

EU seeks to accelerate Turkey's stalled accession process

Hurriyet Daily News, 02.10.2015



The European Union is seeking to accelerate Turkey's almost stalled accession negotiation process by annexing a set of priorities and concrete recommendations to its soon-to-be released progress report, seen as a short-term road map for the next government to be formed after Nov. 1 elections.

These concrete recommendations cover an implementation period of 12 to 18 months so that more negotiation chapters can be opened as part of Turkey's accession process, started in 2005. Turkey opened only 14 chapters out of 35 and closed only one of them. Croatia, which began negotiations on the same day as Turkey, joined the EU in mid-2013.

As the EU is preparing to release its annual report on Oct. 21 or Oct. 22 in which it will assess the state of human rights and fundamental freedoms within the last 12 months period, it will, for the first time, annex a document to outline its recommendations to Turkey's next government. This year's report is expected to be made of three main parts.

The first part will assess the state of Turkey's accession process, as a sort of picture of the point Turkey has reached so far. This picture will also be important in regards of shaping Turkey's next actions.

The second part will assess Turkey's last 12 months in terms of its performance on negotiation chapters as well as its human rights and democratization process. It's expected the report will highlight overall human rights violations as Turkey's number one issue as well as restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of press and the Kurdish peace process. The EU's criticisms on the home security package and internet laws would also be detailed in this part.

The third part, however, will contain concrete recommendations for the acceleration of the accession process, enabling Turkey to fulfill more criteria to open negotiation chapters. This set of priorities is envisaged to cover a period of 12 to 18 months, which would be regarded as a short-term road map for Turkey's next government after the Nov. 1 polls.

According to diplomatic sources, this year's report is being written in a more political language compared to last years' technical format and therefore, will be more interesting and even exciting. Using this language, the 2015 report will supposedly address Turkey's growing human rights deficiencies in a more direct way, sending a clear message to the next government.

The reason for the postponement of the progress report's announcement by one week was because the EU wanted to have better coverage and reflection on its findings, as the original date of the release of the document coincides with the EU Council meeting on Oct. 13, sources stressed.

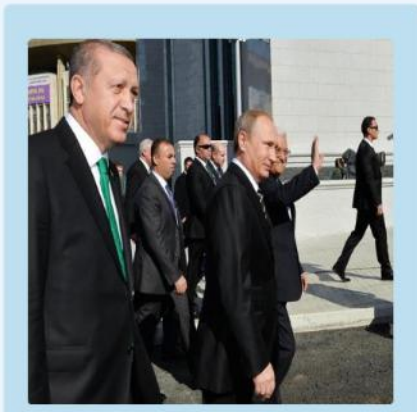
In the meantime, sources expressed their expectation for the opening of chapter 17 on economy and monetary policies most likely before the end of this year. But it's too early to confirm this, sources said. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has expressed Turkey's expectations for the opening of chapters 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights, 24 on justice and home affairs and 15 on energy.

According to sources, a growing number of issues to the concern of Turkey and the EU have the potential to create a new momentum in Ankara-Brussels relations, as well as Turkey's accessions process. Turkey and the EU are currently talking about ways to cooperate in dealing with the refugee crisis, security problems concerning Syria, counter-terrorism and energy. Describing Turkey as a partner of the EU in dealing with these common problems, sources highlighted the EU's willingness to establish solid mutual ground with Turkey in countering refugee issues.

The draft plan on dealing with the refugee crisis to be negotiated between two parties will also help Turkey's efforts to fulfill the required criteria of securing its borders as part of visa liberalization process with the EU. Turkey hopes to accomplish the process by 2017 and allow its citizens to travel in the Schengen area without visas.

Kremlin: Russia wants to keep good ties with Turkey

Reuters, 08.10.2015

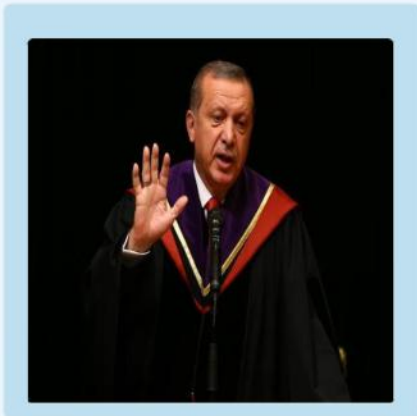


Russia wants to keep good ties with Turkey, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, after Ankara voiced its growing anger at Moscow's military intervention in Syria.

