

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

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About CRP News & Background

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The United Kingdom decides to leave EU

On 23 June a referendum was held by the United Kingdom to decide whether it should leave or remain in the European Union. The outcome of the Brexit (a puzzle word for Britain exit) vote was in favour of the “Leave” option, which won by 52% to 48%. The turnout of the voters was 71.8%, an equivalent of more than 30 million people. According to BBC it “was the highest turnout in a UK-wide vote since the 1992 general election”.



*Britain Stronger in Europe campaigners, London, June 2016.
Photo: Philafrenzy [Wikimedia Commons]*

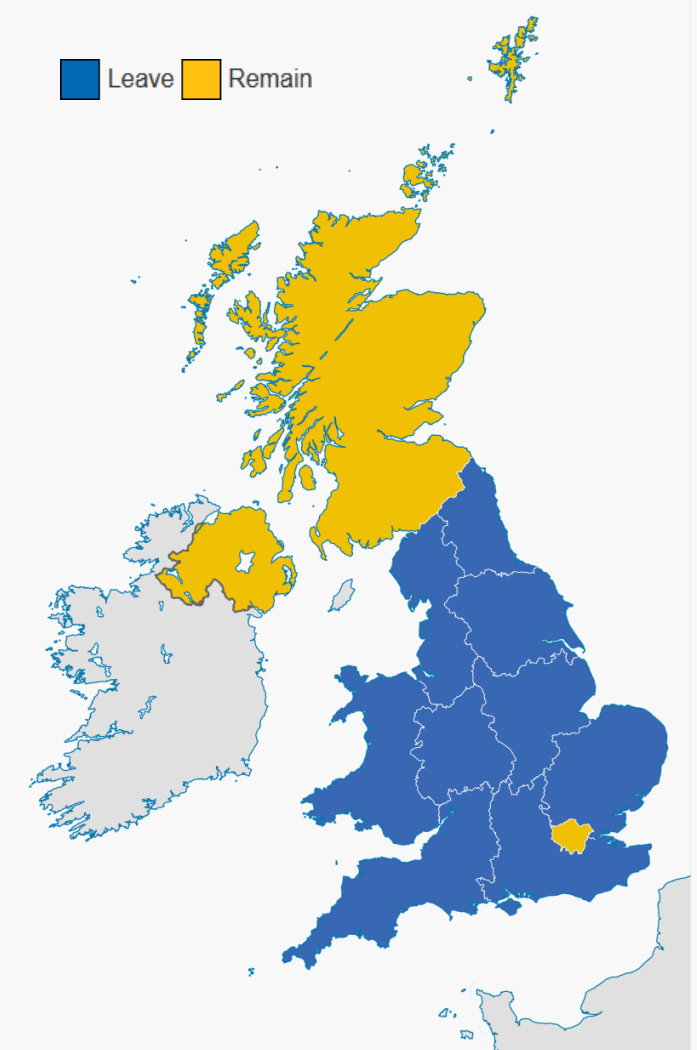
As for the breakdown of the votes, it is clear that both England and Wales wishes to leave the EU, the first voting with a ratio of 53.4% to 46.6% and the latter with 52.5% to 4.5%. But Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the Union: Scotland with the ratio of 62% to 38% and Northern Ireland with 55.8% to 44.2%. After seeing the results, Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon stated that the option of “Leave” is “democratically unacceptable” in the case of Scotland, which has voted in favour of remaining in the EU. As a consequence, it is possible that Scotland will go through another independence referendum after an unsuccessful effort in 2014. Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness said that as an impact of the vote “the whole island of Ireland should now be able to vote on reunification”. To exit the EU, the United Kingdom has to invoke an agreement called Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, which allows the member states to withdraw from the EU. The UK's Prime Minister has to decide when to



invoke the Article, which “will set in motion the formal legal process of withdrawal”. It is most likely that David Cameron’s successor will have to decide whether he or she wants to invoke the Article, since the British PM announced that he will be stepping down as Prime Minister by October the latest due to the outcome of the Brexit vote. According to Clive Coleman, a BBC Legal Correspondent, it is uncertain how the leaving process will play out, since the Article has only been in force since late 2009 and has not been tested yet.

The outcome of the referendum still could be overturned, since it is, as mentioned before, a long process, two years to be exact, and the Parliament has to pass a number of laws to take Britain out of the (for now) 28-member EU. Since the withdrawal agreement has to be ratified by the Parliament, the House of Lords and/or the House of Commons could vote against its ratification. The results could also be overturned if the two-thirds of the Members of Parliament forced a general election (the next scheduled would take place in 2020), in which a party who campaigned on a promise to keep the UK in the Union won by an election mandate that has topped the one of the referendum.

Those building their campaign on the slogan “Vote Leave” were the United Kingdom’s Independence Party (UKIP), approximately half of Conservative MPs, including five cabinet ministers, several Labour MPs and the Democratic Unionist Party. The members of UKIP argued that the European Union was holding back Britain



Result of the referendum by regional voting areas.
Photo: Furfur [Wikimedia Commons]

by “imposing too many rules on businesses and charging billions of pounds a year in membership fees for little return”. UKIP also wants to take back full control over its borders, so that it could prevent the flow of immigrants who wish to either work or live in the United Kingdom.

British Prime Minister David Cameron was campaigning with those who wanted to remain in the EU. He sought for an agreement that would change the terms of Britain’s membership by giving the country



a “special” status. Such agreement could have been used to find solutions to problems the British public found unsustainable, in this case, the great number of immigrants flowing in the country. Taking part in the “Britain Stronger in Europe” campaign were 16 members of the Prime Minister’s cabinet, the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru (the Party of Wales) and the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative Party has pledged to be neutral in the campaign. Other EU member states, such as France and Germany, and even US President Barack Obama wanted the UK to remain a member of the European Union. The pro-EU parties believe that “the United Kingdom gets a big boost from the EU membership” and argued that the flow of immigrants, most of whom are young and come in the hope to find work, “fuels economic growth and helps pay for public services”. It is also believed that leaving the EU would affect the UK’s status in the world, saying that Britain is “more secure as part of the 28 nation club, rather than going it alone”. Other great proponents of the “Remain” campaign were the big businesses, because they believe being part of the EU have great benefits: it makes it easier “to move money, people and products around the world”. The Brexit vote is followed by great uncertainty. The future of UK citizens working in the EU (and vice versa) depends on the agreements the two parties will be signing after the withdrawal process concludes. These agreements will decide whether those who want to work in the EU

will need a working visa or not. However it is unlikely that traveling in the EU will require application for a visa, since there are many countries outside the European Economic Area that British citizens can visit up to 90 days without needing a visa. There is a possibility that traveling (and other) arrangements will be negotiated with the member countries.



Prime Minister David Cameron announces his resignation following the outcome of the referendum.
Photo: Tom Evans [Flickr]

Throughout the referendum campaign the British PM has emphasised that the so-called “triple lock” for state pensions would be threatened if the United Kingdom left the EU. If Britain’s economic performance started to decline due to the exit vote, the Bank of England may be considering raising interest rates to fight the extra pressure on inflation. If it decides to do so it would make mortgages and loans more expensive, which could be in favour for savers. Before the referendum the Treasury forecast a rise of 0.7%-1.1% in mortgage borrowing costs. During the campaign the Treasury also argued that UK shares would



become less attractive to foreign investors if the British public decides to leave the EU. In the short term this would lead to a decline in value, but as for the long run shares are believed to rise with company profits, as they typically do. The weaker pound might be rewarding for big exporters as the value of their shares might rise, but the profit of importers will most likely start to crash.

Product safety will not be harmed due to the Brexit vote, only if the United Kingdom decides to remove the current safety standards. But it is unsure whether UK citizens' healthcare costs will be covered if retired in an EU country (and vice versa) and the issue of house and other property prices are undetermined as well.

