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# Cultural Relations Policy

## News and Background

# January 2014





## About CRP News & Background

Cultural Relations Policy News & Background is a part of ICRP Monthly Review Series and an initiative of Institute for Cultural Relations Policy Budapest. Launched in 2012, its mission is to provide information and analysis on key international political events. Each issue covers up-to-date events and analysis of current concerns of international relations on a monthly basis.

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## The United Kingdom in the EU: an uncertain future

The European Union must choose between reforming its institutions and function or decline – said George Osborne, the United Kingdom's Chancellor of the Exchequer during a two-day conference on EU reform. He even told the audience that the UK will leave the European Union if decision makers do not recognise the need for change.

British discontent with the European Union has been getting more frequent and louder during the past couple of years. The best-known advocate of the "UK should leave the EU" idea is definitely Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), however a year ago in 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron himself announced his plans to renegotiate the terms of the country's EU membership. However, his party's bill, to authorise an in-out referendum by 2017 was killed off in the House of Lords by Labour and Liberal Democrat peers on 31 January 2014. Despite his disappointment, Cameron is committed to hold the vote whether the bill is passed or not. He said his government will use every possible tool to ensure the referendum and the next session of parliament would provide an opportunity for another private member's bill which he



Nigel Farage. Photo: Euro Realist Newsletter [Flickr]

would support. He added however that "the referendum I want to give the British people does not depend on a private member's bill in this session or the next session. It depends on me being prime minister after the next election – and if I am prime minister after the election there will be a referendum."

However, not everyone shares the Prime Minister's opinion. His views have certainly caused headache to several businessmen across the country, including leaders of the car-manufacturer Ford who have declared: they would withdraw most of their investments if the UK left the European Union. Cameron has got criticism from European politicians as well. Although he



has claimed that the United Kingdom is not alone in demanding reform in Brussels – citing Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands as possible allies – most member states disapprove the idea of a British in-out referendum. François Hollande French President called David Cameron's demands for EU treaty changes as “not a priority for the time being” during a UK-France summit held at the end of January, 2014. While the British government would like to get back more power over immigration, justice and welfare, Hollande thinks the most important problem in Europe that has to be solved is the economic crisis.

Undoubtedly, economic challenges make the British PM concerned as well, however his way to deal with the question differs from others'. Cameron's Conservative Party that currently dominates the UK's coalition government would put pressure on the EU

to focus on completing the single market and prioritise free trade deals with the United States, China and Japan. George Osborne has also warned EU politicians – at the conference mentioned above – that the Union is falling behind China and India since European economy has stagnated over the last six years while India's has grown by a third and China's by a half. “The biggest economic risk facing Europe does not come from those who want reform and re-negotiation. It comes from a failure to reform and renegotiate. It is the status quo which condemns the people of Europe to an ongoing economic crisis and continuing decline” – he said. Staying with the topic of economy, it can be stated that the second key point of the EU-UK relations is the euro itself. During the negotiations of the Maastricht Treaty – at the beginning of the 90's – the UK requested an opt-out clause which entitled the country not to participate in the third stage of the economic and monetary union (EMU). As a result, the UK has never introduced the euro and ever since, British public opinion has remained against joining the eurozone. In his speech of the EU-reform conference, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has referred to this topic as well, saying that the EU should not allow the will of the 18 eurozone states to compromise the countries outside the single currency. He has made it clear: “If you cannot protect the collective interests of non-eurozone member states, then they will have to choose between joining the eurozone, which the UK will not do, or leave the European Union.”



If the economic issues mentioned above were not enough to the British government to deal with, recently another problem has emerged, namely the immigration influx. After the labour market restrictions on Romanians and Bulgarians had been lifted on 1 January 2014, flights to the British Islands have been fully booked and British authorities are expecting other thousands of newcomers. In addition, anti-immigration groups are worried that – because of their historical ties with Romania and Bulgaria and the legal environment – Moldavians, Macedonians, Serbs, Ukrainians and Turks – become also eligible to claim passports that would allow them to work anywhere in the European Union. Romanian and Bulgarian politicians have considered such fears exaggerated and assured their British counterparts that they get the situation under control. Kristian Vigenin, Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and William Hague, British Secretary of State for Foreign It is hard to give any prognosis for the Kingdom's future in the EU, however it is quite obvious that problems are multiplying

and there are more and more politicians who speak out against the country's EU membership. Although even the Prime Minister seems to support the idea of leaving the Union, it is not sure whether his promise to hold a vote is a serious commitment, a threat for EU politicians or a simple campaign trick for the next general election in 2015. and Commonwealth Affairs met on 16 January in London and emphasized that the free movement of workers in the EU on a non-discriminatory basis is a key part of the single market and also a factor of economic growth and competitiveness.



EU Council 2012: Family Photo. Photo: Council of the European Union [Flickr]

### 1,500 Syrian asylum seekers in the United Kingdom

Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has disclosed that his country has accepted 1,500 Syrians, as a part of its international asylum obligations. Even Nigel Farage UKIP leader, anti-immigration politician has emphasized that “refugees are a very different thing to economic migration and [...] this country should honour the spirit of the 1951 declaration on refugee status that was agreed”. The UK has made its largest aid contribution as a response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis with 500 million pounds being spent inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries.



## Kiev uprising continuing

**Huge demonstrations** are continuing in Kiev as contrary to the protesters' demands, Viktor Yanukovich is still the President of Ukraine. The riots started in late November, when the President refused to sign an utmost important deal with the European Union in Vilnius. Since then, there have been many demonstrations on the central Independence square and as it seems, the protesters are not likely to give up in the near future.



Protesters throwing tires to the fire set by the protesters to prevent internal forces from crossing the barricade line. Photo: Mstyslav Chernov [Wikimedia Commons]

The first bigger protest of the New Year happened on the fifth on January, with the aim of encouraging others to go to the streets after the Orthodox Christmas ended. During the demonstration there were approximately ten thousand people on the

main square. In the meantime, the President is constantly accused with many charges. For example there was an attack on 25 December 2013 on an opposition activist and journalist, Tetyana Chernovol. She got seriously injured of heavy beating by the police in a protest. There were of course immediate allegations with the President. But later in an announcement Yanukovich denied all the accusations, claiming that all of them were groundless.

To respond to the public demands, the President's administration often gives a voice to the government's intention that in the end it would support closer ties with the EU and the process of the European integration. According to Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Arbutov the Association treaty is planned to be signed in 2014 and the government will do everything to reach this goal.

At the same time the EU says that they do not see any sign of such intention. According to Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, there has not been any draft taken to create a new document and there has not been set a new date for the EU-Ukraine 2014 Summit. Amid high tensions, after more than two



two months of protests, Yanukovich finally started the negotiations with the opposite demonstrators and politicians. They agreed to set up a special commission that can help in better communication between different parties. The talks did not result in real and practical decisions as the opposition told to the press.

