

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

September 2015





About CRP News & Background

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Editorial Team

Series Editor | Eszter Balogh

Authors – September 2015 | Rita Ferreira, Ece Batman, Asli Yurtsever, Csilla Morauszki, Joseph Ben-obasa

Executive Publisher | Csilla Morauszki

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Kulturalis Kapcsolatokert Alapitvany

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Migration crisis in Europe



*Migrant-saving operation in June 2015.
Photo: Irish Defense Forces*

Europe continues to assist the biggest human exodus since the II World War. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugee's data around 588,247 people arrived the Old Continent, by sea, between January and October 2015. The majority of migrants are coming from Syria, trying to escape the civil war, followed by Eritrea and Sub-Sahara Africa. The European Union is facing one of the biggest social crises since its birth, testing the community stability and the European project of integration.

On the one hand, solidarity movements have been emerging by European citizens. The social media has been one of the major vehicles exposing the reality faced

by the migrants that run away from their countries, searching for a better life. In September, the image of a three-year-old child, later known as Alan Kurdi, whose boat sank down, trying to reach the Greek coast, lying face down at one of Turkey's main tourist resorts, shocked the world, and triggered demands for a quick solution. The picture soon became one of the key-images for the need of a European solution.

On the other hand, even though the image sensitized people from all over the world, the European countries haven't been able to find a proper response to the crisis. In the beginning of September, five Eurostar high-speed trains were retained in the Euro tunnel, which connects France to England, because there were reports that migrants were blocking the lanes, to try to climb the vehicle and arrive to United Kingdom. A dangerous route that thousands of refugees have attempted this year.

The 28 members seem ideologically divided regarding the migration crisis. On one side, countries like German and Sweden maintain their doors open, in a solidarity approach – which might give Angela Merkel the Nobel Prize of Peace. In fact,



during September the first trains from Syria with asylum-seekers arrived to Germany, carrying more than a thousand people. On the other side, nations like Hungary, who have received thousands of people, being the country a mandatory scale, when trying to reach Central Europe, started to close their gates, putting at stake the meaning of the European project. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban have even promised to close the south borders of the country, until the 15th of September, declaring a state of emergency, giving extra powers to the police and allowing troops deployments.

The border with Austria remained open, with Budapest providing buses to help the refugees arriving to the neighbour



Refugees at Keleti Railway Station in Budapest. Photo: Mstyslav Chernov



Refugees crossing the Hungarian border in August 2015. Photo: Gémes Sándor/SzomSzed

country. However, receiving more than 12,000 people, Wien started to pressure European Union to find a solution. “We have always said this is an emergency situation, which we have to handle quickly and humanely. We have helped more than 12 000 people in an acute situation. We must now step by step go from emergency measures to a normality that is humane and complies with law”, stated Austrian Chancellor Wener Faymann.

On the other part of the Atlantic, President Barack Obama, accused of getting behind Europe, affirmed that, in the next fiscal year, the United States will accept, at least, 10,000 refugees from Syria, a six-fold increase of the number that Washington accepted this year.

“Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has even promised to close the south borders of the country”



Pope Francis, the Humble Pope

Elected two years ago, on March 2013, Pope Francis has shown from the beginning that he is not like the ones before him. It all started with the choice of the name: Francis, the saint that dedicated his life to the poor, a name never chosen by his ancestors. In the day after the elections, the recent pontiff unexpectedly celebrated the morning mass, not directed to the cardinals of the Roman Curia, but to janitors, gardeners and other Vatican office workers, mass that he now celebrates four times a week. In one of those mass, that he not only presided like other pontiffs, but also preached, he presented the foundations of what would guide his Pontificate. "The church asks all of us to change certain things. She asks us to let go of decadent structures – they are useless". In a symbolic gesture, and in accordance with his policy, Pope Francis has given priority to small and peripheral countries, such as Albania, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Philippines, Ecuador and Bolivia, for his official visits, moving crowds wherever he goes. In September 2015, he visited the American continent with two stops, first Cuba, followed by United States. The strategy of going firstly to Havana and then



2014 Pastoral Visit of Pope Francis to Korea. Photo: Korea.net

Washington stresses Vatican, or at least, Francis ideology that peripheral powers are connected to centres of power. The official visit to both nations has also been seen as a way of strengthen the agreement between the two countries that recently reopened their bilateral relation and to give an example of reconciliation of the world.





Pope Francis in St Peter's square. Photo: Alfredo Borba

After three days in Cuba, where the leader of the Roman Catholic Church met with Fidel and Raúl Castro and highlight the

speech that “legislative activity is always based on care for the people”. Still in the capital, the Pope presided the first canonisation in American soil, regarding the 18th century missionary Junipero Serra. After Washington, Francis arrived to New York, where he remember the 9/11 victims, while visiting the memorial of the terrorist attack. The highlight of the visit was his presence at the General Assembly of United Nations. In his speech, he focused on the relation between people and money, and was not afraid to accuse certain powerful nations of abusing United Nations to prioritise their own power

“Once again, slipping away from formal protocols, the pontiff ignored the speech that he had prepared and that was published by the Vatican, and improvised a message of love towards family”

need for United States and Cuba to normalise their bilateral relations and, in that way, develop their full potentialities, Pope Francis departed to Washington.

