

Diplomacy played key role in freeing Mosul hostages

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Political bargaining and diplomacy played a key role in freeing 49 hostages from extremist jihadists, Turkey's president has said, denying that a ransom was paid but hinting that a swap deal might have taken place to save the country's Mosul consul general and 48 others.

"I do not know what they mean by bargaining. If they refer to materialistic bargaining, it's totally out of the question. But if they talk about diplomatic bargaining, yes, it's certainly true. This is a diplomatic success, the result of a political bargain," President Erdoğan told reporters at a press conference he held before his departure to the United States Sept. 21.

His statement was the answer to a question about claims that Turkey made a deal with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to end 101 days of captivity of 49 hostages. While Erdoğan categorically ruled out that a ransom was paid to ISIL, he implied that a swap deal with jihadists could have occurred. Responding to a question over claims that Turkey agreed to release three ISIL militants in return for 49 hostages, Erdoğan said: "Whether there was a swap or not. Of course, everybody will write something about it. What we look at here is: Whether a swap has taken place or not, our 49 citizens returned to Turkey.

Even if this swap took place, as the president, I always look after my 49 citizens. Nothing can be of more value than my citizens. They are now back to my country." Erdoğan repeated that the operation to free the Turkish hostages was conducted by the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) without the involvement of any other country's secret service. Some 46 Turkish citizens, including Öztürk Yılmaz, the consul general in Mosul, and three Iraqi staff were kidnapped on June 11 by ISIL after the militants seized control of all of Mosul, Iraq's third largest city. Their 101 days in captivity finished with a happy ending on Sept. 20, following the Turkish intelligence agency's intense work and a secret operation. The statement heralding the news that Yılmaz and other hostages had been brought to Turkey after they have been freed was issued by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu at 6:10 a.m. Turkish local time.

"We have taken our citizens and brought them back to our country," Davutoglu told reporters in a short press conference in Baku, where he was conducting a visit before departing to Sanliurfa, a city near the border with Syria, to meet the freed hostages. He added that the Turkish captives crossed into Turkey at 5 a.m. through the Akcakale border gate. A more comprehensive statement about the release of the Turkish hostages came from the presidency early on Sept. 20. "Our consul general in Mosul, his family and Turkish citizens at the consulate who had been abducted have been freed in a successful operation," Erdoğan said in a written statement. "I thank the prime minister and his colleagues for this carefully planned, detailed and secret operation, which continued all night and was successfully completed early in the morning," the statement added.

101 days of captivity end for 49 captives after intel agency operation

Hurriyet Daily News, 20.09.2014



Some 101 days in captivity for Turkey's consul general in Mosul and 48 others at the hands of the world's most dangerous terrorist organization finished with a happy ending on Sept. 20, following the Turkish intelligence agency's intense work and a secret operation.

The statement heralding the news that Consul General Öztürk Yılmaz and other hostages had been brought to Turkey after they have been freed was issued by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu at 6.10 a.m. Turkish local time. "We have taken our citizens and brought them back to our country," Davutoglu told reporters in Baku.

He was conducting a visit before departing to Sanliurfa, a city near the border with Syria, to meet the freed hostages. He added that the Turkish captives crossed into Turkey at 5 a.m. through the Akçakale border gate. "Some 46 Turkish citizens and three Iraqi staff were kidnapped on June 11 by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) after the militants seized control of all of Mosul, Iraq's third largest city. Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT) was heavily involved in following the kidnapping and never lost connection with Yılmaz, who was occasionally able to communicate with Turkish officials via mobile phone. A more comprehensive statement about the release of the Turkish hostages came from the presidency early on Sept. 20.

"Our consul general in Mosul, his family and Turkish citizens at the consulate who had been abducted have been freed in a successful operation," President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said in a written statement, announcing the news to the public. "I thank the prime minister and his colleagues for this carefully planned, detailed and secret operation, which continued all night and was successfully completed early in the morning," the statement added. "Our National Intelligence Organization [MİT] has followed the issue with patience and dedication, and finally performed a successful rescue operation." According to sources, the operation was not a military one and there were no clashes with ISIL militants.

It was rather based on negotiations with local authorities in Iraq that bore fruit late on Sept. 19. Sources denied the involvement of any other country's intelligence organization and said no ransom money had been paid. As the hostages crossed the border into Turkey through the Akçakale border gate, they were transported to Sanliurfa Airport by two buses where they met Davutoglu, whose plane landed at the same airport. After a brief meeting at the airport, Davutoglu's plane took off for Ankara Esenboga Airport along with freed personnel of the consul general and their families. The one-hour flight from Sanliurfa to Ankara witnessed emotional moments as Davutoglu thanked them all for their dignity and patience in waiting to be rescued by the state. The prime minister and his wife, Sare Davutoglu, gave each of the hostages a red rose and hugged the two babies, 11-month-old Deniz and 8-month-old Ela, who had been kept hostage along with their parents.



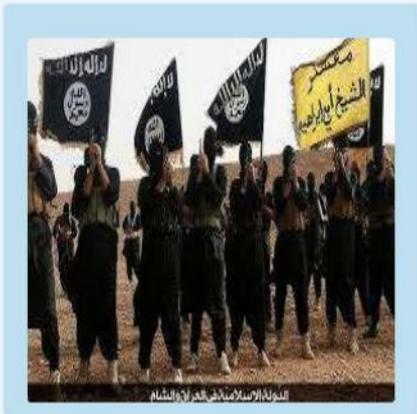
As the news broke that the Turkish hostages were freed, more than 1,000 people flocked to Esenboğa Airport to greet the freed hostages along with the families of the kidnapped. In his first statement to the press, Yılmaz thanked MİT and its undersecretary, Hakan Fidan, along with other officials for their efforts to save the 49. "Yesterday was my birthday. I had wished that, God willing, I would have celebrated it in Turkey," he said. "After we began our travel to Turkey, I called our prime minister. Even before I told him that we had arrived, he welcomed me. We stand on our feet. We never lost our hope ... There is not a pain one cannot stand for his or her country. I have never felt sorry. I will always carry this experience in my very being, proudly." As the hostages were reunited with their families, Davutoglu delivered a speech to those gathered at the airport.

"My brother Öztürk - who at the same time is my colleague - and his staff waited in dignity and strength. They did not bow their heads; they stood up straight. In full conscience of what they represent, they always trusted in their state and the people who stood behind them. Today, they are with us. This is the last day of a patient and honorable waiting. I thank them all; I hug them on behalf of you. I kiss them on their forehead," Davutoglu said. His speech was also a reaction against the opposition parties who strongly criticized the government for its allegedly incorrect policies that led to the kidnapping. Calling them "provocateurs," Davutoglu said: "I know those who forced us to make statements on this issue just to show their opposition and at the expense of endangering the lives of these people. I call on them: At least today come and share this happiness. Leave speculation behind."