The negotiations came after many people got injured in a clash when tried to reach the Parliament. There were around 100,000 people on the streets that day. The protests were a consequence of a new package of laws, Yanukovich introduced because of the uprisings. These included the ban on installing tents and stages on public

squares, the permit to arrest those who wear masks or helmets, the ban on using more than five vehicles in a convoy and the arrest or higher fine for those who violate the law. If everyone respected the new rules, there would not be protest practically at all. The demonstrators live in tents of the squares, coordinate everything from stages and try not to leave it for even a moment. If they do not wear masks or helmets and do not use vehicles, they can be really vulnerable and exposed to police violence.

While many claim that these laws are against basic freedoms, Yanukovich says that they are compatible with the



Berkut special police soldier holding a shotgun pointed at the line of protesters, Hrushevskoho str. Euromaidan Protests. Photo: Mstyslav Chernov [Wikimedia Commons]





European standards. At the same time, the international community is also concerned about the issue. They call for the revision of the legislation and the end of the violence on the streets. Jose Manuel Barroso called the attention of Yanukovych that the EU might impose sanctions against Kiev if the situation does not get better soon.

Russia's official position has not significantly changed since November. Sergei Lavrov Foreign Minister claim that the protests are getting out of control and accused the EU of helping in the escalation of events. They often emphasise the effect of different countries on the protesters.

In spite of the public hostility, Yanukovych still calls for further discussions and cooperation. He does not want more people to turn against the government, even though he has not mentioned any possible solution for the critical problem. As a sign of goodwill, he signed an amnesty for all those who got arrested in the uprising and as well for the ones who violated one of the new protest laws. Even if it was a big gesture, the protesters did not accepted it. They claimed that it was not satisfactory and they do not give up the fight for their final goal.

### **EU-Eurasian free trade plans**

Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested the EU to establish a free trade zone between the Customs Union and the European Union. The Customs Union currently consists of three countries: Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, with the leadership of Moscow. There are several questions to be answered until the decision, this is why Putin called experts to examine the idea. The first time he can discuss it in person is 8 June 2014 when the world's significant actors meet in Sochi in frames of the G8 summit.

### **EU-Russia talks on spheres of influence**

On a 28 January summit in Brussels EU officials assured Putin that their free trade agreements with some post-Soviet countries would not harm the economic interests of Putin in the region. The meeting tried to focus on the EU-Russia relations but as they told, it was extremely hard to avoid Ukraine as a topic. Putin declared that Ukraine's choice can have a huge impact as he signed certain agreements with the current officials. If they change, there can be no guarantee for future help.



## Kerry says Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is not "mission impossible"

**From 2nd to 6th January**, US Secretary of State John Kerry visited the Middle East for the tenth time in order to accelerate the peace dialogue between Israel and Palestine by meeting both Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and also consulting with other local officials.

Originally, back in last April, Kerry had set the goal of reaching a final agreement regarding the Israeli-Palestinian issue by the end of 2013. The Obama administration is reportedly working hard to present the preliminary framework to both sides by the end of January. The peace process itself, however, has continually had hurdles and obstacles, which would indicate that the date for the peace agreement (if there will be any) might not be set for the near future.

An Israeli official indicated that during Kerry's previous visits, while PM Netanyahu showed real commitment towards the peace agreement, President Abbas only used his meetings with Kerry to list his complaints about Israel. In his January meeting with PM Netanyahu, however, Kerry had to face an outraged leader who said that Israel has its own doubts about the peace talks, criticising the "unabated" Palestinian Authority-sponsored incitement, as well as President Mahmoud Abbas's failure to condemn the recent uptick in terrorism. "A few days ago in Ramallah,



John Kerry. Photo: Al Jazeera English [Flickr]

President Abbas embraced terrorists as heroes," Netanyahu said. "How can President Abbas say that he stands against terrorism when he embraces the perpetrators of terrorism and glorifies them as heroes?" This last visit of the US secretary confirmed that despite Israel's seemingly higher willingness towards the agreement, it is not only the Palestinians who have serious complaints.

After having spoken with Netanyahu on the first day of his stay and Abbas on the second, Kerry returned to Israel in order to once again meet with the Israeli PM. He asked patience from Netanyahu, promising that the soon-to-be presented framework deal will clarify every issue and enable the two sides to reach a final peace agreement. "We have always known that achieving peace is a long and complicated process. It's a tough road. But this is not mission impossible," Kerry said.



## Afghanistan to delay US deal until reaching peace agreement with Taliban

**Afghan President** Hamid Karzai expressed his firm refusal to sign a deal with the United States until his country is engaged in peace talks with the Taliban. Karzai said that signing such a key pact with the USA under pressure is out of question. The aforementioned deal with the US would allow American troops to stay in Afghanistan after the end of 2014, which is currently the official termination date of NATO-led combat operations in the country.

The pact, called the Bilateral Security Agreement, was devised last year and the US has been looking forward to make it come into force, but the Afghan leader has consistently denied signing the pact thus far. If the deal was agreed upon, the 15,000 US troops would be enabled to remain in Afghanistan, along with a smaller group of special forces that would stay to organize counter-terrorist operations.

If, however, Karzai continues to turn down the signing of the pact, foreign military forces are legally bound to leave his country in less than a year. In December, a

high-ranked Afghan general said that his nation may be exposed to a huge danger without the deal, in the face of continuing Taliban violence. The president, however seems to be ambitious about first establishing peace with the terrorist organization before engaging in any sort of further talks with the Americans. Karzai also shared his expectations towards the USA, waiting for them to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

The Afghan leader's reluctance is not the only sign that there has been some tension in the Afghan-US relations lately. In the beginning of January, despite US concern and voices of disapproval, Karzai ordered the release of 72 imprisoned terrorism suspects for lack of evidence to prosecute them. US Secretary of State John Kerry expressed his support regarding the Afghan-Taliban peace talks, also considering it a key element for the maintenance of the Afghan-US cooperation and the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement later on this year.

### HPC praises US, Pakistani, Saudi peace efforts

Early in January, The High Peace Council (HPC) welcomed recent US, Pakistani and Saudi efforts, saying they could turn out to be crucial steps towards restoring long-awaited peace in Afghanistan. The US and Pakistan are admittedly aiding Afghan President Karzai's struggle to make peace with the Taliban. Saudi Arabia has not been considered a key actor in the peace process so far, but analysts think it could provide a unique kind of support, being viewed as the birthplace of Islam.



## Hope for peace in Syria?

Key talks started between the Syrian government and opposition on the 22nd of January in the Swiss city of Montreux with no breakthrough on any important question. Negotiations were supported by US Secretary of State John Kerry, Russia and the UN which was represented by Lakhdar Brahimi as a coordinator. Negotiations are called Geneva II talks referring back the unsuccessful peace talks held in Geneva in 2012.

Not a single goal was met: There was no consensus allowing humanitarian aid to reach besieged population, no plans to cease the fire between the two sides and no real discussions over the way to end the

war. There is a crucial disagreement between the two parts that who is going to take part in the mutually-agreed-upon transitional government.

The main problem that hinders the agreement is the future role of the recently presiding Bashar al-Assad whose position is backed by the government and his militia, meanwhile opposition group says that the president lost his legitimacy and must be excluded from the future political scene of Syria. Representative of the opposition Ahmad Jarba, leader of the National Coalition said "We all agreed that there is no future for Bashar al-Assad and his family in Syria," he added "His departure is inevitable." After the one-week-long negotiations the opposition gained credibility both in Syria and abroad thanks for its representatives' democratic, gracious and willing-to-cooperate approach.

