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Regional Updates

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CYPRUS

BY DUYGU ALPAN

Earlier this month, the newly elected Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made his first foreign visit to the Greek Cypriot side where he indicated his government's support for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with a single international identity, and peace negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations. Tsipras highlighted the need for substantive efforts to resolve the 40-year conflict on the island. During his visit, he also met with the representatives of Greek and Turkish civil society organizations, remarking that he is the first Greek Prime Minister addressing the Turkish Cypriots.



On February 5, the Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades stated that, “Cyprus and its citizens deserve much more than a divided country” speaking to the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish media during a press conference in Nicosia. He also suggested to share a common vision “to make Cyprus a modern European state” and underlined that, “there is only one plan, solving the Cyprus problem and reunifying Cyprus, on the basis of all that has been agreed as a compromise”.

The Greek Cypriot side and Egypt signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Cairo on February 16 in order to facilitate cooperation in the field of oil and gas. The MoU allows utilizing gas infrastructure in Egypt for mutual benefits of the Greek Cypriots and Egyptians. Additionally, the Greek Cypriots' Cyprus Hydrocarbons Company (CHC) and the Egyptian Gas Holding Company (EGAS) were authorized to study the technical solutions to transport gas via a direct marine pipeline from the Aphrodite field to Egypt.

On February 25, the Greek Cypriot side and Russian Federation signed a number of agreements, which included a deal on military cooperation, allowing the Russian navy to enter ports in the Greek Cypriot side. Notably, the agreement came while Russia-EU relations remain tense over the Ukrainian crises. Russia's President Vladimir Putin said this deal will mostly be used in international anti-terrorism and piracy efforts, and added, “I don't think it should cause worries anywhere”. During his two-days visit to Russia, Anastasiades remarked criticism on the European Union's sanctions against Moscow noting, “whatever sanctions are introduced against Russia, they impact on other countries, members of the EU, which include my motherland, that in a lot of ways depends on Russia”.

Among extensive media coverage on the missing persons throughout the month, it was claimed by a Greek Cypriot newspaper that a mass grave was found in Paralimni town in the Greek Cypriot side, where, according to the news, 13 Turkish Cypriots are buried.

The European Parliament passed a resolution on February 12 on mass graves of the missing persons of Ashia at Ornithi village in the Turkish Cypriot side of the island. The resolution condemned Turkish authorities and military, and the local Turkish Cypriot authorities for their “continued failure [...] to fully cooperate with the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP)”. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot officials reflected the Parliament’s decision as “partial and deceptive”.

The CMP delivered a statement on February 18 over the allegations that the remains it returned to a Greek Cypriot family were misidentified. The Committee, which clarified technical aspects of its analyses, affirmed that it identified the right person.

The representative of the Turkish Cypriots, Özdil Nami, noted during an interview that the international community is waiting for the results of the elections to be held on April 19 concerning the resumption of the negotiations. He also stated “there is no choice other than the negotiations”.

As the electoral process has started in the Turkish Cypriot side, the upcoming months may be of significance for the direction of official negotiations.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

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[Feb. 2, 2015 - Tsipras begins Cyprus visit, stalled UN talks and economy on agenda](#)

[Feb. 3, 2015 - Türkiye hükümetine bir mesaj veriyorum](#)

[Feb. 3, 2015 - ‘The 40 year wait must end’](#)

[Feb. 6, 2015 - International lenders say no deal yet to restart Cyprus aid](#)

[Feb. 6, 2015 - Kıbrıslı Türklere ait toplu Mezar Bulundu](#)

[Feb. 6, 2015 – Greek Cypriot leader calls for common Cyprus future](#)

[Feb. 6, 2015 - Cypriots deserve more than a divided country, says President](#)

[Feb. 9, 2015 - Cyprus denies ‘Russia deal on military bases’](#)

[Feb. 10, 2015 - Building bridges with cheese in divided Cyprus](#)

[Feb. 12, 2015 - EP resolution on Mass graves of the missing persons in Cyprus](#)

[Feb. 13, 2015 - Family shocked over remains mix-up](#)

[Feb. 17, 2015 - Energy: Cyprus and Egypt sign offshore gas and pipeline MoU](#)

[Feb. 18, 2015 - Statement delivered by the 3 CMP Members at Press Conference](#)

[Feb. 18, 2015 - Kıbrıs'taki Kayıp Şahıslar Komitesi](#)

[Feb. 18, 2015 - CMP in Cyprus: Greek-Cypriot Missing from the 1974 Turkish Invasion Identified](#)

[Feb. 20, 2015 - Kayıp Şahıslar Komitesi'nin Açıklaması Tepkilere Neden Oldu](#)

[Feb. 25, 2015 - Cyprus Signs Deal to Let Russian Navy Ships Stop at its Ports](#)

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[Feb. 26, 2015 – Rum-Rus ilişkilerinde önemli gelişme](#)

EGYPT

BY OMAR SHEIRA

In the days following the coordinated January 29 attacks by Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis (ABM), President Abdelfattah el-Sisi announced a series of responses. After meeting with the county's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), he established a new counter-terrorism unit in East Suez, unifying the Second and Third Field Armies under the command of Lieutenant-General Osama Roshdy Askar. El-Sisi also highlighted the importance of an economic plan and accordingly pledged \$1.7 billion for the development of the Sinai Peninsula. Finally, he assured leaders of Egypt's political parties that the Sinai attacks will have no impact on the upcoming parliamentary elections, which were scheduled for March.



