



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

## ***SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE***

### ***AT A GLANCE***



***SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE***

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” 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, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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

### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

“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 © 2019

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved





**ALBANIA:** February 19<sup>th</sup>, in response to the opposition's actions regarding their MPs mandates, the President of the American Chamber of Commerce (ACC) in Albania, Mark Crawford, stated that lack of domestic political stability presents an economic threat. Crawford reiterated his opinion that domestic politics should be more careful with Albania's international profile. The ACC President went on to add that everything that provides further stability is a positive, whilst anything and everything that negatively impacts stability a detractor. He said the current political climate creates resistance for investors, but some are still willing to wait for the situation to be stabilized. He expressed concern regarding those who have become wary of investing in Albania, reiterating that reputation with foreign investors should be a priority for the country's top politicians. The risk of foreign investors to abandon Albania becomes even more of a concern as the other Balkan states continue to introduce more favorable investment policies. The U.S business representative in Albania admitted that other countries of the region provide a more attractive investment environment. *"At least we should be competitive with the region, because if the return on investment is more stable in Skopje or Pristina, people will go there,"* Crawford explained. These statements were made following a meeting between the American Chamber of Commerce and the Albanian Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data. (www.tiranatimes.com, www.oranews.tv)

- February 21<sup>st</sup>, opposition supporters in Albania hailed the decision of their MPs to quit the country's Parliament, while the European

Commission and European Parliament criticized their decision which *"undermines democracy."* Opposition parties summoned their protesters near the Parliament in Tirana, where Police deployed about 1,000 officers, equipped with gas masks and some in full anti-riot gear. Police warned on Wednesday about *"plans to storm the Parliament"* and ordered telecommunication companies to switch off signals at the area of the protest. However, no violence occurred and opposition supporters created their own cordon to separate the protesters from the police. Some youngsters threw flares at the Police before Lulzim Basha, Head of the main opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë - PD), led protesters toward the Parliament, a few hundred meters away and near the Prime Minister Edi Rama's office, which protesters attacked last Saturday. As Police struggled to reposition forces on Tirana's Heroes of the Nation boulevard, the protesters dispersed peacefully. Announcing more protests, Basha told his supporters: *"Today, our journey of hope begins. Today we put a padlock on the Parliament of the crime."* Before the protest, Albania's U.S and EU allies issued several statements calling for peace. The EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn issued a joint statement *"In view of the protests in Albania today, we reaffirm the right of citizens to engage in peaceful demonstrations as an essential feature and a core value of democracy, but we strongly denounce any rhetoric by political leaders calling for violence,"* it read. The U.S Embassy said *"The United States urges all participants in today's demonstrations to peacefully exercise their right of assembly and reject violence, and calls on the Government and security forces to practice restraint."* Albania has entered unknown political territory after the

opposition decided to relinquish its MPs' mandates. Previously, opposition parties had boycotted the Parliament but not given up their mandates. ([www.balkaninsight.com](http://www.balkaninsight.com))

- February 15<sup>th</sup>, the Minister of Infrastructure, Belinda Nalluku, announced that the Government has finalized the financial agreement with Turkish Airlines, while the company has been able to receive international certifications. *"We have worked to consolidate the technical testing phase and to produce the documents and manuals that lead to the certification. The final process will be completed within 10 days,"* she said. The CEO of Turkish Airlines said that *"Air Albania"* airplanes will be soon flying carrying passengers. *"We are very proud to cooperate with the Albanian company. The infrastructure is ready, as you have seen. The technical process is completed very carefully."* The Prime Minister, Edi Rama replied to all critics regarding *"Air Albania"* saying *"Air Albania, the first national company, a joint venture with Turkey's flag carrier Turkish Airlines which has launched its first test flight last October is not disappeared or lost, it just needs more time."* Rama rejected last week's leaks that Air Albania is heading toward failure. ([www.albaniandailynews.com](http://www.albaniandailynews.com), [www.top-channel.tv](http://www.top-channel.tv))

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister, Edi Rama speaking in Italian media which pays special attention to the current political developments in Albania said that there is no chaos in the country but he stressed that opposition incites conflict. Regarding renunciation of mandates, Rama said that the opposition has undertaken such action to block justice reform. *"There is no chaos or revolt by the people. Protesting in the square are neither yellow vests, nor trade unions, nor students, but*

*the parliamentary opposition which was sent at home by the people a few years ago after it had immersed the country into corruption. Today they do not want to face local election because they know that another defeat is waiting for them,"* Rama said. ([www.albaniandailynews.com](http://www.albaniandailynews.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Albania has entered in a period of political turmoil and fragile political stability not only because opposition organizes huge massive protests against the Government, but mainly because opposition MPs decided to abandon Parliament and resign. Such an action is blocking Parliament's works undermining Albania's reforms (economic, justice etc). Such decision was strongly criticized by the international community namely the EU (and U.S) putting at risk the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama claimed that his open to dialogue but he excluded the possibility of early parliamentary election. As long as the Government does not collapse it is estimated that opposition will try to polarize political atmosphere which may lead in violent outbreak in the country. 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. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Latest European Parliament assessment on Albania accession negotiations is a rather positive sign underlining concerns over specific issues such as corruption, justice reforms, and implementation*

*of rule of law. The final decision for opening Albania's accession negotiations in June 2019 is up to the EU Heads of Governments. One should underline that unofficial concerns have already been raised regarding this date. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a “mother nation.” It is estimated that Albania will fully comply with the EU and U.S “line” for territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo if it is necessary for a mutual accepted solution. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of “protector” of Albanians in the region.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

February 19<sup>th</sup>, Bosnian authorities discovered six Afghan migrants, five of which are suspected terrorists, and the sixth is suspected of smuggling and organized crime. The State Security Minister Dragan Mektic confirmed this information, saying they were placed under supervision in the Istocno Sarajevo Migrant Centre. *“They were apprehended, and we are investigating more information regarding the case and how they entered Bosnia illegally,”* Mektic said. *“We are investigating the route they followed, and when we get enough information, we will decide on their fate.”* The suspects entered Bosnia during the first two months of 2019 and were residing among the migrants in the northern town of Bihac

and the capital of Sarajevo. Receiving information from foreign security agencies, inspectors of the State Foreigners Affairs Agency discovered the suspects during security screenings of migrants. Last year Bosnia recorded some 25,000 migrants who entered the country illegally in a bid to get to Western European countries. Most of them left the country and some 10,000 are still residing in migrant centers across the country. According to the Security Ministry, Bosnia can expect additional 25,000 migrants in 2019, and the State Border Police expects the first wave of migrants to come in spring 2019. ([www.ban1info.com](http://www.ban1info.com))

- February 20<sup>th</sup>, four and a half months after the general election, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) entity's House of Peoples (HoP) will hold its inaugural session on Wednesday, when 55 out of 58 delegates will be elected – 17 Bosniaks, just as many Croats, 14 Serbs and seven “Other.” Serb delegates will fill the remaining three mandates after the House of Peoples implements the Central Election Commission's (CIK) instruction on how to form the new House of Peoples. Namely, the FBiH HoP delegates are elected when all the cantons submit their representative lists to the CIK for confirmation. This year, the process took months because the CIK had to change the election procedure after the authorities failed to amend the State Election Law. The coalition with most delegates in the House is the one led by the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) with 14 delegates, followed by the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Socijaldemokratska Partija Bosne i Hercegovine – SDP) with 11 delegates and the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka

Demokratske Akcije - SDA) with nine delegates. (www.ban1info.com)

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, leader of one of the left-leaning parties that have formed a pro-Bosnian bloc after the election in October 2018 is having doubts about the bloc's recent refusal to enter a coalition with the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) and be part of the Government. The BH Bloc promised never to enter a coalition with any ethnic-oriented party and opted for remaining in opposition, but Zeljko Komsic, the leader of Democratic Front (Demokratska Fronta - DF) told the Montenegrin "Pobjeda" that he is questioning what voters will say after the Bloc decided to stay once again away from the Government. The SDA insisted on a coalition with the BH Bloc but after it was rejected multiple times, it reached out to the two other nationalist parties, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrataor - SNSD). The three parties can now form a Government although the latter two aim to change the internal structure of Bosnia or disintegrate it while the SDA (and BH Bloc) is vehemently such a scenario. The way things stand now, important issues will be soon on the agenda, like the Election Law which the HDZ BiH wants to change so that people can vote only for members of their own ethnic group - something the SDA is firmly against. But Komsic said he has fears that SDA may give in to the HDZ request without the BH Bloc being able to prevent it as it is not part of the Government. "By avoiding to participate in the Government, have we given the SDA a green light to make a deal with the HDZ?"

