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Regional Updates

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CYPRUS

1. The National Unity Party (UBP) and Democratic Party (DP) formed a new Turkish Cypriot government on April 16, with UBP's leader Huseyin Ozgurgun as prime minister. The former government of the UBP and Republican Turkish Party (CTP) collapsed on April 4 after the resignation of five ministers from UBP. According to Cypriot press, the UBP was unsatisfied with the CTP approach towards the signing of the 2016-2018 economic protocol between the northern part of Cyprus and Turkey. This agreement includes cooperation between the two sides on political reforms, infrastructural projects and privatizations in northern part of Cyprus. Ankara's demand for the granting of 26,000 new citizenships to Turkish settlers in the north of the island represents the main reason which hampers the conclusion of the deal. Some Turkish Cypriot politicians see this demand as a threat for ongoing peace talks, while the UBP's officials showed the readiness to fulfill Turkish request. The newly-appointed PM pointed out that his government would support Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akinici in the reunification talks with Greek side.
2. On April 17, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu met with new Turkish Cypriot PM Huseyin Ozgurgun and other high official during his private visit to the northern part of the island.
3. US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland paid an official visit to Cyprus where she met with President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinici on April 20. Nuland reiterated US's genuine support to the Cyprus reunification talks and welcomed the efforts of both sides towards a settlement.
4. On April 24, Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades condemned the crimes committed against the Armenian population, calling them "a disgrace in the history of mankind". In a written statement dedicated to 101st anniversary of this event, Anastasiades expressed solidarity with and sympathy to the Armenian people.
5. According to the Cypriot Greek House, the defense committee was provided the required funds to hire 3,000 professional soldiers for the National Guard in the upcoming years. In February, the Cypriot cabinet announced its decision to reduce mandatory army service to 14 months from the current two years by 2017. The reduction of army service will be overcome by recruiting 3,000 professional soldiers.
6. The new meeting between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders took place on April 25. President Nicos Anastasiades marked meeting as "productive", explaining to the media that the two sides started to take a common stand on a number of issues. Besides the positive developments, Anastasiades noted that some differences remained. Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akinici dismissed the notion that the newly established government of the northern part of Cyprus would hamper the reunifications talks.



