against the Government motivated by foreign circles aiming to topple the ruling coalition could not be excluded. Montenegro needs 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. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.*



**NORTH MACEDONIA:** January 20<sup>th</sup>, the Government approved the draft laws on amending the ID cards, driver and traffic licenses, travel documents (passports) and other documents to be printed bilingually and with the new name of the country. (www.republika.mk)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, effective fight against corruption is needed for the country's progress and better lives of the citizens, EU Ambassador David Geer said on Wednesday. (www.republika.mk)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, with 62 votes, the Parliament adopted the Law on Census of Population and Households, which is to be held in April this year. The MPs of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) did

not participate in the vote and announced that they will collect signatures from the citizens for annulment of this law. (www.republika.mk)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) leader, Ali Ahmeti commenting the upcoming census noted that the Albanians could not be less than 25%, as they were in 2002. He argued that Albanians in North Macedonia have a birth rate that has increased in recent years. (www.republika.mk)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ████ :

*The law on state's census which is scheduled for the coming April could become a factor of tension and instability in the country. The upcoming census is not only a parliamentary dispute but it could be evolved into an interethnic dispute. Opposition VMRO-DPMNE rejects the idea of census due to nationalistic criteria and ideas. Ethnic Albanians declare publically that they will not accept a result which will downsize Albanian population of the country in less than 20 – 25%. The Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev is trying to downgrade the upcoming census speaking for "a statistical act which will not affect ethnic groups' rights." The open front with Bulgaria regarding identity and language issues continues to affect the opening of accession talks of Skopje with the EU. It is an "open sore" which should be resolved as soon as possible and North Macedonia is the one should compromise. However, EU officials highlight lately that accession talks are not affected only by the Skopje – Sofia dispute, bur corruption is also a major issue. Netherlands Ambassador in North Macedonia has strongly criticized corruption of the country, while also the EU Ambassador in*

*Skopje said that corruption is a problem for opening accession talks. It is encouraging that Skopje implements the “Prespa” agreement with Greece; last week the Government approved the change of state’s name (from Macedonia to North Macedonia) in documents such as passports, driving licenses, ID cards.*



**ROMANIA:** January 19<sup>th</sup>, a reformist faction within the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) – Romania’s senior ruling party, represented by MEP Rares Bogdan and Robert Sighiartau, is likely to attempt to overthrow Former Prime minister Ludovic Orban from the party’s helm at the coming congress. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, Romania’s center-right Government drafted and passed a memorandum to meet the European Commission’s requirements under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), which establishes an “ambitious” timetable, the Prime Minister Florin Citu announced on Wednesday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, at this moment, ensuring an as fast and efficient as possible implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is “essential” for the Romanian authorities, Deputy Prime Minister Dan Barna said at his meeting today with Istvan Jakab, Acting Head of the European Commission’s Representation in Romania. (www.nineoclock.ro)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Internal problems of PNL it may affect the already fragile ruling coalition with UDMR and USR-PLUS. However, it is unlikely party’s*

*internal disputes to topple the Government. The minority Government of Florin Citu seeks to forward the necessary reforms but the fragile support in the Parliament limits its options. In other words the country faces political instability and uncertainty with a weak Government amid the COVID-19 pandemic and difficult economic circumstances. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. After redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security.*



**SERBIA:** January 19<sup>th</sup>, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic condemned former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj’s statement on a possible union with Albania as a threat to Serbia, the region and Europe. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the European Parliament’s rapporteur for Kosovo Viola von Cramon-Taubadel warned on Friday that Chinese investments in Serbia’s heavy industry are a political issue and are not helping local companies become profitable. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Serbia’s opposition New Party (Nova Stranka) and Social-Democrats invited all other opposition parties and



movements to a joint meeting next Tuesday to discuss proposals for an inter-party dialogue under the European Union's auspices ahead of 2022 elections. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Serbian ruling coalition is not really willing to start a substantial intra-party dialogue with opposition parties under the EU auspices. Opposition "invests" in these talks seeking to unite all political forces against the Government. On the other hand, the EU seeks to interfere in Serbian internal politics weakening the President Aleksandr Vucic's power. It is true that the long reign of SNS in Serbian politics includes shortcomings in transparency, accountability, corruption, lack of rule of law, weak judicial system. But one could claim that Serbia is not in worst situation compared to the other Western Balkan countries. On the contrary, Serbia could present better rates in several economic and political sectors. Besides, opposition decided to boycott last elections strengthening the democratic vacuum in the country; giving an alibi to the ruling coalition to fully control the Parliament. The fact is that political struggle in Serbia has geopolitical dimension namely the strong approach of Serbia with Russia and China. Moreover, military neutrality of Serbia is a problem for the Euro-Atlantic structures. The EU has openly criticized the Chinese investments in Serbia as "unnecessary and non profitable." It is not a secret that the EU would encourage a political change in the country aiming to get rid of the SNS and SPS burden. Vucic expressed his concern over the Kosovo former Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj statements who openly spoke for a unification of Kosovo with Albania. The*

