

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

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About CRP News & Background

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EU and Turkey working on a deal regarding the migration crisis

In the light of the recent migration crisis, European Union (EU) member states are seeking an alternative solution to reduce the number of incoming refugees to Europe. As an alternative way to reduce the influx of refugees, EU leaders met with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Brussels to finalize an agreement which has been discussed by diplomats over the past few months. It is a result of the struggle of European Union to limit the strain on the member states' from taking in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. The deal consists of aid to help Syrian refugees in Turkey for approximately 3 billion euros and also to allow Turkish citizens to travel visa-free into Schengen zone. This deal is seen by Turkish government as a positive



Meeting. Photo: European Council President [Flickr]

opening for them to renegotiate their agenda on joining the EU.

Turkey has been accommodating around 2.2 million Syrian refugees who fled their country due to the long-standing conflict. The money is intended to help the refugees raise their living standards, therefore they do not have to cross to Europe and stay put in Turkey. It is also seen as a way not only to reduce the number of refugees coming to Europe, but also to reduce the number of deaths following the alternative way of crossing to Europe through Greek islands.

French President Francois Hollande says that it is reasonable for Europe to help Turkey accommodate the refugees due to its impact on reducing the incoming refugees to Europe. The deal should also make it easier for both parties to check migrants arriving and keep out those who pose a threat, therefore the attack in Paris caused by Islamic State (IS) militants can be prevented. Starting from January 2016, Frontex, the EU border agency, will have a liaison officer in Turkey. As for the Turkey membership in EU, this deal could lead to that. However the EU does not make any promises to Turkey since the focus of this deal is to maintain the migration crisis.



This has become a priority due to the measures taken by EU have done little to control migrant movements. Despite that, the visa-free travel for Turkish citizens will be discussed and hopefully put into realisation by October 2016. However, these deals have certain conditions which Turkey must meet first before it comes into realisation.

Even though the Turkish government sees this as an opportunity to further their own political agenda, there are many issues arising in relation to this deal. The tension between Turkey and Russia has complicated things for the EU forcing them to re-engage with Moscow in order to try to advocate peace in Syria which believed could end the flight of refugees and contain IS. Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny says tensions between Russia and Turkey over the incident were of “enormous concern”, while the EU’s Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini says the incident should not affect the prospect of finding a political deal in Syria. Turkish PM argues that the large amount of refugees fleeing their country and coming to Turkey and Europe is a result of UN’s failure not to solve the problem in Syria at the earlier stages.

Despite the Turkish government’s excitement for the deal with EU, there are many who voice their concerns. The editor of the main centre-left newspaper in Turkey was arrested after publishing an article that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan disliked. The editor published an open letter to EU leaders urging them not to prioritise the crisis over respect for human rights in Turkey. Jean Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, says the deal

will not make the EU forget about the main differences and divergences they have with Turkey in regards of human rights and freedom of the press.

The problem refugees currently face in Turkey is not only the lack of benefits they receive from Turkish government, but also the inability to integrate. They find it hard to live due to the restrictions of them to work. The refugees cannot work legally in Turkey without working permits. Since they can only get the status of “temporary protection” and not the refugee status, they cannot apply for the working permits. However, Turkish government is considering on granting some refugees working permits with a government research project working on identifying their skills and assessing what gaps in the labour market they could fill.



Syrian refugee women in Turkey increasingly vulnerable. Photo: UNFPA Flickr [Flickr]

Children of refugees also cannot get any formal education in Turkey. According to AFAD, Turkey’s relief agency, 290.000 children are currently being taught in temporary refugee education centre. In contrast, Human Rights Watch’ report estimates that 400.000-700.000 school-aged



Syrian children are receiving no formal schooling due to the bureaucracy and language barrier.

The International Organisation on Migration says about 9.000 refugees, out of more than 2 million in Turkey, have left by November 2015 through legal resettlement or family reunification programmes.

In response to the influx of refugees coming to Europe, Slovenia has begun to build a razor wire fence along parts of its border with Croatia with the purpose of having better control over a tide of refugees flowing through Slovenia en-route to other European countries. Since mid-October 2015, around 180.000 people have streamed into Slovenia through a Balkan corridor from Greece, which most of them are heading to Austria or Germany. The fences were built in Veliki Obrez, a village on the southeastern border with Croatia. This, some would argue, is a result of disagreement over the quota mechanism initiated to spread refugees into EU member states. Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia strongly oppose the quotas and shut their borders to refugees in

October. The disagreement over the quota mechanism is only one part of the difficulty the EU faces when it comes to finding a common solution among member states. Slovenia's action is seen as an individual measure taken to protect itself from future the worst-case scenario. However, Croatia sees Slovenia's action as unnecessary and a waste of money.

