

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

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News and Background

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About CRP News & Background

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Editorial Team

Series Editor | Csilla Morauszki

Authors – April 2016 | Dóra Vető, Aldoreza Prandana, Hannah Cartwright, Andrea Moro, Badra Aliou Doumbia

Executive Publisher | Andras Lorincz

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Mass drowning in the Mediterranean Sea

Egyptian, Italian and Greek officials have been unable to confirm a report that up to 500 people, most of them Somali, had capsized near the Egyptian coast after setting off for Italy in boats. Officials in Egypt did not immediately respond to inquiries and Italy's coast guard, which coordinates all rescues in the waters between Italy and Libya, said it had no information about a shipwreck. In Geneva, UNHCR spokesman William Spindler said: "Our offices in Egypt, Italy and Greece are trying to find out more about this reported incident".

Exactly one year ago, an estimated 800 migrants drowned off the Libyan coast when the fishing boat they were traveling in collided with a mercantile vessel that was attempting to rescue them – the most deadly Mediterranean shipwreck in decades. Speaking after the reports of up to 500 victims in a new tragedy, Italian President Sergio Mattarella said Europe needed to reflect in the face of "yet another tragedy in the Mediterranean in which, it seems, several hundred people have died".

In 17 April incident, six bodies were recovered and 108 migrants were rescued from a semi-submerged rubber dinghy, Italy's coast guard said, as boat arrivals accelerate amid calm seas. A private rescue ship called Aquarius run by humanitarian group SOS Mediterranee found the bodies on the rubber dinghy, a coast guard spokesman said.

The migrants and the six corpses were being taken to the Italian island of Lampedusa, the coast guard said. Italy's coast guard had earlier rescued 33 migrants from a small island off the eastern coast of Sicily.

Almost 6,000 migrants and refugees sailed from Libya to Italy last week in what appears the start of a wave of at least 100,000 and "possibly many, many more" this year, the International Organization for Migration reported.

Meanwhile, on the first anniversary of the death of 800 migrants off Lampedusa, Oxfam has accused the EU of failing to protect people seeking refuge in Europe.

In a new report, the aid agency said that vulnerable people seeking safety and dignity remain at risk of death, torture and exploitation as they try to reach and cross the Mediterranean.

The crossing between Libya and Italy is the deadliest sea route in the world and the death toll for 2016, before today, had already reached 219. Nearly 10,000 people attempted to use this route to reach Europe in March alone.

Total arrivals to Italy in the first quarter of 2016 were almost double the number of arrivals in the same period in 2015. UN Special Representative for Migration has said that the Italian authorities and people are responding in a very constructive way to the migrant crisis. He said that the first obligation in Europe has to be to save lives.



Pope takes 12 refugees back to Italy

On 16 April Pope Francis decided to bring 12 Syrian Refugees back to Italy with him during his trip to Greece. The migrants consisted of three Syrian families, including 6 children. The refugees were from the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, which he had visited during his trip to Greece. Two of the families were from Damascus, and the other was from Deir al-Zour. All of the families fled the crisis in Syria after having their homes bombed.

The migrants that he took with him were chosen by lottery, and were able to leave with him through a coordinated effort between Italian and Greek authorities. The families will be looked after by the Italian Charity organisation, Sant'Egidio. The group is formed by two engineers, a teacher, a tailor, their children, and one other family, whose occupations have not been reported.

The Pope toured the refugee camp with two leaders of the Eastern and Greek Orthodox Churches, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and Archbishop Ieronymous II. This move shows a growing solidarity among religious leaders towards the refugees. The three leaders greeted refugees personally and were given pictures that the refugee children drew.



Pope Francis.

Photo: Casa Rosada (Argentina Presidency of the Nation)

The pictures depicted our scenes were children drowned and the sun cried. Pope Francis was quoted as having said, "The children have these things in their minds, and it will take time before these memories go away... If the Sun is able to cry, so can we. A tear will do us good."



Pope Francis has taken an interest in the Syrian crisis, and made his trip to Greece centered around the migrant crisis. In his speech in Greece he called on Europe to behave in a way appropriate to “our common humanity”. He has spoken on numerous occasions about migrant’s rights. He spoke in 2013 on the Italian island of Lampedusa to draw attention to the large numbers of migrants arriving on the shores there from Libya. Pope Francis has not limited his comments on migration to European issues, in February during his trip to Mexico he spoke about immigrants near the US border. His message has focused on



*Pope Francis visits a favela in Brazil during the World Youth Day 2013.
Photo: Tânia Rêgo/ABr - Agência Brasil*

the traditional Christian more of welcoming the stranger. He has urged Christians and Catholics worldwide to treat migrants humanely and with respect. It sends an important message, especially to those religious Christians claiming that the influx of Muslim refugees will undermine Europe's Christian status, to remember what Christianities root messages are. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (#210) he said, “Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralyzing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development!” His act of taking in more Syrian migrants shows how dedicated he is to the issue, and it gives many hope that Europe will be able to resist xenophobic influences, and continue striving towards the most humanitarian way possible to deal with the migration crisis.

“Pope Francis has taken an interest in the Syrian crisis, and made his trip to Greece centered around the migrant crisis”



Spain will have new elections on June

King Felipe of Spain announced that the political parties are not required to have a solution to find a new prime minister and new elections will be held on June 26. The statement is a result of a flurry of coalition offers and counter-offers which ended up at nothing. Since Spain's inconclusive general election last December, the country's leading politicians have failed to bridge their differences to come up with a new prime minister. Not one coalition has come even close to securing the 176 votes in the parliament that are needed to be elected prime minister.

Mariano Rajoy from People's Party, who came first in the December vote although a bit short for winning, is acting as the Acting Prime Minister was offered the position by the king considering his party's winning yet he is not able to with the basis of not having enough support to form a government. The election led to the most fragmented parliament in Spain's history, with the PP winning 123 seats in the 350-seat lower house, the Socialists won 90 seats, anti-austerity Podemos won 69 seats, and Ciudadanos won 40 seats. Rajoy argued that the Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez had the opportunity to avert the elections by creating a grand coalition government to bring political stability to Spain, yet he repeatedly ruled out the option because since the very beginning the Socialists ran in the elections to make sure that Rajoy would no longer be prime minister.

