



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

“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: October 1st, the opposition's Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) is preparing its branches for early parliamentary elections, according to data from a meeting on Sunday. Opposition has estimated that the political crisis can be overcome by early parliamentary and local elections on the same day. The Socialists, meanwhile, have called on the opposition for institutional dialogue, stressing that the next elections will be held by the end of their second term. PD's leadership and members of its former Parliamentary Group held a meeting to discuss the greater commitment of local party structures. PD leader, Lulzim Basha, according to data from the meeting, has urged all those present to disperse as soon as possible in circles and to increase and revitalize party membership. Basha said, according to reliable sources, that PD should prepare for early parliamentary and local elections on the same day, so the entire party should meet citizens on the ground. He said that Albania's deep political crisis can only be resolved by early elections. According to him, the OSCE/ODIHR report on local elections and the Bundestag resolution have offered the real evaluation of the situation, so resolving the crisis remains the main goal of the opposition, and that this only comes from addressing the sovereign with free and fair elections. Basha expressed hope that by mid-October there would be no negative interference with EU decisions on the fate of negotiations with Albania. However, he also stressed that no one should be under the illusion that opposition action will be stopped or that the opposition will back down, but alongside the opposition movement the PD's program and ruling alternative will continue. Thus, participants of the meeting have made it

clear that there will be no protests until October 18th, 2019 though the demand and readiness of the citizens is high, that there will soon be early elections with a transitional Government and that party branches need to be prepared. Alongside EU expectations for integration, another reason PD is maintaining patience in this period is the fragile climate of dialogue that has just initiated at the OSCE-organized roundtable on electoral reform. Participants in the PD meeting claimed that opposition sees electoral reform as the first step in resolving the political crisis and early elections, and therefore does not want to be blamed for damaging this dialogue process. PD said that the Parliamentary Commission on electoral reform is illegitimate, and it is proposing a Commission with representatives of the main parties and the participation of international representatives. In addition, PD is working on an anti-crisis package, which aims to assist the fight against crime and the growth of the economy. Opposition has estimated that the political crisis is multifaceted and that no time is wasted with pre-election preparations, so it is setting up an election headquarters in the center, which will spread throughout the country. The Socialist majority has rejected opposition demands for an international electoral reform Commission, and has called on oppositionists to dialogue in institutions, denying even the presence of a political crisis in the country. The Socialists are continuing their governing at the central and local levels, dismissing the possibility of early elections. They did not seem concerned, but enthusiastic about the German Parliament's demands for judicial reform and prosecution of corrupt officials and judges. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- October 2nd, after Edi Rama said that he is ready to visit Lulzim Basha at his office for the electoral reform, the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader declared that this is not a matter that belongs to Basha, but to Rama. *“Albania is facing a crisis. We have a plan to take the country out of the crisis. We have a proposition for the Electoral Reform. We have sent it to Edi Rama and to his representatives. If he cannot implement it, he must move away because we are ready to do it,”* the PD leader declared. The plan Basha is referring to is the document introduced by the opposition outside the Parliament, which foresees the establishing of an extra-parliamentary structure. The plan has five points; Firstly, the united opposition responds positively to the invitation of international partners for reforming the electoral law. Secondly, the electoral reform is necessary for improving the technical aspect, but not enough to guarantee free and fair elections. Opposition supports the OSCE/ODIHR stance that the current legal structure could offer a healthy base for democratic elections if it is to be implemented impartially and through sincere political will. PD wants a concrete mechanism for realizing the division of politics from crime. Moreover, the discussion for the Electoral Reform should be done through a list of priorities, with the purpose to resolve the problems that require political will in order to guarantee democratic elections and a constitutional and representative Government, and then should be focused on resolving technical issues. Furthermore, having guarantees from the state for securing equality among parties, and for holding democratic elections which would guarantee the Constitutional right to elect and to be elected. The current Government does not offer any guarantee that the parties and politicians

are separated from crime, while they still hold control of the Central Election Commission, the Police, the Secret Service, the Prosecution and Courts. Finally, offering guarantees that citizens will be able to decide, by making referendums effective. (www.top-channel.tv)

- October 4th, the Netherlands believes that the EU must not open the accession negotiations with Albania. This declaration was stated by the Foreign Minister of the Dutch Government, Stef Blok, after a meeting with the Dutch Parliament. According to Blok, Albania is not ready yet for the EU accession negotiations. *“Albania must take further steps in the fight against corruption, and it must improve the rule of law,”* the Dutch Minister said. *“Northern Macedonia has taken important steps ahead. The progress with the rule of law must continue,”* Blok declared. The Netherlands is the first European country that confirms its vote against Albania in the EU Council meeting that will be organized on October 18th. France, which is also skeptical, has not made its stance known yet. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Albania is ready to compromise with the idea that its European perspective may be delayed due to its ongoing political crisis. Although Germany promotes opening of accession negotiations under strict preconditions, the Netherlands have already announced that it is too early for Albania to start talks with the EU. Furthermore, France is maintaining a stance of silence as being skeptical with Albania’s European perspective. A negative decision on October 18th, 2019 by the Heads of EU member states is assessed that will bring rapid political developments in the country namely collapse of Rama Government and snap

elections. If ruling Socialists and Rama refuse to withdraw from power there is a danger of excessive violence in the country. Albania needs political stability and constitutional order to forward its European route and at the moment nobody in the country is able to guarantee such conditions. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation." The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

October 1st, Bosnia's Border Police need 1,100 more officers to fully cover the 600 kilometer long eastern border, which is targeted by the illegal migrants, said Border Police Chief Zoran Galic. *"We lack 407 Officers to perform regular activities and tasks, and for a 24-hour long coverage of the 600 kilometer long eastern state border we need 1,100 more officers while only 15% of the officers who currently work in the Border Police are capable of supervising the border belt because 85% of them has been engaged at the border crossings which we cannot*

leave unsupervised," said Galic who visited the Border Police units in the east and the northeast of the country. According to him, Police officers who are continuously engaged have started expressing dissatisfaction over the working conditions and the payment, which led many of them to leave the service. *"The conditions in which the Bosnia's Border Police officers have been working since 2017 while exercising enhanced measures with maximum efforts are, I can openly say, a disgrace for the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina,"* he stressed, adding that infrastructure at some of those border crossings is very bad. Despite all the problems, the Police officers are still putting maximum efforts, preventing hundreds of illegal attempts of crossing the state border. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 2nd, Bosnia's Defense Minister, Marina Pendes told N1 on Wednesday she will ask for the issue of sending the country's first Annual National Program (ANP) to NATO to be put on the Government's agenda on Thursday. The disputed document is at the center of Bosnia's latest political crisis. It represents a step toward NATO membership - something the Serb leadership in the country vehemently rejects although years ago, the main Serb party agreed to it. Bosnia has not formed a new Government nearly a year after the elections because the country's Croat and Bosniak Presidency members refuse to greenlight a Prime Minister candidate proposed by their Serb colleague after he declared that, he will not support the country's NATO path. Right now, the old Government is still in charge but it has not put the sensitive document on the agenda for the past eight months. *"There is no readiness among representatives of Republika Srpska to vote on the issue,"* Pendes said. She

explained that during the mandate of the last Presidency, enough decisions have been passed to authorize the Government to move toward activating the Membership Action Plan (MAP); a step that would put Bosnia right on the doorstep of NATO. Adopting the Annual National Program is therefore just a technicality, she said. *“There is not one objective reason for certain politicians not to raise their hands for the ANP,”* Pendes said. The current Bosnian Serb Ministers in the Government come from Bosnian Serb opposition parties and are rivals to the current ruling party of Presidency member Milorad Dodik. His party formed an alliance with Pendes’s Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) and her putting the issue on the agenda would force the opposition Ministers to either vote for the document - making a move that would be unpopular among Bosnian Serbs - or vote against it and side with their political opponent Dodik. Pendes also said she hopes NATO will positively evaluate the capabilities units of the country’s Armed Forces have shown during the recent military exercise on Manjaca, in the north of the country. Some 840 soldiers took part in the exercise that was monitored by NATO experts. *“Our goal is to have a percentage of members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina who can at any time act together with NATO forces,”* Pendes said. In the beginning of 2015, Bosnia had two units capable to meet NATO standards, while now it has 11, she said. *“This exercise showed how much operational capabilities of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina are meeting NATO standards. It was an exercise during which domestic and international evaluators have analyzed all*

