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About CRP News & Background

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Muslim students outnumbering Catholics in Viennese schools

The Vienna Board of Education recently carried out a survey that proved that Muslim students are outnumbering Roman Catholic students at middle and secondary schools. The statistics showed that the number of Muslim students is 10,734; meanwhile the number of Roman Catholic students is only 8,632. Elementary schools were also examined. Although, Muslims are not outnumbering Catholics in Viennese elementary schools, the numbers show that this may happen in the close future. In gymnasiums (schools focusing on academic learning instead of vocational skills) Muslims are still the minority. At the moment, Austria is also planning to introduce new textbooks that would be funded from taxes. These textbooks would be published in order to formally teach students about the Islam world. This is not without an example as textbooks have already been printed before. However, these books were anti-Western and taught that Islam is the only true religion. The author was Yusuf al-Qaradawi, spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. The new books, according to the Islamic Religious Authority of Austria (IGGiÖ) are not aiming at proselytizing. President of the IGGiÖ,



*Islamic Center Vienna and Vienna International Center.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

Fuat Sanac, also called for the enactment of a new Islam Law. The history of the law dates back to 1912 when Austria adopted it in order to help Muslim soldiers from Bosnia and Herzegovina integrate into the Austro-Hungarian army. Sanac said that the new law would secure more rights and better protection to Muslim people. Sebastian Kurz, Minister for Integration and Foreign Affairs, would support the new law. He says that it would more clearly state the rights and the responsibilities of Muslim people. The law would state that Islam classes could not deny the Austrian



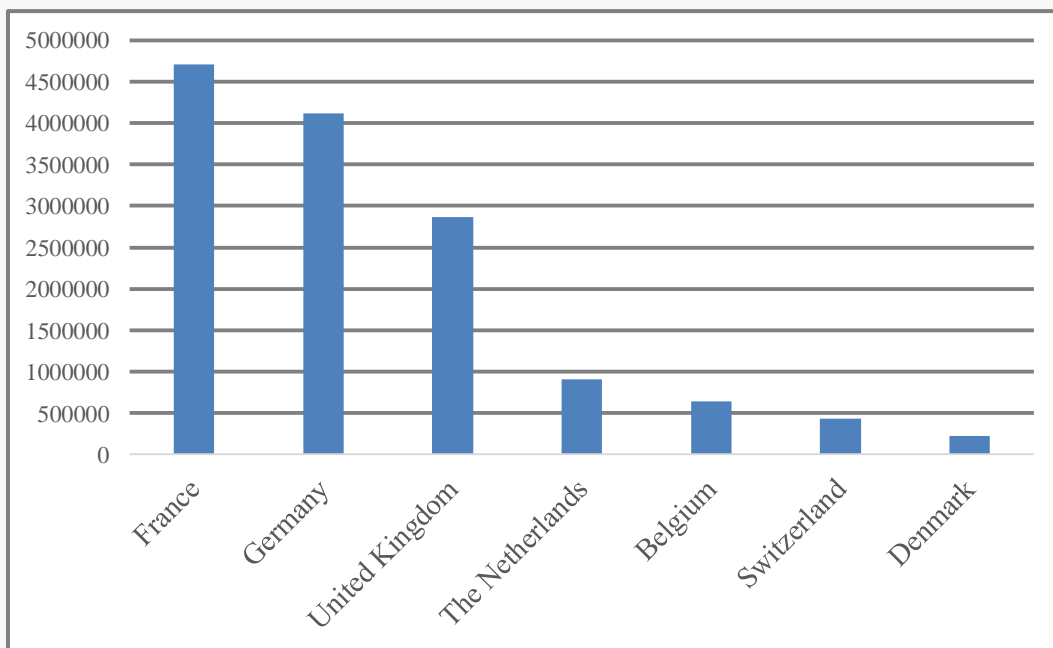
educational system. Muslim groups would also be expected to accept the priority of Austrian law over the Sharia law. Financial support would also be limited, which means that funds coming from abroad (eg. Saudi Arabia) would be put under scrutiny.

Muslim immigrants in Europe

The first Muslim immigrants arrived to Western Europe during the 1940s. Muslim emigration to France was growing during the Algerian War of Independence, between 1954 and 1962. The 1960s and 1970s saw the next wave of Muslim immigration when guest workers were welcomed in West Germany and Switzerland. Between 2001 and 2009 the Muslim population in the United Kingdom increased almost 10 times faster than the rest of the population. By 2010, the Muslim

population reached 19 million in the European Union, which is 3.5% of the whole population. This number amounts to 44 million (6%) examining the whole European continent, excluding only Turkey. The biggest group of Muslims lives in Russia but Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are also Muslim-majority regions.

Most Muslims arrived to Austria during the 1960s mainly from Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina. Since then, Vienna has the largest concentration of Muslim communities. The westernmost part of the country has the highest share of Muslim groups. According to a survey, the Muslim population now exceeds 500.000 in Austria. This number is 6% of the total population. In the 1990s, the number of Muslim citizens was only 150.000 (2%). This number is estimated to reach 800.000 in 2030, which makes up 9.5% of the population.



Number of Muslims in Western European countries. Graph: Eszter Balogh



Crimea voted to enter into the Russian Federation

After the Yes for Russia from the Crimean parliament, the government of Crimea set a referendum for the 16th of March. Obama ordered sanctions on the responsible ones for the military intervention against Ukraine.

The whole crisis began in November 2013 when ex-President Viktor Yanukovich, after a long process of dealing with the EU, turned the trade deal down, and accepted \$15 billion from Moscow. The action started the protests in the streets of the capital. Yanukovich was overthrown on the 22th of February but the protests did not stop.

Although Crimea has an ethnic Russian majority, the attack of the Russian forces was against the territory of a sovereign country, and was illegal. This rallied an emergency summit from the EU leaders to make Russia come round but only symbolic measures were decided. The EU also “voiced support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity”, but no major steps have been taken so far against Russia, only “warning of tougher steps”. The “executive order on sanctions” by Obama is two-sided: there is a framework for sanctions but also an option for dialogues. The Pentagon

announced a “large-scale air force exercise in Poland ... to reassure US allies in the region”; the US Navy said that a guided-missile destroyer was heading to the Black Sea for a long-planned training exercise. To make things worse, military observers from European Organisation for Security and Cooperation could not enter Crimea.

The attack on Ukraine has economic consequences, too. Russian stocks fell, rouble weakened, the Moody’s said that “the stand-off was negative for Russia’s sovereign creditworthiness”.

Obama banned travels to the United States, blocked certain assets, and declared – as many European Union



The Crimea in Ukraine. Map: Wikimedia Commons



leaders – that the referendum would be a violation against international law. However, Putin is not on that list which contains the name of those to be sanctioned.

It is said, that after joining Russia, Ukrainian state properties would be “nationalised”, rouble adopted, and Ukrainian troops treated as occupiers. And as such, they have to leave or surrender.

European Council President Herman Van Rompuy declared a three-stage plan as a resolution. The EU would also offer aid and trade benefits to Ukraine. However, in case of further actions from Russia against Ukraine, “grave consequences” are planned, but these are mostly economic ones. To reach an EU agreement, all members have to vote along the same line. The EU has frozen the assets of Yanukovich and 17 other officials, and the Commission is giving aid up to € 11 bn over the next years if it makes a deal with the IMF about

reforms. Major problem regarding the sanctions that France has a deal with Russia about warships, London and Germany has investments or invested into the country.

Lavrov said, the actions from the West were unhelpful.

Putin signed the Russia-Crimea treaty

Both Putin and the leaders of Crimea signed the bill which tends to put Crimea under the rule of the Russian Federation. Putin sees Crimea which has always been the part of Russia.

After the signing, Putin talked to the crowd at Red Square, declaring: “Crimea and Sevastopol are returning to ... their home shores, to their home port, to Russia!” He shouted: “Glory to Russia!” while the crowd shouted his name. Kiev declared that it does not accept the treaty,



*Ceremony signing the laws on admitting Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation.
Photo: Kremlin.ru*





Military base at Perevalne during the 2014 Crimean crisis. Photo: Anton Holoborodko

the “so-called independence or the so-called agreement on Crimea”, which seems to already have a victim: “after the signing, ... a Ukrainian serviceman had been killed in an attack on a base in Crimea”. According to the Defence Ministry, it happened in Simferopol. The United States called a crisis meeting with the G7 and the EU; Germany and France condemned the treaty; David Cameron emphasised that it is “completely unacceptable for Russia to use force to change borders on the basis of a sham referendum held at the barrel of a Russian gun”. The Prime Minister of Ukraine, Arseniy Yatsenyuk said that this crisis is now has turned into a military one.

Joe Biden, the Vice-President of the US, earlier said in Poland that “Russia’s involvement in Crimea was a brazen military incursion, and [the] annexation was nothing more than a land grab”.