On the other hand, the Socialist's leader in

the parliament, Antonio Hernando, criticised the anti-austerity party Podemos for not agreeing to back a three-way coalition with the Socialists and the liberal newcomer Ciudadanos, which nearly 90 percent of Podemos members voted against such a government. Meanwhile, Ciudadanos leader Albert Rivera called on Rajoy and Sanchez to take a step back and allow a "transition" government lead by an independent figure to be voted in.

Rajoy and his government, which has appeared helpless in the face of Spain's feeble economy and chronic unemployment, has been followed by a series of corruption scandals that have cost the party votes.

Spain has now been without government for about five months. Ever since democracy was reinstated in 1978, Spain has been a two-party state with mostly minority PP or the Socialist governments propped up by the Basques and Catalans in return for more autonomy. However, Podemos and Ciudadanos have changed the political dynamic in Spain which fragmented the votes even more.

There are many things to be considered for the elections on June. The political dynamics in the parliament will still create a fragmented voting if there is no coalition. It is predicted that the result of June election will not be too different than the December's. If the political parties are not able to find a ground, Spain will face another months without a prime minister and a working government.



Pro-EU Serbia's Prime Minister wins an early election for the second term

After only two years being a prime minister, Aleksandar Vučić won an early election, proposed by him and his party, and securing four more years in power with a parliamentary majority. The demand to have an early election is based on his plan to reform Serbia in order to apply for European Union (EU) membership. In doing so, he needs a clear mandate from the Serbian people to focus on the integration to the EU and to work with the possibly unpopular reforms. However, the critics saw his proposal for an early election as an attempt to consolidate his power, expressing concerns about the authoritarian tendencies of the 46-year-old, who has placed curbs on media freedom. Despite the fact that the election respected fundamental freedoms, observers from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) had concerns about the campaign period. PACE delegation head Volodymyr Arieiev referred to "abuse by incumbents of the administrative advantages of office", "media coverage favourable to the ruling parties" and a "lack of full transparency in party and campaign funding".



Aleksandar Vučić.

Photo: Das österreichische Außenministerium [Wikimedia Commons]

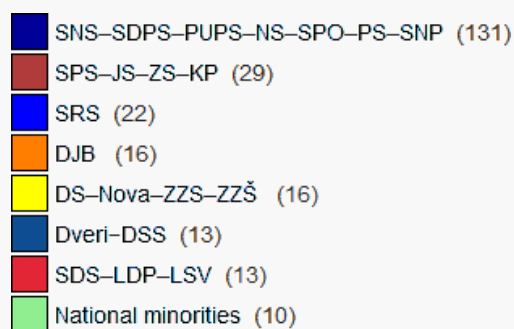
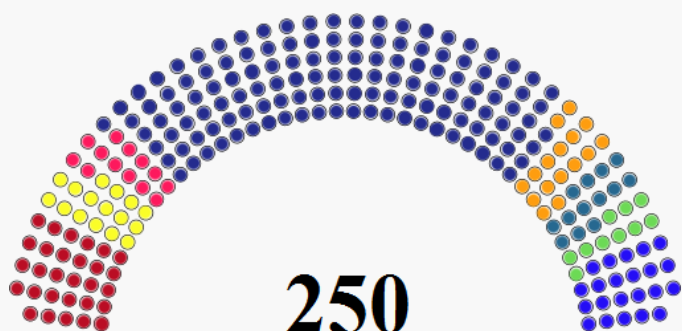
Vučić's Serbian Progressive Party won 48.25 percent of the vote, giving him 131 MPs in the 250-seat parliament. His coalition party in the government, the Socialists, came second with 11.01 percent of the vote. Following them, the far-right Radicals of ultra-nationalist Vojislav Seselj party



received 8.05 percent of the vote which allowed them to have seats in the parliament after not having any representative in the parliament for four years. Recently, Seselj was acquitted of war crimes charges arising from the 1990s Balkans conflicts. There are four other political groupings who also made it past the five-percent threshold needed to enter parliament which are the centrist Democratic Party, a new liberal party called “Enough is Enough” (“Dosta je bilo”), a liberal coalition led by former Serbian President Boris Tadic, and a eurosceptic and pro-Russian coalition called DSS-Dveri. The parliament will have its share of ultra-nationalist members after a while which whether will be an asset for the government or hinder the progress Vučić has made so far in terms of the EU membership. The ultra-nationalist opposition has made it clear that they reject the EU integration and demand for closer ties with Russia. However, Serbia is likely to continue gradually to implement the reforms demanded as part of its EU accession

process, despite the dynamics the parliament have right now with the ultra-nationalist members. It will also continue its EU-led talks on normalising relations with Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia in 2008. Although relations with Bosnia and Croatia may differ, yet not escalated.

But Serbia still has bigger domestic issues to solve. In 2015, its economy grew by an anaemic 0.7%. Serbia remains one of the poorest countries in Europe and Serbs are scraping by on an average salary of €351 (\$395) a month. Although he is very convincing when it comes to his pro-EU policy, if he is not able to raise the living standards in Serbia it will harm his political career. Vučić will now face the task of reforming inefficient state-run companies and the bloated public sector, measures required by the EU and as part of a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Most people hope for a better Serbia by having Vučić to create new jobs which will enable Serbs to stay and not have to look for a better life elsewhere in Europe.



Composition of the Serbian parliament



Eurozone ready to finalise Greek deal

Fiscal issue is the key point in the talks in Athens as Eurozone lenders and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continue to battle on Greece's primary surplus, with the IMF considering EU figures too optimistic.

