

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

June 2014





Discovering International Relations
and Contemporary Global Issues
Since June 2012

About CRP News & Background

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

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Spain's new king



Felipe VI of Spain. Photo: Cancillería Ecuador

Juan Carlos I of Spain has announced his abdication after 39 years of ruling. He reigned the country between 1975 and 2014, when he decided to hand the throne to his son, Crown Prince Felipe. Juan Carlos became king two days after the death of Francisco Franco's death and began the transition from dictatorship to democracy. He established a constitutional monarchy

with the approval of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, creating the first monarch in Spain since 1931.

Crown Prince Felipe, who now became King Felipe VI, promotes international cooperation between Spanish speaking countries. He has represented Spain at many presidential inauguration ceremonies in Latin America since 1996. He visited every Latin American country, except Cuba. The new king is also known for his philanthropy and his closeness to the public. With his sisters, Elena and Cristina, he took part in a public protest after the 2004 bombings in Madrid.

Felipe was crowned in a modest ceremony fit with the countries' poor economic situation. No European royals attended the ceremony, not even Juan Carlos. The coronation signed a historical event, for this was the first time that a Spanish king has passed the crown to one of his sons since 1885. Felipe took over the throne on June 18, at midnight. He swore to protect the constitution and the laws of the country. The ceremony was attended by hundreds of Spanish politicians. Following the coronation, Felipe and his family were taken to Madrid's old royal palace where



they waved to the crowds. Following the abdication of Juan Carlos, tens of thousands went out to the streets to demand a referendum about the monarchy. According to a poll Spanish people are more indifferent to the monarchy than hostile, however. Many of them are more anxious about the high unemployment rate and the poor

economic situation of the country. Recently the popularity of the Spanish monarchy has been sinking. One could hardly see Spanish flags in the country following the coronation ceremony. According to the director of Spain's Elcano Royal Institute, Felipe VI now has a difficult task because he has to reanimate an unpopular monarchy.

“following the abdication of Juan Carlos, tens of thousands went out to the streets to demand a referendum about the monarchy”



Anti-monarchy demonstration in Spain in June. Photo: Asqueladd [Wikimedia Commons]



Ukraine crisis continues

After Crimea has been annexed to Russia, pro-Russian separatists declared independence in the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk after a referendum in May. Kiev did not recognize the independence. In late May and June fights between pro-Russian separatists and government troops have been intensifying. According to reports, separatist groups are more and more aggressive. In a border assault near the city of Luhansk, seven border guards were wounded when separatist attacked the area. Five militants died and eight were killed.

An explosion followed in the main regional administrative building that was previously occupied by the separatists. It is still unknown whether there were any casualties. Pro-Russian groups accused Ukrainian military of launching an air strike, which caused the explosion. Kiev denied the accusations. Around 500 pro-Russian militants are believed to participate in the border attack. They promised safety for those Ukrainian officers who surrender. Although there was a short ceasefire, fighting soon resumed. Heavy fights also continue around the city of Sloviansk, which was captured by the separatists.



Republic of Crimea and of Sevastopol. Map: Wikimedia Commons

Ukrainian troops shelled the city. One member of the security forces was killed and another 13 were injured.

The Ukrainian crisis attracted international attention. US President Barack Obama has announced that Russia can expect more sanctions if it continues to destabilize Ukraine. He said this when participating in a conference during his visit in Poland. Obama also declared that the US will increase its military presence in Europe and will help its NATO allies – including Ukraine. Meanwhile Petro Poroshenko has been inaugurated as president of Ukraine. The new president announced that he wants to bring peace to the eastern part of the country and he did not want revenge. He added that Crimea will always be



Ukrainian, however. Kiev also accused Russia of supporting the separatist groups in the Donbass area. After his inauguration Poroshenko promised regional elections, decentralization of power to regional administration, and an escaped corridor for civilians until fighting ends.

Apart from the warring, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that there was a progress in peace talks. There is now a good chance for ceasefire, which was confirmed by German and Polish foreign ministers as well. On past peace talks no improvement was achieved because Russian separatists claimed that Russia did not speak for them. Rebels also decided to release four out of those eight hostages (international observers) who were

captured a month ago. The four who were set free were taken to a hotel in Donetsk, the rest of them are still in captivity in the Luhansk region.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict also causes trouble for the rest of Europe, for Russia decided to stop gas transfer to Ukraine. One of the largest companies of the world, Gazprom said that since Ukraine managed to pay back its debts it has to pay in advance. If Gazprom halts gas supplies to Ukraine, it threatens the rest of Europe as well. Although the company said that it will supply Europe, Alexei Miller, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors at Gazprom warned that the Ukrainian situation is risking gas transit to Europe.



US President Barack Obama and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.
Photo: White house

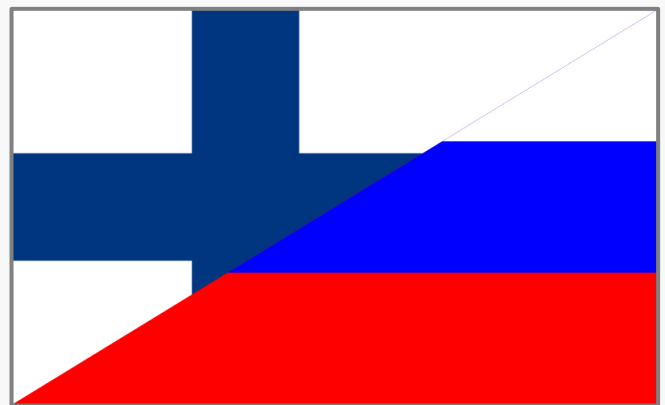


“Russophobia” spreading in Europe?

More and more European countries seem to step away from Russia's political and economic influence by having tighter ties with international organisations and other entities. The change has been strongly on the agenda mainly because it is considered to be the most significant cause of the still ongoing Ukrainian crisis.

The most debated current series of negotiations is the one about the Finnish NATO membership that would mean the end of the country's neutral politics. The official accession would not change the practical moves of Finland as it already participates in almost all the sub-areas of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and has provided peacekeeping forces to several missions – for example in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Still, there is large-scale support to officially join in higher political circles, even from the current president. This is why Finland and the NATO announced in April that they would sign the Memorandum of Understanding that can be a milestone in the accession process.

As a regionally important possible counterpart, Russia is outraged even about the idea of Finland joining the NATO. In an interview in June, Vladimir Putin's personal



Flag of Russia and Finland. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

envoy Sergey Aleksandrovich Markov expressed Moscow's position that such an event would be unacceptable and could be the cause of World War III. According to him, the anti-Russia political changes in Europe are due to the growing “Russophobia” that is the strongest in Finland and the Baltic states. As he said, this can lead to bad decisions and further conflicts in the future.