He arrived on the 22nd September to the North American capital, where he was received by President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden and their families. The Pope also addressed to the Congress, being the first pontiff to do so, stating on his

agendas. The last stop was in Philadelphia. Once again, slipping away from formal protocols, the pontiff ignored the speech that he had prepared and that was published by the Vatican, and improvised a message of love towards family. He also referred to the sexual abuses within the Catholic Church, stating that the aggressors could seek for forgiveness. In a private meeting, he had



even met some of the victims. When questioned about divorce and the appointment of women as priest, he recurred to theological and doctrinal answers to justify the denial by the Catholic Church.

After nine days of visits in the American continent, Pope Francis, once again showing his proximity to the people recurring to the social media, tweet in his account "With my heartfelt thanks. May the love of Christ always guide the American people" #GodBlessAmerica.



Pope Francis in Washington. Photo: TSG Robert Cloys

Pope Francis prepared to forgive women who had abortion

In an act never seen by the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis announced, by letter, that all priests have the power to "absolve the sin of abortion" to whom seeks for confession and forgiveness. The pontiff referred to the act of abort as an "agonizing and painful decision". After the statement, the debate whether this represents a change in the Church doctrine or if it is a pure symbolic gesture, with the upcoming of the "Jubilee of Mercy", next December, was set off.

Pontiff makes it easier for Catholics to remarry

Last year, Pope Francis created a commission of Church lawyers to discuss possible changes in the complex, expensive and bureaucratic procedure of getting a marriage annulled. Accord to the Catholic doctrine, divorce is not recognised, being the only possibility getting the marriage annulled. In September, the pontiff published a new set of rules, which makes it easier to a Catholic couple get their marriage annulled. Instead of two, from now on, the couple only needs the approval of one church and if both spouses agree, the bishops can immediately proceed with the annulment. These radical reforms provide a faster and free of charge procedure.



Elections in Catalonia: another step towards independence?



Location of Catalonia. Map: Wikimedia Commons

On 27 September, world's eyes were focused on Catalonia, Spain where regional elections were held. The vote has had major importance not only because it has been determined the composition of the 11th Parliament of Catalonia but because the election has been considered as an alternative vote on independence from Spain as – due to the central government – a legal referendum could not have been passed over the system. With a record-breaking turnout of almost 80%, pro-secessionist parties delivered a landslide win. Together for Yes (Junts pel Sí-JxSí) won 62 seats in the 135-seats Parliament with its 39.59% of the votes while

the other pro-independence party, Popular Unity Candidacy (Candidatura d'Unitat Popular-CUP) won 10 seats with 8.2% of the votes which means an alliance of the two parties can give the secessionist forces an absolute majority. Remaining seats are divided among five parties, the Citizens (Ciutadans-C's), the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya-PSC-PSOE), the Catalonia Yes We Can (Catalunya Sí que es Pot-CSQEP), the People's Party of Catalonia (Partit Popular de Catalunya-PPC) and the Democratic Union of Catalonia (Unió Democràtica de Catalunya-UDC).

Although it would be too early to provide long-term conclusions, Arthur Mas i Gavarro, President of the Generalitat of Catalonia – and also the leader of the party called Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya-CDC) which is one of the parties forming the winning Together for Yes coalition – has been in a hurry to state that the day of the vote brought a double victory: “the yes side won, as did democracy. [...] We ask that the whole world recognises the victory of Catalonia and the victory of the Yes. We have won