Right after Davutoglu's statement, the office of the prime ministry announced that Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), phoned the prime minister to congratulate his government on the rescue. According to the office of the prime ministry, Kilicdaroglu thanked everyone for their efforts to this end. In return, Davutoglu thanked Kilicdaroglu for calling him to extend his congratulatory message and emphasized the need to be "one and together and to share the happiness of the nation." The main opposition also issued a written statement. "I say welcome to freedom and to your country to our brothers and citizens who were liberated after being held hostage for 101 days in the hands of the terror organization ISIL," the CHP said. "I am very happy our hostages were liberated in safety without any loss." Former President Abdullah Gül, the Foreign Ministry and the Chief of the General Staff also issued statements welcoming the release of the hostages.

Syrian rebels freed ISIL militants for the release of Turkish hostages

Hurriyet Daily News, 23.09.2014



Syrian rebel group Liwa al-Tawhid released 50 members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including the family of a late leader, in a swap deal that ended with the release of 49 hostages abducted from Turkey’s consulate in Mosul, according to security sources.

The wife and children of Haji Bakr, an ISIL leader killed in Aleppo in February, were among the released ISIL members in the simultaneous exchange for the Turkish mission, the source told Hurriyet. A total of 49 Turkish embassy staff were held hostage by ISIL for 101 days and were freed on September 20.

The source said Liwa al-Tawhid, a group that split from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and fights against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, agreed to free the ISIL members after rounds of talks. As part of the deal, the Turkish staff was released at a spot close to Turkey’s Akçakale border gate with Syria. The Turkish staff reached Raqqa at 8 a.m. on Sept. 5, but they were still held until the ISIL members were handed over in the early hours of Sept. 20, according to the source. The family of Haji Bakr and a number of other members were taken hostage by Liwa al-Tawhid during the clash in which Haji Bakr himself was killed. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan refused to confirm or deny any swap for the release of the Turkish hostages in a speech on Sept. 21, saying diplomatic efforts played a role and that no ransom was paid to ISIL. The president highlighted that the most important point was rescuing the citizens, regardless of the method used.

“I do not know what they mean by bargaining. If they refer to materialistic bargaining, it’s totally out of the question. But if they talk about diplomatic bargaining, then yes it’s certainly true. This is a diplomatic success, the result of a political bargain,” Erdogan said. “Whether there was a swap or not – of course, everybody will write something about it. What we look at here is: Whether a swap has taken place or not, our 49 citizens returned to Turkey. Even if this swap took place, as the president, I always look after my 49 citizens. Nothing can be of more value than my citizens. They are now back to my country,” he added. Officials from the Justice Ministry confirmed to Hürriyet that there were “no missing people from the inventory of [Turkey’s] jails.”

UN calls for aid for refugees in Turkey

Anadolu Agency, 22.09.2014



Turkey needs assistance from the international community to help it host the influx of refugees from Syria into the country, the UN Refugee Agency said. UNHCR Turkey representative Batchelor made the call after an estimated 100,000 Syrian refugees fleeing clashes between Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant militants and pro-Kurdish Democratic Union Party forces crossed into Turkey over two days.

Batchelor said: “This is an international responsibility. The question is what will the international community do to provide support and solidarity to that state [Turkey] to ensure that the capacity is there?”

“We appeal to all countries to increase their aid.” “People are deeply fearful. This is no longer an issue of access to food or water. They are fleeing for their lives,” she said, adding that the number of refugees would probably increase. Turkey has already taken in more than 840,000 registered Syrian refugees since the start of the Syrian civil war in March 2011. Officials estimate that the exact figure is about 1.35 million. Batchelor went on: “Turkey is probably hosting the largest number of Syrians. There are 1.35 million Syrians already here. Now possibly more than 100,000 have arrived over the space of two days. This is obviously a massive number of refugees arriving within such a short time -- one that would stretch the capabilities of even the most resourceful countries. Batchelor praised Turkey’s open-door policy on refugees. She said: “We are very grateful. Turkey has been extremely consistent. Prime Minister Davutoglu issued a statement saying that all these people have been received and welcomed.

“The Turkish people have been very supportive, helpful and generous.” “Turkey has been very responsive. They have saved the lives of these people,” Batchelor added. However, she said that all the refugees fleeing to Turkey were not the responsibility of Turkey alone and underlined the need for increased global assistance and support. “We have ... just received in Turkey \$20 million in aid from the United States,” Batchelor said, adding that the sum brought the US’ contribution to Turkey for 2014 alone to more than \$50 million. But she pointed out: “Last year, we had 37 percent of what we requested. This year, it is September, and we have only 21 percent.” Asked why Turkey’s percentage of UNHCR funding was lower than any of the other host countries including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and also within Syria itself, Batchelor said she believed there was “some misunderstanding” relating to a misconception that Turkey was reluctant to accept aid.

“There is a misperception that Turkey is not willing to accept assistance. Turkey has been very willing to accept assistance -- and they have told us they need kitchen sets, blankets and winter clothing. They will be willing to accept all of this,” she stressed. She said the UNHCR had sent 20 truckloads of basic relief items to Turkey’s southeast province of Sanliurfa including thousands of blankets, bed mats, jerry cans and plastic sheeting, in the past 24 hours. She said: “We are now doing airlifts with tens of thousands of core relief items including kitchen sets.

“If we received more international support, the UN could do more with core life-saving items, better assisting Turkey in the very robust response that it has provided.” Batchelor said the UNHCR would be making appeals and she was hopeful that funding would increase in the short term. She said she believed “robust support” was essential not only to save lives, but to also provide education for children. She went on: “We’d like to see the day where Syrians can return to their country and rebuild. They won’t be able to do that if they haven’t been helped. “If the children don’t have an education, if the adults aren’t able to survive, then we’re looking at years and years of conflict.” “We need to empower the Syrian people and bridge them to the time when they can return and rebuild their country. This is an investment not only in food and security and safety and shelter today. This is an investment in the future for all of us,” she said.

Warplanes ‘coming from the direction of Turkey’ hit ISIL in Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 24.09.2014



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said he is considering expanding support for NATO operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to include military involvement. Moments after the statement, airstrikes hit ISIL-held territory in Syria near the border with “warplanes coming from the direction of Turkey.”

Erdoğan’s comments Sept. 23 mark a potential shift in Turkey’s position on international efforts to fight the group. Erdoğan spoke at an annual meeting of world leaders at the United Nations and hours after the U.S. and Arab allies launched airstrikes against ISIL targets in Syria.

Turkey has so far offered limited support, partly because ISIL had been holding 49 Turkish hostages. Erdoğan said Turkey was now considering a role that “includes everything. Both military and political,” Doğan News Agency reported. “Of course we will do our part,” he said. Meanwhile, airstrikes overnight hit ISIL-held territory in Syria near the Turkish border, an organization that tracks violence in the Syrian war said Sept. 24. Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the warplanes that carried out the raids west of the city of Kobane, also known as Ayn al-Arab, had come from the direction of Turkey. He added that they were not Syrian. A U.S.-led alliance launched airstrikes on ISIL in Syria on Sept. 23. ISIL last week launched an offensive against the predominantly Kurdish town of Kobane, forcing more than 130,000 Syrian Kurds to flee. The observatory gathers its information from a network of activists across Syria.