However there was no significant progress during the talks, Brahimi said it is a "modest beginning, but a beginning on which we can build" and added that second round negotiations continue in February. The fact that the two fighting sides could sit to each other was already a big achievement and the road to the talks were no easy as well.



*U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meets with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on January 21, 2014, in Montreux, Switzerland, at the outset of meetings focused on reaching a negotiated political settlement in Syria. Photo: Wikimedia Commons*



Syrian opposition groups are supported by Western and Gulf countries. Also these nations are the biggest donors for United Nations aid efforts in Syria. The government enjoys Moscow's support which is trying to keep Assad in power.

Before the so-called Geneva II talks US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met on 13 January to discuss the upcoming negotiations in Switzerland. They agreed on that Iran – which were accused of providing military and financial support to Damascus – will not be invited to Montreux, however Kerry had suggested Iran could play a side-line role in the peace talks.



*U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pose with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and U.N. Special Representative for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi on January 23, 2014, in Montreux, Switzerland. Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

The Persian state accepted the refusal and said Iran would never attend any conferences which undermines its honour.

### **The US secretly backs opposition groups fighting against al-Qaeda**

The US and the Gulf countries have been secretly supporting rebel groups fighting against al-Qaeda's most extremist wing. America was providing non-lethal aid but also insisted Saudi Arabia and Qatar to equip opposition group with weapons against al-Qaeda's Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shams (ISIS) in Syria. The United States did not directly fund the rebels but it has leaked out that \$2 million in cash every month reached out the oppositions from American source. The Syrian Revolutionary Front, whose main commander, Jamal Maarouf, is allied to Saudi Arabia, and the Army of Islam, a new coalition of the moderate rebels sponsored by Qatar, have continued to liaise with the CIA and Saudi and Qatari intelligence.



## Fears of civil war in Iraq

The Obama administration was urged to make involvements in Iraq because of the fear that the country will be back in civil war. The situation of bombing is very severe, and the overall picture is highly complex.

The al-Qaeda-aligned insurgents are having huge gains since the end of war, and according to John McCain, there are some aspects to do about it – such as sending additional shipments, surveillance drones, US troops to help the Iraqi army. However, there is much pressure that the administration should do more. McCain urged to send high-level advisers to help Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The administration is worried about the involvement, and does not want to send military equipment into a region which is now filled with terrorist-tied fighters. Secretary of State John Kerry said that this “fight ... belongs to the Iraqis”, and the administration believes that the US withdrawal helps Iraq to fight against the al-Qaeda-tied militants. On the other hand, McCain thinks that a residual force should had been left behind to stop things to unravel, and he does not agree with Kerry. However, Gen. Ray Odierno does agree: “I think it’s time for them to step up and see what they can do.”

The chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Howard McKeon noted that also enemies aware whether the US is interfering or not – which is not all the same. Since the US seems to be reluctant to help,

other countries have stepped in: Russia and Iran also offered military help to Baghdad.

One problem is that the Iraqi government has asked for permission to buy military aircraft, 36 in total. So far none have been delivered.

Meanwhile, bombs constantly threaten the citizens of Iraq, which kill and wound many innocent people.

There is much political tension and violence in the country. According to the UN, 2013 was the deadliest year for 5 years in sectarian violence: more than 8,800 people were killed. Soldiers are also in grave danger regarding the bombing.

The city of Fallujah is a highly problematic area. Troops prepared to launch an attack in January, due to the al-Qaeda-linked Sunni militants. The government’s attempt to restore its control over predominantly Sunni cities (such as Fallujah and Ramadi) was seen as an action of domination which will bring the country towards civil war. Local Sunnis demonstrated for months against the discriminations by the Shia-led government, and against the anti-terrorism measures towards their minority community. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged the leaders to address the “root causes”, and also asked for an “inclusive dialogue”, but according to the Prime Minister, the events in Anbar had “no relation to Iraqi problems”, so there is no need for a dialogue. Instead, he asked for international support.



## Iran nuclear talks

As part of the Iran nuclear talks, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif meets with EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton who represents the “P5+1” – Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany. The talks aim to design a roadmap for the practical implementation of the landmark interim nuclear deal that was agreed upon in November last year. The deal took effect on 20 January confirms that Iran is committed to curbing its uranium enrichment to five percent and halting production of 20 percent enriched uranium over the next six months. In exchange, the EU and the US have committed to “ease” economic sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy. Iran has said the nuclear power plant aims to produce 20,000 megawatts of electricity from nuclear power, which would necessitate building 20 such reactors. Western powers and Israel suspect the Islamic republic’s nuclear programme masks a covert weapons drive. Tehran denies that, saying it is entirely for peaceful purposes. President Hassan Rohani also reiterated that Iran has never sought nuclear weapons. “In regards to peaceful nuclear technology, we have never sought nuclear

weapons and will never do so,” Iran quoted him as saying.

Iran and major world powers clinched a historic nuclear deal in November, which was hailed by the six Gulf Arab states as a first step toward an inclusive and lasting agreement that would end international concerns. Under it, Tehran agreed to curb parts of its nuclear drive for six months in exchange for modest sanction relief and a promise by Western powers not to impose new measures on its economy.

In Moscow, on 16 January Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif-Khonsari affirmed Iran’s intentions to cooperate with an international deal aimed at scaling back its nuclear program at a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Putin, in turn, praised Iran’s willingness to negotiate in reaching the accord, which was first announced in November.

Under the interim deal, Iran has pledged to halt its highest-level enrichment of uranium, reduce its uranium stockpiles and stop work on its plutonium reactor and the installation of new enrichment centrifuges. It has also agreed to grant access to UN inspectors to ensure compliance with the guidelines.

In exchange, Iran will get up to \$7 billion in relief from economic sanctions that were



stifling Iran's economy, and a further \$4 billion will be released from previously frozen oil assets. The UN's harshest economic sanctions are expected to remain in place until a permanent deal is reached to alleviate Western fears about Iran's nuclear power program being a façade for building a nuclear bomb.

The reciprocal steps honour a plan to gradually ease restrictions on Iran as it adheres to new commitments to curb its program and allow greatly expanded international inspection and monitoring of the program that it insists is not intended to produce nuclear weapons. The United States, a chief sceptic of Iran's claims and long the main international driver for tough sanctions on Iran, reacted with both praise and scepticism, saying it was an "important step forward" but also warning that the

restrictions would be quickly reinstated if Iran reneges on its efforts.

The European Union said it was responding with a release of some sanctions as part of "a six-month phase of initial confidence-building measures aimed at addressing international concerns about Iran's nuclear activities."

"This is an important day in our pursuit of ensuring that Iran has an exclusively peaceful nuclear program," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton told reporters.

The White House issued a more reserved statement.

"In reciprocation for Iran's concrete actions," White House press secretary Jay Carney said in a statement, world powers would "today follow through on our commitment to begin to provide the



*Iran concluded negotiations about Iran's nuclear capabilities on November 2013. Photo: U.S. Department of State*





modest relief agreed to with Iran. At the same time, we will continue our aggressive enforcement of the sanctions measures that will remain in place throughout this six-month period.”

