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Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

August 2015





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.

As an initiative of ICRP, the content of this magazine is written and edited by student authors. The project, as part of the Institute's Internship Programme provides the opportunity to strengthen professional skills.



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ICRP Geopolitika Kft

45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 – Hungary

ISSN 2063-8205

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Migration crisis: EU efforts to find solutions

Hundreds of thousands of people are living through war and searching for a better life conditions in Europe this year. European countries struggling to cope with a growing humanitarian disaster which comes from Syria, Eritrea and Iraq.

The view of thousands of migrants held in sports stadiums, makeshift encampments or train stations, sometimes lacking food or water, show how terrible and insufficient current conditions are for people trying to find a new life in Europe.

Europe has been shocked in view of immigrant tragedies in the Mediterranean and the exploitation of migrants by human traffickers.



Irish Naval Service rescuing migrants from an overcrowded boat as part of Operation Triton, June 2015. [Wikimedia Commons]

In order to prevent the escalation of the humanitarian disaster, European interior and justice ministers came into contact in Brussels for finding precaution to keep up with challenge of increasing migration.

The ministers will meet on 14 September in Brussels after a statement from the home affairs ministers of Germany, France and Britain commented they had “asked the Luxembourg presidency to organise a special meeting of justice and interior ministers within the next two weeks, so as to find concrete steps” to deal with the circumstance.

These three countries highlighted “the necessity to take urgent action to cope up with intense migrant influx.”

In August, British Interior Minister Theresa May visited Calais to inspect new security precautions for preventing migrants from reaching England via the Channel Tunnel. At least nine of 5,000 displaced people known to have died trying to make a journey from French port to Britain since June.

Unprecedented numbers of migrants are arriving EU borders, surpassing 100,000 in July alone and reaching more than 340,000 this year so far. Italy and Greece are



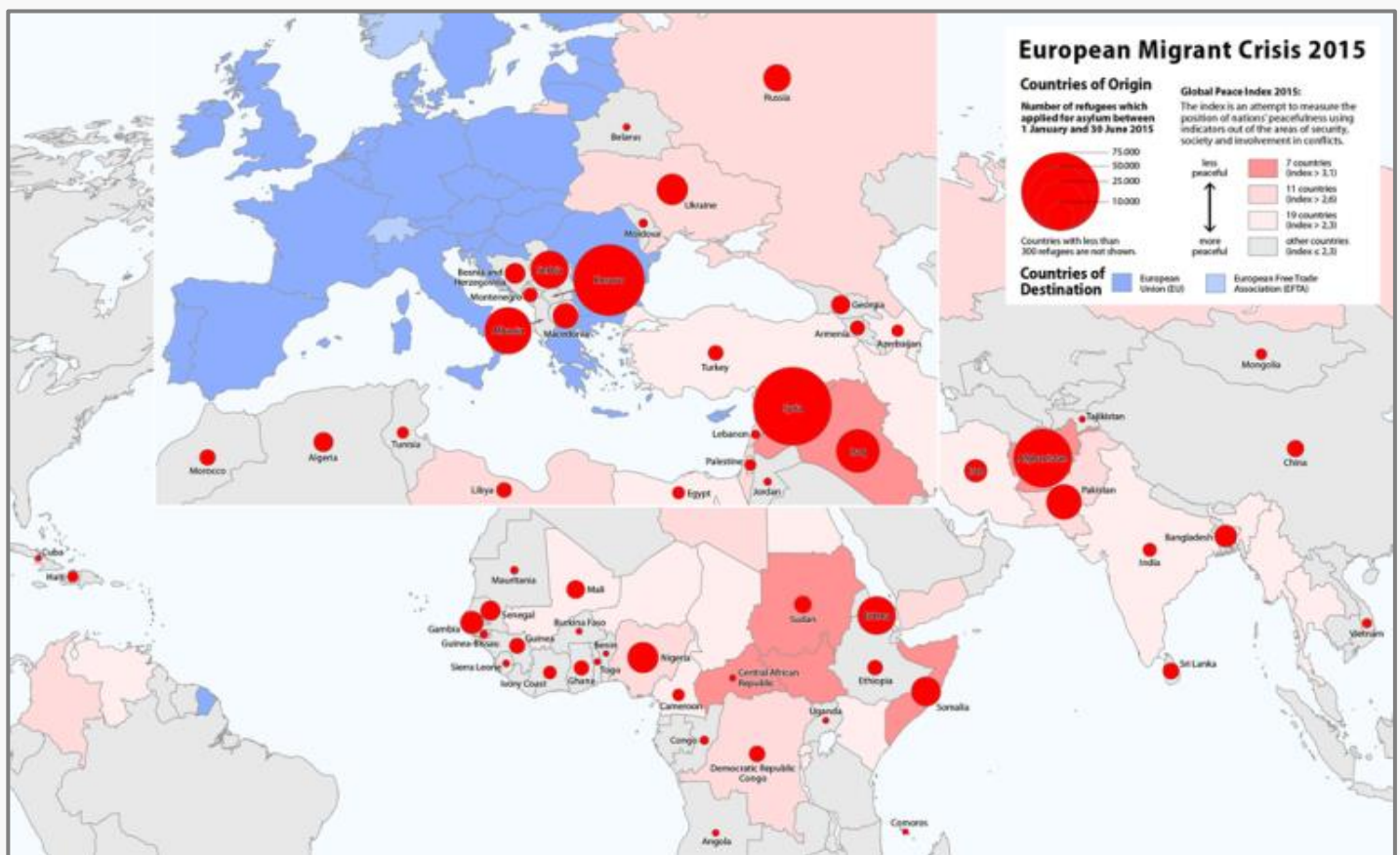
tackling to overcome, while Macedonia has declared a state of emergency.

