

*"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"*

# Cultural Relations Policy

## News and Background

# January 2016





## About CRP News & Background

Cultural Relations Policy News & Background is a part of ICRP Monthly Review Series and an initiative of Institute for Cultural Relations Policy Budapest. Launched in 2012, its mission is to provide information and analysis on key international political events. Each issue covers up-to-date events and analysis of current concerns of international relations on a monthly basis.

As an initiative of ICRP, the content of this magazine is written and edited by student authors. The project, as part of the Institute's Internship Programme provides the opportunity to strengthen professional skills.



## Editorial Team

**Series Editor** | Csilla Morauszki

**Authors – January 2016** | Aldoreza Prandana, Beatriz Isaac, Kiera Wilkins, Dóra Vető, Cosmina Emilia Manda

**Executive Publisher** | Andras Lorincz

© **Institute for Cultural Relations Policy**

Kulturalis Kapcsolatokert Alapitvany

45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 – Hungary

**ISSN 2063-8205**

## Contents

---



- 
- 01** Mass sexual assaults in Germany and Finland

---

  - 03** Poland's takes public media into governmental control

---

  - 04** Migration crisis in Europe

---

  - 06** Cameron-Orbán meeting

---

  - 07** US Supreme Court to rule immigration reform by summer 2016

---

  - 08** Mexico creates first and second class migrants

---

  - 09** Saudi Arabia's diplomatic feud against Iran

---

  - 11** South African racial tension

---

  - 12** Haiti postponed the presidential election for the second time

---

  - 13** North Korean nuclear test

---

  - 14** News in Brief

## Mass sexual assaults in Germany and Finland

**Following the New Year's Eve** celebration in Cologne, Germany, approximately 945 complaints were filed by women who went to the city to celebrate the event, including 434 of such complaints for sex related crimes. Most of the victims reported that their assaulters were people of Arab and North African origin, who made up a group of between 500 to 1000 men described as drunk and aggressive. Germany stated that this huge scale of sexual crimes is a new wave of organised crime they had not anticipated. One or two victims reported that they had been raped by the group of young drunk men. The assaults were aggressive and left bruises on the victims. German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the incident and asked the German authorities to find the perpetrators as soon as possible and to punish them without regard to their origin or background. The German authorities assumed that the incident was planned as it was impossible to be a coincidence for that amount of people to gather and conduct the assaults spontaneously. Some of the perpetrators were known by German authorities and some may have been asylum seekers having arrived in Germany, although they are not necessarily part of

the recent wave of refugees coming to Europe.

Similar attacks also happened in other German cities, such as Hamburg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt and Dusseldorf. The fact that the authorities failed to realise that such large-scale crimes were happening until more and more women came forward in the following days sparked assumptions that media and the authorities were covering up the news to avoid negative stigmatisation of refugees.

The crimes triggered criticism towards Chancellor Merkel's open-door policy for refugees. The opposition has been voicing their opinions on how this occurrence should be used as a sign for Germany, or for Europe in general, to prevent more refugees from coming and to deport the ones who are already in Europe. The Alternative for Germany, a rightwing populist party, alongside Pegida, the anti-Islam and anti-immigrant group, had been using this occurrence to further their campaigns to put a stop to immigration. So far, Chancellor Merkel's open-door policy allowed about 1 million people to enter the country within the past 12 months.

On the other hand, the government and local politicians have been trying to



reiterate that there is no evidence to suggest that refugees were involved in the attacks. Their attempts to do so have proven challenging as the far right group is also trying to point out that there is no evidence to suggest that refugees were not involved.

Germany's Minister of Justice claimed that asylum seekers could be deported if they are found to have participated in the incidents all over the German cities. The law allows for people to be deported during asylum proceedings if they are sentenced to a year or more in prison.

The perpetrators of these sexual assaults are claimed to be refugees of North African descents. However in another case, a Belgian reporter was sexually assaulted when working on the New Year's Eve celebration in Cologne. The assault was broadcasted as it was happened when she was doing her live broadcast. The perpetrators were three German men who were also under the influence of alcohol. The news about this occurrence was buried under the mass attention given to the incidences which involved people of North African and Arab origin.