In spite of the political support in Finland, the accession is said to be far in the future as the public opinion seems to hardly oppose it. According to a survey in June, only 29 per cent supported it, while 52 were against and 19 undecided.

Although Finland is in the spotlight of Russia's attention, there are other countries



as well where Moscow failed to convince the political leadership of closer ties. In June, three geopolitically important states, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova signed partnership agreements with the EU. The deals include free trade agreements as well, that will bring the cooperation into economic spheres. The EU will also aspire to commit these countries to EU standards by new customs regulations, quality controls and the implementation of free market competition. Commenting the events, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned the

EU about serious and dangerous consequences. As he said, these countries can experience what Ukraine did: the pressure of Brussels on the politics of these countries can divide the society even more, providing the possibility of violent internal conflicts. As many experts claim, it will have the most serious effect of Russia: the cheap EU products will displace the expensive and lower-quality Russian products on the market, while Moscow will get isolated both politically, both geopolitically.

“commenting the events, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned the EU about serious and dangerous consequences”



Ukraine ministry of foreign affairs with EU flagging. Photo: JøMa [Wikimedia Commons]



The “elections of blood” and the birth of a new caliphate

On June 3 the Syrian presidential elections were held in the ruins of the civil war. President Bashar al-Assad won the elections for another seven-year term with absolute majority, however, both the European Union and the United States described the voting as “illegitimate” and a “big zero”, since the population is being kept in fear and thousands of Syrians are living in refugee camps not having the opportunity to vote. A few days after his re-election, Assad offered amnesty for those who are charged with “terrorist attacks” or “setting up a group aimed at changing the economic or social nature of the state”. The amnesty covers full pardon and the reduction of sentences, also for foreign fighters.

However, the elections have not changed anything, the civil war is going on between the government and the opponents. In the middle of the month barrel bombs struck the northern part of Aleppo held by the opposition. The assassination was committed by the Syrian government's helicopters claiming around 60 victims on a market who were waiting for food aid and raising the number of the killed in the war over 160,000. Assad's forces also managed



President Bashar al-Assad. Photo: Fabio Rodrigues Pozzebom



to seize Kasab, an Armenian Christian village at the Syria-Turkey border, which was under the domination of the opponents and the residents of Kasab were happy to return to their village after three months. Meanwhile the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) highlighted that chlorine gas might have been used in Syria and caused the deaths of hundreds of people near Damascus. The international inspectors have already removed the 92 percent of the chemical materials, such as sarin, from Syria but they do not get adequate contribution to do so with the remained

suspected involvement in a terrorist attack related to Syria. Not only Britain is struggling with such militant-related problems but France as well, where four more people have been arrested suspected with recruiting militants to Syria. As President Barack Obama has said the only possibility right now to stop ISIS is arming the Syrian rebels, since thanks to ISIS' success their supplies are growing and they already have anti-aircraft weapons as well.

Establishing the Islamic State, a new caliphate in late June indicates the power and significance of the ISIS. Its territory is declared to extend from Iraq's Diyala to

“more and more young British Muslims are going to Syria to join the extremists”

8 percent, though, the deadline for the destruction of the weapons was 30 June set by the UN Security Council. Finally, Syria handed over its acknowledged stockpile which was taken to Italy but the elimination has to be delayed by about two months.

Another issue that has occurred recently regarding this conflict is that more and more young British Muslims are going to Syria to join the extremists owing to the recruitment video spread by the Sunni terrorist group called ISIS which claims territories on both Iraqi and Syrian sides. According to some reports, about 400 Britons have gone to Syria to take part in the fights. In the end of May a 19-year-old was taken into custody by the counter-terrorism police to be questioned about his

Aleppo in Syria. The group announced that their chief, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the “caliph” and the “leader for Muslims everywhere”. In conclusion, the civil war does not seem to come to end yet, on the contrary, more and more people are getting involved and more and more victims it claims. But according to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, there are six necessary steps to make peace in the region: ending the violence; protecting people; launching a serious political process; ensuring accountability for serious crimes; finishing the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria; and addressing the regional dimensions of the conflict, including the extremist threat.



New wave of violence in Israel and Palestine



Israel-Palestine flag. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

Three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped by a terrorist organization on June 12 near Hebron, in the West Bank. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu declared the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas responsible for the incident. According to the PM the abduction was the result of the Fatah-Hamas unity and the new Palestinian unit government. "To my regret, this event underscores what we have been saying – myself, the Defence Minister and the Government of Israel – for many months: The pact with Hamas has led to very harsh results, results which are the exact opposite of advancing peace

between us and the Palestinians," Netanyahu said. He also added that the pact gave Hamas an opportunity to seize Judea and Samaria.

Adnan Damiri, spokesman for the PA security forces in the West Bank, said since the kidnapping had happened in an area under Israeli control, only the Israeli government was to be blamed. He confirmed his statement with the fact that Palestinian policemen have been arrested when entering this area to arrest criminals. Netanyahu demanded the Palestinian Authority to do everything in order to find the hostages as the kidnappers came from Palestinian territories. The FBI also launched an investigation, since one of the teenagers had dual Israeli-American citizenship. During the raids by Israeli military searching for the missing teens, a Palestinian teenager was killed as well when firing at live ammunition and about 400 Palestinians were arrested, some of them were Hamas' members.

In the end of June the three kidnapped teenagers, Gilad Sha'ar, Naftali Frankel and Eyal Yifrach were found dead close to the place where they had been abducted. Earlier Netanyahu did not name the terrorist



organization that he charged with the abduction but now he is accusing directly the Hamas. However, Hamas praised the abduction – saying “regardless of who was responsible ... the Palestinian people have the right to use all forms of resistance in order to liberate land and people”, they refuse the charges but the Israeli and Palestinian officials are on the same page as for the participation of Hamas in this incident. As a result of the kidnapping, according to some sources, Israeli military forces are moving towards Hebron – so Netanyahu may keep his promise: “Hamas will pay”. The tensions are escalating owing to a rocket fire which struck southern Israel on June 30 and the Israeli Prime Minister declared they were ready to extend the operations. Meanwhile another tragedy

struck Israel – a 15-year-old boy, Mohammed Karaka was killed by a Syrian cross-border attack on a civilian vehicle while doing contract work for the Defence Ministry of Israel on June 22. This incident happened on the Israeli side of the Golan Heights and he was the first victim of the Syrian civil war in more than three years. According to the Israeli military, the attack was unprovoked attempt to hurt Israel's sovereignty, as this part of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel in 1967 has never been recognized by the international community; the Israeli warplanes bombed the Syrian targets in response. Netanyahu said that their “enemies don't differentiate between Jews and non-Jews, adults and children” and the best they could do is to let Israel's enemies weaken each other.



