



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: January 26th, Prime Minister Edi Rama has blasted accusations of his Government's mafia connections following the publication of excerpts from an Italian investigation and opposition accusations. (www.exit.al)

- January 26th, the Constitutional Court of Albania has reviewed on Tuesday the first case since 2018, when it was made dysfunctional due to the vetting in the justice system resulting in its judges being fired or resigning. (www.exit.al)

- January 27th, Prime Minister Edi Rama has spoken harshly against journalists who attempted to ask him questions about the Ndrangheta wiretap scandal and alleged links to his Government. During a televised debate, Rama called journalists "incompetent" and "malicious." (www.exit.al)

- January 29th, State Election Commissioner, Ilirijan Celibashi said on Friday that the financing of political parties remains a serious problem and that the Electoral Code establishes clear rules on this issue. (www.exit.al)

- January 29th, German MEP Michael Gahler stated that the Albanian Government has violated the June 5th, 2020 agreement and has not met some of the conditions for the opening of negotiations with the EU. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The arrest of the Italian "Ndrangheta" mafia group could be developed into a "headache" for the Prime Minister Edi Rama and his Government. Allegations that Italian mafia was laundering money in Albania and connections

with state's politicians and officials could be evolved into a huge scandal with the parliamentary elections ahead (scheduled for April 25th, 2021). Rama appeared nervous and attacked journalists due to their questions for the case. Despite eventual function of the Constitutional Court, institutional and constitutional crisis remains in the country setting obstacles towards the Albanian route to the EU accession. Albania is not ready for the first intergovernmental conference with the EU for the opening of accession talks since it has not fulfilled the 15 conditions set by Europe. Defamation law, attacks against media, corruption and money laundering cases involving state officials, constitutionality of June 2019 local elections are still burdens of Albanian politics affecting rule of law, transparency and accountability in the state affairs. It seems that there is a rift in relations between Albania and the EU but it is attributed to the populist approach of Rama with parliamentary elections ahead. The Prime Minister tries to put the blame of the Albanian Government inefficiency on several issues (delay on vaccination of population, not opening of accession talks with the EU) on the EU.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 25th, leader of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) Bakir Izetbegovic said Monday that he is not an enemy of the Serb people, but of the xenophobic, anti-Bosnian and anti-Bosniak policy "which I will always be against," after the uproar against his recent statement commenting on the policies of Milorad Dodik, the Bosnian Serb Presidency Chairman known for his anti-Bosnian rhetoric. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 27th, the Minister of Security of BiH Selmo Cikotic who attended a meeting of representatives of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Border Police of BiH and the Service for Foreigners Affairs of BiH, as well as the Ministries of Interior of the Sarajevo Canton and the Una-Sana Canton pointed out the new initiative of the Ministry of Security to distribute the burden of the migrant crisis evenly on the entire territory of BiH, and to form a new agency that would exclusively deal with the issue of illegal migrants. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 27th, Serbia and Bosnia's Serb-majority Republika Srpska (RS) entity are "exposed to many negative tendencies that are coming from the West, from fierce political elites," and "it will take a lot of unity" for them to defend themselves, Bosnia's tripartite Presidency Chairman and its Serb member, Milorad Dodik, said on Wednesday. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 28th, the Upper Chamber of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has passed the Bosnia and Herzegovina - Croatia Southern Interconnection Act, which will enable the construction of a new gas pipeline to connect the two countries and secure stable gas supply. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Nationalist tension between Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) remains in high levels due to irresponsible behavior of their political leaders. Bosniak, Bakir Izetbegovic and Bosnian Serb Milorad Dodik insist on insulting the identity of Bosnia, dignity of peoples and unity of the country. Lately, Izetbegovic insulted