Erdogan: Turkey will stand firm against terrorism

Anadolu Agency, 24.09.2014



Turkey would do whatever needs to be done as a part of the international coalition against ISIL, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said. “Turkey had a big fight against al-Qaeda for a long time. Our struggle against ISIL will also be the same. We are very firm in this,” he said.

Erdogan praised Turkey’s national intelligence service MIT who conducted Saturday’s rescue of 46 Turkish diplomats held hostage by ISIL for over a hundred days. Erdogan had told U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Ankara that Turkey could only support humanitarian missions as long as the Turkish hostages are in the hands of the ISIL.

He denied that any concessions had been made to the terror group; “There are many speculations circulating, I can say from here very clearly that there is not any ransom paid in exchange for hostages,” Responding to the question on how ISIL released the hostages Erdogan said; “ISIL is playing for a number of things in the region. Perhaps they did not want to increase the number of the enemies they have because Turkey would have remained up to a certain point.” Erdogan denied that the fleeing Syrian Kurds represent a security threat to Turkey, but acknowledged there is a threat. “Of all people coming to Turkey there are some who pose threat. MIT and our security are working to cope with this threat,” he said. Erdogan drew comparisons with the situation in 1991 when Turkey hosted one million Iraqi Kurdish refugees fleeing from Saddam Hussein’s regime.

“Something similar is now happening both in Iraq and in Syria. We opened our doors and we still keep our ‘open door’ policy,” he said. “But we will see how long it goes. There is a question mark over that.” Erdogan also touched upon the speculations regarding foreign fighters crossing the Turkish border into Syria and Iraq to join ISIL. He said that Turkey is unfairly treated in respect to the foreign fighters crossing the Turkey. They are leaving their countries as tourists and travelling across Turkey as tourists, Erdogan said. “Turkish authorities have identified about 6,000 people with this intention. We have 1200 kms of border with Iraq and Syria. Turkey is a gate to enter these countries,” he said. “It is not possible to control every single point of this border.” To claim that thousands of fighters have passed through the Turkish border to join terror groups would be unfair to Turkey, said Erdogan.

Erdogan told Rose that Turkey had warned about the crisis unfolding in Syria long before the ISIL upsurge. However, no sufficient attention was paid to Turkey’s warnings. Erdogan said that the airstrikes against ISIL is only one part of the solution. “If you only go with airstrikes this means that you are not fully involved in this struggle,” Erdogan said. “There will be things need to be done from air, on the ground, from an intelligence perspective, a political and a humanitarian perspective.” Erdogan also noted that the comment saying that the countries in the region would take greater steps would not be fair as fighting terrorism is a global issue which needs a more global approach.

Turkey's top soldier inspects troops on Syrian border

Hurriyet Daily News, 24.09.2014



Turkey's land forces commander inspected troops along the Syrian border on Sept. 24, as the Turkish government signaled a policy change in actively joining the international coalition led by the United States against the jihadist threat in Iraq and Syria.

Land Forces Commander Gen. Hulusi Akar visited Turkey's military facilities and troops deployed along the Syrian border, where he was briefed by officers in the field. Turkey boosted its military presence along the Syrian border to deal with refugee influx in recent years and with the potential Syrian offensive last year.

There are also reports that the army has intensified its military mobility in the region after the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacked the Syrian Kurds in the Kobane region bordering Turkey. The development came after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is in New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly meeting, hinted that Turkey could actively support the U.S.-led aerial campaign against ISIL targets in Syria. Talking to journalists in Ankara, meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdogan stressed that "military cooperation" was a wide definition that could have many different meanings. "Asking whether Turkey will fire a bullet is one thing; asking whether it will engage in a military campaign is another thing. Militarily, you can provide human intelligence or visual intelligence. You can supply with logistics. You can take part in military campaign through various means," Akdogan said.

Recalling that U.S. officials wanted to see Turkey playing a central role in the fight against the ISIL, Akdogan underlined that Turkey was geographically the closest country to the threat and it is already embroiled in the issue. The deputy prime minister said victory against ISIL can only be claimed by ground troops, hinting that the Free Syrian Army is the best option for this but it has not been provided with adequate weapons to fight against both the Bashar al-Assad regime and the ISIL. "With whom you are planning to ally in the region? What is your objective? That's why Turkey wants to see a broader Syrian policy," he said. Akdogan stressed that Turkey's level of participation in the coalition will be evaluated in the Cabinet and other state institutions. Erdoğan had said earlier that Turkey will make its decision after his return to Ankara next week.

Pitched battles between ISIL and Syrian Kurds cause alarm along Turkish border

Hurriyet Daily News, 26.09.2014



Turkish officials detained five Chinese, three Tajiks, a German and a Russian in Sanliurfa September 25 on suspicion of attempting to cross into Syria and join jihadists amid continuing pandemonium on the country's southern border. The suspects were caught in a field belonging to TIGEM, the state-run agriculture organization.

Some electronic devices were found on them, while sources claimed that they were on their way to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Some 43 people, carrying 15 AK-47 rifles and 500 bullets, were captured going in the opposite direction, as they were trying to enter Turkey illegally.

Those detained were reportedly members of the People's Protection Units (YPG), an extension of the Democratic Union Party's (PYD), who were escaping from ISIL after the jihadists took over some villages around Kobane. Kobane is a hot spot across from Sanliurfa's Suruc district where the YPG and the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) are confronting ISIL. Some 140,000 people, according to official figures, have fled possible ISIL atrocities following its offensive against the predominately Kurdish town, since Turkey opened its frontier to refugees Sept. 19. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu held a meeting on the situation of the refugees and security at the borders with the intelligence chief and the head of the General Staff on Sept. 25.

Turkish security forces have already boosted measures by the border. Mobile teams are trying to control the border 24 hours a day and report on the latest situation, while measures have also been increased at airports to prevent the flow of possible foreign fighters to Syria, with European countries, according to officials, sharing more information with Turkey. A number of howitzers have been deployed to crucial hills, while soldiers' sentry boxes in some dangerous spots have been evacuated to avoid any accidental casualties. Turkish soldiers have found a number of rifles, pistols and bullets at the border over the week, which were presumably left there by fleeing refugees. ISIL and the YPG continued to fight on Sept. 25 for control of the crucial Zorava Hill, only five kilometers from Kobane.

Both sides exchanged fire with heavy guns, Hurriyet reporters observed, with sources saying ISIL would gain a military advantage to eventually take over Kobane if it wrests control of Zorava from the defenders. Locals in the Siftik village of Suruc on the Turkish side have been using binoculars to observe the pitched battles. Although many refugees are still crossing into Turkey, some are returning home, even as the sound of gunfire from Syria could be clearly heard in the morning on Sept. 25. More than 1,000 Kurdish refugees crossed at Mursitpinar back to Kobane on Sept. 24, according to one eyewitness. One such refugee, a woman in her 50s called Halise, told Anadolu Agency the night of Sept. 24 that they were miserable even though their relatives in Turkey were trying to shelter them.

