

Ankara wants timetable on visa-free travel to EU

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Ankara has demanded the European Union lay down a “concrete road map” for visa liberalization, FM Çavuşoğlu said following a proposal by Ankara for an interim formula to meet EU criteria for Turkish citizens’ visa-free travel.

Ankara proposed that the Council of Europe monitor Turkey’s anti-terror law, which could pave the way for the implementation of a migrant deal that includes a readmission agreement in return for visa liberalization. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn made the EU visit to Turkey since the failed coup attempt to hold a political dialogue meeting between Ankara and Brussels.

“The key element which we agreed to was that we talk more to each other and a little bit less about each other, showing full respect,” Mogherini said after talks with Çavuşoğlu and EU Minister Ömer Çelik.

Turkish and EU officials engaged in a war of words over the opening of chapters 23 and 24 of the accession process – encompassing justice and rights and freedom and security – as Çelik accused some member states that said it would take years for Turkey to become a member of holding “double standards.”

Çelik recalled criticisms from the EU on the state of human rights and the freedom of press and called on the union to discuss the issues in official platforms during the opening of the relevant negotiation chapters 23 and 24.

Noting that preparations were underway to open the chapters, Hahn referred to the de facto blockage by Greek Cyprus on the opening of the chapters, and said a solution to the Cyprus problem could pave the way for the opening of the chapters.

Arguing that Cyprus and the EU negotiations were different topics for Ankara, Çavuşoğlu identified the position of the EU as a “weakness.” Hahn, however, objected to the wording and said the situation was rather about the operation of EU institutions.

The Turkish government has also suggested that the Council of Europe monitor the implementation of Turkey’s anti-terror law, but the union has yet to give a response, a Turkish official told the Hürriyet Daily News, adding that the issue would be discussed at a technical level.

If the EU agrees to an interim formula on the anti-terror law, which Turkey has refused to alter due to current security challenges, Ankara anticipates that visas will be liberalized in October, according to a Turkish official.

The implementation of the deal would naturally be delayed until the end of the year since Turkey has not instituted the use of new passports, which is another criterion for visa liberalization, said the official.

Turkey and the EU earlier this year implemented a deal to stem the record flow of migrants to Europe in exchange for billions of euros in aid to Turkey and the lifting of short-term visa requirements on Turkish citizens in October. But the EU has failed to change its visa rules, accusing Turkey of refusing to alter its draconian counter-terrorism laws to meet EU political criteria.

Mogherini calls for ‘positive dialogue’ with Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 14.09.2016



The European Union and Turkey must maintain a close, open and constant dialogue to deal with common challenges, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini told the European Parliament.

“Despite all difficulties, both Turkey and the European Union realize there are many interests we have in common and so much we share,” said Mogherini. Commenting on the broad spectrum of issues that the EU and Turkey have to face, she referred to settlement talks on the divided island of Cyprus, the conflict in Syria, and the threat posed by the ISIL, in addition to bilateral ties between Ankara and Brussels.

Mogherini repeated her condemnation of Turkey’s failed coup attempt of July 15, but she also urged Ankara to “commit strongly to the rule of law, protect media freedom, and guarantee everyone’s right to a fair trial.”

She drew particular attention to two issues where dialogue is particularly crucial: The Kurdish issue and the crisis in Syria. “I have repeated very clearly that the European Union deems the [outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party] PKK a terrorist organization. We believe that all violence and terrorist attacks have to end, and arms should be laid down. At the same time, a credible political process should start,” she said.

During last week’s talks in Ankara, Mogherini and her Turkish counterparts agreed that there can be no military solution to the war in Syria, and that only a political transition can bring peace and democracy to the country, according to information posted on the EU’s website.

They also agreed on the basic principles that should guide the future of Syria: The territorial integrity of the country, the unity of the country, the inclusion of all parts of the Syrian society, the protection of all minorities in an inclusive and non-sectarian state.