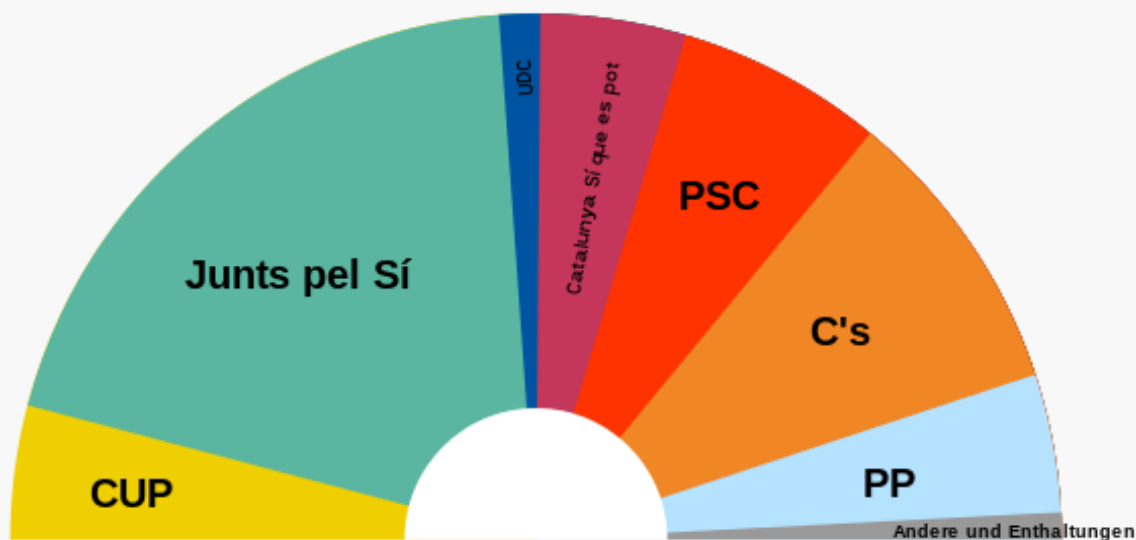


and that gives us an enormous strength to push this project forward." Mr Mas and his coalition partners are convinced that the results of the election give them legitimacy to start an 18-month secession process by the end of which Catalonia would have completely independent state institutions which is a claim long-rejected by the Spanish central government.

Although Catalan independence struggle looks back to a centuries-old past, tensions between the regional and the central leadership have been intensified only in recent years. In 2012 Mr Mas asked for negotiations on a new fiscal pact for Catalonia which was refused by Madrid. A year later, in 2013 Mr Mas released his demands for a referendum, however it was also strongly opposed by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy Brey and his government. In September, 2014 Arthur Mas announced a consultation vote for November that year. The central government appealed to the

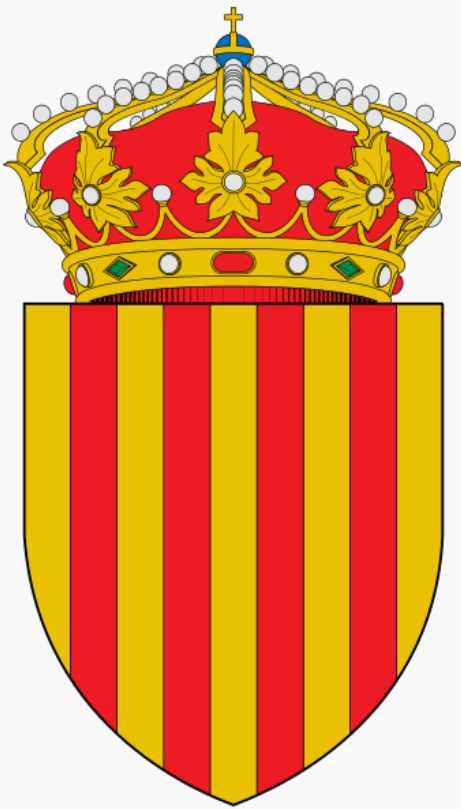
Constitutional Court of Spain which declared the measure unconstitutional. In spite of this decision, Mr Mas and the Catalan leadership held a non-binding vote in November with 80% of voters in favour of independence. However, it should be noted that turnout were relatively low that time, only 42%. So far, the last step of Mr Mas' independence fight has been his announcement in August, calling for early election in Catalonia which had been declared as de-facto referendum on independence.

The outcome is already known, however controversial. Pablo Casado, spokesman for the governing People's Party (Partido Popular-PP) in Madrid has argued that the failure of pro-independence parties to gain 50% of the votes undermines their mandate to call for independence as it means that the majority of Catalan people do not want to secede from Spain. "This election should serve to end the independence



The results of the elections. Chart: Wikimedia Commons





Coat of arms of Catalonia. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

debate once and for all" – he told one of the news agencies. Therefore, the future of Catalonia is still uncertain. While Mr Casado is right about the mentioned percentages and that the number of votes submitted for the two secessionist parties has not reached 50%, it would be a naive idea to think that the rest – 52% – of Catalans are

satisfied with the status quo in Spain. They may not want to be completely independent from the Spanish State; however they definitely want greater autonomy mostly in the field of fiscal issues as it can be observed in the case of the Basque Country.

The current legal system of Spain and the constitution in force do not, and presumably will not allow the Catalan government to take any actions on its way to independence that would be legal and accepted by Madrid.

General elections in Spain – to be held on 20 December this year – however would complicate the situation if the ruling People's Party left the majority, as well as a more fractured national parliament would bring a change into the current frozen positions. As such, the outcome of the general elections will have a crucial importance in this matter. Although polls are showing that the governing People's Party will gain most of the seats of the new parliament, it is very likely that – as it has been hit by corruption scandals and the economic crisis and recession – it will lose its absolute majority. Let's get back to this in December.