"It will take months, but we will have a single European policy on asylum, not as many policies as there are countries," The Italian prime minister, Matteo Renzi, told the *Corriere della Sera*. He believed the migration crisis would push the EU to approve uniform rules for refugees in place of the current patchwork of laws and approaches.

The French, British and German statement called for reception centres in Italy and Greece to register new arrivals and establish a common list of "safe countries of origin" of EU. This would theoretically allow asylum applications to be fast-tracked for specific nationalities.

Germany, which expects to receive 800,000 asylum seekers this year, has been pressing for such a list, arguing that it would free up resources to help those fleeing war and oppression.

Theresa May commented the migrant crisis has been exacerbated by a broken European migration system. "The events of this summer have shown that the most tragic consequences of a broken European migration system have been borne by those at risk of exploitation," she wrote. "And the greatest beneficiaries have been the callous gangs who sell false dreams and trade on the free borders within the EU."



European migrant crisis 2015. Countries of origin of refugees which have applied for asylum in Europe between 1 January and 30 June 2015. [Wikimedia Commons]



Migrant crisis: The European Union wants emergency talks

The European Union is calling emergency talks to discuss a solution to its rapidly increasing refugee and migrant crisis. The crisis had reached “unprecedented proportions”.

The EU leadership said interior ministers from all 28 member states would hold an extraordinary meeting on 14 September. Discussion points will include internal co-operation, fighting the trafficking of migrants and return policy.

More than 300,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe since January, mainly from the Middle East and Africa.

More than 2,500 of those have died making the risky journey across the Mediterranean Sea with 200 missing and feared dead after a boat capsized off the coast of Libya on 27 August, and 71 bodies found in an abandoned truck near the Austria-Hungary border.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was “horrified and heartbroken” because of this issues and called for a “collective political response” to the crisis.

Germany, France and the UK have said the EU should establish a list of “safe countries of origin” that would allow urgent repatriation of some migrants.

Greece, Italy and Hungary have specially struggled with the rising of migrants from not only Syria but the rest of the Middle East countries and Africa.

The UN says it is a major factor behind the rise in migrant numbers because of the ongoing conflicts in Syria.