“We all know that Turkey is absolutely vital to ending the Syrian war,” Mogherini added, stressing that the current convergence between some of Turkey’s and the European Union’s positions on Syria was significant.

“For all these reasons, our relations cannot be limited to a single issue. In this sense, the accession negotiations provide an excellent framework for a broad dialogue on the entire spectrum of our cooperation,” she added.

She also urged the European Parliament to work hard to maintain a close and healthy dialogue with Turkey, and in particular with its civil society. “In the long term, it’s the only strategy that will pay off – both for Turkey and for our Union,” she said.

Mogherini was in Ankara, together with EU Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn, making the highest-level EU visit to Turkey since the failed coup attempt. During talks the Ankara government proposed that the Council of Europe monitor Turkey’s anti-terror law, which is the key obstacle for the implementation of visa free travel for Turks to Europe.

Turkey has demanded the EU lay down a “concrete road map” for visa liberalization, following this proposal as an interim for the implementation of a migrant deal that includes a readmission agreement in return for visa liberalization.

Turkey, Russia agree on joint understanding in resolving regional issues in key military meet

Hurriyet Daily News, 15.09.2016



The Turkish and Russian chiefs of general staff held extensive discussions on a wide range of issues, including the ongoing turmoil in Syria in the first top level military-to-military meeting since the two countries resolved a crisis after Turkey downed a Russian warplane last year.

One of the most important outcomes of the talks is that both top soldiers agree that regional problems can only be resolved through joint initiatives of regional countries as Turkish military sources described the meeting as “fruitful.” Russian Chief of General Staff Gen. Gerasimov arrived in Ankara for a visit.

He was welcomed by Turkish Chief of General Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar through an official welcoming ceremony at the Turkish military headquarters. The Russian chief of staff had planned to pay a visit to Ankara on Aug. 26, but the trip was postponed in the last minute.



According to Turkish military sources, this visit of Russian chief of staff that comes after an 11-year gap was very fruitful as the common understanding in the military has been enhanced with expectation that it will bring about more positive results in the future.

“This positive development is believed to be important in regards that this will lead to a common perspective between the two countries for the solution of other problematic regions in the Middle East,” sources stressed. Turkish military sources evaluated the visit as the indication of the importance the Russian Federation attaches to Turkey’s capabilities in the region as a big power.

“Another important point with regards to this visit is the view that regional problems can only be resolved through joint initiatives of the regional countries among themselves has prevailed,” sources said.

The meeting in Ankara is very significant from different perspectives. From the bilateral relations angle, Gerasimov’s visit could be considered as the “military leg” of the normalization process between Ankara and Moscow that was launched in late June after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin expressing his sorrow over the downing of the Russian jet on Nov. 24, 2015.

Erdoğan and Putin later met in St. Petersburg on Aug. 9 and then in China on Sept. 3 to put political, economy, trade and energy relations back on its track. In particular, Moscow’s lifting of trade sanctions and tourism restrictions provided a better climate between the two countries.

The two top soldiers are believed to have discussed the jet downing incident of last November, after Putin told reporters at a joint press conference with Erdoğan that Russia still awaited information about how it occurred.

Turkey had earlier arrested a Turkish national suspected of killing the Russian pilot, who jumped out of his airplane with a parachute. A hotline has already been established between the two militaries in the last month to prevent the repetition of similar incidents along the Turkish-Syrian border.

Along with the ongoing normalization of bilateral relations, Gerasimov’s visit broadly covers the ongoing military activities of both armies inside Syria, coming as the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) entered the third week of its Shield of Euphrates Operation to clear its border of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). An area of 845 square meters between the Jarablus and Al-Rai provinces of Syria has been taken under the control of the Turkish army along with the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Russia has not openly criticized the Turkish offensive but it has indirectly urged Turkey not to go further south toward Aleppo, where Syrian regime and opposition forces have long been fighting. In addition, Russia also questions how long the Turkish army will stay in Syria and whether its presence will create a de facto safe zone.

