

Turkish lawmakers warn MEPs over further reference to Armenian ‘genocide’ resolution

Hurriyet Daily News, 08.04.2016



Two members of the Turkish parliament have penned joint letters addressed to Kati Piri, rapporteur for Turkey at the European Parliament, and Manolis Kefalogiannis, the co-chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, expressing “sadness” over what they called “falling into the trap of politicizing a painful period in history,” in regards to the mass killing of Anatolian Armenians during World War I.

“We believe the EP resolutions as well as the work carried on by the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee aim at positively contributing to Turkey’s accession negotiations,” Ahmet Berat Çonkar, and Mehmet Kasım Gülpınar, said.

“It is sad to see that the members of the European parliament still fall into the trap of politicizing a painful period in history, disrespecting the agony of others,” they said. “Such resolutions having a one-sided political view serve nothing but to distort history and have the risk of inciting hostilities among nations.

Thus any reference to aforementioned resolution in the final text will not only further damage the credibility of the EP’s report but also have a harmful effect on Turkey-EU relations,” said Çonkar and Gülpınar, in their identical letter sent to Kefalogiannis, also on March 30, referring to a 2015 resolution.

Days ahead of the 100th anniversary of the killings of Anatolian Armenians under the Ottoman Empire during World War I, marked on April 24, 2015, the European Parliament voted “by a wide majority” in favor of an “Armenian genocide” resolution.

Deal with Israel to be finalized ‘very soon,’ Turkey says

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Turkish and Israeli teams have made progress toward finalizing an agreement to mend ties between the two countries, agreeing that a deal will be finalized in the next meeting to be convened “very soon,” Ankara has announced.

“The Turkish and Israeli negotiating teams, headed by the undersecretary of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioğlu; the Israeli prime minister’s special envoy, Joseph Ciechanover; and the acting chairman of the National Security Council, Gen. Jacob Nagel, met in London today,” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a written statement released.

“The teams made progress toward finalizing the agreement and closing the gaps, and agreed that the deal would be finalized in the next meeting which will be convened very soon,” the Foreign Ministry said. Turkey was once Israel’s closest regional ally, but ties collapsed in 2010 over the killing by Israeli marines of 10 Turkish pro-Palestinian activists who tried to breach the Gaza blockade.

In response, Turkey demanded an apology for the killings, compensation for the Mavi Marmara victims and the lifting of the blockade on Gaza in exchange for restoring relations. Israel provided the apology, but the two sides have yet to reach a deal on the remaining two issues.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry did not say what form a deal might take but Ankara has always insisted there can be no normalization in ties with Israel unless its conditions for ending the Gaza blockade and compensation for the deaths of the activists are met.

Israel allows commercial goods into Gaza daily but limits the transfer of certain items such as cement and building materials as it fears militants could use them to build fortifications. Officials describe the blockade on Gaza, which is supported by neighboring Egypt, as a necessary means of preventing arms smuggling by Palestinian militants.

Turkey probes Russia's 'politically motivated' claims on smuggled Syrian antiquities

Reuters, 08.04.2016



Turkey is investigating Russian claims that ISIL militants in Syria and Iraq have profited from smuggling stolen antiquities through its territory, despite its belief the charges were politically motivated, a Turkish official said.

Russia's ambassador to the UN, said the U.N. Security Council that the jihadist group was netting \$150 million to \$200 million annually through illicit trade. "Even though the claims in the Russian media and recently brought to the U.N. by the Russian authorities have been made for political purposes and as propaganda, they are being seriously investigated," a Turkish Foreign Ministry official said.

"Turkey has taken all measures to prevent historical artefacts from Syria being removed and marketed," the official said, adding that it had sent findings on the matter to UNESCO, the U.N.'s cultural agency, in the past.

Russian-Turkish relations have been strained since Turkey shot down a Russian jet near the Syrian border last November. Moscow has repeatedly accused Turkey of supporting ISIL by purchasing oil from the group, a charge Ankara vehemently denies.

Churkin said the main center for the smuggling of cultural heritage items plundered by ISIL was the southeastern province of Gaziantep in Turkey. He also said in his letter that jewelry, coins and other looted items are brought to the Turkish provinces of İzmir, Mersin and Antalya, where criminal groups produce fake documents on their origin. "Turkey will make every effort it can to protect cultural assets, which are the common heritage of humanity, and ensure they are safely passed on to future generations," the Turkish official said.