It is now declared that 97% voted for the accession with Russia at the referendum. The vote was declared illegal by the EU and the US, too. Though, the sanctions against the country (such as travel bans and asset freezes; the UK even suspended bilateral military co-operations “not subject

to treaty obligations”) seem to be ineffectual. Of course, Putin believes that the referendum is legal, “more than convincing”, and “in the hearts and minds of people, Crimea has always been and remains an inseparable part of Russia”. The area was given to Ukraine in 1954, under Soviet rule. Putin criticised the leaders and those “behind the unrest” that these extremists brought the chaos on the area but “praised the courage, bearing and dignity of Crimeans”, and the Russians for their “patriotic feeling”. According to him, the West acts irresponsibly, and said that Russia does not want to have more territories, since “we do not need a divided Ukraine”. He saw that Russia is to face confrontation with others, mainly from the West but “we have to decide for ourselves, are we to protect our national interest or just carry on giving them away forever?” The bill, after the signing, have to be approved both by the constitutional court and by parliament.

Ukrainian troops leave Crimea after the resignation of the Defence Minister

Ukrainian marines exit Crimea without even one single shot from a gun. Pro-Kremlin soldiers have already took their place on ships and bases. G-7 leaders threaten to intensify sanctions.

The Defence Minister Igor Tenyukh had to suffer harsh criticisms for his “often-hesitant reaction” to the occupation. The same accusation was told to mainly all authorities who had anything to do with the occupation in the peninsula. Tenyukh



protected his own handling of the situation in parliament, saying that he was too indecisive, and the “troops were not given clear instructions”. Lawmakers refused the appointment of Col. Gen. Mikhail Kovalyov as replacement, although the parliament accepted the resignation of Tenyukh.

Kiev believes that the invasion in Crimea was illegal, troops were ordered away “for their safety” anyway. Approximately 4,300 servicemen and 2,200 family members had to leave the peninsula. With this, 2/3 of the military personnel have left so far, however, it is not clear how many joined the Russian army.

At The Hague, Obama said that the sanctions are against the energy, finance, arm sales and trade sectors of Russia, and other potential sectoral sanctions are under investigation. Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte said that “European countries support the US idea”, and that sanctions would hit Russia badly in the economy. He emphasised that no one wants people to be hurt.

According to Obama, Russia has the right to have troops alongside the border, but also highlights that a diplomatic solution is urged, and that “this is not a zero sum game”. He insisted Crimea to remain a part of Ukraine, and said that “we’re not recognizing what is happening in Crimea”, and opposed that “a referendum sloppily organized” could be valid or legal.

In the meantime, G-7 leaders declared their support for the new government of Ukraine, suspended Russia in G-8, and cancelled the summit in Sochi. The response from Russia was quite neutral: “The G-8 is an informal club. It has no

membership tickets, and it can’t purge anyone by definition” said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

While the G-7 really appreciated the decision of Russia “to allow observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe into Ukraine”, representatives of Ukraine were preparing a deal with the IMF on a USD 15-20 bn relief package.

Hard times for the Crimean Tatars

The men of Bakchysarai are taking turns to patrol the neighbourhoods after the sun sets. The precautions are needed because residents noticed that several black “X” had been cut into front gates.

Tatars are the indigenous, though minority Muslim community on the peninsula. They have been constantly troubled since the Russians gained control over the territory from the Ottoman Empire. Later in 1944, Stalin deported the entire population with force in only one night: more than 200,000 people were sent to Siberia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Half of them were killed on the way. Under Gorbachev’s regime, remaining Tatars were allowed to return home but were still treated differently: it was hard for them to get jobs, were stared at in schools. Since Tatars are hospitable people, they “set the table for everyone”, and now they live in peace.

Such horrible events lives in the histories, memories, traditions of the people so much that even those remember them clearly who did not live them through: children and grandchildren of the victims. For them,



the “X” on the gate mean almost exactly the same horror as to their parents or grandparents.

The Ukrainian army base in the city of Bakhchysarai is under constant attack. Soldiers are reported not wearing insignia on their uniforms, but now it is obvious that Russian troops fire on Ukrainian soldiers, trying to make them surrender. Putin says that the soldiers are stationed in the area to protect the ethnic Russian population. Locals – who call the soldiers “Green Men” – are unsure about this question. A local woman said that they do not understand why they need protection since all nations and groups have lived in peace so far. Locals are frightened that the soldiers will shoot: Putin and also unknown Russian mothers are asked to take away the soldiers and sons from the peninsula.

The mayor of the city, Zamir Khaibulayev says that the referendum is illegal since “you cannot hold referendums locally”. The votes and other arrangements are not proper. Refat Chubarov, the leader of the Tatar community declared a boycott against the referendum, and asked the UN to send peacekeepers to “de-escalate the military conflict”. The new pro-Russian Prime Minister of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov declared that there will be no discriminations at all in the area, but he already talks about Russian law once the region is under Russian rule. The Tatars are very against the idea of a divided Ukraine: “All the Crimean Tatars ... consider the Crimean peninsula to be a region of Ukraine”. When some women were asked about leaving, they said they will not leave

unless they would be deported to Siberia. They laughed about the idea for a second then felt silent.

Russia might fall out from G-8

After the Foreign Minister of France declared that Russia is suspended from G-8 because of the situation in Ukraine, Russia stated that Crimea now belongs to the Federation.

Putin emphasised that he will use "all means" to protect Russian-speaker people in eastern Ukraine, and to demonstrate this, forces were built up alongside the border. The fear of an invasion appeared.

The scheduled G-8 Sochi meeting in June was also suspended by the other 7 members.



*Ten leaders on the G8 Summit in 2013.
Photo: White House*

On the 15th of March, Russia vetoed the resolution from the West at the UN Security Council emergency vote on the Ukrainian crisis. Surprisingly, China refrained from voting, isolating Russia even more.



The invasion of Crimea is the biggest map-redrawing since Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.

Another region would happily join Russia

The Pro-Russian part of Moldova asked the Russian parliament to create a law which allows them to join the Federation.

The breakaway region of Moldova has always been a problematic point in the life of the country. It split from the country in the 1991–1992 war when the USSR was struggling with its own collapse. Russian loyalists dominate the area who are supported from Moscow. Now politicians and activists are “pleading” to join Putin’s rule. No doubt, the request comes as a respond to the ongoing situation in Crimea. Earlier in 2006, a referendum – unrecognised by Moldova and by the international community, too – was held to

demand independence. The President of Moldova, Nicolae Timofti said that the positioning of the Trans-Dniester region towards Russia “would be a step in the wrong direction”. Naturally, the leaders of the “rebel region” believe differently. The spokeswoman of the Trans-Dniester parliament Irina Kubanskikh said that examinations are in progress about the legislation extended to Trans-Dniester, granting Russian citizenship, and “admitting new subjects into Russia”. Even a legislation was drafted by the pro-Russian party, “A Just Russia”, to make the accession easier. The progress has slowed down but only to give Crimea full attention with its accession. On the other side of the story, Moldova plans to sign an association agreement with the European Union which almost definitely will deteriorate the situation inside Moldova. At least, this is exactly what has happened in neighbouring Ukraine.

Japan puts forward sanctions against Moscow

Japan – as many other countries – also condemned Russia about Ukraine, and also threatened the country with sanctions in case of an escalating situation.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a parliamentary committee that the “(Russian action) violates Ukraine’s unity, sovereignty and the integrity of its territory, and we condemn it”.

The Foreign Ministry of the island country said that negotiations with Russia on easier visa requirements are suspended, and no talks on a new investment accord is expectable in the future. Additional actions are planned such as restricting visas and freezing assets.

US President Barack Obama called a G-7 summit in The Hague “to discuss escalating showdown with Russia”. On the other hand, Japanese Trade Minister Toshimitsu Motegi was “unable to attend” a Russian investment forum in Tokyo on account of “other duties” in parliament.



Venice voted to become an independent state

A grand amount of people, 89% of the residents of the city of Venice voted to split from Italy. Activists attend the rallies in Scotland to have a clearer view on options. The economic differences in Italy between the northern and the southern part is a commonly known fact. The wealthier north has always had problems with the “lazy south”. Wealthier residents in Venice also oppose high taxes which go to the poorer southern areas. Venice receives EUR 21 bn less in grants than the amount it gives in taxes every year – the latter is EUR 71 bn. However, the referendum was unofficial as the Rome government did not recognise it, but shows interesting results all the same. 73% of the eligible voters took part in it which means 2.36 million people. Later, a committee of 10 declared the independence of Venice from Italy. The



Flag of Most Serene Republic of Venice. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

“referendum” was inspired by the Scottish ambitions about leaving the United Kingdom behind. The new “Repubblica Veneta” is supposed to include the 5 million inhabitants of the Veneto region, and is planned to be extended to parts of Lombardy, Trentino and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The activists work together with the SNP, travelling to Scotland with their Catalanian and Basque counterparts to analyse the situations. A campaigner, Paolo Bernardini, who is a professor of European history at the University of Insubria in Como, northern Italy said that this is the “high time” for Venice. He emphasized that history never repeats itself but it seems that many small nations are now on the road to reach independence, and that Venetians realised now that they are worthy of self-rule. Luca Zaia, the president of the Veneto region of the separatist Northern League party highlighted that 85,000 jobs had been lost in the crisis, and that the people are “hungry”: “the will for secession is growing ever stronger. We are only at the Big Bang of the movement – but revolutions are born of hunger and we are now hungry. Venice can now escape.” Venice has only been the part of the united Italy for 150 years. Before that, the “1000 year-old democratic Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia was quashed by Napoleon and was subsumed into Italy in 1886”.