A child in Jerusalem. Photo: Josi Grinboju



Iraqi insurgency escalates as ISIL captures key cities



Seal of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Picture: ISIL

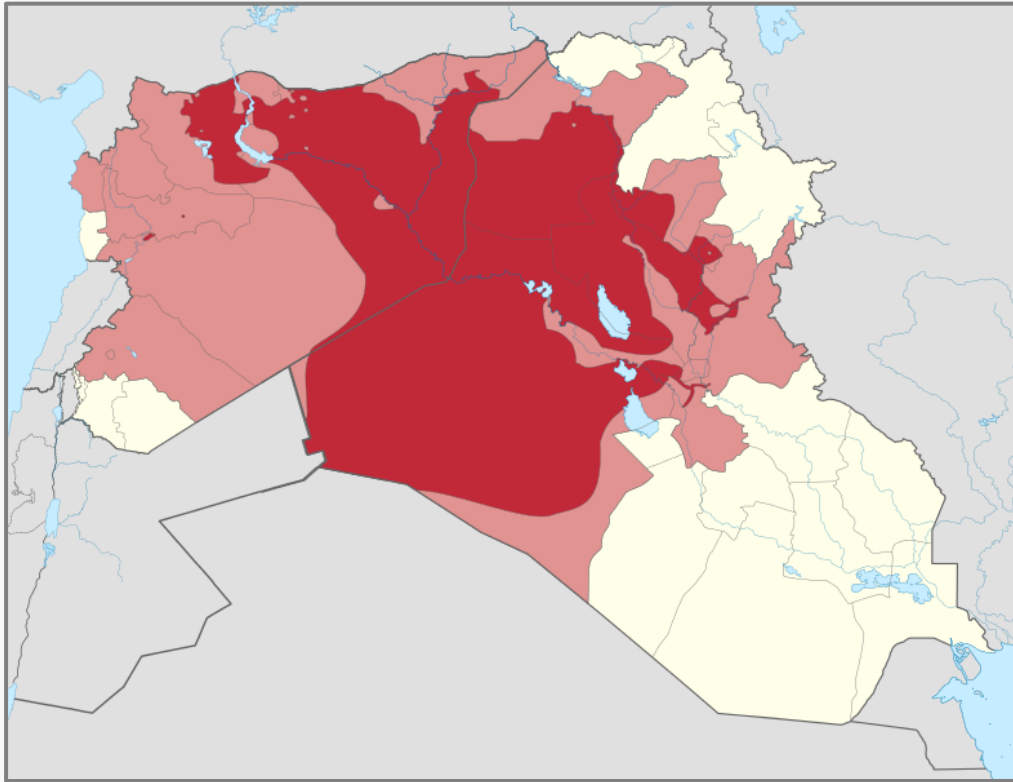
Extremist member of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) seized Iraq's second largest city, Mosul in the beginning of June and released more than 1,000 inmates from prison, prompting residents and troops to leave the city. According to the latest figures, the number of the militants in Iraq now can reach up to 6,000, who have been fighting for 10 years against US forces and the country's Shias in the civil war. The militants invaded into the Turkish consulate in Mosul capturing the consul and his staff too. Afterwards Iraq's

foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari suggested a meeting between the European Union and the Arab League foreign ministers in Athens. He also added that the Iraqi troops and Kurdish forces in Iraq should cooperate to rout the insurgents out of Mosul.

After the seizure of Mosul the ISIL fighters occupied the city of Tikrit as well. They freed about 300 prisoners. Meanwhile, in the city of Kirkuk, which is the biggest oil refinery in Iraq, the invaders also appeared offering safety for the Iraqi soldiers if they give up their weapons. By this time already 500,000 people have left Mosul since the city was seized by the militants. Nouri al-Maliki, the Prime Minister of Iraq, asked President Barack Obama repeatedly for launching drone attacks and airstrikes against the Islamist extremists but Washington did not intend to get involved in this conflict.

ISIL fighters, however, did not stop after taking these cities, they also advanced into the oil refinery town of Baiji and warned the tribal leaders to put down their weapons. In the northern part of Baghdad, in Sadr City, a suicide bomber committed assassination killing at least 15 people and wounding 34 others in a tent giving place for the





Map of Iraq - Red territories are already occupied by ISIL. Map: NordNordWest [Wikimedia Commons]

meeting of the local Shia leaders. In Anbar province three towns have been taken by the militants: Rawah, Anah and an extremely significant crossing between Syria and Iraq, Qaim. Besides Qaim, two more border crossings have been occupied by ISIL: Turaibil, which borders on Jordan, and al-Walid, which borders on Syria as well. The highway between Baghdad and the Jordanian border has been also disrupted, which was a key route for both goods and passengers. By capturing these towns, the fighters seemed to be planning to reach a key dam in Haditha. The disruption of this dam would seriously harm Iraq's electrical grid and produce major flooding.

Afterwards the militants planned to march forward to Baghdad and join the Saddam Hussein-era loyalists and other Sunnis who are opposing the Shia governments' politics. A huge number of Americans had

to be evacuated in Baghdad because of the Sunni fighters. Maliki asked his parliament to announce state of emergency but they did not manage to gather the quorum.

The powerful religious leader, Moqtada al-Sadr called in Shia armed groups against the militants and Sadr's Mahdi Army militia is supposed to have about 100,000 warriors. In the meantime Maliki asked Iranian-backed Shia fighters and volunteers to strengthen his security forces. The pressure on Maliki is getting bigger and bigger and if he wants to in power, his party has to form a majority coalition in the legislature by June 30, since most Shia leaders want him out too.

After these incidents, US President Barack Obama decided to send about 275 US military troops to Iraq to help in the protection of the US Embassy in Baghdad



so the ambassador can fulfil his diplomatic mission in the region. Obama's intention by deploying these personnel in Iraq is also to protect US citizens and property there. Washington brings helicopters and drone aircrafts, as well, to improve airfield and travel route in Baghdad. Until the security improves, the extra troops will stay in Iraq. Now the estimated number of the US troops in the country is about 470. Meanwhile, Russia is selling second-hand Sukhoi jet fighters to the Iraqi government.