Expected to find a deal on how and when to reduce Greece's huge public debt, the IMF wants a compromise on this issue before concluding the review, while Eurozone countries, and in particular Germany, want to first end the review and then start talking about a possible debt relief for Athens.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement after the meeting with IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde and other world financial leaders in Berlin was "The German position is that the IMF is taking part in an agreement... We want a quick conclusion to these talks." In addition, in her opinion, debt relief cannot begin before Greece complies with the commitments it has made. Furthermore, she declared that: "It's not a demand of the federal government to have no debt haircut but rather in our opinion this is legally not possible in the Eurozone," also the negotiations between Greece and the

representatives of the country's quartet of lenders "are on the right track but we are still not where we want to be."

EU and Greek officials argued that the negotiations in Athens are however not smooth. According to EU officials, there are huge differences in attitudes towards debt-related measures between institutions, member states and the like, and the range is quite significant.

Athens has suggested a reduction to about 9,000 euros but the participants still disagreed on whether the tax-free threshold should be decreased to about 8,000 euros from 9,545 euros, as demanded by its lenders.

It has been reported by Greek government officials that the left-led government and its lenders had agreed to raise value added tax to 24 percent from 23 percent as part of tax reforms aimed at saving 1 percent of gross domestic product.

Alexander Stubb, Finland's Finance Minister asserted that there is very little room to maneuver on Greece's debt relief whereas, Alexis Tsipras Greek Prime Minister told the Greek lawmakers that "We will overcome this difficult turning point and a very crucial discussion for the debt relief will start."



Merkel's Turkey visit aims to soothe tensions on EU migrant deal

The EU's controversial deal with Turkey to return migrants arriving in Greece by way of Mediterranean rapidly to Turkey has angered many people concerned with Human Rights. Although the deal seeks to return migrants with illegitimate claims, and resettle Syrians with legitimate claims from Turkey, many still worry that the deal is dangerous. Turkey's government policies



Angela Merkel.

Photo: UKOM (Nebojša Tejić/STA) [Wikimedia Commons]

have become increasingly totalitarian, and the number of human rights abuses are up. Many are afraid that it is not a suitable country to return vulnerable migrants to, and the situation has spread fear and anger. Angela Merkel hoped to allay some of those fears during her trip to Turkey in late April. The purpose of her trip was to inaugurate a new aid program for Syrians in Turkey.

The new aid money comes as part of the new EU-Turkey deal. The EU will also supply Turkey monetary aid to help fund the programs for the migrants the EU will be exporting there. The sum of 6 million Euros is pledged to Turkey over the next few years, and the trip highlighted the first beneficiaries of the new program. She was taken to visit the Nizip refugee camp and a children's centre. At the camp she, Donald Tusk (president of the European council), and Frans Timmerman (the European commission Vice President) were led around by Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to inspect the living conditions at the camp. They also posed for photographs with children there.

The visit does not seem to have assuaged the fears many have. The visit was criticised as being a "sanitised" visit, with them touring the refugee camp that has the best standard of care. Many Syrian migrants and refugees in the country do not find



places in the camp, and instead, are living in urban poverty near big cities without access to aid. These Syrians face high levels of poverty, because, even though Turkey has changed its laws few Syrians are still eligible for work permits. The situation is the same for Syrian children. Only a small percentage are able to get spots in the care centres. The guardian interviewed Abu Shihab, a Syrian in Turkey who runs a sweatshop that employs Syrian children to make shoes. He told the guardian that the kids are often forced to work when their parents cannot make enough money to support their families.

Merkel's visit was further criticised due to Turkey's recent changes in border control laws. The new laws have left tens of thousands of Syrian migrants camped along Turkey's border in tents after having been refused entry into the country. Organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have also reported increases in the number of shootings of Syrian migrants at the border, as well as forcible deportations. It was even said that they returned some of the Syrians to Syria, which the Turkish government denies. If they have done so, it calls into question the whole legality of the deal, as the Returns Directive of the EU guarantees that the EU must not put even illegal migrants in a situation where they could be returned to their country if they would have a life threatening situation there (this is called the principle of non-refoulement). The allegations paint a picture of a country that cannot keep up with the demands of an ever increasing stream of migrants, and are turning to increasingly brutal

mechanisms to keep their burden from increasing. The visit also skipped over the new detention centres where the deported migrants are being held after their forcible deportations from Greece. The conditions at these places are reported to be dire, and the fact that Merkel and other EU officials did not visit the very places set up to handle those directly affected by the deal seems hypocritical.

Merkel is not just being criticised for what she saw or did not see, but she is also being criticised for the implications the deal has for freedom of speech. The Turkish prime minister demanded that Merkel prosecute a German comedian who performed a very lewd and bawdy satirical poem on German Television about the Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan. Merkel agreed to prosecute the comedian. To many the move was a violation of free speech done to pander to a totalitarian type leader simply because he had agreed to the deal. Turkey has already come under fire for not respecting journalistic freedom and for restricting freedom of speech in the country. The fact that Merkel agreed to Erdogan's request is seen by many to look past the freedom of speech in Turkey and allow him to interfere in the freedom of speech in the EU.

Far from easing tensions and calming fears Merkel's visit seems to have highlighted the tensions and shown how badly the EU government wants to play down fears in order to ease its own migrant burden. Time will tell how appropriate the EU-Turkey deal is, but it is unlikely to become any less controversial in the near future.



China passes law restricting NGOs activities

Chinese legislators passed a law implementing security control over foreign NGOs by granting police the authority to supervise foreign NGOs, which reinforces President Xi Jinping's drive to consolidate government control over China's society, culture, and economy. The aim of the new law is to protect the Chinese society against foreign ideologies and influence and to bolster support for Communist Party rule.

The law leaves unchanged the controversial provision putting the Ministry of Public Security in charge of the registration process for foreign NGOs. On top of that, police is allowed, due to its authority as a result of the new law, to question administrators, search residences and facilities, seize files and equipment, and making blacklist "unwelcome" groups and prevent them from operating in the country if they commit violations, including "spreading rumours, slandering, or otherwise expressing or disseminating harmful information that endangers state security."