EGYPT

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. An Egyptian policeman, convicted of killing a driver in the Cairean neighborhood al-Darb al-Ahmar, received a life sentence.
2. The Doctors Syndicate criticized the Health Ministry's decision to shutdown El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture, citing that the Center's closure was based on illegal bases.
3. In a case of corruption, "the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced former Agriculture Minister Salah Eddin Helal and his deputy Mohie Eddin Qadh to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment."
4. After a vendor was fatally shot by a policeman during a minor dispute, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi met with the Ministry of Interior and said that it is important to legally counter these irresponsible actions. In the meeting he also pushed to regulate police performance through legislative amendments.
5. From mid-April onwards, 100 people were arrested in Egypt during protests over the Egyptian-Saudi agreement declaring the two Red Seas islands, Tiran and Sanafir, within Saudi territorial waters. Protests on April 25, the Sinai Liberation Day, were also broken up by Egyptian riot police, with the aid of tear gas.
6. President el-Sisi inaugurated the Interior Ministry's new headquarters in New Cairo following the transfer of all the departments and administrative offices from the old location in Cairo.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. Minister of Housing Mostafa Madbouly announced that the implementation of the New Administrative Capital, east of Cairo, has begun. The project is implemented with the help of Chinese and other international companies.
2. Oil Minister Tarek el-Molla announced Egypt's agreement with Italian oil and gas company to produce 1 billion cubic feet of gas per day from the Zohr gas field by the end of 2017 and 2.5-3 billion cubic feet by 2019.
3. Egypt continues to face a severe shortage of foreign currency which stood at \$16.5 billion in March. Minister of Finance Amr el-Garhy said that this may improve due to two reasons: first, reforms are on-going; and second, Egypt is considering all options for long-term debt from global financial institutions.
4. Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry held talks with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington. Both officials affirmed the willingness to collaborate in order to bolster economic development in Egypt.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Association for Italian Tourism (AITR) suspended all travel deals to Egypt in support for the investigation into Giulio Regeni's murder.
2. During a three-day visit to Egypt, Mauritanian President Mohamed Abdel Aziz and President el-Sisi signed six agreements and memorandums of understanding in different fields.
3. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) published three documents related Alaa Mubarak showing how his company, Pan World Investments, evaded taxes and hid money in offshore tax havens.
4. Saudi King bin Abdulaziz al-Saud visited Egypt for five days to affirm the strong ties between the two countries. During his visit, King Salman: signed 17 Memorandums of Understanding in different fields, worth \$22 billion with President el-Sisi; signed an agreement to build a bridge over the Red Sea, joining Egypt and Saudi Arabia; agreed with President el-Sisi that the Tiran and Sanafir islands will be part of Saudi territory; visited al-Azhar Mosque to discuss with the Grand Imam the promotion of "moderate Islam"; met with Pope Tawadros II; and addressed the Egyptian Parliament to stress importance of economic cooperation, security, unity, and moderation.
5. On April 5, Italy's foreign ministry announced that "immediate and proportionate" measures would be taken if Cairo does not fully cooperate in the murder of Ph.D. candidate Giulio Regeni. Amid mounting pressure from public opinion and heightened diplomatic tensions, the Egyptian judicial delegation investigating the murder of Regeni visited Rome to present their 2,000-page dossier to the Italian authorities. The meeting resulted in two developments: first, Assistant Public Prosecutor Mustafa Suleiman claimed that Egypt refused Italy's request of sharing approximately one million telephone records from the areas where Regeni resided, went missing, and eventually found dead. He cited the request as contrary to the Egyptian Constitution; and second, Italy's Ambassador to Egypt Maurizio Massari was recalled for an urgent evaluation. Towards the end of April, an official complaint to Egypt's Public Prosecution was filed against Reuters anonymous-sourced story that Regeni was detained prior to his disappearance.
6. Two visits by American representatives took place in April: first, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham visited Cairo to discuss security and stability with President el-Sisi and Defense Minister Sedki Sobhi; and second, President el-Sisi, parliament member Ali Abdel Aal, and Foreign Minister Shoukry hosted a delegation led by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Paul Ryan in Cairo to discuss the political situation, security, and cooperation.
7. Hamas deployed security forces and doubled the security bases along the Gaza border with Egypt to improve border security. The initiative came after a Hamas' delegation's March visit to Cairo.
8. French President Francois Hollande and a group of diplomats and businessmen visited Cairo for two days to bolster political ties as well as secure deals in arms, security, urban planning, renewable energy, culture, and technical training, totaling 21 agreements and €5 billion. El-Sisi and Hollande both inaugurated the Egyptian-French Economic Forum in Cairo and delivered speeches on the importance of continued bilateral cooperation between their countries.
9. Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on Egypt to be part of direct negotiations between the two countries to settle the dispute over the territories of Halyeb and Shalateen. The call was immediately rejected by Egypt's foreign ministry.
10. John Kerry visited Egypt and underlined the United States' commitment to the country's stability and regional role despite differences that might suggest otherwise.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

In the beginning of April, Hamas denied reports that negotiations were taking place with Israel over the Israelis held in Gaza. On the other side, Israel uncovered a Hamas tunnel that crossed from Gaza into Israel – the first to be uncovered since the war in 2014.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas stated that he is ready to cooperate with Israel to stop and monitor “mutual incitement” between the two sides. Moreover, he repeated his call to establish the Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, adding that he wants to hear from the Israeli government that it believes in the two-state solution, as a step towards the solution.

President Abbas’ move to condemn the Israeli settlement expansion at the UN on April 22 was condemned by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who described the move as pushing negotiations further away. In addition, Israel officially rejected the French initiative to convene an international peace conference which was planned for May 30 in Paris. The Prime Minister’s Office repeated its stance, saying “Israel remains steadfast in its position that the best way to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is by direct and bilateral negotiations.”

On April 17, Israeli leader Netanyahu held his cabinet meeting in the Golan Heights vowing that Israel will never return the territory to Syria. Following Israel’s statement about the Golan Heights, UN Security Council President and China’s UN Ambassador Liu Jieyi, told reporters “Council members expressed their deep concern over recent Israeli statements about the Golan, and stressed that the status of the Golan remains unchanged”.

Earlier during the month, Netanyahu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The two leaders discussed coordination between their armies and reached understanding on security matters related to the war in Syria. In the same context, the security echelon in Israel estimated that the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade – an Islamist organization identifying with ISIS in the Southern Golan— has acquired some of the Syrian regime’s chemical weapons, Channel 10 reported.

On the Israel-Turkey reconciliation process, Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on April 8 that “progress” has been made in the talks with Israel, and that diplomatic relations will be restored when the deal is finalized “very soon”. Later on April 11, one of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Spokespersons said that reconciliation with Israel cannot be reached unless the blockade on Gaza is lifted. On the other side, Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure, Energy and Water Resources Yuval Steinitz, said that the deal between the two countries was 90% completed.