activities and we will be informed next month whether the unit has met the requirements,” Pendes said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 3rd, Washington and some of the western European countries are conducting a policy of dragging Bosnia and Herzegovina into the NATO, violating in that way a United Nations Security Council's resolution, said Chief of Russian diplomacy Sergey Lavrov, Russian media reported. *“The USA and some leading western European countries demand from the Bosniak [Muslim Bosnians] and some Croat politicians under their influence to take the course towards the creation of a unitary state in Bosnia. The goal is simple – taking Bosnia into the NATO,”* said Lavrov in a speech at the meeting of the Valdai Club, a Moscow-based think tank. Responding to the statement, Bosnian Presidency Chairman Zeljko Komsic recalled the Russian diplomat of his statement during the visit to Bosnia last year. *“Then message of Minister Lavrov to the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina was that Russia is, in principle, against the NATO enlargement, but that if NATO was our choice, Russia will respect such decision of our country's institutions,”* Komsic said. *“And the decision of this country's institutions, the unanimous decision of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was never revoked, retracted or amended, is that Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to be a NATO member state, and it still exists today,”* he told a local news website in Bosnia. The Presidency Chairman called on the Russian Foreign Minister to *“respect what he said i.e. to respect the decisions of the institutions of the states of Bosnia and Herzegovina that, as he earlier said, he respected.”* The NATO accession is a burning issue in Bosnia, where three major

ethnic groups who make the decisions disagree over the country's NATO path. While Bosnian Serb leadership strongly objects it, the Croat and Bosniak politicians are in favor of stronger ties with the Alliance and eventually joining in. To hinder Sarajevo's ambitions of joining the NATO, Bosnia's Serb-dominated region, Republika Srpska, passed a decision in 2017 to proclaim military neutrality. The RS discussed joining the Alliance but situation is now different, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik recently said. His Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) party, which rules the RS, previously supported the stronger cooperation. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ethnic tension and nationalistic rhetoric are constantly maintained in Bosnia by one way or another. Provocative actions by all entities in Bosnia demonstrate that actually none believes anymore in Dayton Peace Agreement promoting their own interests. It is time international community to re-confirm Dayton's commitments by a conference under the UN auspices or ethnic tension and division will continue to be strengthened. The country remains without central Government for more than a year facing functional problems. In other words, Bosnia has reached a political stalemate undermining its sustainability, growth, and security. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to "penetrate" in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Finally, NATO is rather difficult to allow a Western Balkan

country to remain out of its collective security structures. Taking this into consideration, it will not be a surprise to see rapid political or even security developments in the country. As already "HERMES" has assessed Bosnia is a "captured" state with no Government, no state budget, and no growth sliming slowly but steadily towards interethnic tension conflict. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.



BULGARIA: September 30th, the consultative summit meeting convened by President Rumen Radev regarding the invitation expected to be extended to North Macedonia to start EU accession negotiations in October, decided that a national position on the matter should be developed with clear-cut requirements and criteria that will uphold Bulgaria's national interest, BNR reported. According to the participants these requirements should be enshrined in the negotiating framework and become a sine qua non for the country's accession to the EU. The Bulgarian President stressed that it is particularly important to set down red lines that will guarantee that the European integration of North Macedonia will not be at the expense of Bulgaria's history, language and identity as a bargaining chip. Prime Minister Boyko Borissov cautioned that Sofia's support for North Macedonia's membership of the EU has never been unconditional and that the country must not waste this chance. Sofia wants North

Macedonia to progress, in its EU pre-accession negotiations, together with Albania, Boyko Borissov said. (www.novinite.com)

- October 3rd, deals for Bulgaria's armed forces to acquire 150 armored infantry vehicles and two naval patrol vessels are unlikely to be concluded before the end of 2019, it emerged at a hearing of Defense Minister Krassimir Karakachanov by the Parliamentary Committee on Defense. Together, the financial framework for the two acquisitions is about 1.28 billion euro. Bulgaria already has invited bids to supply the armored infantry vehicles but has extended the deadline for submitting tenders to December 2019. Karakachanov said that he expected that the contract for the purchase of the armored infantry vehicles would be concluded in spring 2020. He said that the terms for payment had been shortened from 12 to 8 years. The acquisition of the last vehicle must be completed by the eighth year. Bidders to supply the naval patrol vessels have been allowed to adjust their bids, he said. Karakachanov told the committee that Bulgaria would acquire two minesweepers, second hand from the Netherlands. He said that attempts had been made to secure a second-hand submarine but had not come to fruition. Bulgaria decommissioned its last, ageing submarine, the Slava, in 2011. In November 2018, it was reported that there were plans to convert the submarine into a museum. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- October 6th, the enlargement towards the Western Balkans should not be neglected by the EU, Bulgaria's President Rumen Radev and Austria's Head of state Alexander Van der Bellen agreed at a meeting in Vienna. President Radev reminded that Bulgaria firmly supports and has accelerated the process of EU integration of

the Western Balkans, but insists that the countries which become EU members must not bring unsolved neighbor relations to the Union. If the EU does not pay attention to the Western Balkan countries, a political vacuum will be created that will be filled by others, which is not in favor of the EU, Van der Bellen pointed out. Radev and Van der Bellen also discussed the migration topic at their meeting. This topic remains a serious challenge for the EU Radev said. He added that he had indicated the need for an operational plan a long time ago, especially for the countries with a land border where the risk of increased migration flow is highest, so that the EU can deal with sudden crises. However, such plan has not been developed until now, Radev went on to say. The Presidents of Bulgaria and Austria called for a revival of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and for more active cooperation between the Danubian countries. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces "structural" problems, the Government is stable. Political parties are entering the pre-electoral period of local elections scheduled for October 27th (first round) and November 3rd, 2019 (second round). The country decided to adopt a national position on North Macedonia opening of accession negotiations with the EU underlying that a greenlight is not unconditional by Bulgaria. It is assessed that Bulgaria aims at forcing North Macedonia to close all open bilateral disputes before the EU leaders summit on October 17th – 18th, 2019 where the former Yugoslav country's European future will be decided. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be

addressed decisively. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: September 30th, the Slovenian-Croatian Commission on the joint Krsko nuclear power plant which met on Monday did not reach a consensus on whether to build a joint radioactive waste storage facility in Vrbinja near Krsko, Slovenia, meaning that Croatia would continue with plans to build its own facility near its border with Bosnia. The meeting discussed the successful operation of the co-owned power plant and possibilities for storing medium and low level radioactive waste from Krsko, but a consensus on a joint storage facility in Vrbinja has not been reached for now, Croatian Environment and Energy Minister, Tomislav Coric, and Slovenian Infrastructure Minister, Alenka Bratusek, said at news conference. The two countries are responsible for taking care of the plant's waste. Slovenia announced plans to build a radioactive waste storage facility in Vrbinja near Krsko, and proposed that Croatia should also store its share of waste from the Krsko plant there. The plan would also involve Croatia's investment in the joint storage facility. However, Croatia already announced plans to build its own storage facility in central Croatia, near the town of Dvor, close to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. *“Currently there is no consensus on a joint solution, but we remain open to talks with Croatia in accordance with the agreement between the two countries,”* Bratusek said. Coric said that the