In a similar case, it was also reported that sexual crimes happened in Helsinki, Finland, during New Year's Eve celebrations. Three Iraqi-asylum seekers were arrested for committing sexual assaults in the Senate's Square during the festivities. Members of security personnel reported that there were many complaints from women getting sexually assaulted by asylum seekers who were under the influence of alcohol and

drugs. The Finnish authorities received tip offs from asylum reception centres that the occurrences might happen and they were already prepared for that. Sexual crime itself is claimed to be relatively rare in Finland. It was unknown before the arrivals of 32.000 asylum seekers in 2015, making the 14 cases of sexual crimes in parks and on the streets in 2015 big news. In response to the occurrence, a far right group called Soldiers of Odin have begun to emerge in several towns in Finland where refugees are housed, claiming they want to protect citizens from "Islamic intruders". The Finnish Minister of Interior condemned this group's action and stated that instead of creating security, they will be another source of trouble.

These incidences are becoming a test not only for Germany and those countries where the occurrences happened, but also for European Union as a whole, on their migration crisis policy and also the stigmatisation of refugees throughout European society. Far right groups are using this momentum to impact migration policy while most left groups are trying to find a solution to better integrate the refugees into the society. However, women's rights activists are focusing more on the misogynistic culture which persists within the society despite people's origin and background. German Minister for Families Manuela Schwesig stressed the importance of the need to change men's behavior in order to prevent the same incident from happen again in the future, instead of just warning women to protect themselves.



## Poland's President takes public media into governmental control

**In the first week of 2016**, Poland's President, Andrzej Duda approved a law which grants the government power over the administration of public media. This law means that the government can hire and fire the high cadres of public media.

The government representatives have stated that this action is a response to the media's bias and aims to promote objective coverage.



*President Andrzej Duda. Photo: Michał Józefaciuk [Wikimedia Commons]*

Nevertheless, this controversial bill has raised concerns amongst Poles who have demonstrated in several cities, and has led to the resignation of four channel directors. The European Commission has reacted by launching an investigation into Poland's rule of law. This step is of significant meaning given that it is the first time this sort of action has been taken. The results of the investigation are yet to be revealed.

Despite Jean-Claude Juncker's claim for the need to maintain a good relationship with Poland, harsh comments have been made. The European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans announced that media freedom and pluralism should be essential for those "respectful of the common values on which the union is founded".

Further action has not yet been taken, although there is some talk of sanctioning Poland by withdrawing their voting right in the EU.



# Migration crisis in Europe

## National solutions for a shared problem

**The unprecedented influx** of migrants and refugees has sparked a crisis within the European Union and has recently prompted some governments to impose their own national measures, as a common policy on migration is yet to be designed.

In 2015, migration to Europe reached an all-time high as almost two million people arrived at its doorstep mainly through Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Malta and Cyprus.

Approximately half of those who arrived in Europe claimed asylum thus putting further strain on the receiving countries, particularly Germany who received close to a third of the applications up until last October. Since an effective EU-wide relocation plan has yet to be established, member state governments have responded with national policies, some of which were enforced at the start of 2016. Several member states have been gathering efforts to discourage refugees from seeking asylum within their borders. On the 26th of January the “jewellery bill” was approved by the Danish Parliament, forcing those taking refuge in Denmark to deliver valuables as payment for their stay. The same measure was enforced both in Switzerland and in the Baden-Württemberg

(Germany). Furthermore, Norway is attempting to push the migrants and refugees back to Russia, where they made their way in.

Recently Reuters has announced that “Sweden is likely to deport up to half of last year’s asylum seekers” and intends to tighten its immigration policy by making it harder for companies to employ those who do not possess the proper legal documents. In addition, Sweden has begun to impose checks on its border with Denmark. In fact, several member states, such as Germany, France, Austria, Hungary, have enforced border controls, and in certain cases even erected fences, to tackle the increasing influx of refugees.



*Migrants in Hungary near the Serbian border.*  
Photo: Gémes Sándor/Szomszed [Wikimedia Commons]



All throughout Central Europe debates over national security are underway and many states are pushing for stronger border control. Recently, the Czech and Slovak prime-ministers have announced the need for “back-up EU border plans”. This effort to protect national territory appears as a classic response to a crisis scenario, in which security becomes the priority and freedom may be overlooked.



Refugees at Vienna West Railway Station. Photo: Bwag [Wikimedia Commons]

There seems to be little hope for the continuation of the Schengen zone agreement in the future as even in Germany, where the government welcomed thousands of refugees, there is incumbent pressure on Merkel to establish centers on its Austrian border to ease deportation.