“The steps that we are taking today shows that we are on track toward implementing this arrangement which gives us what we need, which is halting for the first time in more than a decade Iran’s progress toward nuclear weapons capability,” one

official said. Criticism of the deal was not unexpected, but opponents of Iran’s new president, Hassan Rohani, and his administration’s nuclear outreach had been uncharacteristically quiet until now.

Early indications show that Iran’s financial markets are responding well to the deal’s implementation as the Iranian currency, the rial, strengthened by more than 2 percent against the dollar.

### **US warns against business with Iran**

US Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen warned that there are still significant sanctions in place on Iran and that business deals with Iran should be postponed. US does not support it, but Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to boost ties with Iran.

In November of last year, Iran reached an interim agreement with Western powers to curb Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for easing of sanctions. The development has been welcomed by Turkey due to the prospect of boosting trade with Iran after easing the sanctions.

There is clarity on all sides of exactly the narrow scope of sanctions relief, as well as the continued complex broad sanctions that remain in effect, in particular, sanctions on Iran’s banking sector, energy sector and shipping sector.”

Halkbank has for some time been involved in handling oil payments for importing oil from Iran into Turkey and we expect that to continue said Cohen.

When talking about Halkbank, Cohen reiterated that he had discussed the sanctions that remain in effect, including those on the banking sector in Iran, so that there would be “good clarity” across the board on the scope of sanctions. “What I am interested in is that we have a good line of communication with the Turkish government and I know that we have that,” said Cohen.

A number of recent reports in the Turkish press have suggested that US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel has postponed his visit to Turkey, to show the US’s displeasure regarding events following the 17 December corruption investigations, including the restructure of the judicial system and a stronger reaction should be expected from Washington in the coming days.



## Ceasefire after a month-long hostility in the world's youngest nation, South Sudan

Hostilities and ethnic violence has been occurring during the whole month in South Sudan. The situation has escalated to such an extent that South Sudanese President Salva Kiir declared a state of emergency in Jonglei and Unity states on 2 January. The national army, called Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), has been fighting against rebels since mid-December after an alleged coup by former Vice-President Riek Machar. The conflict has rapidly become an ethnically motivated fight between Machar's Nuer and President Kiir's Dinka tribes.

Ceasefire talks had been taking place in Addis Ababa with the help of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). One of the main issues of the negotiations was the imprisonment of detained pro-rebel officials. Machar has been demanding the release of the 11 high-level prisoners, but President Kiir has insisted that they can be only released after the judicial process. This disagreement turned out to be so serious that it made the peace talks stalled on 8 January.

Neighbouring countries of South Sudan have become involved in the crisis for more reasons. On one hand, thousands of refugees have crossed the borders in order to escape violence; most of them have fled to Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and

Sudan. On the other hand, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, who is a strong ally of Kiir, has sent troops and military hardware at the request of President Kiir. Furthermore, Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir has also pledged that Sudan will not support any rebel groups in South Sudan. During the intense fights in over 30 different locations around the country, at least 200,000 people have been displaced inside



Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Government of Southern Sudan that speaks to news reporters outside the Security Council chamber at United Nations Headquarters in New York, United States of America. Photo: Jenny Rockett



South Sudan and the estimated number of deaths is around 10,000. The situation resembles a humanitarian tragedy since people have reported indiscriminate killing of civilians and targeted attacks against ethnic groups.

Finally, on 23 January, South Sudanese government and Machar's rebels signed an agreement of ceasefire. Although this can be the first step towards the end of South Sudan's unrest, it may not resolve the underlying principles of the crisis. Diplomats and analysts have warned that hostility can continue. The two sides also managed to agree on the question of detainees, so these high-level officials can participate in the peace process but firstly they have to face the legal process.

This ceasefire was not the only one signed by Kiir's government this month. On 30 January, South Sudan managed to sign an agreement almost after three years of rebellion with the South Sudan Democratic



*Map of South Sudan. Map: Wikimedia Commons*

Movement/Defense Army's Cobra Faction led by David Yau Yau. Negotiations were led by the Church Leaders Mediation Initiative and chaired by Bishop Paride Taban.

### **African Union summit concentrating on South Sudan and the CAR**

Dominating issues of the African Union summit, opened on 30 January, were the violence in South Sudan and in the Central African Republic. The leaders of different African countries were urging a peaceful and political resolution of the conflicts. The United States was also represented with a high-level delegation led by Deputy Secretary of State, William Burns at the two-day summit. The US has already expressed its concern over the security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic as well as in South Sudan.



## Rwanda's former intelligence chief has been found dead

**Although** the most flagrant events of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict have already happened for decades, there are still serious conflicts and opposition within Rwandan political cycles. On 1 January, Patrick Karegeya's dead body was found in a hotel room in Johannesburg, South Africa. He had played a crucial role as the head of intelligence in the current Prime Minister, Paul Kagame's regime. Karegeya had been in this position for 10 years, until 2004 when he was arrested and jailed for the accusation of insubordination and desertion. In 2007, Karegeya left the country and managed to gain asylum in South Africa where he had been living until his death.

The exact circumstances of the murder are still under investigation, although, according to a police spokesperson, a bloody towel and rope was found in the hotel room. In spite of the fact that the investigation has not been finished yet, the Rwandan opposition has confidently accused Prime Minister Kagame for ordering the assassination of Karegeya. Theogene Rudasingwa, who also had a significant role in Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front party before he had fled to the United States, has stated that the

Kagame regime has intended to intimidate and silence its opponents. Moreover, he has directly accused Kagame saying that the former intelligence chief's death is similar to other homicides ordered by the Prime Minister.



Map of Rwanda. Map: CIA Factbook

The murder of Karegeya was not the first criminal accusation which has been allegedly linked to Prime Minister Kagame and his regime. On one hand, in 2010, there were two unsuccessful attempts by



unknown gunmen to kill Kayumba Nyamwasa, the former Lieutenant General of Rwandan army. Besides Karegeya, he is also one of the founders of the Rwanda National Congress, a new opposition party established in 2010. On the other hand, in 2011, an alleged Rwandan assassin, who was threatening the lives of two Rwandan exiles, was deported from the United Kingdom. Furthermore, in 2012, Rwandan diplomats had been sent back to their country of origin from Sweden and Belgium for spying on Rwandan refugees and for inconsistent activities with their diplomatic status. In contrast of these, according to the Rwandan government official statement, they are not responsible for Karegeya's murder to any extent and the opposition intends to use his death for their own political interests.



*Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda. Photo: World Economic Forum on Africa*

### **20th anniversary of genocide in Rwanda**

Meanwhile the investigation and accusations, the year of 2014 has a special significance in Rwanda since it is the 20th anniversary of one of the most horrible genocide of the previous century. The memorial activities started in Kigali with the lighting of the flame of remembrance in January and are continuing countrywide in order to help reconciliation, to highlight the progress reached since then and to strengthen national identity. This symbolic flame will be carried across Rwanda until 7 April, which is the beginning of the national mourning period and the exact same day when the bloodshed began in 1994.