Next month’s extraordinary meeting was announced by Luxembourg Minister for Immigration and Asylum Jean Asselborn, due to his country holds the EU’s rotating presidency.

The migrant crisis outside and inside EU has recently taken “unprecedented proportions.” In July, the number of migrants that reached the EU’s borders topped 100,000 for the first time – triple the number of people in July last year, according to European agency Frontex.



*Refugees on the Hungarian M1 highway on their march towards the Austrian border.
Photo: Joachim Seidler [Wikimedia Commons]*



Angela Merkel calls on EU for aid Western Balkans face migrant mass influx

German Chancellor, Angela Merkel said the European Union must collaborate to help countries such as Macedonia and Serbia to overcome migrant crisis. The Western Balkans' transit countries are facing huge challenges. Merkel said "it is our responsibility to help them."



Barrier in Hungarian-Serbian border. Photo: Schmidt Andrea [Wikimedia Commons]

Angela Merkel and Balkan leaders concerted Vienna to seek to struggle together the biggest migration crisis to hit Europe since World War II.

Countries taking part include Macedonia and Serbia, two major transit nations for thousands of migrants and refugees trying to enter the European Union by taking the so-called "Western Balkans Route".

The foreign ministers of both countries called for an appointed European Union action plan at the start of the summit.

The Serbian foreign minister, Ivica Dacic said "It is the European Union's problem, but we are expected to come up with an action plan... I have to be very direct here, please understand. We bear the brunt of the burden."

The European Union has pledged 1.5 million euros to help Serbia and Macedonia, but Dacic said the money would not be enough. He asked, "When do you plan to establish controls and prevent migrants going to Serbia and Macedonia?"

"Unless we have a European answer to this crisis, no one should be under any illusion it will be solved", Nikola Poposki, the Macedonian foreign minister said.

Merkel noted that the transit countries were already facing financial problems which were confused by migrant crisis: "As future members of European Union, it is our responsibility to ease their problems", she told a news conference.

The plan also calls for quotas for migrants to be shared more evenly between European Union member states – an idea Britain has rejected.



Calais migrant crisis: UK and France to sign agreement

British and French ministers met in Calais on 20 August to agree a new deal to struggle the migrant crisis there. The deal includes more security around the site where thousands of migrants are living and struggle to move toward Britain.

British Home Secretary Theresa May and French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve visited the Eurotunnel site and meet aid associations helping migrants.



The deal includes measures to deal with the gangs who traffic migrants from Africa and Asia across Europe. The two ministers also discussed about humanitarian support for migrants.

Thousands of migrants are living around Calais. Many of them are living in the camp known as the Jungle. Also, each night

hundreds of people attempt to arrive to the UK by breaching security around the port and Eurotunnel.

At least nine people are known to have died trying to make the journey into Britain since June.

After the meeting Cazeneuve flew to Berlin to meet his German counterpart, Thomas de Maiziere, to talk about Europe's migration policies.

The UK government has offered France help with security around Calais – including 7 million pounds for fences – but police there have said these measures are only a “short-term solution.”

UK Independence Party MEP Mike Hookem said the deal was “too little, too late.”

“The migration crisis is expanding day by day. This problem cannot be solved by these two countries because it starts in the Mediterranean”, he said.

The Calais situation is part of a much larger migration issue in Europe. More than 240,000 migrants have crossed the Mediterranean already this year, arriving on the coasts of Greece and Italy.

UN High Commissioner has said more European countries should share the responsibility.



Ukraine gives more power to rebel areas

On 31 August, the Ukrainian parliament agreed to give more autonomy to the rebel areas in order to foster the peace in the east of the country. The members backed the decentralisation bill that gives more power to the rebel and pro-Russian areas of Donetsk and Luhansk in line with the Minsk peace deal signed in February which establishes a ceasefire in which political decisions should be undertaken towards demilitarization and decentralization, especially in the Donbass area. This deal aspires to be a political solution for the armed conflict where 7,000 people have been killed since April 2014.