Demonstrations in Erdoğan's Turkey



Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Photo: World Economic Forum

Protest has been going on in Turkey since May 28, 2013. The Gezi Park protests started when the government decided to replace the Taksim Gezi Park with the Taksim Military Barracks that were destroyed in 1940. The new building would allegedly include a shopping mall. The first protesters were only environmentalists who were trying to save the park. However, the protests developed into riots after police attacked a group by tear gas and water cannons. Since then, the anti-government demonstrations spread all over the country, demanding Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to resign.

On 11 March 2014 a boy of 15-year-old died due to injuries received by a gas

grenade last year. The boy was on his way to buy bread when he got caught in a fight and a gas grenade shot by a policeman hit his head. After 300 days of coma the boy died on March 11. A large number of people took part in the funeral ceremony of the boy, who became symbol of the Gezi Park protests. After the funeral, around 50,000 people were heading to the Taksim Square when police attacked the crowd with tear gas and water cannon. The demonstrators answered by throwing rocks at policemen. The events caused the death of two people. A 22-year-old boy died when he got involved in a fight between several young men and a group of demonstrators. The other victim was a policeman who got a heart attack probably caused by the effects of tear gas. Protests have been held both in Ankara and Istanbul in the last weeks. Demonstrators are highly criticizing Erdoğan's presidency partly due to the recently enacted strict Internet laws. Erdoğan is also attacked because he provided greater authority to the government over the appointment of prosecutors and judges. The greatest concern about Erdoğan's presidency is the way he handled the corruption scandal



that broke out last December. Four members of Erdoğan's party, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), have been accused of corruption and bribery. The four ministers supposedly gained more than \$100 million in bribes. They defended themselves by claiming that they had fallen victim to a defamatory campaign and that the accusations are baseless. Erdoğan has also said that the corruption inquiry is a part of a conspiracy that is aiming to overthrow him. He accused Fethullah Gülen of plotting against him. Gülen is an Islamic preacher who now lives in exile in Pennsylvania.

On 19 March the Parliament was to discuss the proceedings of the corruption investigations. The main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP), demanded the discussion. Deputy Parliament Speaker Meral Akşener should have presided over the session. The speaker is chosen from a list that rotates monthly, but Parliament Speaker Cemil Çiçek used his power to change the list and finally Deputy Parliament Speaker Sadik Yakut presided over the assembly. Several ministers criticized Çiçek's act and the fact that some documents were not read fully in Parliament. Before the parliamentary discussions, the four ministers had petitioned the Parliament Speaker's Office and demanded the formation of a commission that would carry out the corruption inquiry.

Demonstrators were also outraged by the decision to ban two important social media sites; first Twitter and then YouTube were shut down. On both sites, voice recordings

were published. On one of the voice recordings Erdoğan is discussing a possible intervention in Syria, while another recording implicates that Erdoğan – and several members of his family – have committed corruption. After Twitter became a battleground between the demonstrators and pro-government forces, Erdoğan decided to shut down the site. Erdoğan said that the main reason why Twitter was blocked is that the site ignored several court rulings concerning social media. After threatening that Facebook and YouTube would also be banned in the country, the latter one was also blocked by the Telecommunications Directorate (TİB). The TİB has recently inflicted 36 suspension penalties in the social media. The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) has also nullified the broadcasting licence of the Kanaltürk TV station. The station was broadcasting nationwide, however after the court order, it is allowed to broadcast only in the Marmara region. On his campaign tour, Erdoğan said that he does not care about the international opinion. The sites will be blocked until they meet the requirements of the law.



Taksim Square - Gezi Park Protests, Istanbul. Photo: Alan Hilditch [Flickr]



The Pope travels to the Holy Land

The Vatican confirmed that Pope Francis travels to Israel, Palestine and Jordan between the 24th and 26th of May. The historical event takes place 50 years after Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras met in Jerusalem which was the first visit by a pope to the country. John Paul II visited Israel in 2000 and Benedict XVI in 2009.

The official schedule says that the Pope will be welcomed by King Abdullah and Queen Rania, and later he will celebrate a mass. He will visit the place where Jesus was baptized on the Jordan River, will meet refugees and young disabled people.

On the second day, he goes by helicopter to Bethlehem where the Palestinian President Abu Mazen will welcome him. The Pope also celebrates a mass there, and will have lunch with Palestinian families. After a private visit to the grotto of the Nativity, he meets children from refugee camps. On the same day, he leaves to Jerusalem where private talks will be held with the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. Later in the evening, an ecumenical meeting is planned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of talks between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras. On the third day, he will



Pope Francis at Varginha. Photo: Agência Brasil

meet the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, two great rabbis of Israel and also the Israeli President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, visit Temple Mount and the Western wall. He meets priests, nuns and seminarians at the Gethsemane church and celebrates a mass there, too. The logo of the visit “depicts the embrace of Sts. Peter and Andrew, patrons of the Catholic Churches” the motto is: “So that they may be one”. The visit is planned to emphasise “unity, first and foremost among Christians, Muslims and Jews”. Not surprisingly, Pope Francis had asked for a minimum level of “pomp and circumstance”. Earlier, reports had started to circulate that the Pope will



cancel the trip after all. Rumours appeared because of the strike of the workers of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. There is though a Plan B. When Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had had similar problems with the Foreign Ministry workers, he only had visited Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The workers rejected improved working conditions, and do not want to provide

several services, after 7 months of mediating due to demands of higher salaries. As a result, many foreign trips had to be cancelled already. If the strikes are not over in two months, the Pope's visit has to be cancelled as well.

Hopes are high that Palestinian Christians will be able to enter from Gaza to Israel and from northern Israel to Bethlehem.

“the visit is planned to emphasise unity, first and foremost among Christians, Muslims and Jews”



Farewell to Pope Francis in the Galeão Air Force Base. Photo: Agência Brasil



Diplomatic tensions have arisen between Iraq and the Gulf States



Persian Gulf States. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The Middle East has hardly ever been a peaceful place on Earth. There is no difference nowadays either, when another tension is forming.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar had been accused by the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki of funding Sunni Muslim terrorist groups in Iraq. The interview was aired on France24. After this statement, the Gulf States, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates – the federation of seven emirates – condemned the Prime Minister: the UAE summoned the ambassador “in order to

give a memorandum showing their distress at [the] statement...”, and Bahrain declared that it is “irresponsible”. The Prime Minister believes that the countries want to destabilise Iraq through support of insurgent groups, and with “financial assistance”. Qatar has not made any declarations yet. After summoning the ambassador because of the memorandum, the UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash said that “Maliki’s statements were completely untrue and not based on any accurate assessment of the situation in the region with regards to terrorism” since Saudi Arabia has been working hard against it. Iraq also declared to do the same in Sunni-dominated regions like Fallujah and Anbar.

The relations between the countries nowadays are “chilly” due to the Shia-sympathetic politics Iraq follows, and its close relations with Shi’ite Iran. According to AlMonitor, on the 25th of February, the Foreign Minister of Iraq and Iran, Hoshyar Zebari and Mohammad Javad Zarif, respectively, announced the implementation of the 1975 Algiers Agreement about land and river borders regulations. This agreement is a huge step towards consolidation. Zarif said that “Iran



and Iraq have historic and solid ties that are based on religious, political, geographical and cultural commonalities ... Today, the friendly and brotherly people of Iraq and Iran have two governments that also wish to have friendly and brotherly relations". No one ever believed that these two countries will be able to cooperate the way they do recently: close political, cultural and economic ties represent their relations.



Prime Minister of Iraq Nuri al-Maliki. Photo: U.S. Air Force

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE recall ambassadors in protest

The ambassadors were recalled from Doha, Qatar, after the interference into their internal affairs by the country.

The three Gulf states made the decision and a statement after a "stormy" meeting of foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes six nations: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The countries contacted Qatar on all levels to have a unified policy, to ensure non-interference in any ways into internal affairs, to ask the country not to support "any party aiming to threaten security and stability of any GCC member". This latter means mainly the Muslim Brotherhood which is banned in most Gulf states. Critics accuse Al Jazeera, based in Doha, of "biased coverage in favour of the Muslim Brotherhood" whose several journalists are on trial in Egypt.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have long been antagonistic against the Brotherhood, "fearing that its brand of grass-roots activism and political Islam could undermine their authority". These states also greeted the overthrow of Mohammed Morsi in Egypt last July; on the other hand, Qatar supported Morsi, and felt the "influence in Cairo evaporate". Top UAE court sentenced a Qatari citizen, Mahmud al Jihad, to seven years in prison since he raised funds for a local group, Al Islah which is linked with the Brotherhood.

The three-party statement highlighted that last year the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani agreed during a mini-summit not to interfere but he failed to comply.



Egypt in turmoil

After the ousting of Morsi, the biggest internal conflict has started in the country. Now with the death sentence of all members of the Muslim Brotherhood and with Sisi's run-for-the-presidency, hell breaks loose.