Komsic asked, adding that if such a deal is made, citizens will rightfully question the BH Bloc's decision. It is much better to enter a political battle because only then you have a chance to win, he said. The BH Bloc is linked by the common idea of a multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina as a citizen-oriented country, he said, noting that one of the parties of the Bloc, the (Socijaldemokratska Partija Bosne i Hercegovine – SDP), have started dividing citizens into 'rurals' and 'urbans', which is wrong. (www.ban1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Bosnia has not a Government since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 general elections. It seems that the three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) are reaching an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government bypassing their different views on main issues. Bosnia's accession process towards NATO is the main disputable issue; Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO while the two other members of the tripartite Presidency set commitment to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government. The EP released a report urging the three entities to show responsibility and to overcome their differences forming a Government and implementing the necessary reforms towards the EU accession process. Bosnian Serbs insist on blocking any further steps towards Bosnia's accession to NATO. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. Croatia and Serbia keep on*



*intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. It is more than impressive that Bosnian Serbs and Croats came very close aiming at achieving their special goals. Of course, both entities take in advantage "Dayton Peace Agreement" weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while F.Y.R.O.M would join the Alliance on June 2019. These two countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only "vehicles" for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO (mostly) integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.*



**BULGARIA:** February 18<sup>th</sup>,

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) decided to leave the Parliament. Party leader, Kornelia Ninova has set the terms of the ruling majority [Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB), Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS), United Patriots, and sometimes Volya] *"Election of a new Central Electoral Commission, annulment of midnight votes, return of the reference to the levels at which it was before the voting on that day and the*

*reopening of the debate on the machine vote, the return of the right of every Bulgarian citizen to be able to seek the rights before the Supreme Administrative Court with a cassation complaint."* BSP also addressed the Bulgarian citizens and political parties for the protection of the freedom of democracy and the rule of law." (www.novinite.com)

- February 21<sup>st</sup>, the Government is setting up an anti-disinformation unit to work by the end of the month. The unit will be in the structure of the Council of Ministers and will be responsibility of a Deputy Prime Minister, reports Dnevnik, citing its own sources. Its creation is enshrined in the Joint Action Plan of the European Commission and the European Parliament adopted in December 2019. The Bulgarian Unit will be a "contact point" with the Rapid Response System, which will be led by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs. It is not yet known whether and what kind of staff will this institution have, what technical and expert opportunities will be used and where it will be located. The specific employee who will personally contact will also receive a lot of political information. Therefore, this is not just a clerical administrator. The Government does not answer who the Deputy Prime Minister for Combating Disinformation will be, most likely Tomislav Donchev. In some of the European countries, strategic units have been established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Rapid Alert System is part of the European Commission's Action Plan to Combat Disinformation. It addresses attempts and threats from third parties to manipulate open discussions in EU member states, with "third countries" tacitly referring to Russia. The objectives of the rapid response system are to ensure coordination between



Member States, the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the exchange of information on “fake” real-time information. The contact point (ie the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister) will coordinate the activities of all competent national authorities on the signals received in the system. The European system will be based on a “secure” platform where Member States can share information (unclassified and open source only) about foreign campaigns and attempts to distribute fake news. This will also be the space for coordinating the reactions of states. The system is planned to be linked to the existing Emergency Response Coordination Center as well as the Situation Center of the European External Action Service. The EU plan foresees that the system will work together with existing networks of the European Parliament, NATO and the G7. (www.novinite.com)

- February 21<sup>st</sup>, “In July we are entering the Eurozone waiting room,” Prime Minister Boyko Borisov said, quoted by BGNES. At the end of this year, we will have 17.5% external debt. We will finish with over 120 billion Leva GDP, Borisov also announced. Extensive investments are expected. Unemployment and smuggling will fall below 5%, Borisov said, pointing out that in July the country will enter the Eurozone waiting room. (www.novinite.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots looks like the vulnerable piece of the Governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of fragile political stability. The President Radev grabs*

*every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borisov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. It decided last week to abstain from Parliament sessions setting specific terms to the ruling coalition. It is not clear yet which are the goals of such an initiative except of disturbing Parliaments works. It is estimated that such actions are pre-electoral reactions regarding the EP election on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although 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. Security situation stable; no major threats.*



**CROATIA:** February 21<sup>st</sup>, a year after Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic and her Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic met in Zagreb and agreed that the two countries should try to reach an agreement on their border

dispute within the next two years, there is still no agreement between Zagreb and Belgrade on the matter. In February 2018, the two Presidents agreed that Croatia and Serbia would try to reach an agreement bilaterally, and if unsuccessful, would seek help from an international tribunal. Serbian President Vucic had said at the time that Zagreb and Belgrade had opposing positions on the border issue. According to officials in Belgrade, even though there has been some progress with regard to the land border, Croatia and Serbia are still far from an agreement on the border on the Danube River. The disputed areas on the Danube stretch along some 140 kilometers of the river's 188-kilometer course in that area. While Serbia claims that the border follows the course of the river, Croatia's stance is that the national border follows the borders of the cadastral municipalities, established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which have seats in one or the other country. A State Secretary at the Serbian Foreign Ministry, Nemanja Stevanovic, said in a recent interview with the Serbian news agency Tanjug that the biggest obstacle to the agreement were two river islands on the Danube – the Sarengrad and Vukovar islands – and that Zagreb insisted on a solution that was contrary to international law. Nonetheless, Stevanovic noted that some progress was made with regard to the land border at a meeting of the inter-state commission for borders in 2018. The Croatian Foreign Ministry dismissed the claim that Croatia is in violation of international law, saying that the border of Croatia as a Yugoslav republic had become its state border with its declaration of independence. In other words, Croatia wants the basis for an agreement to be the cadastre. *"This was also confirmed in the position of the Badinter Commission,"* it added. An international arbitration group established in the early stages of

the dissolution of former Yugoslavia in 1991, the Badinter Arbitration Committee said in its ruling that former boundaries between Yugoslav republics were to become borders protected by international law, unless the countries agreed otherwise. The Croatian ministry added that the border between the two republics was defined precisely, and had never been on the Danube. They also said that, in the continuation of negotiations, they expected *"Serbia to abide by its general position, made public on a number of occasions, on the need to respect the borders between the former republics as one of the main principles of international law, and to apply them in defining its position for the entire border with Croatia, because at present it accepts that principle for only one part of the border, in the area of Srijem. We now expect an invitation from the Serbian side to a new meeting, and we hope it will be held soon,"* the Croatian Foreign Ministry said. (www.n1info.com)