## Crisis in the Central African Republic: still far from solution?

The crisis in the Central African Republic has escalated to such an extent that the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to authorise European Union troops to use force in the African country. The international community is seriously concerned about the events happening in Central Africa. For instance, the United Nations has warned that the crisis could possibly end in genocide which could involve millions of people, even in the bordering countries, such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Central African Republic is religiously and politically divided between the groups of the Muslim Seleka and Christian Anti-Balaka. The roots of the conflict lead back to last March when Michel Djotodia, the first Muslim leader of the country came to power. He became President after a coup by the Muslim Seleka group which had overthrown the former Anti-Balaka president, Francois Bozize. Sectarian violence between the two groups had started after the change of regime, and hitherto has caused approximately 2,000 deaths. Furthermore, as a consequence of the violent events, nearly one million people had to leave their homes. President Djotodia was not able to stop the months-

long bloodshed; therefore, the international pressure had become stronger and stronger on him to resign. Finally, Ahmat Allami, the Secretary-General of the regional bloc of Economic Community of Central African States, announced Djotodia's resignation on 10 January.

Ten days later, Catherine Samba-Panza, the capital's former mayor was appointed as the new interim President of the Central African Republic. She has stated several times that she is politically and religiously neutral in the conflict which hopefully can calm the opposite groups down. The spokesman of the Anti-Balaka group said that they were satisfied with the person of the new President.

Nevertheless, the violence has not stopped at the moment of the new President's appointment. The international community



*Catherine Samba-Panza. Photo: Jean-Guy Kidjimalé-Grant*



has made different steps since the outburst of the crisis. France and the African Union has acted firstly, approximately 1,600 French and 6,000 African troops have been deployed to the territory of the Central African Republic. The European Union has agreed on sending up to 600 troops to the country, too. Nonetheless, Gerard Araud, the French ambassador to the United Nations said in a television interview that at least 10,000 troops would be needed altogether in order to rebuild peace, law and order. Not only military, but humanitarian aid has also been sent to the

crisis-hit country. According to the spokesmen of the UN World Food Programme, 1,500 tonnes of food was sent to the region. Amnesty International has also warned against crimes committed throughout the country, such as extrajudicial executions, torture and mutilations of bodies.

The United Nation Security Council has urged the interim Presidency and both of the opposite sides to hold elections as soon as possible, ideally in the second half of 2014.



*Rebel camp in the north-eastern Central African Republic (2007).  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*



## The roller coaster of altering relations between North Korea and South Korea

The tensions and relations between the two states of the Korean Peninsula have been constantly changing during January. Some analysts say that the Northern regime's actions have been following the same pattern for years. So let's have a look at Pyongyang's and Seoul's most important steps towards each other in January.

At the beginning of the month, Kim Jong-un, North Korean leader called for better and more consolidated relationship between the two countries in a 25-minute-long New Year's speech aired by the Korean Central Television. This announcement was noted with general scepticism by the Southern government. The main intention behind this rhetoric of the Kim Jong-un regime was probably to make South Korea cancel its annual military exercises with the United States.

This reasoning can be underpinned by the fact that only a couple days later, North Korea declined the South Korean proposal of war-torn families' reunion. According to the Korean Central News Agency's statement, there were two main reasons for postponing reunions, namely the lack of trust towards South Korea due to its large-scale military exercises together with the US and to the unsuitable timing to the Lunar New Year Holidays.

North Korea's strongly condemning rhetoric against the joint military exercises has been continuing, and Northern sources have urged to stop them and denounced them as rehearsal for an invasion to the North. According to South Korean opinion, these joint military drills, scheduled for late



Map of the two Koreas. Map: Johannes Barre [Wikimedia Commons]





February, are completely defensive in nature. In addition to the repeating proposals of North Korea, an open letter was sent to Seoul by the North's top military body on the direct orders of leader Kim Jong-un on 23 January. In this letter, the



Park Geun-hye, President of South Korea. Photo: Korea.net

proposal to cancel joint exercises was repeated again. As a response Seoul warned that behind these proposals North Korea may be preparing a military confrontation.

On 28 January, some progress occurred in

the case of war-torn families' reunions, since Seoul sent the newly proposed dates of the event. According to South Korean plans, the reunions could take place between 17 and 22 February at the Mount Kumgang resort in North Korea. Seoul expects Pyongyang's response only around the end of January.

The international community has also been paying attention to the events happening on the Korean Peninsula. This is especially true about the countries of the so called six-party talks, namely the United States, China, Japan and Russia in addition to the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The six-party talks were not successful, and therefore, not surprisingly, they have been suspended since 2009. On 29 January, the Chinese Foreign Ministry made an announcement to urge the involved parties to avoid a u-turn on the peninsula and called for the resumptions of the multilateral discussion in order to safeguard the region's stability. Apparently, Kim Jong-un's attitude to the world outside of his country's borders is similar to his predecessor, and so far the international community has not succeeded in moderating North Korea's foreign policy or in easing the regime's repressive nature inside of the country.

According to Gordon G. Chang's analysis, the actions of North Korea have been following the same pattern again and again. The events happened in January could easily fit his model. Firstly, Kim Jong-un's regime makes apparently friendly gestures such as his New Year's speech about improving relations with South Korea in order to cancel the South's joint military



exercises with the US. The second stage of the process is the international community's rejection of overtures; in this case this happened when Seoul rejected the cancellation of the exercises. But this could not be a surprise even for Kim Jong-un. The next stage of the events is a series of threats in order to justify a series of provocations which constitutes the following section of North Korea's usual actions. The final stage of Kim Jong-un's cycle usually occurs when the regime suddenly refrain from provocation. According to this theory, then a couple month later the whole cycle starts again. In conclusion, Chang believes that the regular North Korean provocation occurs rather due to the nature of the Northern ruling regime than as a reaction to events or the South's behaviour.



Emblem of North Korea. Source: Wikimedia Commons

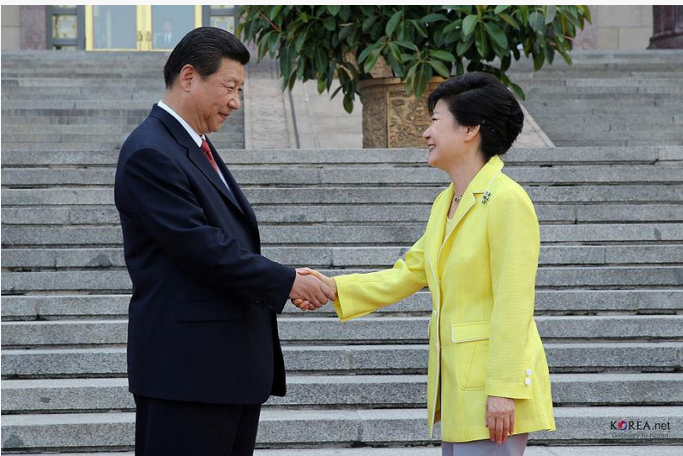
### Plans of setting up the Korean 'AmCham'

South Korea plans to set up chamber of commerce in nine countries and one region, namely in the United States, Japan, Singapore, India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil and Europe, in order to support companies doing business overseas and to build up relations with local business partners. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy has asked two private organizations, the Korea International Trade Association (KITA) and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), to be in charge of the setting process of the Korean business lobbies. This quasi Korean copy of the American Chamber of Commerce is going to be called KOCHAM or the Korea Business Association (KBA).