Scotland hints at another independence referendum after Brexit vote

As the majority of the United Kingdom voted in favour of Brexit (52% to 48%) on 23 June, Scotland is standing at crossroads: 62% of Scots cast their votes to remain part of the European Union, which raises the possibility of a second independence referendum after the unsuccessful effort in 2014. First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon reacted to the result by saying that "it was democratically unacceptable for Scotland to be yanked out of the EU against its will", adding that she will speak to other EU leaders to see whether Scotland could "secure any sort of deal" and go at it alone. A senior German lawmaker and ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel said that "an independent Scotland would be [more than] welcome to join the EU." He believes if another independence referendum was held it would be successful, unlike the first attempt in 2014, therefore the EU will continue on consisting of 28 member states.

Even though, according to the First Minister, another independence referendum is "highly likely", Scotland has to weight its options and consider all factors. If an independent Scotland applied to the EU, it would face a number of demands by Brussels, such as the reduction of the deficit, which was 9.7% of the GDP in 2014-2015 and probably would also imply tax rises or cuts in public-spending. Scottish independence also raises the question of what currency the country would use. But the more problematic issue would be the case of the newly created external EU border between England and Scotland. Since the greatest deciding factor in the Brexit vote was the controlling of migration, it is certain that the British government "would not leave open any back door to England", which would also mean border controls along the most important trading paths between the two countries.



Italy and the Netherlands split the 2017-2018 UN Security Council seat



United Nations Security Council on the United Nations Headquarters in New York City.
Photo: Neptuul [Wikimedia Commons]

The United Nations General Assembly met in June to choose 5 new members for the UN Security Council. Being the international organisation's most powerful body, winning a seat in the Security Council is considered as a great achievement, since members are given a strong voice in matters dealing with international peace and security. The Council consists of 15 members of which 5 are permanent who have the power of veto and 10 are non-permanent who are elected for 2-year terms. The Permanent

Five, or P5 are the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France. 5 members are elected from the nominated candidates of the regions or regional groups every year by secret ballot.

On 28 June, Sweden and Kazakhstan won contested elections for seats in the Security Council, Sweden, Italy and the Netherlands competing for two spots, Kazakhstan and Thailand competing for a seat reserved for Asia. The meeting also made progress in the case of the Netherlands and Italy, who have eventually come to an agreement after 5 rounds of voting: the two countries decided they will be splitting the 2-year term, Italy holding the seat in 2017 and the Netherlands in 2018. The overwhelming rounds of voting in choosing the country from the Western bloc was deadlocked when both countries have received 95 votes each, needing the 2/3s of the UN's 193 members, an equivalent of 127 votes. After two recesses being called by Mogens Lykkesøft, the President of the General Assembly, the foreign ministers of Italy and



the Netherlands announced the deal, stating that they will be splitting the 2-year term. Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni said that deciding to share the seat is considered as “a symbolic gesture for European unity”. The statement was even emphasised by a European diplomat, who said that it is a “truly European gentlemanly agreement”.

Despite the long process of choosing the next country from the Western bloc, Ethiopia and Bolivia were elected without facing any opposition for seats earmarked for Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. The 2-year term for the chosen countries, which are once more, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Sweden and Italy and the Netherlands sharing a seat will begin on 1 January 2017, next to the other 5 non-permanent members of the Security Council, which are Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay.

Italy’s presence in the Security Council could play a big role in pulling Libya out of the current chaos the country is facing, as the North African country used to be an Italian colony. When lobbying for a seat, Italy has portrayed itself as “a crossroads country in the Mediterranean, which has experience dealing with the refugee crisis”. The Netherlands gives home to the

International Criminal Court, based in The Hague, and other world tribunals, therefore the country shows “great commitment to international justice.” Sweden is considered as a “major aid donor.” Unlike the mentioned countries, Kazakhstan and Thailand have been criticised throughout the selection process. Kazakhstan is believed to have cracked down on journalists and political activists, and Thailand’s military leadership, which seized power in May 2014 “has banned political activity and ramped up prosecutions under tough sedition and royal defamation laws”. As mentioned before, to receive a seat in the United Nations Security Council is considered a great achievement, since member countries get a strong voice in matters dealing with international peace and security. Such matters currently include the conflicts in Syria and South Sudan, and actions that are considered as a threat to global stability, like North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile tests and attacks by extremists groups such as the so-called Islamic State. The members also have the power of authorising and overseeing the United Nations’ peacekeeping missions, and the Council can impose sanctions, endorse peace accords and authorise the use of military force.

“being the international organisation’s most powerful body, winning a seat in the Security Council is considered as a great achievement”



Mass killings of Armenians in 1915 to be declared as genocide by Germany

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Germany that its plans to declare the 1915 mass killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during the World War One a genocide would damage bilateral ties, which could also affect the EU-Turkey migrant deal. The symbolic resolution that was proposed by German lawmakers a year ago after the 100th anniversary of the massacre to label the killings of up to 1.5 million Armenians as a genocide has been rejected by the Turks. Despite the support within the German parliament to claim the mass killings as genocide, the opposition argues that it may trigger bad relationship with Ankara.

Eleven German MPs of Turkish origin who supported the declaration of the Armenians massacre as a genocide are under the police protection. They are under protection due to the threats they received. They are perceived by Turkish Germans and Turkish officials as traitors and backstabbers. Turkey rejects the term genocide and argued that the death of Armenians was the result of clashes during World War One and it was not orchestrated. Turkey says that the number of Armenians died during the war was smaller than 1.5 million, while at the same time argues that there were

many Turks died during the same period as well. Many of the victims were civilians deported to barren desert regions where they died of starvation and thirst, while others died in massacres.

The push for such resolution onto the agenda came from the opposition Greens and it was an awkward timing for German Chancellor Angela Merkel since there is a deal with Turkey in regards of the migrants. The deal has eased political pressure on Merkel. However, since Ahmet Davutoglu was pushed out of the position as prime minister, the migrant deal has been under a cloud. President Erdogan has questioned some aspects of the agreement and some of his allies have even threatened to unleash a new wave of refugees to Europe. The opposition Greens have pushed the resolution onto the agenda at an extremely awkward time for Merkel, the driving force behind an agreement between the EU and Ankara that has helped slash the number of illegal migrants entering Europe.

On another note, Pope Francis visits to Armenia has also been treaded delicately since last year he also declared the mass killings of Armenians as genocide. During his visit to Armenia, he is trying to avoid reigniting diplomatic dispute with Turkey.



MSF protest act against EU-Turkey agreement on refugees

On 17 June 2016 the humanitarian organisation Medecins sans frontieres / Doctors without borders (MSF) held a press conference to announce its refusal of EU funding, its Member States and Norway. The conference was entitled “Don’t jeopardise human being’s lives” in order to demonstrate its indignation about the EU-Turkey agreement on refugees. The decision is a “moral statement” to also put into act those principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality written in the MSF Charter.

The UE-Turkey agreement, signed in March 2016, claims that for each Syrian sent back to Turkey from Greece, one Syrian in Turkey will be moved to UE; moreover it promises the liberalisation of visas for Turkish people to easily go to UE and financial helps for Turkey. In June, EU Commission also announced a new proposal to do a similar compromise with other 16 countries in Africa and Middle-east. In the meantime, as a consequence of this deal, in Greece there are more than 8,000 people,

including minors, stranded in refugees’ camps, with unhealthy conditions, with no legal aid and with the fear to be pushed back to Turkey.

In conclusion, MSF, as an NGO, does not want to give relief to people by using money that comes from an institution which is politicising this emergency, and putting into danger the life of those who are fleeing from the war. It is not news that MSF renounces institutional help to protest against governmental policy, in 2004 it refused economic supply from US, as well, and it does not accept any funding from Turkey, Russia and Saudi Arabia. It is not humanitarian aid anymore using money of those who put into danger human beings’ life.



Turkey and Israel normalise ties after six years

After six years Turkey and Israel reached a bargain in order to settle their disputes and normalise their bilateral relations – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced in Rome during his meeting with US Foreign Secretary John Kerry.

The correspondent document was signed in June by Dore Gold, Israel's Foreign Ministry Director General and Feridun Sinirlioglu, Turkey's Foreign Ministry Undersecretary. First of all, the document will be exchanged between the two parties, and subsequently the agreement will be officially passed and agreed by the Parliaments and the two Prime Ministers.