*Serbian President has called such scenario as a threat of Serbia and the region. The country enjoys an upgrade in its regional influence after the political change in Montenegro where a pro-Serbian Government has been established. Kosovo – Serbia dialogue is on hold after political instability in Pristina and the early elections scheduled for February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.*



**SLOVENIA:** January 18<sup>th</sup>, Defense Minister Matej Tonin said the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) have managed to reverse the negative staffing trend in 2020, as the SAF hired 222 members of the permanent force and 73 members of the contractual reserve. (www.sta.si)

- January 19<sup>th</sup>, Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia's (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) leader Karl Erjavec has withdrawn his bid to become PM-designate until all MPs are able to vote in person, after an opposition MP was confirmed to have the coronavirus and several others still waited for the results of their tests. Erjavec said he planned to resubmit the motion of no confidence in the Janez Jansa Government as soon as all MPs who have signed the motion can vote. (www.sta.si)

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, the Foreign Policy Committee debated the Government declaring the Lebanon-based political party Hezbollah a criminal and terrorist organization as a whole, with most of its members endorsing the decision. (www.sta.si)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Foreign Ministers of Slovenia and Croatia, Anze Logar and Gordan Grlic Radman, assessed after their talks in Zagreb that they had managed to raise the Slovenian - Croatian relations to a higher level in the past ten months. The talks focused on Croatia's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Adriatic Sea, and included the border arbitration. ([www.sta.si](http://www.sta.si))

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, four opposition parties filed a motion to oust Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Minister Janez Cigler Kralj over his work during the epidemic and the Ministry's decision to grant funds to an NGO with close links to the Minister. ([www.sta.si](http://www.sta.si))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*DeSUS has delayed temporarily the no confidence motion against the Janez Jansa Government. Jansa's ruling coalition feels safe estimating that opposition cannot reach the necessary votes to topple it. However, the Government is not so stable enjoying fragile support in the Parliament. Announcement of Croatia that it will determine its Exclusive Economic Zone in the Adriatic Sea, it may force Slovenia to claim its rights regarding the Piran Bay dispute between the two states. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under question and it is assessed that they cannot accomplish their mission. The Government is working to improve military situation of the country. In this context, manning situation has slightly improved since almost 300 soldiers were hired. Adoption of an ambitious economic project of 780 million Euros would provide a strong fund for strengthening the Armed Forces.*



**TURKEY:** January 20<sup>th</sup>, not even officially in office yet, US President-elect Joe Biden's choice for Secretary of State has already started to accuse NATO member Turkey on Tuesday of not acting like an ally and claimed Washington will review if further sanctions are required on Ankara over its acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense systems. ([www.dailysabah.com](http://www.dailysabah.com))

- January 20<sup>th</sup>, Turkey condemned on Wednesday Israel's plan to construct over 2,500 new settlement units in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. ([www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr))

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Turkey may conduct a joint counterterrorism operation with Iraq to clear PKK terrorists out of the Sinjar region, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday. ([www.dailysabah.com](http://www.dailysabah.com))

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday dismissed the possibility of holding early elections, as he reiterated once again that such claims are nothing but speculation. ([www.dailysabah.com](http://www.dailysabah.com))

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, at the end of a busy diplomatic week in Brussels, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that Turkey and the EU officials agreed to further enhance dialogue and engage in concrete actions while both sides voiced a consensus on the need to renew the March 18th migration deal, aimed at reducing the influx of irregular migrants toward Europe. ([www.dailysabah.com](http://www.dailysabah.com))

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Turkey's Defense Chief expressed on Saturday hope that lawful solutions to the bilateral issues troubling Greece and Turkey will

be reached at the talks set to take place in Istanbul on Monday. ([www.dailysabah.com](http://www.dailysabah.com))

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Following political change in the US administration Turkey focuses on ameliorating its relations with the EU. Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu visited Brussels where he met top officials seeking to re-establish trust between the two parts and to redefine bilateral relations. On the other hand, the new US administration is appeared determined to harden its position towards Turkey claiming that the latter does not act as an ally. The EU and the US both needs Turkey more than ever in an unstable international environment especially in regions with strategic importance for regional security such as Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe – South Caucasus. In the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea, Turkey is ready to sit on the table of exploratory talks with Greece aiming to reduce tension in the region and to send a positive message to the EU. Turkey is ready to cooperate with Iraq in military level for launching a joint operation against PKK militants in Iraqi territory. None could ignore Turkey in regional level and this is confirmed not only by the fact that Turkey has military presence in several fronts in the region but also that joins several political and diplomatic initiatives for resolving ongoing conflicts. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability,*


*peace and even unity of the state. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.*


[www.hermesresearch.eu](http://www.hermesresearch.eu)


email: [info@hermesresearch.eu](mailto:info@hermesresearch.eu)


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas


## **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.*