idea is problematic for Croatia for several reasons, including that a new site in Vrbinja would only store radioactive waste from the Krsko plant, i.e. it would not be used for other types of radioactive waste produced in Croatia's hospitals or science institutes. *“If Croatia agrees to a joint storage facility in Vrbinja, it would have to build a facility to store medical and other radioactive waste in its own territory, which would not make any sense...We want a comprehensive solution to cover all types of (radioactive) waste,”* Coric said. He added that Croatia is planning to build a new purpose-built Cerkezovac site near Dvor, near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, but added that a joint facility with Slovenia would not be ruled out either, depending on *“how talks with Slovenia would proceed.”* *“Regardless of that, our preparations for Cerkezovac will continue,”* Coric added. In reply to reporters' questions about Bosnia's vocal opposition to the prospect of Croatia's waste facility so close to the border, Coric said that Croatia is aware of objections to the plan in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and added that the matter would be discussed with Bosnia during preparation of a study on the planned site's environmental impact. Asked why other types of Croatia's medium and low level radioactive waste could not be stored in the planned facility in Vrbinja, Bratusek said that under the existing legislation only the radioactive waste produced by the nuclear power plant itself could be stored within its grounds. She added that the issue of radioactive waste should be resolved by 2025 at the latest, as Croatia's share of nuclear waste from Krsko would no longer be allowed to be stored within the Krsko power plant complex, which is how all waste is stored today. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- October 1st, President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic officially announced her intention to run for a second mandate as President today. She said that in the past five years she has fulfilled her duties as President together with citizens, responsibly and with pride. *“We had centuries of strength to survive in our homeland, to defend ourselves from Greater Serbian aggression, and now we need to find the strength and prudence to renew the vitality of our nation,”* said Grabar-Kitarovic. The President noted that she began her first mandate with belief in the great potential of Croatia as a strong and proud country. *“In a second mandate I am determined to continue to firmly lead Croatia in the direction of active and responsible international policy. I will continue to be the guarantor of national sovereignty, to preserve our national identity and our way of life. Croatia fought hard for its freedom, and thus we are indebted to those that gave everything for it, but also those that are still coming, our children, to build a society in which every Croatian person will achieve all of their potentials and live with dignity. Croatia by the measure of a person, that is my goal,”* said the President. Grabar-Kitarovic noted that she announced the decision to run again for the honorable and responsible duty, with a wish to continue on the path of unity and a better Croatia. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)



The Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic

(Photo source: www.predsjednica.hr)

- October 2nd, Croatian Environment and Energy Minister Tomislav Coric said on Wednesday that if Slovenia proposed to Croatia partnership in the construction of a new block of the jointly-owned Krsko nuclear power plant, Croatia should consider it. Speaking to reporters after a session of the inner cabinet, Coric said that at a recent meeting of the inter-state Commission on Krsko data were presented on the plant's output and performance, which, he said, is impressive. Depending on hydro-meteorological conditions, Croatia imports between 35% and 50% of electricity, even though in time new power plants would help reduce the imports. It should therefore be interested in every new megawatt of electricity, Coric said, adding that the country's energy strategy was oriented towards promotion of renewable energy sources. *“I do not know how Slovenia intends to do it but I believe that next year it will raise that issue. Such projects are generally extremely demanding, we are talking about billions of euro, and considering that fact, they are usually based on partnership,”* he said. The functioning of the Krsko power plant has been regulated in the last few decades by an inter-state agreement, Coric said, stressing that the Croatian side was represented in Krsko by the Croatian Power Company (HEP). *“I believe that such a project and participation in it, if it happens, would require the involvement of both the state and HEP,”* he said. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone and Schengen Zone goals. Croatia implements a hard-line

foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. The country has fulfilled all criteria for joining the Schengen area and it is expected to receive a positive assessment by the European Commission in mid-October. However, the final political decision by the Schengen Zone member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: October 3rd, a Turkish drillship, the Yavuz is apparently headed to an offshore field inside Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to carry out natural gas exploration, it emerged on Thursday. According to a NAVTEX issued by Turkey, the Yavuz will carry out drilling operations inside block 7, located off the southwestern coast of Cyprus. The Government said it is monitoring the situation. President Nicos Anastasiades said all necessary measures were being taken in line with international law. The Yavuz had been anchored at the port of Mersin after completing drilling operations off Karpasia. The vessel was dispatched by Turkey to the Karpas area in late June and was said to have started drilling in July. Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said last week that the drillship would be starting its second operation in the area without specifying the location. Turkey disputes Cyprus ownership of fossil fuels in the area, arguing that Turkish Cypriots are entitled to a

share of the resources. Ankara also has its own claims in the area. Meanwhile a September 19th, 2019 statement issued by Turkey in response to agreements Cyprus signed with French Total and Italian ENI on block 7, has been circulated by Ankara as an official UN document. Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hami Aksoy said at the time that “a section of the so-called licensed area number 7 remains within the Turkish continental shelf, which has been registered with the United Nations.” He added that Turkey would in no way allow any foreign country, company or vessel to engage in unauthorized hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation activities within its maritime jurisdiction areas and will continue to take the necessary measures to protect its rights and interests. Cyprus replied that block 7 lies within the EEZ/continental shelf of Cyprus, in a marine area to the south-west of the island, already delimited in accordance with international law, between the Republic and Egypt under the 2003 EEZ Delimitation Agreement. “The exploration and/or exploitation of Block 7 is an exclusive sovereign right of Cyprus and does not affect the rights of any third state, including Turkey,” the Ministry said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 3rd, the UN Secretary-General's Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday he could not confirm the convening of a trilateral or five-party meeting on Cyprus when asked. He referred to a written announcement already issued on the matter when asked about a meeting held on Monday between UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci. Asked to comment on a statement by the Turkish Cypriot leader that Guterres would take an initiative to convene a meeting with the two

leaders or a five-party meeting including the guarantor countries either in October or November, Dujarric said there is nothing he can confirm at this point. Repeated rounds of UN-led peace talks have so far failed to yield results. The latest round of negotiations, in the summer of 2017, at the Swiss resort of Crans-Montana ended inconclusively. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 6th, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci wants to see a tripartite meeting with the UN Secretary-General and a five-party conference with the guarantor powers by the end of the year, he was quoted as saying on Sunday. In an interview with Kathimerini, excerpts of which were published online, Akinci spoke of the obstacles to reaching an agreement to the terms of reference that would see the talks resume. He said the UN Chief Antonio Guterres wanted the terms agreed prior to his next report to the UN Security Council in November. The leaders had almost reached a deal on the terms last month after week-long meetings with Guterres' envoy Jane Holl Lute but failed to enter the final stretch after the Turkish side wanted the issue of political equality for the Turkish Cypriot included in the terms prior to any negotiations. Akinci said the issue of the rotating presidency has been in the spotlight since the Talat-Christofias era in 2008. He said Anastasiades had even discussed with him the percentages for cross-voting because the solution would include a rotating presidency. Akinci also said that during talks in Mont Pelier leaders had agreed to a 7-4 vote for the cabinet, and a positive vote for the Turkish Cypriots. *"The acceptance of this condition was announced by Mr Anastasiades himself,"* said Akinci. The Turkish Cypriot leader, according to Kathimerini said that on August 9th, 2019, when he met President Anastasiades did not

accept the June 30th, 2017 document from Guterres laying down the framework for talks. *"We must give up creating impressions and playing games and explain to our communities the realities,"* Akinci said. *"However, in order to move forward, we must accept clearly the convergences that have been achieved to date,"* the Turkish leader said. Also, he said, open-ended procedures *"now belong to the past."* *"We have an urgent procedure ahead of us that should be focused on the outcome,"* he added. Referring to the crisis in the EEZ due to Turkish activities, Akinci said Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots would not remain shackled in the face of work carried out by foreign companies but it would be good, he said, if progress could be made on this issue before a solution. The Turkish side has proposed joint management of hydrocarbons pre-resolution but this has been rejected by the Greek Cypriot side. Meanwhile, according to Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou on Sunday, Anastasiades is *"absolutely ready"* for reunification negotiations and he is waiting for the UN Secretary-General's invitation. He said the President and the Greek Cypriot side are *"are absolutely ready today, awaiting an invitation of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, so that the terms of reference can be completed on the basis of the understanding reached on August 9th with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci."* *"We hope that the other side will respond positively, despite Ankara's apparent unwillingness,"* he added. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey came back in Cypriot sea waters by sending its Yavuz drillship for research in field 7, within the heart of Cypriot EEZ. Turkish

