

OCTOBER 14 - 20, 2019 – VOL. 2 - ISSUE 52



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: October 21st, opposition's Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader Lulzim Basha sought again Socialist Prime Minister Edi Rama's resignation on Monday, holding him responsible for failing the European integration process and the opening of accession talks with the bloc. *“One person is keeping us all hostage. This has to stop,”* Basha said. The leader of the united opposition, which has long resigned from Parliament and boycotted the last local elections in June, stressed that the difficult economic situation, lack of opportunities, resulting from capturing of institutions and inequality before the law, have forced Albanians to leave in record numbers. *“Europe rejected Edi Rama, not Albania. The failure is Edi Rama's, not Albania's. This message has been stronger than ever from Germany, which said yes to Albania and no to the Government through nine conditions to be met. Without serious reforms, which he is unable and unwilling to do, Europe will continue to reject Edi Rama, while we, the Albanians, will continue to suffer the consequences,”* said Basha. He stated that Rama should return the mandate to the Albanian people, because *“most of the countries were of the same opinion that the Government of Albania did not deserve the opening of negotiations and that placing conditions showed that the Government has taken steps backwards.”* He said that crime, corruption, vote buying, malfunctioning of the Courts are not internal problems of Europe, but of the Rama Government. *“EU conditions are our guide to get out of the crisis, to build a democratic Albania, with the opportunity for all its citizens. Bringing the criminals to justice at high levels is the non-negotiable requirement for opening accession*

talks,” he said. Basha said Tirana's Government should follow the example of North Macedonia and give up the country's leadership. *“With a new, legitimate Government emerging from free and fair elections leading the European negotiation process, prosperity and progress is possible,”* he said. However, Rama rejected demands for resignation and accused the opposition of working too hard to thwart the process. *“They did not leave one stone unturned, but they did not succeed. Northern Macedonia and Albania did not receive what they deserve as a result of an internal clash at the European family table on the future of the European Union,”* he said. Rama said after a meeting of the Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) on the same topic that the only thing Albania can do is to do its homework, and that the latest EU response did not change anything in the country's strategic trajectory, the PS and Government. *“Our homework is very clear. Our path continues without any wavering and with no equivocation. We want to make European Albania for Albanians and our children and we will do it daily,”* he said. France reminded Albania that it has a high number of asylum seekers and immigrants, which does not comply with its European integration requirements, while Germany urged it to reestablish the Constitutional Court and punish officials incriminated in judicial corruption and electoral crimes. The opening of accession talks for both Albania and North Macedonia got rejected by France primarily during the last European Council meeting last Thursday. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- October 23rd, Albanian Police announced on Wednesday that they have uncovered the functioning scheme and identified members of an

Iranian terrorist cell that was targeting attacks on the Iranian opposition movement Mojahedin-e-Khalq, or People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), with over 2,000 members residing in Albania as refugees since 2014. Albanian General Police Director Ardi Veliu and Head of Anti-terror Gledis Nano said the Iranian-Government led terrorist cell is operating within Albanian borders. During a press conference, Veliu said the *"terrorist cell is also responsible, among other things, for the March 2018 plan to carry out a terrorist attack during the celebrations of the Nevruz Festival, attended by high-level members of the to the Iranian opposition organization Mujahideen al Khalq (MEK), a plan that was prevented by increased State Police measures, thanks to accurate information."* According to Albanian Police, *"the terrorist cell is run by a QUDS Forces operative, known under the name Peyman, a permanent resident of Iran, who remotely manages a number of operations in Albania and elsewhere in Central and Western Europe."* One of the cell members is Alireza Naghashzadeh, a former MEK member with an Austrian passport. *"Naghashzadeh was sent by Peyman to gather information in Albania during several separate visits as part of plans for an attack that was eventually halted,"* Veliu explained. Another operative is Abdolkhalegh Malek Zadeh, an Iranian living in Turkey leading the cell's operational work. Malek Zadeh, also known by criminal connections under the nickname Ferhat, has worked over the past two years with Abdulsalam Turgut, a well-known Turkish organized crime figure, to plan terrorist attacks at Peyman and the QUDS Forces behalf", said Veliu. Turgut is an infamous Turkish mafia boss and the head of an international drug trafficking, imprisoned recently in Turkey and

Azerbaijan for drug trafficking accusations. He is also known by the Albanian authorities. QUDS is the operational wing of IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), which operate beyond Iran's borders. QUDS Forces are led by Qassem Soleimani, who is responsible, among others, for Iran's activity in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Within the QUDS unit there is a sub-unit exclusively dealing with all opposition organizations. The unit's Modus Operandi includes long-distance management of proxy forces, usually criminals and mafia members with various pasts who cover Iran's terrorist activities. The criminal operatives based in the Balkans, responding to Turgut or a drug-dealer closely connected to him, have been sent to Albania since 2018 to advance the planned attacks against MEK, as ordered by Malek Zadeh. Last December, Iran's Ambassador to Albania and another embassy diplomat was expelled from Albania. The Foreign Ministry reported at the time that *"the two Iranian diplomats were declared unwanted after allegedly being involved in activities that threaten security in the country."* The decision to declare Iranian diplomats undesirable – the Albanian Foreign Ministry further clarified – was taken in consultation with the Allied countries because of their activity in Albania in violation of their diplomatic status. They were declared *"non-grata,"* while the decision was congratulated by US President Donald Trump through a letter addressed to Prime Minister Edi Rama. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- October 25th, the President of Albania, Ilir Meta, said for Egyptian media that the project for a Greater Albania is not possible, and the one for a Greater Serbia has failed. *"It is very important to protect sovereignty of people in order to preserve*

the sovereignty of a state. It is not Albania's duty to play the referee role with conflicts of other countries," Meta said. Meta underlined that Albania has a joint project, and that is joining the big family of the European Union. *"All Albanians have a joint project, and that is joining the EU. The idea of a greater Albania is not possible. The Greater Serbia project has failed,"* Meta declared. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition strengthens its voice against the Government to resign and early elections to be held. For Rama who carries the burden of failure towards the country's European future it would be much more difficult to remain in power. The ongoing political crisis is expected to become deeper strengthening instability and uncertainty. Violent protests could not be excluded especially if Rama refuses to listen public demands and use Police violence against civilians. 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. What really needs the country is political stability and constitutional order for moving ahead with reforms. Election of Albin Kurti as the new Kosovo Prime Minister is a new challenge for Albania. Besides, 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.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

October 21st, Bosnia faces a complex security threat because no adequate solution for the migrant crisis has been found so far, Bosnia's Deputy Security Minister Mijo Kresic said on Monday, adding that migrant management system needs to be updated. *"The increased number of migrant entries into Bosnia is quite noticeable, as is the fact that they are leaving the country harder and harder. Many of them are concentrating in Bosnia without any strict supervision or control,"* Kresic told the press in Banja Luka. He expressed fears that the crisis could turn into a humanitarian crisis and said that the new Government must be formed as soon as possible so it could improve the management system of illegal migrations. Mayor of Bihac, Suhret Fazlic, a northern Bosnian town which became the hotspot for migrants due to its vicinity to the Croatian/EU border, said that the Una-Sana Canton, where Bihac is located, will hold a meeting of the migrant crisis operative group. The city's Spokesperson Elmedin Mehadzic confirmed for Srna news agency that the authorities will stop paying for the provision of water and waste disposal from the Vucjak temporary migrant camp to the east of Bihac. *"I suppose utility companies will stop the delivery of water and waste disposal unless someone else pays for these services,"* Mehadzic said. The Red Cross organization said it would continue to provide food for as long as they have enough donations and as long as their safety would be guaranteed. The Bihac Mayor said last week in Sarajevo that his town cannot continue to pay for the migrants' food, shelter and basic necessities, because funds are coming out of their budget, without the State's assistance. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 23rd, Bosnia must form a Government as soon as possible and while the country should adopt the Annual National Program (ANP), an essential document on its NATO membership path, the issue should not be *“treated as a platform for further internal bickering,”* Defence Minister Marina Pendes said on Wednesday, according to the main Croat party in the country, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH). *“The functioning of the institutions and the establishment of the Government are necessary for achieving stability and meeting all the goals which are ahead of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is necessary to swiftly implement the results of the 2018 General Election and form the Government through an agreement between the election winners,”* said Pendes, a member of HDZ BiH, the main Croat ethnic party in the country. Bosnia has not formed a Government - officially called the Council of Ministers - since the October 2018 election because the Bosniak (Muslim Bosnians) and Croat members of the tripartite Presidency refuse to vote for the new Prime Minister. The new Head of Government is supposed to come from the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD), but the party opposes the country's path toward NATO membership and announced it would not allow the next step in this direction to be made. Sending the ANP is the next step, and the Bosniak and Croat Presidency members insist on it. While the HDZ BiH has been voicing support for Bosnia's NATO integration, it has also entered an alliance with the SNSD which does not want that. *“Technical issues such as the ANP must not be abused,”* Pendes said pointing out that Bosnia took over obligations which need