The source of the conflict is that 10 Turkish nationals who supported Palestinian activists were killed aboard the Turkish-flagged ship Mavi Marmara. They had aimed to reach the blockade-hit Gaza Strip with charity transports aboard. After the incident the relations between the two countries hit rock bottom and in 2011 Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador from the country.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that after the political pressure has been eased, the all-round relations of Turkey and Israel may reach a new level. According to the statistical data of the pro-government daily Takvim, 76,000 Israeli tourists visited the country in 2010 as opposed to 559,000 Israeli visitors in 2008. Even if the number of Israeli tourists has been continuously increasing in recent years, the re-stabilisation of the bilateral political relations seems to be essential for the tourism sector to show up similar numbers and to flourish again as before.



Erdogan waving flag of Palestine to get sympathy of his voters while keeping Turkey's ties with Israel and US. Image : Carlos Latuff [twitpic]



Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim considers the re-establishment of ambassador-level relations as the first and vital step of consolidation. The new ambassadors will be nominated and granted their letters of credence in the coming weeks. Turkey will be allowed to provide the Gaza Strip with charity transports consisting of 14 tons of foodstuff, clothing and other basic necessities.

Besides, Turkey will be granted the permission to set up a hospital with 200 beds, build residence buildings and contribute to the proper operation of water and electricity supply systems.

We must bear in mind that both Turkey and Israel lie in a geopolitically significant region, which special regard to Turkey, which lies literally on both sides of two continents and controls one of the busiest waterways in the world. As Turkey has been aspiring for EU membership recently, it may also define itself as European forming an economic, cultural and geographical bridge between Europe and Asia. Still, its cultural and religious roots rather identify the country as one of the mainstays of Islam.

Through the consolidation of relations with Israel new horizons and geostrategic ways may open up for Turkey, but the settlement of the issues would be highly beneficial for Israel as well. For instance, the construction of a possible gas pipeline through Turkey in the direction of Europe could be one of the hugest projects ever carried out by Israel. By means of completing this investment Israel will have access to the lucrative

European energy resource markets.

The bilateral agreements would also prompt a new regional security-related cooperation with a view to enhance security. The issue of security in practically all possible aspects is undoubtedly of paramount importance, especially nowadays. The most relevant threat, the Islamic State is already present in both the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, evidently threatening both countries. Alliances are highly needed. Thus, the agreements focus not only on economic matters, but security considerations also play a significant role.

To sum it up, we can say that the consolidation of Turkish-Israeli relations and the complete elimination of sanctions and trade barriers are likely to open up new horizons and strategic gates for both countries. Even if we take into account national interests, which usually promote protectionism, we see that cooperation is much more beneficial in all respects than continuing "warfare".

It seems that the most significant task for diplomacy is to create such a climate in which on the basis of bilateral agreements and on the principle of comparative advantages, the inherent advantages can be capitalised on. Interdependence may provide both countries with strategic advantages.

At the same time, Turkey also aims to settle its disputes with Russia recently and initiates dialogue with Egypt, too. These new developments may mark the start of a new era in Turkish foreign relations and strategy.



Turkey: another bombing attack

Terrorist attack at Istanbul airport killed 44 persons and wounded 260. It seems to be caused by Islamic State command.

In the evening of the 28th of June – around 10:00 pm local time- the international Ataturk Airport of Istanbul was welcoming the last arrivals and saying goodbye to the last departures of the day, when three kamikazes interrupted the daily routine and turned it into a night of fear and tears.

The attack provoked 44 dead people, among them 13 were foreigners, and 260 wounded. It was a suicide attack; the three killers first shot and then, when the police confronted them, detonated their suicide bombs. Ataturk airport serves international and domestic flights; it is the largest one of Turkey and the third busiest of Europe. The strike has not been claimed by any terrorist group yet, however Turkish government points its finger at Daesh, the so-called Islamic State. The type of attack was similar to those occurred in Brussels and Paris, this is the reason why IS has been blamed for it. The international community supported the

Turkey's hypothesis as well, and it called for more and more strength and unity in fighting against this threat. Moreover, as the three killers were identified, it turned out that one of them was a well-known IS' foreign fighter, who seemed also to be the mastermind of two previous attacks in Istanbul.

Sadly, this is the last of a series of terroristic attacks happened in Turkey these years. Since summer 2015 seven big assaults has been counted, killing more than 200 hundred persons, and they were all claimed by terrorist groups, both from IS or Kurds. However this one is different, something is wrong because it has not been claimed, and the questions raised is "why?", "why IS is silent about that?", if it is responsible for that. According to political experts and politicians – who believe in IS as the responsible –, the attack sought to bring Turkish tourism to their knees, in other words to avoid that western infidels go to a Muslim country. In addition to this, it is though that IS wants to put Turkey in a bad



light in front of the international community's eyes, as a sort of revenge. As a matter of fact, recently Turkey is engaged in the fight against Daesh by joining the US-led coalition, allowing them to use the Incirlik airbase for raids, and by allowing NATO allies to carry out patrol flights along its border with Syria. However, previously, Erdogan's regime fed IS, by buying its illegal oil, by letting foreign fighters to go to Turkey for medical treatments and by supporting its raids against Kurdish people (the only ones combatting against Daesh at the beginning).



*Airside of Terminal 2, where the landside attack took place.
Photo: Milan Suvajac [Wikimedia Commons]*

Along with all these bombs, a much bigger bomb is blew up in Turkey. It is made by Erdogan's government which tries to turn Turkey into a democracy in order to enter in the EU, but in the same time it arrests journalists –with different opinions from his– for terrorism propaganda; it says to combat against IS, but it also helped them against



*Turkish flags flying at half mast in Ankara, the capital of Turkey, on 29 June, during the official mourning declared after the terrorist attack at the Istanbul Atatürk Airport on 28 June 2016.
Photo: E4024 [Wikimedia Commons]*

Kurds. Indeed, the Kurdish minority and its two representatives parties, the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK) and the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK), are a big concern for the government, even because they are mainly located at the border with Syria and this makes more difficult for Turkish government to choose which side stand by: IS or Kurds and the rest of the world. "This attack does not produce any results, it aims to produce propaganda against our country using the blood and pain of innocent people" said the President of Turkey right after the fact. On the contrary, it seems that these attacks are producing results, which are dead people, spreading fear and anger (which is part of IS' strategy), and destroying the tourism, which means no jobs for many people. The hope is always one, that is: this attack will be the last one.



Clashes in West Iran

Since the 19th of April 2016, several military clashes were erupted between Kurdish insurgent parties: the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK), Komalah and Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) against the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. The main reasons of the confrontations are based on the facts that “the situation in eastern Kurdistan (Iranian Kurdistan) has become unbearable, especially with daily arbitrary executions against the Kurds.”

The West Iran clashes are taken place in the Kurdistan Province, the southern parts of West Azerbaijan Province and Iran Soran district of Iraqi Kurdistan. On 25 February, the first step was made by the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan as they announced the reestablishment of armed resistance in opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran due to their “growing discontent in Rojhelat”. According to Al-Monitor analysis, the PDKI has sent away several teams of its fighters and political cadets into Iranian Kurdistan since March 2015.

During the spring and summer of 2016, seven clashes had supervened in the area, which were being the cause of far too many casualties as well. On 19 April 2016, the Kurdistan Freedom Party militarised Peshmerga units, which were named as the Kurdistan Freedom Eagles for East Kurdistan (HAK-R). They had executed an offensive on the Iranian government security forces in Sanandaj, in the meanwhile the annual Army Day Parade of Iran was held, claiming to have regained the militarised Kurdish vernacular striving. A month later, on 4 May 2016, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan Peshmerga attacked the Iranian security forces in Sardasht area, raising further the number of the dead by killing 8-10 soldiers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. After 24 hours, the following statement was declared by Hussein Yazdanpana, the leader of the paramilitary wing of the Kurdistan Freedom Party: “Iran is at the doorstep of a wide-scale armed uprising ... that will include all off its cities”. With this announcement, they



intended to refer to an upcoming military movement against the Iranian government, performed by their armed forces.