The United States (US) is trying to remedy the migration crisis by attempting to increase the number of Syrian refugees who may be admitted into the US by opening new screening outposts in Iraq and Lebanon. President Barack Obama pledged in September that US will admit an additional 10.000 refugees in 2016 from Syria. Despite having more outposts in Iraq and Lebanon, most refugees are screened by the US State Department and Homeland Security in Istanbul, Turkey and Amman, Jordan. Due to security concerns, the US had to close the outpost in Lebanon which sparked outrage among refugee advocates who argue that Lebanon holds the largest number of refugees who live in poverty and cannot work legally.

“The disagreement over the quota mechanism is only one part of the difficulty the EU faces when it comes to finding a common solution among member states.”

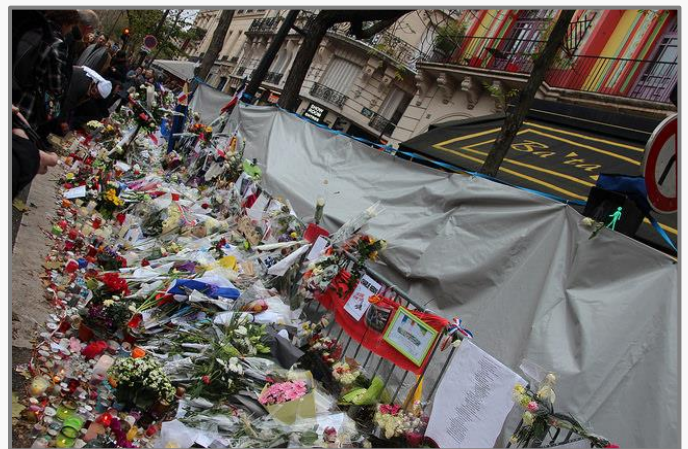


A night that hit Paris: Terrorism on Europe's doorstep

On the evening of 13 November, seven coordinated terror attacks were carried out in Paris by militants of the Islamic State, killing 130 people and wounding several more. Three simultaneous explosions occurred close to the French national sport stadium, the Stade de France where France and Germany were holding a friendly football match. Although French President François Hollande – who was also attending the event – was immediately evacuated from the building, players and supporters were kept unaware of the nature of the incident until the game finished.

The attacks then moved to the city centre where a group of armed men open fired on the Petit Cambodge Cambodian restaurant and the Carillon bar on the other side of the street. 15 people were killed and another 10 were critically injured. Minutes later, the same militants opened fire on a nearby restaurant, the Casa Nostra pizzeria and other nearby venues. However the biggest massacre occurred in the Bataclan theatre on the Voltaire Boulevard. American band Eagles of Death Metal were performing in the concert hall, when heavily armed men entered and

began to shoot at members of the audience whilst shouting “Allahu Akbar”. According to witnesses, the attackers also threw hand grenades into the crowd. They described the terrorists as calm, concentrated and determined men. The attackers shot dead 89 members of the crowd. Those who managed to escape ran to the streets, offices, toilets or the roof. Others lay on the floor pretending to be dead until the French elite tactical unit (RAID) and police arrived.



Bataclan Paris attacks memorial. Photo: Takver [Flickr]

In response to the attacks, President Hollande and the French government agreed to declare state of emergency and to temporarily close the borders. All state schools and universities remained closed



until the next day. Cultural and sporting events were postponed or cancelled and the Eiffel Tower, the symbol of Paris, closed its entrance.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks and designated Paris as the capital of abomination and perversion and also blamed President Hollande for the airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Seven attackers died, having been either shot dead by the police or killed by their suicide vests, however not all of them were captured on the night of the incident. Those whose identities have been revealed, were all citizens of the European Union or had recently arrived to the continent. By 16 November, French authorities became focused on a radical jihadist, named Abdelhamid Abaaoud who they believed to have been the leader of the attacks.



Le Carillon. Photo: Pierre Lrnt [Flickr]

On 18 November, French police backed by military units and the French special forces launched an offensive in Saint-Denis against a building presumed to be the location of Abaaoud. The police raid turned into deadly shootout in which Abaaoud were killed and five suspected

members of the Islamic State were arrested. Five police officers were injured and a Belgian shepherd police dog named Diesel was also killed. In the meantime, the identity of another suspect of the assault has been released. Salah Abdeslam, a Belgian-born Moroccan-Frenchman had rented a car in the night of the Paris attacks that was used to drive the perpetrators to the Bataclan theatre. Having escaped, he has become the target of one of the largest manhunts in Europe's history and has been billed by some newspapers as "the most wanted" man on the continent.

The search for the perpetrators led authorities to an impoverished suburb of Brussels, Molenbeek which harbours a history of terrorist links. In a police raid executed by the Belgian security forces only days after the Paris attacks, seven people were arrested, but five of them were later released.