Also making Gerasimov’s visit more important is the deal brokered between Russia and the United States that has succeeded in securing a temporary ceasefire in many of the conflict areas in Syria. If the truce continues, the Russian and American militaries are planning to launch a joint offensive against the ISIL and al-Nusra through the Joint Implementation Center.

As Turkey and Russia are neighbors in the Black Sea and Eurasia, Gen. Akar and Gen. Gerasimov were also scheduled to discuss military developments in these regions. A statement on the Black Sea made by the Russian chief of staff just a day before his visit to Ankara was seen as important as it reflects how Moscow views its competition with Ankara in that area.

“Several years ago the Russian fleet’s combat capabilities were in stark contrast with that of the Turkish Navy. Some even said Turkey was in full command of the Black Sea. Now it’s different,” Gerasimov said. He also stated that Russia’s Black Sea Fleet had been reinforced by submarines carrying the Kalibr missile system.

“There are three of them now. One more will join soon. Another two will arrive next year to increase the strength of the submarine group to six. This brigade of diesel submarines matches all modern requirements,” Gerasimov said, adding that Russia’s Black Sea Fleet is now capable of destroying a potential enemy’s amphibious force in the ports of embarkation.

He added that this was important because an enemy landing force should not be allowed to reach the coast of Crimea, “wherever it may come from.” Gerasimov’s statement came as a direct response to NATO’s plans to increase its military visibility in the Black Sea with the deployment of more vessels and strengthening the fleets of new NATO members, Bulgaria and Romania. Before NATO’s recent Warsaw Summit, Turkish President Erdo an urged the alliance that the Black Sea would turn into a “Russian lake” if counter-measures were not taken.

One of Russia’s main concerns is Turkey’s softening of the implementation of the Montreux Convention that limits the passage of military vessels on non-literal countries into the Black Sea through its straits.

Presidential Spokesperson Kalın: No military plan for Raqqa yet

Hurriyet Daily News, 13.09.2016



Turkey does not currently have a military plan for an assault on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) jihadist group’s stronghold of Raqqa in Syria, Presidential Spokesperson brahim Kalın has said.

“What will Turkey’s answer be if the U.S. says to Turkey: ‘The PYD [the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party] will also enter Raqqa; you come too and let’s fight against ISIL together?’ We exhibited the same attitude before. We supported the cleaning of Manbij from Daesh [ISIL]. We did not join their operations but principally we said that we supported it.

We had one stance which was that the PYD would not enter and stay there. The same thing also applies to Raqqa. Currently, we do not have military planning regarding Raqqa,” Kalin said in an interview with daily Habertürk, adding that Ankara was cooperating with the international coalition in the anti-ISIL fight.

However, Kalin noted there would be a broader and more cautious plan for Al Bab, another ISIL stronghold, before Raqqa. “The method that will be followed in Al Bab and other operations is obvious. There is a certain ISIL concentration there and they have reached a certain number.

Therefore, a broader and cautious plan will be realized,” he said, while noting that the date for an operation was not clear yet, as work on operational details has been ongoing. On his way back from the G-20 Summit in China on Sept. 7, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had stated that Ankara and Washington were discussing military action on Raqqa.

“Raqqa is an important center for Daesh,” Erdoğan said. “[U.S. President Barack] Obama particularly wants to do something together [with us] about Raqqa. We have told him that this is not a problem for us,” he said. “This is an issue that we have been discussing with the United States. What can be done there will become more concrete after more talks,” Erdoğan said.

Turkey launched a joint military operation with the U.S.-led coalition along its border inside Syria on Aug. 24 to rid the areas close to the border of ISIL and the Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey sees as a terror organization.

Turkey, US-led forces hit more ISIL targets

Hurriyet Daily News, 14.09.2016



Turkey and U.S.-led coalition forces have intensified their joint military campaign against the ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Some 13 Turkish “Fırtına” howitzers shelled six ISIL targets on Sept. 13 in the Wuguf area of northern Syria as part of the Euphrates Shield Operation, the TSK said.

