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Regional Updates

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CYPRUS

BY DUYGU ALPAN

In the beginning of the month, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı and Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades attended a theatrical play, “Cyprus: Saddened in Greek, Wounded in Turkish”, in their shared hometown, Limassol, as part of the efforts fostering a positive atmosphere towards a solution on the Cyprus question. The play featured the message that both sides committed mistakes and no one is free of guilt, highlighted the two leaders. Responding to the questions after the event, Anastasiades said it is within his plans to reciprocate Akıncı’s visit to the Greek Cypriot side.



Mustafa Akıncı and Nicos Anastasiades held their third meeting within the framework of the UN on June 17. During the meeting, the leaders screened what the negotiators have achieved up to date, and decided to start dealing with the unsolved core matters in an interdependent manner. Hence, the leaders entrusted the negotiators to intensively concentrate on a specific set of essential issues, and report back until the next talks. Furthermore, the leaders scrutinized the confidence building measures (CBM) agreed on earlier, and continued working on further CBMs. They also appointed members of the newly formed committee on gender equality. Akıncı stated regarding the meeting that now they have Akıncı-Anastasiades documents containing the opinions of both sides as well as issues, which have not yet been agreed upon.

The following peace talks took place on June 29. During this latest meeting, the stocktaking phase was finalized and the stage of substantive negotiations was launched, having unresolved core issues focused, announced UN Secretary General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide. After being briefed by the negotiators, the leaders broadly examined the issues that the negotiators dealt with, in a pragmatic and constructive manner. The leaders continued discussing CBMs and expressed satisfaction with the pace being kept up to date. Anastasiades and Akıncı demonstrated their expectation to find practical solutions to the pending issues, and also discussed the economic benefits of a prospective solution. Following the meeting, Eide noted that he is very encouraged and even more optimistic with regards to the course of the talks, while Anastasiades marked the meeting as highly productive. The next leaders’ meeting is scheduled for July 10.

The Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akıncı met with the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in New York. Ban “welcomed the positive atmosphere” enclosing the Cyprus Talks, and spurred the leaders to keep the momentum going. Following his meeting with the Secretary-General, a “mutually acceptable solution” will be achieved within months rather than years, said Akıncı.

In an interview he gave, Anastasiades stated that they seek a solution, which does not generate losers or winners, abstaining from giving a timeframe for the settlement. He also noted that the new coalition government to be formed in Turkey might have an impact on the Cyprus issue. However, Turkey rigorously rejected the link between the island's negotiation process and Turkey's new government to be formed.

The European Parliament (EP) passed a resolution on June 10 regarding the European Commission's 2014 Progress Report on Turkey. The resolution gave more place to the Cyprus problem than usual. The EP urged Turkey, among other things, to begin withdrawing its troops from the island, and to transfer the closed area of Famagusta to the UN, while calling on the Greek Cypriot side to open the port of Famagusta under the supervision of EU customs, and "to allow Turkish Cypriots to trade with the EU in a legal manner." Turkey rejected the resolution as it found the text one-sided and "far from being objective". The Turkish Cypriot side also demonstrated that "many of the assessments contained in the Report are not acceptable"; and added that the Cyprus-related paragraphs of the resolution do not correspond to the positive climate on the island.

In the energy sphere, the Cyprus gas field "Aphrodite" was declared commercially viable by Noble Energy International, Delek Drilling and Avner Oil Exploration. The three companies are expected to submit to the Greek Cypriot side a development and production plan for the field. This development is being considered by Greek Cypriots as a significant step from the exploration phase towards exploitation.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

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[June 5, 2015 - İşte Anastasiadis'in sunduğu Güven Artırıcı Önlemler listesi](#)

[June 8, 2015 - Cyprus gasfield is "commercially viable", Egypt pipeline an option](#)

[June 8, 2015 - Noble, Delek say Cyprus gas field is commercially viable, plan exports to Egypt](#)