provocations are getting harder and harder, while Cyprus is watching escalated situation helpless to protect its sovereign rights. While Cypriot President Nikos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci express their willingness for restarting negotiations, Turkey escalates tension in the region. However, Anastasiades continues to express readiness for talks. The fact is that Turkey comes and goes in Cypriot EEZ whenever it wishes without any major consequence. Actually, it achieved to put on the table of negotiations the issue of hydrocarbons, while international companies look reluctant in starting works in sea fields claimed by Turkey. International community namely the US and EU called Turkey to respect international law and Cypriot sovereignty. Cyprus has called Turkish vessels to seize activity within its waters but Turkish officials were very clear; as long as Turkey and Turkish Cypriots are not included in the “energy game” tension will not be decreased. However, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu expressed Turkish diplomatic aspiration saying that “Turkey would prefer a common path.” Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising deterrence. So the Turkish strategy in Eastern Mediterranean could be summarized “gunboats or talks with the threat of gunboats.” Next trilateral meeting between Cyprus, Egypt, and Greece will take place on October 8th, 2019 in Egypt. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this

situation. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty. A “hot” incident cannot be excluded during autumn.



GREECE: September 30th, Deputy Citizens’ Protection Minister Lefteris Economou said that 250 people will be transferred from the overcrowded Moria migrant camp on the eastern Aegean island of Lesbos to the mainland by the end of Monday. Economou was speaking to reporters on Lesbos a day after clashes and two fires at the camp on Sunday resulted in the deaths of a child and a woman, as well as the injury of another 19 camp residents. He added that plans to relieve pressure on islands will be speeded up so that at least 3,000 people can be transferred to the mainland by the end of October. According to Reuters, more than 9,000 people arrived in Greece in August, the highest number in the three years since the EU and Ankara implemented a deal to shut off the Aegean migrant route, with over 8,000 people arriving in September. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 30th, the Armed Forces Chiefs of Greece and North Macedonia signed a technical agreement to allow the policing of the latter's airspace by Greek fighter jets, as the country prepares for its full accession into NATO. Meeting in Thessaloniki, the Head of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA), General Christos Christodoulou and his counterpart Lieutenant General Vasko

Gjurchinovski also discussed issues of mutual interest, GEETHA said in a press release. On May this year, a pair of Greek F-16s conducted a test flight in North Macedonia's airspace to assess compatibility of communication and radar systems. The agreement on air policing came after Athens and Skopje signed a landmark deal in June 2018 to end a decades-long dispute on the name of North Macedonia. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- October 5th, on an official visit to Athens over the weekend during which he signed an extended defense agreement with Greece, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo backed Greece's position opposite Turkey's continuing provocations in the Eastern Mediterranean, describing the country's illegal drilling for hydrocarbons in the region as "unacceptable." *"We have told the Turks that illegal drilling is unacceptable and we will continue to take diplomatic actions to make sure that we do, as we do always, ensure that lawful activity takes place,"* Pompeo said during a joint press conference with Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias. *"We want to make sure that rules govern international exploration in the Mediterranean Sea's energy resources and that no country can hold Europe hostage,"* he added. Earlier on Saturday, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis had also asked Pompeo for support in dealing with Turkey, noting that its recent moves in the region are *"a flagrant violation of Cyprus's sovereign rights."* Dendias and Pompeo signed a protocol of amendment to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) between the two countries which relates to the use of Souda Base and the air bases of Stefanovikeio and Larissa in central Greece and the port of Alexandroupoli. Both officials emphasized the importance of the deal in

promoting stability in the broader region while Pompeo indicated that it is not related to Turkey's activities. Dendias, who also condemned Turkey's activities in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), declared that Greek - US relations are at a *"historic high point."* *"The strategic upgrading of our cooperation with the USA is a guarantee of security and a source of stability, growth and prosperity,"* he said, heralding the launch of a *"new era"* in relations. While praising the country for cutting red tape to help foreign businesses invest, Pompeo also raised concerns about Chinese investments in Greece, saying he had confidence in the Greek Government to know when and if to accept Chinese investments. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government focuses on facilitating country's growth restoring Greece's country profile. "Novarty's" case may become source of political tension in the coming months, especially after Parliament's decision to establish an investigative committee on former Deputy Justice Minister Demetrios Papaggeopoulos regarding his role in intervening and influencing Justice investigation. Arrivals of migrants from Turkey continue in increased rates. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. Latest riots in migration camp of Moria in Lesvos island forced the Government to relocate thousands of migrants to mainland. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial

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



KOSOVO: September 30th, Kosovo authorities have banned visits by Serbian officials during the campaign for the October 6th, 2019 parliamentary elections, the Pristina-based Zeri newspaper said on Monday. The daily quoted Jetlir Ziberaj, advisor to outgoing Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli, who said that Serbian

state officials would not be allowed into Kosovo before the elections. “*The October 6th elections are the elections of the republic of Kosovo and its citizens. Belgrade officials cannot and will not be allowed to campaign in the Kosovo elections, nor threats from Belgrade be allowed against the Serb community of Kosovo. Belgrade knows the reality in Kosovo and must respect Constitution and laws of Kosovo,*” Ziberaj wrote in a post on social media. Zeri said that the Deputy Head of the Serbian Government’s Office for Kosovo Damjan Jovic had not been allowed into Kosovo. Serbian media reported that another Deputy Head of the Office for Kosovo Dusan Kozarev had been escorted out of Kosovo by the Police. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 2nd, Kosovo’s outgoing Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli said that next Prime Minister will revoke the 100% tariffs on Serbian goods, Pristina daily Koha said on Wednesday. “*The election winner, the future Prime Minister who says the tariffs will remain in place is a liar. The exception is [outgoing Prime Minister Ramush] Haradinaj who I know as stubborn and immovable once he sets his mind on something,*” Pacolli. According to Pacolli, tariffs will be revoked even by people who said they would never be revoked. Early parliamentary elections will be held on Sunday, October 6th, 2019 in Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 6th, Kosovo Central Election Commission (CIK) said that after 77% of votes counted, Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) party took the lead in the rest of Kosovo’s with 26.1%, followed by the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) with 25.2%. Serb List (Srpska Lista), Kosovo Serb party supported by Belgrade, won in all

Serb-dominated municipalities in northern Kosovo, N1 reported. After 100% of votes counted in the northern Mitrovica, Serb List won 98.07% of the votes, Vucic told reports in Belgrade, adding that in other municipalities with a Serb majority the party won over 90% of the votes. Early general elections were held in Kosovo on Sunday after Ramush Haradinaj resigned as Prime Minister following the call from The Hague-based Special Court for war crimes by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the 1998-1999 armed conflict in the then Serbia's province. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Initial election results show a change in Kosovo political power with Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) party to lead. If it wins the election a major change will be inaugurated in Kosovo's politics. International community (US, EU) has called for fair elections, while the EU monitors the election procedures. Under these circumstances dialogue with Serbia comes in second priority. International community namely the US and EU will repeat their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections, assessing the new Kosovo political reality. Restart of bilateral negotiations could not be expected before December 2019 or beginning of 2020 provided that Kosovo will revoke tariffs imposed to Serbian goods. Kosovo insists on maintaining high level of tension with Serbia due to a series of provocative actions; ban of Serbian officials to enter north Kosovo populated mostly by Serbs, Police operation in the north arresting Serbs, 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war,

establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs undermining any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. The possibility of Kosovo Army presence in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence.



MOLDOVA: September 30th, the EU is willing to increase financial support for backing the Moldovan cabinet's reforms agenda; yet, it is important that Moldova fulfills the commitments taken. High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini made statements to this effect at a joint news conference with Prime Minister Maia Sandu in Brussels today. The event was held after the fifth meeting of the Moldova – EU Association Council. *“Your presence here is an important sign of the importance you assign to our partnership and I assure you that EU attaches the same importance to its relations with Moldova. Today, we discussed the important reforms underway in Chisinau, to strengthen the democracy and the rule of law state. You went this way with much resolution. This is an essential way also for our partnership, so that all of us take advantages from the Association Agreement as*

much as possible,” Mogherini said. The European official noted that it is important that Moldova achieves results and observes the commitments assumed.