In the final version, the law states that foreign NGOs must not endanger China's national security and ethnic unity. It



*Chinese policeman guarding the southern entrance of the Forbidden City in Beijing, the Tiananmen, dominated by a giant portrait of Mao Zedong.
Photo: Christophe Meneboeuf. [Wikimedia Commons]*

stipulates that any group wishing to operate in China must register with public security officials and they must refrain from engaging in political or religious activities or acting in a way that damages "China's national interests". Criminal charges will be taken against any individual who is known to violate the law. Since President Jinping came to power, authorities have detained or interrogated scores of human-rights lawyers and other activists who promote



Western-style rule of law. In January, the authorities took Peter Dahlin, a Beijing-based Swedish human rights campaigner, into secret detention and accused him of being an agent working for “wester anti-China forces” to stir up opposition to the Communist party. Dahlin was, then, subsequently removed from China after being paraded on state television to make what supporters called a “forced confession.”

Government officials have recently issued warnings about foreign spying and the



Palmyra after Islamic State's defeat by Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq coalition and freedom.
Photo: Jawad Shaar ([tasnimnews](#))

infiltration of western ideas through education and entertainment. Two other new laws on national security and counterterrorism give the government and security forces a stronger legal footing to curb perceived threats to national interests. Critics of the legislation believe the law was born out of the Chinese government's fears that foreign governments were using NGOs to undermine the Communist party by spreading western concepts such as democracy and freedom of speech. This law is also being criticised by many domestic NGOs because it cuts the connection between foreign and domestic NGOs in terms of funding which will make both foreign and domestic NGOs work and do their activities slower. Domestic NGOs in China rely on foreign NGOs funding a lot since it is hard to raise funding on their own due to the government's bureaucracy and restrictive regulations.

In response to the new law imposes to foreign and domestic NGOs, the United States government reacted by stating that the law will constrict contacts between individuals and groups in the US and China.

“the law leaves unchanged the controversial provision putting the Ministry of Public Security in charge of the registration process for foreign NGOs”



North Korea to hold first congress in 40 Years

In April the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or as we know it, North Korea convened its Congress for the first time in about 40 years, 36 years to be exact. The last time the congress met Jimmy Carter was the president of the United States. This is the seventh congress of the Workers' Party of Korea. The rare meetings of the congress are unusual for a communist state, as they are technically the main ruling body of Korea. The congress will be held for a total of four days commencing on May 6th. The purpose of the congress has not been announced, the only hint as to what will take place is from a statement saying that the congress would address the task of how to continue to build a thriving nation. This has led to a lot of international speculation on what will occur.

The meeting of the Congress had drawn a lot of international attention for several reasons. First, Korea is running what is called a "70 day speed campaign", with workers working overtime to prepare for the congress. There are even reports of people sleeping and eating, essentially living, at work in order to fully prepare the congress. The international community is also watching the congress carefully because

they were unsure of the purpose for the congress. It has been used in the past by the ruling family to cement their rule, and to name their successors. In 1980, Kim Il Sung, the first leader of North Korea, announced that Kim Jong Il, his son, would be his successor. That Congress also



Headquarters of the Workers' Party of Korea. Photo: Mark Fahey [Elicit]



cemented the hereditary rule of the Kim family. After his father's death, Kim Jong Un was pronounced to be the next leader of North Korea.



*The Monument to Party Founding in Pyongyang, North Korea, erected in 1995.
Photo: Bjørn Christian Tørrissen [bjornfree.com]*

It is believed that the congress could also be used by Kim Jong Un, the current leader of North Korea, to bring focus back to the party. His father and predecessor, Kim Jong Il, was known for having been a military man, rather than focusing on party politics. It is likely that he will use the opportunity to announce any changes to the party which would further cement his role as the leader of North Korea. This would include announcing any new laws about the party's functioning, changing roles of the party members, and potentially designate his own successor. Since the party elections will take place at the event, and will determine who the party leaders will be until the next congress, many are hopeful that it will curb Kim Jong Un's vicious party

leadership of the last few years. The leader is known for having purged the party of those whom he considered unfaithful. Most notably, he had his uncle thrown out of the party and executed for treason. His uncle was believed to have been organising a political coup against Kim Jong Un. He has ordered a number of disappearances, executions, and dismissals throughout his time in office. The official elections could end that trend.

The leader is also expected to talk heavily about the country's nuclear program, as it has been one of his main focuses throughout his time. In his first public speech in 2012 he made his commitment to the military clear, "Superiority in military technology is no longer monopolised by imperialists... We have to make every effort to reinforce the people's armed forces." That year he was also appointed Marshall to the North Korean Army, the highest post that exists. Since his appointment he has overseen a number of military advancements including long range missile testing, nuclear bomb tests, and even a hydrogen bomb test in 2016.

Whatever happens at the congress is sure to be closely watched and examined by the international community as a prediction of the future of the North Korean state. It could have implications on international sanctions and policies made towards North Korea.



Wave of Islamist killings hit Bangladesh

A wave of Islamist killings hit Bangladesh, not only targeting high-profile cultural and intellectual figures, but also private individuals whose lifestyle is opposing Islamist values.

In the most recent incident Xulhaz Mannan, the founder of Bangladesh's only lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) magazine, *Roopban*, lost his life when a gang of six, dressed as courier service personnel, have entered the apartment building where he lived, hacking him and his friend. According to the officer in charge of the local police station, Mohammad Iqbal, another two people have been seriously injured in the killing of Mannan and his friend in the Kalaban area of the city of Dhaka. Homosexuality is considered as a crime in Bangladesh, therefore many LGBT activists have been forced to leave the country, therefore the attack on the founder of the country's only LGBT magazine and his friend can be linked to this issue.

The attack on Mannan came only two days after an English professor called Rezaul Karim Siddique was attacked and hacked to death with machetes while he was walking towards the bus station from his home in the North-Western city of Rajshahi.

Earlier in April an atheist blogger, Nazimuddin Samad was a victim of murder near Jagannath University, where he was attending as a law student.