[June 9, 2015 - Statements by President of the Republic and leader of Turkish Cypriot community](#)

[June 9, 2015 - Liderler doğdukları şehirde sanat için buluştu](#)

[June 9, 2015 - Efforts for missing persons taken to Strasbourg](#)

[June 10, 2015 - EP resolution of 10 June on the 2014 Commission Progress Report on Turkey](#)

[June 10, 2015 - Turkey report 'critical but constructive', EP says, Ankara to send it back](#)

[June 12, 2015 - Anastasiades: New Ankara gov't may affect Cyprus talks](#)

[June 12, 2015- Press Release on Statements of GCA Leader Nikos Anastasiadis in Turkish Media](#)

[June 16, 2015 - Cyprus peace talks: Rocky road to reunification](#)

[June 16, 2015 - Cyprus-Israel to boost submarine cable](#)

[June 17, 2015 - Othello's Tower Builds Trust in Divided Cyprus](#)

[June 17, 2015 - Özlü Müzakereler Başlıyor](#)

[June 27, 2015 - Cyprus 'closely monitoring developments in Greece'](#)

[June 29, 2015 - UN says progress made in Cyprus talks](#)

[June 29, 2015 - Leaders 'immersed in substantive negotiations'](#)

[June 29, 2015 - Lebanese man jailed in Cyprus ammonium 'plot' against Israelis](#)

[June 28, 2015 - Cyprus would consider writing off Greek debt if there is a deal](#)

[June 29, 2015 - Yunanistan'daki mali kriz nedeniyle Güney Kıbrıs'ta endişe hakim](#)

EGYPT

BY OMAR SHEIRA

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The third phase of the Evacuation of Rafah will begin after Ramadan to expand North Sinai's Buffer Zone to 1,000 meters.
2. President Abdelfattah el-Sisi issued a rare apology to "the Egyptian lawyers and to all Egyptian citizens who have been the subject of any abuse".
3. El-Sisi publicly criticized several ministers of the cabinet due to the lack of progress on current development projects.
4. There were two separate attacks on Egypt's tourism sector: the first on security guards at the pyramids of Giza and the second on Luxor's Karnak temple by a suicide bomber and two gunmen.
5. The Journalists' Syndicate rejected the crackdown on journalism and urged a meeting with President el-Sisi to discuss freedom of press in Egypt.
6. The Egyptian army began digging a trench, 20 meters deep, along its Sinai border with Gaza to prevent smuggling operations which threaten national security.
7. Egypt's Minister of Religious Endowments Mohamed Mokhtar issued orders requiring mosques to remove content inspiring extremist thought and provide a list of the library's contents.
8. Egypt opened the Gaza crossing three times in June, to allow the movement of people on both sides of the border and permit the delivery of cement supplies.
9. Egypt's Prosecutor General Hisham Barakat was assassinated by a car bomb attack on his motorcade.
10. El-Sisi attended the funeral of assassinated Prosecutor General Barakat and delivered a speech on the need to facilitate and hasten swift justice.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. Egypt signed a \$2 billion exploration deal with Italian company Eni to develop the country's oil resources over the upcoming 4 years.
2. Petroleum Minister Sherif Ismail said \$3.8 billion projects are to be implemented before the end of 2015.
3. Egypt plans to inaugurate its national project, the New Suez Canal, on August 6.
4. Egypt signed a deal with BP to receive 16 cargoes of liquefied natural gas in 2015-2016.

LEGAL & JUDICIAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. 22 people and 7 others were sentenced to ten years and five years in prison, respectively, over violence in February 2013 protests.
2. A total of 372 public figures from political parties submitted a petition to the Supreme Constitutional Court to amend the current protest law in accordance with the recommendations of the National Council of Human Rights.