The state of Egypt is not ideal. There is unending turmoil since 2011 when Hosni Mubarak was failed, and the worst internal conflict has begun when Morsi was toppled. Now 529 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were sentenced to death by court which act was called "a grotesque example of the shortcomings and selective nature of Egypt's justice system" by Amnesty International. They also highlighted that the decisions are unjust. According to Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director, this death sentence "surpasses most other countries' use of capital punishment in a year". The defendants received this verdict because of their "alleged role in violence after the Muslim Brotherhood president was ousted in [last] July". All accused are supporters of former President Mohamed Morsi who has to face such charges which can easily lead to death penalty.



Abdel Fatah Al Sisi. Photo: Secretary of Defense

The charges against the members include the killing of 2 policemen, riots and membership in a terrorist organization – as the Muslim Brotherhood now is such an organization, declared by the Egyptian authorities.

The 529 defendants are a part of a much larger group of people: 1,200 Brotherhood supporters are on trial but most of them "were judged in absentia". The spiritual leader, Mohamed Badie is also among them. There was an immediate uproar after the sentences. Hamza Zoubaa, the



spokesperson of the Freedom and Justice political party, tweeted that “with the sentencing to death of revolutionaries, the revolution has entered a new phase and the result will be both unexpected and unprecedented”. Even the Gamaa Islamiya, the extremist movement in Egypt pledged “new forms of opposition against the military coup”. Protests started after the death sentences in the Minya governorate, in the city of Samalout, and at the University of Minya. Brotherhood supporters

does not belong to the Brotherhood. Al-Jazeera journalists are also on trial, it is now their third hearing, in Cairo. 16 of them are Egyptians, 2 British, 1 Australian and 1 Dutch. The foreigners are accused with collaboration, and showing manipulative video footages to the rest of the world. Though, this trial was postponed since the defence lawyers declared that the accused are under tortured in the prison by the guards, and they should be removed. One of them even had to be hospitalised

“Amnesty International is aware that approximately 123 death sentences happened in 2011, 91 in 2012, and 109 in 2013”

had set fire to a school, and a university student was killed during the fight in Cairo. It seems that the court is really keen on punishing anyone in connection with Morsi in any ways but “ignore gross human rights violations by the security forces”: only one police officer is on trial. Amnesty International is aware that approximately 123 death sentences happened in 2011, 91 in 2012, and 109 in 2013. Never in the history of Egypt has happened such a case like this one in March, said Gamal Eid, the director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information who believes that the sentences will be modified. However, this will leave a mark on Egypt, its people, and their memories. He also noted that now even those question the justice system who

with arm and hand injuries. Meanwhile, general Abdel Fattah al-Sisi declared his candidacy for the presidential elections on TV. Sisi was the one who ousted Morsi, the first freely elected leader in Egypt. Sisi is expected to win really easily, and would be another man from the military who leads the country – this trend was only interrupted by Morsi’s one year leadership between 2012 and 2013.

Sisi is more than popular among his supporters. He is “the strong man” who will definitely stabilise the country. He is footaged on TV like the strong man, jogging with troops, for example, and vowed in military uniform to fight against the “terrorist threat”. However, he had to resign from his posts of Army Chief and



Minister of Defence to be able to run in the elections. In the eyes of the Islamists, he is no less than just the leader of a coup against the freely elected leader.

Hassan Nafaa, a political science professor at Cairo University said that “if [he] doesn’t have a real plan for reconciliation, he certainly will fail. But I don’t know if he will be able to do it”. Indeed, Sisi warned his followers that he cannot perform miracles in a country so deep into poverty. He “propose hard work and self-denial” in a country with weak economy and huge youth unemployment.

Sisi also cannot offer stability. The possibility of his presidency caused a drop in the Egyptian stock market since “the prospects for an economic recovery under his rule are bleak”.

He has no economic programme, only promise of “work, food, education, medical treatment and homes” to all Egyptians.

He has already silenced the opposition media as well, created a cult around himself, defamed opponents which assumes not fair elections. The only fair election was the previous one, and its winner is “being violently repressed”. As the election comes closer, Sisi’s only contestant is the third place winner of the 2012 elections, leftist politician Hamdeen Sabahi. As a response to the elections, the US declared that they do not support individual candidates or parties in Egypt. Bernadette Meehan, the White House National Security spokeswoman said that “we urge the Egyptian authorities to ensure that the elections are free, fair, and transparent; that all candidates are able to campaign freely...; and that views of all the Egyptian people are fully represented”. Washington expressed its criticisms with the decision of the court, too. Secretary of State John Kerry said that he is “deeply,



*U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meets with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi in Cairo, Egypt on March 3, 2013.
Photo: U.S. Department of State*





Protesters march through Cairo holding up four-fingers, a hand sign in memory of last year's deadly crackdown on supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi, March 28, 2014.
Photo: Hamada Elrassam/VOA

deeply troubled by the sudden and unprecedented decision". He urgently emphasised "to reverse the ... ruling and ensure due process for the accused.

Anything less would dishonour the bravery of all who sacrificed their lives for democratic values". On 12 March he declared that in the upcoming days, he would decide about the American aids and funds going to Egypt.

US President Barack Obama wants stability in Egypt but he believes that this can only be granted "through ... its commitment to transition to free and fair elections and democratic governance". Though, these seem to be just empty words since, in theory, "that put him at odds with Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, who in the name of stability has put billions behind the regime of ... Sisi since it staged a coup against the democratically elected government of Mohamed Morsi in July". In practice, the differences between countries do not seem

to be important since Sisi announced his candidacy. This step quite ensures that his presidency – if he will be the president – will be neither democratic nor stable.

The Obama administration supported Sisi's "democratic" notions, though it now seems that it will not happen. Many in Washington do not really pay much attention whether Sisi's presidency would be democratic or not.

To overcome all problems, Egypt now really would need peace. The tourism industry is critical in the life of the country which is now damaged because of the situation. Free-market reforms are also inevitable to attract foreign investment. Sisi "can deliver neither". The Obama administration should realise that Sisi cannot offer the democratic governance to Egypt. The US should suspend military aid, and redirect the aid to support the democratic movement. Surely, Obama should not believe that Sisi "is on the path to democracy".



State of affairs in Tunisia

March was a hectic month in Tunisia. Three years after the popular revolution broke out in 2011, the President Moncef Matzouki eradicated the emergency situation. However, Murphy's law is always on the horizon.

A Tunisian diplomat, the ambassador's secretary, Mohamed Bechikh was kidnapped by unknown people in Tripoli; the Tunisian foreign minister asked the Libyan authorities to do everything to release the man and protect other staff of the mission in Libya. Efforts are in operation to locate him, and to identify his kidnappers. Later an Italian man, Enrico Ravanelli was kidnapped, too. He is an employee for an Italian construction company. Then again, several other foreign diplomats were also targeted; the Benghazi consulate was even hit by an RPG last year. The abduction sparked

outrage: it is now believed that the neighbouring country is not able to protect foreigners. Some are surprised that while the relations are good, Tunisians are still attacked by Libyans. Though, there is a conflict inside Libya, but it is "supposed to be internal and concerning Libya alone". If the country becomes stable again, many believe the order can be re-established. Others think it is "unfortunate" that the authorities have done nothing against the violence which will encourage the attackers to continue their activity.

A 26-year-old activist concluded that "blood only brings blood", and that "the first priority of Libyan authorities should be to ensure the security and safety of foreign nationals ... in particular representatives ... and to take care of the interests of foreign countries". Otherwise, there is no such thing as "state".

Bolsted political and economic relations between Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates

Tunisian interim PM Mehdi Jomaa and his delegation continued the inchoate talks about relations in the UAE. The official Tunisian sources said that "talks focused on possibilities of providing economic and financial support to Tunisia so as to help it overcome economic difficulties". Political relations and economic co-operations were also thoroughly discussed. Emirati investors and businessmen were received by the PM; the meetings were "very reassuring on the future of the ... projects ... despite several difficulties". However, the final decision was to "cement ties ... and work on boosting cooperation[s]".



Civil war in South Sudan



Salva Kiir, president of South Sudan. Photo: Al Jazeera English

Sudan was the largest country in Africa until 2011 when South Sudan won its independence from the northern part. More than 90% of the population supported the separation and after a referendum South Sudan became the world's youngest country. In 2011, former military commander, Salva Kiir Mayardit, became president of South Sudan. The new president promised reconciliation and reconstruction of the country. However, Kiir's government and presidency came in for criticism. His Vice President, Riek Machar was accused of planning a coup against Kiir in 2012. In July 2013, Kiir began to clean and reorganize his government. He

dismissed members of the military, the Cabinet Affairs Minister Deng Alor Kuol, the Finance Minister Kostl Manibe Ngai, and finally Vice President Riek Machar. Kiir is allegedly attempted to reduce the size of his government, however, according to Machar, Kiir tried to organize a dictatorship. After Machar was removed from the government, he hardly escaped assassination with his wife.