But the peace agreement is fragile and has many threats. The first is the military presence over the area and the reciprocal ceasefire violations reported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The second is the rhetoric on both sides as the Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko is using a belligerent speech rejecting pacifism. The third is the social opposition to concessions. The same day the decentralisation bill was approved, a clash burst outside the parliament between nationalist demonstrators, many from Svoboda Party, and the riot police.

Eventually, one National Guard was killed and more than 100 people were injured. However, Kiev is undertaking policies to give more power and a special status to the rebel areas and despite his speeches, Poroshenko has committed himself to withdraw the heavy weapons in the front line to comply the Minsk deal. On the other hand, despite the suspicions that Russia is sending military infrastructure to the Donbass, the rebel forces withdrew unilaterally the lighter weaponry in another step towards conciliation. The talks between the two parties, France and Germany have agreed to reinstate the ceasefire on 1 September.



*Remains of an Eastern Orthodox church after shelling near Donetsk International Airport.
Photo: Mystyslav Chernov [Wikimedia Commons]*



Is Turkey drifting towards civil war?

Turkey has started a high-risk attack against the rebel Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), while providing the US with an airbase for attacking Islamic State (IS) militants in Syria. An armistice with the PKK collapsed last month, after renewed clashes in south-eastern Turkey. In the latest violence, four Turkish police officers and a soldier were killed in Sirnak, part of the Kurdish-majority region.

Turkey has drifted toward to a major spiral of violence. It started with the Islamic State suicide bomb attack July 20 in Suruc, a Kurdish dominated town near the Syrian border.

A bomber blew up himself at a gathering of left-wing activists, killing 32 people. The attack was apparently ordered by IS. Nevertheless, Kurdish protesters also blamed the Turkish government for conspiring with IS.

Two days later, Kurdistan Workers Party's rebels killed two policemen in their beds in Sanliurfa as revenge for the Suruc bombing triggered sustained clashes between Turkish security forces and the PKK.

In the meantime, IS fighters clashed with Turkish troops along the Syrian border, and they killed one of them.

Two Turkish soldiers have been killed and 31 wounded in a suicide attack by Kurdish PKK

militants. A tractor laden with explosives was driven at a military police station early morning near the town of Dogubeyazit in Agri province, near the border with Iran.

Since 24 July, Turkey has carried out hundreds of air assaults on PKK bases on both sides of the Iraq-Turkey border.

Turkey reacted by arresting hundreds of suspected supporters of IS and the PKK, while its aircrafts bombed the groups' positions in Syria and northern Iraq, in turn. By 10 August, more than 1,300 people had been arrested in the crackdown.

By August 10, three PKK militants and a police chief were killed in Istanbul's Sultanbeyli district. After hours, two female militants of the radical leftist Revolutionary People's Liberation Army-Front (DHKP-C), which supports the armed struggle of the PKK, targeted the US Consulate in Istanbul. Furthermore, August 10 has become known as "bloody Monday" because an improvised explosive device planted by the PKK killed four policemen in Silopi.

The clashes between PKK and Turkish security forces have become violent and spread the entire country. And after September 2012, for the first time Turkey has started bombing PKK targets inside Turkey by the Turkish air force.



Humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen

The United Nations warned that Yemen is experiencing a humanitarian catastrophe and equated the level of the crisis with the ones in South Sudan, Syria and Iraq. The country is suffering clashes between the Huthi rebels and the loyal of the exiled President Abd Mansour Hadi supported by the Saudi-led coalition that have led the state to collapse. In March, the conflict broke out again with more violence. Since then, the Saudi-led coalition is pushing north the Huthi rebels to get the power back. In the last six months the death toll has risen to 4,500 people and more than 23,000 have been injured. The UN is calling for a ceasefire, followed by a time to aid civilians and to reach a political solution.