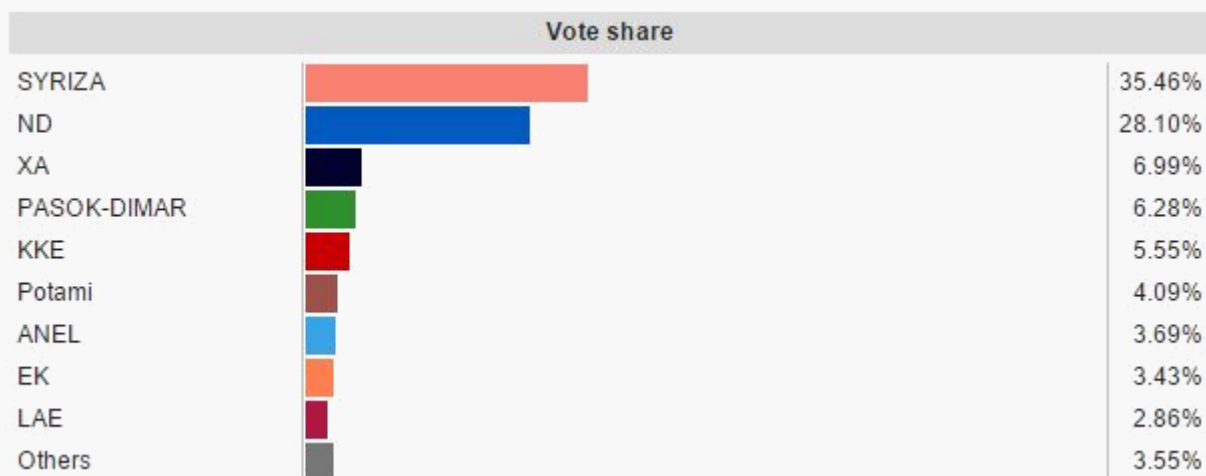
“the current legal system of Spain and the constitution in force do not allow the Catalan government to take any actions on its way to independence”



Elections in Greece

Greece has organised its fifth general election in six years, with a tight finish predicted between the left-wing Syriza party and conservative New Democracy. After Syriza lost its parliamentary majority in August, the snap election was called. Tsipras lost his popularity after he agreed a new bailout deal with European leaders. With all the votes counted after a snap general election on Sunday, the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's party won 35.5% of the vote to 28.0% for the centre-right New Democracy party. In January, Syriza won 145 seats in the 300-member parliament, only four lesser than it won in the general

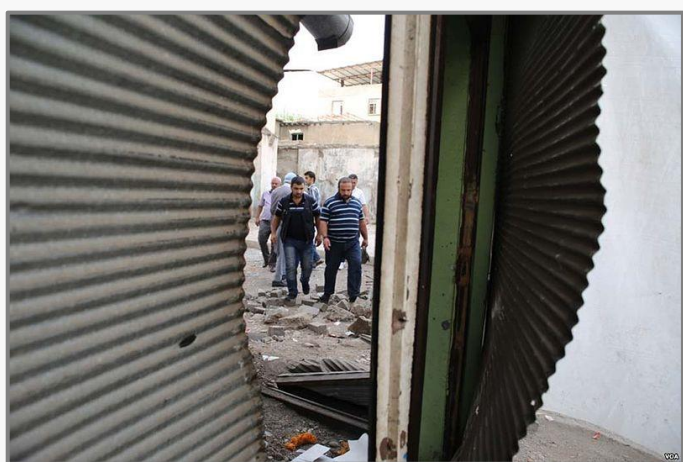
election that swept the party into power. Tsipras quickly announced he would resume co-operating with Independent Greeks (ANEL), a small nationalist party that won 3.6% of the vote and 10 seats. Pollsters had predicted it would fall short of the 3% threshold for entering parliament and this result was too surprised. This unlikely partnership worked smoothly during Syriza's first term despite being criticised as opportunist by party hardliners. But the coalition looks more vulnerable than it did the first time round, with only 155 seats in parliament compared to 162 last time.



Share of votes in the elections. Chart: Wikimedia Commons



Turkish jets strike PKK targets after deadly militant attack



The aftermath of a PKK terrorist attack in Diyarbakir in September 2015. Photo: VOA

Turkish ground forces have crossed into Iraq in chase of Kurdish militants for the first time since a cessation of hostilities two years ago. Government officials said the offensive was a “short-term” precaution to hunt down PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) rebels.

The military said its aircraft bombed 23 targets in a mountainous area near the Iraqi border. Another six soldiers had been injured, but none were in critical condition. The clashes, weeks before polls the ruling AK Party hopes will restore its majority intimidate to sink a peace process President Tayyip Erdogan launched in 2012 an attempt to end a rebellion that has killed more than 40,000 people. Kurdistan

Workers Party (PKK) rebels said they had killed 31 servicemen in an attack on a convoy and clashes on 6 September, in the mountainous Daglica area of Hakkari province, near the Iraqi border. The army statement said 16 had died, making this the highest military death toll in a single attack for years. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the PKK had suffered “serious damage” inside and outside of Turkey and was in a state of “panic.” The PKK is determined a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the European Union and United States. Several thousand people have protested in cities across Turkey against PKK severity and the office of the pro-Kurdish HDP party have come under attack. Turkey is gearing up for an election on 10 November after the governing AK Party lost its overall majority in June elections and failed to form a coalition government. It was the HDP that devoid of the AKP of its majority, polling over 13% of the vote and entering parliament as a political party of the first time.