The subsequent clash was performed on 20 May 2016, when the Iranian military forces were on the point to build up new military redoubts along the Iraqi boundary and to locate further armed forces to the region. According to the Kurdish groups, nine new troops have been constructed along the frontier. On the same day, five Kurdish rights activists were executed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the north-western Urmia city. The name of the convicts were Naji Kiwan, Ali Kurdian, Haidar Ramini, Nadir Muhamadi and Ruhman Rashidi, they were accused of “conspiring against the Islamic Republic of Iran” and then kept under arrest for several days.

However, it was seemed that the conflicts between the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (IRGC) and the Party of

Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) had calmed down, due to the stoppage of hostilities that have been going on for months betwixt the two part and also the lack of PJAK's concerns in connections with the Kurdish militant movements' activity. But the clash reached its peak just on 13 June 2016, when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps ambushed and murdered five militants of the PJAK. It was also reported by Iran, that the killed members had assassinated two people of the Iranian military Basiji militia along with an engineer, who was labouring on “development projects” with the IRGC in Sardasht, in May 2016.

According to Rostam Jahangiri – who is the head of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan – six security members as well as their commander of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution were murdered by Kurdish rebels of the PDKI in Shno area where eight Kurdish insurgents also had passed away. The clash lasted for two desperate days, while Iranian artillery fire was reported and Iranian reinforcements were dispatched into the area. After the encounter was ended, the PDKI announced fatalities, as they mislaid six soldiers, but killed more than 20 IRGC members and bruised 17. “Iranian official



حیزبی دیموکراتی کوردستانی ئێران

Logos of the Kurdish insurgent parties.



statement acknowledged 3 Iranian security members and 12 terrorists".

By the time of 27 June, both PDKI and IRGC demanded dozens of casualties, but without credible figure was reported by the Iranian IRNA agency. Furthermore, later on that day it was announced that five Iraqi Kurdistan civilians were wounded in the midst of a bombardment and two civil porters were killed by Iranian security forces in Alan area of Sardasht city, West Azerbaijan province of Iran on the boundary betwixt Iran and Kurdistan



A group of PJK fighters in 2012.
Video caption: Voice of America [Wikimedia Commons]

Region. On 28 June, eleven Kurdish insurgents of PDKI with three IRGC militant were killed in the neighbourhood of the Iran-Iraq border, but it is still not clear whether the murders were executed by Kurdish rebels. "The PDKI said several of its fighters and 20 Iranian soldiers were killed in the incidents". According to a PDKI pronouncement, two soldier of PDKI were murdered in conflicts with the IRGC in Sawlaw, on 5 July, 2016.

On 10 July, a representative of the county of Eslamabad-e Gharb, the Iranian MP escaped from an assassination attempt in Western Iran. The attempt was performed by four soldiers who were recognised as PJAK's members. During the assassination, the driver and the head of the Veterinary Department of Dalahou County were killed, meanwhile the governor of Eslamabad-e Gharb, the director general of fisheries of Kermanshah and other passengers of the vehicle were wounded. The personality of the gunmen still could not be identified, according to Al-Arabiya, the pan-Arab television news channel broadcast.

“during the spring and summer of 2016, seven clashes had supervened in the area, which were being the cause of far too many casualties as well”



ISIS is committing genocide against Yazidi people

On 16 June United Nations investigators stated that the forces of the so-called Islamic State “have committed genocide and other war crimes in a continuing effort to exterminate the Yazidi religious minority in Syria and Iraq.”



Yazidi men.

Photo: Bestoun94 [Wikimedia Commons]

According to a number of earlier reports, “a wide-range of crimes against humanity and war crimes were committed” since 2011, with the unfolding of the civil war in Syria, which has been continuing ever since. But the report released on 16 June pointed out the crime of genocide. Since

August 2014, crimes carried out by IS have affected an estimate of 400,000 members of the Yazidi community, a Kurdish ethno-religious group, which is primarily living in the Nineveh Province of Iraq, with additional communities existing in Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Iran and Syria as well.

The latest investigations have uncovered a number of mass killings with victims of both Yazidi men and boys, who have been either shot in the head or were killed by their throats being slit, all because they refused to convert to Islam. It was reported that the killings often occurred in front of their families and in most cases the corpses were left on the roadsides. The investigations uncovered a dozen mass graves in areas, which were recaptured from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; these are currently under further investigation.

According to activists and witnesses, on 2 June, 19 Iraqi Yazidi girls were killed in Mosul in front of a crowd of hundreds, when put in iron cages and burned alive, because



they refused to engage in sexual relations with their Islamic State captors. The girls were captured by ISIS and taken as sex slaves in August 2014, when the terrorist group has gained control over a northern Iraqi region. Both the Human Rights Watch and the United Nations have called on the terrorist group to release the girls, citing human rights abuses. It is unsure how many Yazidis are being held captive: according to the Kurdistan Regional Government's estimate, ISIS is believed to have captured 1,800 women and girls in Iraq and Syria, while the UN puts the number at 3,500 Yazidis. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic found out that more than 3,200 Yazidi women were still held captive by IS fighters, mostly in Syria. The chairman of the panel, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro stated that "genocide has occurred and it is still ongoing". The captured Yazidis are being treated inhumanely, they are tortured, used as sex slaves and they are being killed if they are not doing as they are told so. Members of ISIS are using sexual mutilation and sterilisation to prevent the birth of Yazidi babies, children are being taken away from their families to the fighters' families and to training camps, so that they are completely cut off from their beliefs and practices, "erasing their identities as Yazidis." It was uncovered that as young as 9-year-old girls were sold off as sex slaves



*Collage involving the Persecution of Yazidis by the Islamic State.
Photo: Zfigueroa [Wikimedia Commons]*

and, according to the Middle East Media Research Institute, some of the girls have been put up for sale on social media platforms. It is also not unusual that the children are being punished for their Yazidi parents' crimes. Chairman Pinheiro emphasised that these acts are clearly stating that the Islamic State's intent is to destroy and erase the Yazidi community as a whole. He has urged for the action of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, or the action of any other international tribunal, since it is imperative that the international community started taking action and stepped up in preventing any more killings of the Yazidis before it was too late.

“a wide-range of crimes against humanity and war crimes were committed since 2011”



North Korea test-fires ballistic missiles

At the beginning of June, Amano Yukiya, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned that according to recent satellite images the Yongbyon plutonium plant in North Korea is operating again, probably with a view to manufacture fissile material needed for nuclear weapons.

In the middle of June, tension in the region has become even more palpable as Pyongyang carried out rocket tests using so-called Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Even if these proved to be unsuccessful, North Korea infringed the resolutions of the UN Security Council. Before that, Pyongyang has already carried out similar tests, in April three times and in May once. The South Korean intelligence bureau assumes that there are around 20-30 Musudan-type rockets at North Korea's disposition.

North Korea poses a constant threat and security risk for the international community. Japan's Minister of Defence, Nakatani Gen condemned the recent missile tests as obvious provocation, which cannot be tolerated. The minister added that North Korea timed the rocket launches exactly for the 50th anniversary of the breakout of the Korean War. (25th June 1950)

US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power has called on the international community to condemn Pyongyang's acts quickly and unanimously,

while the UN Security Council has left the sanctions against North Korea in place in order to contain or possibly prevent such future acts.

It is highly worrying that through similar rocket tests North Korea endeavours to develop such ballistic missiles which may be capable of delivering nuclear weapons not only within the Korean peninsula and region but may threaten the US too due to the increased range of these missiles.

There are obvious advances in North Korea's rocket technology as the second missile covered a distance of about 400 km. Still, according to the American-Korean research centre at John Hopkins University, Musudan-type rockets may reach a range up to 2,500-4,000 km. US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter has announced that as the consequence of these developments the security of Japan, South Korea and the US needs to be enhanced.

We should not downplay the importance of the results of these missile tests, as they may have provided valuable information for the North Korean leadership, making it possible for them to continue the experiments. All in all, if no further steps are taken from part of the international community and North Korea remains keen on modernising its technologies, they may be able to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile by the end of the decade.



