

„Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues“

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

September 2012





About CRP News & Background

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

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.



Editorial Team

Andras Lorincz, Series Editor

Gergo Nagy, Csilla Morauszki Authors – Issue September 2012

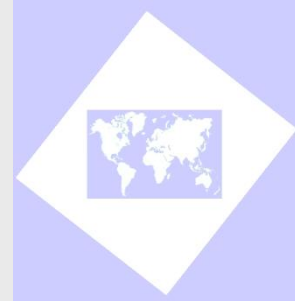
Csilla Morauszki, Executive Publisher

© Institute for Cultural Relations Policy

ICRP Geopolitika Kft

45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 - Hungary

Contents



-
- 01** Euro Crisis Deepens: Protests in Spain and Greece

 - 03** Progress in Scottish Independence Talks

 - 05** Azerbaijani Axe Murderer Extradited

 - 07** Anti-Islam Videos Inflames Tensions in the Muslim World

 - 08** Meeting Over Julian Assange Case

 - 09** Iran-Israel Tensions

 - 10** Fishing Dispute in the Indian Ocean

 - 12** Senkaku Islands Sovereignty Dispute

 - 13** News In Brief

Euro Crisis Deepens: Protests in Spain and Greece

As European sovereign debt crisis deepens, concerns are increasing that Spain may become the fourth country to require a full bailout in the eurozone. In the meantime a series of ongoing nationwide protests demands radical political change in Spanish politics and economic crisis fuels separatist sentiment in some regions as well. On 11 September 2012, which is Catalonia's national day, around 1.5 million people took over the centre of Barcelona and turned the holiday into a huge separatist protest. The mass with Catalan flags and banners with the slogan "Catalonia, New European State" demanded independence and issued a warning to the central government according to which if Madrid does not give Catalonia more control over its taxes, independence could be an option. Catalans would like to have greater fiscal autonomy, because they think the region provides more taxes to the national system than it should. Madrid redistributes these amounts to poorer regions that is why Catalonia wants to change this system and create a new fiscal pact reducing its contribution.

Catalonia with its 7.5 million inhabitants accounts for 16 percent of the Spanish population and 19 percent of the state's GDP. Though with €42 billion of debt it is far the largest indebted among Spanish regions. In August Catalonia requested aid from the €18 billion emergency fund set up by the central government to help regions pay their debts and suppliers of health care and basic services. Due to the fiscal problems mentioned above the Catalan regional government had to make some of the deepest budget cuts in Spain which has resulted growing tensions in the society. Even so Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy rejected the Catalan demand for special fiscal powers and criticised independence protests because as he said, the country needs unity and strength to deal with the economic crisis. In response Catalonia's leader Artur Mas announced snap elections for November 25, 2012 which vote is also seen as a de facto referendum on the region's demand for greater independence. Although polls show growing support for separatist sentiments in Catalonia, Spain's constitution bars a referendum on it.



Of course Catalonia can unilaterally declare independence as well. The region has its own language, accounts for a fifth of the Spanish economy, is home to several big companies and has never before been so close to independence. In the meantime tensions are increasing in Galicia and in the Basque Country as well.

On 25 September 2012 around six thousands protesters gathered outside the parliament in Madrid and twenty-two were arrested in clashes between the police and the demonstrators. According to protesters the police were shooting into the crowd with rubber bullets, but authorities would not comment the statement. Demonstrators accused the Spanish right wing government of trying to resolve the country's worsening economic situation on the backs of people while unemployment is near 25 percent and investors remain concerned that the country will not meet budget deficit targets.

As economies in the eurozone continue to crumble, Greece's crisis goes on. On 26 September 2012 thousands of Greeks took the streets of Athens to protest against new draconian austerity measures. It was the first general strike since the new conservative-led coalition came to power in June. According to police statements more than 25,000 people gathered and some protesters threw Molotov cocktails near the parliament. Police responded with tear gas and arrested dozens of people in the scuffles.

Greece national debt is bigger than its economy and European leaders are

concerned that Greece's problems will infect more and more eurozone countries that is why it is extremely important to save the Greek economy. In return for international bailout funds, Greece has agreed to a strict austerity program and labour market reform sin the past and now the government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras is proposing to save money by raising the retirement age to 67 and cutting pension benefits.

