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Regional Updates

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REGIONAL UPDATES: CYPRUS

CYPRUS

On 10 September, two boats crowded with 305 Syrian refugees arrived in the northwestern coast of Cyprus island. According to Deutsche Welle, two men were taken into custody on suspicion of migrant trafficking. Migrants reported paying up to \$2,000 each to the smugglers for the trip. This has been one of the largest waves of migrants to be received by Cypriot authorities in a single day since 2011.



Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades attended the 21st Pancyprian Conference of NEDISY, which is youth wing of Democratic Rally Party (DISY) on 10 September.

In his speech, he encouraged younger generation about working life and gave some advice on “dialogue and hope”. He also mentioned that a prospective solution of Cyprus should be “corresponding to international law and European law as well as United Nations Secretary General’s parameters”.

On 12 September, Speaker of the Assembly of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Sibel Siber said that they were waiting for the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ report to be released. “We expect Guterres’ report on Cyprus Talks to be objective and will explain the present situation unequivocally”. Siber added that, “Turkish Cypriots would need to be regarded by the rest of the world. So, they would need to work hard to uphold the Turkish Cypriot’s social existence in the world and push for the embargoes to be lifted”.

On 12 September, after exploratory drilling at the Onisiforos, Cyprus’ Energy Minister Yiorgos Lakkotrypīs said that, “a gas field discovered off Cyprus that contains less than 0.5 trillion cubic feet of the hydrocarbon is too small to make it commercially viable on its own.” He added, “We are not disappointed with this drilling. It leaves us optimistic for the future.”

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On 14 September, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı attended a conference organized by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) and the Economic Development Foundation (İKV). During his speech, Akıncı addressed business people working in Turkey. He also evaluated the latest situation in Cyprus issue as well as the collapse of latest Cyprus Talks was held in Crans-Montana.

In his speech, Akıncı talked about both water and natural gas; “Northern Cyprus gets 75 million cubic meters water from Turkey per year. There may also be an opportunity to benefit from this water to the South. We can also share natural gas. The route of natural gas is very simple. Israeli gas and Cypriot gas would combine to come to Turkey. This is for both Turkey's and European Union's needs. Findings of experts show that this is the shortest, fastest and cheapest way”.

Akıncı also opined “we, as Turkish Cypriots, do not want to be a minority within the unitary structure of Southern Cyprus. Likewise, we do not wish for being 82nd province of Turkey. Our society has no such intention. Turkey does not need a new province as well. However, we would need to have cooperation and solidarity with Turkey both in terms of political and economic sense, as we have done so far.”

Akıncı addressed business people and said that, “As politicians and business people gathered here, I believe one of our common stakeholders is the membership of European Union. For both Turkey and Turkish Cypriots, we would like it happen for a better quality of life that values people. We want an order based on democracy, human rights and law to be valid. We wish that rules of production and competition to have contemporary norms.”

On 21 September, Greek Cypriot leader Nikos Anastasiades addressed a speech at the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly. During his speech, Anastasiades blamed Turkey for “adopting an inflexible stance and the presence of Turkish troops in the island”. Also, he said “It is my intention during tomorrow's meeting with the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to convey our readiness to immediately resume negotiations”. Moreover, Anastasiades addressed few questions to the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in sense of role of Turkey on Cyprus issue.

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On 25 September, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı met with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in New York. Akıncı said that, “We would like to see the end of isolation policies applied to Northern Cyprus. Ignoring the problems does not make it disappear. So, we shall find out how to solve this issue. If we do not agree on equal power sharing, we cannot make progress. Greek side should accept that fact that one day a president of united Cyprus would come from Turkish Cypriots side.” Akıncı also stressed that “as time passes, status quo is changing and hopes are running out for a solution. Resolving the problem today is not easier compared to the period of 2004. It may be impossible in 10 years later.”

Upon the questions over security and guarantees, Akıncı replied, “As more confidence build up on the island, less troops are needed. If more cooperation are built, less guarantees are needed.”

TRNC Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu gave an interview to the U.S. based television channel PBS as well as Slate Magazin. Ertuğruloğlu said that a new process should be discussed in Cyprus. He also noted that the UN should make a clean break on the basis of equality in the island. He asked for support to lift unjust sanctions against the Turkish Cypriot people. The Minister stressed that UN should review its policies for the new process. “Over the last 50 years in Cyprus negotiations, all sort of formulas have been tried, yet success has not been achieved because the Greek Cypriot side does not need a solution.” he added.

