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Regional Updates

December 2014 | № 3



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CYPRUS

BY DUYGU ALPAN

The last month of 2014 witnessed developments in Cyprus predominantly related to the hydrocarbon reserves offshore the island both in the local and regional levels. In the beginning of the month, representatives of Greece, the Greek Cypriot side and Israel held talks with the EU officials to fund a pipeline project bringing the natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, which needs diversification of its energy supplies than the Russia-dominated ones. However, according to some views, the project would be financially challenging due to foreseen technical difficulties.



On December 6, the Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, made a visit to Greece amid tensions over hydrocarbon reserves offshore Cyprus. During the two-day visit, the leaders expressed their willingness for the peace talks on the island to resume very shortly in spite of the disagreement on key issues between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Also, without any mention of Cyprus, the Greek and Turkish leaders committed to further strengthen the cooperation between Turkey and Greece in the field of energy.

The Greek Cypriot officials announced that the preliminary drilling in the Onasagoras in Block 9, in the Eastern Mediterranean came up with the result that no exploitable gas reserves were found in the area. Referring to the similar cases like Norway and Israel, where the initial findings on energy resources were discouraging, the Greek Cypriot Leader, Nikos Anastasiades, said that the results should not cause disappointment. Yet the Greek Cypriots underlined that they will focus on the other important field of Aphrodite in Block 12.

The UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide visited the island to meet with the chief negotiators of the respective Cypriot communities, Ergun Olgun and Andreas Mavroyiannis. Eide's visit to Cyprus was a routine one in order to evaluate the latest state of affairs on the island not only with the officials, but also with civil society representatives of the two communities.

The NAVTEX, issued by Turkey in October 2014, and followed by the Greek Cypriots' withdrawal from the peace talks, expired on 30 December. Hence, the next move of the Turkish research vessel Barbaros, which is currently anchored off Famagusta port, is an issue of concern since it could determine the course of the negotiations. However, it remains uncertain whether the Greek Cypriot side will return to the negotiating table without any other preconditions should Turkey permanently terminate its seismic research in the disputed maritime zone.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

[Dec. 1, 2014 - Israel sees 'stars aligned' for new gas pipeline to Europe](#)

[Dec. 3, 2014 - Greece, Cyprus and Israel to explain Med pipeline vision to EU](#)

[Dec. 3, 2014 - Proje için Komisyonun Katkısı İstenecek](#)

[Dec. 5, 2014 - A Subsea Mediterranean Pipeline Does Not Look Viable](#)

[Dec. 6, 2014 - Turkey declares will for solution](#)

[Dec. 7, 2014 - Kıbrıs'ta Müzakereler Başlamalı](#)

[Dec. 7, 2014 - Turkey, Greece cement ties, seek ways to resume peace talks](#)

[Dec. 8, 2014 - Turkey 'welcomes pipelines passing through its soil'](#)

[Dec. 13, 2014 - Nicosia Against Turkish Foreign Minister Visiting 'North and South'](#)

[Dec. 16, 2014 - Special Advisor Back for Talks Meetings](#)

[Dec. 17, 2014 - Olgun Eide'yle Görüştü](#)

[Dec. 18, 2014 - IMF Withholds Bailout Money for Cyprus](#)

[Dec. 19, 2014 - Doğalgaza İlgi Azalıyor](#)

[Dec. 22, 2014 - Cyprus: Greece, Russia and Israel, building strategic bridges with potential enemies](#)

[Dec. 23, 2014 - Lower gas estimates should not be a cause for disappointment](#)

[Dec. 30, 2014 - Barbaros being monitored as NAVTEX expires](#)

[Dec. 30, 2014 - Yeni Kriz Kapıda](#)

EGYPT

BY OMAR SHEIRA

The Egyptian military announced its plans to start doubling the 500-meter wide buffer zone at Sinai's Rafah Border during the first week of January 2015. Meanwhile, attacks by militant groups continued, one notably striking a pipeline that carries gas to Jordan. The Egyptian army's campaign against radical militants also continued through consistent raids on militant hotbeds in northern Sinai. Egyptian army spokesman Brigadier General Mohamed Samir announced the destruction of scores of tunnels, vehicles, and headquarters; dismantling of improvised explosive devices and roadside bombs; arrests of over 370 militant suspects; and a steady decline in the number of militants in the peninsula, in comparison with 2013. However, security expert General Hussein Hamouda emphasized the prevalence of security challenges and the importance of addressing them through the improvement of social and economic security.



In a series of blows to the banned Muslim Brotherhood, a number of pro-revolution parties and groups refused to coordinate with the Brotherhood on any of their activities. In addition, the Brotherhood-led National Alliance to Support Legitimacy (NASL) lost the support of the Salafist Front in December.¹ President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi also stressed the 'impossibility' of the Brotherhood's participation in the next Parliament, citing their lack of popular support among the Egyptian public. This was followed by Ayman Nour's call for national reconciliation among Egyptian civil parties and movements was, as other initiatives, rejected by most political powers and parties.