to be met for the country to prove that it is a serious party among Euro-Atlantic partners. *“With the implementation of the ANP, the potential for fulfilling defined strategic goals and priorities is being created. Through implementation of the chapter on defense and military issues, the Armed Forces will be able to implement the tools of partnership cooperation more efficiently in order to increase their capabilities and effectiveness, as well as that of Bosnia's security system,”* she said. The ANP must be forwarded to the Council of Ministers, Pendes stressed. Pendes added that Bosnian Croat representatives will *“continue to advocate for Bosnia to fulfil its strategic foreign policy goals and join the EU and NATO.”* (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 26th, Bosnia and Herzegovina will be supplied with gas through a leg of the Azerbaijani pipeline that ends in Italy, Bosnia Presidency member Milorad Dodik confirmed on Saturday following a meeting with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in Baku. *“It is known that Azerbaijan is constructing a southern leg of the pipeline that is supposed to end in Italy, through Montenegro and Republika Srpska (Bosnia's semi-autonomous region) and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We talked on this subject and said there is no problem concerning the construction,”* Dodik told RTRS, Republika Srpska's public broadcaster. The Serb Presidency member pointed out that this means the Republika Srpska, as well as the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina, will be supplied with gas from Montenegro's direction. *“We also discussed the possibilities of engaging Azerbaijani companies for the construction of highways under favorable loans,”* said Dodik, adding that the country he is visiting these days is interested in the development of economic

relations. *“That is a growing economy, the country that has at disposal significant sources of oil and gas,”* he stressed. (www.ba.n1info.com)



Meeting of member of the tripartite BiH
Presidency Milorad Dodik with Azerbaijani
President Ilham Aliyev
(Photo source: www.predsjednistvobih.ba)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Lack of state's Government since October 7th, 2018 elections is an insurmountable obstacle which undermines stability and growth of the country. Not only that but it creates “fertile soil” for emerging ethnic tension and nationalistic rhetoric which is detrimental for Bosnia's sustainability. Dayton Peace Agreement has been put into question by almost everybody including Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) threatening peace, stability, and coexistence of ethnic entities in the country. It is not a secret that political situation in Bosnia is alarming and at the moment it is considered as the most dangerous for a violent turbulence or a conflict in the region. 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: October 21st,

In Moscow, the Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria and Russia, Ekaterina Zaharieva and Sergey Lavrov noted the success in developing dialogue between the two countries last two years and the high-level contacts that have taken place. Zaharieva made an official visit to the Russian capital at the invitation of Lavrov. In a conversation that lasted much longer than expected, the two Ministers focused on the development of strategic energy projects Balkan Stream, Rosatom's bid to build Bulgaria's Belene Nuclear Power Plant, and the modernization of Kozloduy NPP. Lavrov said that given the Russian technology of the two reactors in Belene, he hopes for a positive development for his country's participation in the plant's construction. The excellent cooperation in trade, tourism and education was also noted. Lavrov accepted the invitation to visit Bulgaria. (www.novinite.com)

- October 22nd, Bulgaria has moved a step closer to the end of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), put in place when it joined the EU, intended to bring it up to the bloc's standards regarding judiciary and fight against corruption. A report on progress under the CVM, adopted by the European Commission said that Commission considers that the progress made by Bulgaria under the CVM is sufficient to meet Bulgaria's commitments made at the time of its accession to the EU. However, it stopped short of a final decision on ending the CVM for Bulgaria, saying that the Commission will also take duly into account the observations of the Council of the EU, as well as of the European Parliament. *"Bulgaria will need to continue working consistently on translating the commitments reflected in this report into concrete legislation and on continued implementation,"* the report said. *"Although challenges remain regarding the implementation of the necessary reforms and maintaining the accumulated speed, the progress made by Bulgaria is currently sufficient to consider discontinuing the operation of the CVM and using new monitoring mechanisms at national and at the level of the EU. We will carefully hear the opinions of (the European) Parliament and the Council before deciding,"* European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told a briefing, according to a report by Bulgarian National Radio. *"I stated at the beginning of my term that I would like the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism to end with this Commission. Of course, achieving that ambition has always depended on meeting all the requirements in the area of judicial reform and the fight against corruption and organized crime,"* Juncker said. The report looks at the progress made over the past year to meet the final

17 recommendations issued by the Commission in its January 2017 report. *"It positively notes that Bulgaria has worked consistently on the implementation of these recommendations,"* the EC said. The Commission said that Bulgaria will need to monitor the continued implementation of the reform with a newly-established post-monitoring council, and that will feed into the future dialogue with the Commission in the framework of the comprehensive rule of law mechanism. *"Both the internal post-monitoring and the EU-wide mechanism should support sustainability and irreversibility of reforms, even after an end of the CVM for Bulgaria."* Since the last report in November 2018, the Commission has seen consolidation in Bulgaria of the legal and institutional framework put in place over previous years. *"Translating this into results over the long term will now require determination and follow-up, first of all at national level, notably by the post-monitoring council which will be co-chaired by a deputy Prime Minister in charge of judicial reform and the representative of the Supreme Judicial Council."* The Commission said that the responsibility to ensure the respect of the rule of law and a proper functioning of the state is an internal constitutional responsibility of all national Governments towards their people. In addition to the commitment to pursue reforms in relation to the fight against corruption, the Commission notes in particular the commitment of the Bulgarian Government to put in place procedures concerning the accountability of the Prosecutor General, including safeguarding judicial independence in line with the Venice Commission recommendations. Commission also notes the commitment of the Bulgarian authorities to adopt legislation to repeal provisions in the Judicial

System Act requiring automatic suspension of magistrates in case of a criminal investigation against them and reporting of membership in professional associations. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- October 27th, the first round of local elections is over. At 9:00 pm, all sections were closed. This also applies to places where by 8:00 PM, when the election day officially ends, there were still people in front of the sections who wanted to exercise their right to vote. However, after 60 minutes, all such sections were closed; it became clear from the words of CEC Spokesman Alexander Andreev to BNT. He also noted that Election Day was relatively normal. The immunity of five candidates was lifted after such requests were received by the prosecution and the CEC considered and decided accordingly. There were approximately 250 complaints received during the day. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces “structural” problems, the Government is stable. First round of local elections was held on October 27th. Taking into consideration exit polls and first preliminary results it seems that ruling GERB was the winner of the election but weakened compared to last parliamentary elections. Second round will be held on November 3rd, 2019. 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: October 22nd, the

European Commission (EC) assessed on Tuesday that Croatia met the conditions for joining the Schengen Area and asked the Council of the EU to include Croatia in the area without internal border controls. “*The European Commission considers that, based on the results of the Schengen evaluation process initiated in 2016, Croatia has taken the measures needed to ensure that the necessary conditions for the full application of the Schengen rules and standards are met,*” a press release said. “*Croatia will need to continue working on the implementation of all ongoing actions, in particular its management of the external borders, to ensure that these conditions continue to be met. The Commission also today confirms that Croatia continues to fulfill the commitments, linked to the Schengen rules, that it undertook in the accession negotiations,*” the press release said. Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said “*I commend Croatia for its efforts and perseverance to meet all the necessary conditions to join Schengen... This is why I trust that Member States will take the right steps for Croatia to become a full Schengen member soon.*” Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos said “*Schengen is one of the greatest and most tangible achievements of European integration. But its strength very much depends on its inclusiveness - now that Croatia has taken the measures to ensure that the necessary conditions are met, we must recognise this. Once it becomes a full Schengen member, it will contribute to further strengthening the*

Schengen area and ensure that the EU's external borders are better protected.” In order to join Schengen, a country must prove that it can assume responsibility for controlling the EU's external borders on behalf of the other member states of the area and issue short sojourn visas, efficiently cooperate with the security authorities of the member states, and apply the Schengen rules such as control of external land, sea and air borders (airports), issuing of visas, Police cooperation, protection of personal data, and the need to connect to and use the Schengen Information System and the Visa Information System. The Commission's evaluation on technical preparedness is not enough for joining but it is a prerequisite for the member states to make a political decision on the accession. Slovenia has made it clear that it is going to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to Ljubljana's dissatisfaction with the unresolved border dispute with its eastern neighbor. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- October 25th, Croatia has six weeks to come up with a concrete plan on how to increase its defense budget to 2% of GDP by 2024, Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic said on Friday in Brussels. *“NATO thinks that Croatia has to invest more in equipment and the modernization of its Army. The Heads of state of NATO member countries are set to meet in London in six weeks' time and NATO believes that Croatia has to come with a concrete plan on how to achieve a defense budget of 2%,”* said Krsticevic who was in Brussels to attend a meeting of NATO Defense Ministers. NATO heads of state agreed at a 2014 summit in Wales that within a period of ten years (by 2024), member countries needed to increase their defense spending to at least 2% of their