Bosnian Serbs called them "bad people", while Dodik constantly promotes the idea of secession of Republika Srpska (RS) seeking actually dissolution of Bosnia under the Dayton peace agreement. Besides, it is time talks for amending this agreement to start in order to make Bosnia a functional state. German Christian Schmidt has already received unofficially the green light by the Peace Implementation Council to become the next High Representative in Bosnia replacing Valentin Inzko. Schmidt appears ready to exercise more active role in Bosnian internal affairs when he takes office by using the so-called "Bonn powers" which allow him to impose or amend laws. It is not clear how Bosnia's constituent entities will accept such interference of the international stakeholder especially when national voice for ousting international supervisor increases lately. Appointment of a German as High Representative in Bosnia with the approval of the US (Schmidt's deputy will be an American) could be a sign of near future developments in the country, since Germany and the US are the two international stakeholders which could implement (or impose) reforms in the country. Besides, the newly elected US President, Joe Biden has spoken for a more active role of the US in Bosnia. Geopolitical rivalry for power and influence in the Balkans between Russia and the west (namely the US and EU) is becoming harder and harder especially after political change in Montenegro. Russia (and China) could find fertile soil for penetration (political, military and economic) in Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro (lately) putting at risk stability of security subsystem of Southeastern Europe. Migration still remains a major problem for Bosnian authorities which could destabilize certain parts of the country.



BULGARIA: January 29th, Bulgaria's Parliament at second reading voted on the proposals for rules of inquiry of the Prosecutor General and his/her deputies. MPs voted to approve the proposal for a dedicated prosecutor to investigate any alleged crimes by the Prosecutor General. (www.bnt.bg)

- January 30th, the 2020 budget ended with a deficit of 3.5 billion Leva (1.8 billion Euros), which is below the set in its updated version, according to the data of the Ministry of Finance. The collected revenues are more than expected, as well as the expenses. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

Protests continue in the country for more than 200 consecutive days. The Government initiated a parliamentary act by which sets the necessary conditions and rules for investigation of the Prosecutor General and his Deputies. It could be assessed as a pre-electoral move of the Government since dismissal of Prosecutor General due to corruption is a persisting demand of protesters. Political situation is highly polarized not only because of protests but also because of the struggle between the Prime Minister, Boiko Borissov and the President, Rumen Radev. Bulgarian society appears highly disappointed from current political, economic and social situation in the country and only elections could defuse tension. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively; besides these are the reasons for social reaction and unrest. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets,

armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: January 29th, the floating LNG terminal on the island of Krk and the Zlobin-Omisalj pipeline which will deliver Liquid Natural Gas to Croatia's gas transport system and consumers were inaugurated on Friday, with Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic calling it a historic day that changed Croatia's position on the energy map of Europe. (www.glashrvatske.htr.hr)

- January 29th, Croatian Minister of the Interior Davor Bozinovic has "expressed concern" about the migrant situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and welcomed the European Union's intention to grant 5 million Euros to the country to strengthen the capacity of its border police, the Ministry of Interior said in a press release carried by state agency Hina on Thursday evening.

- January 29th, Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grljic-Radman said on Friday that he expected an official apology from the Serbian Government after a member of a Serbian delegation visiting recently Croatia to deliver humanitarian aid referred to the town of Knin as "Serbian and occupied." (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ████ :

Croatia enjoys political stability and this is an advantage for dealing with the recent 6.2 Richter scale earthquake in Sisak - Moslavina County (central-east Croatia) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Migration problem in borders with

Bosnia is a “headache” for the country, while Croatia faces accusations for mistreatment of migrants. The country pays special attention for Bosnian Croats seeking to protect their rights. Croatia appears ready to declare its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Adriatic Sea. Currently there are unofficial talks between Croatia, Italy and Slovenia for the issue. Inauguration of the LNG terminal on the island of Krk is of strategic importance for the state since it strengthens its energy security. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces’ modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: January 26th, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar spoke with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres by teleconference late Monday, telling him “A just, realistic and sustainable compromise must be based on sovereign equality and the cooperation of two states with equal international status.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 29th, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is due in Cyprus on Thursday for a short visit for contacts with the two leaders and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Elizabeth Spehar, it was reported on Friday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 29th, the Government on Friday announced a series of measures designed to fight corruption, which are based on the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 31st, the EU has already said it would not countenance two states in Cyprus, which is

what the Turkish side has been touting, while the Greek Cypriot side says it wants to stick to the decades-old agreed formula for a bizonal, bicomunal federation (BBF). (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Consultations between the parties involved in the Cypriot question have started since due to the informal meeting between Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot community, Greece, Turkey and UK which is scheduled for early March. Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades has declared his readiness to join talks for a potential resolution of the Cypriot question in the context of a bicomunal, bizonal federation with increased competencies in the constituent communities. On the other hand, Turkey and Turkish Cypriot community has hardened its stance by declaring that the only solution is two sovereign states. Despite talks regarding the Cypriot question, it is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: January 25th, ex-Prime Minister Antonis Samaras expressed his objections regarding the adopted approach of the Prime Minister, Kiriakos Mitsotakis regarding Greek – Turkish disputes. According to him,