“Even though there is life-threatening danger there, we want to go back,” she said, while waiting in front of the border gate with eight other of her family members. “We were staying in the same place with nine other families,” said, Selma Sexmuz, a mother of eight. “We don’t have enough money to survive. Life is expensive here. We took shelter in Kobane two years ago after leaving Damascus. We are scared, but we do not have any other option. I have been here for the last six days.”

Mahmoud Osman Ali, 77, said: “We came here in mass panic. They told me ISIL has not reached Kobane. I am going back alone after having sent my daughter and her seven children to Gaziantep [in Turkey].” Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), Health Ministry and Social Services officials, who mostly speak Kurdish, are the first people to welcome the refugees. Sanliurfa municipality is also expending efforts for hygiene while health officials are vaccinating kids. AFAD is distributing food and water to refugees after medical exams.

Meanwhile, Mehmet Bekaroglu, a deputy leader of the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), told Hurriyet September 25 after a visit to the region that only 50,000 people had fled to Turkey, just one-third of the official figure. The refugees at the borders are living in poor conditions, he said, adding that this was due to a row between officials in Suruç and the mayor from the People’s Democratic Party (HDP). Some tents erected by the official aid bodies remained empty, he said.

Turkish, Iraqi trade chambers meet to boost economic ties

Hurriyet Daily New, 24.09.2014



Iraq and Turkey should establish a customs union and joint market to improve and maintain the sustainability of commercial ties, a prominent Iraqi business representative has said, amid tremors in bilateral trade caused by violence in the country.

“We have to think deeply and we need to create a customs union to eliminate the difficulties at customs,” Jaafar Rasool al-Hamadani, chairman of the Iraqi Federation of Chambers of Commerce, said at a workshop between Turkish and Iraqi business representatives in Ankara on September 23 with a view to boost trade between the two countries.

In fact, the conflict involving the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq has slowed Turkey’s exports to Iraq. Speaking at the meeting organized by Turkey’s Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), al-Hamadani said the constraints squeezing imports and exports should be rethought to be solved. Al-Hamadani, who was due to meet with Turkish Customs Minister Nurettin Canikli on Sept. 24, said both sides would benefit from an economy and customs union that was signed between the two governments. Iraq had been Turkey’s biggest trade partner after Germany, said TOBB Chairman Rifat Hisarciklioğlu during the meeting.



The Turkish private sector, which looked to expand with overseas projects, took a great role in Iraq's reconstruction in the aftermath of the war that tore the country down, seeing bilateral trade and investments prospering. However, in August the country dropped from the second to the fifth place among Turkey's top export markets, with the recent turmoil in the country, as Turkey's Exporters' Assembly (TİM) figures show. "Around 300 Turkish companies working in Iraq were forced to [cease their activity] and evacuate their 7,000 employees for safety," Hisarcıkliođlu said during the meeting.

Turkey's exports to Iraq have contracted by around 40 percent since June, when the ISIL militants took control of northern Iraq's largest city Mosul, mainly due to transportation security concerns. Hisarcıkliođlu said the TOBB is closely watching the situation in cooperation with the government and companies, also complaining about the "difficulties raised by Iraq." "Attempts to impose fees due to delays and requests for Turkish companies to use routes through Iran when they cannot transport their goods due to closed roads have left us in a difficult situation," he said.

World Bank urges Turkey, EU for closer customs union talks

Anadolu Agency, 24.09.2014



World Bank Turkey Director Martin Raiser has called on Turkey and the EU to cooperate more closely to solve problems in the EU-Turkey Customs Union agreement, which is seen as one of the largest obstacles to Turkey's economic integration with the EU.

“While the best solution would be moving forward with the accession negotiations, other practical steps could be taken to reduce the impact of asymmetries, such as establishing working groups. Well-managed parallel track negotiations mirroring the main EU negotiations to start and conclude at the same time could resolve the problem,” said Raiser.

Raiser spoke at the Turkey-EU Customs Union panel held by the European Union and the Ankara-based think tank Global Research Association, which conducts research on Turkey's harmonization with EU principles and policies. The free trade agreement (FTA) between the EU and third parties enables non-EU countries' goods to enter European markets or Turkish markets via Europe without duty charges, but Turkey's exports to non-EU countries do not benefit from the same tariff reductions granted to the EU. As a result, Turkey still faces high tariffs and non-tariff barriers. In his speech, Raiser noted that the EU had concluded many FTAs with countries such as Egypt, South Africa and Algeria, which have themselves refused to conclude FTAs with Turkey.

The lack of any mechanisms that would eliminate this reluctance from third parties to sign agreements is seen by Turkey as the biggest problem with the Customs Union. “Turkish firms have not received automatic reciprocal access to those markets, while imports from these countries can often enter Turkey duty-free by way of trade deflection via the EU,” Raiser said, acknowledging the situation as an obstacle in bilateral relations between Turkey and the bloc. He also noted that the proliferation of FTAs between the EU and larger countries, such as the U.S. and Canada, led to vital risks for Turkey. Turkey has been voicing its concern over a number of FTAs signed by the EU, especially the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the U.S.

Raiser further stated that although Turkey is a candidate for EU membership, its inability to participate in the decision making process on EU Customs Union policies increased the risk of Turkish non-compliance to EU legislation. Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci has repeatedly said that if the EU signs an FTA with major economies, such as the United States, Canada or India, it would greatly harm the Turkish economy. Turkey is pressing to be included in the TTIP currently being negotiated between the United States and the European Union, which aims to cut tariffs and harmonize regulations in the world's largest economic blocs.

As growth slows in Turkey, unemployment climbs

Hurriyet Daily News, 22.09.2014



Turkey's growth rate, which had been estimated by official and private institutions and organizations to be around 3 percent for the second quarter of 2014, has been announced at 2.1 percent - below expectations. This amounts to a notable slowdown in the growth tempo.

Consequently, seasonally adjusted unemployment has increased; unemployment is rapidly escalating. This trend is not unique to the second quarter, a similar course will be seen in the coming quarters. The Turkish economy, which shrank after the 2009 global crisis, recorded "miraculous" growth rates at an average of 10 percent in 2010 and 2011.

Then came low growth years. In 2012, the economy grew around 2 percent, while in 2013 it grew 4 percent. The target for 2014 is 4 percent, but growth in the first six months of the year was only 3.3 percent: 4.7 percent in the first quarter and 2.1 percent in the second quarter. Cabinet ministers have also accepted that the targeted 4 percent growth was too ambitious and a revision is necessary. The biggest contribution to the second quarter's 2.1 percent growth rate came from the export of goods and capital. While the contribution from private and state consumption was a total of just 0.6 percentage points, the decline in investments also had a negative effect. The "Gross Capital Formation," made up of the government and the private sector's investments, dropped 3.5 percent, contributing the most important negative effect on growth. Especially the private sector's investments have come to a halt. The biggest contribution to the second quarter's 2.1 percent growth rate came from the increase in the added value of exports of net goods and services.

