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# Regional Updates

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## CYPRUS

BY DUYGU ALPAN

The newly elected Turkish Cypriot President, Mustafa Akıncı, paid his first official customary visit abroad to Turkey where Akıncı and the Turkish President Erdoğan expressed that 2015 may be the year of resolution in Cyprus should both sides on the island demonstrate sincere and common will in favor of a comprehensive settlement.



On May 11, the Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akıncı, accompanied by their negotiation teams, came together for a social dinner hosted by the UN Secretary General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide at Nicosia’s Ledra Palace Hotel. After the 2-hour dinner, Eide stated that both leaders agreed to meet on May 15 for a “general exchange of views” to discuss the structure of the negotiations. Eide also noted that the meeting was held in a very positive environment, and this initiative is a “unique opportunity, an opportunity that will be grasped”.

The Foreign Ministers of Greece and Turkey held a meeting in Ankara on May 11-12. The two Ministers emphasized that Turkey and Greece have a common will towards the resolution of the Cyprus question, and are determined to give full support to the respective Cypriot communities in their efforts for a comprehensive resolution on the island.

The official Cyprus peace talks recommenced on May 15 in Nicosia’s buffer zone under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) after the 7-month hiatus. Eide announced after the meeting that the two leaders shared their vision for a united federal Cyprus adding that the meeting was held in a very constructive climate. Anastasiades and Akıncı agreed to be more involved in the peace process by meeting at least twice a month, in addition to the negotiators who are decided to meet more intensively. As part of the confidence-building measures (CBMs), Anastasiades presented to his counterpart the coordinates of 28 minefields located in the north of the island, and Akıncı committed to lift the requirement to fill visa papers used in the crossing — the practice entered into force shortly. Besides that, the leaders decided to establish a joint cultural committee, which would support the peace track. Akıncı and Anastasiades agreed to work on further CBMs, which will be announced when a consensus is made.

As agreed in the official talks, the Turkish Cypriot Negotiator Özdil Nami and Greek Cypriot Negotiator Andreas Mavroyannis held several meetings throughout the month of May. The negotiators from both sides will regularly come together in order to deal with issues which will support the leaders’ talks.

Beyond the official peace negotiations, Mustafa Akıncı and Nicos Anastasiades strolled the divided capital Nicosia on May 23 to demonstrate their willingness and intent for the reunification of the island. The leaders, who were cheered by the local peoples for their constructive efforts, shared traditional drinks and food while touring around the medieval city.

The Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot leader Akıncı held their second negotiation under the framework of the UN on May 28. The UN Envoy Eide stated that Akıncı and Anastasiades agreed on several core matters regarding the Cyprus problem. On the humanitarian face of the issue, the leaders made a joint appeal for information on the missing persons from both sides of the Green Line assuring that the identity of the informers will be kept confidential. The other decisions given during the meeting include: first, to open further crossing points, initially on Lefka-Aplici and Deryneia, while other prospective gates will be examined in the relevant committee; second, interconnect electricity networks, and similarly interoperate mobile telephones, which is only in the phase of mutual determination; and third, work to prevent radio frequency interferences. Furthermore the leaders agreed to establish a committee on gender equality, addressing the need for women's active role in the settlement process. Finally, Eide announced that the next leaders' meetings were scheduled June 17, June 29, July 10 and July 27.

#### **Sources and Further Reading (click to access)**

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[May 6, 2015 - Both leaders committed to resume talks, says Eide](#)

[May 7, 2015 - Erdoğan, Turkish Cypriot leader urge Greek Cypriots sincere effort for peace](#)

[May 8, 2015 - Cyprus nears completion of 'troika' review, looks positive](#)

[May 12, 2015 - Turkey, Greece agree Aegean security measures, talk up Cyprus progress](#)

[May 13, 2015 - Cyprus's great halloumi debate](#)

[May 14, 2015 - Cyprus peace talks raise hopes of an end to a conflict that has haunted Europe](#)

[May 15, 2015 - Kıbrıs Müzakereleri Yeniden Başladı](#)

[May 15, 2015 - Remarks by the President on his meeting with the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community](#)

[May 15, 2015 - "Our goal is a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal solution"](#)

[May 15, 2015 - CYPRUS: Talks start, leaders to meet twice a month](#)

[May 15, 2015 - Cyprus peace talks resume amid 'climate of optimism' - UN](#)

[May 15, 2015 - Müzakerelerde 'güven' vurgusu](#)

[May 19, 2015 - Government welcomes EU-Turkey council conclusions](#)

[May 22, 2015 - Negotiators working on 'low politics' CBMs](#)