Even Syria and Iraq joined together thanks to the common enemy, ISIL. Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has given Syria permission to launch airstrikes on the Sunni-held positions in the area of Iraq. Maliki said "We welcome any Syrian strike against Isis, because this group targets both Iraq and Syria ... But we didn't make any request from Syria. They carry out their strikes and

we carry out ours. The final winners are our two countries". The actions of ISIL brings together not only Syria and Iraq but Iran as well, which also feels threatened by the extremists and is thinking about military intervention.

All in all, the Islamist extremists do not seem to stop and are still fighting against the Shias. In the end of June ISIL managed to establish a new caliphate in certain parts of Iraq and Syria and declared their chief, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the "leader of Muslims everywhere" and they are planning to implement their strict Shariah law in the seized areas. However, the death toll is really high on both sides and ISIL prompt Iraq and Syria to cooperate and also Washington is thinking about arming the Syrian rebels to stop the Sunni militants.



Searching for insurgents in Iraq, 2007. Photo: Elisha Dawkins



Sisi stabilises his power in Egypt

Egypt, three and a half years after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's regime and the landslide victory of former army chief Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi in elections in May this year, has not yet found its Arab Summer after a turbulent Spring. Ex-president Morsi, who came to power as the first freely-elected president of Egypt following 30 years of rule under Mubarak, and was ousted by el-Sisi one year ago, is now facing trial for charges that carry the death penalty, while series of mass trials of his supporters are making the headlines these days. Alone in June, over 180 members of the so-called Muslim Brotherhood were sentenced to death by Egyptian courts, among them their spiritual leader and other influential members. Brotherhood supporters, now officially declared supporters of a terrorist organisation under the new government, have witnessed a series of mass trials, the largest of which saw 529 sentenced to death in one session in southern Egypt.

The trials, usually held at military courts, have drawn worldwide rebuke. Negad-el Borai, a prominent rights lawyer, warns that "There has been an excess in using the death sentences recently, which will only lead to more violence in society because people are now used to the idea of execution, killing and blood," while international organisations, such as Human

Rights Watch, also point to the alarming number of arrests of human rights activists and the jailing of young demonstrators under a new law passed last year that restricts protests. Other activists face charges related to protests held in Cairo last November against provision in a new constitution that allows citizens to be tried in military courts.

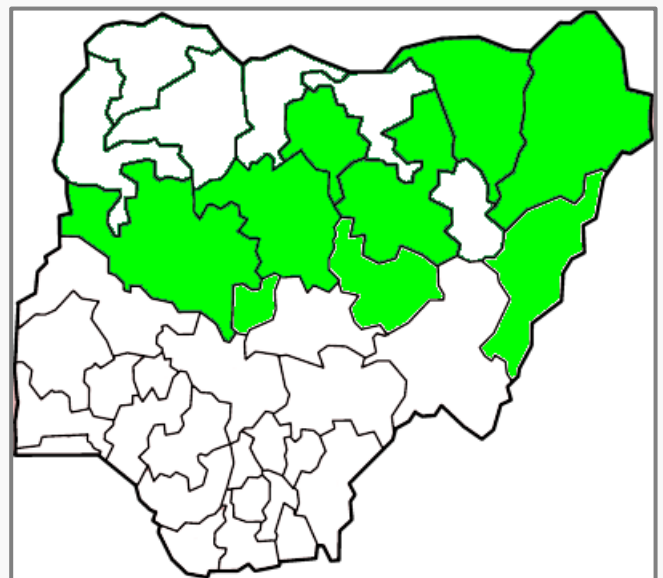
After being sworn in on the 8th of June, el-Sisi justifies such rigorous actions with the need for security and order, maintaining that free speech must take a back seat while he fights Islamic militants and works to revive the ailing economy. Indeed, the country is facing massive challenges, above all a stagnating economy and social inequalities, with about 25% of ordinary Egyptians living below the poverty line in the Arab world's most populous country. The president, who so far enjoys the backing of influential and rich Arab nations such as Saudi-Arabia, Kuwait and Emirates, has sent out "very few and contradictory signals", which might be at his disadvantage, considering growing international concern about his actions and rising discontent among the Egyptian people with a government, which they cannot relate to – a fact that contributed to the revolts which toppled Mubarak's regime.



Boko Haram attacks continue in Nigeria

Issa Tchiroma Bakary, Cameroon's communication minister has confirmed that Boko Haram released prisoners. Two Italian priests and a nun have been set free, who were kidnapped in northern Cameroon in April, allegedly by Boko Haram. The two priests, Giampaolo Marta and Gianantonio Allegri were missionaries from Vicenza, northern Italy. They were working to improve water supplies and supporting the fight against the spread of HIV in the country. The third released prisoner, Gilberte Bussiére, was a nun. According to the Montreal-based *Congrégation de Notre Dame*, she was working in Cameroon since 1979. At the time of her kidnapping she was a consultant for a school in Douvangar. Vatican spokesman Reverend Federico Lombardi said the release of the three prisoners is a great relief. Boko Haram recently has been carrying out kidnappings in Cameroon.

Boko Haram is causing great trouble in Nigeria. Since 2009, the Islamist militant group waged war on the government, aiming at creating a purely Islam country. The group is attacking institutions that are believed to spread Western influence. They attracted international attention in April



Map of Boko Haram's activity between 2010 and 2013. Map: Nerika [Wikimedia Commons]

2014, when 200 schoolgirls were abducted from Chibok, in Borno state. Borno state is one of the three areas that are under the state of emergency since 2013. The two others are Yobe and Adamawa states. In June, Boko Haram carried out many attacks on villages in the north. At least dozens died in the village of Gwoza, in Borno state, where Boko Haram opened fire on a church gathering. Militants were dressed as soldiers and pretended that they came to help the villagers. They were told to gather in the church, where militants fired on them. Similar event occurred in the



village of Bardari, near the University of Maiduguri. Attackers said they came to preach for the people, who were then gathered together. 45 people died after the militants fired on them. Officials say that up to 200 people were killed in the region in one week.

The World Cup also attracted the attention of Boko Haram. A suicide bomber – supposedly belonged to Boko Haram – killed 14 and injured 26 people at a bar where people were watching the World Cup in Damaturu, Yobe state. A hospital worker said 21 people died. The bomb

went off after the Brazil vs. Mexico game. The attack was similar to the one carried out by the Somali al-Shabab group in Uganda in 2010. 74 people died when the group attacked people who were watching the 2010 World Cup. Boko Haram also carried out a bomb attack after a local football game in the town of Mubi, Adamawa state. A bomb blasted when supporters were trying to leave the place after the game. Most of the victims were fans and it is still unknown whether any of the players got wounded.