Turkey won't implement migrant deal if EU falls short, says President Erdoğan

Hurriyet Daily News, 07.04.2016



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned the European Union that Ankara would not implement a key deal on reducing the flow of migrants if Brussels failed to fulfil its side of the bargain.

Erdoğan's comments indicated that Ankara would not sit still if the EU fell short on a number of promises in the deal, including visa-free travel to Europe for Turks by this summer. "There are precise conditions. If the European Union does not take the necessary steps, then Turkey will not implement the agreement," Erdoğan said in a speech at the Presidential Palace in Ankara.

"Everything that has been promised [must be put into action by the EU], everything that is specified under the accord," he added. The March 18 accord sets out measures for reducing Europe's worst migration crisis since World War II, including stepped-up checks by Turkey and the shipping back to Turkish territory of migrants who arrive in Greece.

In return, Turkey is slated to receive benefits including visa-free travel for its citizens to Europe, which in the accord is promised "at the latest" by June 2016. Turkey is also to receive a total of six billion euros in financial aid up to the end of 2018 for the 2.7 million Syrian refugees it is hosting. Meanwhile, its long-stalled accession process to join the EU is to be re-energized.

"Some three million people are being fed on our budget," said Erdoğan, referring to the Syrian refugees on whose welfare Turkey says it has spent some \$10 billion since the Syrian conflict began in 2011. "There have been promises but nothing has come for the moment," said Erdoğan. "We have received lots of thanks for our action on the refugees and in the fight against terrorism. But we are not doing this for thanks."

"Everything should happen in line with what has been promised, what has been set out in the text," he added. The first transfer of over 200 migrants from the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios to Turkey took place. But the process has been stalled by a last-minute flurry of asylum applications by migrants desperate to avoid expulsion.

Since then, there have been no more transfers. Nikos Xydakis, Greece's junior foreign minister for European affairs, said it would take "at least two weeks" to process the first batch of asylum applications. Under the pact with the European Union, Turkey has agreed to take back migrants who arrived in Greece in illegal crossings of the Aegean Sea after March 20. It also agreed to allow one Syrian refugee to travel to Europe in exchange for everyone that it takes back on its soil. The deal has caused controversy, with rights groups including Amnesty International claiming Turkey could not be considered a "safe country" for the return of refugees.

Saudi king to pay official visit to Turkey ahead of OIC summit

Hurriyet Daily News, 07.04.2016



Saudi Arabia's King Salman will pay an official visit to the Turkish capital next week ahead of his participation in the 13th Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit in Istanbul, the Turkish presidential office has announced.

Salman will visit Ankara upon an invitation from President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 11-13, the presidential office said. The Saudi king will then proceed to Istanbul in order to attend the OIC summit on April 14-15, it noted. "During the meetings to be held within the framework of the visit, regional and international issues will also be dealt with," Erdoğan's office said.

Salman's visit to Turkey will come shortly after he arrived on his first official visit to Egypt, with Cairo saying it was hoping to boost ties with its most important Arab ally and garner trade deals to help bolster its shaky economy.

Ties between Ankara and Cairo have been strained since Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi ousted Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, who is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, after mass protests against his rule.

In early February, while categorically ruling out meeting with former army chief el-Sisi until death penalty sentences for Morsi and other Muslim Brotherhood leaders were lifted, Erdoğan had already given a green light for ministerial-level talks between the two estranged countries. Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu reportedly agreed the 13th OIC Summit in Istanbul in April could offer an opportunity for such ministerial talks.

Riyadh has helped bankroll el-Sisi's government since 2013, giving billions of dollars in aid, grants and cash deposits to help buoy the country's economy. Egypt has faced years of political upheaval since a 2011 pro-democracy uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak sent foreign reserves tumbling and slowed economic growth. The two Arab nations, however, are at odds in their approach to the region's major crises, primarily the wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

NATO chief calls Turkish PM Davutođlu as refugee swap begins in Aegean

Hurriyet Daily News, 04.04.2016



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg called Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutođlu hours before Greece began returning migrants from Lesbos to Turkey under a landmark European Union deal to stop the uncontrollable influx of refugees into Europe.