The Egyptian armed forces continued military operations against ABM, Afnan Misr, and other extremist militants in Sinai. The operations included uncovering and destroying the longest smuggling tunnel between Sinai and Gaza, stretching 2.5 kilometers; unfolding potential attacks through raids and arrests; and finally, advancing the second phase of the Gaza Buffer Zone, to clear 500 meters where 1,220 houses are marked for demolition¹. The total amount of compensation paid out to the relocated families in both phases has reached approximately \$47.3 million.

Throughout the month, there were also multiple bombing attempts on shops, restaurants, offices, metros, checkpoints, vehicles, military personnel, and the airport, mainly in Cairo, but also in Alexandria, Qaliubiya, Suez, and Port Said. Some of the bombing attempts succeeded and others were uncovered and defused prior to detonation. On February 8, a riot outside of a football stadium resulted in a stampede and clashes between Zamalek fans and security forces, killing a total of 25 people.

In judicial and legal developments, Al-Jazeera's journalists were all released in February. Peter Greste was unconditionally deported, and Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed were released on bail, with a condition of retrial, which was adjourned after the first session to March 8. On February 11, Qasr al-Nil prosecution announced that activist Shaimaa al-Sabbagh's killer was taken into custody. A series of other rulings were also issued by Egypt's courts, sentencing 183 Muslim Brotherhood supporters to death; Ahmed Douma and 230 other activists to life in prison; blogger Alaa Abdelfattah to five years in prison; and 16 Muslim Brotherhood leaders to life in prison. Contrastingly, Mubarak-era ministers Habib el-Adly and Ahmed Nazif, were acquitted of corruption charges. Finally, the Supreme Court ruled part of an election law unconstitutional on March 1, causing the High Elections Committee to reschedule the parliamentary elections. This came despite the formed alliance among Al-Wafd, Conference, Ghad, and Tagamoia parties and the candidates' preparation for registration.

¹The total buffer zone is planned to extend 5 kilometers from Egypt's Gaza border.

In regional and international affairs, there were nine key developments. First, Defense Minister Sedki Sobhy met with Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to discuss the security environment in the Middle Eastern and North African region. Second, el-Sisi, and other international leaders, condemned the killing of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh, who was captured and burned alive by the extremist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Third, Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb stressed that Egypt may use force in Yemen if the Bab el-Mandeb strait is threatened by the Houthis. Fourth, Egypt finalized a €5.2 billion deal with France, to buy 24 Rafale fighter jets, a multi-mission naval frigate, and air-to-air missiles. Fifth, Russian President Vladimir Putin officially visited Egypt and established a strategic partnership on various fronts including military, agriculture, energy, nuclear, space development industries. Sixth, following the leaked audio recordings, el-Sisi contacted Gulf Arab state leaders to reassure them of strong Egyptian-Gulf ties; a sentiment that was reciprocated. Seventh, ISIS beheaded 21 Egyptian Copts in Libya. In response, the Egyptian government coordinated an immediate series of airstrikes with the Libyan air force and helped facilitate the safe return of several thousands of Egyptians from Libya. Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry also flew to New York for an emergency meeting at the UN with permanent delegates to rally support—unsuccessfully—for an intervention in Libya. Eighth, Al-Azhar University’s Grand Imam, Ahmed el-Tayeb, attended a terrorism summit in Mecca and called for an overhaul and revision of Islamic education in order to curb the spread extremist militant thought. Ninth, Hamas was declared a Terrorist organization by an Egyptian court due to its presumed role in “committed acts of sabotage, assassinations and the killing of innocent civilians and members of the armed forces and police in Egypt”.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

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- [Feb. 1, 2015 - Sisi pledges billions to develop Sinai after recent attacks](#)
- [Feb. 2, 2015 - Egypt court sentences 183 Muslim Brotherhood supporters to death](#)
- [Feb. 3, 2015 - Hagel Discusses Security, Terrorism with Egyptian Counterpart](#)
- [Feb. 4, 2015 - Egypt court: Activist Ahmed Douma among 230 sentenced to life in prison](#)
- [Feb. 4, 2015 - Sisi condemns brutal death of Jordanian pilot by Islamic State](#)
- [Feb. 4, 2015 - Gulf States to deposit \\$10 bn in Egypt before conference](#)
- [Feb. 8, 2015 - 25 people killed in Egyptian soccer match riot](#)
- [Feb. 9, 2015 - King Salman hails strong Saudi, Egypt ties](#)
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- [Feb. 16, 2015 - Egypt bombs Islamic State targets in Libya after 21 Egyptians beheaded](#)
- [Feb. 21, 2015 - EGP 93m disbursed for Sinai’s ‘second phase’ families](#)
- [Feb. 22, 2015 - Steel tycoon Ahmed Ezz barred from running in parliamentary election](#)
- [Feb. 23, 2015 - Mohamed Fahmy trial postponed](#)
- [Feb. 24, 2015 - Court acquits Al-Adly and Nazif of profiteering](#)
- [Feb. 28, 2015 - Egypt court gives life sentences to top Muslim Brotherhood leaders](#)
- [Feb. 28, 2015 - 3.2 billion euros of Egypt-French arms deal financed by loan from Paris: Sisi](#)
- [Feb. 28, 2015 - Egypt Court Declares Hamas A ‘Terrorist Organization’](#)
- [Mar. 1, 2015 - Egypt Court Rules Parliamentary Elections Law Unconstitutional](#)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