The conflict also has an ethnic background, since Kiir is supported by the tribes of the Dekon area, while Machar is backed by the Nuer tribe. The Nuer tribe is concentrated in South Sudan, while the Dekon tribes are mainly from Ethiopia. The two parties started armed fight on 15 December 2013. Kiir's army was receiving aid from Ugandan troops. Since December, thousands of people died and over 930,000 civilians were relocated, including refugees who came to Sudan from countries in order to seek for a new home. On 23 January, Kiir and Machar's representatives have signed a ceasefire agreement in Ethiopia, however, neither of the warring sides kept itself to the treaty. Kiir also has allegedly agreed to free prisoners who are the supporters of Machar. Countries like the



United States and the United Kingdom welcomed the agreement, but neither Kiir nor Machar was able to end the hostilities. The failure to maintain peace is particularly important because the civil war affects South Sudan on different layers: politically, socially and economically. Sudan, as the newest country of the world, may fail to build a political base for the new state. The war already required the lives of too many people, including both members of the army and civilians. According to the international organization, the Human Rights Watch, both sides are responsible for committing war crimes. Killing, raping and stealing is widespread in the country. In addition, if the sides are unable to cease the fight, the country will have to face with a period of famine. As people have to flee due to violence pervading their homes, they are not able to plant. The wet season is coming and if people are not able to produce their food there will not be enough supplies available. Meanwhile, Sudan's oil industry is also influenced in a negative way, as workers have fled the

country because of the ongoing civil war. On March 12 a meeting was held in Addis Ababa where US and UK envoys met leaders from East Africa, namely the members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The IGAD has 8 members, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan. The association was established in 1986 in order to maintain a strong cooperation between the member countries and to focus on development. All but one IGAD member, Eritrea, joined the meeting. The participants, including Somalia's Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed, asked the two sides to stop the fight and emphasized its negative impacts on the country and its population.

Kiir attended the meeting, however, peace talks were not yet on the schedule. As Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said the process is very slow but the parties are on the right way to reach a peaceful relationship. Further discussion on ending the hostilities is planned on 20 March.



South Sudan. Map: Wikimedia Commons



Withdrawal of Chadian troops and possible disarmament in Central African Republic

Chad's President Idriss Deby announced on 13 May 2013 that it would close its 1,000 km border with Central African Republic due to the continued and increased violent climate in the neighbouring country. President Deby stated that the border would remain open to those Chadians wishing to return home but would otherwise be tightly sealed.

Chad had previously been at the centre of efforts to help stabilise CAR. However, after much scrutiny and accusations insisting that their troops were siding with the Muslim Séléka rebel forces, the government has decided to completely withdraw its troops from CAR as of April 2014.

Since the March 2013 coup in CAR's capital of Bangui, which led to President Francois Bozize being overthrown, the situation in the country has deteriorated rapidly. Due to sectarian killings, in a country with a population of 4.5 million with a Christian majority population and Muslim minority, to date, there are reportedly 2,000 dead and 1,000,000 displaced persons in CAR. The continued violence in the country has led to increased demand for intervention by the United Nations and a recommendation from UN Secretary



Central African Republic. Map: Wikimedia Commons

General Ban Ki-moon to implement a mission in CAR.

On 10 April 2014, the UN Security Council approved a UN peacekeeping mission comprised of 12,000 forces and authorised the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) through 30 April 2015. The mission will include 10,000 military personnel comprised of 240 military observers, 200 state officers, 1,800 police personnel made up of 1,400 formed police unit personnel and 400 police officers, and 20 corrections





*Members of the Rwanda Defense Force move into formation after arriving in Bangui, Central African Republic.
Photo: Defenseimagery.mil*

“the need for long-term international support in CAR is crucial”

officers. While the African-led International Support Mission (MISCA) is currently working in coordination with French troops, known as Sangaris, and the recently authorised European Union force (EUFOR), the responsibilities of MISCA will be over-taken by MINUSCA as of 15 September 2014.

The need for long-term international support in CAR is crucial to help rebuild the state. The problems in the country are thought to exceed the capabilities of a UN peacekeeping mission and require additional cooperation and support from other institutions such as international financial and banking institutions as well as other changes such as an comprehensive political process, the will of political actors in CAR, free and fair elections, the creation of a new military, the demilitarization and

reintegration of combatants, and the promotion of resolution.

After the recent attack on a church by Muslim rebels on 28 May 2014, in which the UN reported 17 dead and which led to two days of violent protests in Bangui, CAR's Prime Minister Andre Nzapayeke announced that 8 June 2014 will be a National Disarmament Day, a day for all citizens to hand in their weapons, in an attempt to halt the increasing violence in the country. CAR's Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza has stated that the disarmament will occur in collaboration with the African Union force and the French troops so as to ensure the protection of the minority Muslim population.



Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist group kills hundreds of people

March began with a tragic event in Nigeria as on the 2nd day of the month bombings killed nearly 100 people. The attack was committed by the country's militant Islamist group Boko Haram in a viewing centre in the city of Maiduguri, on the northeast of the country where fans were watching a football game. Although this particular event left the highest death toll behind, there were several others as well. In a raid against a boarding school 59 children died in February when terrorists threw explosives into the rooms of the students and those who could not flee were burnt inside. The name of the group means "Western education is forbidden", consequently they

often kidnap girls and assault schools in order to strike against current education and impose strict Islamic law. The organization has been active in the last four years, during which thousands of people have been victims of their violence since 2009. This year already 700 people have been killed in 40 brutal attacks. Their base is located in the north-eastern poor regions of Nigeria where recent attacks took place. The foundation of an Islamic state within the country is their ultimate aim and unfortunately so far they have proved to be more successful in spreading their ideology than government officials, government spokesperson Sambo Dasuki said.

As violence has escalated recently in some parts of the country, a new defence minister, General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau was appointed at the beginning of March to tackle the crucial issue of Islamist militancy. The appointment of a new government member was, however soon followed by the attack of a military base on 14 March, which eventually made the authorities change their strategy towards the organization. The government is attempting to engage local communities in



Logo of Boko Haram. Picture: ArnoldPlaton [Wikimedia Commons]



the fight against them besides using military means. Analysts and diplomats suggest economic development programs to be carried out in the poorest regions of the country instead of fighting Boko Haram only with force. Most of the terrorists of the Boko Haram come from the Kanuri ethnic group, thus in the framework of a new counter-insurgency strategy they are trying to work with the Kanuri community itself, such as engaging leaders to take part in the struggle. Besides the latter, part of this bottom-up approach is providing training and support to groups in the region to

tackle the Islamists locally. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported 249,446 displaced and nearly 1,000 dead between January and March and added that one in five of the Nigerian population do not live in their own homes. According to NEMA estimates, 3.2 million people have been affected by the crisis, mostly the elderly, women and children. An exacerbating factor is the fact that Boko Haram members cannot seek safe haven outside Nigeria, which increased sharply the number of their guerrilla attacks.

“NEMA reported 249,446 displaced and nearly 1,000 dead between January and March and added that one in five of the Nigerian population do not live in their own homes. According to NEMA estimates, 3.2 million people have been affected by the crisis, mostly the elderly, women and children”



South Africa's conflict with Rwanda over exiled diplomats

Following an armed attack on exiled Chief General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa's home, South Africa expelled three diplomats from Rwandan embassy and one diplomat from Burundi. The reason for such a decision is that the diplomats are allegedly linked to the raid on Nyamwasa's house. Nyamwasa was the Chief of Staff of the Rwandan Army. He had to flee the country in 2010 due to his alleged involvement in terrorist acts in Rwanda.

Meanwhile South African police is also investigating the death of Patrick Karegeya who was killed in Johannesburg. Karegeya was the head of intelligence in Rwanda. He was jailed twice for opposing and critiquing President Paul Kagame's government. Finally he was dismissed in 2006 and he had to flee the country as he was linked to a planned coup against Kagame in 2007.

His body was found in a hotel on 1 January 2014. The circumstances of his death are still not clear, but the South African police linked Kagame to the murder. Kagame's opposition also accused the president of being involved in other attacks against

exiled oppositions in South Africa. David Batenga, nephew of Karegeya demanded the closure of the Rwandan embassy and claimed that the embassy's aim was not to maintain diplomatic relations but to retaliate on the traitors. According to Jeff Radebe, a parliamentary member in South Africa, Pretoria has evidence that Rwandan diplomats are linked to attacks against exiled oppositions, however, Rwandan High Commissioner to Pretoria, Vincent Karega, denied the allegations. Karega also said that Rwanda has not been presented with the evidence.

President Kagame refused to being involved in the attacks but he also celebrated the death of his opponents. He also declared that his country has the right to defend itself from traitors. Edward Royce, chairperson of the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said that the Rwandan government is continuously trying to eliminate those who stand against the government. The Rwandan government exiled six South African diplomats as an answer to Pretoria's act.



Controversial anti-gay bill in Uganda

Back in February, President Yoweri Museveni signed an anti-gay bill whereupon sanctions and aid cuts have to be faced. The signing of the anti-gay law can mean financial problems as European countries freeze aids, and investors are scared away.

The bill declares that “repeat homosexuals” have to be put to prison for life, any promotion of homosexuality must be outlawed, and people have to report homosexuals. Ugandan officials had discussions with the European Union over the issue which supposed to mean sanctions since the “country had violated human rights and democratic principles”. The European Commission – the executive arm of the EU – was asked “to launch an urgent political dialogue”.