More than 40,000 people have died since the PKK launched its armed campaign in 1984, calling for an independent Kurdish state within Turkey.



Vladimir Putin confirms Russian military involvement in Syria's civil war

Russian forces have begun participating in military operations in Syria in support of government stripers, according to three Lebanese sources familiar with the political and military situation there.

US officials said Russia sent two tank landing ships and additional cargo aircraft to Syria recently. US officials have not ruled out the possibility that Russia may want to use the airstrip for air combat missions. The White House said it was closely observing the situation.

Russia says the Syrian government must be included a shared global flight against Islamic State. The Islamic group has taken over large parts of Syria and Iraq. The United States and Assad's regional enemy



Vladimir Putin's speech at the United Nations. Photo: Kremlin.ru

see him as part of the problem. Assad's forces have faced big setbacks on battlefield in a four-year-old multi-sided civil war that has killed 250,000 people and tilled half of Syria's 23 million people from their homes.

Moscow confirmed it had experts on the ground in Syria, its long-time ally in the Middle East. But Russia has declined to comment on the scale and content of its military entity. Damascus denied Russians were involved in combat. As a reflection, the Western concerns were articulated by Germany's foreign minister warning Russia against increased military interference, saying the Iran nuclear deal and new UN initiatives offered a starting point for a political solution to the conflict. Two of the



Russian Sukhoi Su-25 at Latakia. Photo: Mil.ru



Lebanese sources said the Russians were establishing two bases in Syria, one near the seaside and one further inland which could be an operations base. Another of the Lebanese sources said that so far any Russian combat role was still small: “They have started in small numbers, but the bigger force did not take part. There are numbers of Russians taking part in Syria but they did not yet join the fight against terrorism strongly.”

Washington has put pressure on the countries nearby to deny their airspace to Russian flights, a move Moscow denounced as international boorishness.” The US State Department said Russian

use of Iranian airspace would not be surprising, given Tehran's past support for Assad.

To avoid flying over Turkey, one of Assad's main enemies, Russia has sought to fly planes over Balkan states, but Washington has persisted to deny Moscow permission. Turkey has not officially confirmed prohibition of Russian flights to Syria but says it considers any requests to fly over its airspace to Syria on a case by case basis.

Thus far in the war, Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah has been Assad's main sources of military support. The acceleration turned against Assad earlier this year.

“Russia has sought to fly planes over Balkan states, but Washington has persisted to deny Moscow permission”



Russian military aircraft at Latakia, Syria. Photo: Russian Ministry of Defence



Japan changes its military politics after 70 years of pacifism

The upper chamber of the Parliament approved with majority of votes new bills allowing Tokyo to engage in overseas combats. This was a major change in the Japanese Constitution, which for 70 years adopted a pacific approach regarding international disputes. The new bills had already passed through the lower chamber, in July 2015, and were now approved by the upper chamber with 148 votes favour and 90 against. They will be

allies in external conflicts, within the law, but with limited role.

The supporters of the change imposed by Shinzo Abe government, which includes United States officials, argued that the island has to develop its military power, against potential threats from neighbouring countries, such as China and North Korea, forces known for their military and nuclear weapons programs.

However, the recent military project drove

“Tokyo’s Self-Defence Forces are allowed to defend its allies in external conflicts”

implemented within the next six months. The bills represent a reinterpretation of article 9 of Japan’s pacifist Constitution, implemented after the II World War, were can be read “aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of setting international disputes.” However, from now on, Tokyo’s Self-Defence Forces are allowed to defend its

to protests and demonstrations on the street of Tokyo, and even an episode of physical altercation in the parliament. The opponents argued that the new legislation will throw away seven decades of a pacifist policy, without a public debate. Though the Prime Minister Abe Shinzo does not face any danger of being unseat, once he won the second of three-year term as ruler of the Liberal Democratic Party, the new legislation may unbalance the tables on next year elections.



Obama seals Iran deal win as senate democrats find 34 votes

US President Barack Obama has secured enough support in the US Senate to guarantee that the Iran nuclear deal will go into effect.

US Senate Democrats blocked legislation meant to kill the Iran nuclear deal for a third time. Before the US Congress voting Obama needed to support at least 34 senators.

Otherwise Obama announced he will veto the rejected resolution. After the announcement of Senator Barbara Mikulski, Obama had received the support of 34 members in the 100-members US Senate.



Barack Obama in 2007. Photo: Center for American Progress Action Fund

Mikulski: This is the best option

In a statement Maryland Democrat Barbara Mikulski gave the decisive 34th commitment. She said “no deal is perfect, especially one negotiated with the Iranian regime.” But she called the pact “the best option available to block Iran from having a nuclear bomb.”

The next is the House of Representatives

Obama needs to convince 146 members in the 435-member House of Representatives. Democrats, who has 44 seats in the senate, have 188 seats in the House of Representatives. And, Democrats act with suspicion towards the nuclear deal besides Republicans.