A series of judicial and legal updates took place in December. In judicial developments, the Giza criminal court sentenced 188 defendants to death for killing 11 police officers and two civilians. Three Egyptian courts also acquitted 191 Brotherhood members, while serving 40 others 15-year prison sentences. Pertaining to the acquittal of former president Hosni Mubarak of murder and corruption, Prosecutor General Hisham Barakat challenged the court ruling. This was supported by the launch of a petition by 6 political parties of the Democratic Trend Alliance (DTA), demanding Mubarak's retrial. In legal developments, criminal procedures were amended to extend the reach of laws on bribery and corruption; a new law was drafted prohibiting government employees from discussing politics at the workplace; the parliament constituencies law was ratified by President el-Sisi, paving the way for parliamentary elections in 2015; and, a set of laws to improve investment, industry, and mining were passed to attract foreign investment in Egypt.

In regional and international affairs, there were six main developments. First, a regional conference held by Al-Azhar University emphasized the importance of educating Arab youth, to clarify any

¹ The NASL also lost the support of Al-Watan Salafist party in September 2014.

misperceptions on Islam. Second, el-Sisi and Saudi intelligence chief Prince Khaled bin Bandar held talks in Cairo to discuss regional developments and improve their ties against regional threats. Similarly, Iranian representative, Ahmad Moballeghi spoke of increased cooperation between Cairo and Tehran to confront regional threats and violence in the forthcoming period. Third, travel restrictions were imposed for Turkey and Libya to control jihadist-inspired travel. Fourth, Egypt and China upgraded their relations to a strategic partnership with improved political, economic, military, cultural, and technological cooperation. Fifth, el-Sisi met with a Qatari envoy and will meet with Emir Sheikh Tamim Al Thani as a part of reconciliation efforts facilitated by Saudi Arabia. Finally, Cairo expressed its diplomatic support to provide a venue for mediation between notable figures in the Syrian and Libyan crises.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

[Dec. 2, 2014 - General Prosecutor challenges Mubarak's innocence](#)

[Dec. 2, 2014 - 188 death sentences in Egypt's latest mass capital punishment verdict](#)

[Dec. 3, 2014 - Egypt's Brotherhood calls for unity with revolution groups](#)

[Dec. 3, 2014 - Mixed reports emerge on corruption in Egypt](#)

[Dec. 4, 2014 - New law issued to prohibit bribery in the republic](#)

[Dec. 4, 2014 - Egypt's Al-Azhar sponsors conference to educate 'brainwashed' Arab militants](#)

[Dec. 4, 2014 - Egypt's President Sisi meets Saudi intelligence chief Bandar](#)

[Dec. 5, 2014 - Salafist Front's letter of withdrawal from the National Alliance to Support Legitimacy](#)

[Dec. 5, 2014 - Political groups launch petition to try Mubarak and aides - statement](#)

[Dec. 5, 2014 - New law forbids government employees to talk politics at work](#)

[Dec. 5, 2014 - Increased Iranian-Egyptian anti-terror cooperation needed: Iranian cleric](#)

[Dec. 8, 2014 - Political movements and parties reject Ayman Nour's call for reconciliation](#)

[Dec. 10, 2014 - Egypt imposes restrictions on male citizens traveling to Turkey, Libya](#)

[Dec. 11, 2014 - Governorate of Sinai, ISIS entrance to Egypt in 2015](#)

[Dec. 11, 2014 - Egypt to pass mining and industrial land laws next week](#)

[Dec. 18, 2014 - Egypt courts acquit 191 'Brotherhood' members, 40 sentenced to jail](#)

[Dec. 23, 2014 - China, Egypt Upgrade Relations to Strategic Partnership](#)

[Dec. 27, 2014 - Egypt's Sisi ratifies electoral constituencies law](#)

[Dec. 27, 2014 - Nearly 300 people arrested in Sinai military raids](#)

[Dec. 29, 2014 - High Security measures at Ahmed Hamdi tunnel as 'terrorists' flee Sinai](#)

[Dec. 30, 2014 - El-Sisi stresses impossibility of Muslim Brotherhood participation in next Parliament](#)

[Dec. 30, 2014 - Egypt, Qatar plan reconciliation summit to end Mursi ouster row](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - The pledge of allegiance to ISIS ends with the dissipation of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - Egypt to begin expanding Gaza buffer zone next week](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - Egypt cautiously steps into Syria and Libya morass](#)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

BY MUHAMMED AMMASH

As the prospect of Palestinian statehood gained ground in several countries outside the Middle East, Arab League foreign ministers agreed in a meeting held in Cairo on 29 November 2014 to formally present a draft resolution¹ to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The draft resolution, submitted by Jordan on December 17, suggests binding Israel to withdraw completely from Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 by the end of 2017, calls for East Jerusalem to be the capital of Palestine, and affirms to attain a peaceful solution no later than 12 months after the adoption of the resolution. Nonetheless, the UNSC rejected the bid on the ground that it could not reach the required minimum 9 votes to adopt a resolution.