The developments have brought renewed focus on the threat posed by jihadist networks in Belgium. On 21 November, Brussels raised terror alert to its highest level and Belgian officials warned citizens to avoid crowds because of a serious threat of attack. Brussels' whole metro network was closed that weekend and public events were cancelled. Although no incidents happened in those few days, recent happenings have left a scar not only on Brussels but on Europe and the whole European society. Terrorism has not been an unknown phenomenon on the continent, however the fact that the Islamic State was able to paralyse two of the biggest European cities and cause



permanent sense of fear, has opened a new chapter in the modern Europe's history.

The above mentioned events of November have had important political and diplomatic consequences as well. Anti-immigration voices have become stronger all over Europe and even in the United States. First, Polish leaders have declared that the Polish government would not accept EU-mandate quotas for refugees following the attacks in France. As Konrad Szymański, Minister for European Affairs said: "in the face of the tragic acts in Paris, we

do not see the political possibilities to implement" such a plan. Poland has been backed in her decision by Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia who also do not want to accept any more refugees. Tensions over the refugee problem have been raised not only in Europe but in the US as well. Although President Obama announced in September that 10,000 Syrians will be allowed to enter the county next year, after the terror plot in Paris, more than half of the nation's governors oppose allowing Syrian refugees to enter their states.

“the fact that the Islamic State was able to paralyse two of the biggest European cities and cause permanent sense of fear, has opened a new chapter in the modern Europe's history”



*Eiffel Tower illuminated as a memorial to the Paris attacks.
Photo: Divulgação Prefeitura de Paris [Wikimedia Commons]*



*Dozens of mourning people captured during remembrance of Paris attacks victims.
Photo: Mstyslav Chernov [Wikimedia Commons]*



Turkey shot down Russian warplane

On November 24, 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian warplane on the Turkish and Syrian border. The warplane was sent to support troops fighting against the so-called Islamic State (IS). The incident has created a huge source of tension between Russia and Turkey.

There are two sides of the story regarding this incident. Turkish officials stated that the Russian warplane violated the Turkish airspace regulation. The warning was informed to the pilot of Su-24, the Russian warplane, and the pilot started to engage with Turkish military force. Therefore Turkish military force had to shoot the plane down. However, Russia argued that the warplane was flying at an altitude of 6,000m, as suggested by the airspace law. Therefore there was no law being violated by Russia. The warplane was sent to Syria to assist the troops fighting against IS in Syrian border. After it got shot down, the warplane crashed in Syrian territory, 4 kilometres away from the border.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan said that the warplane was not only violating the Turkish airspace regulation, but also it was unclear whether the warplane belonged to Russia. Had they known it, Turkish forces would not have shot it down.

Russian President Vladimir Putin replied by arguing that the reasons given by Turkey sounded like weak excuses and dismissed the claims that it was the warplane's fault. Putin said that they gave information beforehand about the warplane: its purpose, whereabouts and intended route. Putin was appalled by the Turk's decision to shoot down the warplane. He argued that the Russian warplane neither threatened the territory of Turkey nor did it violate any airspace regulation.



Sukhoi Su-24M2. Photo: Toshi Aoki [Wikimedia Commons]

Russia also questioned Turkey's attitude after the incident. Instead of contacting Russia directly, Turkey went straight to NATO. Russia argued that such an action, essentially looking for back-up, only heightened tension. Putin angrily accused



Turkey of being an 'accomplice' to terrorism by shooting of Russian airplane. Turkey was once viewed as a friendly state by Russia however it appears that this incident has somewhat severed their once good relationship.

After the shooting of Russian warplane, Russia sent two helicopters to evacuate the body of the pilot. However the helicopters got ambushed by rebels and one of the helicopters got shot down.



Vladimir Putin. Photo: Global Panorama [Flickr]

Russia had not previously violated any Turkish airspace regulation since making the decision to intervene in the Syrian crisis. However, recently Russia also violated the airspace regulations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As a result of such violations, some Western countries chose to impose sanctions. The relationship between Russia

and Turkey had become increasingly turbulent since Russian intervention in Syria. Russia launched bombing attacks against ethnic Turkmen in Syria. For Turkey, ethnic Turkmen people are viewed as unofficial Turkish citizens. Therefore by killing the Turkmen people, it meant that Russia was launching attacks towards the Turkish people too. Turkish Foreign Minister called Russian Ambassador and asked Russia to stop attacking civilian Turkmen villages. Since this incident tension had been simmering between the two therefore the shooting down of the Russian warplane only enflamed the situation.

International actors suggested Russia and Turkey should "step back" and deal with the problem calmly in order to avoid unnecessary escalation.

American President Barack Obama argued that Turkey had the right to protect its territory. Obama and French President Francois Hollande said that the coalition should reach a political solution for the Syria crisis and have Russia involved in the process in order to prevent such incidents to happen again. Hollande claimed that French and Russian intelligences will work together in the future to share information about the targets of the operation to avoid unnecessary harm.