High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini with Moldovan Prime Minister Maya Sandu
(Photo source: www.gov.md)

“Today, we agreed to update the association agenda and set new priorities, based on which the Association Agreement is to evolve in the next years. Our support will stay conditioned by the reforms’ progress. We resumed the payments for the budgetary support in last June. We are willing to increase the financial assistance and support in terms of consultation, in order to back the agenda of the government’s ambitious reforms. We hope that we will soon be able to release the first installment of macro-financial assistance. I think that all these represent a clear signal of the appreciation we have for the reforms you have already carried out and of our expectations concerning the future steps,” Mogherini said. As for the general local elections, due on October 20th, 2019 Mogherini said that the polls “will be an important test for the electoral process.” Sandu said that, in Brussels, the officials had discussed especially the things the cabinet managed to do during the first 100 days. “We made serious commitments of implementing all actions we have in the present agenda. These are

complicated reforms; yet, at the same time, these are things expected by the citizens. The reconfirmation of the news that we can get the two installments of macro-financial assistance till the end of this year, if we manage to fulfill all commitments, is gladdening,” Sandu said. The Government today informed that Mogherini would pay a visit to Chisinau in several days. (www.moldpres.md)

- September 30th, Prime Minister Maya Sandu has subjected President Igor Dodon to strong criticism for his vision of Transnistrian conflict settlement, which he presented in his speech made at the United Nations General Assembly Session in New York last week. Sandu stated on the RTR-Moldova television channel that the President “presented his own opinion on the issue, which does not reflect the Moldovan Government’s position.” “The President had no courage enough to demand a withdrawal of Russian troops from the Republic of Moldova territory. It is very bad that he has not renounced the policy that had been waged heretofore by all the previous leaders of the country, including President Vladimir Voronin [leader of the Moldovan Communist Party],” the Prime Minister stated. In her opinion, this has happened because Dodon wants to have very good relations with the Russian Federation. “I understand this. But he should not forget that he bears responsibility to his people and the State. Yes we need to have good relations with Russia, but we must primarily defend the interests of our country. We need to further demand a removal of the Russian troops from Moldova,” stressed Sandu. She remarked that in his speech in New York Dodon touched on the problems from the so-called “big package” for Moldova, which includes a de facto international recognition of

Moldova's neutrality and the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict by means of a consensus to be reached between the great powers. *"We are categorically against this package. Dodon is proposing the 'big players' to agree upon a future for our country – in detour of us the people of Moldova. That's not correct. This question is to be solved by citizens of the country. And we shall never agree to settle the Transnistrian conflict at the expense of giving up our goal of achieving integration into the EU sooner or later,"* stressed Sandu. The Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate – PAS) which she chairs has also stated that it disagrees with the inconsistent position of President Dodon concerning the illicit presence of the foreign military in the Moldovan territory. (www.infotag.md)

- October 2nd, *Moldova* President Igor Dodon has spoken out for creating a vast zone of free trade between the Eurasian Economic Union [of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, EAES] and the EU. Speaking at the EAES Summit held in Yerevan (Armenia) on Tuesday, Dodon said *"We hope that sooner or later the two Unions will enter into negotiations on creating a big zone of free trade between these major international organizations. We support the idea of concluding such agreement, which would become a serious breakthrough in promoting the concept of creating a united Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Moldova is a European state, which is the center of such, processes geographically and geo-politically."* In his words, participation of Moldova in new integration projects like the EAES is a matter of priority and a good possibility to diversify its economic ties and markets for exporting Moldovan goods and

services. He named as interesting the experience of Moldova, which has been implementing for 5 years already the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement [DCFTA, the essential-most component of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement] simultaneously with other working agreements on free trade with CIS countries, Balkan countries and Turkey. Dodon said that presently Moldova has created favorable domestic political conditions for promoting real economic and structural reforms and for waging a weighted external policy. This has been achieved thanks to a change of power that happened in Moldova last June, he stressed. *"For the first time over the 28 years of the Republic of Moldova's recent history, political forces with diverging programs, ideologies and foreign political priorities have formed a governing majority and appointed a coalition Cabinet of Ministers. Those processes were backed by an unprecedented geopolitical consensus between our main external partners - the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United States. We shall be cooperating and developing mutually beneficial relations with all our partners both in the West and the East proceeding from our national interests, and we are not going to participate in geopolitical battles on somebody's side against somebody else,"* stated Dodon. In his words, as an EAES observer country, Moldova is going to use all the possibilities for deepening cooperation with the Union, and will consider possibilities of participation in the Eurasian Development Bank. *"I would like to underline that a positive dynamic is remaining in the Republic of Moldova's trade with EAES countries. Last year, our trade turnover grew up 10%, and in January-July of the current year it went up by 6%. Moldova has*

goods to offer to the Eurasian Economic Union countries,” stressed Dodon. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Moldova is a field of rivalry between the West and East, between the US, NATO, and EU on the one side and Russia on the other. PSRM and ACUM block, two political formations with totally different ideological background, expressing two different worlds it might compromise in order to get access to power, but sooner or later differences will come to the surface. President Igor Dodon's speech in the UN General Assembly was strongly criticized by the Prime Minister Maya Sandu mainly because it was considered as an approach to Russia. On the other hand, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security, Federica Mogherini, praised the state's efforts to promote reforms promising that the EU will support the country. The Prime Minister, Maya Sandu said that the country "is back to the EU path." The Prime Minister seeks to get as much financial aid as she can from the US and EU in order to implement ambitious projects for the country. In this context Mogherini announced that the EU will allocate to Moldova 14 million euro in October and 22 million euro in November. The agreement signed by the Government's partners – ACUM block and PSRM – strengthens political stability despite their different views. Transnistria is a case which concerns Moldova and withdrawal of Russian troops is a priority for the Government. It should be noted that Russia closely follows political developments in Moldova and it will not allow any overcome of its "red lines" such as Moldova's integration in NATO or EU. Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian

national security. It is assessed in the near future Moldovan Government will strengthen its calls for withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: October 1st, the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Legislation Reform should start working as soon as possible, Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavistosaid said and added that it would be good if local elections were held on the same day as the parliamentary elections. After meeting with his Montenegrin counterpart, Srdjan Darmanovic, he said that Finland, which currently chairs the Council of the EU would like the new countries to start negotiations with the EU. *"We support opening negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania, it is to be seen if we can persuade other members on this issue. Also, we support continuation of talks with Montenegro and Serbia,"* Haavisto told reporters at Villa Gorica. He stated that the rule of law, freedom of media and development of civil society are very important things during talks with the EU. *"It would be good if municipal elections were held on the same day as the parliamentary ones. These are issues that are critical to the rule of law from our perspective,"* Haavisto said. He added that Montenegro and Finland have a lot in common and can further enhance cooperation. Darmanovic said that Finland and Montenegro have extremely good relations and that the country strongly supports integration of Western Balkans into the EU, both at political and expert levels. He thanked Finland for being a vocal advocate of the most successful Union policy - enlargement

policy, through the current EU Council Presidency. *“In this context, I exchanged views with Haavisto on the challenges and future of the EU, with an emphasis on maintaining the credibility of this policy through the continued European integration of the region. The continuation of the firm support of the Finnish Presidency is of great importance to us,”* he added. (www.rtcg.me)