“officials say that up to 200 people were killed in the region in one week”



*A truck promotes the #BringBackOurGirls hash tag used by protesters of the 2014 Chibok kidnapping.
Photo: VOA*



Presidential elections in Afghanistan



Presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah. Photo: US Department of State

Days before the presidential elections in Afghanistan, two bombs went off targeting presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah, who survived the attack. Six people died, including Abdullah's bodyguards and 2 people were injured. The first explosion was detonated by a suicide bomber in a car; the origin of the second bomb is still unclear. Abdullah was leaving an election gathering as a part of his poll rally when his

convoy was attacked. It was the first attack since the presidential campaign started. After the attack, Abdullah appeared live on television to tell his supporters he is alive. No group took responsibility for the attack. The Taliban, however, has repeatedly threatened to stop the poll campaign and condemned the poll as US sponsored charade. Abdullah's opponent, Ashraf Ghani, publicly condemned the attack on his Twitter.

Since the polls opened 150 attacks were carried out in the country. On Election Day security has been tightened. 200,000 soldiers were deployed to polling stations. Police have been checking almost every car. Reports said that rocket attacks occurred some places when polls were opened. According to Omer Daudza, Afghan interior minister, the US trained military was able to deflect most of the violence. Thousands of donkeys were used to transfer polling boxes throughout the countries due to poor road conditions. On the last elections, on April 5, neither of the two candidates secured the 50% majority. This time Abdullah secured 45% of the votes for himself, while Ghani received 31.6%. The preliminary result is expected on July 2 and the final result will be published on July 22.



Chinese visit to Taiwan cancelled

Since the Chinese revolution in 1949, when the previous government ousted by the Communists fled to the island of Formosa (Taiwan), the China-Taiwan relations have been forming a hot spot of international relations. Even nowadays, Beijing does not recognise the independent Taiwan and treats it as a part of its own territory – while Taiwan has been governing itself for more than six decades. During all this time, the two entities have built up two totally different political systems: in China, the Communist Party rules almost everything while Taipei succeeded to build up a multiparty democracy.

Due to these historical reasons, new economic and political deals always have a big echo in both countries. It is significant even more in Taiwan, where every help or cooperation with China is seen as an imperial aspiration of the Communist Party. Since the negotiations started about closer economic and trade ties, the Taiwanese have been protesting on the streets, standing up for the political independence. In March and April thousands participated in different demonstrations, even occupied the building of the Parliament. The protests became more intense and violent when Zhang Zijun, head of Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office visited the island. It was a historic step, as he was the first government minister to visit Taiwan. In spite of the importance, the public opinion was strongly opposed to the 'charm offense'. There were signs everywhere saying 'Communist



Zhang Zijun. Photo: Securityconference.de

Zhang Zijun, get the hell back to China'. Only on his first day, three hundred protesters gathered. First, they just peacefully expressed their opinion, but then tried to throw white paint at Zijun. They did not succeed, but could cover almost fully the security staff. The action was committed by the members of the pro-democracy Black Island Nation Youth Front.

Due to the uncordial welcome, Zhang Zijun cancelled his four-day visit and travelled back to Beijing. He was not outraged by the events, but Taiwanese anti-Chinese protesters see it as a usual step from China: they might seem accepting the events, but deep inside they intend to take further steps. It is still a question how it will influence the trade act and the whole economy, as Taiwan's biggest trading partner is China.



Anti-government protests in Bangkok

Appropriately enough, as many protesters in Bangkok's squares and representative shopping malls are wearing Guy Fawkes masks from the popular movie "V for Vendetta", their protest could be described with one of the quotes from the movie: "Beneath this mask there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an idea [...] and ideas are bulletproof." Indeed, the people's ideas of the ideal state were stronger than their former government's cover-up tactics, which were used to detract attention away from corruption and patronage and they are stronger than the fear of the current military regime. Seven months of mass opposition protests against the former Thai government had led to a military coup on May the 22nd yet protests are continuing – in smaller numbers but on a daily basis. What is remarkable is that media censorship and intimidation tactics used by the military regime, such as a night-time curfew and a martial law which bans political assemblies of more than five people, do not seem to have any impact on the protests. Several arrests have made the headlines in the last months, among them leading activists, which especially used the power of symbols and social media in order to get organised.

The Guy Fawkes mask is only one of these symbols; protesters were also seen with posters of Prayuth's, the military commander's, face with the words

"Thailand 1984", a reference to George Orwell's anti-authoritarian novel which has become an accessory for many of the Bangkok protesters. Also the three-fingered salute from the "Hunger Games", a symbol of resistance and rebellion against totalitarian rule, could be seen frequently. Among the protesters are members of the "Red Shirt" movement, who are supporters of the ousted government, ordinary pro-democracy campaigners from the Bangkok middle class and also "Yellow Shirt" protesters, supporters of the pro-establishment opposition. Their aims and ideas might differ, yet the symbols of discontent and revolution, which could be seen in other parts of the world, such as in the Occupy movement in winter 2011, binds them together.