“The relationship between Russia and Turkey had become increasingly turbulent since Russian intervention in Syria.”



Kurdish forces seize Iraq's Sinjar town from ISIS

Kurdish Peshmerga forces, backed by U.S. air strikes, seized the Iraqi town Sinjar from ISIS. Sinjar is located in Northern Iraq and it is home to the Iraqi Yazidi minority. The town has been in the hands of ISIS since August 2014. Sinjar now first needs to be cleared of the likely explosives which presumably have been planted by IS in buildings and roads. According to John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of State, this will be done in a couple of days.

Sinjar is a strategic conquest as it is a necessary prerequisite to the seizure of Mosul due to its ability to cut off several important supply routes used to move fighters, weapons and oil. Mosul is one of the biggest Iraqi towns which remains under control of ISIS. By retaking Sinjar, the Kurdish forces were able to adopt positions along Highway 47. This road is strategically located between Mosul with Raqqa; the latter being ISIS headquarters.

It is also a symbolic conquest, as many Yazidis lost faith in the PKK when they were unable to protect them against the ISIS attack. However, Iraqi Kurdish President Barzan had pledged to retake Sinjar and once successful he claimed: "We promised and we keep our promises: we proved to our Yazidi brothers and sisters that all Kurdistan is behind them. Today we took

revenge for every Yazidi." Under the control of ISIS, the Yazidis in Sinjar have been systematically killed, captured and enslaved. Young women were taken as sex slaves, while many older women were executed. Several mass graves were discovered after the Kurdish forces claimed victory.

Yazidis are seen by ISIS as 'devil worshippers' and more than two thousand still remain in captivity by ISIS. Yazidis of all ages joined the Kurds and Peshmerga fighters in the battle to capture Sinjar. Many Yazidis are highly motivated to fight in order to seek revenge for the violent crimes committed by ISIS. A 65-year old Yazidi man insisted that "even those who don't have weapons should come and bring a stick to beat the enemy."



Sinjar. Photo: Sgt. Eric C. Schwartz [Wikimedia Commons]



Bombing of Russian commercial plane

Metrojet Flight 9268 from the Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Sheikh to St. Petersburg crashed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula after it exploded midair. The latest United States (US) intelligence suggests that the explosion was caused by a bomb which was planted before the plane took off. However, the report was still not official due to the waiting for the evidence from the crash. In the initial suggestion, US intelligence also suggests that Islamic State (IS) is affiliated with the bombing of Russian plane which killed 224 people on board. The affiliation with IS is partially based on monitoring of internal messages of the terrorist group. In contrary to IS' usual response to claim the responsibility after the attack, they have not provided any details in this case which raises doubts of their involvement. To support this, officials in Egypt and Russia could not conclude this as IS' responsibility without further evidence. Also in response to this matter, Britain and Ireland suspend flights to and from Sharm al-Sheikh for a while. Two employees in Sharm al-Sheikh airport has been interrogated by Egyptian authorities. They are suspected of being involved with the incident by working with whoever planted the bomb.

Vladimir Putin, in response to this incident, vowed to hunt down those responsible for blowing up the Russian airplane which killed a lot of people. After the Paris attack, Russia found a proof of traces of foreign-made explosives on fragments of the downed plane and of passengers' belongings which implied IS' involvement in the matter. As a result, Russia intensified its attacks against militants in Syria and declared ISIS as an enemy of Russia. Russia has been involved in Syria since September 2015 at the request of Syrian government. Russia, along with Iran, has been known as the supporter of Bashar al-Assad. Russia suggests for Syrian government and the opposition to meet together and discuss the future of Syria. Russia discusses an eight-point proposal for both sides to launch a constitutional reform process of up to 18 months, followed by early presidential elections. In this proposal, Russia also puts al-Assad as the person in charge to create peace in Syria. In response to this, US, its Gulf allies, and Turkey say that in order to create peace in Syria, al-Assad has to be removed from his position and his involvement in the government to trigger peace that Syria needs.



Leaders of China and Taiwan hold first talks since bitter 1949 split

Ever since the end of World War II the international system has shown inclination towards forming economical regional institutions. Liberals within International Relations theory believe that economic integration can lead to interdependence and avoid conflict. Such theories arguably hold some truth, for Prime Minister Li Keqiang of China, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and President Park Geun-hye of South Korea met recently for the first time since 2012 in order to discuss greater trade ties. The summit was held on November 1st at Ms. Park's presidential headquarters, the Blue House and the three leaders have agreed to meet annually in order to continue the discussions. Their next meeting will happen next year, in Tokyo.

The meeting has historical significance, for it restores a system of cooperation among the three countries, resulting in an important frame of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. Jointly stating that China, Japan and South Korea would work for regional peace and stability, the three have apparently skirted their countries' territorial and other thorny disputes.