Before the starting of the crashes the life in Yemen was already critical. Half of the population were poor, there was a high unemployment rate and a lack of social services, but the raging of the conflict, the weapons embargo that restricts any sort of import and the disparity on the distribution of goods have deprived 21 million people (80% of the population) from basic services, water, food, hygiene and healthcare, and also electricity and fuel, as denounces the UN and the report "The Steady Bleed" of

Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) published on 1 August. Furthermore, 1.4 million people have been displaced.

Amnesty International published on 17 August a report called 'Nowhere safe for civilians' accusing the two parties of war crimes on unlawful, disproportionate and indiscriminate "airstrikes and ground attacks" on innocent civilians, an accusation hold by the UN. According to the Red Cross, that suffered and attack in its office in Aden, Yemen looks now like Syria after five years of war. This organisation called the world to wake up and solve the problem politically. Despite the calls of the UN to the International Community for redouble their efforts, the campaign aid launched by the UN that was supposed to assist Yemen was only 18% funded in the middle of August.



Exiled President Abd Mansour Hadi. Photo: Wikimedia Commons



North and South Korea sign peace truces



South Korean soldiers standing guard at the JSA between the blue buildings. View from the south, with North Korea to the rear. Photo: Henrik Ishihara

After a month of escalating tensions, North and South Korea reached an agreement on 22 August. The crisis in the Korean Peninsula had been rising since the beginning of the month, when Kim Jong-un government exploded landmines in the common Demilitarised Zone, injuring two South Korean soldiers. As response, Seoul started to broadcast anti-Pyongyang propaganda through speakers installed along the frontier between the two countries. The tensions reached the critical point on 20 August, when the North fired four shells towards the South, driving Seoul to respond with a barrage of artillery fire. It was when Kim Jong-un imposed an ultimatum, in which he assumed to use military action against Seoul, in case the government did not haul the broadcasts, that both countries decided to start the negotiations.

The meeting was held in Panmunjom truce village, inside the Demilitarised Zone, with the present of high representatives of both governments. Pyongyang sent the deputy Hwang Pyong-so, considered by many analysts the second in command of Kim Jong-un, and Kim Yang-gon, an expert in negotiations with South Korea, since the government Kim Jong-il.

As for Seoul, it was represented by the national security advisor of the President Kim Kwan-jin and the minister of unification Hong Yong-pyo. After three days of conversations, both governments agreed to stop the military standoff, and however, Pyongyang did not explicitly assume the responsibility for the landmine explosions, it did show its regrets towards the situation and agreed to lift the semi-state of war that had declared. "It is very meaningful that from this meeting North Korea apologised for the landmine provocation and promised to work to prevent the recurrence of such events and ease tensions," said the South Korean representative Kim Kwan-jin. As for South Korea, Seoul's government agreed to halt the broadcasting propaganda against the North. The United States and United Nations have already shown their support on the agreement, as well as Beijing, Pyongyang's main ally.



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Greek Prime Minister resigns and asks for early elections

■ Alexis Tsipras resign from the Prime Minister office on 20 August, at the same time he requested early elections. The resignation was presented one month after the approval by the Parliament for a third bailout, creating division inside Tsipras' party, Syriza, with almost one third of its deputies voting against or abstaining. By calling for early elections, the Greek Prime Minister elected in January 2015 hopes to strengthen his position among the people and shut down the anti-bailout rebels inside Syriza. The elections are scheduled for 20 September.

Boko Haram kills 56 people in a Nigerian village

■ Governor of Borno Kashim Shettima stated that Boko Haram had killed 56 people in the remote village of Baanu. The statement was made during a meeting with the parents of the 219 girls, who were abducted in a school, in Chibok, in 2014. The recent attack occurred on 28 August, at night, according to the villagers that were able to escape. In the six years of uprising, Boko Haram has killed 20,000 people, 1,000 of which since the election of President Muhammadu Buhari, in March 2015, who assumed the obliteration of the Nigerian extremist Islamic group.

