

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

October 2014





About CRP News & Background

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Ukraine as the topic of international discussions



*ASEM 2014 – Meeting of the leaders of Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine.
Photo: Kremlin.ru*

Thorough October, Ukraine has been repeatedly discussed on plenty of meetings: in the Asia-Europe Meeting, on European Union deals, and even on bilateral discussions. Meanwhile, military presence in Europe takes a new form in the Swedish archipelago when a foreign submarine is found.

16 October 2014 might as well be the most important date in this month. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) takes place every two years and its aim is to deepen the relations between the members of the European Union, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as China, Japan and Korea. The

meetings have been taking place since 1996. The latest one is held in Milan, Italy, and its significant advancement is that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko both will be present and negotiate about the case of Ukraine.

The hot topics of the meeting are the gas bills of Ukraine and – most importantly – the ceasefire agreed in Minsk on 5 September which has been violated and ignored numerous times ever since. In this agreement, the parties agreed on an immediate bilateral ceasefire; monitoring and tracking of this ceasefire carried out by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); the decentralisation of power; a “buffer zone” between Ukraine and Russia; prisoner release; amnesty for those who are involved in the conflict; national dialogue; humanitarian aid; early local elections; withdrawal of illegal militant groups from Ukraine; economic reconstruction for the eastern regions; and finally, security guarantees for participants in the crisis discussions. Much of these expectations have not been adequately fulfilled, and so are on the schedule of the meeting as well



as the gas negotiations, since – with winter coming up – a potential “bitter battle for gas” would be most unfortunate in the crisis, says a Euronews correspondent.

This challenge has been kept in mind within the European Union as well, and – following the ASEM-meeting – the EU brokered a deal between Russia and Ukraine where Russia agreed to supply gas to Ukraine thorough the cold months of the winter. This

includes the EU guaranteeing that Ukraine pays the gas bills, and it helping Ukraine with its debts. As the country relies on Russia for around 50% of its gas and – despite storage facilities – it regularly faces shortfall, this agreement means a leap towards energy security for the inhabitants of Ukraine for the winter. The joint agreement was welcomed by every participant of the discussion.

“The hot topics of the meeting are the gas bills of Ukraine and – most importantly – the ceasefire agreed in Minsk on 5 September which has been violated and ignored numerous times ever since”

Pro-Western parties in Ukraine

Polls suggest that Petro Poroshenko's pro-Western party is going to achieve a narrow win on the parliamentary election. The other possible candidate Arseniy Yatsenyuk also pushes for reforms and aims to take steps towards the West. Both parties mean a break from the Russian-friendly leadership of Viktor Yanukovich under whom the Ukrainian conflict broke out.

Submarine found in Sweden

After its distress signal, a submarine was found in the archipelago of Stockholm. The object is presumably Russian as the sign receiver was situated in Kaliningrad. This led to investigation whether there are underwater activities in Swedish territory: the Swedish Armed Forces claim this to be “very likely”. Russia denies the suggestions.



Sweden recognises Palestine

One of the first actions of Sweden's new government was to recognise the State of Palestine. With this action, Sweden becomes the first European country to give formal recognition to Palestine.

The general Swedish election of 14 September 2014 brought a new government for the Scandinavian country. With the centre-left Swedish Social Democratic Party winning with the Moderate Party as second, the new Prime Minister is Stefan Löfven whose party – for the first time – forms a coalition government with the Green Party. Prior to this, the election topics were mostly about education, health care, youth unemployment, green infrastructure, questions of pension; while the state of Palestine was not brought up. This is why it was an unexpected move from Stockholm to recognise Palestine almost as soon as the new Prime Minister became in charge. The decision has been both welcomed and criticised. Israel harshly opposed Sweden, and so has the United States which called the decision “premature”, whereas countries like the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Ireland, Portugal, and such entities as the European Parliament have symbolically expressed their support for Palestine. As a response, Sweden accentuated that the decision was not



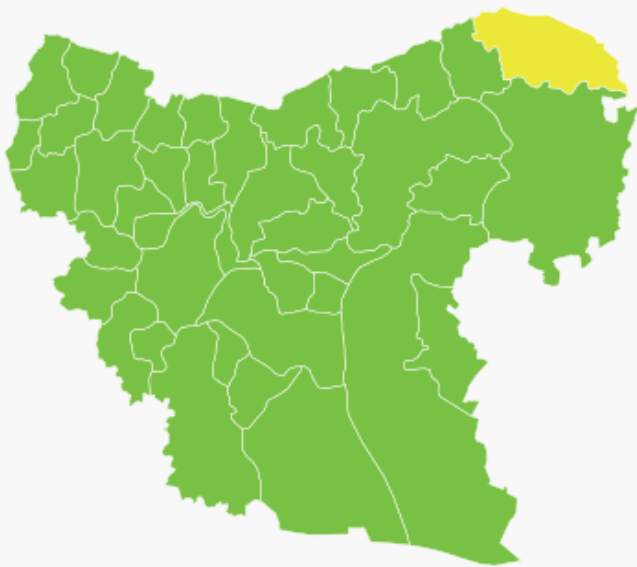
*Löfven and his Cabinet in October 2014.
Photo: Frankie Fouganthin*

against Israel but for peace, nevertheless Israel cancelled a meeting with the Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström. Wallström – who often stresses the role of women internationally and has been a United Nations envoy on sexual violence – emphasised that in the building of the new Palestine, women and gender equality must be pillars.

It also needs to be noted that – although Sweden is often referred to as the first European country to unilaterally recognise Palestine – multiple European countries have already recognised Palestine – Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Romania – before their admission to the European Union.



Fight for Kobane



Kobane subdistrict, Syrian governorate of Aleppo. Map: Wikimedia Commons

The unstoppable strength and the brutal violence of its fighters has forced the international community to intervene, in order to stem their advance in Kobane, the last bulwark of freedom.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS (or ISIL, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), is a state established from the jihadist rebel group of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2013. The group, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, grew significantly in influence and power entering the Syrian Civil War. The IS gained large portions of territories in Eastern Syria, within the governorates of Idlib, Deir ez-Zor

and Aleppo, where the Sunni Muslims are the majority, managing even to conquer Raqqa. By June 2014, after the rule over Mosul, in Iraq, the “caliphate” was proclaimed over the territories under its control.

The organization, now a real state, has been active for years in the region, since 2004, shortly after the intervention of the United States and the United Kingdom in Iraq in 2003. Nonetheless, it has become known to the Western public opinion only in the last few months. The main reason for this evolution in the perception of the phenomenon from “not relevant” to “a big danger”, is due to the fact that ISIS has become “social”. By social, here I mean the fact that ISIS is exploiting the means offered by the Internet, from the social networks to Youtube.

Indeed, it is only after the uploading of the videos of the beheading of the Western journalists and humanitarians, that many of us, two months ago, became aware of the existence of an Islamic State.

The cruelty of this acts is all contained in no more than ten minutes videos, in which “Jihadi John”, the name given to a fighter of the IS whose alleged nationality is British,



is beheading the prisoners. In July there were several beheadings of Syrian soldiers, but it was with the death of the American journalist James Foley, on the 19th of August, that the case erupted. Soon after his death, there were the murders of David Haines and Hervé Gourdel. Alan Henning, a British humanitarian aid worker, killed on the 3rd of October, was the fourth Western hostage to die in the hands of the IS. The militants of the caliphate reject everything they feel as different. They pursue an extreme form of Sunni Islam, and everybody, from non-muslims to Shia

force of the caliphate. The last levee is represented by the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds of the area, who are struggling to maintain the control over their lands. In the last few weeks, the city of Kobane, in Syria, close to the Turkish border, is under siege, and it has become the symbol of the Kurdish resistance against the IS militiamen. Similarly, during the Second World War, Stalingrad was for months under the siege of the Nazis, and only after many bloody battles and the cost of thousands of lives, the Red Army managed to defeat the Nazis and start the counter-attack.

“Their jihad is directed towards the whole world, and they will stop only when every enemy will be destroyed”

are considered heretics. Thus, their jihad is directed towards the whole world, and they will stop only when every enemy will be destroyed.

Nevertheless, if, on the one hand, it is sure that ISIS is declaring war to the whole world, on the other hand, it is not sure that the world is answering to this declaration. Up to now, more than forty countries joined the coalition against the IS, the Netherlands and Canada just recently. Anyway, the intervention is limited to aerial attacks, and many of the countries are not directly involved in the fightings.

The only armies actively participant on the ground are the Syrian and the Iraqi, that as already outlined, cannot stand the military

Today, Kobane has the same strategic importance of Stalingrad in WWII: it is the last bulwark of defense, and prevents the IS to become a direct threat for Europe.

Turkey, as appeared from the words of its President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, did not want to be involved in the fightings. In fact, for many Turks, the sufference of the hated Kurds was a victory in itself. Anyway, Turkey is still suffering from this situation for the increasing number of Kurdish refugees that are crossing the border. They are bringing with them tales and memories of torture, rapes and mutilations. Meanwhile the Turkish troops have lined up on the border. Many women in Kobane, has been victim of the violence of the IS militiamen, and



many have embraced the weapons to defend their homes and kinship. Only on the 2nd of October, the Turkish Parliament voted to allow the deployment of forces to fight ISIS. The U.N. special envoy for Syria Staffan De Mistura claimed for the necessity of a concrete intervention of the international community in the area. Anyway, the YPG, the Kurdish militia defending Kobane, needs more ammunitions than soldiers. The situation between Turks and Kurds, claiming for their independence throughout the years, is very delicate. The Kurds are today the biggest minority in Turkey, representing more of the 10% of the state population. Among them, there are the peshmerga (in kurdish “the one who face death”), one of the strongest military forces of the area. Nonetheless, the shift happened when the Turkish President confirmed that Ankara was helping the peshmerga to enter in Syria, shortly after calling them “terrorists”. Certainly, in Turkey there is a complex tangle of inner and outer interests at stake. In the meantime,



Emblem of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

the U.S. airstrikes seems to have some effects. Indeed, the Kurds were able to reconquer the city of Zumar and the near villages, in Northern Iraq.

This strikes created also some serious effects to the grip of the IS on Kobane. The next weeks will be determinant to understand if Kobane is destined to become the Stalingrad of this conflict.

Deaths in Kurdish protests in Turkey

In the last few days, the Kurdish protests mounted all across the Anatolian plateau. The demonstrations were set up to demand a more proactive attitude of the Turkish government to defend the Syrian-Kurdish city of Kobane. From Ankara to Istanbul there were arrests and injuries, both among the police force and the demonstrators. Anyway, the biggest incidents occurred in the South-Eastern part of the country, where the presence of the Kurdish minority is more relevant. Five people were killed in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city, one in Varto, two in the Siirt province and one died in the near Batman. At the end, twelve people have died in the overall of the protests. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed the will to fight all the terrorist organizations, and the Turkish Kurds are wondering if he intends to kill two birds with a stone.



ISIS attacks in Egypt



President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Photo: Kremlin.ru

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) unexpectedly made attacks in Egypt. The attacks were launched on 24 October 2014, and they resulted in the deaths of 33 security personnel. The attacks bring significant changes to the international relations of the already tense region.

Egypt has not seen attacks like this since the removal of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi in 2013. Ever since, the region has been turning into an Islamist insurgency which now has reached its peak. The first and most severe attack took place in Sheikh Zuweid, a town on the Sinai Peninsula near the border with the Gaza Strip, the second also occurred in close proximity. The means of the militants were

grenades and a car bomb. The attacks focused on the Egyptian military which was, coincidentally, carrying out an offensive against jihadists in the region that is considered a militant hideout. It is Ansar Beit al-Maqqdis – a Sunni jihadist group supported by the ISIS – that is believed to be behind the attacks.

The consequences of the attacks on the international situation were fairly significant: aside from the three days of mourning, Egyptian President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi declared a state of emergency and called a meeting of the National Defence Council. Furthermore, since the affected region is close to Gaza and is swarming with militants, the Rafah crossing of Egypt to the Gaza Strip was closed. The precautions and the state of emergency led al-Sisi to postpone the peace talks between Israel and the State of Palestine in which Egypt had the role of a mediator; the currently active ceasefire agreement is not affected by this. In addition, the United States expressed plans to aid the counter-terrorism in Egypt – currently, the provided military support is around \$1.3 billion each year – but the extent of this has yet to be declared.



Boko Haram: violence rages on



Attack by Boko Haram in May 2014. Photo: Diariocritico de Venezuela

On 14 April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped from the town of Chibok, north-eastern Nigeria. Boko Haram, a radical Islamic terrorist group claimed responsibility for the abduction. Despite of the international outrage, no girl has been rescued. 57 girls managed to escape on their own from their captors.

The Nigerian military force announced an agreement with Boko Haram on ceasefire. According to the government of Nigeria, after several negotiations the radical group will release the schoolgirls kidnapped in April.

Local residents notified the media about the abduction of dozens of women and girls from Adamawa state just a day after

claimed truce. Boko Haram has not yet taken responsibility for the kidnaps. The leader of the Islamic extremist group has denied any agreement with Nigeria's government. Although he referred to a possible hostage swap, in a video Abubakar Shekau has said the kidnapped schoolgirls have converted to Islam and they have been married off already.

A global campaign has started putting a pressure on the government of Nigeria. The cost of upgrading military equipment and training new units is unbearable as the quarter of the federal budget is already spent on security.

State of emergency was declared in May 2013 in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.



First Lady Michelle Obama holding a sign in support of the 2014 Chibok kidnapping. Photo: First Lady of the United States Twitter account



Violence and kidnapping have continued. Boko Haram's militants are taking more and more villages under control forcing residents to work and kidnapping teenager girls. Since April, the extremist group claims to have taken over five towns in north-eastern Nigeria.

The terrorist group have continued killing. A major bus station was exploded in the state of Gombe. It is the neighbouring state with Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, the three states under emergency. Boko Haram fights

against the Western culture. The radical Islamic beliefs forbid Muslims to participate in any activity connected to the Western society, which is why they focus on kidnapping and killing schoolgirls. Their aim is to convert the Christian states and spread the extremist Islamic views.

The acts of the religious extremist Boko Haram raise islamophobia in the western countries. Many people tend to connect those terrorist attacks with the Muslim community.

“Boko Haram's militants are taking more and more villages under control forcing residents to work and kidnapping teenager girls”



Chibok 100 art installation by Sarah Peace. Photo: Sarah Peace



Hong Kong government calls off student talks

Protests in Hong Kong eased up somewhat as the situation came to negotiations – that are likely to have no prospective results. The tension about – and struggle for – free vote and democracy has been growing since the late summer of 2014, and there has been no political advancement on the scene so far.

The protests – also known as the Umbrella Revolution – began in September 2014 as an opposition to the electoral reforms in Hong Kong. This proposed that the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) would set up a committee that pre-approves general candidates before they could be freely voted for by the people. In practice, this gives an option for screening out potential candidates. The reform would be valid from 2017. The main forces behind the organisations were mostly student-led, such as the Hong Kong Federation of Students; they started to protest in front of governmental buildings in 22 September, 2014. Four days later the protesters forcefully entered the barred complex where the office buildings are situated; this then caused the protests to escalate more until the police used shields and pepper



Umbrella Revolution Conflict in Mong Kok. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

spray on the protesters whom later on carried on with civil disobedience and further attempts to get into the government complex. The growing frustration of the police riled up more and more people to join the demonstrations for democracy, until on 3 October a student suffered head injuries. This ultimately led to talks between the student organisations and the government.

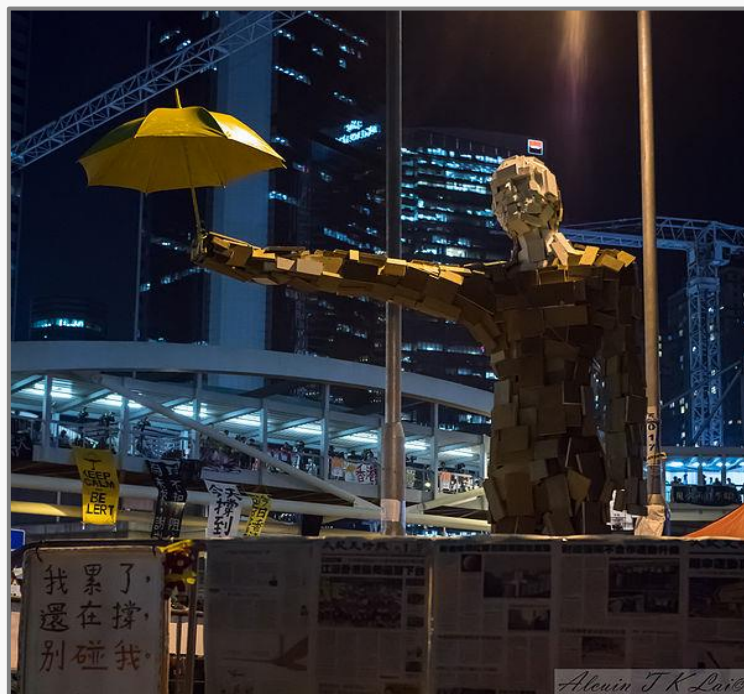
Once the negotiations began, the police and the government stopped trying to clean out the area – consequently, significant percentage of the crowd went home seeing the lack of opposition. However, negotiations were not likely to



have a satisfying outcome: the negotiations seemed to be a step from the NPCSC to feed the growing impatience of the residents who – eventually – do have to put their time to making a living. This was shown when the government called off the scheduled discussion of next day on 9 October, saying that it was “impossible to have a constructive dialogue” with the

demonstrators whose activity they deemed to be illegal: Hong Kong’s chief secretary, Carrie Lam declared the talks cannot continue until the streets are empty. The demonstrators promised more protests in return as they see the government as the unconstructive party as they do not show willingness to consider their points. It is yet to be seen how this stalemate will continue.

“The demonstrators promised more protests in return as they see the government as the unconstructive party as they do not show willingness to consider their points”



Umbrella Revolution Sculpture in Admiralty, Hong Kong. Photo: Alcuin Lai



New Zealand became temporary member of UN Security Council

New Zealand has won one of five two-year seats on the United Nations Security Council. The United Nations Security Council was set up after World War II by five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – countries that have the power to veto any resolution proposed by another

newly elected non-permanent members of the UN Security Council for a two year term starting on 1 January, 2015. Other countries who won a seat for 2015-16 are Malaysia, Angola, Spain and Venezuela and they will work together with the current non-permanent members: Lithuania, Chad, Chile, Jordan and Nigeria are in the

“Its main task is to maintain international peace and security with the power to set up peacekeeping operations, to implement sanctions and to authorise military action if needed”

member of the Security Council – and its main task is to maintain international peace and security with the power to set up peacekeeping operations, to implement sanctions and to authorise military action if needed.

Beside the five permanent seats, ten temporary seats are rotated on a regional basis for two year terms. After two decades, New Zealand is among the five

Security Council until 31 December, 2015. While Malaysia, Angola and Venezuela campaigned unopposed in their groups, New Zealand's opponents were Spain and Turkey in the Western Europe and Others group. To secure a seat in the Security Council, all nations had to win the support of two thirds (129) of the 193 UN member states. New Zealand has already secured a seat during the first round of voting with a





Logo of the United Nations. Picture: Wikimedia Commons

safe number of 145 votes, along with Angola, Malaysia and Venezuela. For the second seat in the Western Europe and

Other states group there was a competition between Spain and Turkey, where after two rounds, Spain overcame Turkey and took the last one of the five seats in this round. New Zealand's campaign was rather low-budget compared to Spain and Turkey, although the state has focused more on what the country would bring to the Security Council instead of trying to use empty promises of economic support to win votes. According to these, New Zealand's priorities have focused on three main topics: world affairs (including the 'madness' of the Islamic State militants and tensions in Ukraine), veto reform and intermediate seats.



US President Barack Obama chairs a United Nations Security Council meeting in 2009.
Photo: Pete Souza [The Official White House Photostream]



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Catalonia plans a popular consultation for independence

■ After the stop of the Spanish Constitutional Court to the Catalan independence referendum, Artur Mas, the President of the Generalitat of Catalunya since 2010, declared the will to hold a different form of consultation. The vote will be held on the 9th of November, within an existing legal framework. According to Mas, even if there were divisions within the North-Eastern separatist camp, the real adversary of the consultation was represented by the Spanish government, that did everything in its power to stop the referendum. The news of the abandonment of the referendum was warmly welcomed by the Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy, who asked for a dialogue with the Catalan people. Surely, the result of the consultation will have consequences on the evolution of this tense situation.

Estonia as first among former Soviet states with new same-sex law

■ On 9 October 2014, Estonia became the first former Soviet state to grant equal rights to same-sex couples by a narrow majority. The new Cohabitation Act allows same-sex couples the same rights in adoption, partners' hospital access and inheritance. The decision is influential in the Baltic region and might even inspire steps to this direction in other former Soviet states.

Violence against women in Iran

■ After recurring acid attacks against women, about 1000 people protested in Isfahan, central Iran. Under the Islamic law, women must wear hijabs covering their whole body and hair. According to local reports, women are being attacked with acid for "badly veiled". President Hassan Rouhani warns the public to focus on preventing the attacks rather than the so-called issue of bad hijabs. Victims of the attacks were blinded and disfigured. Demonstrators demand to put an end on religious extremism.



Shia Houthi and al-Qaeda threaten Yemen

■ In the Southern regions of Yemen the situation has become hot in the last few months. A group operating under the name of Houthi, Shia Muslims that adhered to the branch of Zadaism, gained a lot of influence. Just recently, they envoy troops in the city of Ibb and tried to take control over the city of Radaa. Last month they attempted another takeover in Sanaa, the capital. Houthi is pursuing separatism through extreme methods. The President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi named a new prime minister, attempting to reinforce the position of the Sunni Islamists and tribal fighters loyal to the Islah party. And al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) expressed the will to fight Houthi in the name of Sunni Islam. Indeed, AQAP revealed to be behind the suicide bomb that killed 47 people in a rally of Houthi supporters last month.

Tunisia holds its first election under a new constitution

■ Despite the bad weather, people started queuing early to cast their vote on 26 October, Tunisia's first election under its new constitution. The day was an important milestone in the country's political transition from dictatorship to democracy and due to insecurities about the day, security presence was visible to ensure safe voting. Over a 100 parties took part in the election and overseas residents were allowed to vote too.

“The day was an important milestone in the country's political transition from dictatorship to democracy ”

Suicide bombing in the capital of Chechnya

■ A suicide bomber has blown himself up in Grozny, Chechnya, killing five police officers and wounding a dozen other. The bomber has been identified as a 19 year old resident who disappeared two months ago and has denoted the explosives when police officers were about to check the suspicious-looking man. The attack is regarded as a high-profile and symbolic target as people were celebrating Grozny City Day along with the Chechen president's birthday at the concert hall, where the event took place.



Burkina Faso: Compaore resigns

■ Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaore resigned after the violent protests held in the last few days in Ougadougou, the capital of the country. After his attempt of emending the Constitution, in order to extend his 27 years rule over the country, the protesters set fire to the Parliament and to the government buildings. His resignation was broadcast, and he stated the necessity to hold new elections within 90 days. For the article 43 of the Constitution, the president of the senate should take over when the president resigns. Notwithstanding, the army chief, General Honore Traore took over the role of head of the state. He declared the state of emergency and the dissolution of the two houses of Parliament, creating a power vacuum in the transitional process. The protesters, happy for Compaore's resignation, did not go home, but remained in the squares, not convinced of the real intentions of Gen Traore, perceived as too close to the former president.

Another round of prisoners released in Myanmar

■ Myanmar president Thein Sein has granted amnesty for 3073 prisoners – including 58 foreigners – a month before the Southeast Asian summit. Most of the prisoners are believed to have been imprisoned for minor, ordinary crimes, though the president has pledged to release all political prisoners and usually acts according to his promise shortly before diplomatic meetings and summits. The government that took office in 2011 has already granted amnesties several times to prisoners.



President of Myanmar Thein Sein. Photo: IRRI Photos



Rebels kill more than 20 people in Congo

■ Ugandan rebels belonging to the group called Allied Democratic Forces (ADF-NALU) have killed over 20 people in an east Congolese village. Even though United Nations peacekeepers and government troops are present in the Democratic Republic of Congo, violence still simmers in the area.

Suspicious around Kim Jong-un

■ The absence of the Supreme Leader in North Korea has raised some questions in the international media. Although state press has continued the glorifying reports, international journals made some wild suspicions in connection with his health or the decrease of his power. After six weeks of no show, Kim Jong-un made a delightful appearance in the North Korean newspaper's website with a wide smile and a cane, left some questions unanswered.

Bolivian president has been elected for a third term

■ Evo Morales has been elected for an unprecedented third term in government with an outstanding 60% of the votes, winning eight of Bolivia's nine states. The president now has great chance to become Bolivia's longest-serving leader consecutively in office, though he did not specify whether he would seek a fourth term later on. Morales is known for his anti-imperialist and socialist rhetoric as well as for strengthening Bolivia's economy.

Enhanced police presence in Guerrero, Mexico

■ A suicide bomber has blown himself up in Grozny, Chechnya, killing five police officers and wounding a dozen other. The bomber has been identified as a 19 year old resident who disappeared two months ago and has denoted the explosives when police officers were about to check the suspicious-looking man. The attack is regarded as a high-profile and symbolic target as people were celebrating Grozny City Day along with the Chechen president's birthday at the concert hall, where the event took place.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Sanctions removed against Fiji

■ After democratic elections the USA and Australia have lifted sanctions against Fiji. After a local visit, Julie Bishop, foreign minister of Australia anticipated a new start in the relationship between the two countries. The election in Fiji has been the first one since Voreqe Bainimarama took the power over in 2006. The results put an end to his alteration into civilian leader. To secure the reunited ties both Australia and Fiji will appoint high commissioners.

The United States partially lifts ban on lethal weapon sales to Vietnam

■ “The State Department has taken steps to allow for the future transfer of maritime security-related defence articles to Vietnam,” State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki told a briefing. The idea behind the act is to help Vietnam improve its maritime security, however a number of human rights groups have expressed concerns about Vietnam not being ready for this on its own.

The United Kingdom ends Afghan combat operations

■ After 13 long years, the United Kingdom has ended its Afghan combat operations in October, 2014 with the symbolic act of lowering the British flag at Camp Bastion, the troops' main Afghan base since 2006. Following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, 140.000 British troops have served in Afghanistan, of which 453 were killed during the war that cost nearly 20 billion pounds to England. Around 500 mentors are still to stay after 2014 to help with training at the officer academy.



Kenyan president fronts International Criminal Court in the Netherlands

■ Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta is the first president to face ICC while still in office. Kenyatta is charged with crimes against humanity related to his post-election violence back in 2007. The case has been delayed a few times already, as at least seven prosecution witnesses have dropped out presumably due to bribes. ICC judges could decide to send the case to trial or abandon it due to the lack of evidence.

Deaths of Civilians on the India-Pakistan border

■ The Himalayan region of Kashmir has been contended between India and Pakistan since 1947, when the latter became independent. They fought three wars and risked a fourth one in 2001. Lately, the tensions increased again. In Arnia, three kilometres inside the Indian border, five civilians were killed and 25 wounded by the Pakistani military forces. Similarly, four civilians died near Sialkot, close to the Indian state of Punjab, killed by the Indian forces. The battles continued during Eid, celebrated by Muslims in both the countries. This time soldiers died, while the two countries keep continuing to answer each other's provocations. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a talk with the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Anyway, they failed to meet on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.



The location of Kashmir. Map: Wikimedia Commons



■ News in Brief

International relations

European Union reaches landmark climate deal

■ The new environmental target of the European Union is to cut at least 40 percent of the carbon emissions by 2030. The agreement took place within the frames of the European Council where leaders of the organisation agreed also on 27 percent targets for the amount of renewable energy. The goal is “ambitious” but still might not be enough to keep the rise of global average temperature under two degrees Celsius.

Malala and Satyarthi win Nobel Peace Prize

■ Pakistani child education activist Malala Yousafzai and Indian child rights campaigner Kailash Satyarthi win Nobel Peace Prize together. Malala, who was shot by the Taliban in 2012, is the youngest recipient of the prize due to her efforts to the education of young people, particularly girls. Satyarthi's greatest influence is in his efforts against child labour; he has been an activist behind the Convention No. 182 of International Labour Organisation which aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. The Nobel Peace Prize was given jointly to an Indian Hindu and a Pakistani Muslim on purpose.

“Malala, who was shot by the Taliban in 2012, is the youngest recipient of the prize”

Japanese Prime Minister sends offering to Yasukuni Shrine for war dead

■ Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe has sent a ritual offering to Yasukuni Shrine. The shrine in Tokyo was founded by Emperor Meiji and nowadays is seen as a symbol of Japan's past militarism, as war criminals are honoured there along with millions of war dead. The PM is hoping to meet the Chinese and the South Korean presidents, however his recent move might have complicated his intention for bilateral meetings.





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