Kristian Schmidt, the head of the EU delegation will meet with the Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa which is followed by a closed meeting. The EU is among the top donors of the African state, every year with more than EUR 460 million. The overall amount of foreign aid to Uganda is one fifth of the annual budget which is USD 12 bn/EUR 8.6 bn. Several European donor countries – Sweden,



President of Uganda Yoweri Museveni. Photo: DFID

Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands – have already frozen the aid payments, and their money will be redirected towards “private sector initiatives, aid agencies, rights and civil society organisations”. 42% of the aids from Sweden was aimed “to promote democracy, human rights and gender equality”. As aids are not unconditional, the freezing has been inevitable.

The Finance Minister of Sweden, Anders Borg was in the country as part of the East African tour to review economic growth opportunities. He said that “life imprisonment because of ... sexual orientation is unacceptable”. The country had a good reputation, “being safe and stable in political terms” which was



overshadowed by these recent events. Borg also had meetings with gay right activists, and emphasised that, apart from the aid cuts, tourism and the investment field will be affected by this law. He warned the Finance Minister, Maria Kiwanuka, and the Prime Minister, Amama Mbabazi of further consequences. In 2013, Sweden spent approximately USD 35 million on projects aimed economic progress. France expressed concerns, too. The French government declared its “commitment to the universal decriminalisation of homosexuality and the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity”. The Foreign Affairs ministry spokesperson said that France supports "civil society initiatives" with the aim to fight against these kinds of

He called on the African country to “uphold ... international commitments relating to the protection of human rights”. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned that this new law can stop the effective changes in HIV/AIDS solutions. He really hopes that at the earliest opportunity the law can be undone.

Fred Opolot, the Ugandan Foreign Affairs spokesperson said that the Ugandan government is going to have a meeting with the donors to have a discussion about the situation forming around the new law, and “to reiterate the President's stance on the matter”. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe backs the anti-gay law, and plans same “crackdown” on homosexuals in his own country, too. He believes that telling Museveni what to do is also a violation



The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, a group against AIDS, protests in New York City against the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda.

Photo: Riekhavoc[Flickr]



against human rights, and homosexuality is “un-African”. He found out lately that there is a Gays and Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe, and wanted to know immediately who the part of the group is. There have been several raids against the GALZ already, saying that it is an unregistered organisation, however, “a magistrate dismissed [its] case”.

Ethiopia is also on the way to discriminate through law. The vote about the bill is

coming soon, and is “widely expected to pass”. The bill would put homosexuality on the list of “non-pardonable” offenses. All same-sex acts are illegal, and can be punished with 15 years in prison. If someone infects another person with HIV during a same-sex act, the person can get 25 years imprisonment for it. If the bill becomes law, the President cannot pardon those on New Year’s Eve who were accused with the charge of homosexuality.

The latest fuss about Pope Francis’ views on homosexuals

In an interview of the Italian daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, the Pope said about civil unions that “we have to look at the different cases and evaluate them in their variety”. Some translated his words in the interview that the Pope suggested that gay civil unions might become tolerated by the church. The Catholic News Service was the most measured about the Pope’s statement as they tweeted: “the Pope, in interview, suggests church could tolerate some civil unions”. The fact is that when the Pope was asked about civil unions, he said that states aim at “to regularize different situations of living together” to ensure health care and other economic benefits. Technically, he did not say anything about the affirmation of gay marriage, or the support of the church for civil unions. He repeated though that the Catholic teaching about marriage is an act between a man and a woman. “Who am I to judge?” said the Pope last July which is definitely his most famous sentence so far, and for which he became the 2013 Man of the Year by the LGBT magazine, *The Advocate*. Now in the interview, he again highlighted that he is not in this position to judge but to welcome. There were other relevant sights in the Pope’s interview which are important to mention. He criticised the role of globalisation in poverty; talked about priest child abuse; credited the previous Pope for his courage for “standing up against the crimes”; highlighted the increasing transparency of the church; confirmed that he wrote to the Chinese President Xi Jinping, and there are connections between the two states; and that the next pontifical visits must take him to the Holy Land, to Asia and to Africa – though he would like to visit his sister in Argentina but since he paid a visit to Latin America lately, he cannot do that. The recent Pope is a charismatic person and leader: “his attitude of mercy for all is the new tone for the world’s largest church”. His response to his “celebrity stardom” was: “Sigmund Freud said that in every idealization there is an aggression. To depict the Pope as a kind of superman or a star seems to me offensive”.



Constant tension on the Korean Peninsula

It is quite common that tension is rising around North Korea and its foreign affairs at this time of the year. As per tradition, the annual South Korea-US military exercises have triggered off a quite threatening reaction from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The "Key Resolve" command post exercise and the "Foal Eagle" field training exercise started only on 24 February and generated a North Korean military reaction as early as the beginning of March. Despite of the regular nature of North Korean aggression, there are certain aspects which can make the international community concerned about these events. On 4 March, North Korea launched seven artillery shells with different types of range from its south-eastern coast towards north-eastern open waters. Four of the short-range projectiles had a range of 150 km and the remaining three had a range of 55 km. Furthermore, the Kim Jong un regime reportedly has missiles with a much longer range, such as the so-called Scud-D missiles with a range of more than 700 km. Naturally, South Korea has condemned the artillery launch and called it "intended provocation". In addition, South Korea also warned that the launch had happened just

minutes before a Chinese commercial plane crossed the same area. The United Nations has been dealing with various aspects of the North Korean question this month. On one hand, on 27 March, the Security Council unanimously condemned the above mentioned missile launch and declared that it was a violation of UN resolutions. The Security Council will also continue discussion on possible response to North Korea's actions. Possible sanctions can reportedly include the expansion of the current UN blacklist with additional North Korean entities and a ban of luxury goods' export to the country.

On the other hand, North Korea was debated topic of the UN Human Rights Council's meeting in Geneva on 17 March. Michael Kirby, the head of a UN inquiry into human rights violation in North Korea, called on the United Nations to take action against North Korean atrocities. Kirby's call was following a 400-page report released roughly a month earlier by a UN-commissioned investigation. The report is based on North Korean exiles' testimonies since the country refused to permit the investigators to cross North Korean borders. Various types of human rights violation are



described in the report, such as slavery, executions and mass imprisonment. North Korean representatives have repeatedly denied the report's accusations.

In addition to the discussion within the UN frameworks, the leaders of South Korea, the United States and Japan separately held talks about North Korea on 26 March. The countries pledged not to engage in negotiations with North Korea until it shows sincerity about giving up its nuclear arsenal. The summit can have an additional significance since it was the first between the current leaders of the two Asian countries, South Korean President Park and Japanese Shinzo Abe. On 31 March,

military tension between the two states of the Korean Peninsula became even more serious. North Korea and South Korea fired hundreds of artillery shells near a disputed sea boundary. Due to the exchange of fire, residents of five South Korean islands have been evacuated to shelters. Although short-range missile tests are not uncommon in the area, considering the high number of launches these events can give cause for concerns. According to analysts, North Korean leader Kim Jong un is not only trying to gain international attention but the missile launch is also aiming to send a message to his own elites and ensure his regime's survival.



Marching band at Arirang Mass Games - North Korea. Photo: Uri Tours



China and the South China Sea Code

The 10th joint working group meeting, scheduled on the 18th of March, dealt with the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC).

China seems to be willing to cooperate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) who met in Singapore to talk on the code. However, past is very likely to repeat itself since China mainly puts little significance on decisions. Some say that diplomacy will dominate though “hope is not a strategy”, and it is more likely that “full range of instruments” from the US and Japan will be needed to reach a diplomatic solution. On the other hand, preparations for a “range of crises in the absence of Chinese cooperation” have to be taken into consideration.

The Burmese Army Chief, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing said that “the early completion of the Code of Conduct (COC) ... is of the utmost importance for regional stability and security in the seas”. Burma, also known as Myanmar is the current leader of ASEAN, and their on the matter is more in line with the concept of China as the general noted: “The territorial dispute ... must be peacefully solved between the two



ASEAN-China Free Trade Area. Map: Wikimedia Commons

countries or among the countries involved...”. It shows that not only China believes that external actors are not welcomed.

Since 2009, China has used unilateral fishing bans, harass vessels, and patrols on waters against ASEAN states in the South China Sea together with “a combination of diplomatic, administrative and military instruments”. The new leadership operates with a so-called “charm offensive” since last year, though the overall attitude of China is unchanged: it seeks better relations in the region but defends its sovereignty “at the expense of other ASEAN

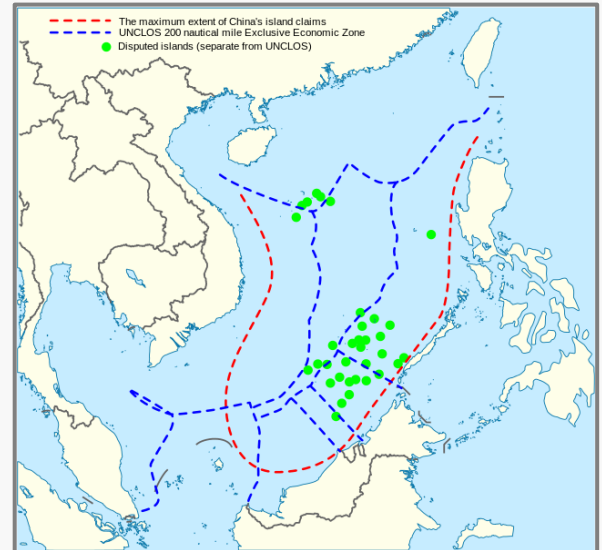


claimants". That is why it is highly important to have an integrated strategy which can also be effectively complied; and to emphasise that even China has to "resolve ... disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law" with a binding code.