## An overview of China's intricate foreign affairs in January

**The Chinese diplomatic** and economic foreign affairs showed a quite elaborate pattern in January 2014. Throughout the month, the schedule of the Chinese diplomacy has been undoubtedly busy. The country had strengthened its relations with several states during January. A sign of the political ties with Pakistan could be



President Park Geun-hye and Chinese President Xi Jinping.  
Photo: Korea.net

seen on 2 January when the Finance Ministry of Pakistan confirmed a loan of \$6.5 billion from China in order to contribute to the constructions of two nuclear power stations' building in Karachi. The energy supply has been a problematic question in Pakistan for a while. Therefore, the 15% increase in electricity production, which could be reached with the new stations, is crucial to foster the stability of the country.

China has also bolstered its bilateral ties with the Russian Federation. Chinese central government has announced President Xi Jinping's scheduled visit to Sochi Olympic Games. The President is going to make an official sojourn between the 6 and 8 February. A planned meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin is also part of the schedule. This high-level talk can be a good occasion for discussing international and regional issues as well as bilateral cooperation of the two countries. On 27 January, China and France celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic ties between the two countries. Xi Jinping and his French counterpart, President Francois Hollande sent congratulatory messages to each other's countries. Both of them stressed the extraordinary nature and importance of relations between France and China. On 22 January, the countries' Foreign Ministers, Wang Yi and Laurent Fabius also had a meeting where both of them highlighted their countries' commitment to develop bilateral ties further.

Besides the developing external relations of China, the country also had several conflicts in January. First of all, China has



received strong criticism from the United States, Philippines and Vietnam for fishing rules recently accepted by the Chinese government. According to the new regulations, every foreign fishing crew need to request a permit from Chinese authorities to work in the area of the South China Sea. There have recently been regular disagreements about the use of the area among interested nations, mostly due to energy resources, fisheries and significant shipping lines.

China's relations with Japan and India have also got an impetus after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was an honorary guest at Republic Day parade in Delhi, India on 26 January. This official visit was more than just a diplomatic gesture since India has strengthened its maritime and defence cooperation with Japan. For

instance, Japan has been invited to join common naval exercises alongside with the United States. China has commented these actions in a quite suspicious manner, and stressed that hopefully this defence cooperation between Japan and India would serve the region's peace and stability. It is worth to mention that China have territorial disputes with nearly all of its bordering countries, for instance, with Japan and India.

In addition to the above mentioned debated acts of the Chinese government, leaked information about a whole network of offshore companies definitely have not increased the international reputation of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. A total of 22,000 offshore clients have been linked to the close relatives of the party's members. According to the report



published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists in January, almost every sector of the economy is involved in the scandal and the estimated worth of the relocated assets are between \$1 trillion and \$4 trillion. The lack of transparency and the extent of corruption in the highest ruling circles can make it difficult to investigate these cases, and especially to impeach all of the involved people.

The picture of China's foreign affairs is even more complex if we take into consideration its economic ties in the region and around the globe. On one hand, China is undoubtedly on its way to become one of the world's biggest economic powers. There are more and more Chinese companies which have gained leading position in their field, such as Lenovo, Pearl River Piano and Haier. It is common in these striving companies that firstly they

had collected enough know-how from their Western partners before they started successful global expansion. China's image as a producer of cheap and low-quality goods is gradually fading away.

On the other hand, the economic stability in Asia and the Pacific region is one of the main priorities of China. As regards the safeguarding of this stability the United States also has a crucial role. One of the most determining questions of China's future economic ties within the Asia Pacific trade is about the evolution of two competing initiatives, namely the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. It is still not unequivocal which agreement is going to be the dominant one. Nevertheless, it is out of question that these will have great significance for China's economic possibilities or on the contrary, for its restrictions.

### **Hong Kong imposed diplomatic sanctions on the Philippines**

On 29 January, Hong Kong's Special Administrative Region government announced sanctions, which will come into force on 5 February, against the Republic of Philippines. Hong Kong will suspend the visa-free treatment for Philippine owners of diplomatic and official passport. The reason of this sanction is that the Philippine government has not apologized formally for a tragic event happened in last August, when a Philippine dismissed police officer hijacked a tourist bus in Manila and eight tourists from Hong Kong were killed during the shocking tragedy. Philippine President stated that collective apology for individuals' mistakes would be against his country's culture.



## Shinawatras still in power in Thailand

**The Thai government** imposed a 60-day state of emergency in Bangkok as the protest that has been going on for months do not seem to come to an end. The decree gives several rights to the state: it can censor the media, ban public gatherings and detain suspects without charge. It also gives extra power to the authorities to handle the situation but as an official said they do not intend to implement violent steps.

The demonstrations started in November 2013 with the aim of ousting the current government before the snap elections on 2 February. The protestors claim that the Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra is just a puppet in her brother's, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's hands. Thaksin was ousted by another protest in 2006 and as many say, with the same family on power nothing has changed since then. The former prime minister has been abroad since the ouster and there is no sign of his willingness to return home as he would face a two-year prison sentence in Thailand. If protestors succeed, they want an unelected "People's Council" to come to power and reform the regime in a democratic way. This would come along with the elimination of the Shinawatra family from the country's political life. To achieve it, the demonstrators are planning to surround different political buildings to cut them off from supplies, but as they told, they have no intention to obstruct public transport or airports. So far there have been many injured, most of them in an attack in

the middle of January, when two explosions interrupted an anti-government demonstration. That day there were 12,000 people on the streets, that is only a little part of the mass of 170,000 protesters on previous Monday.

From the government's side there are about 20,000 militants to defend the city. The biggest part of Bangkok has been unaffected yet, but there are constant atrocities in the demonstrators' centres – clashes with the police, burnt cars, and so on. There is an international fear towards the political and social crisis in Thailand that can affect the whole region. Many human rights organisations, the United States, and even the United Nations asked for peaceful methods from both sides and called for avoiding the violence and for the respect of basic human rights.

The situation does not seem to get better as there is no nationwide consensus in Thailand concerning the best leadership. While a huge mass is on the streets protesting for change in bigger cities, in the rural North and Northeast of Thailand there are still supporters of Thaksin. They wear red shirts, expressing that they do not want the Shinawatra family to disappear from the Thai political life. The handling method of the demonstrations is a central question in Thailand as there have been many violent incidents in the last few years. In 2008, the whole public transport was closed and in 2010 the protests resulted in the death of 90 people.



## Second summit of CELAC begins in Havana

**The second summit** of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC – Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños) took place on 25–29 January, 2014 in Havana, Cuba with the participation of 33 countries. As it was the first summit since the CELAC's great advocate, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez had died in 2013, the session started with a one-minute silence to remember him. The keynote speech has been delivered by leader of the host nation, Raúl Castro Cuban President who has emphasized that the forum "is the legitimate representative of the interests of Latin America and the Caribbean". Of course, this opinion has sense in the light of the fact that originally the CELAC was created as an alternative to the Washington-based Organisation of American States (OAS) which was accused of serving US interests rather than Latin-American.