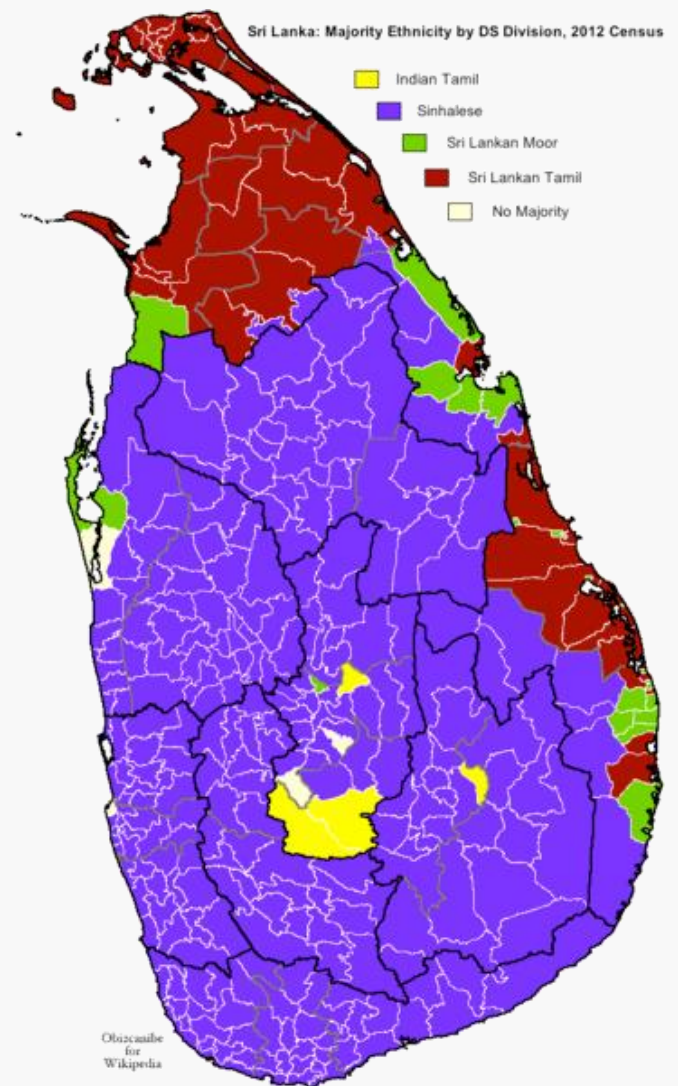
The military regime will have to take these protests seriously, as they will not stop before democracy will finally be restored – a goal which seems far away at the moment: military rulers have declared that an elected government will not take over for at least 15 months. Critics accuse General Prayuth of using the violence as a pretext for a long-planned power grab by the military and its supporters within the Bangkok-based elite. Another quote from the movie might be suitable here: "People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people."



Buddhist-Muslim unrest in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, which is nowadays presented to tourists as an “island paradise”, has left the bloody 26-year long civil war long behind, yet ethnic differences, which shaped the country’s identity for centuries still lead to tensions between the Sri Lankan people, as this could be seen in June, when underlying tensions between Buddhists and Muslims escalated in violence.

Sri Lanka had long been regarded by the United Nations as a model developing nation; a country which gained peaceful independence from the British Empire in 1948 and which is characterised by its various ethnic populations with their distinctive and fascinating cultures, traditions and religions. Three main ethnic groups form the cultural landscape of Sri Lanka until today: the Buddhist Sinhalese majority, the linguistic/religious Minority of Tamils – which consists of the Ceylon Tamils and the Indian Tamils, and finally, the Muslim group of Tamil speakers. Even though these groups can be traced in Sri Lanka’s pre-colonial era, there were not any significant disputes between them. Only in 1815, when the British, who took over from the Portuguese and Dutch in 1796, put the whole country under



Ethnicity map of Sri Lanka. Map: Obizcanibe [Wikimedia Commons]



administrative rule, it affected the relations between the ethnic groups. Feelings of insecurity rose among the Sinhalese population, when the Tamils managed to dominate the civil and business services, and imbalances were created. A bloody and long-lasting civil war between the Tamil Tigers, the LTTE, and the Sri Lankan government, was the result, which claimed more than 100,000 lives over the years and

which is located between Colombo, the country's capital, and Galle, a popular tourist destination. Whereas the long-lasting civil war was mainly between the ethnic groups of the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils, the current violence is directed against the Muslim population, which make less than 10% of the country. The riots were not a random act of aggression, but indeed an escalation of an anti-Muslim

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left the country shattered and traumatised. The peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups, as it can be seen in various other parts of the world, is in danger, when outer circumstances favour one or more groups at different times, and hostility and competition for political and economic power are being created. What happened in these last few weeks in Sri Lanka, is indeed a result of such imbalance, even if it might only be the result of a minority complex, fuelled by fear, envy and anger in the minds of the people.

On the 16th of June, in some of the worst religious violence in Sri Lanka in decades, three people have been killed and 78 injured in riots between Buddhists and Muslims in a south-western coastal town,

sentiment. Dayan Jayatilleke, a political scientist and former Sri Lankan diplomat, explains that this sentiment had only arisen in 2009, saying: “When the war was over, the Sinhalese looked around and found that while the two major communities were bashing each other, the Muslims had been at peace and had prospered. They found more mosques, stores, better educated young Muslims – a changed profile after years of war. And they lashed out.”

In a country with no history of domestic Islamic extremism, this is quite remarkable but what seems to be more surprising is the rise of so-called “Buddhist radicalism” in Sri Lanka. The riots followed a protest march by a hard-line Buddhist group, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS, also known as Buddhist Power





Muslim woman in Sri Lanka. Photo: Adam Jones

Force), which is led in part by monks who are shouting anti-Muslim slogans and setting Mosques on fire. Their leader, a man called Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, rejects the Dalai Lama as the group's spiritual leader, is delivering hate speeches and openly declaring: "Yes, we are racists!" "Yes, we are religious extremists!" The evening of the 16th of June, when he was delivering this speech, the mob attacked Aluthgama, Beruwala and nearby Darga Nagar, three towns with a large Muslim presence. By creating fear and envy among the Sinhalese population, the BBS is trying to gain more influence among the people, who see Muslims as a rising power in Sri Lanka, as they control at least half of small businesses and hold near-monopolies in the textile and gem trades. The BBS,

which was formed in 2012, is furthermore promoting an international agenda; in the past it has campaigned on issues including alleged poor treatment of Sri Lankan Buddhists working in the Middle East or Christian evangelization.

The government of Sri Lanka, meanwhile, is slow in its actions, so that many in Sri Lanka believe that Bodu Bala Sena has the quiet backing of Mr. Rajapaksa, the president, as well as his brother, Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In fact, previous attacks by the Bodu Bala Sena have gone unpunished, and hard-line monks have been able to operate largely with legal impunity. Only three weeks after the bloodshed, the government of Sri Lanka held a press conference, in which it distanced itself from the attacks yet it did neither condemn them nor will the perpetrators face any legal persecution.

Such lack of action is raising increasingly concern among human rights activists and abroad. The violence has raised fears that Sri Lanka could soon see echoes of Myanmar, where Buddhist monks helped incite violence in 2012 and 2013 in which Buddhist mobs slaughtered Rohingya Muslims.

The week after the incident, many Muslim parents did not send their daughters to school, while other Muslim girls were advised to remove their hijabs and long Panjabi trousers and hide them in their school bags at the slightest sign of any trouble. This indicates that Muslims' identity has become a liability in post-civil war Sri Lanka. The fact that "Impunity breeds further violation" should be taken very serious by the Sri Lankan authorities now.



Five Taliban detainees released from Guantanamo Bay

US President Barack Obama made a huge deal with the Taliban: in return of Bowe Bergdahl, a US soldier held by Afghan militants, he released five high-ranking Taliban detainees from Guantanamo Bay. The decision evoked huge debates in Washington's political circles, mainly because as some congressional Republicans claim, by this Obama broke a federal law.