China's black Monday

■ It was a dark Monday for the Chinese markets, the one on 24 August, with stocks falling 8.5%. The Black Monday, as the Asian media soon entitled it, confirmed the tendency registered in the previous week, with the markets closing in negative field for three times, as consequence of the devalued of the yuan, in the beginning of August, and the massive outflow of capital from China. This was the biggest fall of the world's second largest economy in eight years, leading to a domino effect, with Asian, Australian, European and North American markets closing with losses.

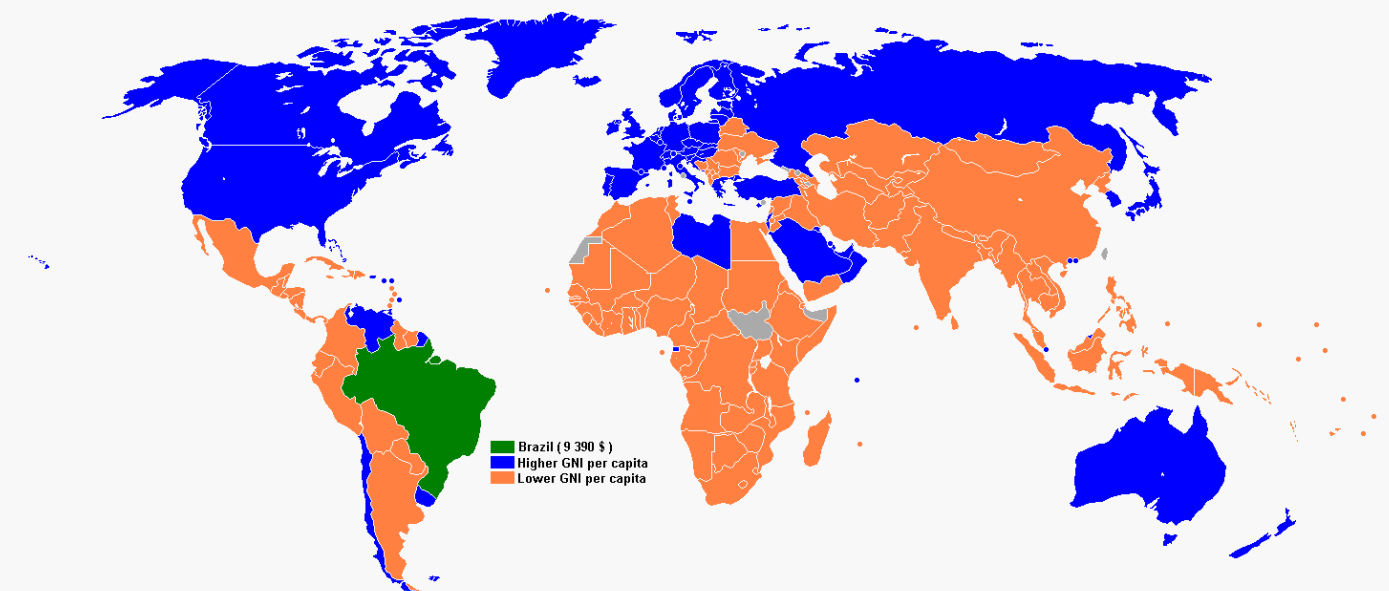


A bomb explodes in a touristic square in Bangkok killing 29 people

■ A bomb ripped through central Bangkok, close to the Erawan Shrine on 17 August. The detonation happened at around 7 pm. Thai police said it was a pipe bomb, 3kg of TNT explosive stuffed into a pipe and wrapped with white cloth. The explosion killed 20 people, according to officials, 12 of whom died at the scene. More than 120 people were injured. The defence minister, Prawit Wongsuwan, told Reuters. "We still do not know for sure who did this and why", he later told reporters: "We are not sure if it is politically motivated, but they aim to harm our economy and we will hunt them down." The national police chief, Somyot Poompanmoung said they aim was to kill because it is known that the shrine is crowded with Thais and foreigners during the evening hours. Thousands of people including tourists visit it every day.