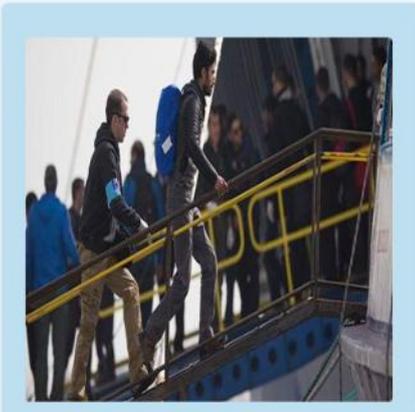
The telephone conversation late took place upon Stoltenberg's initiative, anonymous sources told. Stoltenberg's initiative also came hours before his scheduled meeting with U.S. President Obama. Last week, on the sidelines of a nuclear security summit in Washington, Turkish President Erdoğan held a bilateral meeting with Obama.

NATO ships have been patrolling the Aegean Sea, conducting reconnaissance, monitoring and surveillance activities as directed, while the alliance has been sharing information with Turkish and Greek authorities and the European Union's border agency, FRONTEX, to assist in the international efforts to counter human trafficking and criminal networks in the region.

Davutođlu and Stoltenberg made "a comprehensive exchange of views on illegal migration in the Aegean Sea, the fight against terror, Iraq, Syria, Libya and the latest developments in Afghanistan," the same sources told Anadolu. Extending condolences for Turkish citizens who lost their lives in recent terrorist attacks, Stoltenberg also voiced the alliance's strong support for Turkey's active efforts in the fight against terror, the sources said.

UN Committee on Migrant Workers to review Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 08.04.2016



Turkey's record on protecting the rights of migrant workers is due to be reviewed for the first time by the U.N. Committee on the Rights of Migrant Workers (CMW) next week in Geneva.

During meetings between the CMW and a delegation from the Turkish government scheduled for April 14-15, a wide range of issues are likely to be discussed such as the clarification of status and rights granted to refugees who fled their countries outside the Council of Europe, particularly Syria; ensuring the human rights of migrant workers crossing borders; implementation of the March 18 EU-Turkey agreement.

Including expulsion of migrant workers from Turkey prior to and following the agreement; conditions of detention for migrant workers, including alternatives to detention, especially for children and families; protection of migrant children from forced labor and exploitation; access to justice, education and healthcare for migrant workers and their families; extent of people smuggling and trafficking; specific laws to criminalize human trafficking, procedures to protect victims; measures to facilitate the right of Turkish workers living abroad to vote; consular services for Turkish migrant workers and their families abroad and efforts to facilitate their safe and sustainable return to Turkey.

Turkey is one of the 48 parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and so is required to be reviewed regularly by the committee. A cabinet decision to grant work permits to refugees who have fled to Turkey to escape conflicts in their homeland went into force. It did not specify nationality, but the measure chiefly applies to the around 3 million Syrians who have fled the almost five-year conflict in their home country for the relative safety of Turkey, as well as some 300,000 Iraqis.

Refugees in Turkey are not allowed to work or be employed in the country without a valid work permit, according to a government decree. In early January, Turkish police seized over 1,200 unsafe life jackets destined for use by migrants trying to reach Greece by sea, in a raid on an underground workshop in the center of the Aegean city of Izmir that used Syrian underage labor.

In late January, Britain's Independent claimed H&M and Next admitted to identifying child labor in supplier factories in Turkey. After an effort to gauge the scale of the problem, the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) asked 28 major brands last month about their Turkish suppliers and their strategies for combating the exploitation of Syrian children and adults.

At the time, the head of the Istanbul Readymade Clothing and Confection Exporters' Association (İHKİB) denied the reports. "It is impossible legally in Turkey to hire child labor. Besides, H&M and Next will never accept such production [practices]," İHKİB's Hikmet Tanrıverdi said in a statement.

PM: Merkel to open new Syrian refugee centre in Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 04.04.2016



German Chancellor Angela Merkel will next week inaugurate a new centre for Syrian refugees in the southeastern Turkish city of Kilis built with EU funds, Turkey's prime minister said.

"We are going to inaugurate a school and a hospital built in Kilis thanks to EU financing with European leaders led by Mrs Merkel," said Turkish PM Davutoğlu in a speech to his ruling party in parliament. He did not specify which other leaders would accompany Merkel for the ceremony in Kilis, a town on the Syrian border that houses a massive refugee camp for Syrians who have fled their country's devastating five-year war.