The operation, which was launched in cooperation with the U.S.-led coalition, saw the Turkish military back the FSA with artillery, tanks, air power and Special Forces in a bid to sweep ISIL and other terrorist elements from its borders after a series of attacks targeting the country. Aircrafts from the anti-ISIL coalition also backed the operation.

On the same day, U.S.-led coalition forces pounded ISIL targets between al-Rai and Azaz in five airstrikes killing six militants. The TSK statement said there had been five coalition strikes on ISIL targets in the Yahmul, Kafr Ghan, Güzel Mezra and Jakka areas east of Azaz and six ISIL militants were killed, in addition to the destruction of four mortar positions and two defensive positions. The statement added that Turkish jets did not carry out the strikes but were waiting on the ground for any instant targets that might emerge.

Meanwhile, U.S. warplanes eliminated a “significant chemical threat” to Iraqi civilians by bombing a complex of buildings near the northern city of Mosul that ISIL militants had converted from pharmaceutical manufacturing to chemical weapons production, the three-star general in charge of U.S. air operations in the Middle East, Air Force Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian, said on Sept. 13, the Associated Press reported.

Harrigian told reporters at the Pentagon that the target was an ISIL headquarters also used to produce lethal chemicals, possibly including chlorine and mustard gas. He provided no details on the chemical production.

He described the airstrike as a large, well-planned operation, which destroyed more than 50 targets at the site with a variety of U.S. warplanes, including Air Force B-52 bombers and Marine Corps F-18D attack planes. Other U.S. officials said later that a total of 12 U.S. planes were used.

Harrigian said the mission was part of a broader effort to cut off ISIL’s main sources of revenue, kill their leaders and create “organizational dysfunction” in ways that will eliminate the group as a military threat in Iraq and Syria.

The Pentagon said Sept. 13 that it launched various strikes on ISIL forces in Syria over the past several days, including hits on some targets that “may have resulted in civilian casualties,” AFP reported.

The incidents took place Sept. 7, Sept. 10 and Sept. 12, according to a statement from CENTCOM. It did not give a number of dead or injured. But in the Sept. 10 raid “near Raqqa, Syria, a strike against an ISIL target may have resulted in the death of civilians near where the strike occurred,” CENTCOM said.

Syrian army says it shot down Israeli warplane, drone

AFP, 13.09.2016



Syria’s military said it shot down an Israeli warplane and a drone early on Sept. 13 in response to an attack on Syrian army positions -- a claim denied by Israel. “Our air defences blocked the attack and shot down the military aircraft in (the southern province of) Quneitra and a drone” in the province of Damascus, said the Syrian army statement carried by state news agency SANA.

It accused Israeli forces of supporting “armed terrorist groups” in the country’s south. The Israeli army said none of its aircraft had been downed.

“Overnight two surface-to-air missiles were launched from Syria after the (Israeli) mission overnight to target Syrian artillery positions,” military spokesman Arye Shalimar said. “At no point was the safety of (Israeli) aircraft compromised. Nothing true about what they claim.”

The Israeli military earlier said it targeted Syrian army positions after stray fire from its war-torn neighbor hit the Israeli-held zone of the Golan Heights. An Israeli military spokeswoman told AFP Monday’s projectile was most likely not intentional, rather spillover from “internal fighting in Syria.”

It was the fourth such incident in nine days, and came as a new Syrian ceasefire brokered by Russia and the United States came into force on Monday. The initial 48-hour truce does not apply to areas held by jihadists such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group.

Efforts for aid underway as Syria cease-fire largely holds

Hurriyet Daily News, 13.09.2016



A nationwide cease-fire brokered by the United States and Russia was mostly holding across Syria yesterday and efforts to deliver badly needed aid to besieged areas including the northern city of Aleppo got cautiously underway.