[May 23, 2015 - Cyprus' rival leaders take stroll through divided capital](#)

[May 27, 2015 - Armenia signs military deal with Greek Cyprus](#)

[May 28, 2015 - Statement delivered by Espen Barth Eide on Thursday](#)

[May 28, 2015 - Leaders appeal for information on missing](#)

[May 28, 2015 - Cyprus talks reap first major progress in more than a decade](#)

[May 29, 2015 - Cyprus police foil planned Hezbollah attacks against Israeli targets in Europe](#)

## EGYPT

BY OMAR SHEIRA

### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi delivered what was announced as a monthly address on the country's developments in the month of April highlighting the main obstacles on several issues — including security, corruption, economic development, energy, administration, housing, and the media — and the efforts undertaken to address them.
2. Sinai Tribal Union meeting brought 30 tribes to discuss the confrontation of militant groups in Sinai. The tribes concluded to work in coordination with agencies and institutions of the formal state and deny protection to those involved with militant groups.
3. Egypt's Justice Minister Mahfouz Saber resigned after making comments on the illegibility of a garbage collector to become a judge due to his/her social class. He was replaced by an outspoken critic of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmed el-Zend.
4. Imprisoned Muslim Brother leader and former parliamentarian, Farid Ismail died in detention due to the lack of proper medical attention.
5. Following the issuance of Mohamed Morsi's death sentence, three Egyptian judges and their driver were killed in North Sinai during an armed attack by armed men in three cars.
6. Cairo Court for Urgent Matters ruled for the disbanding of 50 Muslim Brotherhood NGOs and banning of all their activities
7. President el-Sisi is set to meet with several political party leaders to discuss the election law amendments and upcoming parliamentary election.
8. Political activist George Ishaq of the National Council for Human Rights called for a three-year moratorium on executions to alleviate the existing tensions in Egypt.



### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Minister of Communication and Information Technology revealed plans to upgrade internet speeds and lower costs, to increase internet availability to all levels of society.
2. Egypt signed energy agreements with American and German companies and permitted the private sector to import natural gas, in order to address the summer energy crisis.
3. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) claimed that Egypt is moving in the right direction, however, criticized the postponement of imposing the capital gains tax.
4. Egypt's foreign reserves rose to \$20.5 billion after Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates each deposited \$2 billion.
5. Egypt's government plans to negotiate a \$6 billion loan with the IMF in June to close the financing budget gap for the 2015-2016 fiscal year.
6. Egypt's military established a multi-industry company with operations in engineering, infrastructure, real estate, tourism, marketing, agriculture, and manufacturing.

## LEGAL & JUDICIAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. 40 people were referred to a criminal court after an investigation indicated their alleged communication with the radical group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).
2. A verdict sentencing 14 police officers to prison on murder and torture charges against prisoners was upheld by Cairo's Court of Cassation.
3. President el-Sisi issued a Decree No. 188/2015 himself and the office of the Cabinet from Articles 19 and 20 of the Civil Service Law, which pertains to oversight on hiring practices.
4. 15 defendants were sentenced to life in prison on charges of murder in a case relating to violence which occurred in December 2013.
5. Cairo Court of Appeals sentenced Former president Hosni Mubarak and his two sons were to three years in prison in a corruption case. Having been detained during the trial, Mubarak can be released upon paying a fine of LE 125 million.
6. Former president Mohamed Morsi and 120 defendants received a death sentence in a mass prison break.
7. Egypt executed six men for their alleged roles in attacks on military personnel in Cairo and being members of militant group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (now known as Wilayet Sinai).
8. 17 people were acquitted for violating the protest law and participating in an unannounced demonstration in January.
9. Eight militants, including Adel Habara, were convicted in the killing of seven soldiers earlier this year and sentenced to death

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Egyptian Defense Minister Sedky Sobhi and his Chinese counterpart Chang Wanquan signed an arms deal after holding discussions on military cooperation.
2. El-Sisi invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to attend the inauguration ceremony of the new Suez Canal, set to take place in August.
3. Israeli intelligence claimed that Russia was selling advanced S-300 air defense systems to Egypt.
4. Parliament President, Norbert Lammert declined to meet el-Sisi during his June visit to Berlin, citing human rights concerns.
5. Cairo will host Syrian opposition in a second conference to discuss the resolution of the current crisis and the future of Syria
6. Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry met with Algerian President Abdel Aziz Bouteflika to discuss trade, investment, counter-terrorism, and the Middle Eastern region.
7. Libyan tribe leaders met in Cairo to address the instability in Libya and ally against militants
8. Egypt and Jordan are set to sign 9 agreements in the fields of water, media, civil service, with the aim of increasing bilateral cooperation.