The rift within the coalition has grown as Merkel's government was warned of the possibility of being taken to court in order to reverse its migration policies. Meanwhile, the government is already tackling the overflow of migrants by agreeing to

repatriate illegal Moroccan immigrants. This agreement with the king of Morocco, signed on the 28th of January, came to being following the mass sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve and heightened pressure from Angela Merkel's Bavarian allies to restrict migration flows. Also, Berlin is attempting to reduce the flow of Northern African migration by declaring Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria as “safe countries” and therefore increasing the number of migrants unqualified for political asylum. The wave of millions of people entering the EU alongside failed common policies in regards to regulation of migration flows and relocation of refugees have led many member states to pursue diverse measures in order to secure national borders. The warnings are vast, coming from politicians and academics, but could be summarised by the European think tank Bruegel: “Without a European solution, political pressure will rise and Schengen will be in danger”.



Refugee Rights Protest. Photo: Takver [Flickr]





## Cameron-Orbán meeting



*PM and PM Orbán joint press conference. Photo: Number 10 [Flickr]*

**Earlier this month**, David Cameron was told by Viktor Orbán at a conference in Budapest not to treat Hungarian's living in the UK as "migrants". Orbán went on to reiterate the fact that Hungarian people are not "parasites" and in fact give more in taxation to the UK economy than they receive in benefits. This confrontation follows Cameron's efforts to renegotiate an EU deal which would significantly limit in-work benefits for EU immigrants. Cameron has called for the ceasing of in-work benefits to immigrants who have been in the UK for less than four years. The proposal would not affect those already living in the UK however it has been subject to a great deal of criticism from many sceptics. It has

been argued that EU citizens all possess the legal right to work in any EU state therefore should not be victim to inequalities in welfare. In an attempt to compromise, Brussels is currently considering whether or not to allow the UK to have an "emergency brake" in order to curb immigration from the EU.

The "emergency brake" proposal is based on the idea that in-work and out of work benefits could be hypothetically ceased to immigrants of less than four years if EU institutions deem that the welfare system of an EU member state was under an unbearable strain. Cameron has stressed the importance of limiting the "pull factor" of the UK for immigrants. Despite a great deal of division amongst the Conservative party MP's, Cameron remains keen to focus on four key areas of renegotiation. Such areas include an opt-out option against further political integration, in-work benefits for immigrants, reduced "burden" of excessive EU regulations and finally a demand for the recognition that the euro is not the sole currency in the EU thus not all states should contribute to euro zone bailouts. The UK is set to hold a referendum which will decide whether to leave or to stay in the EU by the end of 2017.



## US Supreme Court to rule immigration reform by summer 2016



*Barack Obama President of the United States. Photo: LondonSummit [Flickr]*

**Fourteen months ago**, President of the United States of America Barack Obama issued an order expanding temporary legal status for some adults who entered the US illegally. This is a result of his frustration over Congress' inability to act on immigration reform. The new order granted temporary legal status and work permits to illegal adult immigrants who had been in the US for five years with children who have American citizenship or a lawful permanent residency. President Obama aimed to prevent people from being afraid and instead allow such people to be granted equality as legal American citizens. The action of issuing such a law was a follow-up from a previous temporary reprieve from deportation that he issued in 2012 for children age 15 and under brought to the US illegally. The action

issued by President Obama sparked those opposed to the law to rule out his reform. The opposition argued that President Obama overreached his power by trying to implement this law. Since the action was issued, the Republican-governed states challenged the action by bringing it to the court and arguing that this reform will not benefit the US, but instead will become a burden. Texas, in particular, argued that granting temporary work permits for illegal immigrants will hurt the US by spending millions of dollars to produce documents such as driving licenses. Therefore this reform has not been implemented yet due to ongoing debates within Congress.

The Supreme Court will give the ruling in the upcoming summer in the midst of presidential election. This reform would not only be the centre piece of President Obama's second presidency term, but it would also affect how the next US president and their government's action towards immigration policy. During the presidential debate, both sides have been using this reform as their argument. For example, Hillary Clinton said that she will expand this reform when she is elected and Donald Trump planned to reverse the reform and strengthen the border between the US and Mexico.