According to Amnesty International's South Asia director, Champa Patel, four killings have been taken place in the country in April. In the past 3 years at least 16 people have been victims of such attacks, including 6 secular bloggers, 2 university professors, an Italian priest, 2 other foreigners working in the development sector and a prominent gay activist.

Despite the fact that it is not completely sure who is to blame for the attacks, responsibility has been claimed either by the self-proclaimed Islamic State or Ansar al-Islam, a chapter of al-Qaida in the subcontinent. But Bangladeshi authorities have denied that international jihadi groups exist in the country. They believe the attacks have been carried out by home-grown militants who are linked to the main opposition party who aims to destabilise the government.

Regardless who is countable for the killings, they are considered as a worrying sign of weakening political and security institutions.



Dilma Rousseff's impeachment generates tensions in Brazil

Brazilian lawmakers shouted, scuffled and even sang as they debated whether to impeach the country's President on 17 April. After more than six hours of voting and fiery speeches, the results did not fall in President Dilma Rousseff's favour. When the final tally was announced, 367 lawmakers had voted to impeach, comfortably more than the two-thirds (342) needed to pass the motion. Only 137 voted against the proposal, while a handful abstained.



*Dilma Rousseff speaking at her presidential inauguration on January 1, 2015.
Photo: Senado Federal [Flickr]*

Presiding over the session was Rousseff's chief accuser, speaker Eduardo Cunha, who has been the puppet master in this impeachment drama. He is accused of receiving more than £3.5m in kickbacks from the state-run oil company Petrobras and of lying to congress about Swiss bank accounts. The police raided his home and seized hundreds of documents.

The impeachment motion will next go to the country's Senate. If a majority approves it there, Rousseff will have to step down for 180 days to defend herself in an impeachment trial. If the motion is approved, Rousseff could be suspended as early as May. That would be about three months before the Summer Olympics kick off in Rio de Janeiro, an event that was supposed to showcase Brazil as a rising power on the global stage. The vote came after weeks of raucous debates inside Brazil's Congress and rival protests outside. In Copacabana (Rio de Janeiro) three big-screen TVs were set up for people to watch the proceedings. In Brasilia, police erected a 1-kilometer-long barricade on the lawn in front of Congress to separate anti-government protesters from Rousseff supporters. Opponents blame Rousseff for the worst recession in decades, now in its second year. They also hold her accountable for a massive bribery and corruption scandal that has engulfed dozens of politicians in the Workers' Party an coalition government. Although Rousseff has not been implicated in the scandal, for many years she was the chairwoman of Petrobras, the state-run oil company at the heart of the investigation. Her supporters argue the impeachment trial is a petty revenge orchestrated by



politicians accused of much more serious crimes. Rousseff's exit would mark the end of an era for the Workers' Party, which assumed the presidential office in 2003 with the election of former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. During Lula da Silva's two terms, the left-leaning party was credited with lifting millions of Brazilians out of extreme poverty through increased social spending, largely financed by booming commodities exports to China. But under Rousseff, his handpicked successor, those exports dried up. The economy started to drop at the same time the corruption investigation revealed a history of bribes involving the country's biggest construction companies, Petrobras and dozens of politicians.



Eduardo Cunha states that the Chamber of Deputies agreed to open the proceedings, on December 2, 2015. Photo: Senado Federal [Flickr]



Michel Temer in his first ministerial meeting on 13 May 2016. Photo: José Cruz [Agência Brasil]

Last month, Lula da Silva was taken in for questioning on suspicion he benefited from the scheme during his tenure and afterward. A few days later, Rousseff sought to appoint her former mentor as her chief of staff, which would have given him certain protections from prosecution. The move fuelled nationwide protests. In case of impeachment trial against Rousseff she would be replaced by Vice President Michel Temer, whose party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, or PMDB, has also been implicated in the corruption scheme and could be further weakened by the ongoing investigation. Rousseff's supporters have vowed to take to the streets in retaliation, ensuring a long battle ahead.

“opponents blame Rousseff for the worst recession in decades, now in its second year”



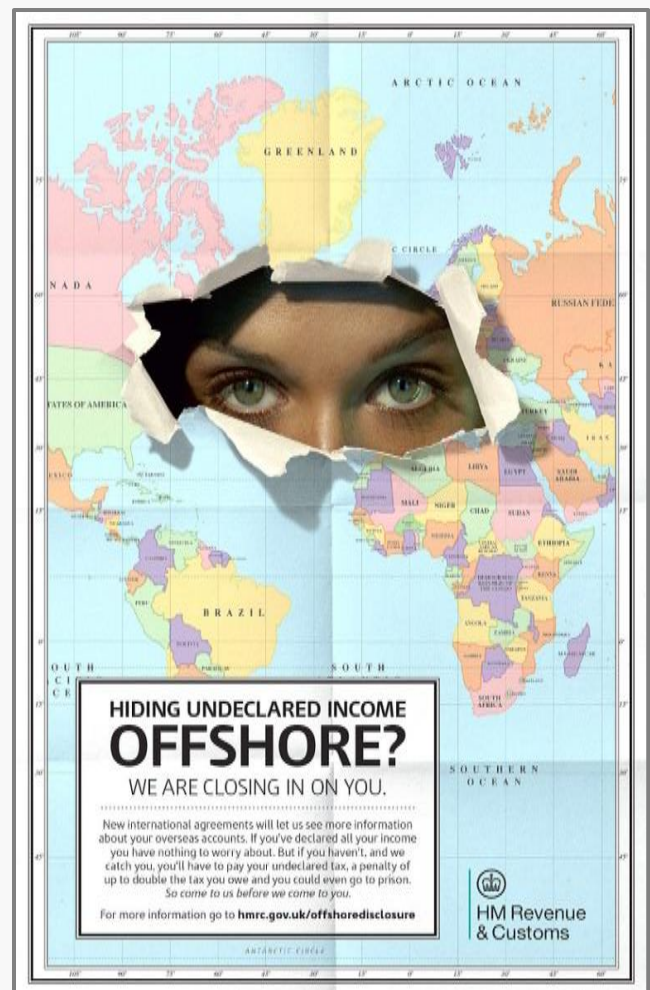
Panama papers leak

The Panama Papers leak is an unprecedented leak of 11.5 million files from the database of the world's fourth biggest offshore law firm, Mossack Fonseca, which is based in Panama and is run by a Swiss tax expert named Jurgen Mossack and his Panaman partner, Ramon Fonseca.