The added value created in exports of tourism, international construction and international transportation was the main competent of growth, with a 2.8-point contribution. A significant factor in the drop of the growth rate was the shrinkage in domestic sales and investments. High interest rates and the hike in foreign exchange rates had an effect in this result. With the decline in demand for housing, white goods and automobiles, the growth in the domestic market also shrank. External sales, on the other hand, both due to the recession that Europe is still experiencing and also the increasing geopolitical risks and war in the Middle East, could not open a field of growth. This whole situation has considerably slowed down production wheels.

When viewed according to sectors, it can be seen that agriculture declined nearly 2 percent - a result of draught and other climatic circumstances. While 7 percent growth was recorded in mining, growth in the manufacturing sector stayed at 2 percent. As a result of the fall in domestic sales, growth in trade was limited to 0.3 percent. In the "star" sector of the period, the construction sector, average growth was exceeded by just half a percentage point, becoming 2.6 percent. It doesn't seem possible that Turkey's unsuccessful growth performance will shift to a positive tempo in the third and fourth quarters of this year.



Interest rates, which cannot be lowered due to inflation rates approaching two digits, are pressuring both investments and domestic demand, and it looks like growth will remain below 3 percent on an annual basis in the coming quarters. The low growth of the second quarter has been reflected in the increase in unemployment. The rate of unemployment for June (seasonally adjusted) has been released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) as 9.9 percent. Non-agricultural unemployment in June, however, has reached 12 percent; youth unemployment is 18.1 percent. When viewed from the annual basis, general unemployment has increased by 1 point in 12 months, from 8.9 percent in June 2013 to 9.9 percent in June 2014.

On an annual basis, the number of unemployed has gone from 2,412,000 to 2,854,000, an increase of 442,000. It is noteworthy that a little over a quarter of this increase occurred only in the month of June. When non-agriculture unemployment is viewed, the 10.8 percent rate of June last year increased by 1.2 points this June, to reach 12 percent. In the May-June period of this year it increased by half a point. Unemployment among those aged under 24 has increased 1.4 points in 12 months, from 16.7 percent to 18.1 percent.

These are alarming dimensions. In June of this year, 20,000 people joined the workforce but were unable to find jobs, while some 96,000 people who had jobs have also lost their jobs. The June employment data (seasonally adjusted) show that there has been an employment drop of 72,000 in agriculture and 32,000 in industry. In June, the employment drop in the construction sector was 54,000, meaning that the number of workers in the sector dropped to 1,800,000. Despite the drop in agriculture, industry and construction, employment in June in the services sector increased by 62,000. But, at the end of the day, the net employment loss was nevertheless 96,000.

With the addition of the 20,000 who joined the workforce in June but were unable to find jobs, some 116,000 people were added to the army of the unemployed; thus increasing unemployment to 9.9 percent. What was effective in the rise of unemployment was the 3.5 percent drop in investments in the second quarter, the fall in production capacities, and the draught experienced in agriculture. Growth data in the second quarter showed that there has been a decline in investments of up to 7 percent, particularly in machinery-equipment investments, while there was a 3 percent increase in construction investments. The fall in domestic demand, primarily in the construction, automobile and white goods sectors, has forced businesses to stock and, if the stocks are full, to lower capacity.

Turkish Central Bank leaves key rates unchanged as inflation remains high

Reuters, 25.09.2014



The Turkish Central Bank has left its key interest rates unchanged, despite slowing economic growth, as it battles stubbornly high inflation and pressure on the lira in the face of an expected tightening in U.S. monetary policy.

The lack of action was expected, although it was the first time since April that rates had been kept on hold. The bank said it would leave policy tight in Turkey until the outlook for inflation improves significantly. “Elevated food prices continue to delay the improvement in the inflation outlook,” the bank said. “Meanwhile, declining commodity prices are expected to limit upside risks on inflation.”

The bank left its one-week repo rate at 8.25 percent, its overnight lending rate unchanged at 11.25 percent, its primary dealers overnight borrowing rate at 10.75 percent and its overnight borrowing rate at 7.50 percent. The Turkish lira exceeded 2.25 against the dollar, its weakest in seven months, after the rate decision, continuing its weak performance. All 14 economists polled by Reuters forecast the central bank would leave its main one-week repo rate at 8.25 percent. Two predicted a 50-basis-point cut and one predicted a 25-basis-point cut in the overnight lending rate. “The Central Bank faces a tricky balancing act.

Inflation is uncomfortably high and the current-account deficit, though it has narrowed, is still a weak spot,” said Neil Schearing, head of emerging markets research at Capital Economics. He said the economy was struggling and growth will slow from the pace set in the first quarter. The country is especially sensitive to changes in global liquidity because of its large current account deficit, which was easier to finance during the years of cheap U.S. funding. The Bank last month unexpectedly lowered its overnight lending rate, which was considered more a signal to a government keen for rate cuts that it was supporting the economy.

Kurdish forces push back ISIL in northern Syria

Reuters, 25.09.2014



Kurdish forces in northern Syria pushed back an advance by fighters of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) towards a strategic town on the Turkish border on Sept. 25 and appealed for U.S.-led air strikes to target the insurgents' tanks and heavy armaments.

ISIL launched a new offensive to try to capture the border town of Kobani. At least 140,000 Kurds have fled, crossing into Turkey. Kurdish and Islamic State fighters exchanged artillery and machinegun fire in a cluster of villages on the west of Kobane, where the frontline appeared not to have moved significantly for several days, a Reuters witness said.

Kurdish officials meanwhile said ISIL had concentrated their fighters south of the town late on Wednesday and had pushed towards it, but that the main Kurdish armed group in northern Syria, the YPG, had repelled them overnight. "The YPG responded and pushed them back to about 10-15 km (6-9 miles) away," Idris Nassan, deputy minister for foreign affairs in the Kobane canton, told Reuters by telephone. Syrian Kurdish refugees watching the fighting from a hill on the Turkish side of the border said the ISIL insurgents had not been able to advance from positions they had taken up in olive groves west of Kobane. Turkish military vehicles patrolled their side of the border, with soldiers occasionally moving people away from the hill overlooking the fighting. Heavy weapons fire could also be heard further away from the border inside Syrian territory.

The town's location has been blocking the Sunni Muslim insurgents from consolidating their gains in northern Syria. The group tried to take the town in July but was repulsed by local forces backed by Kurdish fighters from Turkey. The YPG on Sept. 25 renewed calls for U.S.-led air strikes to hit ISIL positions around Kobane. "Although all ISIL positions and their heavy armaments, including tanks and armoured vehicles around Kobani, are clear and within view for everyone on the front line, it is worth noting that these targets have not been bombed yet," YPG spokesman Redur Xelil said. "We are of the utmost readiness to cooperate with the international coalition forces against terrorism and give it detailed information about the main targets," he said. Ocalan Iso, a Kurdish defence official, confirmed that YPG forces had stemmed ISIL's advances south of Kobane, known as Ayn al-Arab in Arabic.