Around 20 trucks carrying aid crossed into northern Syria, some 40 kilometers west of Aleppo, although with security a concern it was not clear how far into Syria they would go. A Turkish official said they were mostly carrying food and flour. The Syrian government said it would reject any aid deliveries to Aleppo not coordinated through itself and the United Nations, “particularly from Turkey,” Syrian media reported.

Syrian state media said armed groups had violated the truce in a number of locations in Aleppo city and in the west Homs countryside on at least seven occasions yesterday. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said pro-government forces had shelled near two villages in the south Aleppo countryside and a neighborhood on the outskirts of Damascus. But there were no reports of deaths or injuries.

The U.N. said its trucks had not yet entered Syria and that it was still awaiting confirmation that the ceasefire was holding before sending in its own convoy. “We are waiting for this cessation of hostilities to actually deliver the assurances and the peace before trucks can start moving from Turkey.

As I speak, that has not been the case,” Jens Laerke, spokesman for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said in Geneva. “We need to enter an environment where we are not in mortal danger as humanitarian organizations delivering aid,” he said.



The cease-fire is the second attempt this year by the U.S. and Russia to halt the Syrian war. Russia is a major backer of President Bashar al-Assad, while the U.S. supports some of the rebel groups fighting to topple him.

Some air attacks and shelling were reported in the first hours of the truce on Sept. 12 evening, but that appeared to die down and the Observatory, which monitors the war, said it had not recorded a single civilian death from fighting in the 15 hours since the ceasefire came into effect at 7 p.m.

Turkey said on Sept. 12 that, in conjunction with the United Nations, it aimed to send more than 30 trucks loaded with food, children's clothes and toys to besieged parts of Aleppo within hours of the truce taking effect.

The United Nations said the Syrian government had effectively stopped aid convoys this month and Aleppo was almost running out of fuel. The head of the city council for opposition-held Aleppo expressed concern that planned deliveries would be conducted according to Russian wishes and would not meet the needs of an estimated 300,000 people living there.

Brita Hagi Hassan told Reuters the rebel-held part of the city, which has been fully encircled by pro-government forces for more than a week, was in dire need of fuel, flour, wheat, baby milk, and medicines. The council wanted to a role in overseeing the deliveries, he added, rejecting any presence of government forces on the road expected to be used to make the deliveries.

"We need 60 tons of flour each day," he said. More than 301,000 Syrians have been documented as killed since the start of the conflict in 2011, the Observatory said in its latest assessment yesterday, although it estimates the actual death toll at around 430,000, in line with the U.N.'s estimate. Some 11 million people have been made homeless in the world's worst refugee crisis.

U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura was monitoring the cease-fire very closely, a spokeswoman said, but she declined to comment on how it was being observed so far. The truce does not cover the jihadist groups Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, a group formerly called the al-Nusra Front which was al-Qaeda's Syria branch until it changed its name in July. Its initial aims include allowing humanitarian access and joint U.S.-Russian targeting of such groups.

The agreement comes at a time when Assad's position on the battlefield is at its strongest since the earliest months of the war, thanks to Russian and Iranian military support. The RIA news agency quoted Russia's foreign ministry yesterday as saying Moscow and Tehran had no differences over the ceasefire deal.

Hours before the truce took effect, an emboldened Assad vowed to take back all of Syria. In a gesture loaded with symbolism, state television showed him visiting Daraya, a Damascus suburb long held by rebels but recaptured last month after fighters surrendered in the face of a crushing siege. Fighting had raged on several key fronts before the truce, including Aleppo and the southern province of Quneitra on Sept. 12, the first day of the Eid al-Adha Muslim holiday. The Observatory said at least 31 were killed by air strikes on rebel-held Idlib province and eastern Damascus, and by the bombardment of villages in the northern Homs countryside and rocket attacks in the city of Aleppo before the truce.

Washington, Moscow extend Syria cease-fire

Reuters, 15.09.2016



U.S. Secretary of State Kerry and his Russian counterpart Lavrov agreed that a cessation of hostilities agreement in Syria was holding, and extended it by 48 hours to allow for increased humanitarian access.