According to official Eurostat in May 2012, 53.8% of Greeks younger than 25 were unemployed. The country suffers from a years-long recession's effects, Greece's credit rating has been downgraded to the lowest in the eurozone, so the government is seeking new ways to ensure the state receives another international bailout from the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

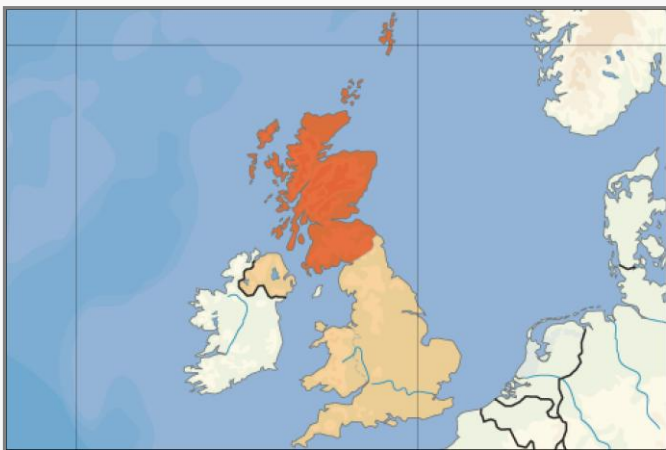


Photo: Fotogracion

Progress in Scottish Independence Talks

At the beginning of September 2012 First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond has indicated that he is ready to hold negotiations with the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, David Cameron on Scottish independence referendum. Salmond has also asked his Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to manage the Scottish government's campaign and prepare the administration and the society for the forthcoming referendum.

On 13 September Nicola Sturgeon met Michael Moore – the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for Scotland – to start working and clear up the details of further negotiations. Although any final deal is expected to be signed in a meeting between Alex Salmond and David Cameron, the two parts had a constructive



Map: David Liuzzo



Photo: Mogens Englund

set of discussions and made progress in several tough issues. They have concluded on the role of the Electoral Commission and on campaign broadcasts. Even so the matter of a single question or second question on increased powers remains unresolved. The first would be a single, straight proposition on independence, however the inclusion of a second question would ask for the devolution of full tax powers (devo max), with responsibility for defence and foreign affairs remaining at Westminster. Negotiations continue and

according to Scottish authorities, a Salmond-Cameron meeting is expected to take place shortly. Downing Street officials were more secretive, emphasizing that no date had been fixed for the historical meeting between the two leaders. The only certainty is that the Scottish government wants a referendum on independence to be held in autumn 2014.

Hot Summer in Northern Ireland

In the meantime more than 60 police officers have been injured and hospitalised during three nights of rioting in north Belfast. Violence and tensions have been running high in the area since 12 July 2012, when a loyalist band taking part in an annual Orange Order parade marched in a circle outside a Catholic church, playing a provocative sectarian song. Members have now apologised however according to the Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, this incident could jeopardize peace process in Northern Ireland.



Belfast City Hall

**“REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE
TO BE HELD IN AUTUMN 2014”**

Azerbaijani Axe Murderer Extradited

The Azerbaijani serviceman who killed Armenian officer Gurgen Margarian in 2004 and was sentenced to life in prison in Hungary was extradited to Azerbaijan on 31 August 2012.

Ramil Safarov murdered the Armenian lieutenant with an axe while participating in a NATO-sponsored course of studies in Budapest. Although the Hungarian government said they had returned Safarov to his homeland only after receiving official assurances from the Azerbaijani authorities that the remainder of his sentence would be enforced, Ilham Aliyev – President of Azerbaijan – pardoned Safarov and greeted him as a national hero.

The extradition was followed by protests outside the Hungarian consulate in Yerevan and Armenia immediately cut diplomatic ties with Hungary. The Armenian President, Serzh Sargsyan referred to the possibility that the Azerbaijani President and the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán had entered into a secret agreement during the latter's visit to Baku on 30 June, 2012. Although several sources in the media have speculated as well concerning Hungary's deepening economic ties with Azerbaijan, Viktor Orbán stated that his country acted within the frames of international law and denied every conspiracy theory.

Due to the war in 1998 over the Nagorno-Karabakh region between its majority ethnic Armenians – backed by the Republic of Armenia – and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the two former Soviet republics do not have diplomatic relations. The conflict ended in a ceasefire, left about 30,000 people dead, displaced thousands and caused great tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Negotiations, aimed at finding a peaceful settlement to the incident, have been carried out under the OSCE's (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) Minsk group since the 1990's, but the tense relations are to further deteriorate after the Hungarian government's decision.