"As our fighters secured the area, we found 12 Islamic State bodies," he said by telephone. ISIL fighters also remain to the east and west of the town and fighting continues in the south. Both men said they had also heard warplanes flying over Kobane late on Sept. 24 for the first time, but it was not clear exactly which areas they were targeting. A third night of U.S.-led air strikes on Wednesday targeted ISIL-controlled oil refineries in eastern Syria, U.S. officials said. The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war, said eight YPG fighters had been killed in overnight clashes.

US launches air strikes against Isis in Syria for the first time

The Guardian, 23.09.2014



The US and allied operation into Syria is ‘ongoing’, the Pentagon said. The US stepped up its war against the Islamic State militant group, launching air strikes on targets in Syria for the first time. The Pentagon press secretary, rear admiral John Kirby, confirmed that the US and allied nations sent fighter jets, bomber aircraft and Tomahawk missiles in an operation against Isis that he described as “ongoing”.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, indicated that Raqqa, a Syrian stronghold of Isis, was among the targets of the operation, which began in the early hours of Tuesday morning local time.

The first wave of strikes finished about 90 minutes later at around 10pm EDT (2am GMT), but the operation was expected to continue for several more hours. The head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdulrahman, told Reuters by telephone in Beirut that the air strikes hit checkpoints in Raqqa city and surrounding areas. Dozens of Isis fighters were killed or wounded in the attacks, he said. The US was joined in the Syria operation by Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, an official said. A Jordanian army statement on Tuesday said its airforce had “destroyed a number of targets that belong to some terrorist groups that sought to commit terror acts inside Jordan” without making explicit reference to Syria.

The president of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, Hadi al Bahra, said the strikes were necessary. “We have called for air strikes such as those that commenced tonight with a heavy heart and deep concern, as these strikes begin in our own homeland. We insist that utmost care is taken to avoid civilian casualties. Our people have been suffering at the hands of Isis for over a year.” The Syrian foreign ministry said on Tuesday that the US informed its UN envoy before launching the strikes. The strikes were carried out by manned air force and navy aircraft, while the Tomahawk missiles were launched from US ships in the northern Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. The aircraft carrier USS George HW Bush is in the Gulf.

Kirby said the strikes were ordered by army general Lloyd Austin, the commander of US forces in the Middle East and South Asia “under authorisation granted to him by the commander in chief”. President Barack Obama met Austin last week to discuss plans to expand the air war into Syria. There have been almost 200 air strikes in Iraq so far. Air strikes against Isis targets in Iraq, which began on 7 August, now occur daily. Of Syria, the official said: “If we need to go daily, we will.” The White House has been under mounting pressure in recent days to show other countries, particularly in the Arab world, are willing to take an active military role in its coalition against Isis. Last week, the secretary of state, John Kerry, promised sceptical lawmakers in a series of briefings on Capitol Hill that he would be in a position to name the unspecified active partners before the end of the week.



But it was the upcoming UN general assembly in New York, at which Obama will chair a meeting of the security council, that the politics of having countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates will be crucial for the US. Obama is hoping to use the special session to secure international backing for a tough resolution against Isis, including an international travel ban on foreign fighters travelling from other countries. The strikes come months in advance of any support on the ground. With Obama ruling out US combat troops for now, there is no capable ground force in eastern Syria to capitalise on the air strikes by seizing territory back from Isis. The US plan is to train a force of Syrian rebels for that purpose in Saudi Arabia, but the training has not begun yet.

The Pentagon estimates that it will take at least eight months for the first units to be ready. Asked on Friday by the Guardian what an air campaign in Syria can accomplish without a ground component, Kirby said: "What air strikes would enable us to do is to continue to put pressure on them, particularly the safe havens and sanctuaries that they enjoy in Syria." The air strikes are a long-telegraphed move by the Pentagon, albeit a reluctant one for many senior military officers and the White House. In June, after Isis overran the Iraqi city of Mosul, US defence officials speculated that an American reprisal would likely need to target the group in Syria as well as Iraq, in order to inflict lasting damage.

Obama said in a televised address on 10 September that he would expand the US war against Isis into Syria, reversing a longstanding caution against involving the US in the bloody confusion of Syria's civil war. Political and media pressure on Obama to launch airstrikes against Isis and then expand the war into Syria has been intense, despite much scepticism on Capitol Hill of Obama's war strategy. The escalation of the war into Syria comes without explicit congressional authorisation. Last week, Congress agreed to provide \$500m requested by Obama for training Syrian rebels, but deferred a vote specifically on the war against Isis until after November's legislative elections. Obama has asserted that the 2001 Authorisation to Use Military Force against al-Qaida provides him with sufficient legal authority, something few legal scholars have embraced, owing to al-Qaida's public rejection of Isis earlier this year.

The US has denied speculation that it will work with the government of Bashar al-Assad against Isis, a common enemy. Syria's use of chemical weapons in its protracted civil war had earlier led Obama to consider strikes against the Assad regime. Now, the US finds itself in the position of conducting an operation that could potentially deliver strategic benefits to Assad. General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, has warned that Assad's air defences – mostly configured on Syria's western coast, far from land held by Isis – are formidable, yet there is no indication that US and allied planes were under attack from Assad in the latest operation.

Thousands protest in Moscow over Russia's involvement in Ukraine

The Guardian, 21.09.2014



Thousands of people gathered in central Moscow on Sunday September 21 to protest against their country's involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine at an All-Russian March for Peace, the first large anti-Kremlin rally since the conflict started in April.

The march for an “end to the Russian regime's irresponsible, aggressive policy” in Ukraine drew 5,000 protesters, according to the interior ministry. But official estimates of opposition march numbers have been notably low in the past, and the volunteer group White Counter said put the number at 26,000 people.

Although some far-left groups, such as Autonomous Action – whose members carried a banner reading “No to war between peoples! No to peace between classes!” – participated in the march, the main contingent of the protest was similar to the movement that shook Moscow in 2011-2013. Other banners read “Hands off of Ukraine!” and “Freedom to the 6 May prisoners”, a reference to those jailed on charges of inciting riots after an anti-Putin rally in Bolotnaya Square on 6 May 2012 that degenerated into clashes between police and protesters. Others carried pictures of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine. In recent weeks, Russian independent media have reported on the growing number of soldiers who have gone missing after being deployed to eastern Ukraine, and secretive funerals have been held for some servicemen in places like the provincial city of Pskov.

Sunday's march was organised by longstanding opposition parties including Yabloko, Solidarity and Parnas, as well as newcomers like the Party of Progress organised by popular anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny, who is currently under house arrest as part of what many see as a politically motivated criminal case. The protesters represented a variety of political views, but most were united in their opposition to what they see as a Kremlin policy to escalate the conflict in eastern Ukraine by sending arms and soldiers across the border. “My last name may be the same as Putin's, but I'm against him,” said Oksana Putina. “We can wake up the Russian people, so that we won't see any more Russian troops in Ukraine ... Let Putin take out his troops, and Ukraine will deal with its own problems.”