US gun control bill after Orlando shooting

After the terrorist attack on 12 June in Orlando, Florida, the United States realised that its gun control bill has to be reformed. The attack, which is also considered a hate crime, was both the deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter and the deadliest incident of violence against LGBT people in the United States' history, as well as the deadliest terrorist attack in the US since the one on 11 September 2001. The shooting was carried out by a 29-year old American security guard, called Omar Mateen, who is believed to have sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The terrorist attack has left 49 people killed and 53 others injured. After a 3-hour standoff Mateen was successfully eliminated by Orlando police.



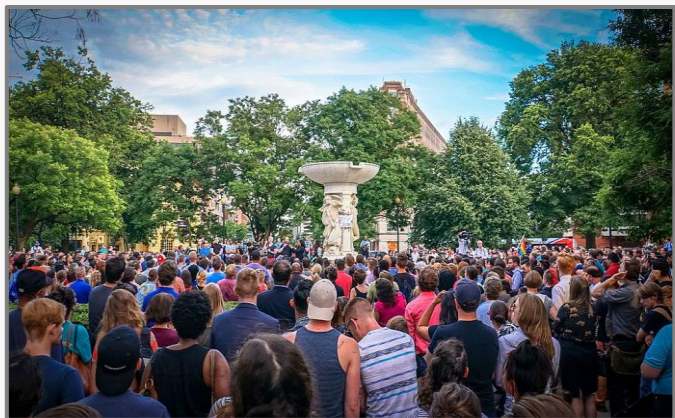
Exterior photo of Pulse gay nightclub and parking lot.
Photo: Rick Singh [Wikimedia Commons]

As a response to the attack, the House Democrats met for a 26-hour sit-in, which was aimed to reach some reforms in US gun control. The historic sit-in ended on 23 June. Democrats also had a nearly 15-hour long filibuster in the Senate with the promise of some progress on proposed gun control legislation. The new bill is forcing votes on universal background checks and is aimed to prevent people purchasing guns who have been put on terrorism watch lists. Republican leaders also agreed to take a vote on the amendment, in the hope of being able to close what is known as the "terror gap", which is "a notion of a legislative hole whereby US citizens can purchase deadly firearms even if they are under investigation for suspected terrorist activity". Although the Republicans are willing to vote, it is uncertain how it will play out: the terror proposal presented in December in response to the San Bernardino shooting was an unsuccessful effort, since both parties have failed to close the terror gap.

Attempts to close the gap lean back to the George W. Bush administration, when it has repeatedly failed because the National Rifle Association, the NRA has put congressional legislators under pressure. Both Bush and Obama have supported the



same proposals. A piece of legislation was jointly proposed by Dianne Feinstein of California, a Democratic senator, and Peter King of New York, a Republican congressman, which is known as the Feinstein-King legislation. The proposed legislation is highly opposed by both the NRA and the Republicans: only one Republican, Mark Kirk of Illinois voted in favour, next to the majority of Democrats. The FBI has been criticised for its investigation process, putting individuals who might have ties to terrorist activity on separate lists, such as the federal no-fly list. Some people in the Senate wish to change the FBI's method and pushes for creating a single consolidated list. Feinstein and King want to give the Department of Justice, which includes the FBI, "sole discretion over which terrorist suspects get to purchase weapons and which do not", which means that in part the FBI has the option of allowing sales to go ahead as part of their investigative process.



Vigil in support of the victims of the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting, Washington, D.C., June 23, 2016. Photo: Ted Eytan [Flickr]



The injured police officer's Kevlar helmet from the incident, showing the damage from a bullet. Photo: City of Orlando Police Department [Twitter]

The NRA prefers an approach that would require the government filing a brief in federal court. The brief offers the targeted individual the opportunity to present his or her case as a response and has to convince the judge to rule within 72 hours. Without fulfilling all of the mentioned conditions, the sale would go ahead. Even though the terror gap is quite popular, there are multiple arguments against it. People on both sides are worried that a list of terror suspects would violate basic human rights. Although there have been many attempts to close the terror gap, it is uncertain whether it was closed earlier the Orlando massacre would have been prevented. As a consequence to the Orlando shootings the United States is considering to extend the weapons purchase ban: after an individual is put on a terrorism suspect list, he or she cannot buy a weapon for the next 5 years.



Peace deal between Colombia government and FARC

After three years and a half from the beginning of a preliminary agreement negotiated by the Colombian government in Havana in 2012, Colombia is now officially moving toward the end of conflicts with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) through the signature of a long awaited peace deal.

As one of the eldest Marxist-inspired guerrillas in the world, the FARC's organisations were born in 1964 when the revolutionaries lead by Manuel Marulanda Vélez started a war pursuing the aim of establishing a popular and socialist democracy as an independent state in the country. The thousands of people who enlisted with the FARC were peasants who felt the impulse to react to a military operation, the so called "operación Marquetalia", which was carried out by the Colombian government with the support of the United States in order to repress episodes of agricultural self-organisations, considered to represent a risk for the



*Banner of the February 2008 anti-FARC rallies with slogans in several languages.
Photo: Rmleon [Wikimedia Commons]*

integrity of the country. The FARC claims to have waged a just war against unequal land ownership but there have been many illegal implications as well as terrible consequences for the civilians. Besides military tactics, in different cases the guerrilla movement has opted for unconventional methods which included terrorism. In addition, bombings, murders, kidnapping and extortion have been the main features of the scene in which civilians have been forced to live in for 52 years. An important step following the start of the negotiation has been represented by the agreement between the Colombian



government and the FARC regarding the progressive disengagement of minors from the FARC's armed forces. With the support of UNICEF, the two line-ups have agreed on an operation that will regard several hundreds of young people. In a recent tweet, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos speaks about "an historic deal which will take children from the war". On the other hands the FARC's leader of the negotiation has assured that they will be activated social and educational programs in order to avoid the social exclusion that had pushed these young people to enlist in their forces.



Terrorist attack by the FARC with a car bomb at the headquarters of Caracol Radio, the attack left 43 people injured. Photo: Julián Ortega Martínez [Flickr]

On the 22nd of June 2016, the two formations have officially announced an historic deal that will lead to the end of the fighting and to the signature of a peace treaty. The agreement has been revealed in the presence of many heads of state and of the general-secretary of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon. The deal provides for key points, in particular the one regarding the FARC's acceptance of disarmament



2012 Car Bombing in Bogota Colombia targeting the former minister, Fernando Londoño. Photo: David Maiolo [Wikimedia Common]

which is fundamental to put an end to conflicts that have caused almost 260 million of deaths, almost 45 thousand missing people plus the displacement of more than 6 million people. The most controversial issue on the agenda is how to demobilise 7,000 FARC soldiers, who have bases in the mountains and forests. UN participation in the monitoring will be essential to the process, as well as international support in general.

Although a final peace treaty will require the vote of a referendum. Currently there are political initiatives of "civil resistance" against the agreement which have not meet credibility in the public opinion, even though there might be legitimate grounds for worry. There are reasons for people for not to trust the FARC's conversion to democracy and to feel doubtful about the fact that the FARC's leaders accused of crimes against humanity will go to the jail. This is the general state of mind, among Colombians, which also focuses on the fact that the peace negotiations have taken so long and missed so many deadlines.



Economic crisis in Venezuela has turned into a humanitarian crisis

Despite being an oil-rich country Venezuela is “suffering the worst economic crisis in history”. The shortages in basic goods, such as rice and cooking oil, mean that the civilians are deprived of the basic necessities of everyday life. Treating these severe problems, the government declared a “state of emergency” and is assigning armed guards for the transportation of food because when a new stock hits the shops chaos rules the streets. To ensure the basic necessities to every citizen, the government has set up the method of rationing. The desperate Venezuelans are standing in hour-long lines, sometimes even waiting overnight, just to get their rations. Due to rationing and fixed prices, products have disappeared from shops and reappeared in the black market. It is estimated that the cost of basic groceries that would keep a family going through a week increased by more than 25% between March and April, and now costs 22 times more than the state minimum salary.