respective GDP with at least 20% of that going to modernization and equipment. US President Donald Trump in particular insisted that the goals be met during his term in office. Croatia currently allocates between 1.7 and 1.75% of its GDP for defense. Krsticevic said that he would pass on NATO's message to the Government and the President, who is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Croatia can increase its defense budget with the procurement of fighter jets. After the procurement of Israeli jets fell through, a second procedure has been launched and it is being conducted by an interdepartmental Commission. The first phase of that process, which involved sending an enquiry to countries for a show of interest in selling their planes to Croatia, has been completed and the second phase is for Croatia to seek concrete offers and that is expected to be conducted soon. In late August, the Croatian interdepartmental Commission for the procurement of multi-purpose combat aircraft said that it had received five letters of expression of interest to provide the country with new fighter jets and eight letters of expression of interest for second-hand jets. During the selection procedure, the Commission is going to check the validity of all potential bids and to see if they comply with the tactical and technical requirements made by the Croatian Air Force. Media outlet speculate that the expressions of interest have been submitted by Italy, France, Sweden, the USA, Norway, Denmark, and Israel. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- October 25th, Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic-Radman said on Friday he expected Slovenia to make a *“wise decision”* and support Croatia's Schengen entry which, he added, was also in the interest of Slovenia's authorities because it meant

the EU's external border would move and become Croatia's responsibility. "Slovenia will certainly act wisely and intelligently," he told reporters in Split in the wake of messages from Slovenia after the European Commission assessed that Croatia met the technical conditions to join the Schengen area of free travel. He said Croatia met a score of difficult conditions to deserve that assessment, adding that Slovenia could benefit the most as protecting the EU's external border was its responsibility now. "(Croatia's) Schengen entry will help Slovenians the most," he said, adding that he was sure the majority of Slovenians thought the same. Asked if during its Council of the EU presidency in the first half of 2020 Croatia would again raise the issue of enlargement to southeast Europe despite opposition from some member states, Grlic-Radman said it would, but noted that it was a process which primarily depended on meeting the requirements. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone and Schengen Zone goals. In fact, Croatia received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries

maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. 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 22nd, Cyprus' Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis has strongly protested "*the continuing violations of the national airspace and territorial waters of Cyprus by Turkey, as well as the infringements by the latter of international air traffic regulations, and appeal for their immediate cessation.*" In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Mavroyianis said "*The Republic of Cyprus reiterates its call to respect Security Council resolutions and adhere to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.*" The letter has been circulated as an official document within the UN. Mavroyiannis encloses four separate annexes recording the violations of Cyprus' national airspace, the infringements of international air traffic regulations in Cyprus' Nicosia Flight Information Region, and the illegal use of closed ports and airports in Cyprus, by Turkey, during the months of July and August 2019. "*Turkey continues to systematically harass civilian and military aircraft within the Nicosia Flight Information Region via radio calls while, during the same period, the regime installed by the occupying power in the area of Cyprus that it occupies, has illegally issued three notices to airmen relating to exercises conducted by the Turkish Air Force. Additionally, Turkish*

commercial aircraft systematically use the Tymbou airport, which continues to operate illegally following the closure, by the Cyprus Government, of all ports of entry in the areas where it does not exercise effective control,” he said. Mavroyiannis said this pattern of behavior constituted a serious concern for Cyprus and was a continuous violation of its sovereignty. *“Furthermore, the persistent policy of violating the Charter of the United Nations and international law and breaching international rules and regulations is a constant threat to international peace and security, negatively impacts regional stability, jeopardizes the safety of international civil aviation and creates difficulties for air traffic over Cyprus, and prevents the creation of an enabling environment in which to conduct the Cyprus peace process,”* Mavroyiannis said. He concluded by urging Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community to contribute to a meaningful resumption of the peace process, instead of focusing on undermining the sovereignty of the Republic and promoting Cyprus’ partition through the creation of facts on the ground. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 25th, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci to a meeting in Berlin on November 25th, 2019 the presidential palace announced on Friday evening. The meeting is to be informal and is being held *“in order to discuss the next steps in the Cyprus issue,”* the announcement said. *“The President’s response was positive,”* it added. Almost immediately, Akinci’s Spokesman Baris Burcu said the Turkish Cypriot leader’s response was also positive. According to reports, the discussions in Berlin will be a way to lay down a

framework for a potential five-party conference in December. Earlier on Friday the Government said the Greek Cypriot side had just been waiting for the time and place for the tripartite meeting, and that consultations with the UN Secretariat had been ongoing. UN envoy Jane Holl Lute is also likely to visit before the tripartite, meeting, Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said. Anastasiades, he said, was not negative to the possibility of some consultation with the guarantor powers in order to resume effective negotiations. *“Our side is seeking to restart negotiations on the well-known basis, which is the joint statement with which the negotiations began, the convergences, and the six points of the Secretary-General,”* Prodromou said. The two leaders had the opportunity to meet briefly on Thursday evening at a reception to mark the UN Day hosted by Secretary-General’s Special Representative Elizabeth Spehar at the Ledra Palace. After exchanging pleasantries and a short conversation, they also had a brief discussion with Spehar. Three years after the Conference on Cyprus in Crans-Montana, Spehar said, *“Cypriots are still facing uncertainty about their future and concern about what will come next.”* She also warned that changes are happening with important implications on and around the island and at regional and global level making the current environment challenging. Spehar posed the question *“where do we see Cyprus in 2045, when the UN turns 100 years old?”* to note that *“Decisions that are taken now could determine the answer to that question.”* According to the UN diplomat, *“while the leaders bear the primary responsibility for the talks and will need to redouble their efforts to conclude the terms of reference and return to negotiations, we should recall that successful peace processes tend to*

include multiple levels of engagement that help build the foundation for success. All Cypriots clearly have a stake in their own future here, and perhaps young people more than any.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 27th, it remains to be seen whether the Turkish side will abandon its intransigent stance by the time the leaders meet with UN Chief Antonio Guterres in Berlin next month, Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said on Sunday. The Secretary-General on Friday called the leaders to an informal tripartite meeting in Berlin on November 25th, 2019 which could lead to a five-party conference in December that would include the guarantor powers, Turkey, Greece and Britain. Prodromou, when asked, what was expected from the Berlin meeting, told reporters on Sunday that President Nicos Anastasiades had the political will for progress. “We hope that by that time [November 25th] the Turkish side will abandon its inflexible stance... that will allow the resumption of substantive negotiations in line with the Secretary-General’s initiative in trying to prepare for a re-launch of talks,” he added. “From the Greek Cypriot side, the President has numerous times reaffirmed that we seek a solution on the basis of UN decisions and resolutions, utilizing the Guterres framework and, of course, through negotiations to find a mutually acceptable agreement for the benefit of all Cypriots.” On whether he thought Turkey would, in fact, abandon its inflexible stance, Prodromou said “This remains to be seen. The president will proceed on November 25th with clear political will and willingness to create the conditions for the resumption of negotiations. This, however, depends on the Turkish side and mainly on Turkey.” Asked what the next steps

might be subsequent to that, he added “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Fortunately, the Secretary-General’s initiative is still in progress and we look forward to the fact that Mr Guterres will proceed accordingly.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although invasion of Turkish drillship Yavuz in Cypriot EEZ continues challenging the state’s sovereignty, Cypriot authorities focus on restarting of peace talks. It is obvious that the lack of military power and more specifically aeronautical power is critical for Turkish uncontrolled actions. Cyprus continues to work by diplomatic means on resolving the crisis but the fact is that Turkey has consolidated its presence in the Cypriot waters. UN Secretary General has announced an informal tripartite meeting for November 25th, 2019. Current situation has not only political and diplomatic repercussions, but also economic ones. Turkey rejects any possibility of unilateral (by Cyprus) exploitation of hydrocarbons within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without equal participation of the Turkish Cypriot community. The presence of Turkish drill ships accompanied by warships forced oil companies to reconsider their activity in Cypriot waters due to safety reasons. Despite Turkish provocations, Cyprus appears ready for talks under the UNSG auspices with Turkish Cypriot community for resolving the Cyprus question. Bi-communal and bi-zonal federation is the basis for a negotiation, according to Cypriot officials. It should be noted that there is a joint Turkish and Turkish Cypriot effort to question Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci legitimacy to lead talks with the Greek Cypriot side. This fact

is strongly related with the latest Akinci's statements which did not support Turkish action in Syria. As long as tension remains in Eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed "hot" incident or a conflict. It is certain that Turkey will not accept "fait accompli" in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: October 22nd, Greek authorities moved more refugees and migrants from overcrowded island camps to the mainland on Tuesday as the Government, facing a surge in new arrivals, said it would take a hardline on those who did not qualify for asylum. Nearly 700 migrants and refugees arrived in the port of Elefsina near Athens from the island of Samos, officials said. Earlier, 120 people arrived from Lesbos at Greece's main port, Pireaus. Greece is struggling with the biggest resurgence in refugee and migrant flows across the Aegean Sea from Turkey since 2015, when more than a million crossed into Europe, many of them via Greece. The islands, which are closest to Turkey, have been struggling under the influx, with some 33,700 refugees and migrants in overcrowded camps, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR. In late September, a woman died in a fire in a tent in a camp on Lesbos, while a fire in an overcrowded camp in Samos forced hundreds of people into the streets this month. *"Our focus was mainly on Samos because we want things there to calm down,"* Migration Ministry secretary Manos Logothetis told Reuters. Greece has

adopted a tougher stance on migration since the conservative Government led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis came to power in July. Mitsotakis told his EU counterparts last week that the Union must review asylum rules and warned economic migrants that they will be returned to Turkey if they are not entitled to asylum, Government Spokesman Stelios Petsas said on Tuesday. *"If they give their money to traffickers hoping to permanently cross into Europe, they will only lose it,"* Petsas told reporters. *"Even if they reach Greece, since they are not entitled to asylum, they will return to Turkey."* *"They can no longer come to Greece and apply for asylum hoping that they stay here forever, as it was the case with the previous Government,"* Petsas said, referring to former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' left-led administration. More than 12,000 people arrived in Greece in September, the highest level in the three-and-a-half years since the EU agreed a deal with Turkey to seal the Aegean corridor to Europe. Athens has announced plans to deport 10,000 people who do not qualify for asylum by the end of next year. Logothetis said up to 300 more people would be leaving Samos this week, and up to 2,000 from all outlying islands next week. Greece aims to move up to 20,000 off the islands by the end of the year, he said. (www.reuters.com)