Cuba re-opens embassy in Washington



Embassy of the Republic of Cuba in Washington. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Cuba and United States gave a new step towards the resume of the bilateral relations. On the 17th September, President Barack Obama held the official ceremony where he received the credentials of José Ramon Cabañas Rodríguez as the ambassador of Cuba in the United States. The ceremony happened two months after the resume of relations between the two

American countries and after 53 years of strained relations. Rodríguez has almost 30 years of experience in foreign service and was head of the Cuban Interests Section in the United States. Since July 2015, he has been the Charge d’Affairs of the new Cuban embassy reopened in Washington that month.

As for an American ambassador in Havana, Obama has not yet appointed anyone. However, this might become a complicated issue to the President’s Administration, once the appointment has to be confirmed by the Senate. Normally a mere formal protocol, the republican majority in the Senate may be an obstacle. Many members of the Republican Party have already shown their disagreement with having an American ambassador in Havana, including Marco Rubio, candidate to the Republican Presidential primary,

“Many members of the Republican Party have already shown their disagreement with having an American ambassador in Havana”



unless Raul Castro make some changes in his regime.

Though it may be seen as a step forward to opener bilateral relations, in practice a Cuban ambassador in Washington does not mean drastic changes. Although President Obama announced new rules to facilitate the trade, travel and investment

between the two countries, the lift of the economic embargo imposed half a century ago, requested several times by President Raúl Castro, does not seem to happen in the near future. The main reason is that such decision would depend on the Congress approval, with Republican majority.



*Cuban president Raúl Castro and US president Barack Obama meet in Panama in April 2015.
Photo: US Government*

Cuba release 3,500 prisoners ahead of visit by Pope

On the other side, Havana promised to release around 3,500 prisoners. The gesture is to be seen as an act of goodwill with the arrival of Pope Francis to the island on a three days visit. The head of the Roman Catholic Church had an important role bringing together the two countries, being directly involved in the organization of diplomatic meetings between the nations.



Venezuela and Colombia to normalise ties after border row

President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela and his Colombian counterpart Juan Manuel Santos have agreed to “progressive normalisation” of their common border. Venezuela closed parts of the border a month ago and launched a major anti-smuggling operation.

“Common sense, dialogue and peace between our peoples and countries have triumphed today”, said Maduro after he

Cborder. Venezuela has deported some 1,500 Colombian nationals and more than 18,500 others have fled in fear, according to the United Nations. Some said they had been ill-treated by the Venezuelan security forces, infusing Colombia to recall its ambassador from Caracas in protest. After that, Venezuela recalled its ambassador from Bogota.

President Santos said that Venezuela

“Venezuela has deported some 1,500 Colombian nationals and more than 18,500 others have fled in fear”

talks in Quito meant at defusing the crisis. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro closed part of the boarder on 19 August, after three Venezuelan soldiers and a civilian were injured in an attack in San Antonio del Tachira near the border.

The closure was first imposed for 36 hours but has since been extended indefinitely.

On 21 September the two sides agreed to a “normalisation” but they did not determine a date for re-opening of the

“should have respected the rights of Colombians” that were forced out. The Colombian leader said on the next day: “I agree that criminal organisations working in the border area are a big problem, but the best way to deal with it is by working together.”

The Venezuelan president agreed to investigate accusation that Venezuelan jets violated Colombian air space earlier this month.



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Queen Elizabeth II becomes longest-reigning UK monarch

■ Queen Elizabeth II has made history by overtaking Queen Victoria to become Britain's longest-reigning monarch. The Queen is already Britain's longest-lived monarch and the world's oldest-serving sovereign. At approximately 5.30pm on September 9, the Queen broke her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria's record of 63 years, seven months and two days on the throne. The Queen spoke briefly to the gathered crowds earlier. "Inevitably a long life can pass by many milestones – my own is no exception – but I thank you all and the many others at home and overseas for young touching messages of great kindness" she said. Prime Minister David Cameron congratulated the Queen on breaking the record. Cameron's spokeswoman said: he noted her notable record and she is a symbol of Britain's enduring spirit admired around the world.



Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II. Photo: Joel Rouse/Ministry of Defence

Egypt's Sisi swears in new government, keeps ministers in key posts

■ Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi kept his finance, investment and interior ministers in a new government sworn in a new government on 19 September, as he tries to rebuild an economy battered by Islamist militant violence. Sisi named former head of the state oil company Tarek al-Mullah as petroleum minister, charged with easing the country's energy crisis and attracting more foreign investment in a strategic sector. The new government faces many difficulties. For instance Islamic State which seized large parts of Iraq and Syria, has gained the backing of the most active militant group in Egypt, the recently renamed Sinai Province. Militants have increased attacks on Egyptian soldiers and police since the army toppled Islamist President Mohamed Mursi in 2013 after mass protests against his rule. After years of political turmoil sparked by the 2011 uprising that toppled autocrat Hosni Mubarak, Egypt is tackling to get large volumes of foreign investment, even though Sisi's economic reforms have won compliment.