## Mexico creates first and second class migrants

**Organisations have recently claimed** that about 500,000 undocumented Central American migrants cross Mexico every year in their attempt to cross the border which separates it from the United States. International attention was drawn to a previously lesser-known route used by Cubans to travel from Ecuador in to the US in November 2015, when nearly 8,000 Cubans were seeking to cross the border. Eventually, they found themselves stuck at the Costa Rica-Nicaragua borderline, because the Nicaraguan government refused to let them in the country.



*San Jose, California May Day March. Photo: zzamiller [Wikimedia Commons]*

A solution was arranged by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico, in which they agreed to fly 180 migrants from Costa Rica to Guatemala. On 13 January the migrants were put on buses and were taken to Chiapas, a southern Mexican

state on the border with Guatemala. Due to special humanitarian visas issued by the Mexican government's National Migration Institute, the Cubans were able to cross the country without any obstacle. Such visas are issued for the duration of 72 hours to 3 days, in cases when migrants are victims of a natural catastrophe, face danger in their country of origin, or require special treatment due to health problems. Migrant rights activist blame the United States and Mexico because on the one hand, the US gives privileged treatment to Cuban migrants across the border and on the other hand Mexico is enflaming the present differences.

Privileged treatment is granted by the Cuban Adjustment Act (1966) which allows US residency to Cuban migrants after one year and a day they reach the country, regardless whether their entry was legal or illegal.

Activists also blame the Southern Border plan which was implemented in 2014 by Mexico with the support of the United States, for the offensive against undocumented immigrants. There has also been complaint about the Central American governments showing solidarity with the Cuban migrants, while being "insensitive, distant and utilitarian" towards migrants from Central America itself.



## Three Sunni-led states join Saudi Arabia's diplomatic feud against Iran

**The diplomatic feud** between Saudi Arabia and Iran heightened when 3 Sunni-led states joined the dispute on 4 January, taking the Sunni kingdom's side. Joining the feud, Bahrain, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates are engaging in a geopolitical conflict in the world's most eruptive regions, which is also known for its sectarian dimensions.

On 2 January the Saudi Embassy in Tehran was attacked, according to Iran, by Saudi Arabia. Iran also believes the reason for the attack was to distract the Saudi population from the country's internal problems. Later on it was reported that the attack was actually carried out by Iranian protesters who ransacked and then set fire to the Embassy, along with the Saudi Consulate in Mashhad. Such actions were a response to the execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a Shiite cleric who had criticized Saudi Arabia for its ways of treating the Shiite minority in the country. The sheikh was one of the 47 people who have faced execution. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations spoke to the foreign ministers of both countries on 4 January, condemning the executions along with the attack on the Embassy. He also added that he finds the two countries' relationship "deeply

worrying". The Islamic Republic of Iran realized long ago that there is a limitation of sectarian identity which is blocking the state of achieving its goals and carrying out its ambitions in the Middle East. Iran is tied to a minority sect in Islam, but it has been advocating Muslim unity to overcome the Shia-Sunni divide.

The unfolding of the crisis in Syria meant bad news for the leaders of Iran, since it quickly turned into a sectarian conflict with Saudi Arabia, each parties representing and supporting the opposite ends of the conflict. It is also common in Iranian public commentary to emphasize a connection between the self-proclaimed Islamic State with the Wahhabi ideology of Saudi Arabia.



*Location of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Photo: LondonSummit [Wikimedia Commons]*



With the diplomatic feud and the joining of Saudi Arabia's allies it is most likely that sectarian tensions and clashes will rise and the region will fall deeper into crisis. There have already been reports on conflicts in the Sunni populated parts of Iran and the Shia populated parts in Saudi Arabia.

Despite the fact that the conflict is affecting the whole region it causes the most damage to Iran, since the country isolates itself in a corner with only Shia friends, which only proves that the accusations about Iran pushing sectarian agenda in the region are valid.

This poses a great challenge to President Hassan Rouhani, since his efforts were mainly focused on bringing Iran out of isolation. In his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly, President Rouhani spoke about the country's commitment to a new era with the priorities of peace, dialogue and moderation. He also promised to make Iran an anchor

of stability in the region. He achieved some of his aims and there has been some success with the signing of the nuclear deal with the P5+1 and the approaches' first real benefit was an invitation to New York in 2015, to join a series of peace talks over the crisis in Syria. But internal critics accused Iran's president of compromising too much and being weak against "international regional bullies", like the United States and Saudi Arabia.