- October 25th, a letter of intent signed earlier this month by the Defense Ministers of Greece and France paves the way for Athens acquisition of two navy frigates but also seems to signal a broader cooperation framework in the area of defense. Seen by Kathimerini, the letter signed by Greece's Nikos Panagiotopoulos and France's Florence Parly speaks of the intention to *"develop and reinforce"* their relationship in the domain of

naval capabilities as well as of an “exclusive defense partnership” that would enable Greece to acquire the two Belharra frigates. However, it also stresses that a “distinct and specific arrangement” would be needed to define the parameters of any agreement, as the letter of intent is not legally or financially binding. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- October 26th, Standard & Poor’s on Friday upgraded previously crisis-ridden Greece’s credit rating by one notch to BB- with a positive outlook. The agency added that another upgrade may follow in 2020. S&P said a possible upgrade depends on the Mitsotakis Government’s success in implementing economic reforms and in reducing a mountain of “bad debt” entailed in NPLs on Greek systemic banks’ balance sheets. The BB- rating was accompanied by observations of reduced risks towards implementing the state budget as well as the recent abolition of remaining capital controls. While an improvement, the “Big 3” ratings agencies still rate Greek debt below investment grade. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis wrote on social media “Greece’s sovereign debt rating upgrade by Standard & Poor’s proves that our economy is growing ever stronger. Our reform agenda aims to attract investment, create jobs, accelerate growth and further restore trust in our economy. And we are fully committed to it.” (www.naftemporiki.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greece enjoys political stability. Standard & Poor’s upgrade was an encouraging signal confirming that the country is moving on the right path and rewarding the Government’s efforts to grow Greek economy. Establishment of a special investigative Committee to investigate allegations

of political interference in the “Novarty’s” case raised political tension between the ruling ND and opposition SYRIZA. The issue will remain in the central political scene in the near future as a source of tension. At the moment, migration is the main security problem of Greece. 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. The Government focuses its efforts on relieving the islands of eastern Aegean Sea (Lesvos, Samos, Chios) from a burden that it may come out of control threatening law and order in these small communities. Last two weeks protests of migrants in Lesvos and Samos have shown that situation is explosive and massive violent reactions from migrants could breakout at any time. 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.” Turkey targeted the wider area of Kastelorizo (and Northeast Aegean Sea) last week issuing two NAVTEXs for naval exercises with live fires. Two more NAVTEXs were issued in Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone. Moreover, Turkish fighter jets massively violated Greek airspace, while Turkish drones flew over the Greek islet of Ro, west of Kastelorizo. Turkey keeps upgrading provocations against Greece with a “hot” incident always to be in the foreground. 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 provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: October 22nd, Albin Kurti, the leader of Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) party, and likely the new Kosovo Prime Minister said on Tuesday that the Pristina's Constitutional Court unequivocally stipulated that the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations was in the jurisdiction of Prime Minister and not the President, the Beta news agency reported. Asked what would he do if the international mediators invited President Hashim Thaci who had led dialogue with Serbia's counterpart Aleksandar Vucic so far, Kurti said that would have violated Kosovo's Constitution. *"If that happens, that will be a breach of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court has decided that dialogue with Serbia should be led by the Prime Minister. Hashim Thaci is the President, but he is not in charge of foreign policy,"* Kurti said as cited by the K7 TV. Kosovo's Constitutional Court has ruled that the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue should be lead by the Prime Minister, while the President has an advisory role. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 25th, Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) party leader and most likely the next Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti said that his

cabinet would include at least one Serb but added that the Minister does not have to be from the Serb List (Srpska Lista). Vetevendosje won individually the most votes at the recent parliamentary elections but cannot form a Government on its own and is negotiating with the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK). Kurti said earlier that the Serb List would not be represented in the next Government which Serb List and officials in Belgrade disputed claiming that the Kosovo Constitution says that the majority Serb party has to get ministerial posts. *"We will reach an agreement with the Democratic League of Kosovo and see who else can join us. We will respect the Constitution but we do not need a coalition with the Serb List. We need to have at least one Serb Minister,"* Kurti told TV Prva in Pristina. Kurti said the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue would be continued after a review of the agreements reached to date. *"We will conduct the dialogue under clear principles but only after we review the 33 agreements from Brussels between 2011 and 2017, when we see what has been implemented and how it affected people in Kosovo,"* Kurti said. He added that it is important to have a dialogue with Brussels about dialogue with Belgrade because that dialogue should be well-prepared. *"We cannot go from one dialogue which failed to another which will fail,"* Kurti said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 25th, Pristina and Belgrade wanted a bigger US commitment in solving Kosovo issue, they even asked me to engage, says Republican Senator, Ron Johnson. In an interview with the Voice of America, Johnson said that the US Presidential Special Envoy on dialogue, Richard Grenell, and US Special Representative on the

Western Balkans, Matthew Palmer, have a joint plan on how to solve Kosovo issue, focusing primarily in economy. Johnson said Kosovo should form its new Government and he is against giving “artificial deadlines” on potential reaching of an agreement. “Palmer and Grenell are cooperating. I have discussed with both of them and I know they have a plan, which will be focused on economic potential. I think they can achieve something and manage to return both parties at the negotiation table and work with them,” Johnson said who is chairman of the sub-Committee on Europe and Regional Cooperation. Johnson said that it would be good for Kosovo to rescind tax on Serbian products, and urged Belgrade to stop asking other countries withdraw recognition of Kosovo. He said that the end of 2019 is not a real deadline for solving Kosovo issue adding that this problem asks “step by step approach.” Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia started in 2011 by facilitation of the EU. The dialogue process was halted after Kosovo Government introduced 100% tariffs in all Serbian products in November 2018. This was used as a justification by Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic who is conditioning resumption of the dialogue with rescinding of tax. The EU and US have also asked for tax to be removed. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Winners of the October 6th, 2019 early parliamentary elections, Vetëvendosje and LDK are still on talks to form the new Kosovo Government. It is a matter of time the new coalition to announce its agreement and Vetëvendosje leader Albin Kurti to become the new Prime Minister. A new era has come to

Kosovo since traditional political forces of President's Hashim Thaci PDK and outgoing Prime Minister's AAK were defeated. In other words, former KLA militants who formed the political elite after war lost power and control of the entity. Kurti is a nationalist hardliner and it is assessed that dialogue with Belgrade will not be facilitated in the near future. Not only that, but it seems that Kurti's strategic choice is to force Kosovo Serbs to cut lines of communication with Serbia and Kosovo authorities to fully control north. Such opinion is pretty dangerous since the balance of co-existence between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is very sensitive. Deployment of security forces and the newly established Kosovo Army in the north may become a reason for turbulence and an armed conflict. Besides, Kurti advocates unification of Albania and Kosovo; a view which will threaten peace and stability not only in Kosovo – Serbia but in the whole Western Balkans. International community namely the US and EU will strengthen their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections. It seems that the US pays special attention in Kosovo problem by appointing Ambassador Richard Grenell as special envoy for Kosovo – Serbia dialogue; together with special envoy for western Balkans Matthew Palmer. 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. Increased tension is expected in North Kosovo by Kosovo Serbs if Serb List representatives will be excluded by the new Government. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its

critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard.