deterrence is the answer against an expansionist state (such as Turkey). (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 25th, Turkey and Greece resumed talks aimed at addressing long-standing maritime disputes on Monday, diplomatic sources said, after months of tension in the eastern Mediterranean. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 25th, Greece is expecting Turkey to make some “*tangible steps of substantial progress*” so that the exploratory talks that started in Istanbul on Monday can move ahead, diplomatic sources said on Monday after the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 26th, Greece signed a 2.3 billion Euros deal with France for the purchase of the 18 RAFALE fighter jets. The agreement foresees the delivery of 12 used and six new aircraft built by Dassault Aviation over two years, starting in mid-2021. In the aftermath of the signing, the French Defense Minister Florence Parly said that the French Government is ready to sell a new generation of frigates to Greece, and is even mulling the idea that some of them be constructed in the country. (www.ekathimerini.com)



French and Greek Defense Ministers' statements in the aftermath of the agreement on RAFALE fighter jets

(Photo source: www.mod.mil.gr)

- January 29th, Riot Police made limited use of tear gas on Friday after engaging in scuffles with protesters during a demonstration of around 60 people outside Athens University to express solidarity with jailed terrorist Dimitris Koufodinas, who has been on hunger strike for several weeks. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Greece joined the exploratory talks in Istanbul on January 25th, 2021 but expectations remain low. It is not known what it was actually discussed between the two parts but the different agendas do not leave lot of space for encouraging foresees. Ex-Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras expressed his objections on the Greek approach towards Turkey claiming that Greek sovereign rights are under threat. Samaras is expressing the hardliners of the ruling party showing a dispute within it. Despite talks between Ankara and Athens the latter is implementing an ambitious project of armament seeking to achieve air and sea superiority in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean theaters. In this context, the French Defense Minister, Florence Parly arrived in Athens last week and signed with her counterpart, Nikos Panagiotopoulos the agreement of the purchase of 18 RAFALE 4th generation fighter jets. Apart from that the French Minister announced an improved proposal for French frigates and promised participation of the Hellenic war industry in their construction.



KOSOVO: January 27th, Kosovo Specialist Chambers has denied the applications for interim release of ex-KLA leaders, Hashim Thaci, Kadri Veseli, Rexhep Selimi and Jakup

Krasniqi accused by the Hague-based Court of committing war crimes. (www.gazeta-express.com)

- January 29th, on February 1st, 2021 Kosovo will formally establish diplomatic relations with Israel, Kosovo's Foreign Ministry has confirmed. (www.gazeta-express.com)

- January 29th, the Supreme Court of Kosovo on Friday upheld a decision of the Elections Complaint and Appeals Panel (ECAP) banning the Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) leader Albin Kurti from running in upcoming election because he has been convicted of a criminal offence within the last three years. (www.gazeta-express.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo is preparing for the upcoming parliamentary elections of February 14th, 2021 which may resolve the long political instability and uncertainty. Although, Supreme Court's decisions may polarize climate, pre-electoral period could be described as calm. Elections will be held under the "shadow" of indictment and arrest of four prominent members of KLA and contemporary political life of Kosovo; Hashim Thaci, Kadri Veseli, Rexhep Selimi and Jakup Krasniqi. Dialogue with Serbia has stopped due to the Kosovo elections. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish rule of law and modern functional administration. Moreover, corruption, organized crime, links between politicians and organized crime and inadequate justice system together with Kosovo unresolved status are significant obstacles towards the establishment of rule of law

allowing Pristina to move ahead in its Euro-Atlantic path.