The US and Australia voted against the resolution; Jordan, China, France, Russia, Luxembourg, Chad, Chile, and Argentina voted in favor; and the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Nigeria, South Korea, and Rwanda abstained from the vote. US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power stated that they “voted against the resolution not because (they) are comfortable with the status quo,” but “because (...) peace must come from hard compromises that occur at the negotiating table.”

Following the failed UN bid, Palestinian Authority seeks joining the International Criminal Court (ICC). In this regard, President Abbas signed a set of agreements that include the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the ICC. Israeli PM Netanyahu vowed to take retaliatory steps after Abbas’ move, stating that the Palestinian Authority itself should fear the ICC.

In Palestine, the national consensus government established and declared by Hamas and Fatah last summer ended its interim term. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri supported the continuance of dialogue. As with Hamas, the General Court of the European Union in Luxembourg decided to annul the Council measures² maintaining Hamas on the European list of terrorist organizations but to temporarily maintain the existing measures. Meanwhile in Egypt, a Court of Urgent Matters is scheduled to rule on the status of Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades--the military wing of Hamas--on January 17.

In Israel, after Netanyahu’s dismissal of two ministers, the Parliament voted to dissolve and moved forward for early general elections in 17 March 2015. Political parties launched their election campaigns while some of them started seeking unity alliances. In this context, Israeli Labor Party and

¹ Full text of Draft Resolution (17 December 2014).

² PRESS RELEASE No 178/14 -- Judgment in Case T-400/10 Hamas v Council, General Court of the European Union, Luxembourg (17 December 2014)

Hatnua Party agreed a “model of joint leadership”. On the other hand, forming a unity around one electoral list is on the agenda of Israeli Arab parties too.

Regarding Turkey, Israel demanded NATO to take effective steps against Turkey for allowing Hamas to operate from Istanbul. Approximately one month after Israel’s call to NATO, Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal visited Turkey, attended the AKP’s annual congress, and applauded the country for supporting the Palestinian cause.

In security affairs, violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians continued throughout the month. The death of Palestinian Authority Minister Ziad Abu Ein shortly after clashes with Israeli troops during a protest in the West Bank added to the tension.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

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[Nov. 26, 2014 - Anger in Israel: terror headquarters operate in Turkey \(in Hebrew\)](#)

[Nov. 29, 2014 - Arabs to push for UN Security Council resolution on Palestinian state](#)

[Dec. 2, 2014 - Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu seeks early general election](#)

[Dec. 3, 2014 - Israeli politicians vote to dissolve the Knesset](#)

[Dec. 5, 2014 - Rivlin backtracks on Armenian genocide recognition](#)

[Dec. 10, 2014 - Palestinian minister dies after reportedly struck by Israeli troops](#)

[Dec. 11, 2014 - Herzog, Livni to unite against ‘radical right’](#)

[Dec. 15, 2014 - IDF soldiers fire tear gas at West Bank school \(in Hebrew\)](#)

[Dec. 15, 2014 - Court to rule on banning Qassam Brigades in January](#)

[Dec. 15, 2014 - Egyptian court weighs labeling Hamas military wing as terror organization](#)

[Dec. 16, 2014 - A united Israeli-Arab party could force Netanyahu out](#)

[Dec. 16, 2014 - Socialist International Urges Unconditional Recognition of Palestine](#)

[Dec. 17, 2014 - EU court takes Hamas off terrorist organisations list](#)

[Dec. 18, 2014 - Palestinians open door to negotiation after submitting draft UN resolution](#)

[Dec. 22, 2014 - Israel issues demolition orders to East Jerusalem homes](#)

[Dec. 22, 2014 - Two police officers stabbed in Jerusalem’s Old City](#)

[Dec. 24, 2014 - Israel attacks Gaza after Palestinian sniper fire](#)

[Dec. 27, 2014 - Hamas chief lauds Turkey as ‘source of power’ for Muslims](#)

[Dec. 28, 2014 - Hamas calls for withdrawal of draft resolution “recognizing Palestinian state” from the Security Council \(in Arabic\)](#)

[Dec. 28, 2014 - Europe, US to offer Israel, Palestine economic benefits](#)

[Dec. 29, 2014 - IDF clashes with rock throwers at Tapuah junction, 1 Palestinian killed](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - Abbas seeks to join ICC following failed Palestinian UN bid](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - UNSC rejects resolution on Palestinian state](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - Israel summons French ambassador over Paris’ support of Palestinian UN bid](#)

[Dec. 31, 2014 - FM Liberman on defeat of Palestinian draft resolution](#)



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