MOLDOVA: October 21st, Mayors were elected in 518 settlements of Moldova at the October 20th, 2019 general local polls and the runoff will be held on November 3rd, 2019 in another 380 settlements. The Head of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), Dorin Cimil, unveiled information to this effect at a news conference today. According to Cimil, distribution of the mandates according to the criterion of political affiliation looks as follows; the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) – 191 mandates, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) – 124 mandates, the ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc – 82 mandates, Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Liberal Democrat din Moldova - PLDM) – 26, the Republican Socio-Political Movement Equality (Mișcare Social-Politică Republicană Ravnopravie - SOR)– 13, Our Party (Partidul Nostru) – 10, Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Comuniștilor din Republica Moldova - PCRM) – 4, Political Party, Romanian Popular Party (Partidul Popular Românesc - PPR) - 2, Liberal Party (Partidul Liberal - PL) – 1, National Unity Party (Partidul

Unității Naționale – PUN) – 1 mandate. Another 64 Mayor mandates were got by independent candidates. The CEC Head noted that 175 candidates on behalf of PSRM, 173 ones from PDM, 167 candidates on behalf of the electoral bloc ACUM, 20 candidates on the ticket of Our Party, 44 on behalf of PLDM, 16 on behalf of PCRM, 38 on behalf of the SHOR political party and 84 independent candidates would compete in the runoff in the other 380 settlements. (www.moldpres.md)

- October 24th, despite a warming in political relations, Moscow has tightened import quotas on Moldovan goods until Moldova gives Russian operators a bigger slice of the market in the transport of bilateral trade. Russia has refused to increase export quotas for Moldovan goods for 2019, setting a quota of 15,000 export permits for Moldovan producers – 3,000 less than in 2018. The Moldovan Economy and Infrastructure Ministry on Wednesday said Russia wanted Moldova first to increase the number of permits for Russian transport operators. Moldovan authorities said Russia would only consider increasing Moldovan export permits if the rate of Russian transport carriers operating Moldovan - Russian bilateral freight services was monitored and increased. *“In August, the Russian side ... requested an additional quota of authorizations, mentioning that 80.8% of ... bilateral transport is being carried out by Moldovan transport operators while the share of Russian operators is only 9.3%,”* a press release from the Ministry read. Russia imposed an economic embargo on Moldova in 2013 after its Government decided to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. Since then, the share of Moldovan exports going to Russia has fallen to only 10% of the total

amount, putting the country in fourth place as an end destination for Moldovan goods. On the other hand, 70% of Moldovan exports now go to EU markets, with Romania being the top destination for Moldovan products. Moldova's pro-Russian President, Igor Dodon, and his Socialist Party, promised warmer relations with Moscow after the fall of Vlad Plahotniuc's Government in mid-June, but progress has been slow. The new ruling coalition, made up of the Socialists and the pro-European ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc, has not obtained any concrete economic advantages from Russia to date. The Economy and Infrastructure Ministry has repeatedly called for more permits for transportation operators in Moldova. A meeting with the Russian side is expected in the coming period, which will discuss the issue of permits, the ministry said. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- October 25th, the President of the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (PMR), Vadim Krasnoselsky, stated that the Transnistrian side has already worked out the agenda of the next week's meeting with Moldova President Igor Dodon and that the questions included into it bear the humanitarian, social and economic characters. According to him, many of these questions were remaining on the agendas of previous meetings, *"preserving their importance and urgency and requiring solution."* *"Among them are banking issues, questions of payments and accounts, of telecommunications, stopping of politically motivated criminal litigations, international communications, exports, imports and so forth. We will be raising and discussing them, and*

proposing solutions. And we are certainly ready to consider questions to be raised by the Moldovan side," said Krasnoselsky. As was already reported by Infotag, since December 2016, when both of them assumed offices, Dodon and Krasnoselsky have held 5 meetings. Shortly after their election, in January 2017 they met in the Transnistrian city of Bendery, then in April – in Holercani [a picturesque locality on the right Dniester River bank, where a countryside presidential residence is situated]. After one-year-long pause, the two leaders met again in Bendery in April 2018. Then there were two meetings, in September and December 2018, in the Condrita countryside presidential residence situated in the namesake picturesque Chisinau suburban locality some 30 kilometers off the capital city. And this year's first meeting has been scheduled for October 29th, 2019 in Holercani. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Local elections have shown that opposition PDM maintains a dynamic despite its defeat in previous parliamentary elections. Furthermore, ruling ACUM block got third place after PDM and PSRM. Although Prime Minister Maya Sandu has rejected any possibility of cooperation with PDM, but one should not exclude a future replacement of PSRM from PDM. Coexistence of pro-western ACUM block and pro-Russian PSRM is becoming more difficult since disputes in high level are more often. However, cooperation will continue between the two parties (not for too long), because both sides are not interested at the moment to lose power. The agreement signed by the Government's partners – ACUM block and PSRM – strengthens political stability despite

their different views. Besides, EU, US, and Russia support this “unconventional” coalition for their own interests. It is already known that 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. 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 23rd,

Montenegro and the USA signed the agreement on the provision of light-armored patrol vehicles produced by American company “Oshkosh.” This was officially confirmed by Defense Minister, Predrag Boskovic, and Judy Rising Reinke, US Ambassador. Governments of the USA and Montenegro reached an agreement stipulating 36.165.105 dollars for the provision of 67 vehicles. Apart from the high level of ballistic protection, those vehicles also have a high level of patency in overcoming different terrain configurations, water and other obstacles in extreme weather. The first contingent will arrive in Montenegro in 2020, and the country will become the first one to have “Oshkosh” vehicles in its Army. Boskovic said that provision of light-armored vehicles was very important for

Montenegro. *“Members of the Armed Forces of Montenegro will be given the chance to show their quality in the best possible way, given the fact that two infantry companies will be equipped with state-of-the-art means of armor protection,”* Boskovic pointed out. Minister expressed his gratitude for the valuable donations made by the USA. *“We have already agreed an 8 million dollars donation for cyber security. It is very important for Montenegro and the Armed Forces of Montenegro, considering the growing threats our country is exposed to,”* The Defense Minister said. Reinke said the agreement was the proof of a partnership between two countries. *“I congratulate men and women in the Armed Forces of Montenegro on the work they have done and on everything they keep doing in Afghanistan, Latvia, Kosovo and in many other areas, where your Government has shown true commitment as NATO partner, ally and friend,”* Reinke said. (www.cdm.me)

- October 25th, Armed Forces of Montenegro will maintain its presence in NATO mission in Latvia by the end of 2021. The mission was undertaken in 2016, as a way of deterring Russia from exerting pressure on the Baltic states. As balkansec.net reports, one reconnaissance detachment from Montenegro, one engineer pioneer detachment and staff officers will be rotating in the six-month long mandate in a “Enhanced Forward Presence” mission (EFP). EFP battalion in Latvia consists of soldiers from Canada, Montenegro, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, Albania and Poland. *“The first rotation sent from Montenegro between December 2018 and June 2019 was a reconnaissance detachment that had eight people and one staff officer. Engineer detachment is in*

Latvia now, and in December, it will be replaced with a reconnaissance group.” Elements of the Armed Forces of Montenegro are part of the Multinational Battalion Battle Group “*Latvia*,” in which Canada plays the role of a country -leader. Battalion units are allowed to move all over Latvia for the purposes of training and fulfillment of tasks. However, Montenegrin soldiers are required not to enter an area of 5 kilometers from the Russian border. Montenegro relies on Slovenia’s partner support in the preparation and engagement of its national element in the EFP and that’s why the training is done in Slovenia. EFP mission was undertaken in order to protect Eastern European countries and deter Russia from exerting pressure on Baltic States. Four multinational battalions have been formed and they have been deployed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland; one battalion in each country. Battalions are led by forces from the USA, Great Britain, Canada and Germany. (www.cdm.me)

- October 25th, if the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) does not accept the caretaker Government, I urge the opposition to try not to go to the polls this time, to leave them [DPS] to participate in the elections by themselves, the Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena Reformska Akcija - GP URA) leader Dritan Abazovic said. At the roundtable “*Electoral Legislation Reform and the Technical Government - Prerequisites for Getting Out of the Political Crisis*” organized by URA, the Center for Investigative Reporting, CIVIS and CEGAS he explained that he was not a fan of such a scenario, that he wanted Montenegro as a success story, but that this was the current

reality in order improve the country as a democratic story. Abazovic also pointed out that much has been tried in Montenegro to improve electoral legislation and atmosphere on the election day itself, that for 30 years we have the same story, and that since the elections exist in Montenegro, all of them have been followed by a dose of controversy. “*The goal is not to have elections in which we will win DPS, but elections in which no one will be able to steal votes. Whoever wins such elections, we wish them luck,*” Abazovic said. He also said that unless we have mechanisms for law enforcement and control, “*even the world's best models of law will be in vain.*” (www.rtcg.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided strengthening ruling DPS’s power. A possible boycott by opposition of the next parliamentary elections will have negative impact in country’s political stability, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. 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.” The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment .



NORTH MACEDONIA: October 21st, North Macedonia will hold early parliamentary elections on April 12th, 2020, ahead of the country’s April 19th Orthodox Easter and April 24th Ramadan holidays, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said on Sunday. According to Zaev, the interim Government will be formed on January 3rd. 2020. The leaders’ meeting at the Villa Vodno was attended by Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) President Zoran Zaev, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) President Hristijan Mickoski, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) President Ali Ahmeti, Alliance for Albanians (Алијанса за Албанците - AA) President Zijadin Sela, Alternative (Alternativa) President Afrim Gashi, Besa Movement (Lëvizja Besa) President Bilal Kasami,

and Democratic Party of Albanians (Demokratska Partija na Albancite – DPA) leader Menduh Thaçi. (www.nezavisen.mk)



Meeting of North Macedonia’s party leaders
under the chair of the country’s President Stevo
Pendarovski
(www.pretsedatel.mk)

- October 24th, announcements that a new Chief State Auditor will be elected by the end of the week will not materialize, the parties remain unable to compromise on a name, and the State Audit Office (SAO) has been completely shut down during that time. Auditors cannot control state institutions, cannot perform basic tasks and cannot receive salaries. The mandates of both the Auditor General and the Acting Director have long since expired, with the Government and the opposition being overruled in the Assembly, which is why the entire system is blocked. The work is stuck in the parliamentary Election and Appointment Committee, which comprises thirteen members of Parliament, six of the Government, six of the opposition and Fadil Zendeli of Besa Movement (Lëvizja Besa), a party that has recently been closer to Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE). Members fail to come up with a solution for a new Chief State Auditor, since

opposition would have gone to the Committee but not to the parliamentary vote, i.e. the Government would have received the necessary votes at the plenary but could not get to there, because it will get a “stop” in its parent parliamentary body. Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) Vice President Muhamed Zekiri, who is part of the Committee, reassures that a solution to this thorny issue will be found soon. *“Opposition wants to push their favorite, but we will not allow it. On the other hand, we are being hampered, but we are trying to come up with a solution with Besa that will be of mutual interest and to unlock the process,”* Zekiri told Nezavisen Vesnik/Independent Daily newspaper. But Besa’s MP Zendeli is not as optimistic as Zekiri. *“SDSM, DUI and VMRO-DPMNE have 12 members in the Committee, and I am on my own. I do not know why they think I am the key member. When Besa made its proposals for other positions, they were rejected by the Committee. Now I do not understand why I should support SDSM? What are the interests of my party? Let the other 12 members reach an agreement, then I will gladly support their proposal,”* Zendeli told Nezavisen Vesnik/Independent Daily newspaper. The Committee’s Chairman Ilija Dimovski claims that inter-party consultations are underway and if all goes well, a Chief state auditor will be nominated in the coming days. In the meanwhile, the State Audit Office staff alert that with the continued postponement of the election of Chief State Auditor, the institution faces a complete blockade that will lead to lack of control over public spending. The State Audit Office recently announced control of Prosecution Offices, including the now closed Special Prosecutor’s office (SPO). Controls cannot be implemented

without an appointed Chief Auditor. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- October 24th, French Ambassador Christian Thimonier said that he has informed French top officials of North Macedonia’s disappointment following the EU Council meeting in Brussels. Thimonier added that geopolitics surpassed realistic expectations, giving the public *“the impression that the Prespa Agreement is the sole precondition for starting accession talks.”* The French Ambassador said the Bundestag was not ready to make a decision in June, elections were being held in the EU and over the summer *“an idea arose mysteriously that the decision will compensate for the Prespa Agreement.”* *“A strange shift in perspective occurred. As an observer I often wondered how we managed to get from an objective evaluation of the agenda to debating the rewards for reaching an agreement, from discussing fundamental aspects to dealing with geopolitical issues. That was never the French perspective. Geostrategic aspects are important, but this strange shift in perspective was more akin to political marketing than diplomatic discussion,”* Thimonier said. He added that situation in North Macedonia has been closely observed and French authorities are aware of the public disappointment in the country. Thimonier said certain parties made promises they left to others to see through. He added that everyone should take responsibility for situation, not just France. Thimonier said that public expectations to get a date posed an added pressure for member states to make a positive decision. In answer to a reporter’s question on why France was the only country to disregard the implemented reforms, Thimonier said that with the Zagreb Summit approaching nothing is set in

stone, and that President Macron had acknowledged reforms, but called for new enlargement methodology to prepare EU member states for the process. *“Member states support France on this issue, and I hope it will be resolved quickly,”* said Thimonier. The Ambassador added that Macron underlined that things were not as clear as they had been made out to be, and EU leaders had an in-depth discussion on the topic. *“Discussion was tense; there were different positions on North Macedonia and Albania and whether their accession should be discussed separately. Member states rejected one French-German suggestion for being too minimalist. I regret that this suggestion was unsatisfactory, and forced to postpone reaching a decision at the Zagreb Summit,”* Thimonier said. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Repercussions of EU rejection to open accession negotiations continue to shaken North Macedonia. Prime Minister Zoran Zaev after his meeting with North Macedonia party leaders announced early parliamentary elections on April 12th, 2020, while an interim Government is expected to be formed on January 3rd, 2020. The rein of ruling SDSM and Prime Minister Zoran Zaev are in question due to the failure to start accession talks with the EU. North Macedonia has entered in political uncertainty and instability, while we have not witnessed yet the reaction of North Macedonia's Albanians in this failure. It should be noted that the dilemma EU opening accession negotiations or Russian influence is not a realistic one since the country has already entered NATO which a major step towards the western security system. North

Macedonia should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. Besides, North Macedonia's politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals undermining not only country's political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as “Extortion”, “Empire”, “Racket”, “Titanic”, “Monster” are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state's function.



ROMANIA: October 22nd, the European Commission (EC) adopted today its latest report on developments in Romania on judicial reform and the fight against corruption, in the context of its commitments under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), reviewing the period since November 2018 until now. EC reminds that its last report on Romania has had to raise a number of times rule of law-related concerns with the Romanian authorities in relation to developments on judicial reforms and the fight against corruption. *“On each of these occasions, the Commission has confirmed backtracking from the progress made in previous years and this evolution is a source of great concerns. The Commission regrets that Romania did not engage with the additional recommendations made in November 2018, which were fully in line with the positions of the other institutions. These recommendations need to be followed if the reform process is to be put back on track and the path towards the conclusion of the*

CVM, as set out in the January 2017 report, resumed. The Commission is confident that Romania could give a new momentum to fulfilling the objectives of the CVM, and stands ready to help the Romanian authorities to this end. The Commission will continue to follow developments closely through the CVM.” As for this year, the CVM report underlines that the evolution of the judicial progress and anti-corruption fight in the first months of 2019 was a source of great concern for the Commission. *“As a result, the Commission had to inform the Romanian authorities in May 2019 that if the necessary improvements were not made, or if further negative steps were taken, the Commission would take steps under the rule of law framework, beyond the parameters of the CVM.”* However, the Commission welcomed the fact that in June the Romanian Government expressed a wish to reset the approach. It notes that an effort has been made to invest in new consultation and dialogue with judiciary. The Commission looks forward to the translation of this commitment into concrete legislation and other measures. Progress will require concrete steps – both legislative and administrative – to address the recommendations summarized in this report. The key institutions of Romania need to collectively demonstrate a strong commitment to judicial independence and the fight against corruption, and to ensure the effectiveness of national safeguards and checks and balances. In the November 2018 Report, the European Commission concluded that developments in Romania had called into question the irreversibility of progress. As a result, the 12 recommendations set out in the January 2017 report were no longer sufficient to close the CVM and eight additional recommendations had to be made. Both the

European Parliament and the Council endorsed this view. The European Parliament issued a resolution calling for cooperation and citing the risk to the rule of law. The Council Conclusions of December 2018 specifically called on Romania to implement the additional recommendations. The Commissions argues that Romania must demonstrate a strong commitment to judicial independence and the fight against corruption as indispensable cornerstones, and restore the capacity of national checks and balances to act when there is a risk of a backwards step. More precisely, the EC asked Romania one more time to *“suspend immediately the implementation of the Justice laws and subsequent Emergency Ordinances and to revise the Justice laws taking fully into account the recommendations under the CVM and issued by the Venice Commission and the Council of Europe’s Group of States Against Corruption GRECO.”* Romanian Justice Minister Ana Birchall has admitted in a press statement that the CVM report on Romania is critical, saying that only two recommendations have been fulfilled out of the 12 included in the January 2017 Report. In his turn, Prime Minister-designate Ludovic Orban opined that recommendations of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) should be put into practice so that Romania *“can get rid of being under the CVM”* as soon as possible. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- October 23rd, some of the opposition parties in Romania have reached agreements with Liberal leader Ludovic Orban to support his new Government at the endorsement vote in the Parliament. However, the new Orban cabinet is still short of its necessary majority, the latest developments show. After more than ten days of

fruitless negotiations, some of the parties that formally form the opposition in Romania's Parliament and voted for the fall of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) cabinet led by Viorica Dancila, have officially stated their support for the new Government to be led by Orban. Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR), the second-biggest opposition party in the Parliament by number of MPs, announced that it would vote for the Orban cabinet after the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) accepted a collaboration agreement proposed by USR leader Dan Barna, which includes four large topics. The two parties agreed, among others, to change the electoral legislation and return to two rounds of voting for electing city Mayors, to repeal the bill that allows the early release of convicted criminals, and to change the bill that allows the early retirement of Magistrates. *"We have reached an agreement. We clearly demanded to maintain the objective of having early elections after the presidential elections. Prime minister-designate Orban agreed,"* said Barna, quoted by Digi24.ro. Thus, the liberals, who have just under 100 MPs of the total 465 deputies and senators in Romania's Parliament, can also count on USR's 40 votes. The minimum number of votes required for having the new Government endorsed is 233. PSD's former junior coalition partner Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), a party that spun off PNL several years ago, under the leadership of former Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu, could also support the new cabinet after Orban accepted Tariceanu's list of demands. One of these demands was that the liberals do not take any other party in the new Government. ALDE specifically asked that the Orban cabinet does not