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, according to a statement released by the President's office, Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic and Slovenian President Borut Pahor met for an informal working lunch in Zagreb. Pahor arrived in Zagreb from where he will continue on to Split at the invitation of the organizers of the Split half marathon, while the informal meeting between the two Presidents was held in conjunction with their agreement aimed at maintaining good neighborly relations between Croatia and Slovenia. During the meeting they discussed several issues, including the next Brdo Brijuni Process meeting which will be held in Albania in May 2019. The two Presidents agreed that in the current international environment it is important to preserve good neighborly relations and political dialogue at the highest level. In this regard they

discussed the last Slovenia-Austria-Croatia trilateral meeting as well as a draft by the President Pahor related to a business forum of the Three Seas Initiative, which will be held at the beginning of June in Slovenia. ([www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr](http://www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr))

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) has joined the two-week boycott of the HRT public broadcaster, launched by NGOs in a show of support for journalists and media outlets the broadcaster sued, the SDP said in a press release. The SDP will not appear on or give statements to HRT, it said. Thirty civil society organizations earlier this month said they would boycott the HRT until March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 when journalists scheduled a protest over the lawsuits. They said in a letter that the purpose of their boycott is to draw attention to the absurdity of the situation in which a public broadcasting service is suing media outlets and journalists over their reporting on how public money is being spent, thus undermining freedom of the press in Croatia through intimidation and pressure. HRT has so far filed at least 36 lawsuits against media outlets and journalists, seeking 311,000 euro in damages. Rather than with lawsuits and pressure, a public media service should protect its reputation and independence by supporting journalists, improving the quality of its program and management, and with other activities aimed at protecting and not undermining freedom of the press, the letter said. It added that the official position of the European Federation of Journalists is that the HRT is the worst public service in Europe in terms of independence, adding that filing lawsuits is a problematic way of spending taxpayers' money and an unprecedented practice

of a public broadcaster in Europe. ([www.n1info.com](http://www.n1info.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. It is assessed that Croatia's strategic goal is to amend "Dayton Peace Agreement" achieving to recognize Bosnian Croats as a third entity in the country. It is more than obvious that Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising "local" (Western Balkans) power. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. Although the President is a member of the ruling party, it is estimated that there is some kind of political distance between the President and Government. However, the state enjoys political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.*



**CYPRUS:** February 21<sup>st</sup>, Turkey will begin drilling for oil and gas near Cyprus in coming days, state-owned news agency Anadolu reported Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said. *“In the coming days we will start drilling with two ships around Cyprus,”* Cavusoglu was quoted as saying in a speech to a business conference in western Turkey’s Aydin province. *“Let those who come to the region from far away, and their companies, see that nothing can be done in that region without us. Nothing at all can be done in the Mediterranean without Turkey, we will not allow that,”* Cavusoglu said. Turkey launched its first drillship Fatih in October to drill off the coast of Turkey’s southern Antalya province. It said a second ship that it purchased would operate in the Black Sea, but was diverted to the Cyprus area. Turkey’s claims in the island’s EEZ partly overlap with Cyprus’ blocks 1, 4, 6 and 7. Ankara also supports the breakaway north’s claims on blocks 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12 and 13, including within few kilometres from the Aphrodite gas field in block12. ([www.cyprus-mail.com](http://www.cyprus-mail.com))

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Cyprus settlement talks must continue based on UN Security Council resolutions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said following a meeting in Moscow with his Cypriot counterpart Nicos Christodoulides. He also said the guarantee system is an achronistic. Christodoulides was in the Russian capital to discuss the Cyprus issue, bilateral relations and those between the EU and Russia, as well as developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Lavrov said his talks with Christodoulides were comprehensive and that they placed great importance on the Cyprus issue. He also said that they discussed in depth a wide range of issues on the bilateral agenda and focused on those agreed

during the visit of President Nicos Anastasiades to Russia a year ago. He also said he had gladly accepted the invitation by Christodoulides to visit Cyprus. As regards the Cyprus problem, the Russian Minister said that the existing system of guarantees is outdated and no longer corresponded to reality. Also, the UN Security Council, he said, does not see the necessity for any changes to the UNFICYP mission at the moment. A prerequisite for securing the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus, could be the guarantees of the United Nations Security Council, Lavrov said. *“We are in favor of a just, stable, viable and comprehensive solution (of the Cyprus problem),”* Lavrov said. *“We believe that bi-communal talks should continue on the basis of the existing UN Security Council resolutions and any changes be made by new Security Council resolutions.”* Cyprus, he said, is an important partner for Russia in Europe. Christodoulides expressed Cyprus’ satisfaction for the longstanding stance of Russia to the Cyprus issue, in particular within the framework of the UN Security Council, the clear position for the abolition of the anachronistic system of guarantees dating from 1960, and any intervention rights conferred thereof, as well as the need to keep the presence of the peacekeeping force in Cyprus uninterrupted *“for as long as this present, unacceptable state of affairs continues.”* He said he informed Lavrov about the latest developments on the Cyprus issue and conveyed Anastasiades’ readiness to continue the talks from where they left off at Crans-Montana, Switzerland in mid-2017. Christodoulides said that he asked for the contribution of Lavrov to achieve the *“non-negotiable goal”* of reaching a solution on the basis of the relevant UN resolutions, European law, and the principles and values of the EU. The two Ministers also discussed international and

regional issues and agreed to continue contacts both bilaterally and internationally. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the UN has officially recognized the recent disputed actions on behalf of the Turkish military in the Strovilia area as new violations of the military status quo in the region and has made demarches, the Cyprus Foreign Ministry announced. In its announcement, the Ministry said that the Government is closely monitoring the situation and is in constant consultation with the UN, which is working towards lifting the violations in order to fully restore the status quo in the region. *“From the first moment, the Government made relevant representations to UNFICYP, to the UN Secretariat in New York, as well as to the members of the UN Security Council,”* the announcement said. According to the Ministry, tensions rose on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 when the Turkish military, *“citing unjustified allegations of so-called smuggling in the area, placed roadblocks on a rural road, preventing the residents’ access to their crops.”* In the ensuing days, it added, the Turkish Army informed Strovilia residents that new procedures were in effect regarding their movement into and out of the village, while the Ministry also asserted that checks were also conducted on UN personnel at the boundaries of British military territory (SBA). The village of Strovilia is inside the Dhekelia SBA but the area in question, along with a few homes, sits just outside the boundary between Dhekelia SBA and the breakaway Turkish Cypriot part. It is understood that there never was an official buffer zone in the area. The fuss was over a dirt road used by people when they wanted to avoid customs at the checkpoint. The Turkish side apparently blocked the road,

prompting reports of an encroachment. The issue was settled after they moved their barriers slightly back and the British bases placed their own to prevent smuggling in a disputed zone in the Famagusta district, the British High Commission said on Friday. Daily Phileleftheros had reported that the Turkish military had advanced in the Strovilia area, increasing the extent of the territory under occupation. They reportedly placed barrels, bars and chains to cut off an area where the three Greek Cypriot families reside in three houses, it said. The incursion of the Turkish military had taken place between February 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019. CyBC also said the families were told by the Turkish military they now lived in the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” and that they would therefore need travel documents issued by the breakaway north if they wish to visit the nearby British base. In 2000 the Turkish military moved its position forward in the area, violating the status quo in the village, according to the UN. Despite repeated calls to withdraw to its original position, the Turkish military has not complied. In its latest renewal of UNFICYP’s mandate last month, the UN Security in its official resolution called on the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkish forces to restore in Strovilia the military status quo which existed there prior to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. Its natural gas deposits affect not only its economy but also its security. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. At the moment, Cyprus is engaged in three different trilateral formations which also include strong features of strategic cooperation and alliance;*