The firm is running a worldwide operation in which it administers offshore firms for a yearly fee and offers services such as incorporating companies and wealth management. Its website consists of 600 people working in 42 countries, having franchises all around the world, such as Switzerland, Cyprus, the British Virgin Islands, and British crown dependencies, like Guernsey, Jersey and Isle of Man. These affiliates are able to sign up new costumers and are allowed to use the firm's brand. As we can see from the above mentioned franchises, the firm has a strong connection with the United Kingdom: half of the companies are registered in British-administered tax havens, as well as in the UK.

The records were leaked from an anonymous source and obtained by the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung. The source stated that the reason he or she has stepped up was because the content of the documents seemed concerning. The

records were later shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which then made the information available to a large network of international partners, including the Guardian and the BBC.



Poster issued by the British tax authorities to counter offshore tax evasion.
Photo: H.M. Revenue & Customs [Flickr]



The unprecedented leak of Panama Papers has released a larger amount of data than in the 2010 scandal of WikiLeaks, when United States diplomatic cables were made public, and in the case of 2013, when Edward Snowden shared secret intelligence documents with journalists. In the law firm's case nearly 40 years' worth of data has been shared with the public: 11,5 million documents and 2,6 terabytes of information has been drawn from the firm's internal database, revealing illegal services, such as the facilitation of money laundering, tax avoidance and other activities which are considered as crimes.

The Panama Papers leak points out the myriad ways in which the rich can exploit secretive offshore tax regimes. The released information shows that 12 national leaders are among 143 politicians who have been using offshore tax havens.

Such leaders include Vladimir Putin, to whom a 2 billion dollar trail leads through its associations. Others include Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, ex-interim Prime Minister and former Vice President of Iraq, Ayad Allawi, Ukraine's President, Petro Poroshenko, the son of Egypt's former president, Alaa Mubarak and Icelandic Prime Minister, Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson.

British Prime Minister, David Cameron's father has been revealed of running an offshore investment fund, which has helped him to avoid paying taxes in Britain. He managed to do so by hiring a group of Bahamas residents to sign its paperwork.

On 6 April the European soccer body of UEFA was raided by the Swiss police to seize

information about a contract which was disclosed in the Panama Papers leaks. The document was signed by Gianni Infantino, the current head of FIFA, several years ago. The contract reveals that a UEFA official has sold broadcast rights to a company at a lower price, which then has sold them on a far higher price. The allegations have not been proven true or false yet.

As for the allegations against President Putin, the Kremlin believes that the information made available to the public can be considered as "a series of fibs" which are aimed at discrediting the Russian president ahead of elections. In a statement made by the office of the Icelandic Prime Minister it is revealed that the assets included in the leaked documents belong to the PM's wife and that Gunnlaugsson had no connection to any related activity.

Despite the given statements, Britain, France, Australia and Mexico have vowed to initiate investigations for possible tax evasion. The ethics committee of FIFA has also launched a preliminary investigation against one of its members.

Mossack Fonseca believes that they have done nothing illegal. Fonseca has also told CNN that the information published is both false and full of inaccuracies in the case of the parties and circumstances that were mentioned.

The Panama Papers leak reveals that the global tax system is highly damaged, secrecy nowadays is a shattered phenomenon and the global governance is fully broken.



■ News in Brief

Domestic Affairs affecting international relations

Ireland set for minority government after two main parties reach deal

■ After its inconclusive general election in February, Ireland has finally managed to settle upon a set up of a new government on 29 April, when the Republic's two main parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil has agreed on a new coalition leading the country. Fianna Fáil has agreed to facilitate a Fine Gael minority administration, which will be allowed to govern until a review of the coalition's performance in September 2018.

Two 16-year-old boys were arrested for an explosion at a Sikh temple in Essen

■ A Sikh temple in the German city of Essen was bombed and it wounded three people that had been there for a wedding ceremony earlier that day. Two 16-year-old boys were arrested for the attack but the motives were not informed to public. The authorities said that both had clear links to Islamic extremism, yet could not figure it out whether they were doing the attack on their own or there was a link to a bigger group.

Bombing in Aleppo

■ On 27 April, the Syrian government has launched a number of air strikes, targeting the rebel-held areas of Aleppo. The attack was aimed at a hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), in which an estimated 30 people were killed, including at least 6 children, 3 women and the area's last remaining pediatrician, Dr. Wasem Maaz. According to Al Jazeera, at least an additional 40 air strikes were carried out after the attack on the hospital.

Syria – Temporary Partial Truce

■ A temporary partial truce was announced by the Syrian forces in the early hours on 29 April, which is known as the "regime of calm". The truce became operational in Damascus and the region outside the capital, the Eastern Ghouta region. According to a statement given by Syrian forces, the truce was aimed to last 24 hours in the two mentioned areas and 72 hours in the northern countryside of Latakia province. However, it did not apply to the divided city of Aleppo, since it has been the primary battleground of the Syrian forces and the rebel groups.

Baghdad state of emergency declared after protesters storm parliament

■ On 30 April, a state of emergency was declared in Baghdad, after protesters stormed the Green Zone and managed to enter the parliament building. The protests have started because of the failure of Iraqi Members of Parliament. Hundreds of people were demanding a call for vote to approve new ministers. Both the United States and the United Nations believe that the ongoing political crisis could eventually become a distraction from the fight against the self-proclaimed Islamic State.



Indian textile union leader pushing for change

■ Rajaram Paritha is a union leader in India's textile industry located in Tamil Nadu. She is calling for a reform of the industry which uses bonded labor, forced overtime time, and low wages to drive up profit margins. She is also trying to shed light on the verbal and sexual abuse the women working in the textile industry face on a daily basis; it is believed there are over 100,000 women being abused within India's textile industry. Paritha is working to promote the union and inform women and girls of their rights, and to teach them leadership and lobbying skills.