- October 4th, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, met with Montenegro’s President, Milo Djukanovic. Pompeo said that Montenegrin nation might be small but still made significant contribution. President said that Montenegro remained reliable partner in the region. After the meeting with Djukanovic, Pompeo met with Montenegro’s Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic. It is of strategic importance for the US and the EU to be present in the Western Balkans, so as not to leave space to those who do not share our common principles and values, said Markovic. Pompeo, on the other hand, said the US would continue to have Montenegro as a partner and ally in the future. Markovic said Pompeo’s visit is a proof that the US values our alliance and constructive role in the region and beyond. *“We appreciate support that Pompeo has shown to Montenegro in EU integration, and praise for reforms it has achieved. Montenegro will continue reforms in the areas of rule of law, fight against corruption and crime, protecting journalists, at an unprecedented pace primarily because of us, but also because of the EU. We will continue to fight human trafficking,”* Markovic said. He said that during the meeting he received assurances that the US will continue to support institutions of Montenegro in the fight against all forms of organized crime. Markovic is confident that by

2024, and perhaps sooner, Montenegro will reach a commonly agreed target of 2% of defense spending. Pompeo congratulated Montenegro on joining NATO, calling this visit, the first since the restoration of independence, a historic one. *“We are witnessing Montenegro's leadership in confronting the dangers of the 21st century. Thanks to our cooperation in cyber security with Montenegro, we have been able to develop protection against the latest Russian software that protects billions of devices around the world,”* Pompeo said. Montenegro, he said, not only supports regional stability as a NATO member, but also shares US priorities across the spectrum of foreign policy issues. He added that US diplomats in Montenegro are focused on fighting corruption and organized crime, as well as freedom of media. *“They will help you to get the results. Earlier this year, I met Oliver Lakic, a journalist who was shot in the leg for reporting on cigarette smuggling. Such attacks on journalists are attacks on democracy and the common principles of NATO. The perpetrators of the attacks will be charged,”* Pompeo said. He also said that in this moment more than 50 US companies operates in Montenegro *“and we very much want to increase that number.”* (www.cdm.me, www.rtcg.me)



Montenegrin President Milos Djukanovic with the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

(Photo source: www.predsjudnik.me)

- October 6th, in an interview for Pobjeda daily, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Sonja Biserko noted that the independence of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and “*the Church issue*” represented the only open identity issues in Montenegro. She also emphasized that Montenegro is particularly important when it comes to the geopolitical aspirations of Serbia, and it is often treated as “an internal issue” in Serbia. On the request of Patriarch Irinej, who visited Montenegro recently and sent a message to the President of Montenegro, expressing hope that Montenegro would withdraw recognition of Kosovo’s independence, Biserko noted “*Serbia’s presence in Montenegro is becoming more aggressive which clearly indicates the significance Montenegro has for Serbia. The latest reason for fueling tensions between the two countries is the proposal for the draft church law. The issue of independence of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church would completely resolve the process of the Montenegrin statehood. In this sense, the church issue is the only remaining and open issue of all identity issues in the country.*” (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was a historic event confirming the superpower’s support towards the small Balkan country. However, the US official put on the table – in discretion actually – issues such as rule of law, organized crime, corruption, trafficking, and media freedom. Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting

opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided in Montenegro strengthening ruling DPS’s power. Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters into a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Russian influence continues to be considered as a “threat” against state’s national security. Moreover, Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that Montenegro is the “natural extension of the country.”



NORTH MACEDONIA: October 3rd, “*I do not expect Bulgaria or Greece to block our Euro-Atlantic integration ambitions; in fact, we expect them to advocate for the opening of negotiations with the EU and full-fledged NATO membership,*” North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said. “*We do not have a plan B if someone resorts to blockade; our plan B is to go back to plan A, because we believe we have implemented a painful process,*” Zaev said.

Commenting on Bulgaria's red lines on history unveiled this week, Zaev said that the History Committees should not aspire to establish the ultimate history. *"History is a living, breathing thing, new and new historical facts will be established over time. There are also historical facts that are not disputed by anybody. We have been telling our commission 'do not be afraid if something has been recorded and accepted history-wise by the two sides, cite documents and discuss them,'" Zaev said. "Find a way to build friendship using them, do not allow to be used as something that can divide us," Zaev added. According to the Prime Minister, the identity has been cemented by the agreements with Bulgaria and Greece. "The treaty with Bulgaria and the agreement with Greece both guarantee identity issues, secure serious perspectives for our country as we are on the eve of a historic decision; getting a date for start of negotiations with the EU, having been waiting for 15 years," Zaev said. (www.nezavisen.mk)*

- October 4th, *"Hearts and minds of citizens of North Macedonia should be leading the state forward and not Russian influence on social media. I would like to warn you as well as about China's involvement in the area of sensitive technologies and their strategy of bribery when securing deals. At the UN, President Trump said that the future belongs to sovereign and independent states that will protect its citizens and will respect their neighbors. North Macedonia reflects this spirit. The USA will continue to be your partner for the benefit of your citizens, the region and the world,"* the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said during his stay in Ohrid, after the meetings with President Stevo Pendarovski and the Government

delegation. Pompeo was thankful for North Macedonia's contributions to NATO's missions and said that he is convinced that the US Senate this autumn will ratify the NATO accession protocol. He greeted the *"Prespa Agreement"* including the *"Good Neighborly Agreement"* with Bulgaria. At the same time, he stated that the fight against corruption is of key importance both for the NATO and EU memberships and for the citizens as well. Pompeo arrived on October 4th, 2019 afternoon at the Ohrid airport, where he was greeted by the Foreign Affairs Minister, Nikola Dimitrov. From the airport he went at the Biljana villa where he met with President Stevo Pendarovski. *"USA is our strategic partner since our independence and its support was key in the defense reforms and transformation of our army with the goal for meeting the criteria for a NATO membership. Through its development programs, USA has helped us in the processes of strengthening our institutions, rule of law, reforms in judiciary, strengthening of civil sector as well as a support for a favorable business climate for a trading exchange between both countries,"* Pendarovski said. The President thanked him for the US' continuous support during the periods when the country was solving its difficult issues regarding inner stability as well as reaching a compromise in the decades-old name dispute. (www.meta.mk)

- October 4th, as speculation grows in North Macedonia about possible early elections as early as spring next year, the main ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM), and the main right-wing opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна

македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) party, insist their recently launched campaigns across the country are just part of their routine activities. The SDSM on Thursday launched its campaign under the slogan “*On the Right Path.*” It said the goal was to present all the Government’s achievements on Euro-Atlantic integration and on social and economic measures at forums across the country. “*This is not part of a pre-election campaign but is just our ongoing activity.*” Social Democrat Secretary-General Ljupco Nikolovski said on Thursday. Through direct communications with the voters, he said, the party wanted hear their suggestions and expectations of the both central and local authorities; the party controls by far the greatest number of municipalities in the country. Although the exact date for the next regular elections has not been determined, polls are due to set up next autumn. Asked about a date, Nikolovski said his party would prefer elections in October next year, but did not exclude the possibility of earlier polls. VMRO-DPMNE also insists that while it is sticking for now to normal politics, it would not mind snap elections at any point. As part of its own campaign, dubbed “*Talks for Renewal of Macedonia,*” which also mainly consists of rallies and debates across the country, it is attacking the Government and accusing it of betraying the national interest, especially with the agreement with Greece, as a result of which the country changed its name from “*Republic of Macedonia*” to “*Republic of North Macedonia.*” They also accuse the Government of corruption. VMRO-DPMNE Head Hristijan Mickoski on Thursday said he had formed a team of experts and “*strategic partners*” to help the party meet its

goals. Key figures in the team are the VMRO-DPMNE runner-up in this year’s April-May presidential election, law professor Gordana Siljanovska, the cardiologist and former VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate Sasko Kedev, and Igor Durlovski, an opera singer who is a sharp critic of the Government. Mickoski on Thursday repeated his call for snap elections as early as March 2020, having previously demanding elections this autumn, and then next April or May. Over the summer the two big parties discussed possible dates for elections but did not say what they had discussed specifically. They are expected to try to align their stands again in the next two months. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Support messages arriving from all over the world regarding the opening of accession negotiations with the EU establishing a positive climate for a positive decision of the EU Heads. However, France, Bulgaria, and Greece by the one or another way have expressed concerns of setting a date for the Balkan country due to a variety of reasons; France is skeptical due to lack of rule of law, corruption, and human rights, Bulgaria threatens North Macedonia because of historical disputes, while Greece has called it to fully implement the “Prespa Agreement” or the “veto card” could be used. The EU Council will decide about it on October 15th, 2019 and EU member states’ leaders will approve or not the EU Council’s suggestion on October 17th – 18th, 2019. It is estimated that the country will get the green light for the opening of accession talks but with strict conditions. There are several European voices calling North Macedonia to focus on judicial reforms, rule of law, fight against

corruption and money laundering, administration reform, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. Although, North Macedonia's politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals it seems that there is a "moratorium" of words and actions between the state's political parties with the EU decision ahead. However, such scandals undermine not only country's political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as "Extortion", "Empire", "Racket", "Titanic", "Monster" are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state's function. It is assessed that no matter what the EU will decide on North Macedonia's accession talks, snap elections will be called after the EU decision; either under positive conditions for Zaev (in case the country gets a date), or under negative conditions (North Macedonia will not get a date for accession talks with the EU). There are signs that the two main parties have already been engaged in pre-electoral preparations.