3. Former President Hosni Mubarak will face a retrial over the killing of protesters during the 2011 uprising. The retrial was confirmed after a judge accepted the public prosecution's appeal against an earlier court ruling.
4. 51 defendants were sentenced to several years in prison on charges of violence during the constitutional referendum of January 2014.
5. 11 defendants were sentenced to death in absentia on charges of murder and attempted murder in the "Port Said Massacre" which occurred in a football stadium in 2012.
6. The police officer convicted of killing Shaimaa el-Sabbagh was sentenced to 15 years in prison.
7. Death sentences passed to ousted president Mohamed Morsi and five other Muslim Brotherhood leaders were upheld by the court.
8. A decree issued by President el-Sisi pardoned 165 people for illegally protesting and committing misdemeanors.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. President El-Sisi visited Sudan to attend Al-Bashir's inauguration ceremony.
2. El-Sisi's visit to Germany ends with \$9 billion deal and talks on a broad range of issues to improve bilateral cooperation.
3. The Cairo Appeals Court for Urgent Matters cancelled the verdict designating Hamas a terrorist organization.
4. Egypt, Italy, and Algeria called for a political solution in war-torn Libya.
5. Syrian opposition met in Cairo to discuss a five-point proposal to resolve the four-year-old crisis.
6. U.S. State Department did not meet with a Muslim Brotherhood group that visited Washington.
7. Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb addressed the New Partnership for Africa's Development, AU Summit, on behalf of President El-Sisi.
8. US and Turkey voiced deep concern on former president Morsi's death sentence. This was met by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry's request for the lack of intervention in domestic affairs.
9. David Cameron invited President El-Sisi for talks in the UK later this year.
10. After being detained in Berlin on an Egyptian arrest warrant, Al Jazeera journalist Ahmed Mansour was released by the German authorities.
11. Russia and Egypt are set to sign a free trade zone agreement to improve economic cooperation.

Sources and Further Reading (click to access)

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- [June 2, 2015 - President el-Sisi arrives in Sudan to attend Al-Bashir's inauguration](#)
- [June 3, 2015 - First day of Sisi's Berlin trip marked by \\$9 bln deal, talks with Merkel](#)
- [June 3, 2015 - 8 political parties, 372 public figures call on SCC to amend protest law](#)
- [June 4, 2015 - Third phase of border evacuation to begin after Ramadan](#)
- [June 4, 2015 - Egypt court annuls decision to drop Mubarak murder charge](#)
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- [June 6, 2015 - Egypt's president issues rare apology after lawyer beaten](#)
- [June 6, 2015 - Cairo court cancels Hamas 'terrorist' designation](#)
- [June 6, 2015 - Egypt to hold tripartite talks with Italy, Algeria over Libyan crisis](#)
- [June 8, 2015 - Reports of cabinet reshuffle in Egypt, Sisi publicly criticises ministers](#)
- [June 8, 2015 - Petroleum projects worth \\$9.4 bln currently underway in Egypt - minister](#)
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- [June 9, 2015 - U.S. State Department will not meet Brotherhood group on Washington visit](#)
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- [June 15, 2015 - Egypt PM Mahlab to speak on behalf of Sisi at AU summit](#)
- [June 16, 2015 - US 'deeply troubled' by Morsi death sentence](#)
- [June 16, 2015 - Erdoğan calls for int'l action against Morsi death penalty](#)
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- [June 18, 2015 - UK invites Egypt's Abdel Fatah al-Sisi for talks, Downing Street confirms](#)
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- [June 22, 2015 - Egypt army digs trench along Gaza border to prevent smuggling](#)
- [June 22, 2015 - Egypt agrees deal with BP for LNG supply](#)
- [June 22, 2015 - Germany releases detained Al Jazeera journalist Ahmed Mansour](#)
- [June 23, 2015 - Russia to sign free trade zone agreement with Egypt](#)
- [June 23, 2015 - Egypt to remove 'extremist' books from mosque libraries](#)
- [June 23, 2015 - Egypt opens Gaza crossing for third time in a month](#)
- [June 29, 2015 - UPDATE 4: Car bomb attack kills Egypt's top public prosecutor](#)
- [June 30, 2015 - Egypt's Sisi attends funeral prayers for top prosecutor Barakat](#)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