Energy crisis in Venezuela

■ At the beginning of April, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro announced that Fridays will be non-working days for staff of the public sector. On 25 April, the government stated that there are going to be 4-hour long power outages nationwide. The following day it was also announced that the government offices will only function according to a "two-day week", operating only on Mondays and Tuesdays for at least two weeks in the attempt of saving energy. It was reported by the local media that protests have risen in the capital city, Caracas and the second largest city, Maracaibo on 26 April. The crowds were demonstrating against both the blackouts, both the continued shortages in food and medicine supply.

Indigenous Canadians cry for help to the government

■ Canada declared a state of emergency after a relentless wave of suicide in the northern Ontario, Attawapiskat First Nations. Robert Sutherland, a member of Attawapiskat community, had the opportunity to meet with Canada's Minister of Indigenous Affairs Carolyn Bennett and to ask where do the First Nations stand within the Canadian government's agenda. He shared his disappointment to the Canadian government who recently has decided to accept 10,000 refugees on top of the 25,000 refugees that are already in Canada. He said that the First Nations had nothing against the refugees, but they demanded the government to help bring some actions to protect the indigenous people while at the same time helping out the refugees.

South African President to face old and new corruption charges

■ South African President Jacob Zuma is facing 783 corruption charges, of which in 2009 those charges were dropped. The high court in South Africa called the earlier decision to drop those charges was irrational. Earlier in March 2016, the high court also unanimously ruled that the president failed to uphold the constitution when he did not repay some of the public funds spent on upgrades to his private estate, Nkandla. A parliamentary vote was taken to remove him from office but he survived with the backing of the governing African National Congress (ANC). However, the civil society groups and opposition parties continue to demand for President Zuma's resignation and blame his government for the failing of democracy in South Africa.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Irish PM urges citizens to make pro-EU case to UK relatives

■ On 21 April, Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny urged Irish citizens to use their influence on friends and family living in Britain, to make the case for continued membership of the European Union. According to Kenny's speech which was delivered in front of the parliament, Britain's departure from the EU would not only damage Ireland's exporters, but would also be seen as a sabotage against the Union. If the 23 June referendum will result in the UK leaving, it might also force Ireland to follow in its footsteps. Despite this realisation Kenny has stated that Ireland will continue on being a committed member of the European Union.

Egyptian police detained Italian student before his murder?

■ The Italian student who was tortured and murdered in Egypt had been detained by police and then transferred to a compound run by Homeland Security the day he vanished, intelligence and police sources say. The claims contradict the official Egyptian account that security services had not arrested him. Giulio Regeni, a 28-year-old postgraduate student, disappeared on 25 January, friends say. His body was found on 3 February, dumped on the side of a road outside Cairo. It showed signs of torture, according to forensic and prosecution officials in Egypt.

Dutch journalist arrested in Turkey for criticising Erdogan



An anti-Erdoğan poster during 2013 Gezi Park protests in Cologne, Germany.
Photo: Raimond Spekking [Wikimedia Commons]

Ebru Umar, a Dutch-born Turkish, was arrested and brought into judge for criticising the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Umar did write a piece criticising President Erdogan for the Dutch daily Metro which then she shared some points via twitter leading to her arrest. She, then, said she was free but forbidden to leave the country. Before Umar, another Dutch journalist Frederike Geerdink was arrested with the suspicion of aiding Kurdish militants which later she was acquitted.



16 Punished for deadly Doctors Without Borders

■ Last autumn's deadly and tragic attack on a hospital in Afghanistan where Doctors Without Borders was operating, is finally getting some closure. The Pentagon disciplined 16 service members for their involvement in the attack. However, none of them will face any criminal charges for their roles in the death of patients and doctors at the facility. The punishments are light, one officer was suspended and ordered to leave Afghanistan, the others were sent letters of reprimand, or were ordered to take counselling or retraining courses. The punishments are the result of a six month investigation from the Pentagon, although groups around the world demand higher punishments for the actions which have been described as war crimes.

China denies US Carrier Hong Kong visit amid maritime tension

■ China has rejected a US carrier strike group's request for a port visit to Hong Kong next week amid escalating tensions in the adjacent South China Sea. The decision follows weeks of increasing diplomatic sparring between China and the United States over Beijing's claims to more than 80 percent of the South China Sea. The nuclear-powered USS John C. Stennis and its escort ships have played a central role in US efforts to demonstrate its continued security presence in the disputed waters, with Defence Secretary Ashton Carter visiting the warship on patrol there earlier this month.

Longest drug tunnel found under US-Mexican border



The US-Mexico border fence near El Paso, Texas. Photo: Phil Gingrey [Gingrey House page]

■ Federal agents have seized a ton of cocaine and seven tons of marijuana smuggled through a clandestine tunnel stretching a half mile beneath the US-Mexico border, the longest one yet unearthed in California, authorities said on 20 of April. Six people were arrested as authorities in San Diego moved two days earlier to shut down the tunnel, the 13th underground passageway discovered along California's border with Mexico since 2006. The 870-yard-long tunnel, one of the narrowest found in the region, also yielded an unprecedented cache of drugs.



■ News in Brief

International relations

Child brides situation in Scandinavian asylum centres

■ As nations that ban child marriage, Scandinavian countries are facing a dilemma with the asylum seekers who are child brides living with older husbands in the asylum centres. However, authorities have, in some cases, let girls stay with their partners, despite the controversy, believing it is less traumatic for them than forced separation after fleeing wars. One of the critics is concerning on the issue of possible child abuse if the child brides are being homed with adults instead of with other child asylum seekers. The Scandinavian countries are still reviewing these cases and trying to find a better solution to assure the security of the child brides.