*Cyprus – Egypt – Greece, Cyprus – Israel – Greece, and Cyprus – Jordan – Greece. The last two are highly improved due to the US engagement which expressed their interest by joining the latest summit. Drilling activities on behalf of ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum in Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone are close to the end and the announcement of results will determine further steps. Turkish threats and aggression did not stop the Cypriot energy project so far. It is a fact that Cyprus has a significant deficit of military power which is (externally) balanced by regional cooperation. However, the US administration appears ready to abolish the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Involvement of an American company (ExxonMobil) in the drills it is proved “wise” and “smart.” Turkey escalates tension in the region by announcing drills for oil and gas within Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) while a huge aeronautical exercise has been announced for February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of military power and especially aeronautical forces it is expected Greece to be engaged more actively in the region. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries (Israel, Egypt etc) sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed earlier than summer 2019. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation”; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most*

*important is considered the decision-making process. Recent close approach between Cyprus and the US provoked Russia’s strong reaction which foresees a possible isolation from its influence in the Island. It is not a secret that Russia enjoys or used to enjoy a privileged relationship with Cyprus due to the US distance regarding defense and foreign policy neutrality. It is a question how Cyprus will achieve to balance between the US and Russia interests in the region. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.*



**GREECE:** February 21<sup>st</sup>, as part of the ongoing Strategic Dialogue between Greece and the US, Foreign Minister Giorgos Katrougalos hosted a working meeting with an American delegation led by Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt. The meeting focused on the further development of bilateral ties in the fields of commerce, investments, energy, regional economic cooperation and people-to-people interactions. Diplomatic sources said there will be more such meetings in the context of the Strategic Dialogue, which was launched last December in Washington. The need to further strengthen ties was also noted during a phone call on Tuesday between Deputy US Secretary of State John Sullivan and Katrougalos. Meanwhile, Pyatt also met with New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Thursday. He briefed the conservative leader about the large US delegation that will arrive in Greece next week to attend the Delphi Economic Forum from February 28<sup>th</sup> to March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019. ([www.ekathimerini.com](http://www.ekathimerini.com))



- February 22<sup>nd</sup> Greece's main opposition New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) warned the Government against making any major foreign policy decisions and commitments during an election year. *“Time is counting down... This is a time for managing foreign policy issues and not for major initiatives or moves that may bind the hands... of the country's next Government,”* New Democracy's shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Giorgos Koumoutsakos, said on a meeting of the National Foreign Policy Council earlier in the day. The conservative party called on the Government to keep the opposition abreast of all new developments on the foreign policy front, stressing that the *“outgoing Government should not move ahead with major decision on issues that are vital to the country.”* The National Foreign Policy Council met on Friday mainly to discuss developments regarding Turkey and Brexit. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, in his first interview as Greece's Defense Minister, the country's former Armed Forces Chief Evangelos Apostolakis has told Kathimerini that adopting confidence-building measures with Turkey in a bid to reduce tensions in the Aegean is a key priority. Speaking of an established *“channel of communication”* between himself and his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar, also a former military Chief, Apostolakis said their aim was to implement the confidence-building measures agreed in 1988 by then Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias and Turkey's Mesut Yilmaz. The enforcement of that agreement is needed *“to avert the creation of frequent unnecessary tensions that could lead to a possible accident with uncontrollable consequences,”* Apostolakis said. As for the so-called *“Blue Motherland”* air and sea exercises that Turkey is to hold in the Aegean and

Mediterranean next week, Apostolakis sought to play down the issue, saying they were part of *“regular training activities”* of the Turkish Armed Forces but would nonetheless be monitored by Greece's Armed Forces. The term *“mavi vatan”* – which translates into English as “blue motherland” – was used in November by Akar in reference to a swath of the Aegean, Mediterranean and Black seas, fueling concern in Athens. Asked about a comment he made in December, while still Armed Forces Chief, according to which Greece would *“flatten”* any rocky islet that Turkish forces land upon in the Aegean, Apostolakis referred to a *“self-evident answer to a hypothetical question.”* He stressed *“the readiness and capability of the Greek Armed Forces to defend national interests when and if required.”* The Minister also underlined the importance of bolstering Greece's defense capabilities, pointing to an upgrade of F16 fighter jets, P-3B maritime patrol aircraft, Mirage 2000s and navy frigates. Questioned about Greece's increasingly close diplomatic and military ties with the US and about the potential for defense procurements from European suppliers, Apostolakis said Greece had a *“long-standing strategic defense relationship”* with the US but *“chiefly belongs to the European family”* and is examining various European procurement options while also seeking to boost Greece's domestic defense industry. As for the Prespes deal with what is now North Macedonia, which is set to join NATO, Apostolakis said the agreement and accession pave the way for *“boosting and extending our cooperation with the neighboring country in the area of defense.”* (www.ekathimerini.gr)

**COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :**



*Political situation in the country is rapidly evolving and it is assessed that early parliamentary elections will be held on May 2019. The country has entered in pre-electoral period. A long pre-electoral period first of all may polarize society with unpredictable results and secondly it hurts national economy. The Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras focuses on approaching the center-left voters and weakening KINAL (former PASOK). Political turmoil emerged in a period where Greece faces several diplomatic, security, and economic challenges. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek Defense Minister announced mutual efforts with his Turkish counterpart for confidence-building measures. Although he tried to downgrade next week's Turkish aeronautical exercise "Blue Motherland" one should note that such an activity it is not "a usual armed forces training." Such training including real fires, virtual naval blockade of eastern Aegean Greek islands, and simulations of landing operations definitely it does not work towards confidence-building measures. On the contrary, it raises tension in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea and it is assessed of high risk activity. Turkish fighter jets keep violating Greek airspace, while NAVTEXs reserves part of Greek continental shelf and Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. None could exclude Greek Navy intervention in a possible incident with Turkish vessels accompanying Turkish drill ships. Security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident.*



**KOSOVO:** February 20<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo's Ministry of Local Government Administration advised the Parliament to reject the initiative of

Mitrovica South Mayor, Agim Bahtiri, who sought unification of this ethnically divided town. More than 16 thousand citizens have signed a petition launched by Mitrovica South Mayor, Agim Bahtiri, on changing municipal boundaries, namely on unification of the southern part inhabited by Albanians with the north dominated by Serbs. But the Ministry of Local Government Administration gave an advisory opinion and suggested the Parliament of Kosovo to reject such an initiative due to legal shortcomings. Gazeta Express got hold of a document of the Ministry, dated January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019, advising the Parliament to reject the initiative and the petition with the justification that it is in violation with the Constitution of Kosovo. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- February 20<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo has renewed its bid to join International Criminal Police Organization after Serbia blocked Kosovo's entry into Interpol last year. Kosovo's Minister of Internal Affairs, Ekrem Mustafa, confirmed to Gazeta Express that they have submitted the application to join the Interpol on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2019. The Interpol has yet to confirm whether Kosovo's bid will be included in the agenda of General Assembly of this International Criminal Police Organization during their regular meetings in 2019. Mustafa said the decision to resubmit the application has been taken by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli. Minister of Interior hopes Kosovo will finally join Interpol in 2019. Kosovo strained relations with Serbia after Belgrade lobbied against Kosovo's entry into Interpol. To counter Belgrade's aggressive campaign, Kosovo introduced trade tariffs on Serbian goods, which remain in place. The decision to reapply for Interpol membership has alarmed Serbian officials, with Serbian Foreign