MOLDOVA: January 26th, the Supreme Security Council (CSS) held today a meeting in its new composition. The meeting was chaired by the President Maia Sandu, who urged leaders of the law-enforcement institutions to take attitude and work to finish the files on corruption and money laundering. (www.moldpres.md)

- January 27th, President Maia Sandu proposed ex-minister of finance Natalia Gavriluța for Prime Minister. According to President Sandu, now the parliamentary groups will be able to show if they really want snap parliamentary elections or they cheat and try to set traps. (www.ipn.md)

- January 29th, "People on both banks of the Dniester/Nistru need a true commitment from the Sides to set aside differences and make progress in the settlement process," said the Special Representative of the Swedish OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting, who has concluded a four-day official visit to Moldova today. He praised the sides for actively engaging in negotiations since the beginning of the year and called on them to step up efforts to achieve tangible results in 2021, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The new Moldovan President, Maia Sandu is working hard to achieve its political task; to dismantle state's control by PSRM and former President, Igor Dodon. In his long reign, Dodon has achieved to establish full control of state's

institutions. Moreover, PSRM is currently controls the Parliament making Sandu's life difficult. The President took the political initiative by proposing a candidate for Prime Minister and the formation of a new Government. There are two options; either the Parliament will support the Government proposed by Sandu or it will not give the confidence vote and Sandu will achieve its task to lead the country in snap elections. The newly elected President and leader of PAS needs desperately elections seeking to gain control of the Parliament by taking in advantage the political acceptance currently PAS enjoys within the Moldovan electoral body. On the other hand, PSRM, PDM and SOR party are seeking to avoid snap elections aiming to gain political time by investing in Sandu's and PAS attrition. Sandu has to deal with Moldova's bad economic situation, the significant budget deficit and economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic which create a pressing situation in society. For PSRM and PDM autumn would be more convenient for elections. In the next few days political parties will unveil their intentions by supporting or not Natalia Gavrilita's Government. The new Supreme Security Council (SSC) of Moldova was established by Sandu and held its first meeting on January 26th where the President made clear that she does not trust all of its members!!! Taking into consideration that SSC is the highest institution deals with the state's security issues it is rather strange (!) the Head of state not to fully trust it. Under current conditions with a country in a dramatic economic situation, high rate of corruption, weak public administration, problematic rule of law and justice the country needs political stability in order to accelerate reforms in several sectors seeking to improve its economic growth and to provide better standards

of life in a society which is deeply disappointed by its political system. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: January 25th, all honorary citizenships awarded within the time frame from 2008 until today shall be thoroughly checked for regularity, it was confirmed to Dan daily by the Ministry of Interior. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although it seems that some apparent consensus has been reached between the ruling majority and the President of Montenegro, political tension is maintained in Montenegro due to the non-stop struggle between the two parts. The Government and President have reached an agreement on the issue of the recall of seven Ambassadors and this shows that both sides realize that compromise should be reached. However, public interest is focusing on lower level institutions such as the security and defense services. It seems that officials appointed by the previous Government work on maintain control of their institutions remaining loyal to the President. On the other hand, the Government is trying to appoint new people in key seats seeking to deconstruct the old status. The US and NATO are worrying for current political situation in Montenegro, while the new American Defense Minister, Lloyd Austin said that Russia is taking in advantage ethnic tension, corruption and weak rule of law to destabilize the Balkan countries (including Podgorica). Opposition is accusing the Government for appointing pro-Russian officials in critical positions in institutions such as the intelligence service, Police and the Armed

Forces. Turbulence and political provocation against the Government motivated by foreign circles aiming to topple the ruling coalition could not be excluded. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: January 25th, in a TV interview, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) leader Ali Ahmeti openly supported the notion that the census should include every citizen who owns some property in North Macedonia – even those who have long moved out and maintain only nominal presence in the country. (www.republika.mk)

- January 28th, “*the ‘Macedonian’ identity and language have never been up for negotiations and it will never be. We can get another 100 ultimatums, another 10 times veto and blockade; we will not discuss these issues. I expect from Bulgaria a clear recognition of the ‘Macedonian’ identity and language,*” Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, answering a question in Parliament. (www.republika.mk)

- January 29th, a large crowd of ethnic Albanians marched on a protest through downtown Skopje chanting slogans in favor of the 2001 terrorist movement UCK/NLA, demanding the release of a group of Islamists suspected with the 2012 Good

Friday massacre. Protesters also carried a map of Greater Albania and messages claiming that Albanians are original inhabitants of the Balkans, as opposed to North Macedonia citizens and others. (www.republika.mk)