SYRIA

1. In the first days of April, Syrian rebels and al-Nusra Front coordinated attacks against the Syrian troops in south Aleppo to retake al-Eis village and a strategic hill. Similarly, the rebels foiled a regime offensive in the southern suburbs of Damascus.
2. Following the capture of Palmyra in March, Syrian troops and their allies captured the ISIS-controlled town of Qaryatain with the aid of Russian airstrikes.
3. A large-scale offensive was launched by several rebel groups, including the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front, in the southwestern parts of the Daraa governorate of Syria. It was subsequently countered by ISIS militants, who seized control of the town of Adwan on April 7.
4. Days before the resumption of the Geneva talks, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said they would be a test whether Syria's president al-Assad can negotiate in good faith. He also reiterated the importance for al-Assad to stand down for the country to move towards a transition. Riad Hijab of the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) voiced a similar concern, claiming that the talks “would be [...] doomed to failure” if they do not cover the fate of al-Assad. On the Russian side, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov affirmed Russia's commitment to the peace talks and President Vladimir Putin said that Russia had reinforced Syrian statehood. On April 6, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin announced that the Western countries on the UN Security Council vetoed the inclusion of the Kurds in the peace process.
5. UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura postponed the second round of talks, which were initially scheduled on April 9, to April 11, to verify the positions of international and regional parties regarding an upcoming political transition.
6. As clashes around Aleppo continued between various belligerents, a reported shelling by Jaysh al-Islam on Kurdish militia used chemical gas. The group subsequently issued a statement that it would investigate and punish those responsible.
7. Ali Akbar Velayati, Senior Adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khameini, said on April 10 that Bashar al-Assad's fate is a ‘red line’ for Tehran and an issue that should ultimately be decided through a vote by the Syrian people.
8. On April 11, a report published by Agence France-Presse on the Russian ground role claimed that “60 different towns and villages and 50 rebel groups have signed truces with the government forces”.
9. Following visits to Amman, Damascus, Tehran, and Moscow, Envoy de Mistura confirmed that his meetings concluded with “interest in the progress of a political transition”. On April 13, despite the continued fighting and breach of the cessation of hostilities, he resumed the peace talks in Geneva, promising the Moscow-Cairo Opposition group to take the steps necessary for holding Intra-Syrian negotiations. In Syria, parliamentary elections—which were denounced by the U.S.,



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Germany, and France—began in al-Assad-controlled areas, reflecting his growing confidence in the civil war.

10. Salim al-Muslet, the HNC's spokesman said that the opposition would be willing to work with members of the current al-Assad government to form a transitional body, on the condition that al-Assad would leave.
11. Speaking on the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim estimated that the process could cost \$150-\$180 billion.
12. The Syrian Government's Chief Negotiator Bashar Jaa'fari was accused by the HNC of not being serious about the negotiations, due to his proposal of amendments to the framework document for the talks. HNC member Abdulhakim Bashar threatened to exit the Geneva peace talks if the Syrian government refuses to compromise. The statements came amid renewed clashes around Aleppo, between regime and rebel forces; and a seizure of villages near the Turkish border by the ISIS.
13. EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini met with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif in Tehran to discuss Iran's role in the Geneva talks, where it relates to facilitating a political settlement in Syria
14. With both sides in the refusing to cede ground in the Geneva peace talks, the negotiations were put on hold by the HNC. Meanwhile in Syria, a market in Idlib was bombed, killing about 40 people. The airstrike was described as a "dangerous escalation" and led to the HNC's leadership departure from Geneva. A day later, HNC coordinator Riad Hijab harshly criticized de Mistura for the faltering truce conditions in Syria and noted that there were signs among belligerents to further escalate the conflict.
15. Following intense airstrikes on Aleppo on April 22, UN Special Envoy de Mistura called on the U.S., Russia, and other world powers to intervene and prevent both the truce and polarized Geneva peace talks from collapsing. Subsequently, reports surfaced on the possibility of a ministerial meeting of the superpowers and regional powers in New York by the end of April.
16. In a visit to Gaziantep, Turkey on April 24, German Chancellor Angela Merkel advocated the idea of safe zones in Syria, where security can be enforced, as a measure of sheltering refugees in their own countries.
17. On a visit to Hanover, Germany on April 25, U.S. President Barack Obama announced the deployment of 250 U.S. special operations forces to train local opposition groups and keep the momentum in the battle against ISIS. On the same day, he held a conference call with leaders of Britain, France, Germany, and Italy to pressure Russia and Iran to enforce the fragile truce and support the Geneva peace talks.
18. Russia Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov was quoted as saying that the Geneva peace talks would resume on May 10. In the meantime, the regime-tolerated Moscow Group said that the current approach would not work, proposing a single, merged opposition. and de Mistura briefed major powers on the situation in Syria.