Minister Ivica Dacic calling Pristina's intention as "suicide move." (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Chairman of the biggest opposition party in Kosovo, Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK), Isa Mustafa, asked creation of a broad-based Government based on political balance in Parliament. He said LDK holds the biggest number of seats in Parliament granting the LDK the Prime Minister's position. "Yes I am in favor of a Government based on political representation in Parliament. Based on current constellation of deputies in Parliament the LDK is the biggest one, and obviously it should hold the Prime Minister's position," Mustafa said adding that they have not drafted a concept yet. Former Prime Minister Mustafa during an interview with Gazeta Blic said that the Government of Kosovo should be in charge of negotiations with Serbia and not the President of the country. "We think the Government should lead the dialogue and the Prime Minister should represent the state in the dialogue with Serbia. We do not stop the President to be involved in this process, but it is the Government which should lead the process and every agreement reached should be ratified by the two third of votes in Parliament," Mustafa stated. The LDK has continuously criticized Ramush Haradinaj's Government of losing its majority in Parliament and called on Haradinaj to announce early election to get a credible Government to talk with Serbia. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Haradinaj's decision to impose 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products provoked major problems in Kosovo affecting Governments*

*stability. The international community namely the EU and the U.S put a lot of pressure on the Government to suspend taxes. The UN Secretary General confirmed that tax is the major problem regarding dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. In a spasmodic reaction Prime Minister Haradinaj stated that the Government has ceased contact with UNMIK. Kosovo reacts more or less as a spoiled child refusing to realize how international system and institutions works. Cease of communication between Pristina and UNMIK is another sign of isolation. Although Kosovo still enjoys the EU and U.S support none could avoid recognizing that the state acts beyond European standards violating international agreements such as CEFTA. On the other hand dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has reached a deadlock trapping mostly Pristina in an endless conflict. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia it will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. However, the state's authorities show a tendency of escalating tension with Serbia undermining a peaceful resolution of the case. By imposing 100% tariff on Serbian (and Bosnian products), establishing Kosovo army, executing Special Forces operation in northern Kosovo, arresting Serbs, and requesting special court for Serbs it is created a climate which does not facilitate dialogue and the establishment of confidence between the two parties. In the meanwhile, Kosovo negotiation team promotes a platform of principles and goals regarding Kosovo – Serbia dialogue. It is a hardline document "seeking to take everything and give nothing"; however it is nothing more than a negotiation base which actually rejects Thaci's goal for border correction. Thaci keeps on promoting "slight" correction of borders if this would lead to Kosovo recognition by Serbia. The*

*question of border exchange or simply change continues to divide Kosovo political forces and population. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) has a leading role in the background pushing for the idea of territorial change (or exchange). Thaci reiterated once again his confidence that dialogue will start again and agreement will be reached. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. Establishment of Kosovo Army is also a factor of destabilization since there is always a possibility of Police or military engagement with Serbian forces. Kosovo seeks KSF to be operating all over the country pushing NATO towards such direction. The presence of Kosovo Army in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.*



**MOLDOVA:** February 20<sup>th</sup>, leaders of the electoral bloc ACUM – Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase, along with Igor Munteanu, the Bloc's candidate on a single-seat constituency, claimed that the President of Moldova, Igor Dodon, presented at the Munich Security Conference, held last weekend, a federalization plan of the country. The declarations were made today at a press conference organized by the electoral bloc ACUM. *“A few days ago, at the Munich Security Conference, Igor Dodon put a federalization plan on the table to his Western partners. This is a Russian plan that contradicts the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, aimed at the ‘transnistrianisation’ of Moldova,”*said

Munteanu. According to Munteanu, Dodon betrays Moldova as federalization means destroying the state and creating on its ruins a Bosnian protectorate separated on cantons with foreign military forces on its territory. Moreover, the mentioned document does not clarify the way the Transnistrian region would be returned under the constitutional control of the Republic of Moldova. Also, the Moldovan Government would have to legalize the current power structures from Tiraspol, as Munteanu declares. He added that the document suggests exclusive elements of sovereignty for Transnistria that, as a consequence, will help the separatist regime break the blockade of its external non-recognition without any benefit for Moldova. Nastase mentioned that the plan was a common idea of Vladimir Plahotniuc, the leader of Moldovan Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM) and Dodon. At the same time, Maia Sandu has called for stopping of all discussions regarding *“this unconstitutional, illegal document.”* *“We will inform the international community and we will oppose to the continuation of discussions on this unconstitutional plan,”* she said. ([www.moldova.org](http://www.moldova.org))

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, representative of the Russian Interior Minister, Irina Volk declared that the Head of the Moldovan Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM) Vladimir Plahotniuc and businessman Veaceslav Platon have organized and participated in an international criminal structure that dealt with large-scale illegal currency operations. According to her, the criminal structure has participated in removing at least 37 billion rubles (the equivalent of about 500 million euro) from the Russian Federation during 2013-2014.

*“Citizens of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova have created an international criminal organization with the purpose of operating large-scale illegal currency operations. The organizers of the illegal actions were holders of Russian Federation citizenship, Vladimir Plahotniuc and Veaceslav Platon,”* Volk said. In April 2017, Platon was sentenced to 18 years in prison in Moldova for raider attacks and money laundering. PDM Spokesman Vitalie Gamurari said the allegations made by the Russian Interior Ministry to Vlad Plahotniuc are qualified as an abusive intervention in the parliamentary elections in Moldova. (www.moldova.org)

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, parliamentary elections were held in Moldova. Polling stations opened at 7:00 and closed at 21:00. It was the first electoral process with mixed system (50 seats with party lists and 51 through single-mandate constituencies). There are 15 political parties in the national constituency; the voters vote for their candidate in the uninominal district where they have registered their domicile. According to the latest information, 325 candidates were enrolled in the uninominal electoral constituencies. Simultaneously with the parliamentary elections, it was held also the Republican consultative referendum organized by the Moldovan Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM), in which the citizens were asked if they are to reduce the number of the Deputies in the Parliament and if they are for the people to be able to dismiss (remove) the Deputies from office. Thus, voters received four ballots in the polling stations. According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), just over 49% of eligible voters had cast their ballots. The first results are expected on the morning of

February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 with the three main political forces contesting the election accusing each other of violations. Voters formed long lines outside polling stations in the villages of Dorotcaia and Coshnita, which are located at the de facto border of Moldova’s Russian-speaking breakaway region of Transnistria. CEC Head Alina Russu said 18 complaints of alleged violations had been filed but that the elections had been held without any major incidents. Observers led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are to release their assessment on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (www.moldova.org)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state’s transparency, accountability and democratic values. Parliamentary election was held on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 which will be decisive for state’s future. Electoral results will determine the country’s orientation and its future towards Euro-Atlantic structures. The electoral process was closely monitored by the international community and especially the US and EU as a “democratic stress test.” Legitimacy of the election will be one of the main topics in the coming days especially if the pro-Russian PSRM will get absolute majority (not likely). A possible ruling coalition by PSRM and the currently ruling PDM is the most likely scenario. The current Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms are needed. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. The ongoing crisis*

*between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot go unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** February 20<sup>th</sup>, continuous stability of the region is a precondition for its further development. Therefore, Montenegro, as NATO member, will keep ardently advocating for the enlargement of the Alliance, while staying committed to the attitude that integration of Western Balkans countries contributes to the greater stability of the region. This was stated in the Proposal Law on the Confirmation of Protocol of the North-Atlantic Agreement on the Accession of the Republic of North Macedonia to NATO. This Proposal Law will be the very first item of the agenda at the meeting of spring session of the Montenegrin Parliament. *“Montenegro became NATO Member on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and, in that context, it finds its membership in the Alliance a permanent guaranteed of stability. From that aspect, it advocates for the continuation of the enlargement. Montenegro firmly supports accession of North Macedonia to NATO,”* reads the explanatory note of the Proposal Law. ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, initiative to form a technical Government is unjustified and politically unacceptable, Prime Minister Dusko Markovic said. He said that the Government is working in full capacity, and that there is no political crisis. Markovic said that the opposition's request for forming technical Government is legitimate, but not realistic. *“Everyone on the political scene has*