Photo: Electionworld [Wikimedia Atlas of the World]

Meanwhile international concern has been growing, because great powers are afraid that the situation between the two countries might deteriorate. The United States has expressed its regret for the case and hopes that the conflict will be solved soon, also asked Hungary for gathering more information in order to understand, why the killer was extradited. The ANCA (Armenian National Committee of America) is “beating the drum” and pushing for US action. Russia, the military ally of Armenia received with deep concern reports of Baku's pardon and jointly with the European Union calls on the Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities to prevent the escalation of tensions in bilateral relations. The European Parliament adopted a resolution deploring Azerbaijan's decision and relieving Hungary from any responsibility in the matter.

Even so the Armenian-Azerbaijani “frozen conflict” turned hot and the international community has a great responsibility to keep peace in the region.



Photo: Pandukht [Wikimedia Commons]

**“ARMENIA IMMEDIATELY CUT
DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH HUNGARY”**

Anti-Islam Videos Inflames Tensions in the Muslim World

Videos about Prophet Muhammad have been recently released with the title of “Innocence of Muslims”. The videos might be trailers of a two-hour film that was shot in the United States and was shown in a small cinema in Hollywood. The first fourteen-minute video clip of the film, translated into Arabic, was initially uploaded to YouTube video sharing website in July 2012 which led to several demonstrations and violent protests in the Arab World and in some western countries as well. The incidents have led to hundreds of injuries and more than 50 deaths. In Libya, an US Ambassador and three other American officers were killed in an armed attack. US federal authorities have identified a Coptic Christian man living in southern California as the key figure behind the film.



Photo: Mohamed CJ [Wikimedia Commons]

International reactions were mixed. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has called on her citizens to exercise more tolerance toward the country's over four million Muslims, declaring that Islam is part of Germany. Russia ordered the video banned and Vladimir Putin is pushing for an anti-blasphemy law on insulting people's religious sentiments. President Barack Obama has condemned the film but declined to ban it as the product of freedom of expression which soft response disappointed Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Message of Sunni Islam Leader

A principal figure of the Sunni Islam world thinks anti-Islam video spreads hatred, that is why he called for believers to respond like Muhammad himself would, through wisdom and patience. While protests exploded in several countries, like Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan or Germany, the grand mufti of Egypt says that Muslims want peace and respect, not conflict.

Meeting Over Julian Assange Case

Diplomats from the United Kingdom and Ecuador failed to reach an agreement over the Assange case. International attention for WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange rose in 2010 when it began to publish US diplomatic and military documents. Several US officials have declared that Assange violated the law by publishing classified files. However Assange has not been charged with any crime, Sweden has announced it wants to question him on allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman there.



Photo: Mohamed CJ [Wikimedia Commons]

Meanwhile the Ecuadorian government was granting Assange political asylum, however facing arrest if he leaves the South American country's embassy in London, which was the subject of the diplomatic meeting. Ecuador does not want to extradite him, in turn British Foreign Secretary says his country is obliged to extradite Assange to Sweden. Diplomats agreed to meet again to discuss the problem.

Iran-Israel Tensions

Commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards says Israel would be destroyed if it launched air strikes on Iran. Tensions between the two countries have increased due to latter's controversial nuclear program. Although Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – President of Iran – denies that the Islamic Republic is seeking nuclear arms and emphasizes its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has left open the possibility of taking military action against Tehran. The Jewish State is widely assumed to be the Middle East's only nuclear power.



Photo: Daniella Zalcmán [Flickr]



Meanwhile President Barack Obama has made clear that the US prefers diplomacy and economic sanctions to force Iran to abandon its nuclear programme, despite Netanyahu's sharpened demands for a tougher response. US elections in November further complicate the situation, because the Iranian-Israeli crisis and tense US-Israel relations put great pressure on Obama in the tight presidential election campaign.

Due to sanctions imposed by Western countries, Iran became isolated economically which caused currency devaluation, high rate of inflation and unemployment, lack of necessary items including medicine and increasing commodity and energy costs.

Fishing Dispute in the Indian Ocean

Incidents which have occurred involving Indian citizens especially in the state of Tamil Nadu has created new tensions between New Delhi and Colombo.