- January 29th, “*the path you are on now is two-way – the first is to continue the engagement with Bulgaria bilaterally, something that the Government is doing now, in order to reach a mutually acceptable solution and second – to continue the progress in the reforms,*” the EU Ambassador David Geer said at Friday’s online conference “*The role of media and civil society organizations in the integration process.*”

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The upcoming national census scheduled for April 2021 is going to become a source of political tension in the country. Moreover, the final outcome it could destabilize the country due to ethnic tension. For Albanians it is out of question a rate less than 25%; a rate below 20% could lead in protests and turbulence. There are rumors for an agreement (“under the table”) between SDSM and DUI that the final outcome would be acceptable for both sides, but such a scenario affects credibility of the whole process. VMRO-DPMNE will try to use the census process for destabilizing the Government seeking to topple it. Political crisis with Bulgaria is maintained and Skopje should compromise if it really seeks to open accession talks with the EU. In short, North Macedonia should resolve interethnic and neighboring tensions in order to maintain its stability. A series of scandals involving state’s politicians and officials confirm that high rates of corruption, absence of rule of law and lack of independent justice afflict the country.



ROMANIA: January 27th, Romania is “fully prepared” to join the Schengen area, Romanian Prime Minister Florin Citu told his Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte in a phone conversation on Monday, January 25th, 2021. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 28th, Romania's Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) unveiled its alternative budget planning for 2021, based on expectations of 4% GDP growth and aiming for a public deficit of 7.26% of GDP. The draft includes all the pension, allowance, and social benefit hikes rejected by the center-right Government. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 28th, the process of drafting the 2021 budget planning seems to take more than expected, although it should be ready next week, because it is going to address much-delayed reforms or reverse past malign measures, Romania’s Prime Minister Florin Citu announced, News.ro reported.

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government is working on submitting the 2021 state budget aiming to present a functional economic plan covering the 2021 – 2024 time period. Opposition prepared its own draft budget with an emphasis on social benefits which the Government rejects. Internal rivalries within the ruling PNL may affect the already fragile ruling coalition with UDMR and USR-PLUS. However, it is highly unlikely party’s internal disputes to destabilize the Government. Political instability and uncertainty affects the state’s strategic goals such as fight against corruption, establishment of rule of law, reform of public administration and

justice system. In other words, Romania should focus on these sectors in order to unblock its accession in Schengen zone; an important goal for the country and its citizens. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. After redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security.



SERBIA: January 26th, officials of some Serbian opposition parties and movements met on Tuesday to discuss ways to fight against the President Aleksandar Vucic’s regime. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 26th, Serbian Defense Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic said in Tuesday’s meeting with KFOR Commander Major General Franco Federici that the international forces are the only legitimate armed formation in Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Meeting of Serbian Defense Minister, Nebojsa Stefanovic with the KFOR Commander, Major General Franco Federici

(Photo source: www.mod.gov.rs)

- January 28th, talks between Serbia's Parliament Speaker Ivica Dacic, and the European Union's representative David McAllister, originally scheduled for Thursday was postponed, N1 has reported. (www.rs.n1info.com)
- January 28th, European Integration Minister Jadranka Joksimovic said on Thursday that there is no dilemma about Serbia's commitment to continue the European integration process but added that the criteria for candidate countries are too strict sometimes. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Intra-party dialogue is in the epicenter of Serbian political life, despite efforts of the ruling SNS to keep low profile. Serbian Government considers talks with extra-parliamentary opposition as a direct interference of the EU in Serbian internal affairs. Actually, it was forced to accept it in the name of good cooperation with Brussels and the acceleration of accession negotiations with the EU. On the other hand, extra-parliamentary opposition which avoided the recent parliamentary elections claiming that it were not fair and free is seeking through dialogue to topple the Government. Enjoying open support by MEPs, opposition believes that it could destabilize the ruling coalition. Social and political turbulence could not be excluded in the near future especially if "foreign actors" seek destabilization of Serbian political life. Close relations of Serbia with Russia and China is seen as a threat by the western powers and this political approach by