Vadim Kryuchkov and Varvara Daryevskaya, who were holding Russian and Ukrainian flags, said they didn't believe the protest would change the Kremlin's course but felt it was their duty to express their opposition. Kryuchkov said he was originally from a town near Luhansk and supported the greater local autonomy for the region, but was against Russia sending troops and arms to eastern Ukraine. “We want Ukraine to see that there are people in Russia who don't support the war,” Kryuchkov said. “Russia is directly participating in this war.” “In fact, Russia started it,” Daryevskaya said.

A few thousand protesters also assembled in St Petersburg, while peace marches in other cities drew far fewer people. According to the human rights organisation OVD Info, a peace march organiser in Yekaterinburg was briefly detained by police but later returned to the protest. The Moscow march was tailed by a few hundred pro-Kremlin protesters holding the flags of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics declared by pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. At least one minor scuffle broke out but lines of riot police for the most part kept the two camps apart. "The whole reason for this crisis is that Russia has refused to recognise Ukraine's European choice," said Higher School of Economics professor Nina Belyayeva, who was holding a sign reading, "Ukraine's European choice = an example for Russia".

She was soon confronted by several pro-Kremlin protesters, who argued that the protests in Kiev this winter that toppled former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich's regime had been organised by the United States. Police did confiscate signs from some protesters, including one reading, "Putler kaput!" When asked about the seizure, a police officer would only say that the signs "didn't correspond to the topic of the protest". "It strongly affects the police officers' nerves when it's something related to Putin," said organiser Ilya Mishenko.

UK Parliament to vote on joining airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq

CNN, 26.09.2014



ISIS presents a direct threat to the British people, Prime Minister David Cameron said Friday as he opened a debate in Parliament on whether Britain should join airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq. The terror group is an organization of "staggering" brutality, he said, which has already killed one British hostage and threatens the lives of two more.

"This is not a threat on the far side of the world," he said, but one which menaces European nations directly. In addition to an ISIS-inspired attack on a Jewish museum in Brussels earlier in the year, Europe's security agencies have disrupted six other ISIS-linked plots, he said.

Parliament was recalled by Cameron for the vote on military action in Iraq, which is expected to be approved but will be preceded by lengthy debate in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Cameron said Britain should join international allies in combating ISIS, an action that he warned would "take not just months, but years." "The hallmarks will be patience and persistence, not shock and awe," he said of the campaign against the Sunni extremist group. The government insists such action is legal because Iraq's government has requested international help to tackle ISIS, which has overrun vast swathes of Iraq and Syria and massacred religious minorities and Shia Muslims. Cameron made that point again Friday, saying there was "no question" of the legality of action given the request by Iraq's leaders and the broad international backing for the campaign against ISIS.



Some MPs may be reluctant to back a bombing campaign in Iraq because of doubts over its effectiveness or unhappiness over past UK military intervention in Iraq. But action has been backed by the governing coalition of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, as well as the opposition Labour Party. Labour leader Ed Miliband told lawmakers the United Kingdom “cannot simply stand by” against the threat of ISIS. If approved, military action could start within hours. UK forces have already been taking part in surveillance missions over Iraq, as well as aiding Kurdish forces with equipment. Cameron acknowledged that the memory of going to war in Iraq in 2003, when Labour’s Tony Blair was Prime Minister, “hangs heavy” over the House of Commons. “This is not 2003, but we must not use past mistakes as an excuse for inaction,” he said.

There is “no realistic prospect” of defeating ISIS without military action, he said, and Britain has unique assets that no other coalition partner can offer, including precision missiles and surveillance capabilities. “It is also our duty to take part,” he said. “Protecting the streets of Britain is not a task that we are prepared to entirely subcontract to other air forces of other countries.” Last year, Cameron suffered a painful defeat in the Commons when MPs voted against action in Syria in response to claims the Syrian government had used chemical weapons against its own people. The motion put before Parliament on Friday specifically rules out action in Syria unless a separate vote is held. It also rules out the use of UK troops in any possible ground combat operations in Iraq. Asked about the possibility of a change of approach to Syria, Cameron said the situation there was “more complicated” than in Iraq and that he was not going to change strategy right now.

“ISIS needs to be destroyed in Syria as well as Iraq and we support the action the U.S. and five Arab states have taken in Syria and I do believe there is a strong case for us to do more in Syria,” he said. “But I did not want to bring a motion to the house today which there wasn’t consensus for.” British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond told CNN he was confident the MPs would back the vote on Britain’s participation in the Iraq air campaign against ISIS but “there will be assurances that they want to receive.” On the likelihood of Britain’s involvement in Syria, Hammond said that it is not inevitable but that the possibility hasn’t been ruled out yet. The United States and its coalition partners began bombing raids in Syria this week against ISIS targets. U.S. aircraft had already been carrying out airstrikes against ISIS -- the group also known as ISIL, which calls itself the Islamic State -- in Iraq since last month. Miliband, explaining his support for the motion, said that ISIS’ ambition to create an Islamist state risks destabilizing the region and make it more likely that Iraq would become “a haven and training ground for terrorism” directed at the UK.

He said some in the House of Commons may be wondering if this is a repeat of what happened in the run-up to the 2003 war in Iraq. “In my view, it is not,” he said, arguing the circumstances now are “demonstrably different.” On Syria, Miliband differed from Cameron’s view, saying that he would want to see U.N. authorization for action there before Britain stepped in. Former Defense Secretary Liam Fox, a Conservative, said he believed there was a legal basis for action against ISIS in Syria and that it should have been up for debate too. “Sooner or later we are going to have to do it. It would have been far better if we had said so today,” he said. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, said earlier this week that his party would support the air campaign in Iraq for a number of reasons, including that it is legal and has been requested by the Iraqi government. Also, he said, “It’s part of a much bigger coalition, a whole array of countries, crucially including a number of Arab countries which deprives ISIL of the ability to somehow portray it as a ‘West vs. the rest’ crusade.”

ISIS beheaded a British hostage, aid worker David Haines, earlier this month and continues to hold another British hostage, aid worker Alan Henning. The group has also released videos of the beheading of two U.S. journalists, James Foley and Steven Sotloff. Muslim leaders around the world have called for Henning's release. They include Shaykh Haitham Al Haddad, a judge on the Shariah Council in London, who has said that "whatever your grievance with American or British foreign policy, executing this man is not the answer." ISIS has been ramping up its threats against the United States and the West. This summer, the group declared the establishment of a "caliphate," an Islamic state stretching across the territory it has conquered.

EU plans for Iran gas imports if sanctions go

Reuters, 25.09.2014



The EU is increasing the urgency of a plan to import natural gas from Iran, as relations with Tehran thaw while those with top gas supplier Russia grow chillier. Two "ifs" - the removal of sanctions on Iran and the addition of some pipeline infrastructure - are not preventing EU planners preparing, a European Commission source told Reuters.

"Iran is far towards the top of our priorities for mid-term measures that will help reduce our reliance on Russian gas supplies," the source said. "Iran's gas could come to Europe quite easily and politically there is a clear rapprochement between Tehran and the West."