Brazil's political and economic crisis reaches new proportions

■ Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's popularity continues to fall. After the corruption scandal involving the company Petrobras, which majority shareholder is the Brazilian Government, and the landslide of the alliance between the government and the Congress, the political crisis reached a new verge with the decline of investment and consumption. For the past six months, the growth of the gross domestic product has been negative, making official that Brazil has entered a period of recession. This not only affected the President's credibility, resulting in protests and the rise of citizens demanding Rousseff's impeachment, as it blows Brazil's aspirations to lead the bloc of emerging economies.



GNI per capita in 2010



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Egypt court sentences three Al-Jazeera journalists to jail

■ Three journalists were sentenced to three years in jail, under the charges of “aiding a terrorist organisation”, the Muslim Brotherhood, banned by Egypt since the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi by the army in 2013. The Egyptian Baher Mohamed, the Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and the Australian Peter Greste, all associated with the television network Al-Jazeera were accused of not being registered journalist and operating from a Cairo hotel without license. The three journalists had been previously found guilty of the same crime, in 2014, but were freed in February 2015 to await trial. Representatives of the international community, such as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and European Union have condemned the resolution of the Egyptian court.

Venezuela-Colombia crisis

■ President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro closed several border crossing last month, and deported 1,300 Colombians in what he called crackdown on smuggling and crime in the turbulent area. 15,000 Colombians have crossed the border voluntarily during the sweep out, and many of them crossing the border river with only what they can carry on their backs. The view of hundreds of Colombians crossing a border river with refrigerators, chickens and mattresses on their backs as goats and children followed shocked many in Latin America. On 4 September, Venezuela allowed dozens of schoolchildren in Colombia to come back for classes.



■ News in Brief

International relations

71 immigrants died inside a truck abandoned on an Austrian motorway

■ More than 70 bodies were found inside a refrigerated lorry in the frontier between Hungary and Austria. Among the bodies there were 59 men, eight women and four children, the youngest, a girl between one and two years old. The truck was found in a motorway by an Austrian highway patrol and, due to the decomposition of the bodies, the authorities believe that has been there for a few days. Early indications suggest the victims suffocated. Four suspects have been arrested by the Hungarian police, suspected of participating in a human-trafficking gang.

200 people died in a shipwreck in the Libyan coast

■ About 200 bodies have been found the coast of one of Libya's main people-smuggling hubs. Those on board had been from sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan, Syria, Morocco and Bangladesh, the security official informed. A Libyan coastguard vessel found the bodies at a port around a kilometre from Zuwara, which is a major departure point for migrants hoping to reach Italy, in western Libya. A security official in the western town of Zuwara said there had been around 400 people on board. On 26 August, 52 bodies were found below deck on a wooden boat with over 450 people on board rescued by the Swedish coast guard off the coast of Libya. The total numbers of deaths in the Mediterranean rose to over 2,500 this year.

Islamic State destroyed a 2000-year-old temple in Palmyra

■ The director-general of Syria's antiquities Maamoun Abdulkarim has confirmed that the Islamic State destroyed the temple of Baal Shamin, considered one of the most important sites of the world heritage city of Palmyra. UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova condemned the extremist group actions, defining them as a "war crime" and "an immense loss for Syrian people and humanity". The Islamic State destroyed several world heritage places, pre-date Islam, considering them as a way of "idolatry". This cultural cleansing has, however, been consider by the many analysts as the jihadist's primary mean of funding, by selling the stolen antiques, and an easy way of getting world publicity.

Thalys train attack

■ A trained gunman fired three shots in the train that connects Paris to Amsterdam. The attacker, who was able to seriously injury two people, was subdued by a Briton and two American servicemen that were on board. The suspect of the attack was later identified by the French police as Ayoub el-Khazzani, a 25-year-old Moroccan who listed the French intelligence services as well the Belgium authorities' records as a radical Islamist who fought in Syria in 2014. Due to the kind of guns used, the local and context the investigation is being led by the anti-terrorist department of Paris.





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