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19. After briefing major powers on the situation in Syria, de Mistura urged U.S. and Russia to intervene “at the highest level” to prevent the “barely alive” truce from collapsing.
20. In an effort to prevent the complete collapse of the two-month cessation of hostilities, a truce was negotiated for the suburbs of Damascus. However, airstrikes on Aleppo—Syria’s largest city—intensified towards the end of the month with over 260 airstrikes in 8 days, as al-Assad sought to tighten his grip on the city. Several medical facilities were reportedly bombed and hundreds of civilians killed.

SOUTH CAUCASUS: NAGORNO-KARABAKH

An armed conflict broke out on April 1 in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh between Azeri troops and Armenian-backed militias from Nagorno-Karabakh. The warring parties used heavy artillery, tanks and aircrafts. Furthermore, both sides reported casualties including civilians on the first days of the clashes. According to Azerbaijan's defense ministry, the Azeri army reacted after Armenian-backed forces started to fire mortars and large-caliber artillery shells across the Karabakh frontline. Armenian officials and representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh discredited such claims, stating that Azerbaijan attempted to restore its control over Nagorno-Karabakh. The international community urged an immediate cessation of hostilities. The OSCE Minsk group which is monitoring the Nagorno-Karabakh truce called on all sides in the conflict to avoid future violence.



At the meeting in Moscow on April 5, the chiefs of the General Staff of Azerbaijan and Armenia reached a ceasefire agreement. The first unilateral ceasefire was declared on April 3. Azerbaijan's defence ministry announced that they are "suspending a counter-offensive and response on the territories occupied in Armenia". Nevertheless, the Armenian side expressed great doubts about this initiative, stating that Azerbaijan is not ready to stop with the offensive operations against Nagorno-Karabakh forces.

The Nagorno-Karabakh clashes led to fresh disagreement between Turkey and Russia. On April 3, Turkish President Recep Tayip Erdogan pledged Turkish support for Azerbaijan, he said "we pray our Azerbaijani brothers will prevail in these clashes with the least casualties". Moreover, Erdogan rejected Russian claims on Turkish support to Azerbaijan and accused Moscow of advocating just Armenian interests in Nagorno-Karabakh. On April 22, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticized statements of Turkish officials on Nagorno-Karabakh following the meeting with his Armenian counterpart, Eduard Nalbandian, in Yerevan. Lavrov marked Turkish statements as they "were not appeals for peace but for war".

WESTERN BALKANS

1. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

On April 9, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia i Hercegowina (BiH) Denis Zvizdic met in Ankara with the speaker of the Parliament of Turkey Ismail Kahraman. During the meeting it was pointed out that the relations between the two countries are good and friendly, Zvizdic especially commended Turkish efforts in the strengthening of regional cooperation among the Balkans states. On April 14, the European Parliament adopted a new resolution on BiH



which encourages the country's EU accession process. Furthermore, the resolution calls for refraining from nationalist rhetoric, threats with referendums and the collapse of the common institutions of BiH. On April 22, CIA Director John Brennan arrived in Sarajevo on an unannounced visit for a series of counter-terrorism meetings with Bosnian security officials. The main reason of Brennan's visit is the on-going concern among CIA officials that ISIL aims to establish a front in southeastern Europe.

2. Kosovo:

The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between Kosovo and the EU came into force on April 1. Hashim Tachi was inaugurated on April 7 as Kosovo's President, the swearing-in ceremony was boycotted by opposition. The Prime Minister of Kosovo, Isa Mustafa held a meeting in Pristina with his Albanian counterpart Edi Rama on April 7, they talked about several topics including the implementation of the bilateral agreements which were signed last year. Following the meeting, Rama noted that the appointment of Hashim Tachi as Kosovo's president represents a positive development for the country. The deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, Numan Kurtulmush confirmed that Turkey will continue to lobby for new recognitions of the Kosovo independence, and to support Kosovan attempts to join international organizations. Kurtulmush stated this during his official visit to Kosovo on the occasion of 23 April, Day of the Turkish Minority in Kosovo. Regarding the third anniversary of the signing of the agreement for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia on April 19, Kosovo President Hashim Tachi highlighted the importance of this day for Kosovo and region and emphasize, "dialogue, normalization and reconciliation between the countries [as] the only alternative".