have any member from the People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) of former President Traian Basescu. The support of PMP, which initially announced it would support the Orban cabinet, is now uncertain. Leader of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) Kelemen Hunor also suggested that his party would vote for the new cabinet to have it installed as soon as possible and end the political crisis. UDMR demanded that the new Government does not pass any emergency ordinance in the field of justice. However, if all these parties (USR, ALDE, UDMR, PMP) voted to support the PNL Government, Orban would still need several more votes to get the endorsement. As it is unlikely that any MP of PSD will vote for a liberal Government, the balance could be tipped by PRO Romania (PRO România - PRO), the party of former Prime Minister Victor Ponta. Ponta's party voted the no-confidence motion against the Dancila Government, but expressed preference for another social-democrat cabinet. *"We will not vote this PNL Government,"* Ponta said on Wednesday morning, after another round of talks with Orban. *"If PNL really wants to change the criminal group at the Victoria Palace (the Dancila cabinet – e.n.), they have to come up with a serious project,"* Ponta added, according to Hotnews.ro. Orban has to submit his list of Ministers to the Parliament by Thursday, October 24th, 2019. The hearings of the Ministers and the confidence vote should, theoretically, take place next week. However, some believe that PSD, which still holds key positions in the Parliament's leading bodies, could use procedural tricks to postpone the whole process. (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 24th, Romania's Prime Minister-designate Ludovic Orban announced his list of Ministers on October 24th, 2019. The Orban cabinet will have 18 members, including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and 16 portfolio Ministers. The list of ministers Orban proposes is the following:

Raluca Turcan – Deputy Prime Minister

Florin Citu – Minister of Finance

Marcel Vela – Minister of Interior

Bogdan Aurescu – Minister of Foreign Affairs

Catalin Predoiu – Minister of Justice

Gen. Nicolae Ciuca – Minister of Defense

Virgil Popescu – Minister of Economy, Energy, Business Environment and Tourism

Lucian Bode – Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications

Adrian Oros – Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Costel Alexe – Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests

Ion Stefan – Minister of Public Works, Development and Administration

Ioan Marcel Bolos – Minister of European Funds

Victor Sebastian Costache – Minister of Health

Cristina Monica Anisie – Minister of Education and Research

Bogdan Gheorghiu – Minister of Culture

Marian Ionuț Stroe – Minister of Youth and Sports

Violeta Alexandru – Minister of Labor and Social Protection. The proposed Ministers will be heard by the Parliament's specialty Committees next week, on Tuesday, while the Parliament is expected to vote the new Government on Wednesday, October 30th, 2019. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Consultations continue between PNL leader, Ludovic Orban and other opposition parties in order a PNL interim Government with Orban as the Prime Minister to get confidence vote in the Parliament. It is estimated that Orban will achieve to form a Government, but he has not achieve yet to secure the necessary votes in the Parliament. However, it will be a weak minority Government and it is doubtful if it will achieve to handle serious state's issues such as the 2020 budget. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of ruling party. Under these circumstances, political uncertainty and instability are reign in Romanian politics. Presidential election scheduled for November 10th, 2019 and November 24th, 2019 (second round if necessary) is another political challenge for the country. 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: October 23rd, President Aleksandar Vucic told a ceremony at the Security Information Agency (BIA) that Serbia faces difficult political and security challenges, adding that the country's top civilian intelligence and security agency has to do everything to keep the peace at home and in the region. "Despite the fact that we are in a year which is economically better than any other... we face an exceptionally difficult political and security situation and a number of

challenges. Not only because of regional problems and relations with Pristina, very complex relations in the region, but also because of the fact, and this has to be in the focus of your attention, that layers of the interests of various players, global and European big and powerful countries, are intertwined on our territory,” Vucic told the BIA Day ceremony. He said the agency has to cooperate with everyone and has an obligation to strengthen Serbia’s position. The President said that the economy and Armed Forces would continue to grow stronger, not because Serbia is planning to wage war with anyone but to prevent a repeat of the 1999 bombing campaign. *“You must bear in mind the fact that you need to defend Serbia’s interests at every moment. We want nothing that is not ours. We want cooperation with everyone, but you have to be firm, brave and make Serbia your most important goal,”* Vucic said. According to him, the presence of a large number of representatives of similar foreign services is a reflection of the respect the BIA enjoys. *“Our service has to cooperate with everyone but there is no place in it for people who work for other services. Exchange experiences but always work for Serbia. That is what we need to maintain independence, sovereignty and military neutrality,”* he said. The President said the BIA would get state of the art equipment and its personnel would get better living standards. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- October 24th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic confirmed on Thursday that the Russian military had deployed anti-aircraft systems in Serbia as part of joint exercises with the Serbian Armed Forces. Vucic said that the Russian Armed Forces had brought one of its S-400 Anti-Aircraft (AA) systems (NATO reporting name SA-21

Growler) and the Pantsir AA system (NATO reporting name SA-22 Greyhound) to Serbia for the exercise, adding that Serbia had ordered the Pantsir for its Armed Forces. He said that he would see the S-400 missile system on Friday and the Pantsir AA system on Saturday. The Serbian Armed Forces web site said that Army of Serbia (VS) and Russian Aerospace Forces AA missile units would take part in the tactical exercise *“Slavic Shield 2019”* at the Batajnica air base outside Belgrade and the Pasuljanske Livade training grounds in central Serbia. It added that Air Force units would also take part in the exercise which will be under the command of Serbian Brigadier General Tiosav Jankovic, Commander of the 250th AA Defense Missile Brigade. The goal of the exercise is to train Serbian and Russian AA defense units to operate together. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Russian Anti Aircraft system S-400 deployed in
Batajnica air base

(Photo source: www.vs.rs)

- October 25th, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic signed a free trade deal with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), in Moscow, after the EU warned that it will closely monitor such relations, as Serbia is a candidate for joining the EU. Beside Brnabic, the deal was signed by the Prime Ministers of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Brnabic insisted that the deal was not problematic

regarding Serbia's EU integration process. *"This is no way contrary to our [pro] European politics; I think this is complementary to our European politics and our EU path. Because it is in the EU's interest to have an economically stronger ... Serbia ... and a free trade agreement with the EAEU will provide us those chances,"* Brnabic said after the signing ceremony. Brnabic went to Moscow with Trade Minister Rasim Ljajic who earlier told the Serbian media in September that it was not a political deal but just a trading agreement, like those Serbia had signed with Turkey and CEFTA – the Central European Free Trade Agreement. In his words, as the Euro-Asian economic union had functioned as a unique whole from January 2015, all Serbian existing agreements need to be unified. *"On May 31st, 2016, the High Eurasian Economic Council decided to open negotiations with Serbia on entering a new unified free trade agreement that would apply to all five EAEU member states,"* he said. *"This means that the agreements we have had with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan so far have to be replaced by a new, more modern agreement, now signed by Serbia with the entire EAEU, which includes Armenia and Kyrgyzstan in addition to these three countries,"* Ljajic added. *"Simply put, if Serbia declined unification of this agreement, we would be left without the agreements we already have with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan,"* he continued. *"We should bear in mind that around 83% of our total foreign trade exchange with the EAEU countries is with the Russian Federation, which is why having this unified agreement is so significant for us,"* he went on. However, Serbia's relationship with Russia is also an issue for the EU, as the EU imposed sanctions on Russia on 2014, which Serbia, despite being a candidate country, did not

follow. Serbia and Russia are also strengthening military cooperation. EU officials pointed out last month that while Serbia can have free trade agreements like the one with the EAEU, they must be cancelled once Serbia becomes an EU member. David McAllister, an EU parliamentarian and former European Parliament Rapporteur for Serbia, said the new agreement needs to have *"an exit clause that will guarantee that Serbia can cancel the agreement by the time of approaching the EU."* *"Serbia needs to secure the compatibility of all of its trade agreements, investing and economic cooperation and other relevant agreements with the EU legal acquis,"* McAllister told Radio Europe Liberty, RSE. EU spokesperson Maja Kocijancic told the portal Euraktiv that the European Commission was closely following talks about a trade deal between Serbia and EAEU, and expects Belgrade to align itself with EU policy. *"Serbia is expected to progressively align with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. We follow the situation closely and discuss these issues in our regular political and trade dialogues with the Serbian authorities,"* Kocijancic said. Ljajic also said that the agreement will cease to be valid when Serbia becomes an EU member state. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS. A potential boycott of the elections by 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. Lately, this