On 30 September, Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Recep Akdağ attended the opening ceremony of the National and Spiritual Solidarity Association (Milli ve Manevi Dayanışma Derneği) in Cyprus. It will serve as the Cyprus Representative of the Turkey’s Justice and Development Party. After Brussels, the Party opened the second representative agency in Cyprus. Akdağ pointed out the importance given by Turkey to Northern Cyprus. The leader of the Association Mehmet Demirci added that, “They aim to reach everyone without distinction of language, religion, or sectarian.”

REGIONAL UPDATES: EGYPT

EGYPT

On 1 September, two representatives, David Kaye and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, from the United Nations Human Rights Council issued a joint statement over Egypt's decision to block access to some websites. Currently, the total number of website blockages in Egypt which began in May stands at 405 according to, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE).



In the statement, Kaye and Aoláin who are UN's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression; and Human Rights and Counterterrorism respectively indicated that, “denying access to websites of all sorts, especially news sites deprives all Egyptians of basic information in the public interest”.

On 4 September, Egypt condemned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on its sixth nuclear test. In a statement issued by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, Egypt stated that Pyongyang's failure to commit to UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) posed a threat to the regional security of East Asia. The statement further stressed that, “international conflicts should be peacefully settled in line with UNSCRs and principles of international law”.

On 10 September, Egypt hosted a joint military exercise, Operation Bright Star 2017 with US forces in western Alexandria's Mohamed Naguib Military base. According to the Egyptian Armed Forces, Operation Bright Star 2017 addressed security cooperation and combating terrorism and extremism as well as training on how to counter threats faced in modern conventional war. Operation Bright Star had been held regularly since 1981.

On 20 September, Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi made a pitch for peace between Israelis and Palestinians at the 72nd UN General Assembly. He mentioned that both sides should take advantage of a “rare” opportunity to achieve peace. Sisi called on Palestinians to unite behind a common goal and to accept coexistence with Israel in peace and security.

He also reassured Israelis by invoking Egypt's long-established peace with Israel, which has lasted over 40 years as an amazing step that could be repeated with the Palestinians. Sisi further called on US President Donald Trump to take advantage of an opportunity that could “write a new page of the history of mankind by establishing peace in this region of the world”.

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On 25 September, Khalid Ali, a former presidential candidate and a human rights lawyer allegedly viewed as Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's leading contender for the 2018 presidential elections, was convicted of violating "public decency" in a photograph showing him celebrating a court victory.

The court victory reversed the Egyptian government's decision to hand over control of two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia. He was sentenced to three months in prison pending an appeal. Meanwhile, according to Amnesty International, Ali's conviction was politically motivated. The confirmation of his conviction would prevent him from contesting in the 2018 Egyptian presidential election.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

On 1 September, United States Ambassador to Israel David Friedman gave an interview to Jerusalem Post, referred to the situation of Israel-Palestine as “an alleged occupation”. However, United States Foreign Ministry use “the occupied territories” term in its legal documents.



On 3 September, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary-General Saib Ureykat made a written statement to Israel’s decision to separate roughly a thousand Jewish people living in Al-Halil, which belongs to municipality of the Palestinian Authority. Ureykat emphasized that the decision is “clearly contrary to international law and rules” as well as the UN Resolution 2334.

On 3 September, Israel’s Cabinet approved a resolution to transfer nearly 17 million dollars for new “Amichai” settlement, which is located north of Ramallah. This was planned to replace “Amona” whose residents were evicted a few months ago. Palestinian authority condemned this decision and Foreign Ministry declared in the written statement saying, “Jewish settlements covering all occupied Palestinian territory are a serious problem which is rising the tensions in the region”.

On 13 September, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas received a letter signed by a million Palestinians, mostly students, for the end of occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. It is to be delivered to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during their meetings in New York.

On 19 September, Jason Greenblatt, US Special envoy for the Middle East, attended a meeting at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in New York. In his speech, he talked about contaminated water is devastating the environment and imposing unnecessary hardship on both Israel and Palestine. He added that, “I am pleased to announce that the United States will join them in this endeavour by working to advance a plan that transforms the wastewater treatment and reuse sector in the West Bank and Gaza.”

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On 20 September, President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas delivered a speech at the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly. Abbas strongly urged that “two-state solution is in jeopardy” and he called on both UN and international community to pressure Israel for “bring an end to Israeli occupation within a set timeframe”.

On 27 September, International Police Agency INTERPOL announced the membership of the State of Palestine as 192nd member of the organization. Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki praised the decision and promised to uphold Palestinian commitments to combating crime and strengthening the rule of law. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the decision “seriously harms the chances to achieve peace.”

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LIBYA

On 3 September, three of the seven-member Presidency Council (PC) criticized Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj for issuing unilateral decrees, thus, breaching the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). Fathi Al-Majbri, Ali Al-Gatranio, both PC vice-presidents and Omar Aswad further indicated that the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) was the only legitimate representative of the Libyan people.