3. FYR MACEDONIA:

Anti-government protests started on April 13 in Skoplje and other Macedonian towns due to President Gjorgje Ivanov's decision to stop criminal investigations against top politicians involved in the illegal wiretapping. The demonstrators demanded a postponement of the June 5 elections, emphasizing that the government did not provide the conditions for free and fair polls. The planned meeting in Vienna between Macedonian political leaders and EU mediators on solving the Macedonian political crisis was canceled. On April 21, senior EU officials stated that the mediations talks "could not take place." On

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April 25, a new round of talks on confidence-building measures was held between Greece and Macedonia in Skoplje. The topics that were discussed included bilateral dialogue on issues related to energy, migration, economy, health care, culture, public administration, education and civil protection. Following another meeting of regional foreign ministers organized in Greece on April 24, Macedonian FM Nikola Poposki said that Macedonia probably would not receive an invitation to join NATO at the upcoming Warsaw Summit, due to Athens' objections.

4. MONTENEGRO:

The Montenegrin candidate for the position of the UN Secretary-General, Igor Luksic, presented his programme to the UN General Assembly on April 13. General Secretary of NATO Jens Stoltenberg said that Montenegro made significant progress in the fight against organized crime and corruption. In an interview with one Montenegrin daily on April 18, Stoltenberg said that a Protocol for accession of Montenegro to NATO will be signed in Brussels during the ministers' meeting on 19th and 20th of May.

5. SERBIA:

On April 7, the European Commission postponed Serbia's opening of EU accession chapters 23 and 24 after Croatia did not give its consent. According to Croatian officials, for opening new chapters, Belgrade has to: improve the treatment of Croat minority in Serbia; realize full cooperation with the Hague war crimes tribunal; and abolish the Serbian law on universal jurisdiction for war crimes committed during the 1990s conflicts in former Yugoslavia. On April 12, following several months of uncertainty, the Serbian government formally backed Vuk Jeremic's candidacy for the position of UN Secretary-General. Vuk Jeremic is Serbia's former foreign minister (2007-2012) and former president of the United Nations General Assembly (2012-2013). On April 14, Vuk Jeremic presented at the UN headquarters a platform aiming to improve UN's organization and international reputation in the upcoming period. The platform includes 5 units: sustainable development, climate change, peacekeeping operations, human rights and humanitarian aid, and a reform of the UN Secretariat. On April 24, Serbian PM Aleksandar Vucic claimed victory in a snap general election, where his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won 48.24 of the votes. Vucic pointed out that this result strongly supports democracy in Serbia, the government's diplomatic efforts and the European path of the country.

RUSSIA

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

1. On April 6, Lower House Speaker Sergey Naryshkin hosted Austrian President Heinz Fischer in Moscow. During the meeting, Naryshkin expressed hope that Austria will keep its friendly and open policy towards Russia. The Austrian president stated that he would continue to press for the cancelation of anti-Russian sanctions imposed by the EU.
2. Russia's Foreign Ministry's official spokeswoman Maria Zakharova called on Turkey to reject the military methods of resolving the Kurdish question. On April 6, Zakharova expressed great concern over the situation in Turkey's south-eastern provinces where Turkish security forces are conducting counter-insurgency operations against the PKK fighters.
3. According to US military sources, Russian jets made several "aggressive" passes near a US guided missile destroyer on April 13. The US ship was located in international waters, some 70 miles from Kaliningrad.
4. The deputy head of the Upper House committee for defense and security Frants Klintsevich said on April 14 that Russia should ban tourist travel to Turkey, but he pointed out that this should just be a temporary measure. Furthermore, he emphasized that visits to Turkey for family or business reasons must be allowed.
5. On April 14, during the annual televised question and answer session, president Vladimir Putin said that Kiev is hampering the implementation of the Minsk peace agreements. Putin called on Western leaders to take more active measures to force Kiev to cooperate with Moscow on settling the conflict in eastern Ukraine.
6. On April 21, NATO and Russian representatives met in Brussels for the first time since the Alliance suspended all cooperation with the Russian authorities in 2014. The main topics on the agenda was the crisis in Ukraine, as well as military relation between Russia and NATO members, Syria and Afghanistan. Following the meeting, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said Moscow is "against an arms race" as NATO bolsters its eastern flank. He also pointed out Russian determination to take the appropriate countermeasures. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said after the meeting that NATO and Russia "have profound and persistent disagreements and today's meeting did not change it". According to Stoltenberg, mutual cooperation will resume after Russia once again respects international law.
7. On April 22, Russia signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change at the United Nations' headquarters. The Paris Agreement is to replace the Kyoto Protocol on climate change after 2020.
8. In a review published on April 26 on Russia's foreign policy activities in 2015, the Russian foreign ministry stated that under the current circumstances, it is not likely to normalize relations with Turkey. According to the Russian ministry, Turkish and Russian authorities hold divergent views on



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a number of issues of the bilateral agenda and international problems.