*the right to make political requirements in the way they judge it is the most appropriate in relation to their interests. For me, this request is unjustified and politically unacceptable. We have more important things to do, Montenegro has to work on realizing their goals, accelerating economic growth, opening new jobs,”* the Prime Minister said. He believes, however, that this political request is not realistic and that the Government can function as long as it has support in Parliament. Markovic said the boycott is legitimate but not productive and that institutions are the right places to resolve all issues. Markovic also said that going out in the streets was legitimate, and that it was a model that is applied in the region. ([www.rtcg.me](http://www.rtcg.me))

- February 23<sup>rd</sup>, several thousand protesters marched in the capital, Podgorica, calling for the country's long-time leader, Milo Djukanovic, and other Government and judicial officials to quit. Civic activists supported by most opposition parties in Montenegro have kept up the pressure on the Government, demanding the resignation of the country's top leaders, starting with President Milo Djukanovic, and focusing on alleged corruption in their ranks. The crowd marched through the capital, Podgorica, on Saturday chanting, *“Milo thief”* and carrying banners reading: *“No more crime,” “Rebellion”* and *“We are the state.”* An informal group of intellectuals, academics, NGO activists and journalists stand behind the protests dubbed *“Resist.”* They accuse the country's long-time leader, President Djukanovic, who has held power for almost 30 years, of presiding over poverty, a loss of human rights and media freedoms and systematic corruption. Beside Djukanovic, the protesters demanded the resignation of the Supreme State Prosecutor, Ivica Stankovic, and the Chief



Prosecutor for Organized Crime Milivoje Katnic. They accuse senior law officials of ignoring evidence and not prosecuting manifest corruption in the ranks of Djukanovic's inner circle. The protesters marched by the Montenegrin broadcaster, RTCG, and demanded more professional and fair reporting. Saturday's protest was the third in a row and following the revelation of footage and documents that appear to implicate top officials in obtaining suspicious funds for the President's ruling party, the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS). The organizers of the protest also said the aim is to fight "collective amnesia" in the country after so many other corruption affairs passed without prosecution. Montenegro has been a NATO member since July 2017 and is a candidate for EU membership. But its Government is often accused of not doing enough to tackle organized crime and corruption. Brussels has demanded more concrete results in the fight against corruption at a high political level as one of the main conditions for it making progress towards joining the EU. (www.balkaninsight.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Massive protests against the President and high officials disturbed a period of "euphoria", emerging state's problems such as corruption, media freedom, and nepotism. In this context, accusations against the country's President for bribery by a fugitive businessman should be investigated with transparency and into depth. The EP assessment is positive praising the state's efforts to implement major reforms, but on the other hand it underlines the problems of the rule of law, media freedom, corruption, money*

*laundering, and organized crime. However, the EP expressly states that Montenegro under certain conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. The Government promotes state's political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. Although the Government takes concrete measures against corruption, organized crime, and money laundering it is assessed that a lot should be done to reach such a level of economic activity; mainly in the field of public administration, public sector corruption, and money laundering. Imprisonment of opposition MPs is a worrying and alarming sign regarding rule of law and democratic values in the country. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Moreover, it tries to modernize and strengthen its operational capabilities and in this context it raised its defense budget aiming at purchasing new assets such as armored vehicles. Establishment of a credible and effective system of Armed Forces reservists will strengthen defense capabilities of its Armed Forces.*



## NORTH MACEDONIA:

February 18<sup>th</sup>, "At the moment, we have not agreed on a joint, consensual presidential candidate, but we have concluded that there is a basis for us to come up with such a candidate. After party consultations this week, we will discuss the matter again, but after party consultations take place," Prime Minister and Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија - SDSM) leader Zoran Zaev said after his meeting with Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) leader Ali Ahmeti. At the summit between

the two parties and coalition partners in the Government, there was talk of more possible names for joint presidential candidates, but Zaev did not want to disclose any of the names. When asked if he himself is considering running for President, he rejected the idea. *“You know that before anything else, I am an economist, I am devoted to the economy and to the reforms ahead, so for now, I remain in executive power,”* Zaev said. (www.meta.mk)

- February 20<sup>th</sup>, at yesterday’s session, the Government determined a new text of the Draft Law on the National Security Agency, which will enable the reform of the Administration for Security and Counter-Intelligence (ASC). Under the new law, ASC will no longer be part of the Ministry of Interior, but will become totally independent body under the name National Security Agency. *“The aim of the proposed law is to overcome shortcomings identified in the reports for the Republic of North Macedonia by the European Commission by establishing a model for reform of the security-intelligence system by which the Security and Counter-Intelligence Directorate will no longer be a body within the Ministry of Interior, but to establish an Agency for National Security in order to protect the national security of the country, i.e. independence, sovereignty, constitutional order, basic freedoms and human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as other issues of interest to the national security of the country,”* the Government said. Ministers at the session also established a new text of the Draft Law on Coordination of the Security and Intelligence Community in the Republic of North Macedonia, which provides for a special body for the coordination of the security and intelligence

community. The Government also established a Draft-Law on Amending the Law on the Interception of Communications, as well as a Draft-Law on Amending the Law on Internal Affairs, in order to synchronize the draft laws on the National Security Agency and the Draft Law on Co-ordination of the Security and Intelligence Community. (www.meta.mk)

- February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Foreign Ministry of North Macedonia issued a guideline for international media on how to refer to the country and its citizens, based on the elements of the Prespes accord signed with Greece. The Ministry said the official name of the country is *“Republic of North Macedonia,”* or in short *“North Macedonia,”* and the nationality (citizenship) is Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia. The official language is the *“Macedonian language,”* and the country codes are MK and MKD. It said the adjective *“Macedonian”* is to be used when relating to *“ethnic and cultural identity of the people, our language, history, culture, heritage, territory and other attributes,”* noting that such terms *“are distinctly different from those used and related to the region of Macedonia in Greece.”* The Ministry said proper examples of the use of the word *“Macedonia”* would include Macedonian ethnic identity, Macedonian language, Macedonian culture, Macedonian territory, Macedonian people, Macedonian history, etc., noting that the adjective *“North”* should not be used in the aforementioned context. When writing about state entities, media should refer to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the President of North Macedonia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, North Macedonia’s Defense Minister, North Macedonia’s municipality of Ohrid, the University of St. Cyril and Methodius



of North Macedonia. Other correct examples of references include the Macedonian economy, the health sector of the Republic of North Macedonia, Macedonian art, Macedonian music, Macedonian agriculture, Macedonian architecture etc. ([www.mfa.gov.mk](http://www.mfa.gov.mk), [www.mia.mk](http://www.mia.mk))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Ratification of NATO accession protocol by the member states proceeds rapidly. Zaev and his Government focus on domestic affairs trying to benefit by the successful name agreement. The ruling SDSM announced that it will not call for early parliamentary elections along with the presidential one. As it was assessed, the Government seeks to fully capitalize its gains from NATO accession (scheduled for June 2019) and a possible opening of accession negotiations with the EU (also for June 2019). VMRO-DPMNE will strengthen its nationalistic rhetoric due to the coming presidential elections seeking to elect its own presidential candidate. Polarization of state's political life including low scale violent incidents could not be excluded during the pre-electoral campaign especially if VMRO-DPMNE realizes that it is not going to elect its own President. The fact is the country is more stable and more coherent watching its future in a more optimistic way. However, the country should focus on its economy and major administrative reforms aiming at reaching the EU standards. The U.S and EU enjoy their success since F.Y.R.O.M moves in their paths far from Russia's influence. Needless to say that in a period where border questions are raised again in the Balkans F.Y.R.O.M achieved to strengthen its political stability and growth prospects.*