On a similar note, the Presidents of China and Taiwan shook hands on November 7th, meeting for the first time since the

countries' bitter 1949 split. The meeting took place in a third party country, Singapore. Furthermore, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou decided to address each other simply as "Mr", eschewing their presidential titles. This gesture might seem irrelevant, but every move made by the two countries has been closely scrutinized. It is, after all, the beginning of a new chapter in the cross-strait relationship.

Despite having existed as separate governments for over 60 years, China's and Taiwan's economy is closely linked. China is Taiwan's bigger trade partner and some Taiwanese companies have factories in the continent. The Presidents did not sign any forms of agreement during this meeting. However, some dialogue signals the possibility of a future drafted together.

In both cases, be it the beginning of a dialogue between continent and island or the revival of talks among neighbours, not all is perfect. Japan's relation with South Korea remains frosty despite dialogue attempts. Mr. Abe insists that there is no proof that Japan's military systematically forced Korean and other Asian women to serve as sex slaves during World War II, which continues to anger Ms. Park.



In addition, Seoul and Beijing's relations with Tokyo are quite delicate due to territorial disputes over islands and conflicting interpretations of wartime history. These have worsened since the Japanese leader sent offerings to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where war criminals are honoured.

Regarding the Chinese-Taiwanese relations, protests have risen in Taipei. Taiwan has acted as an independent country since 1949 and the possibility of renewing dialogue with China might have consequences to the country's

democracy, for China sees Taiwan as a renegade province. There have also been warnings from Beijing that a formal declaration of independence by Taiwan could lead to military intervention.

The current economic atmosphere has shown the region that dialogue and cooperation might be a better option for all involved, and all countries seem eager to find middle ground to work on. Let us hope that this does indeed happen and that International Relations liberal interdependence theory proves to be effective.

“a formal declaration of independence by Taiwan could lead to military intervention”



Xi Jinping. Photo: Day Donaldson [Flickr]



Ma Ying-jeou. Photo: Voice of America [Wikimedia Commons]



ASEAN Summit 2015

The 27th ASEAN Summit 2015 was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 18–22 November 2015. The issues discussed in the summit consisted of the South China Sea disputes and the increasing strength of the so-called Islamic State (IS). The leaders from 18 countries were involved in the summit.

The long-standing disputes between Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam regarding the ownership of the Spratly and Paracel islands and border issues within South China Sea had been taking a toll not only on them but also on the other countries.

China is viewed as the most aggressive country in the conflict due to its persistent claims the islands belong to her which results in various troublesome acts. Such acts include the drilling of rigs into water around the Paracel islands in May 2014. The claim from China on both islands dates back to the map they made in 1947. These claims were mirrored by Taiwan. Vietnam also made the same claims with the proof of documents stating that they have been ruling over those islands since the 17th century. The Philippines claims on the Spratly islands were based on their geographical proximity. Malaysia and Brunei, on the other hand, claim the islands based on the argument that it falls under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) laws.

In regards to the South China Sea dispute, United States' president, Barack Obama, hoped for those countries to quickly settle

the dispute and reach a solution. Obama said that the disputes affect freedom of navigation and free flow of commerce within those which also affects the growth of the region and the political relations between them and other countries as well. In response of China's attitude towards the issue, United States also urged China to be more cooperative in this matter. China has been seen as not taking the issue seriously by acting in out of her own self-interest whilst disregarding the interests of others.

Japan also shared its concern regarding the South China Sea dispute. Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, mentioned during the bilateral meetings that the South China Sea dispute should be resolved soon. Abe also pointed out that the disputes have been affecting the freedom of navigation within the region of East Asia. Abe hoped for disputed countries to respect the rule of international law.

As for the second item of the agenda regarding the so-called Islamic State, Malaysia, as the host of the ASEAN Summit 2015, declared its coalition to fight against IS. Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Razak, stated that IS ideology is against the Islamic belief they harbour and does not represent Islam or Muslims.

The summit was held not long after the Paris attack, the mass killings in Mali and the bombing attacks in Beirut. Therefore the ways to deal with the threat of and terrorist acts were also discussed.



Canadian prime minister brings diversity into the new cabinet



Prime minister Justin Trudeau. Photo: Premier ministre du Canada [Flickr]

The newly-elected Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, has been praised during his first few days of his leadership. Trudeau's decision to bring equality into his cabinet with an equal number of 15 men and 15 women positioned as ministers has been warmly welcomed by the public. Justin Trudeau also showed diversity in his cabinet by having ministers with different ethnic backgrounds. As the second-youngest prime minister in the history of Canada, the aim of creating a very gender-equal and diverse cabinet was to create a better government for Canada. Trudeau chose people for his cabinet based on their backgrounds, achievements and competences.