It is clear that Venezuela's economy is deteriorating and the statistics are only highlighting this devastating fact. According to International Monetary Fund figures Venezuela has the world's worst negative growth rate, which is -8% and the worst inflation rate that is 482%. The unemployment rate is currently put around 17%, but it is expected to rise around 30% in the upcoming years. The country is facing political instability as well, as a number of unrests are continuously unfolding, due to the citizens' hunger and desperation, and the crime rates are skyrocketing, partly due to the high rate of corruption: Transparency International reported that Venezuela is considered the 9th most corrupt country in the world.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro believes that the reason the oil-rich country is on the verge of collapsing is because the United States and right-wing businessmen are deliberately cutting production to sabotage Venezuela's economy. Even though President Maduro has inherited a



“ruinous state-run system” from his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, economists believe that the current Venezuelan president has added his fair share of damaging mistakes. Chávez has built his popularity on oil money and foreign debt, which has helped him to fund consumption, while nationalising more than 1,200 private companies. But in 2015 the oil price was cut in half and Venezuela's reckless public spending has helped to make it “a high-risk debtor”, cutting Venezuela's access to international capital. Due to this lack of access a hole appeared in public finances, which Maduro's government wished to treat by printing money, but it has completely backfired and only fuelled inflation. President Maduro used the country's gold reserves to pay off international debts and tried to finance at least some of the basic goods, but these reserves are now declining.

The opposition put high hopes in a referendum to force the Venezuelan president to step down and launched a petition in April, but Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) is making it quite difficult for the petition to get passed and be presented in front of the general public. Around 1.3 million people have already signed the petition to achieve a recall vote, which would be more than enough, since the law requires 200,000 signatures, but it was reported that an estimate of 600,000 signatures have already been rejected and others are still waiting in lines with their IDs to get checked. If the petition

gets declined, a second attempt would need 4 million votes to trigger a recall vote. The current Venezuelan situation is not left without any regional response. According to Luis Almagro, Head of the Organisation of American States (OAS), Maduro's government is the reason that Venezuela is in humanitarian crisis, stating that “the South American oil-rich nation was now mired in poverty, corruption and violence”. Almagro addressed the permanent council of the 34-nation regional group that “Maduro's government had violated basic democratic principles, which had altered the constitutional order of the county”. The Head of OAS is considering invoking the organisation's democratic charter on Venezuela, and it is likely that he will do so, since he is supported by the majority of the member states. If the organisation decides to invoke the charter it might eventually lead to Venezuela's suspension. Almagro believes Venezuela has come to a breaking point, stating that the current situation is the doing of those who are currently in power. He also emphasised that Venezuela should be the “most prosperous and influential country in the region”, but instead it is a state with a “high rate of corruption, poverty and violence and its population who suffers the consequences”. Venezuela's Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez responded to Almagro's statements by still denying that there was a crisis in the country and she accuses the Head of OAS of “orchestrating a coup to overthrow Maduro” with actions through the organisation.



Two months left until the Olympic Games

In August of 2016 the Olympic Games will be organised by Brazil. The country is the leader of the South American region as the founder of the MERCOSUR and the BRICS besides the fact that it has the fifth biggest surface of the world and its economy is the sixth strongest today. After the country gained the competition, the preparing started as well – but by this time has not finished.

The task to organise the Olympic Games is a great opportunity for all rising countries to show their abilities and to prove themselves as a real power. In 1964 the Olympic Games took place in Tokyo, Japan. In the sixties the Japanese economy recovered and both the GDP and the standard of living were increasing – this is what we call today as the “Japanese miracle”. In 2008 the Games were played in Beijing, China. The step by step reconstruction of the Chinese economy, the Deng-reforms made China a serious power within 30 years. Both countries are important actors of the international politics and leaders of their regions, so their situation is similar to Brazil's. In international relations the well-served international competitions represent the facility of the soft power of the country. This is the reason, why people speculate and spread rumour before the event, which might effect on the success. Japan and China faced this as well at that time. In Japan the social pressure increased heavily, and China was judged in case of environmental pollution and human rights. Today Brazil fights its own battle. Sanitary

problems, like the Zika virus and other expansive illnesses, social and labour discontent of the policemen and firemen, the high level of poverty and the environmental destruction all make the public to lose their faith in the successful, peaceful and secure sport event. Many civil initiatives were started and formal steps were taken to postpone or to move the Games in the beginning of June, but on the middle WHO has reported that they can be organised safely at the estimated date.

The other desperate question is the case of the unfinished buildings. Most of the buildings are far not finished, nor the sport centres, neither the infrastructure, like bus stations and metro lines. 6-8 weeks before the opening ceremony workers are still building the halls and the government said they will finish, but the mess, which is attendant to these works should be taken away in the same time. In this point of view Brazil is in trouble. Although the country had to face the sanitary recession, the buildings should not be as late as now. In this point of view Brazil's aspirations for regional leadership and the role of being the opponent of the USA in continent become problematic. If the works will not be finished and the social discontent maintains, the whole project become forced and unnatural and might lead the country to economic-social recession as well. Brazil's situation is very important now, because this is a great opportunity to show its power, but in case of failure the country (and might the South American region) will face serious effect.

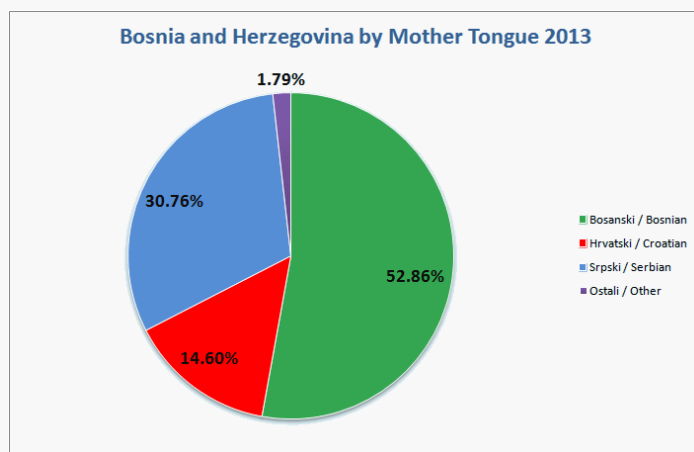
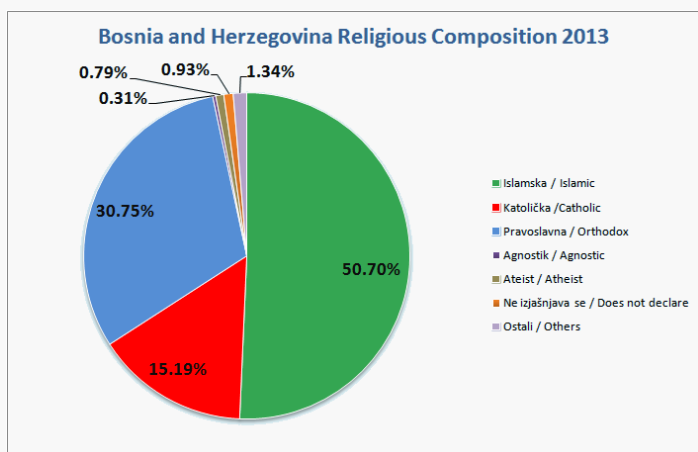


■ News in Brief

Domestic Affairs affecting international relations

Bosnia and Herzegovina shows the census' result until the beginning of July

■ Bosnia is asked to show its population data by Brussels until the 1st of July. Without the publication Sarajevo could not gain access to further financial aid from the European Union, neither could continue the discussions of the membership application. The numbers showed Bosnia has lost the quarter of its population since the end of the war. Today 3.5 million people live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, half of them are Bosniaks, a third is Serb and 15% is Croat. The census itself showed that the ethnic identical problems are still existing 20 years after the war: the citizens were asked if they were Bosniaks, Serbs or Croats. Azra Hazić, professor of economics and parliamentary deputy says, it is a still standing question of where to belong – and this way neglecting essential questions. Ranko Mavrak, journalist also called the census as the matter of majority, who will be able to use their authority and have an effect on the future.