**ROMANIA:** February 21<sup>st</sup>, the European Commission strongly reacted to Romania for adopting emergency ordinance (OUG) significant amendments to the justice laws, which it said violated the recommendations included in the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (MCV). The EC will ask the Government in Bucharest for explanations on this matter, Margaritis Schinas, a Spokesperson for the Commission, said. The European Commission is anxious about the latest developments in the rule of law in Romania. Both the content and the way the last changes were made, through emergency ordinances and without any consultation with the judiciary and interested parties, appear to be in direct contradiction with the Commission's recommendations submitted through the MCV, supported by the by all Member States. As a consequence, the Commission will ask for explanations from the Romanian Government regarding the latest changes. Schinas reminded that one of the recommendations addressed to Romania in the November MCV report was “to put in place a robust and independent system for the appointment of high-level prosecutors based on clear and transparent criteria, with the support of the Commission in Venice.” Another recommendation was “reviewing the laws of justice, taking full account of the MCV recommendations as well as the recommendations of the Venice Commission and GRECO.” However, the latest changes (under the OUG) follow a completely different direction. “As we have already said in the past, Romania must urgently return to the reform process. This means going forward, not back, and refraining from any step that would make progress in recent year

*reversible,”* Schinas concluded. (www.romania-insider.com)

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Romania's President Klaus Iohannis appointed by decree the two Minister candidates nominated by Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, putting an end to the silent political crisis that started in November 2018. Iohannis had previously rejected four times the candidates nominated repeatedly by Dancila. Eventually, she replaced the nominations. *“We made these new nominations to put an end to the deadlock in the Government's activity, especially since the interim period at the two Ministries expired. Regional development and transport are two key areas,”* Dancila said. Upon their nomination, Vasile-Daniel Suciuc will serve as Minister of Regional Development and Deputy Prime Minister and Alexandru-Razvan Cuc will serve as Minister of Transport. (www.romania-insider.com)

- February 24<sup>th</sup>, protests took place in Bucharest in front of the Romanian Government's building in Victoriei Square, as well as in several cities across the country, against the enactment of the emergency ordinance that amends the justice laws. Protesters shouted messages in support of former Head Prosecutor of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) Laura Codruta Kovesi and of the Magistrates who rejected the amendments to the justice laws as well. They also had slogans against Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) leader Liviu Dragnea and the Government. The number of protesters peaked at 8,000-10,000 according to estimates of Digi24 TV station and Adevarul daily. The protests on Sunday were the biggest since the violent incidents during the Diaspora protest on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018. However, they were much smaller than the protests in February 2017,

when the PSD-ALDE ruling coalition started its controversial justice reform. Among the political leaders, Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR)) leader Dan Barna and PLUS leader Dacian Ciolos attended the rally. Some incidents took place when the gendarmes intervened after several protesters came into conflict with a team from Antena 3, a TV station that is favorable to the ruling coalition. (www.romania-insider.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government has been transformed into an “open battle” leading the political functionality in a deadlock. However, it seems that both parts reached a compromise giving an end to the almost 4 month political crisis after Iohannis refusal to decree two Ministers proposed by the Government. Taking a look in the current political situation in Romania, which affects also the EU (due to Romania's Presidency) it is assessed as a Government's “wise” strategic retreat in order to overcome the political deadlock. Romania took over the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states' high officials. The southeastern wave of protests hit Romania too; citizens protested due to the Government's intervention to justice independence. The state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. In this context, one should add the direct European Parliament warning for activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU's core values). Iohannis strongly opposes in Government's plans to intervene in judicial*

*system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state's justice. The state faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Consequently, Russia reacts mainly against the NATO military base in Deveselu where anti-missile defense systems have been deployed.*



**SERBIA:** February 19<sup>th</sup>, Skopje has replace Budapest as the center of intelligence work against Serbia, Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin has told the daily Vecernje Novosti. According to Vulin, the capital of North Macedonia has become a place where funding and support is provided for “snitches and crooks” from all over the region, for politicians who believe cooperating with foreigners is the only way they come to power. Vulin in this way commented on a meeting between North Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and leader of the opposition Alliance for Serbia Dragan Djilas, which took place in Skopje. The Alliance announced that the meeting concerned “*the current situation in Serbia and two-month (weekly) civil protests.*” “*The strong position of President Aleksandar Vucic that Serbia will not accept the rule of the Ambassador has brought him under a direct attack of the services. Skopje has become a space from which they launch and from which they will be launching attacks against Serbia and its President,*” Vulin told the Novosti daily. (www.b92.net)

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Albanians want to include as many Serbs from Kosovo Pomoravlje as possible into the Kosovo Army, President Aleksandar Vucic said urging the Serbs not to do that. Vucic made his comments after a meeting in the Raska District with officials of the Serb List, a political organization in Kosovo that gathers Serbs. He said that he told them Serbia and the Serbs cannot survive if they go against each other, and asked them not to join or participate in the Albanian Army of Kosovo. “*We will see if the Serbs will respond or not,*” he added. He also said that “*for first time he heard from people from Strpce and Gracanica (Serb enclaves in Kosovo) that they are increasingly facing problems with supply of foodstuffs from central Serbia, and that even in the north of Kosovo there are problems because Albanians are “organizing border Police to check how the goods had arrived, and grab them.” “Our job is to fight and we will fight for our people to survive,*” Vucic said. His message was that the state will protect the Serb people. “*Although we may look weak to some, because we are not threatening anyone, because we are not shouting, we are stronger than they think,*” said the President. (www.b92.net)

- February 23<sup>rd</sup>, as anti-government marches continue in Serbia, protesters took aim at the President's recent photo-shot in a hospital with a sick child by carrying medical masks. Anti-Government protesters in Belgrade carried medical masks in mockery of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, whose recent photo-shot alongside a sick child in a hospital angered critics who called it a cynical gesture. The protesters again called on the President and the Government led by his Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) to resign, accusing them of political violence, corruption, capturing

institutions and violating human rights in Serbia. The President started his “*The future of Serbia*” campaign in February, announcing he would visit all parts of Serbia and report on the results of his ruling party. Many believe the tour forms part of preparations for oft-mentioned early elections. Protesters passed through the tunnel in the centre of the city, saying they were “*opening the tunnel of lies of Aleksandar Vucic*.” Among the protesters were parliamentarians but also local councilors who have decided not to participate any longer in parliamentary or municipal sessions in support of the protests. The protesters glued posters with Vucic’s false statements and failed promises along the tunnel walls as they walked. Immediately after the protest, city sanitation workers were dispatched to tear the posters down, however, the citizens who were still in the tunnel chased them off. The protests began on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 when an opposition politician was attacked in the south of the country, and originally focused on the theme of state violence. They have since spread to dozens of cities and towns and embraced a range of other issues. (www.balkaninsight.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Serbia has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens’ reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. People protest in the streets, while opposition starts to take action. Vucic is thinking of snap elections, but he has to balance a lot of things before his final decision. It is assessed that he will try to avoid early elections but it is likely to be forced to conduct them. Serbia has followed so far a successful diplomatic strategy regarding Kosovo achieving to be appeared in the*

*international community as a reasonable voice seeking a compromise resolution via dialogue. Serbia realizes that time runs in favor of it and knows that Kosovo will become more and more nervous as long as it cannot get Serbia’s recognition. On the other hand Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain since Serbia apart from political and diplomatic means has engaged its military and security forces. The Armed Forces are in high readiness alert but Vucic tried to de-escalate situation by stating that war is not a possible solution. However, none could predict Serbia’s reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation included) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state’s leadership is acting in a “reasonable” and “wise” way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Of course, under these circumstances none could speak for restarting of Belgrade – Pristina dialogue. There are certain analysts who claim that such situation will inevitably lead in Kosovo partition with the north part going to Serbia. Some of them claim that this scenario has already agreed by Vucic and Thaci. Serbian repayment will be Kosovo recognition. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance.*