*President of Iran Hassan Rouhani. Photo: President of Russia [kremlin.ru]*

“In his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly, President Rouhani spoke about the country's commitment to a new era with the priorities of peace, dialogue and moderation.”



## South African racial tension thwarts opposition challenge to ANC

**A member of the** Democratic Alliance (DA), South Africa's main opposition party, has sparked outrage after posting racist comments on Facebook. After referring to black people as "monkeys" in a New Year's Day slur of offensive comments regarding beach littering, Penny Sparrow was denounced and expelled by the DA. However, Sparrow's comments triggered a huge backlash within the media which led to claims regarding whether other members of the DA also secretly harbour similar racist perceptions. Such claims of racism are not unfamiliar for the DA. Only last year was the party criticised for reinstating MP Dianne Kohler after she shared a Facebook post which praised former apartheid President PW Botha. Such incidences continue to paint the Democratic Alliance party as one which is inherently racist. Despite the appointment of black party leader Mmusi Maimane, as well as continuous attempts to attract black voters, the DA has failed to convince the public that it is a party for both white and black people. Currently, black people

account for 80% of the population and white people make up 10%. Despite black people forming the vast majority of the population, white people continue to own a disproportionately large share of wealth and property.

Racial inequality remains strikingly apparent despite the ANC's commitment to remedying the consequences of decades of apartheid. In recent years, President Zuma has faced allegations of economic mismanagement and failure to improve social mobility. Despite claims that the ANC has done little to significantly improve problems of employment, education and housing, racist incidents involving DA members ultimately benefit the ANC party as such issues of economic incompetency become overshadowed. Political analyst Susan Booysen argues that "the ANC uses the race narrative and experiences to portray that the struggle is not finished, that the enemy has not quite been defeated". Therefore, such persistent claims of racism arguably hinder the DA from being able to act as effective opposition to the ANC.



## Haiti postponed the presidential election for the second time



*Elections Haiti. Photo: Minustah Photo [Flickr]*

**Haiti has postponed** their presidential election due to the escalation of violence sparked by the opposition candidate's refusal to take part in a process he claimed was riddled with fraud. Jude Celestine, the opposition candidate, argued that the first ruling in October 2015 was rigged in favour of the President's hand-picked successor, businessman Jovenel Moïse.

The President of Haiti's electoral council, Pierre Louis Opont, did not confirm when the next election will be. The postponement led to excitement from demonstrators marching against the election as they

danced on the streets of the capital Port-au-Prince. However, a clash between protesters and police officers soon unraveled. The violence targeted seven election offices and an official's home; several buildings were set on fire.

Haiti has been struggling to build a stable democracy since the overthrow of the 1957-1986 dictatorship of the Duvalier family and ensuing military coups and election frauds. Attempts to create a stable government were challenging due to the competition within the political arena in Haiti. The first democratic election in Haiti was held in 1990, but it was followed by a coup d'état not long afterwards.

The country of 10 million people now faces political uncertainty as the president election is postponed without any specific deadline. While the opposition has demanded for the electoral council to be replaced and for fair elections to be conducted, most Haitians want to have a President for their country so they can start living without political uncertainty and violence.



## North Korean nuclear test: fears rise over alleged hydrogen bomb development

**On the 6th January** at approximately 01:30 GMT, North Korean media declared that the first miniaturised hydrogen bomb had been successfully tested at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site. This act was met by the international community with condemnation and a great deal of scepticism.

UN Chief Ban Ki-Moon declared the events as “profoundly destabilising for regional security”. However, there has been great debate amongst experts as to whether the magnitude of the blast, 5.1, was great enough to be the result of a hydrogen bomb. The hydrogen bomb uses nuclear fusion, as opposed to the atomic bomb which uses nuclear fission, this means that atoms collide together to produce a staggering amount of energy. The hydrogen bomb is arguably more powerful and technologically advanced than any other atomic weapon. Despite debate over whether the test explosion was indeed a result of the hydrogen bomb, the actions

of North Korea portray the fact that Kim Jong-un remains unashamedly committed to the advancement of nuclear weapons. Perhaps unsurprisingly, North Korea has been a source of concern for the international community for decades. After withdrawal from the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty in 2003, there have been increasing concerns over the extent of North Korea’s nuclear ambitions. Since 2006, North Korea has carried out four nuclear tests. Additionally, the fact that there is such emphasis placed on the miniaturised nature of the weapons tested in both 2013 and 2016 instils an even deeper fear within the international community. The miniaturised nature of North Korea’s nuclear weapons is significant because they may be able to fit on missiles. This fact creates an even larger threat to states across the globe. It is perhaps because of this fact that NATO has demanded the “verifiable and irreversible” disarmament of North Korea.