Carla Qualtrough, the new Minister for Sports and Persons with Disabilities, is a former swimmer who won three times in

Paralympic Games. She is a lawyer who has a background in the field of human rights. She has done a tremendous work as a mediator and arbitrator on employment and inclusion for persons with disabilities. Qualtrough is a former president of the Canadian Paralympic Committee, and she was named as one of Canada's most influential women in sport six times. The new Canada's Minister of Defence is an Indian-born decorated Lieutenant Colonel in the Canadian Armed Forces, Harjit Sajjan. He was the first Sikh Canadian combat veteran serving in Bosnia and on three deployments to Kandahar, Afghanistan. He has received numerous military honours for his service with the Canadian Armed Forces, especially for his involvement on reducing the Taliban's influence in Kandahar Province. Before serving in the military, Sajjan was a detective with Vancouver police department.

Harjit Sajjan is one of two Indian-born ministers in Trudeau's cabinet. Amarjeet Sohi joined the cabinet as the Minister of Infrastructure. He was a city councillor in Edmonton, Alberta, with the history of being a political prisoner in India after his involvement as a young activist advocating for land reform in the state of



Bihar. He was arrested on accusation of terrorism. However, he is known as a very calm and thoughtful guy during his political career in Canada and will be a great asset for the government.

Maryam Monsef is an Afghan-born Minister for Democratic Institutions in Trudeau's cabinet. She came to Canada with her family as refugees and is the youngest in Trudeau's cabinet. She is also the first Muslim Canadian to have a position in the cabinet.

Calgary-Center MP Kent Hehr is named as the new Canada's Minister of Veteran Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence. He was named as 'a strong voice for Alberta' for his dedication as a lawyer and former Alberta MLA.

The cabinet of Trudeau consists of people with a wealth of achievements who are experts in their fields. Trudeau has also promised that his government will be more open and transparent than the previous one. Stephen Harper, the former prime minister of Canada, had a history of



Parliament sits in the Centre Block in Ottawa. Photo: Saffron Blaze [Flickr]

dominating the policy-making process and centralizing power within the prime minister's office. Learning from previous mistakes, Trudeau promised to embrace the diversity of Canada and be more inclusive in terms of people's participation in the politics. Muslim Canadians will be included in Canada's new parliament. In addition, 20 Punjabi-speaking MPs will also be included in the parliament, making Punjabi the third most common language in the House besides English and French.

“Trudeau promised to embrace the diversity of Canada and be more inclusive in terms of people's participation in the politics.”



■ News in Brief

Domestic Affairs affecting international relations

First steps taken, still a long way to independence

■ On 9 November, Catalonia's regional assembly voted to formally begin the process of separation from Spain, including the creation of an independent social security system and tax authority. The vote passed by 72 to 63, backed by MPs of the pro-independence Junts pel Sí coalition and the Candidatura d'Unitat Popular. Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy and his government brought the case to the Spanish Constitutional Court which agreed to hear the appeal against Catalonia's declaration and notified the members of the Catalan parliament that they could be suspended from their posts and face legal action if they failed to take the decision into account. In addition, the Catalan resolution also stated that the regional parliament will no longer be bound to decisions made by institutions of the Spanish state.

Scotland bill backed by Commons

■ United Kingdom's House of Commons approved the Scottish Bill on November 9th this year. The bill will give the Scottish Parliament the power to set rates and bands of income tax from April 2017, keep half of all VAT receipts and the ability to top up welfare benefits and create new payments. The UK government added amendments on control over abortion law, and enhanced powers over welfare, including the ability to top-up any cuts to tax credits made by the government. Opposition parties have also suggested amendments, but these have been rejected.

Croatian parliamentary elections bring forward coalition talks

■ On 8 November, parliamentary elections were held in Croatia for the first time since the country joined the European Union in 2013. The governing centre-left coalition led by the Social Democratic Party won 56 seats while its opposition, the centre-right coalition led by the Croatian Democratic Union won 59 mandates from the 151-seats parliament. A strong new political actor has also risen: the Bridge of Independent Lists (Most Nezavisnih Lista) which acquired 19 seats, therefore has consequently become a potential kingmaker in the ongoing coalition talks. As negotiations have thus far remained unsuccessful and no agreement has been reached yet, it is possible that new elections will be announced..



Turkish voters prefer action and development to controversy?

■ After a minor set-back in June 2015, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has won a critical parliamentary election. AKP founder and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan rebuilt the party's reputation with a message of stability after weeks of violence with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels. With this came the Turkish government's declaration that Turkish voters desire unity and integrity for their country. With 316 seats in parliament for Justice and Development Party (AKP), AKP currently form the majority, having to share only 134 parliamentary seats with Republican People's Party (CHP), 59 with People's Democratic Party (HDP) and 41 with Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Interestingly, AKP fell 14 seats short of the number needed to call a referendum on changing the constitution and increasing the powers of the president.