The aforementioned federal law was signed by the President just six months ago. By this, the National Defense Authorization Act, he made it compulsory for Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to notify the Congress about any transfer from Guantanamo Bay 30 days before the action. The swap was realised on 1 June and even a day after congressmen said that they had not received any official notification. Obama still does not consider it a violation of law as he attached a statement to his signature that he would not be obliged to notify the Congress under certain circumstances. As he said, publicity would have put into risk the life and security of Bowe Bergdahl and this situation needed a special solution behind the scenes. Not only the notification's circumstances, but Bowe Bergdahl himself gave doubts to the



Bowe Bergdahl. Photo: United States Army

publicity. Despite the US media which treats him as a hero of the American nation, many claim that he is a deserter and his freedom does not worth the life of five Taliban-alleged prisoners. Some even speculate that he was willing to join the Taliban in Afghanistan. One thing is for sure: the circumstances of his disappearance are still not clear.

Apart from the release of the five Taliban, Obama is taking steps to transfer all the detainees from Guantanamo Bay, to which he often refers as a dark spot of the American history. The final plan is to close the facility, to put an end to its activity and to bring the prisoners to the US, to Afghanistan, Algeria, Saudi Arabia or to any other country that allows it.



Worsening economic situation in Argentina and Brazil



US President Barack Obama with Cristina Fernandez. Photo: Presidencia de la Nación

President Cristina Fernandez promised that she will do everything to find a way to pay back debts of her country. She said this despite that a major setback recently hit the country because of holdout investors, who bring Argentina closer to a default. Holdouts refused to join a debt restructuring deal since the 2001–2002 default. The holdouts that are waging legal war on the

government is led by Aurelius Capital Management and NML Capital Ltd., a part of Elliot Management Corporation, owned by billionaire Paul Singer.

Fernandez made her announcement after US Supreme Court refused an appeal from Argentina to delay a default. The president condemned US courts for continuously ruling against her. Previously, lower court rulings ordered the country to pay holdout funds equal to \$ 1.33 billion. Argentina refused saying that it will not pay until an agreement about debt restructuring is reached. The present Supreme Court decision also prevents the country from normalizing its relations with foreign investors and creditors.

Fernandez also claimed that if they pay on their terms it will lead to other claims from holdouts that can reach up to \$15 billion. Bondholders bought the debt at a very low price and now claiming back full amount. Bonds and stocks fell dramatically in the middle of June because investors had believed that the Supreme Court will delay a decision on Argentina's appeal. This would have given time to Fernandez to negotiate with holdouts about the restructuring of debts outside of US



jurisdiction. Fernandez said that her country was – and is still – ready for a negotiation. She would pay the creditors who accept the restructuring. However, a clause included in the country's debt swap forbids Argentina to offer other terms for holdouts. The clause will expire in the end of December and it is a question whether the government is able to keep blocking investors and US courts until that time. 90% of the debts have already been renegotiated in 2005 and 2010, when investors accepted 25 and 29 cents on the dollar.

Meanwhile Brazil is also struggling with economic depression, which resulted in a strike by metro workers in Sao Paulo. The strike was over wage increase. The workers were offered an 8.8% increase, but they wanted 12.2%. The 5-day stoppage caused traffic chaos and also threatened the successful management of the World Cup. A court ordered workers to return to their jobs, but they refused. As a consequence those who were in connection to the strike were fired. According to Sao Paulo Governor Gerald Alckim the dismissals are



Cristina Fernandez at a book fair in Paris. Photo: ActualLitté

irreversible. Police also clashed with the strikers. Reports said that they used tear gas to disperse the crowds. Altino Prazeres, President of the Union, said they do not want to ruin the World Cup but want their demands to be met. Many workers are bitter about the amount of money spent on the football tournament.

After 5 days, the union decided to suspend the strike in order to negotiate about the payment increase. However, they warned that if their demands are not matched, strike will resume, exactly on the day when the World Cup starts.

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■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Kosovo elected its new parliament

■ Kosovo, Europe's second poorest country held the second parliamentary elections of its independent history. The vote was won by the Hashim Thaçi-led Democratic Party of Kosovo with 31 per cent and with a total turnout of 43 per cent. In spite of the ongoing debates – mainly because of the EU's pressure –, even Serbia encouraged Serbs to vote. Still, the elections raised many questions of democracy as some Serbs were not allowed to give valid votes.



Hashim Thaçi at the 50th Munich Security Conference. Photo: Securityconference.de

Romanian President involved in corruption scandal

■ The Romanian Parliament urges President Traian Basescu to resign due to the charges his brother is accused of. Miraces Basescu is said to be guilty in taking bribe from a man who was convicted of attempted murder – in return of trying to reduce his sentence. The total amount of the bribe can be as much as 250,000 euros. The Parliament vote went 344 in favour and 17 abstaining, even so the President is not willing to resign. As he said, he simply did not know about the illegal activity of his brother. The case became a big scandal mainly because Traian Basescu previously openly stood up for anti-corruption and independent judiciary. Only Greece and Bulgaria stands before Romania in the ranking as for corruption in the EU according to Transparency International.



China's war on terrorism

■ After attackers killed 39 people in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang region, China announced that it will wage war on terrorism. In late June, 113 people were charged with terrorist activities, including leading terrorist groups, drug dealing, and organizing attacks. Four people were sentenced to life in prison.

25th anniversary of Tiananmen massacre

■ It is still unknown how many casualties did the Tiananmen Massacre demand in 1989. The death toll ranges from hundreds to thousands. Since then, people have to commemorate the events secretly, for the government breaks everyone who publicly remembers the victims. The situation was the same this year. When intellectuals gathered in an apartment to discuss the massacre and sent the summary of the discussion to their friends thereafter, participants were charged with public disturbance. Since the Tiananmen Massacre is a politically unpopular event, the Chinese government has always done everything to deny its importance, including torturing those who dare to commemorate their relatives.

Santos to build peace in Colombia

■ Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos was re-elected for another four-year term with more than 51 per cent of the votes. According to many experts and the majority of Colombians, Santos was the only candidate that can finish the peace process he started with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in 2012. The military group has been committing acts of kidnap, illegal mining and distribution of illegal drugs for the past five decades, causing a state of civil war. According to international observers, the result does not only indicate the support of Juan Manuel Santos, but rather the demand for peace.