At the end of September villagers of South India accused the Sri Lankan naval personnel of attacking and wounding them while they were fishing at mid-sea near the disputed Katchatheevu Island.

The island's ownership had been controversial until 1974 when it was transferred to Sri Lanka by the Indian government. Tamil Nadu has refused to accept the settlement. According to the agreement of 1974, Indian fishermen do not have rights to fishing near the island as



Photo: Mohamedzunaid [Wikimedia Commons]



it is within the territorial waters of Sri Lanka. The treaty was superseded by another deal in 1976 under which Indian fishermen also lost the right to dry their nets in the territory or worship at the shrine of the island. Yet villagers of Southern India regularly enter Sri Lankan waters and fishing grounds running into Navy officers who ask them to leave the area. Fishermen claim that naval

officers often order them to return to India by force, beating and shooting them. Sri Lankan envoy to India Prasad Kariyavasam emphasized that their Navy takes actions under strict restrictions, officers cannot harass or shoot Indians who cross the sea boundary. These people are often poor and desperate, fearing for their livelihoods. Being uneducated they do not have any other skills than fishing, that is why they leave the Indian coast, where fish populations have declined recently.



Photo: Vailankanni Basilica

Bilateral relations between the two states have been generally friendly, however were affected by the Sri Lankan civil war. While under the years of war Indians enjoyed fishing rights in the Palk Strait – a strait between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka – fishing was banned to Sri Lankan fishermen who now are back at work and want to protect their interests against their neighbours across the sea.

Although Prasad Kariyavasam has claimed that there is no such tension between India and Sri Lanka that the states' leaders cannot handle, concerns are growing in Tamil Nadu, because as locals are saying: "There's not enough fish".

Religious Tensions

On 3 September 2012 five buses carrying Christian pilgrims from Sri Lanka to India's Tamil Nadu for a religious event to Vailankanni Basilica were attacked by protesters throwing stones to their vehicles. Sri Lankan authorities have issued a travel advisory, asking their citizens not to visit Tamil Nadu until further notice.

Senkaku Islands Sovereignty Dispute

On 11 September 2012 two Chinese patrol ships have been sent to Senkaku/Diaoyu islands to demonstrate China's claim of ownership over the group of uninhabited islands. These territories – known as the Senkakus in Japan and Diaoyu in China – are at the focus of Japanese-Chinese diplomatic relations, as both countries lay claim to these lands. Except for a short period from 1945 to 1972 the archipelago has been controlled by Japan since 1895. China claims that the islands have been part of its territory since 1534. Although Beijing acknowledge that Japan took control of the territories during the first Sino-Japanese war in 1894-1895, Chinese government officials believe that the Potsdam Declaration required that Japan relinquish control of the islands involved which means control should pass to China. Tensions have escalated when this September Japan announced it had signed a contract to buy three of the islands from their private owner which was a rich Japanese family. China thought the deal illegal and warned Japan it would seriously affect their political and economic ties. Although it was not the first critical period between the two states – the Senkakus were the focus of a major diplomatic incident in 2010 as well –, the recent situation has crucial effects on international relations. The United States

declared that it does not take an official position on the islands' sovereignty, but some US government officials claimed that as Japan maintains effective administrative control on the territories, they fall under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan which requires the US to help Japan if China attacks or tries to occupy the islands.



Several anti-Japanese protests broke out in Chinese cities and some Japanese companies were forced to stop operations earlier this month because of the riots. Also the Toyota Motor Corporation confirmed that it was cutting back production in China. The situation is further complicated since the Republic of China (Taiwan) also claims the islands. The disputed territories are close to key shipping lanes, rich fishing grounds and are thought to have oil deposits under the waters surrounding.

■ News in Brief

Bilateral Relations

US-Cuba Relations

■ According to Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parilla both his country and the United States would benefit if the US government would lift its longstanding trade embargo against Cuba. A possible resolution would contribute to the US a totally new market of 11 million people. Although Rodriguez said the embargo is a massive and systematic violation of human rights, regarding the US presidential elections in November 2012, he emphasized that any American president would have the chance to make a historical step towards a settlement.

Strengthening Canada-United Kingdom Relations

■ On 24 September 2012 Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird and United Kingdom's Secretary of State William Hague met in Ottawa to renew and refresh the Canada-UK Joint Declaration signed in September 2011. They also agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding on "Enhancing Mutual Support at Missions Abroad."