The Abu Sayyaf militant group kills a Canadian hostage

■ Canadian hostage John Ridsdel, a former mining executive, has been killed by Abu Sayyaf militants in the Philippines after the demand for ransom was not answered. He was taken hostage along with one other Canadian man, one Norwegian man and one Filipino woman. The Abu Sayyaf group demanded for ransom of 300 million peso, or about 4,4 million pounds, for each hostage. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alongside with British Prime Minister David Cameron will work together to urge other nations to halt the flow of ransom payments to terrorists and not giving up to terrorists' demands easily.

Israeli PM rejects French peace conference initiative

■ Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has rejected a French peace initiative to break the impasse in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians whereas he thinks that the initiative is pointless and not beneficial. Israel's thoughts on the best way to resolve the conflict is by having direct, bilateral negotiations. The peace initiative is initiated due to the far more apart distance both countries have since the last negotiation in 2014. The French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault insisted on having to restart the peace negotiations as he is concerned with the situation both countries are facing.

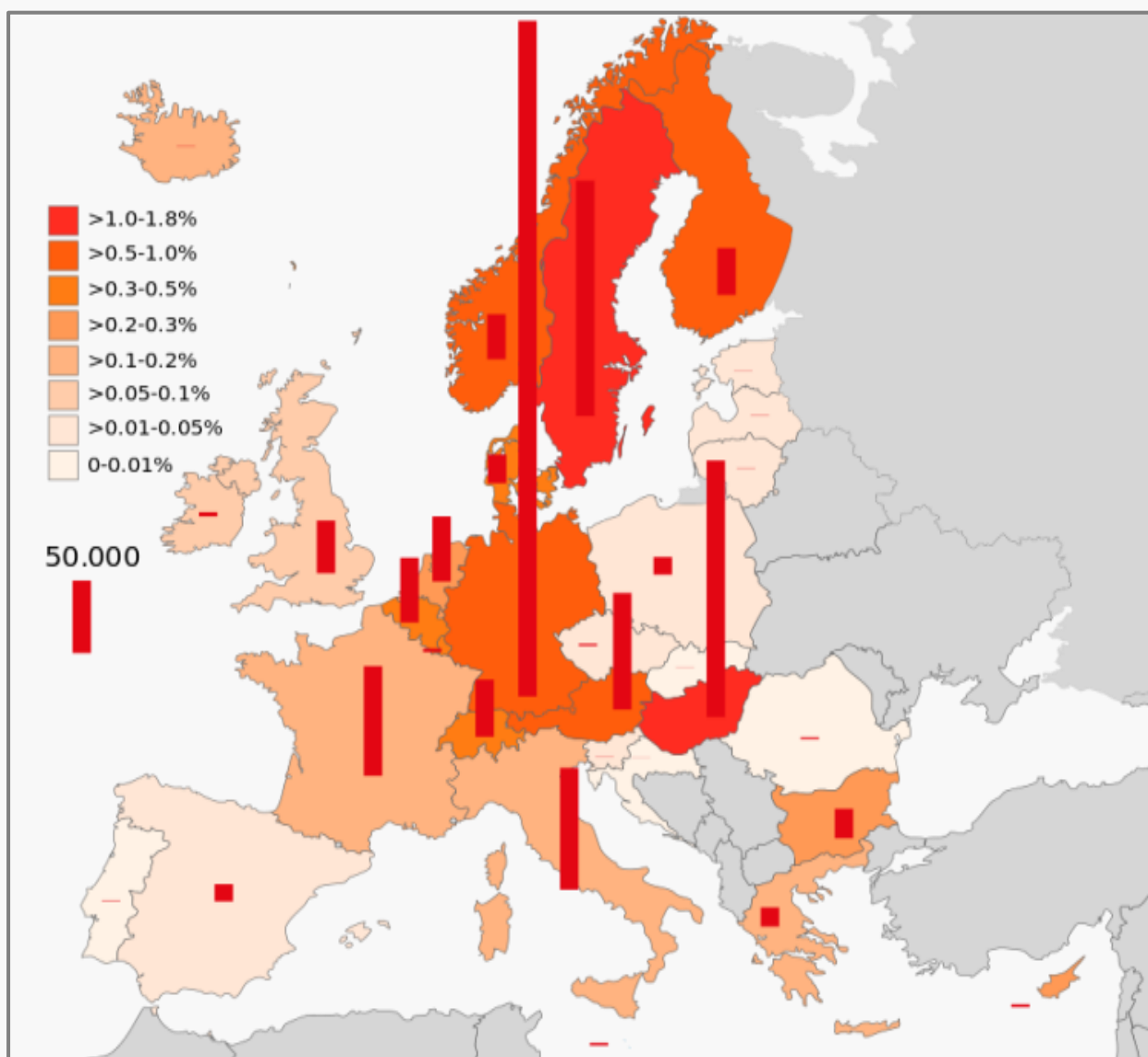
2016 World Press Freedom Index

■ Reporters without Borders released their Annual World Press Freedom Index and the results look dire for press freedom. For the first time, they rated Africa's press freedom as being higher than in the America's, highlighting a dangerous regional trend of government and private sector interference. However, it is not just a regional trend, but a worldwide trend that Reporters without Borders noticed. It seems governments worldwide have developed a significant fear of honest, professional journalism. Violence against journalists and restrictions on the press are growing, which is a concerning trend.



Ban Ki-moon attacks “the more restrictive EU” asylum policies

■ The day after Vienna passed a law allowing police to reject asylum seekers at border, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon gave a speech in the Austrian parliament. He condemned the “increasingly restrictive” policy implemented by the Australian parliament on the asylum seekers. “I am concerned that European countries are now adopting increasingly restrictive immigration and refugee policies. Such policies negatively affect the obligation of member states under international humanitarian law and European law.” Austria is the latest European country to change its asylum laws in response to the refugee crisis. Denmark, Hungary, Sweden and most recently Greece have also made it harder for refugees to reach their territory.



Asylum applicants in EU and EFTA states, January–December 2015. The height of the bars indicates the number of asylum applicants per country. Colours indicate the percentage of asylum applicants in relation to the population. Photo: Furfur/Eurostat [Wikimedia Commons]





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