107 Died after crane collapses at world's holiest mosque in Mecca

■ The accident happened in the Grand Mosque of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, killing at least 107 people and wounding 238. A crane, used in the widening works of the Central Mosque collapse, due to the strong storms felt the days before. Prince Khaled al-Faisal, governor of the region, ordered an investigation to determine the exact reasons of the accident. The tragedy happened ten days before the Haji, the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim should do at least one time in their lives.

Tajikistan clashes leave 22 dead

■ At least 22 people were killed because of gun battles in and around Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. The interior ministry commented nine policemen were killed in gun attacks at a central interior ministry building in the town of Vahdat just outside of Dushanbe. Officials brought an accusation against Deputy Defence Minister Abdukhalim Nazarzoda, saying he was leading a "terrorist group". They announced 13 of the attackers were killed and 32 arrested. The interior ministry said "early on the morning on 4 September, organised criminal group has started armed attacks on Vahdat's internal affairs department and on the central government building in Dushanbe and as a result, a large amount of weapons and ammunition were seized and taken away by that terrorist group" in a statement given to a state-owned news agency. The statement added that "a group of terrorists" led by Gen Nazarzoda had fled towards the Romit Gorge area and that authorities were searching for him and his accomplices.

“At least 22 people were killed because of gun battles in and around Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe”

China exposed its military capacity in V Day Parade

■ Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Japanese surrender in the II World War, Beijing organized a military parade, on the 3rd September, showing its new military hardware. Accompanied by 12,000 troops, including women soldiers for the first time in the Chinese history, the country showed 500 vehicles of 40 different types, including dozen of new ballistic missile with capacity to destroy aircraft carriers. Along Tiananmen Square, the military parade was attended by leaders of several countries, including the Russian President Vladimir Putin. As for NATO, with the exception of Czech Republic, represented by its own President, the Western forces chose to be represented by lower ranking diplomats.



Muslim-Christian clashes in Central African Republic leave 21 dead

■ After the killing of a Muslim taxi driver in the capital of Central African Republic, At least 21 people have been killed and 100 wounded in Bangui on 26 September. Until a grenade attack earlier in September, there has not been any attack in Bangui, which is secured by French and UN soldiers. In the incident, angry Muslims left their stronghold in the 3rd district of Bangui and attacked the largely-Christian 5th district using automatic weapons. Residents escape to other parts of the capital and attackers burned houses and cars, witnesses said. Part of a peacekeeping force of UN helicopters flew overhead.



Otto Perez Molina in 2007. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

“The former president of Guatemala has been arrested and sent to military prison”

Guatemala judge orders jail for ex-president Perez Molina

■ They say no crime goes unpunished, Otto Perez Molina, the former president of Guatemala has been arrested and sent to military prison following allegations of fraud and corruption. He is said to have been under heavy police guard as he was transported to jail, although he denies any wrongdoings. The vice president, Alejandro Maldonado has been sworn in as the acting president until the new president is elected in January. Maldonado had been in the post since May due to his predecessor, Roxana Baldetti's resignation. Baldetti has also been implicated in the fraud scheme that involved Perez Molina and she has also been imprisoned. Molina had been evading justice for a while due to his diplomatic immunity, but all that changed when his immunity was revoked, he still maintains his innocence and is determined to fight the allegations till the end. Over 100 people have also been revealed to be involved with the scheme which has been dubbed La Linea or The Line which consisted of businesses paying bribes to government officials in order to evade import duties. In light of Perez's arrest and other fraudulent exposures, the anti-corruption protest movement as deemed the situation a victory in the ongoing battle against bribery and corruption in the country.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Russia and Estonia exchange spies after Kohver row

■ Russia and Estonia have exchanged two convicted spies over a bridge separating the countries: Estonian security official Eston Kohver was sentenced to 15 years in a Russian prison last month. He was swapped for Aleksei Dressen, who was prisoner in Estonia in 2012 on charges of spying for Moscow. Dressen was a previous officer in Estonia's security police, who was found guilty of passing secret data to Russia for years after Estonia's independence in 1991. According to the Russian Federal Security Service, the swap took place on bridge over the Piusa River that separates Russian's western Pskov region and Estonia's Polva county. The Estonian agent said he was so glad to back home and thanked "all the authorities who helped me get back to Estonia, who helped me to, so to say, endure in prison". Relations between Russia and its Baltic neighbours have been uneasy since they joined NATO and the European Union in 2004.

Nearly 8,000 killed in Ukraine conflict, UN says

■ On 8 September the United Nations human rights office (OHCHR) said that Nearly 8,000 people, including civilians, soldiers and militia members, have been killed since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine. In the latest report of Office said "Since the conflict began in eastern Ukraine in mid-April 2014, a total of at least 7,962 people... have been killed and at least 17,811 have been injured and the actual numbers could be far higher." The UN high commissioner for human rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said that "The shelling of residential areas on both sides of the contact line has led to a disturbing increase in the number of civilian casualties over the past three months." In Minsk, the contact group on resolving the Ukraine crisis met on Tuesday and representatives were expected to discuss a proposed pullback of small arms from the front lines, alongside legislation to diminish federal control over regional governments.

Jerusalem's police attacked a group of young Palestinians in Mosque

■ Israeli's authorities entered the Al-Aqsa mosque complex and attacked a group of young Palestinian with tear gas and stun grenades. According to the Jerusalem's police office, the authorities entered the religious place in order to "prevent riots", a few hours before the beginning of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The Palestinians responded with rocks and fireworks. Israeli's representatives stated that there were no injuries in the incident, while Palestinian witnesses affirmed that several people were wounded. Al-Aqsa is one of the holiest places for Islam, localized in Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, also a sacred place for Jewish, which has led to violent political confronts in the area.



Armenian soldiers killed in clashes with Azeri troops near Karabakh

■ Four Armenian soldiers were killed in an attack by Azeri forces on 25 September near the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in a new outbreak of violence in the region, Nagorno-Karabakh's defence ministry said. Clashes happened along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and around Nagorno-Karabakh, which is located inside Azerbaijan but is controlled by majority ethnic Armenians. The separatist region's defence ministry said in a declaration that four Armenian soldiers had died and several were injured in consequence of heavy weapons bombing and shooting from the Azeri forces. Azeri officials could not comment immediately. Armenia said earlier on the same day that three civilians were killed and two were injured late one day before in an attack by Azeri forces in several villages near the border between the two previous Soviet Republics. The mediation has failed to reach a permanent solution led by France, Russia and the United States. Armenia, an ally of Russia, says it would not stand-by if Nagorno-Karabakh were attacked.

Israel re-opens embassy in Egypt

■ Israel re-opened its embassy in Egypt on September 9 four years to the day after protesters stormed the embassy, straining Israeli diplomats to leave Cairo, according to an Israeli Foreign Ministry statement. Foreign Ministry Director General Dore Gold visited Cairo for an official ceremony marking the re-opening of the embassy. On 9 September 2011, thousands of protesters tear down a protective wall wrapping the Israeli Embassy and plundered the embassy offices. Therewith, Israel pulled its diplomatic staff out of Egypt. A month earlier, Israeli soldiers killed five Egyptian police officers when Israel went after militants who had attacked civilians near the Israeli-Egyptian border. After the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, many Egyptians had called on the government to end diplomatic relations with Israel.



Protesters burning the Israeli flag at the Embassy in 2011. Photo: Gigi Ibrahim



Protesters at the Israeli embassy in Cairo in 2007. Photo: Gigi Ibrahim



Egypt send up to 800 ground troops to Yemen's war

■ Egyptian official sources stated that Cairo sent 800 soldiers to Yemen. The military should join the Arabic Gulf contingent participating in Yemen's civil war, against the Iran-ally Houthi. Egypt sent four units around 150 and 200 troops, with tanks and transport vehicles, to support an eventual assault to the capital, taken by the Houthis last year. Yemen's civil war started in the beginning of this year, confronting the supporters of the current government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and the Houthi forces, loyal to the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. In five months of conflict more than 4,500 people were killed in the attacks, number that has increased with the rise of disease, hunger and poverty.



Egyptian M113 APCs during Operation Desert Shield. Photo: Tech. Sgt. H. H. Deffner

Japan: China detains 2 Japanese on suspicion of espionage

■ There was a development that could hamper efforts to improve strained relations between the two East Asian powers: Japan and China. The Japanese foreign ministry said that two Japanese citizens have been arrested in China on suspicion of spying. China reported these two men detainees on the newspaper Asahi Shimbun and asked if Japan had sent spies to China. A government spokesman said: "As a nation, we absolutely do not do that. I want to say the same thing to all countries." Hong Lei, a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, commented that the two were arrested "in accordance with the law for engaging in espionage activities in China." One man was detained near a military facility south of Shanghai, and the other near the North Korean border.



■ News in Brief

International relations

Vote allows rising of Palestinian and Vatican flags at United Nations

■ The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on September 10 allowing what it officially recognises as the “State of Palestine” and Vatican to raise their flags outside of UN Headquarters and UN offices. Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian permanent watchdog at the United Nations, has previously said the action would be another step in solidifying the Palestinian government’s entity in the international arena. Samantha Power, US Ambassador to the United Nations, told the General Assembly before the vote that the United States is committed to achieving the peace between Palestinians and Israelis but “raising the Palestinian flag outside the UN Headquarters is not an alternative to debate and will not bring the parties closer to peace.” The United States voted against the resolution.

Mahmoud Abbas affirmed that Palestinians “cannot continue to be bound” by Oslo Accords

■ In a speech in the United Nations General Assembly, the Palestinian President accused Israel of not fulfilling the Oslo Accords, signed by the two states in the 1990’s. Mahmoud Abbas, referring to Palestine as a “state under occupation”, affirmed that his people cannot be the only part respecting the peace accords, while Israel continuously violates them. The consequences of his speech are still unclear, but Benjamin Netanyahu, from the Israeli Prime Minister office, alerted that Abbas’ declaration is “deceitful and encourages incitement and lawlessness in the Middle East.”

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