“secret” is becoming more formal; Serbia signed a free trade agreement with Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), while Russian advanced Anti-Aircraft systems (S-400 and Pantsir) were deployed in Serbia due to joint military exercise. In other words, Serbia could be the “Trojan Horse” of Russia in Southeastern Europe. Elections in Kosovo have created a totally new landscape by the win of the nationalist party Vetevendosje. Its leader (and potential Kosovo prime Minister) Albin Kurti is a hardliner. It remains to see if he will abolish the 100% taxes on Serbian goods giving the green light for restarting dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. However, his hardline to forbid any participation of the elected members of the Serb List is of great concern for peace and security in northern Kosovo. Additionally, a permanent presence of Kosovo security forces in Serb majority north Kosovo would bring tension and turbulence. Pressure from the US and EU is increasing towards both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections on spring 2020. Tension remains between Kosovo and Serbia and 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 means 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: October 21st, the Slovenian Armed Forces are planning to purchase 14 six-wheeled (6x6) military vehicles, Defense Minister Karl Erjavec told MPs during questions time in Parliament, noting Slovenia had 85 such vehicles, which he labeled the backbone of the Slovenian defense system. He said the decision on the six-wheelers had been made after the planned purchase of the eight-wheeled vehicles had been delayed for a while. The 6x6 vehicles the army has are an average 16 years old and pretty worn out, Erjavec said in response to an MP question from Matej T. Vatovec of the opposition Left (Levica). (www.sta.si)

- October 22nd, Slovenian Prime Minister Marjan Sarec said on Tuesday the European Commission's decision that Croatia met the technical conditions to join the Schengen Area was political, and insisted that Croatia implement the arbitration ruling on its border dispute with Slovenia. “We regret that the European Commission decided on such an important matter, the assessment of Croatia's preparedness to join Schengen, just before the end of its term and that it adopted a political decision,” Sarec said, according to a press release from his office. “We expect Croatia to meet all conditions for joining Schengen, technical and legal ones, including respect for the rule of law,” he said, alluding to what Slovenian authorities consider respect for the rule of law, including implementation of the border arbitration ruling. Croatia does not recognize the ruling, maintaining that Slovenia irrevocably compromised the arbitration procedure. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- October 24th, Defense Minister Karl Erjavec signed a memorandum to set up regional command for special operations with his

counterparts from Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia as part of a NATO ministerial in Brussels. According to Erjavec, Austria also signed the document. Erjavec told the press the initiative was important, because the Western Balkans could face mass migration or other challenges that could pose a threat to the public order, peace and stability. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although there are disputes between the five parties of the ruling coalition and opposition Left party which supports the minority Government announced that it would end cooperation with it, it is assessed that Government's collapse and early parliamentary elections are not very likely. The Left party obstacle is overcome by the support of the opposition SNS, while coalition parties are not in favor of snap election for their own reasons. Consequently, Marjan Sarec Government enjoys relative political stability, but with a lot of compromise in its agenda. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the "Schengen Zone card" in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an "underworld war" is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed

military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end. However, the 2020 and 2021 budget foresees increased funding for defense sector.



TURKEY: October 23rd, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says a deal has been reached with Russia for Kurdish fighters to withdraw from a Turkish-ruled "safe zone" in northeast Syria within 150 hours, after which Ankara and Moscow will run joint patrols around the area. The announcement was made after marathon talks in Sochi between Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday, hours before a US-brokered five-day truce between Turkish and Kurdish-led forces was due to expire. On October 9th, 2019 Turkey launched an offensive aimed at carving out a "safe zone" cleared of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Ankara considers "terrorists," as well as at repatriating some of the 3.6 million refugees currently residing on its soil. According to the deal announced at a joint news conference in Sochi, Ankara will control a 32 km-wide (20 miles) area between the towns of Tal

Abyad and Ras al-Ain, which covers 120 km (75 miles) of the Turkish-Syrian border. Beginning on Wednesday at noon, Russian Military Police and Syrian border guards will start removing the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which spearhead the SDF, and their weapons 30km (19 miles) from the border area. Once this is complete, within 150 hours, Turkish and Russian forces will run joint patrols 10 km (six miles) to the east and west of the zone. Ankara and Moscow, which have backed opposing sides in Syria's long-running war, also reiterated to their commitment to the preservation of the political unity and territorial integrity of Syria and the protection of national security of Turkey. The Sochi memorandum also said the YPG and their weapons would be removed from Manbij and Tal Rifat, where Syrian Government forces moved in after the Kurdish-led fighters struck a deal with Damascus to fend off a Turkish assault. Russia is Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's main military ally. Since last week's truce deal, Ankara had repeatedly warned that the offensive would immediately restart if the SDF did not withdraw from the region. Turkey had long said it wanted to establish a 444km-long (276-mile) and 32km-wide (20-mile) "safe zone." However, during the truce, the US and the SDF said the withdrawal would only cover an area of about 120km (75 miles) between the towns of Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad - something that was also confirmed by the agreement reached in Sochi. (www.aljazeera.com)

- October 25th, Turkey issued a diplomatic note to the US for treating a terrorist leader as a legitimate political figure by planning to hold talks soon, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, as he criticized Washington for turning a blind eye to the fact that the terrorist in question is

sought with an international arrest warrant. *"The moment we start legitimizing holding talks with terrorists, they will start holding talks with Baghdadi tomorrow,"* Cavusoglu said, referring to the DAESH terrorist leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Foreign Minister criticized its allies for making it a "tradition" to hold talks with terrorists, saying that communicating with terrorists, especially with one that is sought with an Interpol arrest warrant, is unacceptable. The diplomatic note was issued after US officials announced their communication with the PKK-linked People's Protection Units (YPG) leader Ferhat Abdi Sahin, also known by the code name Mazloun Kobani. President Donald Trump recently said he had a conversation with the aforementioned militant, calling him a "wonderful man." *"Thank you General Mazloun for your kind words and courage. Please extend my warmest regards to the Kurdish people. I look forward to seeing you soon,"* Trump said, disregarding Turkey's concerns about Mazloun considered as the foster child of terrorist PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is currently imprisoned in Turkey. Turkish officials are pushing the US to extradite the YPG leader if he visits the US, as they note there is a Red Notice against him, which is valid in 196 countries. The US has provided military training and given truckloads of military support to the YPG, despite its NATO ally's security concerns. The country continues to provide assistance to the group even though DAESH has officially been defeated in Syria. (www.dailysabah.com)

- October 16th, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has rejected a German plan for an internationally enforced security zone along Syria's border with Turkey as "unrealistic" and

rebuffed German criticism of Ankara's recent military operation in Syria. After meeting with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas in the capital Ankara on Saturday, Cavusoglu said at a joint news conference that Turkey's trust in Germany "has been shaken" following "excessive reactions" against its offensive into northeast Syria. German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer's recently proposed an internationally controlled security zone in north Syria under the United Nations umbrella to protect fleeing civilians and de-escalate situation with Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) fighters in the war-torn country. "We find this proposal not very realistic," Cavusoglu said. "This does not concern Turkey alone, there are now the [Syrian] regime, Russia and other actors in this area." German Foreign Minister Maas described the military offensive as an "invasion" and Germany has said it will not issue any new permits for military equipment that could be used by Turkey in Syria. Cavusoglu said Ankara expects Berlin to "act with the spirit of alliance" and "side with Turkey in its fight against terrorism." "We are having difficulty explaining to our people that Germany is siding with a terror organization instead of Turkey despite understanding Turkey's legitimate security concerns," Cavusoglu said. The German Foreign Minister also said Ankara reassured Berlin that it will comply with international law as part of Turkey's plans to relocate refugees to the planned "safe zone" in northeastern Syria. Turkey will handle the situation in a "humanitarian way," Cavusoglu said. Earlier in the week, rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch alleged in separate reports that the Turkish government has been forcibly deporting refugees to war-torn Syria. Al Jazeera's Osama Bin Javid,

reporting from the Turkish-Syrian border, said that the meeting between two Foreign Ministers was an effort for the sides to build bridges despite their divergent positions on recent developments in Syria. "The European Union and Germany are concerned about the territorial integrity of Syria and forcible return of refugees," he said. "Meanwhile, Turkey insists that the EU allies are not standing behind it when it needs them the most. It wants the EU backing while its fight against what is says 'terrorists' on the border." (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkey enjoys the gains of its military operation "Peace Spring" against Syria. Undoubtedly, Turkey was one of the winners in Syrian conflict (with Russia be the second one). It achieved to establish a 32 kilometers "safe zone" and to force Syrian Kurds to withdraw their forces from an area of 120 kilometers in Turkish – Syrian borders. In other words, Syrian Kurds are no longer a threat to Turkish security since they are not able anymore to conduct and support operations within Turkish soil. Turkey continues to face 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 continues to dispute Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by sending its Yavuz drillship in a sea field (code number 7) which has already been licensed to Italian ENI and French TOTAL. Moreover, it raises tension with Greece and Cyprus by announcing several naval exercises with real fires in the Aegean Sea and within Cypriot EEZ. It seems that Turkish strategic plans are targeting the maritime area around the island of Kastelorizo, southeast of the Aegean Sea. Turkey is determined to protect its interests and would not hesitate to use force against Cyprus or Greece. With zero cost so far Turkey achieved to put the hydrocarbon issue on the table of negotiations, to force oil and gas companies to reconsider their engagement in a sea which is not stable and secure, and to directly question the Cypriot sovereignty. So far, so good for a country which is already in a military operation in another country. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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

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

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