They further called on the international community, the sponsors of the LPA and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) specifically, its representative Ghassan Salamé to take a clear and firm stand against what they claim to be violations that threatened the unity, security and stability of Libya.

On 8 September, Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj spoke with a panel of 4 interviewers on state-owned *Rasmiya* Channel. He touched on key aspects of Libya's current crisis and stressed that there was a "blockage" in the political process in Libya. He cited the Tobruk-based HoR, Governor of Libya's Central Bank and boycotting members of the PC as the central figures in Libya's political process blockage.

Serraj threatened to resort to Libya's High Court to bypass the blockage caused by the HoR as the latter was failing to play its required role, which was the passage of necessary legislation including on the constitution "needed for Libya to move forward".

Serraj further indicated that holding fresh elections could prove to be the key to Libya's current crisis. On the state of security in the country, whilst he acknowledged that there was insecurity, he said it should not be over exaggerated. On an alleged deal between Libya and Italy on migration, he mentioned that he did not sign any agreement with Italy, which allowed illegal migrants to be held in Libya.

On 9 September, the African Union (AU) had a mini-summit on Libya in Brazzaville. Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj, Tobruk-based HoR leader Ageela Saleh participated in the summit with General Khalifa Haftar failing to turn up. The summit broke no new ground as rival parties reiterated their positions in their approach to Libya's crisis. According to Saleh, the LPA was forced

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through by then UNSMIL Chief Bernardino Leon who was biased towards one party. Leon failed in his duty by not acknowledging that the Libyan people had already made a choice in the HoR, Saleh added.

Saleh continued that the future of Libyans could only be decided by the Libyan people, hence, Libyans should talk to Libyans with no outside interference.

Speaking at the summit, Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj said that his UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) were not party to the conflict in Libya rather a contributor to the solution. He expressed his conviction that there was an opportunity for all parties in Libya to contribute to building a democratic civil state, which he added would have separation of powers.

On 14 September, the United Nations Security Council unanimously extended for one year the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The Mission's mandate was to support Libya's political process and key national institutions as well as coordination of international assistance. The extension runs until 15 September, 2018.

REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA

SYRIA

On 7 September, UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura said that the Syrian opposition needs to come to terms with the fact that it had not won the war. “For the opposition, the message was very clear, if they were planning to win the war, facts were proving that was not the case. It was now time for them to win the peace,” said De Mistura to reporters in Geneva. Syria’s opposition has been alleged to be on the fringes in their last remaining Idlib province as pro-government Syrian forces continue to gain ground.



On 15 September, the sixth round of Syrian Peace Talks was held in Astana with the aim of solidifying Syria’s de-escalation zones. Alexander Lavrentyev, a senior Russian negotiator who attended the talks said that Russia, Iran and Turkey were close to a final deal on the zones. Russia, Iran and Turkey earlier signed a Syria de-escalation zone agreement in Astana in May, which aimed to wind down violence across the country. The deal still remains in place irrespective of alleged deficiencies.

On 22 September, the Kurdish regions of northern Syria held the first round of a three-phased election as part of a “supposed” plan to set up a federal system of government. Residents picked leaders for their respective communities across certain regions of Kurdish-held northern Syria. Senior Kurdish politician Hadiya Yousef however, indicated that not all Kurdish-held areas participated in the elections. He mentioned places such as Manbij, which was controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and areas still under the control of the Islamic State as some of the areas abstaining from the elections.

Elections for executive councils for towns and larger areas were planned for 3 November. On 19 January, there would be the final phase of the elections to elect legislative councils as well as a single joint legislative assembly.

With regards to the northern Syria Kurdish elections, the Syrian central government in Damascus is opposed to it, however, on 27 September, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem indicated that

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Damascus was open to discussing greater autonomy for Syria's Kurds. "They want a form of autonomy within the framework of the borders of the Syrian state, this is negotiable and can be the subject for dialogue," Muallem said.

On 25 September, the Turkish Parliament approved a bill that would allow Turkish troops to carry out cross-border operations in Syria. Turkish Members of Parliament had previously allowed the Turkish Military to conduct cross-border operations in Syria for a one-year period from 2 October, 2016, until October 31, 2017. The approved bill extended the mandate by one year and permitted the military to embark on cross-border operations if Turkey was faced with national security threats.

On 28 September, U.N.'s Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura called for eighth-round of Syrian Peace Talks. In remarks delivered to the U.N. Security Council, De Mistura said that this fresh round of talks would address "genuine negotiations on the political future" of Syria. He added that both the opposition and the government should take the time leading up to the talks to create conditions for a "meaningful" discussion and to participate "without preconditions."

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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