The main topics in focus have been mostly social problems of the continent such as poverty inequality and hunger. According to a report published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 28,2 per cent of the region's inhabitants live in poverty and about 11,5 per cent in extreme poverty. Castro has admitted in his speech that although some progress has been made to

improve living conditions during the last five years, development has been slow, unstable and fragmented. He has also talked about the risk that global climate change poses to the region, especially to



*CELAC Summit in January 2013. Photo: State Chancellery from Riga*

the Caribbean islands. As regards political issues, he has expressed solidarity for Argentina's claim to the British-controlled Falkland Islands and for Ecuador in its legal dispute with a US oil company, Chevron. Other heads of state, such as Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has urged Puerto Rico's independence from the United States. Naturally, criticism of the US could not have been missed out, thus Castro condemned the 52-year-old American economic embargo on his country as well as US surveillance targeting communications of several foreign heads of state and thousands of individuals. Although the United States and Canada are not



present at the organisation's meetings – since they are not member states –, José Miguel Insulza, chief of the OAS and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon took part in the meeting and have drawn attention to the issue of human rights in Cuba.

The result of the summit was a “zone of peace” accord by which signers reject the use of arms and engage themselves to behave as respectful neighbours in regional conflict resolution. Another declaration accepted has also emphasized that signing nations of the hemisphere are committed to non-intervention in each other's internal affairs as well as to respect the right of every state to choose its political, social, economic and cultural system. In connection to this topic,

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has expressed his country's gratitude for participant's support in the FARC peace process. “And speaking of peace, I want to thank in a very special way the support of all of you to the peace process that we have been moving forward in Colombia, [and] to thank Cuba because Cuba is helping us by serving as host for this process. [...] There remains a difficult path to follow but if you ask me today if I am more optimistic than I was when we spoke about this topic in the last CELAC summit a year ago, I would say yes, I am more optimistic.”

At the end of the forum, Cuba's has passed the CELAC presidency to the next country in the rotation, Costa Rica.

#### **FARC peace talks continue in Havana**

Colombian government and the country's oldest rebel group the FARC have continued with the 20<sup>th</sup> round of peace talks in Havana, Cuba. This time, negotiations have focused on the cultivation of illicit narcotics which is the third programme part of the six-point agenda and probably the hardest to discuss. Although on the first two topics – the agrarian reform and the FARC's political participation – partial agreements have been already reached, consultations on the drug issue can seriously jeopardise further progression of the negotiations. According to the FARC's released proposal, the organisation would put an end to the government's aggressive eradication of coca, poppy and marijuana fields. In any case, tensions are still high between the two parties which situation was demonstrated at the CELAC Summit as well, when Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos neglected an opportunity to meet with the FARC negotiating team.

#### **New round of Cuba-US negotiations on migration**

The US State Department delegation has had a “very constructive” meeting in Havana with their Cuban counterparts on migration issues as well as on cooperation on aviation security and search and rescue. “Despite our historically difficult relationship, over the course of the past year and a half we have been able to speak to each other in a respectful and thoughtful manner” – said Edward Alex Lee, acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs at a news conference. According to the Cuban Foreign Ministry's official statement, the meeting “took place in a respectful environment”, although US delegation has called again for the release of jailed American government subcontractor, Alan Gross.





## ■ News in Brief

# Domestic affairs affecting international relations

### **Israeli ex-PM Ariel Sharon dies, aged 85**

■ After suffering two strokes in December 2005 and January 2006 and then spending seven years in a coma, Israel's ex-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon died of heart failure on 11th January, 2014. Sharon had been in a persistent vegetative state since his second stroke, and his doctors said he went through ups and downs during the period of the coma. His funeral, which was held in accordance with Jewish customs, took place only two days after his death – he was buried beside his wife at his family's ranch. Israeli and Western leaders mourned Sharon, highlighting his exceptional leadership skills and speaking of him as one of the most significant individuals in Israel's history. In the meantime, sweets were distributed to the people on the streets of Gaza, as Palestinians, the majority of whom described Sharon as a tyrant and a criminal, celebrated the news.

### **Tunisia will have a new constitution**

■ Tunisia approved a new, democratic constitution only three years after the revolution that ousted Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. The preparations lasted for two years and the final document was approved with 200 votes out of 216. This shows the broad consensus around it and the success of the negotiations between different parties. Contrary to other constitution in the region it is not based on Islam, adapting the principle of a secular state.

### **Huge march for ETA prisoners in Bilbao**

■ Tens of thousands of people have protested in the streets of Bilbao after a rally in support of jailed ETA members had been banned by a court decision in Madrid. The movement called “march for human rights, understanding and peace” was advocated by Basque nationalist parties, the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco) and the Bildu and initially was organised to call for inmates to be moved to prisons closer to their homes. Although last year the Supreme Court of Spain ordered the release of several ETA prisoners – because of a ruling accepted by the European Court of Human Rights – about 600 captives are still in jail. However – as many of them have been convicted for murder – victims of ETA violence consider the rally a mockery of their suffering. The organisation declared permanent ceasefire and cessation of armed activity in 2011.



### **Fight continuing in the Philippines**

■ Australian Immigration Minister Scott Morrison admitted during a press conference in Canberra that at least one Australian vessel has breached Indonesia's sovereignty by entering Indonesian territorial waters on several occasions. Morrison, according to whom the incidents merely were operational failures, said that his government has informed Indonesia about the matter and apologised. The breach, which is against Australia's own immigrant-friendly policy, had the goal of deterring asylum seeker boats approaching Australia from Indonesia.

### **Rape is still a tool of war in Myanmar**

■ According to the Women's League of Burma there have been roughly 100 rapes committed by the Burma military since 2010. This number includes several gang rapes, systematic crimes and even the abuses of little girls. According to the government it cannot be connected to the military as these are individual acts. But the women's rights group says that it has systematic characteristics and is rather used as a tool of war by threatening different ethnic groups.

### **Syrian civil war spills over in Lebanon**

■ On the 2nd day of the new year, a car bomb, supposedly activated by a suicide bomber, killed at least five people and hurt about 60 more in a densely populated district of Beirut, Lebanon. Three days later, one man was shot dead by a sniper rifle and six others were wounded in Tripoli during armed clashes between the pro- and anti-government supporters of the Syrian civil war. Over the past year, the decades-long tension between the Sunni and Alawite population in Lebanon has become more and more vivid. Al-Qaeda-linked sources said that the attacks would continue in Lebanese territory until Iranian and Hezbollah militants stopped aiding the Syrian government forces.

### **High participation rate on second day of Egyptian constitution vote, despite violence**

■ Still eager to express their political opinion after a sporadic day of violence, Egyptians swarmed the booths on the second day of a key referendum on the new Egyptian constitution. The vote is to gain support for the military-backed agenda toward new elections for a president. The charter is expected to win high approval, as almost all interviewed voters said they agreed that the country needs a new constitution. "This constitution is a nail in the coffin of the Muslim Brotherhood", said Badiea Mansour, who, amongst other voters, expressed his total unacceptance and lack of support towards former Islamist President Mohammed Morsi who was removed from power back in July 2013.