BY MUHAMMED AMMASH

The major topics that have been occupying Israel's agenda were the upcoming general elections and the relations with the US. PM Netanyahu did not back down from his plan to deliver a speech in US Congress on March 3, 2015 while only two weeks remain until the elections in Israel. Despite the criticism and opposition by the White House and several US officials, as well as Israeli opposition parties, Netanyahu flew to the US to speak to Congress.



While it has been stated by the Prime Minister that his main aim is to warn the world about Iran and its threat to Israel and the region, attacks in Europe continued. Following an attack on a Jewish center in Nice, France, hundreds of Jewish and Muslim graves were vandalized in eastern France. Subsequently, a deadly shooting at a Denmark synagogue brought about the repeated call by PM Netanyahu and other government leaders for Jewish immigration to Israel.

Beside the attacks outside of Israel, a few other incidents took place in Israel and Palestine too. A Palestinian citizen was killed by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) near Bethlehem; a Christian center was vandalized in a Jerusalem hate crime attack; and an Israeli citizen was stabbed by a Palestinian citizen in central Jerusalem. On February 27, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed Nickolay Mladenov of Bulgaria as his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace.

Following Israel's announcement of 450 new settlement units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Palestinian Foreign Ministry stated that it would take the case to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In this context, a report stated that the European Union is preparing new sanctions against Israeli settlement expansions following the national elections in Israel.

After the recognition of Palestine in October 2014, Sweden has opened the first Palestinian embassy in Western Europe upon President Abbas' visit to Stockholm. Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said that the recognition came with responsibilities, then he announced a 180 million USD new aid program for the Palestinians. Similarly, Italian lawmakers urged their government to recognize Palestine as a state by backing a non-binding resolution.

Two court decisions targeted Palestine this month. First, on February 23, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were held responsible by a jury in Manhattan for their role in supporting terror attacks in Israel between 2002-2004, in which American citizens were killed. Second, Hamas has been listed as a terrorist organization by an Egyptian court, due to allegedly supporting insurgency in northern Sinai.

Jordan returned its ambassador to Israel, whom it recalled before three months due to Israeli “aggression” on the Temple Mount. This decision was welcomed by PM Netanyahu who stated that the move is an “important step that reflects Israeli-Jordanian joint interests, first and foremost stability, security and peace.” Moreover, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman praised King Abdullah after Jordan’s stand and actions to combat ISIS.

Turkey however, did not show any change in its approach towards the region. Despite the reports and numbers showing that trade between Israel and Turkey has reached its highest¹, political crises between the two countries continues. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu pulled out of a security conference in Munich to avoid Israeli delegation. Subsequently, Israeli FM Liberman slammed Turkey’s action and said that apology to Turkey was a great mistake.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

[Feb. 1, 2015 - Palestinians to take Israel settlements to ICC](#)

[Feb. 2, 2015 - Jordan to return ambassador to Tel Aviv, citing Israel’s steps to ease tensions](#)

[Feb. 2, 2015 - Expect many more rounds of fighting after Gaza war](#)

[Feb. 4, 2015 - FM Liberman praises King Abdullah for strong action against terrorism](#)

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[Feb. 6, 2015 - Lieberman: Israel’s apology to Turkey was a great mistake](#)

[Feb. 6, 2015 - Sweden to press Palestinians to boost role of women in nation-building efforts](#)

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[Feb. 15, 2015 - Israel eyes European Jewish immigration after Denmark attack](#)

[Feb. 16, 2015 - Israeli authorities approve landfill project in East Jerusalem](#)

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[Feb. 21, 2015 - The world has broken its promises about rebuilding Gaza – and children will suffer](#)

[Feb. 21, 2015 - Hamas accuses Egyptian media of spreading anti-Palestinian lies](#)

[Feb. 23, 2015 - Palestinian Groups Are Found Liable at Manhattan Terror Trial](#)

[Feb. 23, 2015 - PM Netanyahu on the US federal court decision](#)

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[Feb. 27, 2015 - Saudi Arabia to allow Israel use of its airspace to strike Iran – report](#)

[Feb. 28, 2015 - Egypt court puts Hamas on terrorist list](#)

¹ [Table D. 4 - Imports and Exports, by Commodity Groups - Turkey](#)



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