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[May 17, 2015 - Egypt executes six men convicted of killing soldiers after 'grossly unfair' trial](#)

[May 18, 2015 - Egypt's justice ministry rejects foreign comments on Morsi death sentence](#)

[May 19, 2015 - German Parliament rescinds invitation to meet with Sisi in June](#)

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[May 21, 2015 - Egypt permits private sector to import natural gas](#)

[May 23, 2015 - Egypt to host second Syria opposition conference in June](#)

[May 23, 2015 - Egyptian FM meets his Algerian counterpart over Libya crisis](#)

[May 23, 2015 - Egyptian court acquits 17 charged for protest at which activist killed](#)

[May 24, 2015 - Egypt Tax Delay Means Rich Pay Less to Cut Deficit: IMF](#)

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[May 25, 2015 - Nine agreements to be signed between Egypt, Jordan](#)

[May 26, 2015 - Egyptian court sentences eight militants to death for army attack - sources](#)

[May 26, 2015 - 50 Muslim Brotherhood NGOs disbanded in 5 governorates](#)

[May 27, 2015 - Sisi meets party chairs over parliament election law](#)

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## ISRAEL-PALESTINE

BY MUHAMMED AMMASH

After tortuous negotiations lasting for almost two months, Israel's new right wing 61-seat coalition was formed under PM Netanyahu's leadership, less than two hours before the deadline's expiration. The Foreign Ministry's seat was left empty by Netanyahu, the new Deputy FM delivered a message saying that Israel owes no apologies for its policies in the Holy Land, citing religious texts to endorse her argument that it belongs to the Jewish people.



The new Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, approved an experimental program to segregate Palestinians and Jews on bus routes running from Israel to the West Bank. The program was suspended before long by PM Netanyahu. Similarly, Israel's Supreme Court rejected a petition by residents of Umm al-Hiran, an unrecognized Bedouin village, against their removal from the village and the demolition of their houses, in order to replace it with a new town for Jewish residents. The rule indicated that the state owns the land, and the Bedouin community has no legal rights to it.

Referring to a two-state peace deal with the Palestinians and the new coalition in Israel, U.S. President Barack Obama said that he is not enthused by the position of some members of Israel's new government. In Camp David homage, he called out that Israeli-Palestinian peace “seems distant now.”

The region witnessed various demonstrations and violent clashes with security forces throughout the month. First, in the beginning of the month, several demonstrations erupted in central Tel Aviv, after a video surfaced, showing a police assault against an Ethiopian Israeli soldier. Second, a march organized by journalists to mark World Press Freedom Day was suppressed by Israeli forces, leaving many injured. Other protests resulting in clashes among people, and between security forces and people occurred during the commemoration of ‘Nakba Day’ — the Palestinian Catastrophe — and the commemoration of Jerusalem's ‘reunification’ — ‘Jerusalem Day’. In this context, while PM Netanyahu stated that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish people alone, Israeli President Rivlin said that it belongs to all of its citizens – Arabs and Jews.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met Pope Francis who canonized two Palestinian nuns in Vatican. For the first time, the Vatican used the term ‘state of Palestine’ in a new treaty, adding momentous symbolic weight for international support for sovereignty. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) defined the accord with Palestine as a contribution for justice, while Israel's Foreign Ministry said it was “disappointed” by the move, saying it would “not advance the peace process.”



Abbas also met former world leaders Jimmy Carter and Gro Harlem Brundtland in Ramallah. The leaders who are part of The Elders, independent human rights and peace group, discussed the direction of Palestinian leadership with Abbas, emphasizing the need for holding Palestinian election, and the Saudi-backed reconciliation efforts between rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah.

Meanwhile, Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) Southern Region Commander Maj. Gen. Shlomo "Sami" Turgeman says "there is an independent rule in Gaza that behaves like a state [...] inside that state there is a ruler, Hamas, and at the moment there is no alternative to Hamas [...]." Subsequently, towards the end of the month, Israeli jets struck targets in the Gaza Strip, following a rocket attack by Islamic Jihad.

Regarding the emerging deal with Iran, U.S. Secretary maintained his claim that it will 'protect Israel' during an interview in Israeli TV. Moreover, Netanyahu criticized the Lausanne Framework Agreement reached by Iran and world powers in the previous month, urging the international community to hold out for a better deal, again.

#### **Sources and Further Reading (click to access)**

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[May 30, 2015 - Perpetrator unknown: The systemic failure to investigate settler violence](#)



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