Fire in Bucharest night club

■ On October 30, a fire incident occurred in Colectiv night club in Romania. The fire resulted in the deaths of more than 40 people and the hospitalization of many more. The incident enraged the Romanian people as they see the fire as a careless result of the government's negligence and its failure to eradicate corruption amongst government officials. About 20.000 people had a large protest on November 3, demanding the resignation of not only Victor Ponta, but also the Minister of Interior, Gabriel Oprea, and the Mayor of the district where the nightclub was located, Cristian Popescu Piedone. As a result, Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta resigned from his position.

Islamic State claims responsibility for hotel attack in Egypt

■ Egypt's Islamic State affiliate, known as the Sinai Province has claimed responsibility for a bomb attack that killed seven people in a hotel based in the northern Sinai Peninsula on the 24 November. The hotel was used by judges overseeing the Egyptian parliamentary elections when a terrorist tried to drive a car bomb into the building. As security forces opened fire the car exploded, however a suicide bomber and a gunman managed to break into the hotel restaurant, killing and wounding several people, including one of the judges. The attack was not an isolated event. Last month the same terrorist group brought down a Russian passenger jet departed from Hurghada.

Two suicide bombers hit Hezbollah bastion in Lebanon, 43 killed

■ 43 people were killed and more than 240 people were wounded in a suicide bomb incident in Lebanon executed by the members of the Islamic State. The targets were the Shia Muslim group Hezbollah right after they increased their involvement in Syria. Hezbollah's stance to support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is seen as a threat not only towards the Islamic State rebels but also to the Lebanese people who oppose involvement in the Syrian conflict. A series of bomb blasts have struck Lebanon in 2013 and 2014. Such events contributed to the deepening of the current political crisis in Lebanon due to the absence of the head of state for over a year.



Saudi women running for office

■ More than 900 women began campaigning for public office as Saudi Arabia has started a slow reform process that also allows women to vote for the first time in the country's history. In 2011, an order by the now deceased King Abdullah granted women the mentioned opportunities for political participation, however only at municipal level. Therefore, critics have described the measure inconsequential.

Ethnic murders put pressure on Ghani government

■ Shortly after the murder of seven members from the Hazara ethnic minority in Afghanistan, protests occurred in front of President Ashraf Ghani's Kabul palace on November 11th. Ethnic tension and violence has persisted in Afghanistan for a number of years. Among the victims were three women and two children, which led to a public outcry after the killers dumped the partially beheaded bodies. President Ghani asked his people to avoid anarchical reactions and said that the government will be committed to avenging their countrymen's blood. Such a response did not quench people's thirst for justice and revenge. During the protests, the demonstrators marched 10 km to the palace, bearing the green-draped coffins of the dead and chanting "Death to Ghani, death to Taliban".

Maldives declares state of emergency

■ In the light of rising threat from the major anti-government group, backed by the Maldivian Democratic Party, the government of Maldives declared state of emergency limited to 30 days to ensure the citizen's safety and to protect national security. This event added to the already occurred political instability in Maldives which can create more tensions between the government and the opposition. The state of emergency was declared due to the reason that there are threats of violence stemming from the opposition. The opposition demanded that the government release their leader, Mohamed Nasheed, from jail after his arrest related to the anti-terror laws. Mohamed Nasheed is viewed, by the opposition, as the first democratically elected leader of Maldives.



Saudi women in Riyadh. Photo: Tribes of the World [Flickr]



Hazaras in Behsud. Photo: Nasim Fekrat [Flickr]



Chinese forces kill 28 alleged terrorist

■ Chinese security forces have killed 28 people in the country's western region, Xinjiang. According to government officials, the victims were part of a terrorist group that had carried out a deadly attack on a coal mine in September. 16 people had been killed then, including 5 police officers and another 18 had been wounded. Chinese authorities undertook a manhunt which involved killing the 28 alleged terrorist. According to human rights groups, Beijing has never presented any convincing evidence of the existence of such a terrorist group in the region. They even state that much of the unrest is caused by the frustration over government control on culture and religion issues of Uighur people who form majority in Xinjiang.



Map showing the location of Xinjiang. Photo: TUBS [Wikimedia Commons]



Burundi peacekeepers. Photo: US Army Africa [Wikimedia Commons]

Burundi opposition asks UN to send peacekeepers quickly

■ Burundi opposition asked United Nations to send peacekeepers to help deal with rising violence in the country on November 13th. As for the Security Council's request to promote dialogue between the government and the opposition only one day before, Burundi government did not give a direct response. The situation is tense, and there is growing international concern that the fighting might develop into an ethnic conflict. The European Union and the African Union are trying to establish dialogue between the government and the opposition, leaving the utilisation of troops as a contingency plan for the time being. Burundi's 12-year civil war has already cost the lives of 300 000 people and is fuelled by the ethnic divide between the Hutu majority and Tutsi-led army. Officially, the government denies having instigated the conflict, but President Pierre Nkurunziza's third term win has added to the tension between both groups. Protests have been growing since Nkurunziza's re-election.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalates – Third intifada in sight?