## ■ News in Brief

# Domestic Affairs affecting international relations

### **Man was shot dead by police officers in Paris, France on Charlie Hebdo anniversary**

■ A 20-year old man was shot dead by police officers in Paris, France on 7 January, which marks the first anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks. The terrorist, who was named Sallah Ali by the French media, tried to force his way into a police station, shouting “God is greater” in Arabic and wearing a suicide belt which was later identified as a fake. It was reported that a piece of paper was found taped to his body and read that he was taking vengeance for “the dead in Syria” and he has “pledged allegiance to ISIL”. The fake suicide belt and the nature of the note assumed that the Moroccan born homeless man was unstable.

### **Canada government discriminated against aboriginal children**

■ On Tuesday 26th January, a human rights tribunal declared that the government of Canada was guilty of discriminating against aboriginal children by underfunding welfare services on reserves. Nine years ago, First Nations Child and Family Services and the Assembly of First Nations accused Ottawa of failing to provide equal funding for children on reserves compared to non- native children. The tribunal argued that in addition to improving the funding formula and issues of aboriginal child welfare, Ottawa must also address wider social issues surrounding the principles of human rights for indigenous people. Issues of poverty and lower life expectancy are among the challenges Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has pledged to address.

### **Bomb attack in Istanbul's metro**

■ A suspected member of the self-proclaimed Islamic State committed a suicide bomb attack in Istanbul's historic Sultanahmet district, causing the death of ten people and at least fifteen injuries. The victims of the attack were mostly German tourists. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that “Turkey was the top target for all terrorist groups in the region”, especially because the country has been taking on a more active role in the US-led campaign against the terror group, carrying out air strike operations in Syria. Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated that they have identified the suicide bomber as a foreigner, who was most likely a member of the so-called Islamic State.



### **Again, Taliban attacked an education facility in Pakistan**

■ Four Taliban attackers killed at least 20 people, most of whom were students and teachers, at Bacha Khan University in Pakistan. The attack reignited the horror faced by Pakistanis after the attack which occurred in December 2014, when gunmen swarmed through a school in Peshawar and killed dozens of children. Attacks on school property, and specifically on educational facilities, are viewed as a marker of the Taliban's extremist ideology and ruthless methods. They view school as a part of government authority which is threatening them by offering opportunities for young people in Pakistan and Afghanistan, a modernist view of the future that the Taliban loathes. The Taliban targeted schools because those are easy targets which will give maximal shock value for their movements.

### **Terrorist attacks in Jakarta, Indonesia**

■ The Indonesian capital, Jakarta, was attacked by terrorist on the 14th of January. The attacks consisted of a series of bomb and gun attacks which wounded seventeen people and killed seven people, five of which are the terrorists and two civilians, one Canadian citizen and one Indonesian citizen. The attacks were reported as imitating the Paris attacks and it was followed by Islamic State claiming the responsibility of mobilising the attacks in Jakarta. Previously in December 2015, Indonesian authorities had arrested nine people suspected Islamic State terrorists with documents outlining a plan to do terror attacks in Jakarta.



*Damaged Police Box caused by suicide bomb attack in front of Sarinah Building.  
Photo: Gunawan Kartapranata [Wikimedia Commons]*



*Girls in school in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.  
Photo: DFID - UK Department for International Development [Wikimedia Commons]*



### **Thai election in 2017 even if the constitution is rejected**

■ Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has declared that a general election will be held in 2017 regardless of whether the draft of the new constitution passes the referendum this year. The government originally stated that a new constitution was a necessary prerequisite for a general election. Having been under military government since the 2014 coup, it is perhaps of little surprise that many spectators are concerned over the potential danger of holding an election under rules of an old constitution. It is argued that without a new, improved constitution, the Thai political system will continue to be vulnerable to abuses of power. Prayuth did not explicitly state why he wished to hold an election if the draft is rejected in the referendum, however the general rhetoric appears to reiterate the government's alleged commitment to returning to democracy as soon as possible.