The centre was built under a new agreement between Turkey and the EU which aims to stem mass migration to Europe and the drowning of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean in overloaded inflatables. Turkey has promised to take back irregular migrants who have made it to Greece, and the EU has said that for every Syrian deported to Turkey, another will be resettled directly from the vast migrant camps in the country.

The first 202 migrants were deported from Greece and a similar number are expected to be expelled, officials said. European leaders hope the agreement will discourage migrants from risking the Aegean crossing that has claimed 366 lives this year alone, and break up the lucrative rackets that smuggled about one million migrants into Europe last year. Davutoğlu hailed the operation, saying the Aegean sea would no longer be a "migrant cemetery".

In return the EU has agreed to double aid to Turkey to six billion euros by 2018 in a bid to improve the lives of the 2.7 million Syrian refugees living there. It also agreed to accelerate visa-free travel for Turkish citizens and progress in its bid for membership of the bloc.

Bankers ‘not concerned’ about massive Turkish citizens’ personal data leak

Hurriyet Daily News, 08.04.2016



Banking sources have said they were not concerned about the leaked personal data of nearly 50 million Turkish citizens, as this data was not enough for third parties to illegally perform banking transactions.

Reports of a fresh data leak began circulating, after the report on hackers who posted a database online which included the personal information of nearly 50 million citizens, describing the incident as “one of the largest leaks of its kind.” This massive leak triggered panic among many citizens, who have been mainly concerned of potential illegal banking transactions by third parties using their personal data.

“There is nothing to be concerned about. We feel comfortable so our customers should do the same,” said a banking source, adding that a two-factored ID verification system is in operation in Turkey’s digital banking.

A website which had a surname-based search of the leaked data was online. The information which could be accessed on the website included data such as national ID numbers, addresses, birthdates and parents’ names. The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into reports of the leak.

“It is not enough for any ill-intentioned people to access to another’s online bank accounts by using these data. In Turkey, a two-factored ID verification system is used in digital banking. In this vein, it is not enough for even customers to show who they are.

They also need to pass two different ID verification steps, which require the surname of their mother or the answer of a pre-designated question, such as the name of their first pet. Passwords constitute another factor. The leaked data did not include any of these. In this vein, it is impossible to make illegal banking transactions by using the leaked data,” added the source.

According to another banking source, any ill-intentioned person cannot even apply to receive a loan by using the leaked data, as the two-factored verification system is also used, in line with the regulations, which were set properly by the banking watchdog. Almost all banks also require another verification method, which is based on SMS.

Banking sources noted call center staff take an exclusive training on ID verification. “If call center operators have doubts about the identity of the caller, they ask some additional questions, such as when the bank card was last used or in which areas the bank holder has an automatic payment order,” said one source.

Turkish currency weakens after presidential aide says currency justifies rate cut

Reuters, 08.04.2016



Turkey's lira weakened after a presidential aide said its level justified an interest rate cut, increasing the political pressure on the central bank to cut rates. Cemil Ertem told state broadcaster TRT Haber that the Turkish Lira, still not far off a record low hit last year, was in a "strong position" against the U.S. dollar.

"This is an important advantage for a central bank rate cut," he said. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly railed against the high domestic cost of borrowing, equating high interest rates with "treason." The Central Bank cut the upper band of its interest rate "corridor" last month.

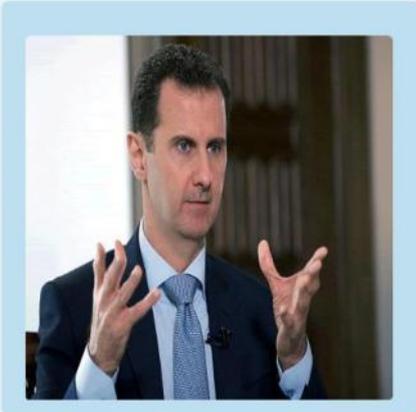
The lira weakened as low as 2.8710 against the dollar after Ertem's comments from below 2.86 earlier. The currency hit a historical low of 3.0750 against the dollar on Sept. 24, 2015. Turkey is negatively diverging from other emerging markets on "continued talk of aggressive rate-cut cycle by government officials," said TEB Investment strategist Işık Ökte in a note.