Belgrade may have a cost for the ruling elite. Corruption, rule of law, independent justice, media freedom, transparency and accountability in public administration are state's sectors that the Government should work hard in order to improve situation transforming Serbia into a modern democratic country. Kosovo – Serbia dialogue is on hold after political instability in Pristina and the early elections scheduled for February 14th, 2021. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: January 25th, the priorities of Slovenia's EU presidency in the second half of this year and bilateral cooperation were in the focus as Foreign Minister Anze Logar held talks with his Belgian counterpart Sophie Wilmes. Logar stressed that Slovenia would place special emphasis on strengthening the EU's capacity to address health and other crises. (www.sta.si)

- January 26th, the five Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia's (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) decided at Tuesday's meeting they will continue to work as a single parliamentary faction, but they have not yet decided whether to be a part of the opposition or cooperate with the coalition. (www.sta.si)
- January 27th, Defense Minister Matej Tonin is to temporarily take over the role of Health Minister from Prime Minister Janez Jansa on Monday, the news portal 24ur.com reported, quoting unofficial information. Tonin is to continue to serve as Defense Minister as well. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Jansa Government's stability is at question since the five DeSUS MPs will decide if they will remain in the ruling coalition or they will withdraw to the opposition. Under current situation and uncertainty, the Government either will maintain its fragile majority of 46 MPs (in the 90 seats Parliament) or it will become a minority one enjoying support by SNS and ethnic minority MPs. Situation is fragile and snap elections is an option. According to the Slovenian President Borut Pahor, delimitation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) by Croatia has nothing to do with the Ljubljana – Zagreb border dispute “which has been resolved with the border arbitration agreement.” The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under question and it is assessed that they cannot accomplish their mission.



TURKEY: January 25th, Georgian military officials announced on Sunday that Turkey has donated military equipment to the country's Army. In a statement, the Georgian Defense Ministry said that the donation included laser rangefinders and various pieces of engineering equipment and was delivered at a ceremony attended by officials from both countries. The move follows Turkey's donation last November of 36 buses, 12 armored earthmovers and various other pieces of equipment to the Georgian Army. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 25th, Turkey condemned on Wednesday Israel's plan to construct over 2,500 new

settlement units in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. (www.aa.com.tr)

- January 25th, as Turkey and Greece on Monday relaunched exploratory talks in Istanbul to discuss their disputes, the two sides differ on their approach to the talks. While Turkey advocates discussing together all issues that have caused tensions between the two NATO-allied neighbors, Greece demands to limit the talks to only the demarcation of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 26th, the EU has decided to hold off on possible sanctions on Turkey due to positive developments in a meeting of the bloc's Foreign Ministers on Monday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 27th, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reiterated his Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - AKP) determination to carry out sweeping economic and legal reforms to prepare Turkey for the 2023 elections, saying that they will start introducing new packages to the Turkish Parliament soon. The president had called 2021 the “*year of reforms*” and pledged that his party would bring about many reforms in the justice and economy fields. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 28th, a motion extending the deployment of Turkish troops in the Gulf of Aden, Somalia and the Arabian Sea until February 10th, 2022, was published in Turkey's Official Gazette early Thursday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 29th, a joint Turkish - Russian center to observe the cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh will come into operation as of Saturday, Turkish

Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Friday.
(www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkish effort to normalize its relations with the EU continues. The latter withdrew the threat of sanctions claiming that Turkey shows positive and constructive behavior. Germany has played critical role in this decision by forming a strong block of states within the EU which oppose imposing sanctions against Turkey. Turkish – Greek exploratory talks did not reach any concrete result; actually they did not even start since both sides cannot agree on the agenda. Turkey seeks to put on the table all issues it considers as bilateral but Greece is willing to discuss only delimitation of maritime zones. Talks will continue in Greece but there are low expectations for tangible results. It seems that Turkey is buying time seeking not only to avoid possible sanctions by the EU, but also to decode the new climate in the US under the Biden administration. Strong diplomatic and military presence of Turkey continues in several fronts. It strengthens its influence in South Caucasus not only by its strong alliance with Azerbaijan, but also by strengthening its relations with Georgia. Turkey has achieved to successfully penetrate in the region with the tolerance of Russia implementing the strategic doctrine “one nation, two states.” In Africa, Turkey renewed its military presence in Somalia seeking to maintain its influence in the country. Despite economic difficulties, internal political problems and security vacuum in the southeast of the country, Turkey exercises a multifaceted foreign policy with characteristics of a regional power which seeks to expand its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, North and East

Africa. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state.

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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.*