Charts showing data of the 2013 census in Bosnia. Images: Jrmcarth [Wikimedia Commons]

Charlie Hebdo getting new death threats over a year after massacre

■ It has only been a year since the terrible attack on the Paris office of Charlie Hebdo and the satirical magazine is already receiving a number of death threats. According to a source close to the investigation, “the first threat was made on the magazine’s Facebook account, before being removed by an unknown person”. The threat reportedly said that several members of the editorial team would be targeted in an attack. A second threat was sent to the editor of the magazine a few days later, with the same content. Since the attack on 7 January 2015, in which 11 people were shot dead and another 11 were injured, the magazine has been moved to a top secret location and was placed under enhanced security.



Second most dangerous mafia fugitive has been arrested by the Italian paramilitary Carabinieri police

■ Italy's paramilitary Carabinieri police arrested Calabria 'Ndrangheta's boss Ernesto Fazzalai after 20 years on the run. Fazzalai's name is written on Europol's list, which makes him the second most wanted mafia boss after the Sicilian Cosa Nostra mafia's fugitive Matteo Messina Denaro. Fazzalai had been convicted to life sentence, resulting from a trial in absentia, for different crimes including mafia criminal conspiracy, murder, illegal possession of weapons and drug trafficking. Since the 90's, 'Ndrangheta organisation has spread from its Calabria base up through northern Italy and has logistics bases in Europe, as well as in South America.



The presence of 'Ndrangheta in the world. Image: [WikiMafia](http://www.wikimafia.it)

Attacks in Aktobe

■ The north-western Kazakh city of Aktobe was under attack, on June 5, by gunmen which death toll reached 19 deaths, including 13 attackers, three civilians and three National Guard servicemen. As a part of counterterrorism measures, the Kazakh security forces targeted suspects of those who were involved in the attacks happened on June 5. The incident occurred on June 5 was suspected as a following event of major protests against the planned agricultural land reforms that took place in Kazakhstan in April and May. In the counterterrorism operation on June 10, the Kazakh security forces managed to kill 13 suspected attackers, four injured and nine arrested.

Sudanese conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile

■ A comprehensive four-month ceasefire has been announced by Omar al-Bashir the Sudanese President in the states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where fighting between armed rebels and government troops has left scores of casualties. Since 2011, rebel fighters of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) have been battling government forces in the two southern states in a conflict where neither side has managed to definitively take control of the two areas. According to Brigadier Ahmed Khalifa al-Shami, the army spokesman "this gesture of goodwill from the government is to give the armed groups a chance to join the peace process and to surrender their arms."



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Reports on Benghazi attack puts Hillary Clinton on edge

■ Two years after the beginning of an investigation into the September 11, 2012, terrorist attack in Libya, Republicans on the House Benghazi Committee unveiled an 800-page report laying into the White House for its handling of the incident and presenting previously undisclosed facts from testimony. The report leaves questions: who launched the attack, why did they do it, and were US actions in the turmoil of post-revolutionary Libya a contributory factor? These questions remain unanswered in the final report of the House Benghazi Committee. Within the report, there are details putting Hillary Clinton on edge over her involvement in the matter which also affects her presidential campaign. However, until those questions have been answered, the truth behind the Benghazi attack and the US government's involvement will remain a mystery.

Expectations of improvement in Turkey's relations with Russia

■ Since last November when Turkey shot down a Russian warplane near the Syrian border relations between Ankara and Moscow has been strained. Turkey has suffered string of deadly bombings on its soil, thus the June 28, 2016 was the last but not the least on one of the world's busiest airports, a hub at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. It was reported by a Turkish government official that the June 28 attack in which 44 people were killed was carried out by three suspected Islamic State suicide bombers, they are confirmed to be Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationals respectively. The revelation that one of the attackers was a Russian came on an inappropriate time. In the aftermath of that event, Tayyip Recep Erdogan, Turkish President wrote Russian President Vladimir Putin to express regret over the incident but he stopped short of making the apology Moscow wanted before it will lift it economic sanctions affirmed officials in Ankara.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Erdogan during a meeting in Baku, 13 June 2015.
Photo: Kremlin.ru [Wikimedia Commons]



Erdogan and Putin at the opening of the Blue Stream gas pipeline in 2005.
Photo: Kremlin.ru [Wikimedia Commons]



China-Taiwan: a new turning point?

■ On the 25th of June the Chinese Government announced the interruption of the communication mechanism with Taiwan. It was the last act after a long verbal crossfire between China and Taiwan since the election of the new Taiwanese President, Tsai Ing-wen, last January. Since then, the president – member of the Democratic Progressive Party – has been emphasising the importance of defending Taiwan's sovereignty. In particular, during her first presidential speech she claimed to preserve the peace between the People Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) and to defend the "sovereignty and the territory of Taiwan", by omitting the official recognition of the 1992 Consensus. This agreement, signed by RPC and ROC to start a dialogue between them – the first since the 1949 civil war- , is considered by Beijing the legal base to maintain the bilateral relations. Since 2008, bilateral relations have improved, but on that time Taiwan's President was from the Nationalist Party, more open towards China; now the Presidential Party has changed, as a consequence will the China-Taiwan relations at a new turning point?



Fiji-New Zealand relations

■ On the second week of June New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key has taken a 2-day visit to Fiji. The visit was the first time since a military coup in 2006, when Fijian Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama first seized power and retained his leadership role 8 years later when his political party won the election. PM Key's visit was an attempt to improve relations after Fiji held democratic elections in 2014. Since the elections, New Zealand has lifted economic sanctions directed against the South Pacific nation. Key requested PM Bainimarama to re-engage with neighbouring nations on the Pacific Islands Forum and to lift a longstanding travel ban on some of New Zealand's journalists, but he has rejected to do so.



■ News in Brief

International relations

NATO agrees on “Comprehensive Package of Assistance” for Ukraine

■ On 15 June 2016 a meeting was held between NATO and Ukraine in Brussels. It was reported that the alliance agreed to “boost” support for Ukraine with a “comprehensive package of assistance”, asserting that the package's aim is to help Ukraine strengthen its defences by building stronger security structures. Jens Stoltenberg NATO Secretary General admitted that “modernising Ukraine’s forces while they are engaged in conflict is no easy task, but the government is making good progress,” the project has already been implemented by NATO under the “Trust Funds” established for Ukraine to help reform its military including command and control, cyber defence and rehabilitating wounded soldiers.

The end of UN mission in Liberia

■ UN mission left Liberia on 30 June 2016, leaving hope and fear for what still remains to be done in the country. The mission started in 2003, after two civil wars, for the purpose of demilitarise the two enemy groups and to train up a new police force; as a matter of fact it was one of the longest and largest UN mission in the Sub-Saharan region with a large contribution of 42 countries in military forces and 35 in police personnel. Although this is an historical moment for Liberia, many concerns still remain about the future of the national security, because there are still gaps in the field of logistics and training, such as lack of communication mechanisms, transports, uniforms. The small national budget allocated by the government, which is four time less than the UN mission budget (of \$ 344 million per year), and the problem of corruption would not help to improve the situation. The security system must be depoliticised in order to protect the population of this weak country, which is threatened by the terrorism from Ivory Coast and epidemics, like Ebola in 2014.

Human rights groups requiring investigation against Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen

■ “The credibility of the UN Human Rights Council is at stake”. This is what the two top human rights groups, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have claimed after their investigators documented unlawful airstrikes by the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen, that have killed at least 900 civilians, including children. The groups are calling for the suspension of Saudi-Arabia’s right to membership in the above-mentioned council. Furthermore, according to the groups, Saudi-Arabia has taken advantage of this position to avoid possible war crimes’ charges, obstructing a resolution which would have started a credible international investigation.