### **India's new Juvenile Justice Act is violating UN law**

■ In the light of recent enactment of a new Juvenile Justice Act by the Indian parliament, which lowers the age of a legally defined juvenile for trial from 18 to 16 years old in heinous crime cases, civil rights groups and child welfare activists have stated their dissatisfaction with the decision. They argue that reducing the age limit would be against the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, which India ratified in 1992. In reference to the existing law in India which was formed in 2000, the accused under the age of 18 cannot be given any penalty higher than three years, nor be tried as an adult and sent to an adult jail. By enacting the new law, the context of the penalty will change which will allow anyone between the age of 16 and 18 who commits a heinous offence to be tried as an adult in court.

### **One step closer to close Guantanamo Bay**

■ It seems that detention camp Guantanamo Bay is closer to being abolished as the number of its prisoners has dropped to less than 100. Oman, a close US ally, has accepted the transfer of 10 Yemeni men and will host them until a permanent placement is found. Some of the transferred inmates were imprisoned for more than 10 years without trial or charge such as Samir Najji Moqbel who was taken to the outdoor pens of Camp X-Ray and victim to physical abuse. A series of transfers was promised to ease the permanent closure of the detention camp. Guantanamo Bay has previously received critics from human rights activists and the hunker-strikers in there were violently force fed. The 93 left prisoners in Guantanamo Bay can mean a step ahead for the promise president Barack Obama made at the beginning of his first term of office in 2009, to promptly close the prison.



## ■ News in Brief

# Bilateral relations

### **Lifted restrictions on American financing exports for Cuba**

■ It seems that president Obama is aiming to normalize and improve the relations between Cuba and USA before leaving the office next year. The Obama administration announced lifting restrictions on American financing exports to the island nation. This way, US banks can provide direct financing for the export of any product other than agricultural commodities. Obstacles may occur due to the fundamental different governments and economies both countries have, so in this regard exports to Cuba would have to be approved and distributed by a state-run ministry and Cuban cabinet can ease the process for its citizens to start businesses, engage in trade and access information online. Exposing the country to more American goods could help Cuba's economy and government. Prohibitions would still apply to exports that would go directly to the Cuban military, the police, or intelligence or security services, or that would generate revenue primarily for the state, such as sugar production.

### **Russia makes an offer to Japan around Pacific Islands**

■ Russia intends to give Japan priority in searching for foreign partners which will help developing fisheries around Pacific islands. Both Moscow and Tokyo have territorial claims in the area that strained relations between the two countries since World War Two after four of the islands at the southern end of the chain was occupied by Soviet forces. Yuri Trutnev, President Vladimir Putin's special envoy for Russia's Far Eastern region, declared that the offer is supposed to develop a huge territory rich in resources, but with the lack of infrastructure and in addition, another farming project with China was proposed worth for 10 billion \$. Even though many Russians disapprove of the project with China because its high interests in natural resources, Trutnev says there will be established concrete terms regarding the land.

### **Iran deepens China ties as sanctions end**

■ On the 23rd January, the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in order to signify the beginning of a new, extensive bilateral relationship. Khamenei claims to have "never trusted the West" and now, since the lifting of UN, US and EU sanctions in 2015, seeks to develop deeper bilateral relations with "more independent countries". After years of economic and political isolation, Iran has now managed to secure a deal which promises to increase bilateral trade with China by \$600 billion within the next ten years. This agreement incorporates the signing of a 25 year comprehensive agreement which addresses cooperation in areas such as nuclear energy, transport, tourism and the environment.

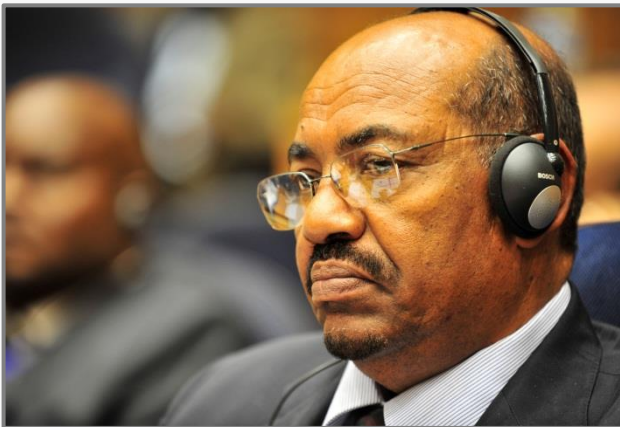


### **US student arrested in North Korea for “hostile act”**

■ North Korea claims to have in detention a US citizen which state news agency KCNA identified as University of Virginia student Otto Frederick Warmbier. The young man entered North Korea as a tourist and was detained during a tour in Pyongyang under accusations of committing a "hostile act" against the state. The US interests concerning this matter, are represented by Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang, as Washington and Pyongyang do not have diplomatic relations. North Korea sometimes uses the detention of foreigners as a means of exerting pressure on its adversaries and tensions have grown after stating that a hydrogen bomb has been successfully tested.