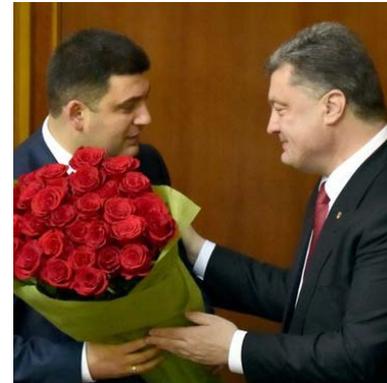
9. On April 26, The Supreme Court of the Crimean Republic banned the “Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People” as an extremist group and forbid its activities on the territory of the Russian Federation.
10. On April 27, the chief of Russia’s General Staff Valery Gerasimov said that Turkey continued supplying arms to terrorists in Syria, which negatively affects the reconciliation process. Besides this, Gerasimov stated that wounded terrorists undergo treatment and rehabilitation at Turkish hospitals.
11. The resolution calling on the French government not to extend the EU-imposed sanctions against Russia was supported by French MP on April 28. The 101 of 577 deputies of the National Assembly took part in the vote and among them 55 voted in favor of the resolution, which is non-binding.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

1. A National Guard will be established under the auspices of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs after President Vladimir Putin’s decision dated April 5. The guard will fight terrorism, organized crime, and will comprise existing Interior Ministry troops.
2. Russia’s Constitutional Court has decided not to fulfill a demand from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) related with the Russian law on the prisoners’ voting rights for the term of their jail time.
3. In an interview with Chinese, Japanese and Mongolian mass media on April 12, Russian FM Sergey Lavrov confirmed Russia’s intention to protect its eastern-most territories including the Kuril Islands. It means that Russia will continue to develop its military infrastructure in the east border regions.
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UKRAINE

1. The Dutch Electoral Council announced the official results of the non-binding referendum on the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement on April 12. According to the results, the turnout was 32.28%, with 61% of voters opposing the ratification and 38.21% voting for it. Commenting on the referendum results, the Dutch PM Mark Rutte said that it will take a few months before finding a solution to the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande pointed out that they will continue to back Ukraine's EU path, despite the results of the Dutch referendum.



2. The bill on extending the moratorium on the repayment of a 3 billion debt to Russia for an indefinite period was adopted by Ukrainian MP on April 12. The debt was made when Viktor Yanukovich was the head of the state, he signed an agreement with Moscow in 2013 on a \$15 billion loan to Kiev. Under the deal, bonds worth \$3 bln were listed on the Irish Stock Exchange and acquired by Russia using the funds from its National Welfare Fund.
3. On April 14, Ukrainian MP elected a new government voting for the Cabinet of Ministers, proposed by president Petro Poroshenko and PM Volodymyr Groysman. Before the MP's voting, Groysman replaced Arseniy Yatsenyuk on the PM's position, who resigned on April 10.
4. On April 20, The European Commission officially proposed visa liberalization for Ukraine after Kiev has met all the requirements needed for the visa-free regime.
5. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker confirmed to President Petro Poroshenko that "the EU keeps firmly advocating for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty", during a telephone conversation on April 20. Besides, Juncker said that EU will not lift sanctions against Russia until full implementation of Minsk II.
6. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a bill on April 20 which bans all movies produced in Russia after 1991 if they "glorify the work of government bodies" of Russia. Previously, Ukraine banned Russian movies produced after 1 January 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014.
7. On April 27, Germany and France rejected President Petro Poroshenko's proposal to send armed OSCE mission to eastern Ukraine. According to Martin Schaefer, a spokesman for the German Foreign Minister civil status of the observers was agreed upon by all 57 OSCE members and it signifies a necessary compromise between all sides of the conflict.
8. During a UN Security Council open meeting on April 29, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tayd-Brook Zerihoun reported that 9,300 people have been killed in Donbas since the beginning of the conflict.

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