“There was agreement that as a whole, despite sporadic reports of violence, the arrangement is holding, and violence is significantly lower,” U.S. State Department spokesman was quoted. “As part of the conversation they agreed to extend the cessation for another 48 hours,” Toner added. Even though cease-fire deal was holding, the necessary conditions for aid to be delivered to the city of Aleppo weren’t in place.

As of the afternoon of Sept. 15, Syrian government forces and rebels had yet to withdraw from a road needed to deliver aid to Aleppo, threatening the most serious international peacemaking effort in months as the sides accused each other of violating a truce.

The aid delivery to rebel-held eastern Aleppo, which is blockaded by government forces, is an important test of a U.S.-Russian deal that has brought about a significant reduction in violence since the cease-fire took effect. The U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura said the United States and Russia were expected to manage the disengagement of forces from the road, but also criticized Damascus for failing to provide permits needed to make aid deliveries to other areas.

Jan Egeland, head of the United Nations humanitarian taskforce for Syria, said on Sept. 15 that 20 trucks loaded with desperately needed aid for eastern Aleppo had crossed into a buffer zone between Turkey and Syria.

“They’ve been waiting and sleeping at the border now for 48 hours. So they could go on a minute’s notice,” Egeland said, voicing hope the aid could be delivered to eastern Aleppo. “Can well-fed grown men please stop putting political, bureaucratic and procedural road blocks for brave humanitarian workers that are willing to go to serve women, children, wounded civilians in besieged and crossfire areas?” he asked.

France, which backs the opposition, became the first U.S. ally to publicly question the deal with Moscow, urging Washington to share details of the agreement and saying it was not credible without aid for Aleppo. Control of the Castello Road is divided between the government and rebels who have been battling to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for more than five years. It has been a major frontline in the war. Russia, whose air force helped the Syrian government to blockade opposition-held Aleppo this summer, said on Wednesday it was preparing for the Syrian army and rebel fighters to begin a staged withdrawal from the road.



But on the morning of Sept. 15, both Syrian government and rebel forces were still manning their positions. An official in an Aleppo-based Syrian rebel group said international parties had told him aid was now due to be delivered. "Today the withdrawal is supposed to happen, with aid entering tomorrow. This is what is supposed to happen, but there is nothing to give hope," Zakaria Malahifji, of the Aleppo-based rebel group Fastaqim, told Reuters. Egeland said both the rebels and the government were responsible for delaying aid deliveries into Aleppo.

"The reason we're not in eastern Aleppo has again been a combination of very difficult and detailed discussions around security monitoring and passage of roadblocks, which is both opposition and government," he said. About 300,000 people are thought to be living in eastern Aleppo, while more than one million live in the government-controlled western half of the city.

The United States and Russia have backed opposing sides in the Syrian war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people, forced 11 million from their homes, and created the world's worst refugee crisis since the World War Two.

Washington hopes the pact will pave the way to a resumption of political talks. But a similar agreement unraveled earlier this year, and this one also faces enormous challenges. Under the agreement, nationalist rebels fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) are supposed to disengage from a group that was known as the Nusra Front until it broke ties with al-Qaeda in July and changed its name to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.

A Syrian military source said this was not happening. "I believe they want to obstruct the main demand of the Syrian state and leadership, and of Russia - the separation of Nusra from the rest of the organizations, and it appears that this will not happen," the source said.

Jabhat Fateh al-Sham has played a vital role in recent fighting around Aleppo. FSA groups are suspicious of the group, which has crushed several nationalist factions. But they have also criticized its exclusion from the cease-fire agreement. The United States and Russia are due to start coordinating military strikes against the former Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) if all goes to plan under the deal.

But Russia said on Sept.15 the United States was using "a verbal smokescreen" to hide its reluctance to fulfil its part of the agreement, including separating what it called moderate opposition units from terrorist groups. The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that only government forces were observing the truce and opposition units "controlled by the U.S." had stepped up shelling of civilian residential areas.