Canada Suspends Diplomatic Relations With Iran

■ On 7 September 2012 Canadian government closed its embassy in Iran and declared *persona non gratae* the remaining Iranian diplomats in Canada. Ottawa has cited Iran's human rights violations, its controversial nuclear program, threats against Israel and security concerns for Canadian diplomats in the state to justify the decision. Canadian government has also designated Iran as a state-sponsor of terrorism and has advised Canadians to avoid travels to the Islamic state. Later, on the 67th session of the UN General Assembly, Canadian diplomats walked out before Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's – President of Iran – speech.

Merkel-Hollande Meeting On De Gaulle Speech Anniversary

■ On 22 September 2012 French President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel met at the Baroque palace in Ludwigsburg to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Charles de Gaulle's speech to German youth that symbolized the beginning of the two states close relationship. Germany and France have been close ever since.

■ News in Brief

Bilateral Relations

15th EU-China Summit

■ On 20 September 2012 José Manuel Barroso and Herman Van Rompuy welcomed China's Premier Wen Jiabao for the 15th summit between the European Union and China. Economic and financial issues, dialogues on trade, human rights and the situation in Syria were leading parts of the discussion. The last meeting took place seven months ago in Beijing.

India-Pakistan: Warming Relations

■ Indian minister for external affairs S. M. Krishna and Pakistani interior minister Rehman Malik signed a new visa agreement in the frame of a step-by-step approach to repair the two countries' diplomatic relations. After years of hostility and suspicion, trade has been increasing and dialogue has improved in recent months between the two South Asian countries.

Myanmar Refugees Are Preparing To Return Home

■ According to Thailand's National Security Council, more than 100,000 Myanmar refugees who live in camps along Thailand's border may return home within a year. As a result of recent talks between the states, Myanmar is preparing to be ready in one year with building shelters and laying out infrastructure.

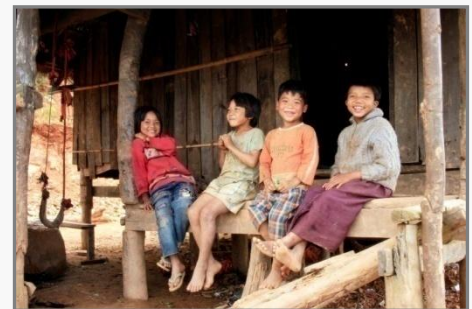


Photo: Taina Bee [Fotopedia]

Clinton's Wide-Ranging Asia Trip



■ At the beginning of September 2012 US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the Cook Islands, Indonesia, China, Timor-Leste, Brunei and Russia to highlight a strong, long-term US focus on the entire Asia-Pacific region which has important role in the Washington-Beijing competition for regional influence.

■ News in Brief

Bilateral Relations

Inter-Korean Relations

■ According to South Korean president Lee Myung-Bak the two Koreas' unification is inevitable. During his visit to Oslo he emphasized the importance of a peaceful reunification and said that nuclear weapons or armed force are not a way to overcome the problem. In the meantime North-Korea rejected the South's proposal on aid shipment which could have helped his difficulties in chronic food shortages. The two countries have remained technically at war since 1953. Although the new North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's raising to power could have relaunched debate about the chances of reunification, relations are still tense between the two states.



Saudi Arabia Turns Back Female Pilgrims

■ Saudi Arabia turned back more than a thousand Nigerian female pilgrims who were not properly accompanied according to Saudi authorities. Islam requires every Muslim, who is capable financially and physically, to perform Hajj in Mecca, but according to Saudi law each woman pilgrim under the age of 45 years must have a male sponsor during the pilgrimage journey. Nigerian women called the situation dehumanizing and returned home.

Sudan and South Sudan Sign Partial Agreement

■ An agreement that includes restarting oil exports was inked by Sudan's President Omar Al Bashir and the newly independent South Sudan's President Salva Kiir during a ceremony in Addis Ababa. Though key issues concerning the contested region of Abyei remain to be resolved, the presidents also got a deal on a demilitarized zone and principles of border demarcation.



■ News in Brief

South America

Venezuela Withdraws From Human Rights Bodies

■ Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez kept his word and took steps to get his country out from the jurisdiction of the Costa Rica-based Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Washington-based Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Chavez made the decision after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights had sided with a Venezuelan, Raul Diaz. He was convicted of participating in the 2003 bombings of the Spanish Embassy and Colombian consulate in Caracas where four people



Photo: Flickr

were injured. Diaz was sentenced to more than nine years in prison, but sought asylum in the United States. While he denies any involvement in the attacks, Chavez accuse the courts mentioned above of supporting terrorism by siding with Diaz. the negotiations.