Investors are also concerned over the uncertain future of Central Bank Governor Erdem Başçı. Markets are waiting to see whether he is reappointed for another five-year term after April 19. "We maintain our view that with the slowing fund inflows into emerging markets, the uncertainty of the central bank governor appointment until April 19 and the possibility of a series of rate cuts in overnight lending rate, could impact the lira negatively," said İbrahim Aksoy, an investment strategist at HSBC Asset Management.

Industrial output rose a calendar-adjusted 5.8 percent year- n-year in February, the Turkish Statistics Institute said. Markets were also watching a Moody's review on Turkey expected later on April 8. Moody's rates Turkey at Baa3 with negative outlook.

Syria talks ‘doomed unless Assad stays’

AFP, 06.04.2016



Syrian peace talks which fail to address the question of President Bashar al-Assad’s fate are “doomed to failure,” a spokesman for the main opposition grouping involved in negotiations said. Riad Naasan Agha, of High Negotiations Committee, said that the talks which are set to resume in Geneva must focus on the future of the Syrian leader.

“If negotiations did not address the fate of Assad, it would be a waste of time and doomed to failure,” he said late Tuesday at a forum hosted by Al-Jazeera in Qatar. The U.N. has said the upcoming round of talks will focus on plans for a political transition to lead Syria out of five years of brutal civil war.

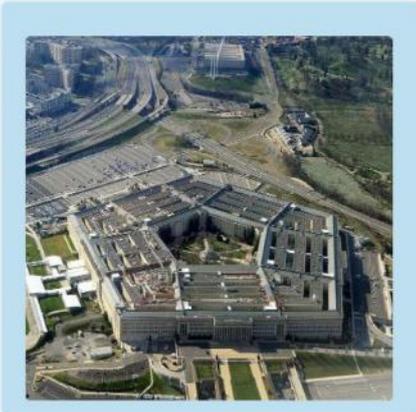
Agha said that he was not hopeful the talks would produce a positive outcome as negotiations on forming a transitional government were almost at a “dead-end.” Negotiators from the regime are expected to attend the talks but only after the completion of parliamentary elections in the country.

The previous round of talks broke up, without making any concrete advances towards a political solution to the devastating war. The opposition wants Assad to leave power before any transitional government is agreed, but the regime says his future is not up for discussion.

The U.N. envoy on Syria, Staffan de Mistura, on Tuesday met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose country is a key backer of Assad, in Moscow as he prepares for the Geneva talks. De Mistura is also expected to visit several other countries ahead of the talks, including Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Kerry visits Iraq, showing support for embattled prime minister

Reuters, 08.04.2016



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Iraq to show support for its prime minister, who is grappling with a political crisis, a collapsing economy and a fitful fight to retake ground from the ISIL militants.

PM Haider al-Abadi unsettled Iraq's political elite with a proposed cabinet reshuffle that aims to curb entrenched corruption by replacing long-time politicians with technocrats and academics. His aim is to free Iraqi ministries from the grip of a political class that has used the system of ethnic and sectarian quotas instituted after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 to amass wealth and influence through corruption.

U.S. officials are worried that the political unrest may harm Iraq's efforts to retake territory it has lost to ISIL militants, notably its second city of Mosul, seized when parts of the Iraqi army collapsed in 2014. Kerry's visit "will underscore our strong support for the Iraqi government as it addresses significant security, economic, and political challenges," State Department spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

In the past two weeks, Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led coalition air strikes have retaken significant parts of the region around Hit, an important town 130 km (80 miles) northwest of Baghdad. An offensive billed as the first phase of a campaign to recapture the northern city of Mosul has been put on hold until reinforcements arrive to hold ground, the commander of the operation said.

"The political wrangling in Iraq - it's certainly an issue that concerns us," a senior U.S. official in Washington told reporters earlier this week before Kerry flew to Iraq aboard a U.S. military aircraft. Kerry plans to "encourage the Iraqis, while they're dealing with the cabinet reshuffle, not to lose sight of the need to stay focused on the fight against" ISIL, he added, stressing the need "to plan steadily and carefully" to retake Mosul.

Baghdad is also hamstrung by the plunge in global oil prices that has shrivelled its main source of revenue. Officials from the International Monetary Fund and the government said the oil price forecast in the 2016 budget would be cut to about \$32 a barrel from \$45, widening Iraq's fiscal deficit by several billion dollars. As well as meeting Abadi, Kerry plans talks with Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari and with the head of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, the State Department said.