Aegean smugglers use new rhetoric to trick migrants into making perilous journey to Greece

AFP, 16.09.2016



Human smugglers have started to use new rhetoric in order to trick migrants in Turkey into making the perilous journey to Greek islands with the hope of a better life, while also lowering the prices of the journeys on mostly unsafe dinghies.

Taking advantage of the row between Turkey and the European Union over the implementation of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens, human smugglers in Turkey's Aegean coasts have developed new rhetoric by telling migrants the EU-Turkey migrant deal would soon fall apart and thus they should cross the Aegean Sea.

Turkey and the EU reached a deal in mid-March, when Turkey agreed to take back all irregular migrants reaching Greece in exchange for the EU taking the same amount of Syrian refugees from Turkish refugee camps. Within the deal, the EU also agreed to give a total of 6 billion euros to Turkey to be used for Syrian refugees, accelerated EU accession talks for Turkey and visa liberalization for Turkish citizens on the grounds the country met all 72 criteria.

The row started when the EU insisted that Turkey change its anti-terror law – one of the 72 criteria – to which Turkey has objected severely. Police sources speaking on condition of anonymity in the Aegean city of Izmir said that the price for a journey on a boat from Turkey to a Greek island had fallen as low as \$250, while this figure was between \$1,000 and \$1,500 at around the same time last year.

More than 1 million migrants entered the EU in 2015, most of them from Turkey. This new rhetoric and sales on the tariffs have affected the number of crossings made from Turkey to the Greek islands.

Greek authorities said a total of 960 migrants entered the country from three islands – Lesbos, Chios and Samos – between Sept. 1 and the morning of Sept. 12, while the UNHCR put this figure at 1,458.

Though the number of migrants crossing from Turkey to Greece decreased significantly after the migrant deal in March, the figures started to increase again over the last month. While this figure was 1,721 in May, 1,554 in June and 1,920 in July, it rose to 3,447 in August and Greek authorities said the overall figure in September could exceed that total if the trend continued as it had over the first 12 days of the month. The Turkish Coast Guard said the number of migrants caught before they could make the journey to Greece had also increased lately.

This figure was 1,109 in May, 538 in June and 881 in July but increased to 1,604 in August, while 948 migrants were caught in the first nine days of September. While there was a rise in migrant crossings in the Aegean Sea, the situation was no different in the Mediterranean Sea, despite the journey from Libya to Italy being more dangerous.

United Nations envoy Martin Kobler said in an interview published on Sept. 15 that some 235,000 migrants in Libya were ready to make the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Italy as soon as the opportunity arose. As Kobler was making this statement, reports emerged that the bodies of five migrants were being recovered off the Libyan coast.

“We have on our lists 235,000 migrants who are just waiting for a good opportunity to depart for Italy, and they will do it,” Kobler told Italian daily La Stampa. “Reinforcing security is the most important issue at the moment. If we have a strong and unified army... then the dangers of terrorism and human trafficking will cease,” he added.

According to the Italian Interior Ministry, nearly 128,400 migrants have arrived via the Mediterranean since the start of the year - a five percent jump over the same period in 2015. The Italian coast guard said on Sept. 14 that the bodies of five migrants were recovered while 650 others had been rescued during the day in several operations.

The rescued migrants were pulled from five inflatable boats and one small vessel, said a coast guard statement, giving details of six separate operations. An Italian navy vessel and a Maltese non-governmental group’s boat were involved, along with Irish navy patrol boat the James Joyce, which recovered the five bodies, the statement said.

NGOs call for boycott of Hungarian vote on migrants

AFP, 15.09.2016



Human rights campaigners urged voters in Hungary to boycott what they termed an “inhumane” referendum on migrant relocation under an EU quota plan.