ROMANIA: October 1st, Romania's main opposition party, the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), submitted its no-confidence motion against the Government of Prime Minister Viorica Dancila. The Government has minority support in the Parliament, from the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), after junior coalition partner Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) left and joined the opposition in August, following disagreements between Dancila and

ALDE leader Calin Popescu-Tariceanu. A total of 237 MPs have signed the motion, 4 more than needed for the motion to pass, according to the head of PNL senators, Raluca Turcan. "Two Deputies of the parliamentary minorities, four Deputies of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), and an independent MP have signed for this motion," said Turcan, quoted by Adevarul.ro. The effort to overthrow the PSD cabinet led by Dancila is also supported by the Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România -USR), People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP), Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR), PRO Romania (PRO Romania - PRO), and ALDE. Pro Romania President Victor Ponta said that, for first time since 2012, a no-confidence motion is likely to pass. However, he added that he would support a "center-left" Government, while most of the opposition parties declare themselves as "center-right." The PSD, which still controls some of the Parliament's leading bodies, is trying to schedule the vote on the motion during the weekend when most MPs are usually out of Bucharest. (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 4th, Prime Minister Viorica Dancila said on Thursday evening that if the censure motion against her cabinet is successful in Parliament, she will fight even more, in the opposition, to win the presidential election and return Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) to power. "If the non-confidence vote succeeds, I will fight even more, in the opposition, to win the presidential election and recapture power. It is the only alternative that mayors have. Had they not wanted that, they would have not endorsed me, but it is in their interest first of all,

and then we will have a comparison to see what the people coming after us do (...),” Dancila told Romania TV private broadcaster when asked if PSD decides to endorse independent Mircea Diaconu as the presidential candidate of the Left-Wing in case the no-confidence vote succeeds. She added that if the vote succeeds, a new Government must be set up as soon as possible. “Coming up with a Government and set it up as soon as possible, but I think that doing so in the midst of an election campaign betrays lack of accountability and does not do good to this country. The censure motion is certainly the Opposition’s tool, I am not faulting the Opposition for tabling it, but the way in which they go out into the public space with certain statements, with certain things they want to do, 400 furloughed people, their claim that we have no pension and salary money. So, they have not pledged not to cut pensions and wages (...) We are the country with the second largest economic growth in Europe. Instead of enjoying that, they criticize,” Dancila said. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- October 5th, Romania will have a new Government starting next week, President Klaus Iohannis, currently campaigning for a new mandate, said at a meeting of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) in Iasi. He urged the PNL members to get ready to come to power as the current Social Democrat Government led by Prime Minister Viorica Dancila will be dismissed by no-confidence motion following the vote in the Parliament scheduled for Thursday, October 10th, 2019. He also told the liberals that the new Government will have a short mandate, until next year’s parliamentary elections. “We will have a new Government starting next week,” Iohannis said,

according to Digi24.ro. “The no-confidence motion is running and I tell you seriously: get ready for governing!” he added. “I want it very much, and I say it publicly so that all Romanians understand: I want this motion to pass and this failed Government to fall,” Iohannis said, adding that someone will need to govern Romania afterward. “It will not be a long mandate, it will be a Government with a short mandate, almost a transition mandate,” the President said. “We need a Government to perfectly organize the presidential elections, to build and promote the national budget for next year, which is very difficult as the current finance minister has admitted that they have made mistakes. Local and parliamentary elections need to be organized and, to be very clear, I expect total and efficient involvement, in good faith, from PNL to pass this transition period,” he stated. PNL leader Ludovic Orban has the highest chances of being nominated by president Klaus Iohannis to lead the new Government. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition finally filed a motion of no confidence against the Government achieving to receive support by 237 MPs including 4 lawmakers from the ruling PSD. It is very likely the motion to be successful toppling the Prime Minister Viorica Dancila’s Government. Coming political developments will be rapid since a new Government should be formed having the responsibility of conducting the Presidential election scheduled for November 10th, 2019 and November 24th, 2019 (second round if necessary), and to pass the 2020 state budget. However, it is not certain what will be the next day in Romanian politics since opposition parties look divided and not willing to adopt a common stance. Under

these circumstances, political uncertainty and instability are reign in Romanian politics. Early parliamentary elections are estimated to be inevitable (estimated to be held on June 2020). The no-confidence motion will be discussed on October 10th, 2019 and PSD Government works to overturn political balance within the Parliament in desperate attempt to remain in power. However, it should be noted that Dancila's statements after the no-confidence motion was filed in the Parliament shows that she almost accepts the coming political defeat focusing on the presidential race. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: September 30th, Nebojsa Zelenovic, leader of the opposition Together for Serbia (Zajedno za Srbiju - ZZS) party and the Mayor of Serbia's western town of Sabac, said on Monday the Government's measures for improving the election process were "*nonsense which has not scratch the surface*," the Beta news agency reported. He said measures did not cover the role of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), the Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Agency, the institutions opposition saw as crucial issues in the election process. Commenting on possible negotiations between the Government and opposition mediated by the EU as suggested by David McAllister, the Chairman of the European Parliament (EP)

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Zelenovic said opposition group Alliance for Serbia (SzS), which his party is a member of, would not take part. He said foreign observers are ready "*to turn a blind eye to violations of democracy and human rights when it comes to the issue of Kosovo.*" (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 1st, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic called Kosovo Serbs to vote for the Serb List at the October 6th, 2019 parliamentary elections because that party "*is the only one working with Belgrade and central Serbia.*" The President told the Serbian state TV (RTS) that a vote for the Serb List "*is the only way to remain linked*" and added that anything else means severing links and stopping possible support from Belgrade. "*Serbs can vote for whoever they want but I am asking them to choose the Serb List because it is the only one working with Belgrade. Turn out for the elections in big numbers so that we can vote for our survival in our homes, for Serbian salaries in schools, hospitals... All that will be revoked unless the voice of the Serb List is heard,*" Vucic said. Asked if he would try to join in the election campaign in Kosovo, Vucic said that he will not have time for that because of a number of scheduled meetings with foreign officials and a trip to Prague but added that he does not want to bring danger to the Serbs by going to Kosovo. He said he would have invited the Serb List candidates to Belgrade to symbolically show that Belgrade is their capital. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 6th, Aleksandar Vucic, the President of Serbia and leader of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) has started consultations prior to the elections set to take place early next year. The President held first consultations with Serbia's