Greece seals sale of biggest port Piraeus to China COSCO

Reuters, 08.04.2016



Greece is to sell its biggest port Piraeus Port Authority to shipping group China COSCO Shipping Corporation, marking the second major privatization for the country since last year.

The port sale had been halted by the leftist government of Alexis Tsipras when it won elections in January last year but it was resumed under Greece's 86 billion-euro bailout deal agreed with its euro zone partners in August. Striking dockworkers marched in central Athens to protest against the sale, which they fear will put their jobs at risk. Container terminals were shut as a result of the strike. Brief scuffles broke between police and some of the protesters.

Under the 368.5 million euro deal, signed by China COSCO with the Greek privatization agency, COSCO will buy 51 percent of Piraeus Port for 280.5 million and the remaining 16 percent for 88 million after five years and once it concludes investments of 350 million over the next decade.

The total value of the contract is 1.5 billion euros (\$1.70 billion), including additional investment, as well as revenues of 410 million euros, dividends and interest Greece is expecting to collect under the 36-year concession deal between Piraeus Port and the government. Privatizations, a major element of Greece's bailouts since 2010, have produced revenue of only 3.5 billion euros so far because of political resistance and bureaucratic hurdles.

Athens concluded a 1.2 billion euro airport leasing deal with Germany's Fraport in December hoping this would help the country meet this year's target for privatization proceeds of 1.9 billion euros for this year.

In January, Greece named COSCO as the sole bidder for Piraeus Port. The port, a gateway to Asia, eastern Europe and north Africa, handled 16.8 million passengers and 3.6 million 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers in 2014. COSCO has been operating one of the port's container terminals since 2009 and is investing 230 million euros to build a second container terminal at the port.

Dutch voters reject treaty to deepen Ukraine-EU ties

Reuters, 07.04.2016



Dutch voters have overwhelmingly rejected a Ukraine-European Union treaty on closer political and economic ties, in a rebuke to their government and to the EU establishment.

The treaty, which had already been signed by Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government and approved by all other European Union nations as well as Ukraine, took effect provisionally in January. But that didn't stop Dutch voters rejecting the deal by a 64-36 margin in a national referendum. In another sign of antipathy, only 32 percent of voters went to the polls, fewer than in other recent elections and barely enough for the result to be considered valid.

Voters said they were voicing their opposition not only to the treaty itself but also to European policymakers on matters ranging from the migrant crisis to economic policy, not long before Britain's June vote on whether to stay in the EU. Although the Dutch referendum was non-binding, Rutte acknowledged it was politically impossible for his unpopular government to continue ratifying the treaty in its current form.

However, as the Dutch currently hold the EU's rotating presidency, he will need time to figure out whether and how he can alter the treaty in a way that could satisfy all parties. Rutte said the government would consult with parliament and European partners "step by step. That could take days or weeks."

Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko said his country will continue moving towards the European Union despite the Dutch vote. "Under any circumstances we will continue to implement the association agreement with the European Union including a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement," he told reporters in Tokyo.

Moscow has said it regards the Dutch vote as an internal affair. Any proposed changes to the EU-Ukraine treaty will have to pass both houses of Dutch parliament, including the Senate, where Rutte's shaky coalition lacks a majority. Some political commentators have predicted a coalition collapse over the issue, though new elections must be called no later than March 2017 anyway.

If a compromise can be found, it must also be palatable to other European countries, as well as the European Union Commission and the Ukrainian government. Rutte's main political rival, the anti-EU, anti-Islam politician Geert Wilders, whose popularity has hit all-time highs amid Europe's refugee crisis, said the result was "the beginning of the end" for Rutte's government and the EU in its current form. "If two-thirds of the voters say no, that is a vote of no confidence by the people against the elite from Brussels and The Hague," he tweeted.

The European Commission has said it will wait for the Dutch government to suggest a way forward. Options include leaving the Ukraine agreement in force provisionally, or drafting exemption clauses for the Netherlands as has happened in somewhat similar circumstances in the past.

Schulz: EU must watch rights in Turkey despite refugee deal

AFP, 03.04.2016



European Parliament President Martin Schulz said the EU must make no concessions to Turkey over human rights but voiced confidence in a deal with Ankara to manage the refugee crisis.