BY MUHAMMED AMMASH

After Haaretz's report on the secret meeting between **Israeli and Turkish** Foreign Ministry Directors in Rome, Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu confirmed the meeting between senior officials to open a channel to normalize the two countries' relations, and repeated Turkey's three conditions for normalization: official apology – which has already been achieved; compensation for the families of the activists who lost their lives in *Mavi Marmara*; and lifting the blockade in Gaza. **Egypt**, on the other side, has appointed a new ambassador to Israel – the first since the recalling of its last ambassador in the wake of Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza in 2012.



French FM Laurent Fabius who visited the region in June said that **France** would not stop searching for ways to restart peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. In his meeting with PM Benjamin Netanyahu, he told the PM that he wants to set a timetable for a final-status agreement. Moreover, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the French FM that the new Palestinian unity government should not include Hamas. President **Barack Obama** on the other side, raised the possibility that the U.S. will allow a United Nations (UN) vote on issues related to the Palestinians, if the two sides take no meaningful steps for peace.

According to the recent **UN Human Rights Council** commission report published in Geneva, both Israelis and Palestinians may have committed war crimes during the 2014 Gaza war. The report's claims were rejected by both Israel and Hamas. In the same context, a Palestinian delegation submitted complaints to the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** against Israel's conduct between June 13, 2014, and May 31, 2015, referring to the alleged Israeli war crimes in Gaza and the construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. **Washington** slammed the decision to submit papers to the ICC saying it is 'counterproductive'.

In security matters, Israel is on alert as rebel groups in both Syria and Egypt's Sinai advance towards its borders. Tensions increase in the North as Druze groups living under Israeli control in Golan Heights attacked IDF ambulance carrying wounded Syrians, protesting the treatment of rebels by Israelis. Moreover, rockets fired by a Salafist group in Gaza reached Israel, resulting in Israeli strikes over targets in Gaza. Also, several Israeli border security officers and Palestinian citizens were injured in various clashes on the checkpoints. As for the Swedish fishing boat *Marianne av Göteborg* – carrying activists towards Gaza in an attempt to break the blockade; it was towed by Israeli naval vessels into Ashdod Port without any incident. Finally, an arson attack by extremist Israeli settlers at the **Church of 'Loaves and Fishes'** in Northern Israel added to the societal tensions in the country.

In **Palestine**, political uncertainty continues as the disagreement between Palestinian parties over the formation of a new unity government persists. In the talks that have been going between the **Palestinian Authority (PA)** and **Hamas**, the PA insists that all Palestinian parties wishing to join the next government must accept its policies, such as recognizing Israel and supporting the two-state solution. Hamas has accentuated it would not do so by all means.

In **Israel**, the new Culture Minister Miri Regev threatened to oppose, and pull institutional funding for the *Elmina Theater* in Jaffa – a Jewish-Arab children’s theater promoting coexistence through art. The Minister proclaimed that she will fight ‘de-legitimization of Israel’ by local artists. In addition, after the government’s rejection of bills by Joint List and Meretz MKs that would allow Palestinians married to Israelis to become citizens, uproar broke out in the Knesset after Deputy Interior Minister Yaron Mazuz said that Arab MKs should hand in their Israeli ID cards. Additionally, PM Benjamin Netanyahu, who is heading the Communication Ministry at the same time, avowed his intention to shut down a brand new TV channel “Palestine 48”.

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- [June 3, 2015 - Three rockets shot from Gaza at southern Israel; no injuries](#)
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- [June 16, 2015 - Pressure mounting on Golan as Nusra Front kills Syrian officer, wounds 10](#)
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- [June 16, 2015 - Palestinian unity government ‘to resign over Gaza row’](#)
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- [June 24, 2015 - Chaos erupts in Knesset after deputy minister comments](#)
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