**SLOVENIA:** February 20<sup>th</sup>,

Slovenian President Borut Pahor underscored the need to invest in security as he visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels. NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg repeated his call for an increase in defense spending. *“Slovenia is increasing defense spending not because it will face a direct military threat, but because the world is less safe and also because [Slovenia] is part of the western world,”* Pahor said. Pahor said that in compliance with NATO defense targets was not about meeting the country’s obligations to NATO, but rather about its own security; *“Slovenia must invest in security,”* he said. (www.sta.si)

- February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Government has decided against sealing a 306 million euro deal to acquire 48 eight-wheeled Boxer armored personnel carriers from the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR), Slovenia's biggest defense purchase in a decade. The army does not have a comprehensive tactical study showing exactly what capabilities Slovenia needs and the procurement documentation is based on a tactical study made in 2005 that does not represent an appropriate basis for the purchase, Defense Minister Karl Erjavec said after the Government session. The Minister ordered the Army to carry out a new tactical study that will determine whether it needs new eight-wheeled personnel carriers, which vehicles would be best, how they will be maintained, and how staff will be trained. Erjavec said this did not mean that the purchase has been terminated. *“We will have to buy eight-wheeled armored personnel carriers sooner or later, but first we need to define exactly what we need.”* Under this situation it casts doubt on the country's ability to meet the pledge given to NATO that it will have one battlegroup ready by 2022 and a second one by 2025. Erjavec was sanguine about that, noting that it was already

clear the first battlegroup will not be ready by 2022. *“Even if we signed the purchase agreement today, we would not be able to do everything,”* he said. The effort would be hampered not just by long delivery times but also by staff shortages and lack of investments. Erjavec repeated today that the mid-term defense program and the white paper on defense would be revised. Pointing to Slovenia's commitments to NATO about increasing defense spending, he said the 2020/21 budget would be *“the moment of truth.”*

(www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc) which may test governmental cohesion. Border dispute with Croatia is still ongoing and former Government of Miro Cerar filed a lawsuit against Croatia over its refusal to implement the border arbitration. Although the Prime Minister Marjan Sarec announced that his Government will follow the same policy in the issue, he showed up with an attitude of compromise by claiming that his country will not stop Croatia's accession in the Schengen zone. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. 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:** February 19<sup>th</sup>, the

Turkish Police have launched raids to detain over 300 people suspected of having ties to an outlawed group believed to be responsible for a 2016 coup bid, Turkey's official Anadolu news

agency said. The order to arrest 324 people was made by Prosecutors in Turkey's three biggest provinces of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir and is part of different probes into followers of US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen. Turkey accuses Gulen of ordering the abortive bid to topple President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Gulen denies any involvement in the failed coup. The Istanbul Public Prosecutor sought the arrest of 53 active duty soldiers in 15 provinces, including in the metropolis, Anadolu reported. In the Aegean province of Izmir, the Public Prosecutor issued 182 arrest warrants with police conducting raids across 42 provinces, including Izmir, DHA reported. The capital's Public Prosecutor said it issued 89 arrest warrants in two separate probes, including one looking at the Gendarmerie, which is in charge of domestic security. The Ankara Prosecutor's Office said 30 suspects had already been detained. More than 760 people were detained last week in operations across 76 provinces of Turkey's 81 provinces, although 122 suspects were later freed under judicial supervision. As many as 16 other suspects were released, according to the Ankara Public Prosecutor's office. Tens of thousands of people have been arrested over suspected links to Gulen since 2016. Meanwhile, more than 100,000 people have been sacked or suspended from the public sector. Despite criticism from Western allies and human rights defenders over the scale of the crackdown, the Police operations and probes continue. Turkish officials insist that the raids are necessary to remove the "virus" caused by the Gulen movement's infiltration of Turkish state bodies. (www.aljazeera.com)

- February 20<sup>th</sup>, amid an ongoing rift between the United States and Turkey over its decision to buy a sophisticated Russian air defense system,

Ankara says it is determined to complete the 3.5 billion dollar acquisition and activate the S-400s in October 2019. But Turkey is also leaving the door open to the purchase of advanced Patriot missiles from the US, saying negotiations are still under way on cost, technology transfers, and the delivery period, defense officials said. NATO-member Turkey has long relied on US Patriot batteries from the alliance for its air defense but has been looking to procure its own system for years. NATO nations - particularly the US - view Turkey's purchase of the Russian-made equipment with suspicion, as it is believed to be incompatible with systems relied upon by the Alliance. The US's stance was recently underlined by Vice President Mike Pence in a speech at the Munich Security Conference. *"We will not stand idly by while NATO allies purchase weapons from our adversaries. We cannot ensure the defense of the West if our allies grow dependent on the East,"* said Pence. (www.aljazeera.com)

- February 21<sup>st</sup>, Turkey criticized as "unacceptable" a vote by the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee to accept a draft advisory report on Turkey, which called for the suspension of EU accession negotiations with the country. The report is expected to be voted on by the entire European Parliament in mid-March. *"The call in the draft report — which is not legally binding and bears only the status of an advisory decision — to officially suspend our country's accession negotiations with the EU is absolutely unacceptable,"* Turkey's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said. He said the draft report exemplified the EU's biased and prejudiced attitude towards Turkey, adding Ankara would continue to push for its amendment. *"We expect the necessary changes to be made for a more realistic, unbiased and*



*encouraging final report which will be accepted in March at the European Parliament's general assembly," Aksoy said, stressing that Ankara would only take such a document into account. He stressed that Turkey would continue to adopt reforms for accession into the bloc and Ankara expected the European Parliament to honor its pledged obligations towards Turkey. In October, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he would consider putting Turkey's long-stalled bid to join the European Union to a referendum, signaling exasperation with a process he says has been waylaid by prejudice against Muslims. Turkey says EU membership remains one of its top strategic goals even though the accession talks, formally launched in 2004, have been stalled for years due to the objections of the Greek Cypriot administration on the divided island of Cyprus as well as opposition from Germany and France. (www.daily-sabah.com)*

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :**

*Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists 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. Turkish – U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Although Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation, the EU sends messages of terminating the EU – Turkey accession talks. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq and against YPG Kurds in Syria as well. The U.S reconsiders its unconditional withdrawal from Syria after*

*domestic and international critics. Protection of Syrian Kurds and YPG forces is a priority for the U.S troops which will remain in Syria as long as it is necessary. In this context, dialogue between Turkey and the U.S is ongoing aiming at reaching a common point of understanding. Turkey is waiting for the “green light” for establishing a safe zone in Syria but it is doubtful if it will ever get it. President Erdogan expressed once again his anxiety to start a new military operation in Syria. Turkey has been developed into a “regional power” engaged in military operations in the territory of two other countries, it threatens to start a new operation in Syria, maintains a significant military force in North Cyprus, and threatens a NATO ally – Greece – with an armed conflict. Apart from the use or the threat of use of direct armed violence Turkey participates actively in diplomatic processes in the region (Syria negotiations, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Cyprus question, Qatar crisis etc). The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and Southeast Mediterranean. Announcement of a huge navy drill in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea may raise tension with Cyprus and Greece. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Regarding Turkish interests in East Mediterranean Sea it seems that they are reaching a critical point since Cypriots have already started hydrocarbon drills in their Exclusive Economic Zone via the US energy giant ExxonMobil. Turkey has sent its drill ship Barbaros in the EEZ of Cyprus escalating tension in Eastern Mediterranean. Taking into consideration that a huge aeronautical exercise has been announced by the Turkish Armed Forces in the end of February one should keep an eye on*




*possible incidents in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea.*


[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

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

 Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict