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Regional Updates

October 2017 | No. 30



Published: November 2017

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CYPRUS

On 3 October, Jack Straw, UK former Foreign Minister, wrote an article for the Independent newspaper titled “Only partitioned island will bring the dispute between Turkish and Greek Cypriots to an end”. Straw claimed from the Greek Cypriot point of view, conceding political equality with the Turkish Cypriots means “giving power away”.



In his article, he criticised European Union’s decision on Greek part’s membership in 2004 as a “one of its worst decision ever”. He said Cyprus’ EU accession had been reached with the Turkish Cypriots or not. “It is time to end the charade that negotiated agreement to unite the island with a “bizonal, bicomunal” government will ever be possible. The solution is to partition the island and give international recognition to TRNC”, he added.

The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) President Rifat Hisarcıkloğlu met with Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Industry delegation on 3 October. Hisarcıkloğlu said, “We, as the Turkish business community, want to invest more in Cyprus to make it an island of prosperity and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. We are aware that the unfair isolation of Turkish Cypriots has slowed this down but thanks to the hard work and the contribution of the Turkish Cypriots, the process of prosperity will continue. We want the Cypriot industry to grow and the Cypriot entrepreneurs to produce more. We will continue to support the development of the production capacity of the Cypriot industry as TOBB always has.”

On 4 October, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu paid an official visit to Washington after the failure of the Cyprus negotiations. He indicated that they could accept a negotiation on the basis of confederation instead of federation. “It’s time for international recognition for TRNC. We can now work for it. The second option is an autonomous republic. Like France-Monaco model or UK-Gibraltar. It means a republic that we have transferred our powers in the foreign affairs; defence fields to Turkey and ruled the rest in ourselves.” He concluded his words by pointing out that they have to talk to Ankara about this idea.

Speaking at the event on 4 October, 30th anniversary of the Lapta Immigrants Association, Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades noted that Turkey was uncompromising against the positive views of the Greek Cypriot side in recent negotiations. Anastasiades continued, “Our constant goal is to find a solution to the Cyprus problem, a state of full respect for the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all the inhabitants of Cyprus. A state in which the military presence of the third countries, the occupation troops and guarantees do not exist, both the Greek and Turkish Cypriots will be able to live in welfare and security.”

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On 11 October, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued his 12-page report on Cyprus, which covered the period of May 2015-August 2017. In the report, Guterres said, “A historic opportunity was missed in Crans-Montana”. He added that, “lack of mutual trust and political will was the result of failure.” Guterres did not consider any side as responsible for the failure. For the continuation of the negotiations, Guterres pointed out that, “the UN is ready to contribute to a solution however the biggest duty falls on the mutual will of both sides in Cyprus”.

On 20 October, Turkey Deputy Prime Minister Recep Akdağ hosted TRNC Minister of Education Özdemir Berova in Ankara. Akdağ said, “The more you develop the human capital and the stronger it is, the easier it is to develop. In this way, we will continue to give our young people living in Cyprus all kinds of support as our government, of course.” He added that, “We are aware of the importance of education in progress and solution process.”

On 24 October, Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades held a meeting with Russia President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. They discussed the Cyprus problem, bilateral relations, international and regional issues with the emphasis on the Eastern Mediterranean. Regarding Cyprus, Vladimir Putin said that, “We consider it important that the final solution be found by the Cypriots themselves without the imposition of ready recipes and pressures from outside”. Two heads of state signed a Joint Declaration for the years 2018-2020, to co-operate in the field of modernizing the economies.

Later on the meeting of Anastasiades and Putin in Moscow, Anastasiades said that, “good relations between Russia and Turkey could contribute to solution process in Cyprus. This also could be a message to Turkey for correct understanding of our position.”

On 26-27 October, the “One Step Ahead” summit annual meeting was held at Girne American University. TRNC Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu, representatives of civil society organizations, academics and students participated in this meeting. Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı addressed a speech saying, “5-month later on the broke of negotiations in Crans-Montana, no committee from EU came to Cyprus”. Akıncı called for support from the representative of Diplomats International Günther Meinel on this issue.

Akıncı highlighted the achievements of the last two years on economy, management, recent advances, but he claimed that the upcoming elections in Greek side removed them from solution. “A state in the north of Cyprus is not for the sake of anyone, but for everyone's benefit”, he added.

On 28 October, Turkey's Ambassador to Nicosia Derya Kanbay said “Turkey maintains its goal of achieving a fair, lasting, sustainable and negotiated solution in the island in full coordination with Turkish Cypriot people and the state”. He also added, we expect the international arena to take steps to abolish the restrictions and sanctions applied all aspects of life for the Turkish Cypriot people

EGYPT

On 16 October, some politicians, celebrities and lawmakers gathered in Cairo to launch President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi's re-election campaign. Abdel Nabi Abdel Sattar, an activist who was spearheading the "Continue Sisi" campaign indicated that, it aimed to gather 30,000 signatures for a petition urging Sisi to run for a second term in the 2018 presidential election. "We want him to continue this difficult mission of fighting terrorism and reviving the economy", said Abdel Sattar.



Members of the Egyptian Parliament were also allegedly launching a campaign to support Sisi's re-election. Irrespective of these developments, Mamdouh Hamza, a civil engineer and an outspoken critic who rejects Sisi's re-election bid said that he was preparing to launch "a democratic civil movement" targeted at "the regime's failed policies". Earlier in August, Sisi had indicated he would contest the 2018 elections "if that was the will of the Egyptian people".

On 23 October, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi reiterated his determination to press ahead with Egypt's war against terrorism by securing its borders and hunting down militants. This came at the backdrop of an ambush by militants in the southwest of Cairo that left at least 16 Egyptian policemen dead. At a meeting attended by Egypt's top security officials, including defense and interior ministry representatives, Sisi further indicated that, Egypt would continue its confrontation against terrorism and those financing and standing behind it with strength, decisiveness and efficiency until it was curbed.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

On 2 October, the Palestine Cabinet met in Gaza for the first time since 2014 in a further step towards the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority retaking control of the territory. Palestine Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah promised to end the division between Fatah and Hamas, which has been going on for ten years.



U.N. Middle East Envoy Nickolay Mladenov said that he was “carefully optimistic” about the reconciliation talks. “If the region stays engaged, if Egypt's role continues and if the political parties themselves continue to show the willingness they are currently showing to work with us on this process, then it can succeed”, he told AFP.

On 12 October, the United States announced withdrawal from UNESCO, which will become effective at the end of 2018. Behind this decision, “anti-Israel bias, Palestine full membership on the organization and the need for fundamental reforms” plays important role according to Al Jazeera. Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted he had instructed, “prepare Israel’s withdrawal in parallel with the U.S.” US Department of State spokeswoman Heather Nauert said in a statement. Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova called the US withdrawal a matter of “profound regret”.

On 18 October, High Representative of European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini stated that EU was expecting a clarification from Israeli authorities regarding Israel’s new settlement decisions in West Bank. Mogherini opined that the decision was contrary to international law as well as an obstacle to the solution process on Israel-Palestine issue.

On 18 October, Israel’s “target on media institutions” was protested by supporters of Palestine Media Forum in front of UN building in Ramallah. Palestinian news agencies Transmedia, Palmedia and Ramsat were shut by Israeli forces due to alleged “encouraging attacks in the city of Nablus, Ramallah, El-Halil ve Bethlehem”.

On 27 October, according to Israel’s Yediot Ahronot newspaper, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein sent a message to Israel, 130 Israeli companies if it continues settlement activities in the occupied territories, it would be taken to the blacklist.

On 30 October, UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson wrote an article in today’s Daily Telegraph ahead of the centenary of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 2017, titled as “My vision for Middle East peace between Israel and a new Palestine State”. In the article, Johnson said the only viable solution to the conflict was two states for two peoples. He added that, “Achieving this goal would require painful compromises from both sides”. He indicated he believed that, “For Israel, the birth of a Palestinian state was the only way to secure its demographic future as a Jewish and

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democratic nation. For Palestinians, a state of their own would allow them to realize their aspirations for self-determination and self-government.”

On 31 October, Palestinian Ambassador to Ankara Faed Mustafa assessed about the centenary of Balfour Declaration, the project of establishing an Israeli “homeland” on the Palestinian territory. Mustafa said Israel was still dependent on the Declaration, and added that, it recognized civil and religious rights of Palestinians but did not officially recognize their political rights.

LIBYA

On 1 October, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) kicked off a month-long meeting in Tunis that sought to end Libya's conflict in a year. The plan was an initiative of UN Envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame. At the meeting, Salame urged the different camps in Libya to set aside their differences and forge a resolution.



The participating delegates were expected to amend the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) within a few weeks and convene for a conference on reconciliation within a month after the event according to, Salame. The UNSMIL is a United Nations special mission in Libya in the aftermath of the Libyan Civil War. It is not a military mission but a political one led by UN's Department of Political Affairs. The UNSMIL is tasked with assisting Libya in the rebuilding of the rule of law and other institutions.

On 2 October, the European Union Mission to Libya (EUBAM) indicated that it was struggling with its operations concerning Libya. According to EUBAM's report, "sustainable progress in Libya may remain limited in the absence of a political solution, an end to the military conflict and a return to stability". The mission which is based in Tunisia sends people to Tripoli twice a week. It was however, yet to find a permanent base in Libya given the country's general insecurity.

Vincenzo Tagliaferr, who oversees the mission, said EUBAM's light presence meant that it soon should be able to respond to the increasing Libyan expectations of "immediate capacity building and support". He added that political infighting in Libya's ministry of defense had made it more difficult to execute an EU-backed security plan in Tripoli. EUBAM is composed of 18 international staff, with three local staff in Libya helping with coordination and translation.

On 3 October, the Libyan Dialogue Committee of the House of Representatives (HoR) and the State Council (SC) agreed on proposed amendments to the LPA which would reduce the capacity of the Presidential Council (PC) from nine members to three with the prime minister appointed separately. There would also be further discussions on Article 8 of the LPA which stipulated who could appoint the military along with civil and security posts.

Additionally, the HoR demanded that the SC should contain 200 members and not just 145 as stipulated by the LPA, the SC currently has 138 members. Discussions also hinged on extending the term of the Constitution Drafting Assembly by another three months in order to formulate an amended version to what was proposed and whether or not a return to the 1951 or 1963 Constitutions respectively was necessary.

On 10 October, UN Security Council endorsed the UN's action plan to resume inclusive political process in Libya. In a Presidential statement, the Security Council urged all Libyans to work together

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in a spirit of compromise and engage constructively in the inclusive political process set out in the action plan. The plan was initially presented in New York on 20 September.

On 14 October, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar stated that majority of Libya was now under the control of the national army which he leads. During a meeting with officers and soldiers from the Libyan National Army (LNA) in Benghazi, Haftar said, “the size of Libya was 1,760,000 km with his army currently in control of 1,730,000 km. He added that there was only a little left in attaining full control.

On 18 October, the lawyer of Saif al-Islam, son of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi indicated that Al-Islam will return to Libyan politics as he was the country’s only hope. Lawyer Khalid al Zaidi said that it was essential for Al-Islam to return to politics to reach a political settlement in Libya.

He added that, “there had been frequent reports that Saif al-Islam had left Libya, but that was not true. He had rather been communicating with Libyan leaders and representatives of tribes to reach a political solution and appease the conflicting parties”.

On 31 October, 15 people were killed in air strikes on the eastern Libyan city of Derna. The UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) condemned the air strikes and called on the UN Security Council to investigate the attacks. A statement issued on behalf of Prime Minister Fayeaz al-Sarraj said the air strike should be treated as a war crime.

SYRIA

On 5 October, the head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Ahmet Uzumcu said it had collected evidence that sarin nerve agent was used in opposition-held northern Syria in March, five days before a chemical attack struck the town of Khan Sheikhoun. OPCW's findings disprove the claim that this year's April attack on Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib which killed at least 87 people, was the first time sarin was used since the 2013 gas attack on the suburbs of Damascus.



On 6 October, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz called for a peace settlement in Syria that would preserve the country's territorial integrity. King Salman's comments were made during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The meeting was perceived to deepen ties between the two countries. Saudi Foreign Minister Abdel al-Jubeir said pursuant to the meeting that Saudi Arabia and Russia were working closely to unite Syria's opposition. Both Russia and Saudi Arabia had supported opposite sides in Syria's six-year long war.

On 7 October, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the start of an operation in Idlib as increased military movement was being observed near his country's southern border. "There was a serious operation in Idlib at the moment and this would continue", said Erdoğan at the 26th semi-annual "consultation and assessment camp" of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). He further indicated that the operation aimed to provide Idlib security. Subsequently, on 25 October, Erdoğan indicated that the cross-border operation in Idlib province was largely complete.

On 13 October, three opposition groups, Jaish al-Islam, Jaish al-Ababil and Aknaf Beit al-Maqdis agreed to a cease-fire deal in the south of Damascus. The agreement was brokered by Russia and Egypt in Cairo but was however, not signed by the Syrian government. The political leader of Jaish al-Islam said that, the cease-fire was unlike previous deals that involved the evacuation of fighters and their families to northern Syria. "The residents of this area would stay in their homes and this deal would lift the siege and cease the fire", added Alloush. The three villages of Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem had been under siege since 2013 with an estimated 42,500 civilians still living in the areas.

On 25 October, Russia vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) that would have extended the mandate of the mission investigating chemical weapon attacks in Syria. This was the ninth time Russia had used its power of veto in the Security Council to block resolutions targeting President Bashar al-Assad. The investigation by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) – known as the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) – was set up by Russia and the U.S. in 2015 to identify the source of chemical weapon attacks in Syria. Its mandate was extended last year and is due to expire in November.

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On 26 October, UNICEF spokeswoman Juliette Touma indicated that more than 1,100 children in Eastern Ghouta were suffering from malnutrition. She added that if aid was not delivered soon, more children would suffer from starvation and malnutrition. The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) also issued an appeal for access to the besieged opposition enclave. The WFP said in its statement that it was concerned about reports of extreme cases of hunger and malnutrition among families in the area. It further added that it last reached Eastern Ghouta in September, however, so far this year only 70,000 people have received food assistance out of an estimated 400,000 population.

On 27 October, United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that President Bashar al-Assad should have no role in the future of Syria. "It is our view and I have said this many times that we do not believe that there is a future for the Assad regime and Assad family. The family reign is coming to an end. The only issue is how that should be brought about", Tillerson said ahead of the eighth round of peace talks in Geneva. UN Syria Envoy Staffan de Mistura said the talks would work to move into "real negotiation on a constitution and UN supervised elections" as part of a political transition in Syria.

Meanwhile, on 31 October, the seventh round of Astana peace talks was held in Kazakhstan. Representatives of the Syrian government and some armed opposition groups alongside representatives from Iran, Turkey and Russia participated in the talks. The focus was on the de-escalation zone agreement in Syria. Russia's chief negotiator Alexander Lavrentyev told reporters that he was confident a political settlement to the Syria war was possible. "Assad had confirmed his readiness for ... the preparation of a new constitution and the holding of new parliamentary and presidential elections on this basis", Lavrentyev said. He added that Moscow was ready to host a congress for all Syrian groups within a month with the goal of working on a political settlement and a new constitution. He further added that the congress would seek "compromise solutions towards the political settlement" of the conflict.

Global Political Trends Center (GPoT Center) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institution established under the auspices of Istanbul Kültür University in 2009.

GPoT Center was founded with the aim to support reconciliation and non-violent solutions to international as well as domestic issues through dialogue. Our mission is to contribute to stability, democratization and peace through organizing multitrack diplomacy meetings, conducting innovative and independent research, and encouraging informed debates in the media on key issues affecting Turkey and the world.

GPoT Center serves as a platform for the free exchange of views and information on political, social and economic matters concerning a variety of parties and segments of society. We aim to achieve our mission by routinely bringing together opinion leaders, government officials, policy makers, analysts, scholars, experts and members of the media from Turkey and abroad.

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