The appeal was made by 22 NGOs including the Helsinki Committees for Human Rights group. “We have decided to campaign for the referendum to be rendered invalid [as] it does not allow promotion of our common values, has no sense and is inhumane,” said a statement. Some eight million Hungarians are due to vote on Oct. 2 on whether they support the EU quota plan - which would oblige Hungary to take in a share of migrants without requiring parliamentary approval.

Several opposition parties have also voiced support for a boycott of the poll as Brussels seeks to resettle refugees among members of the bloc. The scheme is designed to ease pressure on Greece and Italy, the main entry points into the bloc for migrants fleeing the Syrian civil war and has been approved by a majority of EU member states.

But Hungary and its right-wing Prime Minister and fierce Brussels critic Viktor Orban has led opposition to a mandatory scheme he views as a bid to “redraw Europe’s cultural and religious identity” and an attack on national sovereignty. Hungary built fences on its southern borders last year to stop the migrant flow after some 400,000 people transited the country while Orban has refused to take a single migrant under the plan.

Meanwhile, scuffles broke out on the Greek island of Chios, police said Sept. 15, during a protest by locals demanding the departure of some 3,500 refugees and migrants held there. Riot police were deployed to keep a crowd of 800 people from approaching two migrant camps, a police source told AFP.

“A few bursts of tear gas” were fired when the protesters tried to break through the cordon and reach one of the camps, the officer added. State agency ANA said journalists were also chased from the scene. One of them said he was struck by a protester allegedly linked to Greece’s neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. Four camp volunteers and a migrant were also briefly detained when they came out of the facility, the police officer said.

There are now over 60,000 refugees and migrants in Greece, most of them seeking to travel to Germany and other affluent EU countries. But they are unable to do so after a succession of eastern European and Balkan states shut their borders earlier this year.

Clinton back on campaign trail after releasing health info

AP, 15.09.2016



Hillary Clinton was set to return to the campaign trail Sept. 15 following a bout of pneumonia that sidelined her for three days and revived questions about both the Democratic nominee and Republican Donald Trump’s transparency regarding their health.

Clinton’s campaign responded with a new letter from her doctor Sept. 14 declaring her “fit to serve” as president and recovering well from her recent illness. The letter - the first substantial update on her health in more than a year - details the medications she is taking, her cholesterol levels and other results from a physical exam.



Clinton, 68, was set to spend campaigning in Greensboro, North Carolina, and speaking to a Hispanic group in Washington. It is to be her first public appearance since Sept. 11, when she abruptly left a 9/11 memorial service in New York after becoming dizzy and dehydrated. After a video emerged of her stumbling and being held up by aides, the campaign revealed she had been diagnosed with pneumonia days earlier.

Trump says he, too, plans to release details from a recent physical, though it was unclear when that would happen and how much information he would provide. So far, the businessman has only released a widely mocked letter from his longtime physician declaring he would be the healthiest president in history.

Speaking in an air-conditioned minor league basketball arena in Canton, Ohio, Trump made his most direct reference to Clinton's recent diagnosis of pneumonia. "You think this is easy?" Trump asked. "In this beautiful room that's 122 degrees. It is hot, and it is always hot when I perform because the crowds are so big. The rooms were not designed for this kind of crowd. I don't know, folks. You think Hillary Clinton would be able to stand up here and do this for an hour? I don't know."



Announcements & Reports

What can The Eurozone Learn From US Monetary History?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/08/what-can-the-eurozone-learn-from-us-monetary-history/>

The Missile Defense Agency and the Color of Money

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/missile-defense-agency-and-color-money>

Transatlantic Rifts: Averting a Turkey/Russia Conflict

Source : Chatham House
Weblink : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/transatlantic-rifts-averting-turkey-russia-conflict>

Upcoming Events

Congo's Political Crisis: What is The Way Forward?

Date : 20 September 2016
Place : Washington DC, USA
Website : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/congos-political-crisis-what-is-the-way-forward/>

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 25 September 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 : 26 September 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 26 – 27 September 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>



Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 27 September 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 : 27 September 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 : 28 September 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 : 28 September 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 September 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 21 – 22 November 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>