## ■ News in Brief

# Bilateral relations

### **Turkey and Libya for further cooperation**

■ Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan are planning to build up better cooperation in the fields of energy and military. Currently there is a 3.5 billion trade yearly between the two countries but they do not find this number satisfactory. In the future Libya will increase the amount of oil it provides to Turkey while Turkey can start oil exploration in Libya. Istanbul will also give military equipment such as helicopters, technological knowledge and help in training the new staff.

### **Russia-Hungary nuclear pact was signed**

■ According to a new pact between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán Russia is going to build two new units at Hungary's already existing Paks nuclear plant. Apart from the construction a large loan will be provided and Moscow will help in supplying and in the training of the new staff. According to Sergei Kiriyenko, the head of Russia's state nuclear corporation Rosatom, the new deal can boost the Hungarian economy, create new workplaces and give energetic independence to the country.

### **Australian boats admittedly breach Indonesian waters**

■ Australian Immigration Minister Scott Morrison admitted during a press conference in Canberra that at least one Australian vessel has breached Indonesia's sovereignty by entering Indonesian territorial waters on several occasions. Morrison, according to whom the incidents merely were operational failures, said that his government has informed Indonesia about the matter and apologised. The breach, which is against Australia's own immigrant-friendly policy, had the goal of deterring asylum seeker boats approaching Australia from Indonesia.

### **Kenya and Ghana will cooperate in new fields**

■ Amina Mohamed, Kenya's Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary and her Ghanaian counterpart, Hanna Serwaah Tetteh signed a new cooperation pact that is supposed to boost the economy of both countries. The deal covers the collaboration on the fields of energy, natural resources, investment, agriculture, but also applies to politics, jurisdiction and foreign affairs in the future. To realise all these plans, a special commission of ministers was created that will work with the assistance of experts of every concerned area. As political leaders hope, this will help to improve living standards in both countries.



### **India regulates labour conditions with Saudi Arabia**

■ India signed a labour pact with Saudi Arabia, regulating the working conditions of Indian workers in the Gulf country. Inter alia it defines minimum wages, working hours, paid holidays and ensures an assistance for employees, even though it applies only to domestic workers. The pact will be monitored by a special committee. According to Indian officials, the new deal is a sign of good relations between the two countries. In the future it can make possible similar pacts with other Middle Eastern states and also the extension of competences of cooperation.

### **US-India meeting cancelled over current events**

■ The USA and India postponed their meeting – concerning energy issues – and have not announced a new date yet. The decision is probably linked to a recent event in December 2013 when Devyani Khobragade Indian diplomat was arrested in New York with the charges of visa fraud and underpayment of her maid. At the same time US officials claim that the two events are not linked and they are trying to find an appropriate date as the energy issue is a main priority for both countries.

### **Oval Office talks: Obama-Rajoy meeting**

■ US President Barack Obama and Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy met on 13 January, 2014 at the White House. The two main topics on the agenda were the situation of global economy and foreign policy, diplomacy in particular with regard to Syria, Libya and Iran. As regard economic questions, Obama has congratulated Rajoy of handling the eurozone crisis so well. As he said: “The economy had undergone some wrenching difficulties that existed throughout Europe and the eurozone, and I congratulated the prime minister on the progress that has been made in stabilizing the economy, moving into growth, reducing the deficit, and being able to return to the financial markets in a way that reflects sound leadership.” Although American-Spanish foreign relations have gone through some difficulties in the past couple of years – the last memorable momentum was the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero’s government – currently bilateral relations are close and cordial.



## ■ News in Brief

# International relations

### **Palestinian ambassador killed by blast in Prague**

■ Jamal al-Jamal, Palestine's ambassador to the Czech Republic died in a hospital after a bomb went off when he opened a long-unused safe at his home. "The safe was sitting neglected in one of the areas of the old embassy. No-one had touched it for 20 to 25 years", Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki told Associated Press after what the police reported to be an unfortunate accident. The Palestinian foreign office promised to send a delegation to Prague in order to aid the local forces during the investigation.

### **Shinzo Abe explaining his visit to the shrine**

■ Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called Japan's neighbours- especially Korea and China- to have a discussion over last month's event, when he visited the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. This shrine is regarded by this whole region a symbol of Japan's brutal military past as we can find there the memorial of 14 war criminals. Shinzo Abe hopes that with appropriate talks these countries can come over their territorial and historical disputes and can create a better security in the region.

### **Serbia moving towards Europe**

■ On 21 January Serbia officially started the membership talks with the European Union. The process will probably take several years but this ceremony is still a milestone in the history of the country. If everything goes as planned, the talks will end in 2020. To achieve this, Serbia promised to have better relations with Kosovo – even though has not made a clear point on the recognition of independence yet. EU officials still consider it a great gesture and are positive about the cooperation.

### **Erdogan will respect the rule of law**

■ Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had a visit with major EU officials in Brussels after several recent events had aroused the attention of the European Union. Only a few months after the Gezi protests the Turkish Government wants to introduce a new rule that makes possible for authorities to have greater power in the appointment of judges and prosecutors. On his visit, Erdoğan told the officials that he will respect the rule of law, the separation of powers and juridical independence. Both Barosso and Herman van Rompuy assured that Turkey is not left alone, the events are constantly followed by the European Union.



### **Still no change in the Western Sahara conflict**

■ While situation in Western Sahara continues to remain one of the biggest frozen conflicts in Africa, Christopher Ross the United Nations' special envoy has made a Maghreb tour in January to try once again to achieve some progress as regards a peaceful resolution. The so-called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) – which is a partially recognised state claiming sovereignty over the entire territory of Western Sahara – was proclaimed by the Polisario Front in 1976. Its government controls about 20–25% of the territory it claims, while the rest of the disputed area is governed by Morocco. The SADR is recognised by only about 80 states in the world. Recently, in January 2014 Paraguay has withdrawn its recognition of the entity, however a Danish party for example, called Red-Green Alliance has put forward a bill that would see Denmark recognise the African state.

### **NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden nominated for Nobel Prize**

■ The Former NSA contractor Edward Snowden has been nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize by two Norwegian politicians, who claim that the whistleblower's actions provided access to a "more stable and peaceful world order." With Snowden being a nominee, the five-member Nobel committee is obliged to consider him for the prestigious award. The committee never confirms nominations, but nominators occasionally, like in Snowden's case, reveal their submissions. The peace prize is awarded on 10th December in the Oslo City Hall each year.

### **Russia violated a 27-year-old treaty?**

■ The USA claims that Russia violated a 1987 treaty by testing a ground-launched cruise missile as under this agreement all medium-range missiles are banned in both countries. The accusation is highly important and serious as this treaty was a milestone in the Cold War era between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. If the charges get proved it can mean a turning point in US-Russia relations after the current events such as the Snowden-case, the Syria-conflict or the Ukrainian demonstrations.





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