### **Opened borders between Sudan and South Sudan**

■ According to state news agency SUNA, there has been a decree issued by Sudan's president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir for the authorities to take all measures for implementing the opening of the country's borders with South Sudan. The relations between the two states have been tense due to the secession of the south in 2011 (taking with it three quarters of the country's oil). Disagreements regarding the borders and the status of certain regions have been paired with accusations from both sides of backing armed rebellions. As Bashir agreed to cut the transit fees for South Sudanese oil crossing its territory via pipeline to the Red Sea last week, the president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir announced in response, a normalization of relations.



*Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, the president of Sudan.  
Photo: U.S. Navy [Wikimedia Commons]*



*North Korea — Pyongyang. Photo: (stephan) [Flickr]*



## ■ News in Brief

# International relations

### EU security chiefs brace for more Islamist attacks

■ An 8-page long Europol report was published by the security agencies of the European Union, which discussed the possibility of another terrorist attack carried out by Islamists. The report says that further Islamist attacks can be expected in the near future. It also states that the strategy of the so-called Islamic State appears to be shifting and not only France, but other EU member states are threatened as well. The governments of the European Union are working to improve and harmonise their intelligence system, ensuring that sharing information with each other can act as a key element of cooperation, in order to ensure preventative action against possible attacks.

### Taiwan president visits Itu Aba Island

■ Amid the rising tensions in the South China Sea over competing claims which countries such as Taiwan, China Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei have, Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou paid a visit to Itu Aba island to reaffirm Taipei's sovereignty over the outpost. The visit received criticism from Taiwan's ally, Washington, the Philippine Foreign Ministry said all parties had a shared responsibility to refrain from actions that could increase tensions and high officials of Vietnam in Taiwan declared that Hanoi "resolutely opposes" this visit. The lifting work of Taiwan on Itu Aba (the \$100 million port upgrade, building a new lighthouse) seemed to be unfazed by China, the two countries claims are based on maps from the late 1940s belonging to the Nationalists, when they ruled all of China and then fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the Chinese civil war to Mao Zedong's Communists. The 46-hectare (114-acre) island, which lies in the Spratlys, supports around 180 people, about 150 of them coastguard personnel and has a hospital, an airstrip, and fresh water.



Muslims offer the first Friday prayers. Photo: Jordi Bernabeu Farrús [Flickr]



Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou. Photo: Jameson Wu [Flickr]



### Strikes on east Syrian town kill 63, including children

■ An air strike attack on 24 January on an eastern Syrian town, Khasham caused at least 63 deaths, including the death of 9 children. It is believed by the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights that the attack was carried out by Russian warplanes, which would not come as a surprise since Russian jets have been bombing around the city of Deir al-Zor and also hit the Islamic States' de facto capital, Raqqa, killing at least 44 people.

### Italy says the West is prepared to take on IS in Libya

■ As the Islamic State is expanding and stepping up its attacks throughout Libya, Western powers are preparing to keep the terrorist group out of the country. According to Italian Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti the Islamic State is gaining advantage by being able to strengthen in the current political vacuum, which causes Italy and its allies to prepare for an emergency. Ms. Pinotti also added that Italy has been working with the United States, the United Kingdom and France in the past couple of months. The United States has already taken action by sending “a small number of military personnel” to inform and warn the local forces about what is really happening and what results it can cause. Since Libya used to be under Italian possession and is located about 320 kilometres from the Italian island of Lampedusa, Italy wishes to act in a leadership role in the stabilization of the country.



*Russian Sukhoi Su-25.  
Photo: Mil.ru [Wikimedia Commons]*



*Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti. Photo: Alessio Jacona [Flickr]*





Institute for Cultural Relations Policy





<http://culturalrelations.org>