Under the controversial agreement, Turkey is due to take back illegal migrants from Greece, when it will also start an orderly resettlement program of Syrian asylum-seekers to the 28-member bloc. Turkey has received EU financial aid and other concessions, but Schulz, speaking to Germany's *Bild* am Sonntag newspaper, said Europe must give no ground to President Erdoğan when it comes to fundamental freedoms.

Schulz said Erdoğan "went one step too far" when his government called in Germany's ambassador last month over a satirical TV program that mocked the leader, demanding it be pulled off the air. "It is unacceptable that the president of another country demands that we restrict democratic rights in Germany because he feels he was caricatured," said Schulz, a German citizen.

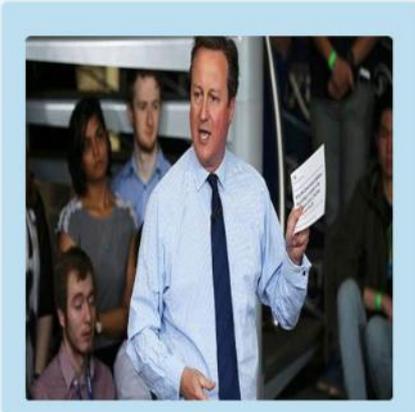
"We must not be silent on violations of fundamental rights in Turkey just because we are cooperating on the refugee question," he said. "On the contrary, we must denounce these violations and permanently stay in discussions with Turkey on freedom of expression and human rights issues."

However, speaking of the refugee deal, he said "I am optimistic that the distribution will work." "All EU countries have agreed to this scheme. Germany alone is ready to accept 40,000 refugees, France 30,000 and Portugal 10,000. "And once we have managed to distribute a first group in the EU, I am confident that it will work from then onwards."

Schulz predicted that "in 2016, we will not feel the same pressure as last year", when more than one million asylum seekers arrived in Germany alone. "The ceasefire in Syria has now held for more than two weeks already. This is a record," he said. "The IS [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] terrorists are being driven back," he said, adding that new aid money had also improved conditions in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.

UK's Cameron admits he profited from father's offshore fund

AFP, 08.04.2016



British Prime Minister David Cameron admitted he had held a 30,000 stake in an offshore fund set up by his father, after days of pressure following publication of the so-called Panama Papers.

Cameron sold the stake in the Bahamas-based trust in 2010, four months before he became prime minister, he said in an interview with television channel ITV. Downing Street have issued four statements on the affair following Sunday's publication of the leaked Panama Papers, which showed how Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca had helped firms and wealthy individuals set up offshore companies.

"We owned 5,000 units in Blairmore Investment Trust, which we sold in January 2010. That was worth something like 30,000 (37,000 euros, \$42,000)," Cameron said. "I sold them all in 2010, because if I was going to become prime minister I didn't want anyone to say you have other agendas, vested interests."

He insisted he had paid income tax on the dividends from the sale of the units, which he bought in 1997. Downing Street first dismissed the story as a private matter before saying Cameron had no offshore funds, then saying he and his wife and children did not benefit from any offshore funds. It later added that Cameron would not benefit from such funds in the future.

The row is the latest headache for Cameron, who faces a tight race to ensure Britain stays in the European Union in a referendum due to be held on June 23. The prime minister has been under intense pressure from the main opposition Labour party and media this week to come clean over his financial arrangements past and present.

Labour's deputy leader Tom Watson told Sky News that, while it was too early to say whether Cameron should quit, "he may have to resign over this but we need to know a lot more about what his financial arrangements have been". Cameron indicated in the ITV interview that he would be prepared to publish his tax returns although a previous offer to do so in 2012 did not materialise.

The story could be damaging partly because it taps into a perception of the Conservatives as the party of the rich, and its leadership as products of affluent backgrounds educated at some of Britain's most expensive schools.

"The PM has always been aware that if voters knew the scale of his wealth, they would consider him incapable of relating to their daily struggles," wrote Isabel Oakeshott, author of a biography of Cameron, in the Daily Mail newspaper this week. Cameron's father Ian was a stockbroker who died in 2010, four months after his son became premier.

The prime minister revealed he had been stung by criticism of his father -- who he has previously called his "hero" -- and stressed that the culture in the finance industry had changed in recent years. "It has been a difficult few days, reading criticisms of my father and his business practices -- my dad, a man I love and admire and miss every day," Cameron said.

Republican Cruz beats Trump in Wisconsin, says he can unite party

Reuters, 06.04.2016



Republican Ted Cruz easily won the Wisconsin presidential primary, dealing a blow to front-runner Donald Trump's hopes of amassing enough delegates for the party's nomination and boosting chances of a rare contested convention.

Cruz's double-digit win over Trump was a breakthrough for Republican Party forces battling to block the controversial New York billionaire, and it raised the prospect of a prolonged nomination fight could last to the July convention in Cleveland, Ohio. Democratic presidential contender Bernie Sanders won in Wisconsin, gaining momentum in his fight.

Trump entered the night with 737 convention delegates to Cruz's 481, leaving him 500 delegates short of the 1,237 needed to become the party's nominee in the Nov. 8 election. But Cruz said the party was beginning to rally to his campaign and he was cutting Trump's lead, although he acknowledged the growing possibility the fight could go all the way to the convention.

"Either before Cleveland, or at the convention in Cleveland, together we will win a majority of the delegates and together we will beat Hillary Clinton in November," Cruz told cheering supporters in Milwaukee. "We're winning because we're uniting the Republican Party," he said.

Cruz, a conservative U.S. senator from Texas, was aided in Wisconsin by Republican Governor Scott Walker, who dropped his own presidential bid in September, and by a barrage of ads from Super PACS - independent funding groups - backed by party establishment figures worried that Trump will lead Republicans to a broad defeat in November.

The Wisconsin primary also capped a difficult week for Trump, who was forced to backtrack after saying women who have abortions should face punishment if the procedure is outlawed, and who voiced support for his campaign manager after he was charged with misdemeanor assault for grabbing a reporter. A new Reuters/Ipsos poll showed Cruz about even with Trump nationally, with Cruz's recent gains the first time since November that a Trump rival has threatened his standing at the head of the Republican pack.



The poll of 568 Republicans, taken between April 1-5, showed Cruz winning the support of 35 percent of Republicans to Trump's 39 percent. Cruz and Trump were also briefly about even early last week. As recently as a month ago, when Senator Marco Rubio was also still a candidate, Cruz trailed Trump by about 20 points.

In the Democratic race, the win for Sanders, a U.S. senator from Vermont, is his sixth in the last seven nominating contests. Sanders said his message of breaking up the big banks, reining in Wall Street and reducing income inequality was bringing new and young voters into the process. "What we have been seeing throughout this campaign is extraordinary voter turnout in state after state," Sanders said at a rally in Laramie, Wyoming.

Clinton, who did not appear in public on the night of April 5, tweeted her congratulations to Sanders. "Congrats to @BernieSanders on winning Wisconsin," Clinton said on Twitter. "To all the voters and volunteers who poured your hearts into this campaign: Forward! -H." Sanders still faces a difficult task overtaking Clinton as the race moves to New York on April 19 and to five other Eastern states on April 26.

Heading into April 5, Clinton led Sanders by 263 pledged delegates in the race for the 2,383 needed to be nominated at the party's July convention in Philadelphia. She also has a big lead in superdelegates, who are party leaders free to back any candidate. Sanders needs to win up to two-thirds of the remaining delegates to catch Clinton, who will keep accumulating delegates even when she loses under a Democratic Party system that awards them proportionally in all states.

Sanders needs to rack up big winning margins over Clinton in the remaining states to close the gap. He has vowed to stay in the race until the convention, and his campaign says superdelegates could begin to shift their support to him if they see he has popular support.

Announcements & Reports

► *The European Union's Growing Innovation Divide*

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/04/the-european-unions-growing-innovation-divide/>

► *A Proposal to Revive the European Fiscal Framework*

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/03/a-proposal-to-revive-the-european-fiscal-framework/>

► *Barriers to Bankable Infrastructure*

Source : CSIS

Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/barriers-bankable-infrastructure>

Upcoming Events

► *The Search for Europe*

Date : 19 April 2016

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/the-search-for-europe/>

► *The UK and the EU: Managing the Euro and the Single Market*

Date : 23 April 2016

Place : London - UK

Website : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/uk-and-eu-managing-euro-and-single-market>

► *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

Date : 24 April 2016

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>



► *The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives*

Date : 24 April 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

► *Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?*

Date : 30 April 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

► *What future for Europe's Social Models?*

Date : 30 April 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

► *Challenges for Growth in Europe*

Date : 30 April 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

► *Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives*

Date : 30 April 2016
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

► *The Future of the Welfare State*

Date : 30 April 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>