The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant declares war on the Philippines

■ A propaganda video was released by the self-proclaimed Islamic State, in which it attempts to recruit fighters from the Philippines and neighbouring countries. According to Rita Katz, the director of SITE Intelligence Group, which is tracking the activities of terrorist groups, the video was released in 5 languages: Arabic, English, Filipino, Indonesian and Malay. Screenshots taken by the agency show fighters from the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, who are urging their fellow countrymen “to join their ranks in Syria”, adding that if they are unable to reach the Middle East then they can “join the mujahedeen in the Philippines”. Filipino security officials have denied the presence of ISIS fighters, but noted that several radical groups, such as Abu Sayyaf have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State’s self-appointed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

China joins RIMPAC, a US-led naval exercise on the Western Pacific

■ RIMPAC – Rim of the Pacific Exercise is the biennial naval exercise of the US, which has begun on 30 June. In 2014 an unwelcome incident happened during the program involving a Chinese spy vessel. This year on the way back from the Western Pacific to Hawaii, as the Chinese vessels emerged the US group invited them to join. During the cruise Chinese intelligence-gathering spy vessel was sent as well, which have raised some further questions. Experts were not sure about the meaning of this case: China tries to establish its comprehensive authority on the South China Sea while the only responsible power of this territory is the US. In any case, the invitation proved the leadership of the US, beside the fact that China could show its competence and took part as a partner. Yun Sun, an expert on Chinese foreign policy at the US Stimson Center think tank says that the most important thing in this issue that both parties were transparent and cooperative to each other to be able to manage this serious question of control.

Canada and Mexico strengthen relationship to prepare for the US election

■ Canada and Mexico have decided to strengthen their relationship after a long time having bilateral disputes. The stronger relationship will entail the trade of Canadian beef to Mexico and for Canada to scrape obliging rules for Mexicans visiting Canada. The move taken by both government is a preparation for a foreseen political change in regards of the US election. Both the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the President of Mexico Enrique Peña Nieto argue that the future of the North America Free Trade Agreement relies on the outcome of the US election. In order to assure that NAFTA will stay stable, both countries have to work with whoever wins the election in November 2016.



The 64th Bilderberg Conference

■ The 64th Bilderberg Conference will be held in Dresden this year. The Bilderberg Conference is known as the world's most secretive gathering of global elites which will be attended by rich and powerful bankers, prime ministers and former heads of the CIA and MI6 alongside other global elites. Around 126 participants will discuss an agenda which will include the issues of China, Europe, migration, the Middle East, Russia and the "geopolitics of energy and commodity prices", and will be chaired by a French count, also the chairman of the global insurance giant AXA, during the three-day meeting from June 9-12. The organisers of the Bilderberg meetings always refer to it as a forum for informal discussions about the world's mega trends and a chance for participants "to reflect and gather insights".

A long-awaited historic gathering of Orthodox Churches

■ After 55 years in preparation, a historic gathering of Orthodox Churches has opened on the Greek island of Crete. The Russians, however, decided not to attend the gathering after the Churches of Antioch, Bulgaria and Georgia refused to take part after disputes about the meeting. Fourteen Churches representing over 300 million faithful had been originally invited to the gathering. The decision not to attend the meeting by the Russian Church shows the longstanding divisions among Orthodox Christians. There seems also to be a struggle for power between Russia and the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, considered as the spiritual head and "first among equals". The disagreements themselves ranged from seating plans to efforts to reconcile with the Vatican.

The highest number of refugees in history

■ The number of refugees as a result of conflicts and wars have reached its highest number ever in history. The UN Refugee Agency estimated number of either refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced persons is reaching up to 65,3 million by the end of 2015. This number is 5 million higher than last year. The total of people coming from Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia take over than half of the total number of people estimated by the UN Refugee Agency. As an impact of that, the UN refugee chief says a rise of xenophobia which has taken hold in Europe as it struggles to cope with the migrant crisis. The influx of people coming to Europe has led to greater support for far-right groups and controversial anti-immigration policies.

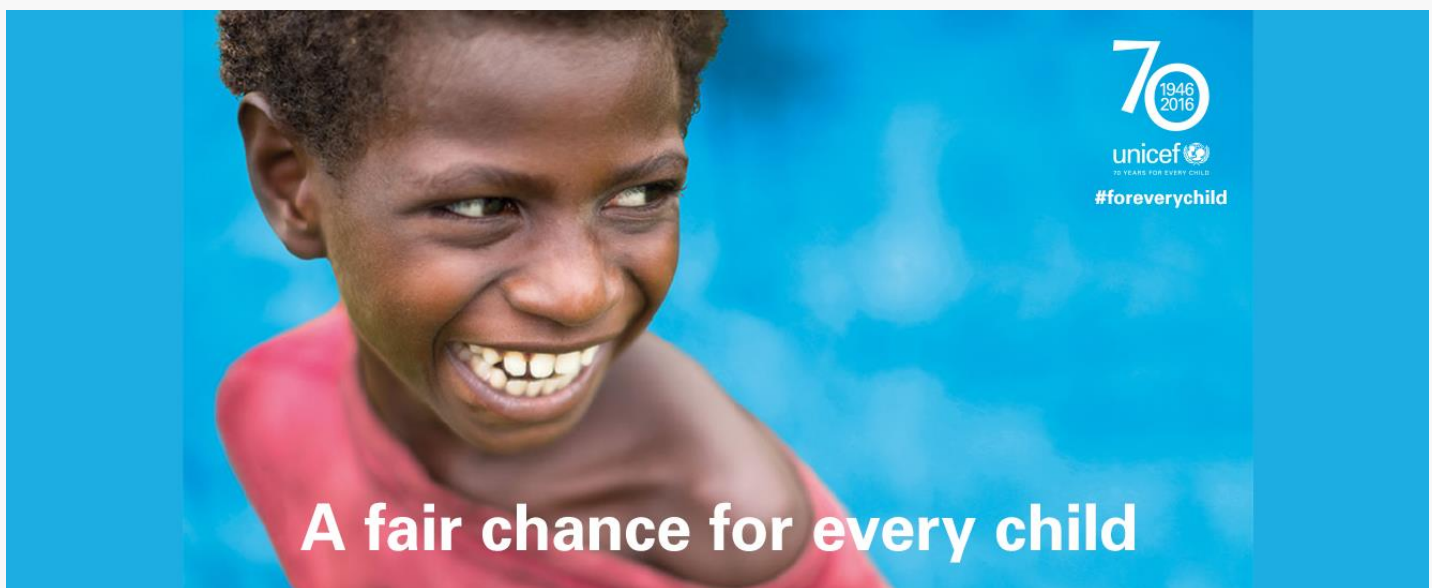


UNHCR tents at a refugee camp on Olifantsfontein, Midrand, Johannesburg. Photo: NJR ZA [Wikimedia Commons]



UN report: Tackle inequality to prevent children from dying

■ Thinking that in 2016 the condition of people all over the world is getting better is still a hope. That is demonstrated by the last UNICEF report, *The State of the World's Children 2016*, which denounces the inequity of worldwide children's situation, the inefficiency of governments' actions and what would happen by 2030 if countries do not improve the conditions of disadvantaged people. According to UNICEF report, it is estimated that, if the world does not tackle inequity in these years, by 2030: 167 million children will live in extremity poverty, 69 million children under age 5 will die between 2016 and 2030, 60 million children of primary school age will be out of the school, 750 million women will have been married as children, and much more. UNICEF calls governments, civil society and international institutions for an urgent action to avoid to turn these statistical data into real facts and to draw the pathway to equity. Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director told: "Inequality is a choice. Promoting equity – a fair chance for every child, for all children – is also a choice. A choice we can make, and must make. For their future, and the future of our world." The report can be accessed online at: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2016>



The high level of criticality of the Iraqi humanitarian crisis in UNICEF 2016 report

■ The UN children's agency published a report which furnishes proofs regarding the seriousness of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. What emerges is the danger that arising from the conflicts affects many Iraqi children, making them victims of terrible abuses and exploitation. Among the others, the disconcerted data highlighted in UNICEF's report regards 3.6 million children facing risks of death, sexual violence or recruitment for armed groups. Furthermore, in 2016, one out of four of 1.1 million of children will be born without medical assistance, the lack of potable water obligates the 25% of children to satisfy this need by accessing to rivers and streams. Almost the 10% of Iraqi children has been forced to leave their homes because of the violence since 2014.





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