The four countries which also have claims on the sea (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam) have to band together, and external actors (US, EU, Australia) have to "speak out against Chinese transgressions". A great coalition, a global interest is a much better solution than just a US-China debate.

The code would be only a diplomatic tool for tensions. Resolution would lie in a legal realm, codifying all claims which would open sovereignty disputes and joint resource development. Problem is, China claims 90% of the South China Sea which is "inconsistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) by any stretch of the imagination".

Other states and the international community have to challenge China and its claims like the Philippines, via a UN initiative. Pointing-forward thinking is relevant in case of a spill-over to other areas, of increasing coordination, cooperation and crisis management, domestically, regionally and internationally. For weaker ASEAN states the challenging of China in any ways must be too risky but it is very possible that this is exactly what China is banking on. To be successful, they have to step up.



Maritime claims in the South China Sea. Map: Goran Tek-en [Wikimedia Commons]



Territorial claims in the South China Sea. Map: Voice of America



The leader of China makes his first-ever Europe visit

“Rocks cannot interrupt the course of a river in its tumultuous voyage to the ocean, I am convinced that no problem or difference can snarl the march of Sino-European friendship and cooperation.”

The President of China, Xi Jinping made a “ground-breaking first visit ... to European Union headquarters ..., saying closer ties between the two partners ... were a win-win”. On his Europe-trip, the President visited France, Germany, Belgium and EU institutions in Brussels, escorted by a “200-strong business delegation”. Xi attended the G7 meeting as well, and had discussions with U.S. President Obama about the Ukrainian situation. He met French President Francois Hollande and also German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

On his visit to Belgium, the President lent two pandas to the zoo, had a “red-carpet day with Belgium’s royals”, and certainly had more serious business as well. Among these were the crisis in Ukraine, human rights, and mostly trade matters. It was likely he would meet pressure on the supporting of Russia – however, recently China declined to back the country about the issues of Ukraine, abstaining from a vote at the UN. The China-EU relations are usually

“marred by friction”. For example, China targeted French wine after the EU put tariffs on Chinese solar panels though the President noted high hopes for his visit, to be beneficial for both parties, bringing them together. The economy of the world and global humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts were also on the “menu”. The EU constantly worries about the human rights issues in China, that is why Amnesty International and protesters gathered outside the EU institutions to ask for freedom to activists in prisons, and more rights for Tibet and its people.

The former Belgian ambassador to China, Patrick Nijs said that “Xi’s trip shows that China’s foreign policy remains mindful of Europe and interested in pursuing greater integration with the Europeans”. Belgium,



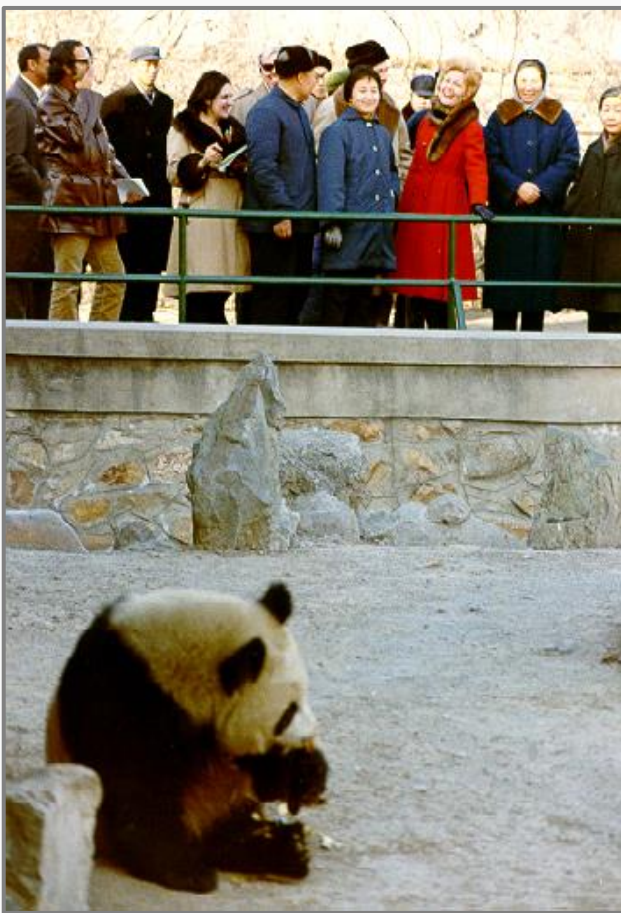
President of China Xi Jinping. Photo: Voice of America



“a gateway to Europe” is hoping for new investments, even if these will not reach the size of those “mega deals” with France and Germany.

The EU rolled out the red carpet for Xi while he met with European Council President Herman van Rompuy, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and European Parliament chief Martin Schulz. The President's visit was on a lower profile than the visit of the President of the US earlier – only “little security fuss and a few flag-wavers”. No press conference was

scheduled, either, so few details are believed to emerge from the visit. However, an EU diplomat said that since the EU is the biggest trade partner for China (the two-way trade is more than EUR 1 bn per day), economic matters were the dominant elements. Xi had bilateral talks with the Belgian Prime Minister, Elio Di Rupo, and several parliament leaders; he visited the biggest Chinese-owned company, Volvo too. In Belgium, the “panda diplomacy” of China had a kickback. The country is “famous” for the division between the Dutch- and French-speaking communities. The pandas now are in a zoo in Wallonia which is in the French-speaking part of Belgium, approximately 60 kilometres from Brussels, and not so far from Mons where the Prime Minister was the mayor earlier. The zoo, The Pairi Daiza, has a huge ticket sales boom which also angers the oldest and best-known zoo in the country which is in the northern part, in Antwerp. As a result, the pandas stirred up the language row. Not only in Belgium were problems around the official visit. The Chinese delegation in Germany wished to make an official visit to a Holocaust memorial with Angela Merkel which appeal had been turned down since Berlin “fear[ed] that it would be used by China as propaganda to highlight its complaint that Japan has not done enough to atone for its militaristic past”. The Chinese delegation was told that they are free to visit any memorials they would like to but only in their own free time.



'Panda diplomacy' has got decades-old history: Pat Nixon viewing a panda in a Chinese zoo
Photo: Wikimedia Commons



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Serbia marks 15th anniversary of NATO bombing

■ In March 1999, the NATO decided to bomb Yugoslavia for more than two months in order to put an end to the Kosovo War. 15 years later, the country is still emotionally affected by the memories of the bombing. On 24 March, on the 15th anniversary of the NATO attack, victims have been commemorated all over the country. Prime Minister Ivica Dačić delivered a speech on Straževica Hill referring to the fact that the NATO carried out the bombing without authorization from the United Nations. The MP also said that the bombing caused the death of minimum 2,000 people, although the number of victims is still unclear. The Humanitarian Law Centre states that approximately 275 people died in Serbia and Montenegro and 484 in Kosovo. The bombing caused extensive damage to each country and according to President Tomislav Nikolić the NATO did not manage to fully apologize for carrying out such a violent attack.

Spain's economic situation is slowly improving

■ On 5 March, Spain was removed from the European Commission's list of countries whose economic state is unstable. While the country was removed from the list, it has to face with other requests from the European Union. The country is expected to meet these requirements this year. According to the Commission, Spain was able to improve its former financial state accumulating account surplus over the last year, its economy is still threatened by domestic and external debts. The country should focus on exporting products in order to decrease its external debts. Households and companies reduced their debts; however families are still in danger due to low salaries and the still high rate of unemployment. Meanwhile, the conflict over Catalonia is also aggravates the country's situation. Alfred Bosch, spokesperson for the Catalan Republican Left required an independence referendum to be organized on 9 November. As an answer, Prime Minister Marian Rajoy said that all Spanish citizens should make the decision and he did not give his consent to the referendum.

27 dead, 109 injured in Kunming railway station attack

■ On March 1, a group of men burst into the Kunming railway station – in Yunnan Province, China – and killed 27 people and injured minimum 109 people. Reports say that the men, all in black, entered the station and immediately started to randomly stab people. According to local television channels, the attack was carried out by a terrorist group. K6, a broadcasting organization, says that the police managed to kill several of the attackers. However, the identity of the men and their motivations are still not known. Photos, showing the bodies of the victims, were published online, but it is questionable whether the images reflect reality. Meanwhile Xi Jinping, President of China, and other important politicians expressed their sympathy to those who fall victim to the attack.



People are forced to leave their homes due to fights in southwest Colombia

■ Fights have been going on between state armed forces and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) near the town of Guapi. The fights are highly threatening the lives of the civilian population, including indigenous families as well. Apart from the peace talks in Cuba, the sides do not show any willingness to put an end to the fighting. According to reports, the FARC have recently admitted to kidnapping and torturing two police officers.