■ Since the start of October, tension has been growing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There has even been talk of a possible third Palestinian intifada, following the ones in 1987-1993 and 2000-2005. Although current attacks have been less intense than the first two, there has been a powerful wave of violence. According to several sources, there have been numerous cases where Palestinians have attacked Israeli civilians and soldiers, mostly by stabbing them, or even running them over with cars. At the same time, Israeli troops have been accused of using excessive force against Palestinians. Palestinians claim that these people could have been arrested for their acts, instead of being shot dead on the streets.

Gunfire along the Pakistani-Indian border

■ According to Indian news agencies, Pakistani security forces have killed two Indian soldiers in a shooting along the de facto border dividing Kashmir between the two countries. Although the ceasefire agreed in 2003 remains in place, neighbouring countries often accuse each other of violating it by firing along the disputed border. The recent incident happened days before Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic visit to the Indian-administered Kashmir.

Indonesia – Philippines on border talks after the sinking of 4 PHL vessels

■ Tension arose between Indonesia and Philippines after the sinking of 4 PHL vessels by Indonesian navy ships. Philippine officials stated that the vessels did not break the EEZ law since it was still sailing within the Philippine's EEZ area. Representatives of both countries attended bilateral talk at the 34th Border Committee Chairmen's Conference (BCCC) in order to discuss and enhance cooperation in regards of border and maritime issues.



Military agreement between Japan and the Philippines

■ Leaders of Japan and the Philippines have agreed upon the framework of a military deal, under which Tokyo will supply Manila with used military equipment, including aircrafts that could be deployed to patrol the disputed South China Sea. The deal can be considered as a landmark, since it is the first time Japan has agreed to directly donate such equipment to another country and it also proves that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has a definite security agenda.

US and Cuba sign environmental pact

■ On 18 November, the United States and Cuba reached another milestone in diplomatic relations by signing an environmental agreement under which scientists of the Florida Keys and the Texas Flower Garden Banks national reserves will cooperate on maritime issues with researchers of the Cuban Guanahacabibes National Park and the Banco de San Antonio sanctuary. “We recognize we all share the same ocean and face the same challenges of understanding, managing, and conserving critical marine resources for future generations. [...] The opportunity for international cooperation in marine conservation is invaluable and this moves us closer to ensuring a healthy and productive ocean for everyone” – said Kathryn Sullivan, chief of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



Shinzō Abe. Photo: Day Donaldson [Flickr]



NOAA's Dr. Kathryn D. Sullivan. Photo: United States Mission Geneva [Flickr]



■ News in Brief

International relations

“Jihadi John” killed in drone attack

■ According to the Pentagon's press release, it is “reasonably certain” that a US drone strike in Syria killed the Islamic State's militant, Mohammed Emwazi. The Kuwaiti-born British combatant also called “Jihadi John” became known worldwide after he had appeared in beheading videos released by the Islamic State. British intelligence, MI5 warns that revenge attacks could be developed, although secret services are on high alert and are continuously monitoring the communications of known IS sympathisers.

Pirates attack Polish ship off Nigerian coast, kidnap five

■ On November 27th a Polish-owned cargo vessel anchored around 56 km off the Nigerian coast, and was arranging for a new crew to take it back to port when pirates attacked and kidnapped its captain and four crew members. The Cyprus-registered Szafir was boarded overnight by armed men in two boats, who looted the 10,000-tonne container ship. The rest of the crew, made up of 11 people were left unharmed. This was the first attack since February and Polish Maritime Minister Marek Grobarczyk said the safety procedures of all Polish companies operating in the area would be reviewed to ensure sailors' safety.

Tensions rise over Cuban migrants in Central America

■ More than a thousand Cuban migrants – heading north to the United States – were trapped in Costa Rica after its neighbour country, Nicaragua closed and militarised its borders on 15 November. While Europe is dealing with its own migrant crisis, Central American countries are trying to solve a standoff over immigration rules that allow Cubans – who manage to reach one of the United States' border checkpoints – to enter the country and apply for residency after a year spent there. The so-called Cuban Adjustment Act has been seriously questioned since diplomatic relations between Washington and Havana started to thaw in April this year. Fear that policies may change as a result of the détente has forced thousands of Cubans to leave the island as soon as possible. According to Costa Rica's government, Nicaragua's decision may lead to a humanitarian crisis; however the creation of a corridor from Ecuador to Mexico would guarantee the safe transit of Cuban migrants.





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