Russia is currently Europe's biggest supplier of natural gas, meeting a third of its demand worth \$80 billion a year. The EU has imposed sanctions on Moscow over the conflict in Ukraine, increasing the need for gas from elsewhere. While sanctioned itself, Iran has the world's second largest gas reserves after Russia and is a potential alternative given talks between Tehran and the West to reach a deal over the former's disputed nuclear program. "High potential for gas production, domestic energy sector reforms that are underway, and ongoing normalization of its relationship with the West make Iran a credible alternative to Russia," said a paper prepared for the European parliament. However, the paper added that Iran was not a credible alternative energy supplier in the short-term due to sanctions and large infrastructure needs before exports become viable.

Internal EU energy security documents seen by Reuters also describe plans to tap new non-European gas import sources in central Asia, including Iran. Iran, exploiting the reversal of old enmities caused by the upheaval of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), is also keen to sell its gas. "Iran can be a secure energy center for Europe," its President Hassan Rouhani was quoted on Sept. 24 telling Austrian President Heinz Fischer in New York. Tehran's assertions over reliable supply are likely to ring alarm bells at Russia's giant Gazprom, after interruptions to its exports via Ukraine in previous disputes scared Europe. "Iran is trying to position itself in Europe as an alternative to Russian gas."

UN Security Council blacklists foreign fighters, recruiters

Reuters, 24.09.2014



A UN Security Council committee blacklisted more than a dozen foreign extremist fighters, fundraisers and recruiters tied to militant groups in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Tunisia and Yemen, including a senior leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Individuals from France, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Senegal and Kuwait are among those targeted by the Security Council's al-Qaeda sanctions committee. France submitted three of the individuals to the committee, while the United States proposed 11 individuals and the groups Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia.

This group has links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and has recruited Tunisian youth to fight in Syria, and the al-Qaeda-linked Abdallah Azzam Brigades. The U.N. action coincides with the expected adoption on Sept. 23, at a meeting due to be chaired by U.S. President Barack Obama, of a U.N. Security Council resolution to suppress foreign extremist fighters. It also comes as Obama builds an international coalition to fight ISIL militants, who have captured swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq and urged followers to attack citizens of various countries. One individual sanctioned by the U.N. committee is Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Mustafa al-Qaduli, an Iraqi who is a senior ISIL leader in Syria and previously served as a deputy to al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Also blacklisted is Norwegian Anders Cameroon Ostensvig Dale. He is described as a member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula who made several trips to Yemen where he was trained to make bomb belts, improvised explosive devices and car bombs. "Dale's ability to travel to many countries without visa restrictions has the potential to be used by AQAP to carry out an attack in those countries," according to the U.N. listing. The U.N. committee also added Shafi Sultan Mohammed al-Ajmi, a Kuwaiti who is described as an active fundraiser for Nusra Front and "operates regular social media campaigns seeking donations for Syrian fighters," according to the listing.

Diplomats said the Security Council has agreed a U.S.-drafted resolution, to be formally adopted on Wednesday, that aims to "prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping" of people to perpetrate, plan, prepare or participate in extremist attacks. The resolution generally targets foreign extremist fighters traveling to conflicts anywhere in world, but it has been spurred by the rise of ISIL and al-Nusra Front in Syria and Iraq. Some 12,000 fighters from at least 74 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight with extremist groups, experts have said. The draft resolution is under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter, which makes it legally binding for the 193 U.N. member states and gives the Security Council authority to enforce decisions with economic sanctions or force. The draft text, however, does not mandate military force to tackle the foreign fighter issue.



Announcements & Reports

► *Struggle against Isis, border crossings and Turkey*

Source : ORSAM

Weblink : http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/enUploads/Article/Files/2014921_policybrief11ing.pdf

► *Powering profitable sales growth*

Source : Accenture

Weblink : <http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture-Five-Imperatives-Power-Profitable-Sales-Growth.pdf>

► *Integrating the demand side: a holistic approach to the customer*

Source : Accenture

Weblink : <http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture-Integrating-Demand-Side-Holistic-Customer-Approach.pdf>

► *Rapid-growth markets*

Source : Ernst & Young

Weblink : http://emergingmarkets.ey.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/1000759_RGM-Feb2014-OK-LR.pdf

► *Citizen today August 2014*

Source : Ernst & Young

Weblink : [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-_Citizen_Today:_the_economics_of_behavior/\\$FILE/EY-Citizen-Today-the-economics-of-behavior.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-_Citizen_Today:_the_economics_of_behavior/$FILE/EY-Citizen-Today-the-economics-of-behavior.pdf)

► *Asset management 2020: a brave new World*

Source : PwC

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► *Insurance 2020: forcing the pace*

Source : PwC

Weblink : <http://www.pwc.com.tr/tr/publications/industrial/insurance/pdf/pwc-life-insurance-2020.pdf>

► *Security transition in Afghanistan*

Source : CSIS

Weblink : http://csis.org/files/publication/140924_Security_Transition_in_Afghanistan_Rev.pdf



► *The unstoppable far right?*

Source : GMF

Weblink : http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files_mf/1411497458Lochocki_UnstoppableFarRight_Aug14_web.pdf

Upcoming Events

► *The Evolving Risks of Fragile States and International Terrorism*

Date : 29 September 2014

Place : Washington – USA

Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/09/29-evolving-risks-fragile-states-international-terrorism>

► *Debt Management in an Era of Quantitative Easing: What Should the Treasury and the Fed Do?*

Date : 30 September 2014

Place : Washington – USA

Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/09/30-debt-management-quantitative-easing-treasury-fed>

► *US Arms Control Policy and Strategic Posture in the Face of a Resurgent Russia*

Date : 06 October 2014

Place : London – United Kingdom

Website : <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/events-s-calendar/us-arms-control-policy-and-strategic-posture-502c>

► *Energy and Economic Competitiveness*

Date : 06 – 07 October 2014

Place : London – United Kingdom

Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/Energy2014>

► *Abenomics – Stock-Taking and Lessons for the EU*

Date : 08 October 2014

Place : Brussels – Belgium

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/452-abenomics-stock-taking-and-lessons-for-the-eu/>



► *Europe's Strategic Choices: Building Prosperity and Security*

Date : 17 – 19 October 2014
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/Berlin2014>

► *The New Shape of Banking: Regulation, Reform and Resilience*

Date : 20 October 2014
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/Banking>

► *7th International Energy Congress Expo*

Date : 24 - 25 November 2014
Place : Ankara - Turkey
Website : <http://www.energy-congress.com>

► *The Comprehensive Assessment, the ECBs' New Role and Limits of a Common Supervision in the EU*

Date : 30 October 2014
Place : Berlin – Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/461-the-comprehensive-assessment-the-ecbs-new-role-and-limits-of-a-common-supervision-in-the-eu/>

► *Food Security: Mapping Risks, Building Resilience*

Date : 01 – 02 December 2014
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/foodsecurity2014>

► *11th Asia Europe Economic Forum*

Date : 05 December 2014
Place : Tokyo – Japan
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/view/460/>