Peace agreement between guerilla forces and the Philippine government

■ After 40 years of fighting the Philippine government is most likely to sign a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The agreement will officially form an autonomous area in the southern part of the Philippines, in the Bangsamoro area. The region will have its own laws and security force, including the police. Analysts say that other rebellious groups and politicians, who would like to secure their power, can threaten the peace. However, the agreement would be a step towards development in the southern Philippines.

Thailand: ending state of emergency

■ On 4 March Thailand decided to extend the state of emergency due to the ongoing anti-government protests. Demonstrations are aiming to remove President Yingluck Shinawatra from the presidency. The emergency state was to be extended until the protests entirely cease. But on 4 March the cabinet finally decided to replace the emergency state with the Internal Security Act because the protests against Shinawatra were peaceful.

Ceasefire agreement between Pakistan and Taliban

■ Negotiators of the Pakistani government extended the ceasefire with the Taliban. The two parties met on 26 March. The location of the meeting was not revealed to the public. Government negotiators met with representatives from the TTP Shura and intermediaries from the TTP. TTP intermediary Jamaat-e-Islami's Professor Ibrahim said that the main goal of the meeting is to reach armistice. Ceasefire will last until the parties can reach an agreement about peace.

Removing Syria's chemical weapons

■ The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons reported that it is planning to rid Syria of its entire load of chemical weapons by June 30. The OPCW have already removed half of the weapons that were loaded to ships at the Latakia port. The Syrian government agreed to the action after a chemical weapon left hundreds dead in Damascus last year. The process is supported by the US, Russia, Denmark, Finland, Norway and China. The most dangerous chemicals will be destroyed by hydrolysis in international waters.



Ceasefire between ethnic groups and the government in Myanmar

■ On 10 March government of Myanmar managed to reach a ceasefire agreement with representatives of the ethnic groups at the Myanmar Peace Centre. The two sides have agreed to form a group of 18 members – 9 from both sides – who will work on a ceasefire draft. At the moment, each side has its own draft and the group has to work on creating a single draft. A final ceasefire agreement is to be signed in August.

War crimes inquiry after civil war in Sri Lanka

■ In 2009, after 26 years of civil war, the army overthrew the organization of the separatist Tamil Tiger in Sri Lanka. Since then, both sides have been accused of committing war crimes. Members of the UN Human Rights Council now voted for an international inquiry that would target both parties. In the last months of the civil war, 40,000 Tamil civilians have been killed allegedly by government shelling. Sri Lanka denied the accusations and said that the Tamil group has reorganized itself and still means a threat to the government.



*Pro-Tamil Tigers demonstration in 2009, Oslo
Photo: Max Froumentin*



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Kosovo dialogue resumes in Brussels

■ After the last meeting on 12 February, discussions about Kosovo-Serbia relations will continue on 31 March in Brussels. Kosovar Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi is to take part in a conversation with Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić and EU High Representative Catherine Ashton in order to talk about the main questions of the problematic relations between the two countries. Among the major topics will be the organisation of Serb municipalities in Kosovo, which is still a highly debated issue and is also strongly linked to the coming general elections in Kosovo. According to Aleksandar Vulin, former Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija in the Government of Serbia, the meeting should also discuss a possible modification in the Kosovo election system. The participants will also debate about the structuring of the Mitrovica Basic Court, where the main dispute is about the ethnicity of the members. Finally, the representatives will also open negotiations about the fate of the civil defence. While Priština would put it under the control of the Kosovo Security Force, Serbia objects the idea, emphasizing that the KSF could later be organized into Kosovo's military force.

A nuclear deal was clinched between Russia and Iran

■ Iran has entered into an agreement with Russia to construct two nuclear plants in the city of Bushehr, where a power plant has been already operating since 2011. The two new power stations will be built next to the one in Bushehr and will be able to produce at least 1000 megawatts of electricity. The sides also agreed about the building of two desalination stations. The agreement was reached after a meeting between Nikolai Spassky, Deputy CEO of ROSATOM, and representatives from the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). Spassky said that this agreement is the next step of a 1992 deal between the two countries on collaboration in the field of nuclear energy.

Iranian weapons captured on the Red Sea

■ The Israel Defense Forces captured a ship transporting Iranian weapons. The load was taken to Israel and the crew was questioned but seemed to be unaware what the ship was carrying. The ship was heading to Gaza and was seized close to the shores of Sudan. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the weapons would have been used against Israel. He also called for harsher treatment of Iran. The country was accused of firing rockets apart from the 2012 ceasefire. The Hamas denied the accusations and said that Israel is trying to justify the blockade of the Gaza strip by making up stories.





U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Photo: U.S. Department of State

Renewed US sanctions against Iran

■ President Barack Obama has further extended sanctions against Iran when he resumed the National Emergency Act of 1976 that has been yearly sustained since the 1990s. Obama said that Iranian policies are a threat to US foreign policy and security. The sanction is extended for one more year. The decision was made after Iran had made a temporary nuclear deal with the US, China, Russia, France, Britain and Germany in Geneva on 24 November, 2013. The next meeting will be held on 17 March, when the parties will work on reaching a final agreement.

US: strengthening military cooperation with Saudi Arabia

■ On 20 March, US defence secretary Chuck Hagel met Salman bin Sultan, deputy defence minister of Saudi Arabia. The two parties met in order to secure a stronger military cooperation between the two countries. In spite of the fact that the Saudi Arabia leveled criticism at US policy in Syria and Iran, the two sides had a discussion in Washington. Hagel and Salman discussed the situation of the Gulf states and the need to reinforce regional cooperation. Hagel also emphasized that although the US will maintain its diplomatic relations with Iran, the country also wants to strengthen its military collaboration with Saudi Arabia.



Diplomatic relations are ceased between the US and Syria

■ The United States decided to cut all diplomatic relations with Syria. Diplomats, who are not US citizens were asked to leave the country. The Syrian embassy, which had no ambassador, was also closed in Washington. Syria's honorary consulates were also shut down. Daniel Rubenstein, envoy for Syria, said that the decision is a reaction to Syrian President Bashar Assad's action to stop his country's diplomatic services. Rubenstein also said that diplomatic relations will resume if Assad leaves the Syrian presidency.

Bahrain and Pakistan: agreement on economic cooperation

■ Pakistan and Bahrain have signed agreements in order to strengthen economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met the King of Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, while the ruler paid a three-day visit to Pakistan. The six agreements are to increase the number of Bahraini investments in Pakistan. Nawaz said that his country would welcome investments in the field of energy, oil industry, mining and also in the financial sectors, like banking. Meanwhile, Bahrain should increase its imports from Pakistan.

Kenya resumes diplomatic relations with Somalia

■ In order to improve its relations with Somalia, Kenya is planning to reopen its embassy in the capital, Mogadishu. Mohammed Affey, ambassador to Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, claimed that their aim is to support Somalia on its way to democracy and to help the nation to rebuild the country destroyed by the war. Other agencies also returned to the country, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Kenyan embassy has been previously relocated to Nairobi due to insecurity in Mogadishu. Ministers and parliamentary members also moved to the Kenyan capital. Affey also said that Somalia would need international help in order to organize a real democratic country, where the people elect their own leaders. If international aid is given, Somalia is more likely to suppress the jihadist Al Shaabab.

“Somalia would need international help in order to organize a real democratic country, where the people elect their own leaders”



■ News in Brief

International relations

Jens Stoltenberg has been appointed as new secretary general of NATO

■ On 1 October 2014 Jens Stoltenberg will replace Anders Fogh Rasmussen as secretary general of NATO. Stoltenberg is the former prime minister of Norway. He was in office twice from 2000–2001 and 2005–2013. Anders Breivik's attack that killed 77 people occurred during his presidency. David Cameron said that Stoltenberg is to take over the leadership in a decisive year referring to the Ukraine crisis and NATO's plan to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan.

Caribbean nations sue former colonizers for slave trade

■ Haiti and Suriname are among those fourteen Caribbean states that decided to take legal action against countries that previously had benefited from slave trade. The plaintiffs state that slavery is still affecting people's everyday lives in the form of poverty, illness, and illiteracy. The association of the Caribbean Community is suing countries like the Netherlands, France, Spain and the United Kingdom. However, the Caribbean states say that the UK should pay the most, as it was highly involved in slavery. A UK based law firm that earlier procured £21.5 billion to Kenyans who were abused during the Mau Mau rebellion will conduct the case. According to reports, the amount of compensation could reach £200 billion.

Oil and gas agreement was reached between Iraq, Egypt and Jordan

■ On 6 March Iraq, Egypt and Jordan signed an oil and gas deal. The three countries are trying to create a stronger cooperation in the field of energy. Jordan benefits from the agreement, for the country was in lack of fuel since the Sinai sabotage. The parties agreed to export oil to Egypt from Iraq through Jordan. The pipeline will cost around \$ 10 billion and is planned to be finished in 2018.

Palestine rejects Israel's request for declaring the country a Jewish state

■ The League of Arab States decided to support Palestine's denial to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Palestine is afraid that it would bring discrimination against the Arab minority of the country. The request was presented as a condition for peace. Israel also claims that it would acknowledge Jewish traditions and history. The league announced its decision on the 25th Arab Summit.





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