FARC areas of operation. Map: NCTC.gov



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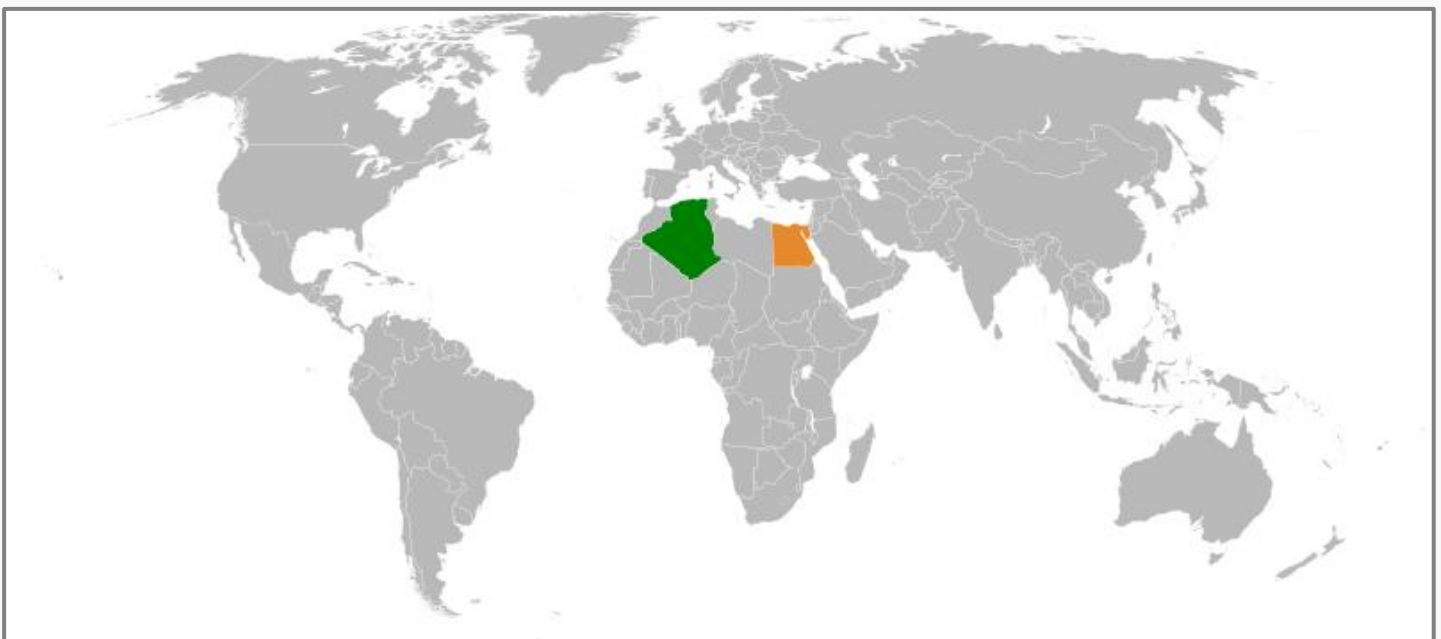
Bilateral relations

Ukrainian Jews to flee to Germany

■ Germany offered its help for the Jews in Ukraine by giving out more permissions for immigrants. According to different reports, the number of anti-Semitic incidents has been growing since the Ukrainian crisis broke out last year. Germany has always helped the Jews of the post-Soviet region, but due to the current situation, will give priority to those who come from Ukraine. Apart from this, the application procedure will be simplified for them, making the whole process shorter.

Egyptian president's first official visit abroad

■ Abdel Fattah el-Sisi paid his first official foreign visit. Sisi visited Algeria, partially hoping that the country will support Egypt in counter fighting Islamist militaries in North Africa. The Egyptian president has been criticized for his oppressive method when he took part in the removal of Islamist Mohamed Morsi from presidency. Yet, his country is still seen as a good security partner due to its geographical location.



The location of Algeria and Egypt on the world map. Map: Wikimedia Commons



■ News in Brief

International relations

Investigation opens into the alleged NSA surveillance of Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone

■ Edward Snowden might not be in the best position to reveal further details about US intelligence surveillance any more, yet his revelations so far have done serious damage to the diplomatic relations between Germany and the US, and this damage is growing at a scandalous pace. In June, Germany's attorney General Harald Range announced that an investigation would be held against "unknown" persons, following recent allegations by Snowden, that the US government bugged Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone. After previous scandals including the large-scale surveillance of millions of Germans' data and the monitoring of phone calls, which had been revealed last year in June, Germany's government seems to be willing to pursue such allegations more seriously, thereby also responding to the general perception of the German people, that "spying on friends", as Merkel put it, is unacceptable. Also the opposition is increasing the pressure on the government, thereby calling for Snowden to testify in parliamentary inquiry into NSA surveillance in Berlin. The government, meanwhile, has decided against opening an investigation into claims of wider NSA surveillance of German citizens. One reason for this might be the fact that German intelligence agencies are clearly depending on intelligence from the better-equipped, more powerful Americans in combating terrorism and thus in no position to insist on restricting American practices. The German-US relationship, in the meantime, stays seriously strained – with no end in sight.

South Stream in Bulgaria is delayed

■ The construction of the South Stream pipeline which is supposed to serve as a direct gas and oil connection between Russia and Europe is now suspended due to mainly political reasons. The Bulgarian government seems to be torn between the EU, the USA and Russia. It awarded the construction to a Russian company which happened to be on the USA's sanction list in the Ukrainian crisis, so Washington asked it to change the decision. Between all these debates, Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski – mainly due to the EU's political and economic pressure – announced to block the pipeline on a press conference. The step caused political crisis in the Bulgarian government.



Juncker as new president of European Commission

■ Former Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Jean Claude Juncker was elected as new president of the European Commission. He was the candidate of the European People's Party. Juncker succeeds José Manuel Barroso in the presidency. Although Juncker won the elections, he did not enjoy everyone's support, including Angela Merkel.



Jean-Claude Juncker. Photo: European People's Party

NATO forces repeatedly kill US soldiers in Afghanistan

■ Five American soldiers were killed by NATO forces in Zabul province, Afghanistan on June 9. The incident happened accidentally when a Taliban attack struck the international forces and the coalition needed air support. The casualty also involved an Afghan soldier and an interpreter. The Taliban spokesman has told that during the coalition airstrike the foreign soldiers and the Taliban insurgents were trapped in a gun-battle – that is why the bombs hit the international troops. The accident happened a day after the Taliban attacked the Jinnah international airport in Karachi, Pakistan. Security forces regained control on the next morning. 29 people were killed in the attacks.





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