Colombia-FARC Peace Talks

■ Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos confirmed that his government begin negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He appointed former Vice-president Humberto de la Calle and Sergio Jaramillo as the government's representatives at the negotiations that takes place in Oslo, on 8 October 2012. The FARC are a Colombian Marxist revolutionary guerrilla organization which are mainly funded by kidnaps to ransom and production and distribution of drugs. The forthcoming peace talks could end Latin America's longest rebellion, because the country's second guerrilla group, the ELN announced that it may also join the negotiations.



■ News in Brief

International Law

International Supervision Ends In Kosovo

■ The International Steering Group – comprised of 23 EU countries, the US and Turkey – has announced the end of Kosovo's supervision. The former Serbian province had been monitored since 2008, when it unilaterally declared its independence. Nevertheless NATO-led peacekeepers and agencies continue to operate in Kosovo's territory. Serbia, which does not recognise Kosovo's independence and regards it as the country's part, has not accepted the announcement.



US Refuses to Extradite Former Bolivian Leader

■ The extradition case of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, former President of Bolivia has generated tense diplomatic relations between Bolivia and the United States. In October 2003 Sánchez de Lozada sent his security forces to put an end to growing protests against the Bolivian government's energy and globalization policies. Nearly 400 people were injured and 67 were killed in the clashes, including women and children. Later the President offered his resignation in a letter and left for the United States. In 2007 Bolivian authorities formally charged him with genocide for the incident. Bolivians have never stopped attempting to bring Sánchez de Lozada to justice, but the Obama administration has refused Bolivia's extradition request.

END OF KOSOVO'S
SUPERVISION

■ News in Brief

Middle East

PLO seeks UN status upgraded

■ Palestinians would seek to upgrade their status to "non-member observer state" by the end of 2012 rather than just an "observer entity" as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the United Nations General Assembly. The upgraded status would give PLO the same UN rank as the Vatican.

Syria Conflict: No Progress

■ Fights continues in Syria, but the international community is unable intervene. Although the UN Human Rights Council condemned the country and extended war crimes inquiry, Russia, Cuba and China voted against the Arab resolution. In the meantime the number of Syrian refugees jumped from 18,500 to 35,000 in a month according to the UN refugee agency. Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt met in Cairo to discuss the deepening crisis and a new UN and Arab League envoy – Lakhdar Brahimi – arrived in Damascus for talks with Syrian officials, but the United Nations has so far been unable to reach agreement on how to respond to the civil war.

Pope Visits Lebanon

■ On 14 September 2012 Pope Benedict XVI travelled to Lebanon for a three-day visit, expressing support for Christians across the region. The main reason of his visit was to encourage dialogue and to call on Christians, Jews and Muslims to abolish religious fundamentalism, praising Lebanon as an example of cooperation among faiths. As more than 30 percent of Lebanon's population is Christian, the pope was warmly welcomed. During the first papal trip to the country in 15 years, the pope has called for an end to the violence and the worsening civil conflict that has caused thousands of deaths in Syria and emphasized the importance of tolerance over the anti-Muslim video spread to several countries.

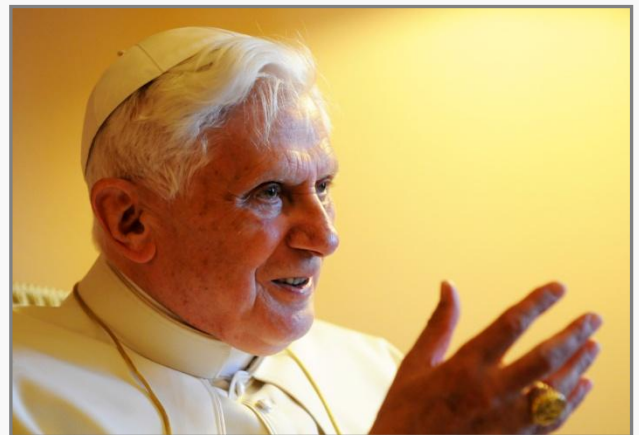


Photo: Catholic Church (England and Wales) [Flickr]



Institute for Cultural Relations Policy



<http://culturalrelations.org>