Social Democratic Party of Serbia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Srbije - SDPS) leader Rasim Ljajic, Vucic's coalition partner. "Sunday, was dedicated after a long time not only to presidential but also to party-related activities. The first consultations prior to the upcoming election, with a friend, the SDSP leader Rasim Ljajic," said a post published on "The future of Serbia" Instagram profile. Ljajic and his party were recently targeted by criticism of SNS MP Dragan Sormaz, who said that Ljajic and Nenad Popovic should be left to seek a new path. Ljajic was reproached for not adequately defending Aleksandar Vucic and his political party was said to be dealing with trivial topics. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS. A potential boycott of the elections by the opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. Serbia advocates equal friendly relations with the US, EU, Russia, and China. However, it is a common "secret" that it is considered by the west as a close "friend and ally" of Russia. Pressure from the US and EU is increasing towards both sides to restart dialogue. At the moment, there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock since Kosovo has called for early parliamentary elections on October 6th, 2019, and Serbia is preparing for elections on spring 2020. Kosovo election results will be critical to the Pristina - Belgrade talks. Security situation is complex and uncertain. None could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in

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



SLOVENIA: September 30th, an ethnic Slovenian from Austria's Carinthia has been elected to the lower house of the Austrian Parliament for the third time ever, as Olga Voglauer of the Green Party made it to the National Council in Sunday's general election. Slovenian minority representatives welcomed the news, hoping the Greens will form a coalition with the ruling People's Party (OVP). (www.sta.si)

- October 4th, the Left (Levica) issued a strong rebuke to the Marjan Sarec minority Government, announcing that the tax package put forward by the cabinet, coupled with the go-ahead for a bonus for welfare recipients engaged in work on the parliamentary Labor Committee "marks the end of cooperation" with the coalition. Left's leader Luka Mesec accused the Government of leading anti-social policies and forming alliances with the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS). Meanwhile, Zmago Jelincic indicated that his Slovenian National Party (Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka - SNS) party would support budget documents for the coming two years in Parliament, despite some grievances, saying the decision is guided by "common sense." (www.sta.si)

- October 5th, Dejan Zidan, the President of the coalition Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati - SD), said that the clash between the minority coalition and the opposition partner Left (Levica) over social security issues is harmful and has called the party threatening to stop supporting the Government for a meeting next week which would discuss open issues. In a social media post, Zidan noted that the coalition and the partnership with the Left is being “*broken on the back of the most vulnerable ones*,” referring to the go-ahead for the abolition of a bonus for welfare recipients engaged in work on the Labor Committee yesterday, which prompted Left leader Luka Mesec to announce an “*end of cooperation*.” “*We are quarrelling about 16 million euro. I think too that abolishing the bonus is a wrong move*,” he said, adding that the conflict is detrimental to the coalition. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the Left party withdrew (according to its leader Luka Mesec) its support of minority Government of Marjan Sarec it is assessed that it enjoys relative political stability. Opposition SNS has already announced that if the Left would end cooperation with the Government, he would offer his support. Nevertheless, there is always a possibility of snap elections. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter’s effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the “Schengen Zone card” in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level

and an “underworld war” is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end.



TURKEY: September 30th, Turkey laid out targets for its economy that envisage a surge in growth from near zero this year and a slowdown in inflation. Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak said consumer price growth will ease to an annual 12% at the end of this year from 15% in August. Gross Domestic Product will expand 0.5% in 2019 and 5% during the following three years. Inflation rate will drop to 8.5% at the end of 2020 and 6% the following year, according to Albayrak's presentation to reporters in the capital, Ankara, on Monday. The outlook suggests Turkey is looking to replicate growth levels last seen before a currency crash last year. With the economy still fragile but on the mend, a Government approach that is starting to take shape is focused on creating incentives for

banks to ramp up credit while lowering the cost of money. *“The good news is the growth forecast for 2019 was revised down to a more realistic level. The bad news is that dose of realism missed the 2020 growth target,”* Ziad Daoud, Mideast Economist in Bloomberg said. Albayrak's predictions also show policy makers remain cautiously optimistic on prices. The central bank has recently said inflation might be lower than its July prediction of 13.9%, citing downside risks from weak demand. In his presentation on Monday, the Minister said Government spending would also be in line with the targeted inflation path. Price growth has slowed thanks to a stronger lira and a moderation in food costs. Below are some of the highlights from Turkey's new medium term economic program that Albayrak unveiled today: i) The ratio of the central Government budget deficit to GDP is seen at 2.9% in 2019, up from a previous forecast of 1.8%. ii) The budget gap is seen at 2.9% of GDP in 2020 and 2021, and 2.6% in 2022. (www.aljazeera.com)

- October 4th, Turkish drill ship Yavuz will start a new round of offshore drilling operations in the eastern Mediterranean, south of Cyprus, on October 7th, 2019 Cagatay Erciyes, Head of the Foreign Ministry's department looking into the eastern Mediterranean, said on social media that the area where Yavuz would launch drilling operations was within Turkey's continental shelf. According to an issued NAVTEX, the Yavuz drilling vessel will continue to work in the Mediterranean until January 2020. Turkey, as a guarantor nation for the Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus, is currently carrying out hydrocarbon exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean with its drilling vessels, Fatih and

Yavuz along with two other seismic vessels that are also operating in the same region. Turkey has consistently contested the Greek Cypriot administration's unilateral drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, asserting that Turkish Cypriots also has rights to the resources in the area. (www.yenisafak.com)

- October 5th, *“Turkey will carry out an air and ground operation in the east of the Euphrates River in Syria and purge the region from terrorists to establish peace there,”* President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Saturday. Speaking at the opening of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) annual camp in Ankara, Erdogan said Turkey aimed to *“water the east of Euphrates with fountains of peace”* and settle refugees there. Turkey has on many occasions expressed that it aims to settle up to 2 million Syrian refugees in the zone, and has repeatedly warned of unilateral military action if it is not satisfied with progress. *“Turkey saw that land and air patrols with the US were a tale; we have made our preparations, we have completed our operation plans, given the necessary instructions,”* he said, adding that *“Turkey would carry out air and ground actions as soon as today or tomorrow.”* *“We gave all warnings to our interlocutors regarding the east of Euphrates and we have acted with sufficient patience,”* he asserted. Turkish and US military officials agreed on August 7th, 2019 to set up a safe zone which Turkey says should stretch 30 km into Syria and be cleared of the Syrian Kurd People's Protection Units (YPG) militants as well as to develop a peace corridor to facilitate the movement of displaced Syrians who want to return to their homeland. Turkish leaders have said the US is not doing enough and is moving too slow in

establishing the zone. Syrian opposition forces have so far supported a potential cross-border offensive by Ankara in northeast Syria. On Friday, they united under the Defense Ministry and pledged their support to Turkey. Turkey currently hosts some 3.6 million Syrian refugees, more than any other country in the world. Ankara has so far spent 40 billion dollars for the refugees, according to official figures. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey demonstrates readiness to start a military operation within Syrian ground, east of Euphrates river aiming at eliminating Syrian Kurd militants of YPG and establishing a 32 kilometers safe zone. US hesitation to implement the mutual agreement with Turkey is making the latter nervous. An offensive operation in Syria by Turkish forces will make things complicated since Syrian Armed Forces have threatened Turkey with a total war in Turkish – Syrian borders. Moreover, the US are not willing to abandon Syrian Kurds in Turkish “mercy,” while Russia is strategic partner of Assad’s regime and has developed close defense relations with Turkey. It is assessed that a potential military operation by Turkey it will not be the same with former operations “Euphrates Shield” and “Olive Branch” since a lot of stakeholders is expected to be engaged. It should be noted that Turkey reiterates that it will move almost 2 million Syrian refugees in the established safe zone, sending a message of relief Europe from refugee’s flows. Turkey remains a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO). Due to its geopolitical and geostrategical aspects Turkey has the ability to achieve its national goals and

protect its interests either by diplomatic means or by the threat of use or use of force. The US obviously does not seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on improving bilateral relations. Undoubtedly, the US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey is sending back from October 7th, 2019 its drillship Yavuz to start drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and more particular in field “7” where it is believed there are significant amounts of hydrocarbons. Turkey does not abandon its interests in the region showing decisiveness to protect them. The state issued a NAVTEX starting from October 7th, 2019 until January 2020 showing that winter will be “hot” in Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will


set the base to become a regional military super power.


www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karamelas


NOTE

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

 *Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions. Low tension incidents.*

 *Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.*

 *Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.*