“As for the Russian air force operation in Syria, our actions in support of safeguarding Syria contribute to ensuring stability and security in the region sitting on Turkey's borders,” Peskov told a call with journalists. Peskov also said any increased presence of British troops in eastern Europe would be regrettable and would amount to Britain using an alleged Russian threat as camouflage to press ahead with NATO expansion.

Angered by air strikes, Turkey's Erdoğan warns Russia on energy ties

Reuters, 08.10.2015



President Tayyip Erdoğan, angered by Russian incursions into Turkish air space, has warned Russia there are other places Turkey could get natural gas and other countries that could build its first nuclear plant.

Russian aircraft twice entered Turkish air space at the weekend as Moscow carried out air strikes in Syria. Turkish F-16 jets have also been harassed by Syrian-based missile systems and unidentified planes since then. "We can't accept the current situation. Russia's explanations on the air space violations are not convincing," the Turkish daily Sabah and other media quoted Erdoğan as telling the reporters.

Russia's air strikes in support of President Bashar al-Assad's forces have shifted the balance of power in the Syrian conflict and dealt a blow to Turkey's aspirations of seeing Assad removed from power. But beyond protesting, there is little Turkey can do. Russia is Turkey's largest natural gas supplier, with Ankara buying 28-30 billion cubic meters (bcm) of its 50 Bcm of natural gas needs annually from Russia. Other major suppliers are Iran and Azerbaijan, with a small amount planned from Turkmenistan.

Turkey commissioned Russia's state-owned Rosatom in 2013 to build four 1,200-megawatt reactors in a project worth \$20 billion, although a start date for what will be Turkey's first nuclear power plant has not yet been set. Erdoğan said he was resentful over the Russian intervention in Syria, which Turkey sees as its own backyard, but did not currently plan to speak to President Vladimir Putin. "These are matters for Russia to think about. If the Russians don't build the Akkuyu (nuclear plant) another will come and build it," he was quoted as saying.

"We are Russia's number one natural gas consumer. Losing Turkey would be a serious loss for Russia. If necessary, Turkey can get its natural gas from many different places." There was no immediate reaction to his comments from Moscow. The inflexible nature of gas infrastructure means shifting from one supplier to another is not straightforward. Turkey imports Russian gas primarily through two pipelines, one passing through the northwestern region of Thrace, the other entering Turkey from under the Black Sea.

"Erdoğan's statements on gas are not realistic at all. Turkey is dependent on Russia in the short and medium terms," said one private-sector gas official. "No gas entry from Thrace means the end of Turkey as that gas pipeline feeds all of Istanbul and the Marmara region. There is no alternative pipeline system that can bring this gas." Turkey could look to boost purchases of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Nigeria and Algeria to plug a potential gas shortage, although that would be a costly option for a country whose annual energy imports bill already exceeds \$50 billion.

It is already looking to increase gas imports from Turkmenistan, currently a marginal supplier, but energy analysts say Russia has blocked such moves. Erdoğan is due to visit Turkmenistan. The Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), in which Turkey has a 30 percent stake, is expected to bring Turkey 6 bcm of Azeri gas but only after mid-2018 when the pipeline becomes operational. Turkey's surplus in electricity generation means it can afford to live without a nuclear power plant for several years to come. "Turkey is not dependant on nuclear energy right now," a Turkish energy official said. "There is an overcapacity in power right now, which will continue until 2020... So if the nuclear plant is not built right away, that won't create a problem.

Turkish PM: Syria conflict must not spark Russia-NATO crisis

Reuters, 07.10.2015



Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said he does not want the conflict in Syria turning into a crisis between Russia and NATO nor into a Russian-Turkish dispute.

But Turkey, a member of the alliance, will not compromise on the security of its borders or air space, Davutoğlu said. Russia has breached Turkish air space since launching air strikes in Syria last week. Only two of Russia's 57 air strikes in Syria have hit Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), while the rest have been against the moderate opposition, the only forces fighting ISIL in northwestern Syria, Davutoğlu also said.

Turkey wary over EU's migrant plan offer

AFP, 08.10.2015



Turkey is giving a European Union plan to assist the country in hosting over two million Syrian refugees only a lukewarm reception, indicating funding needs to be drastically increased and lamenting shortfalls in help over previous years.

The EU hopes that helping refugees inside Turkey will discourage Syrians from taking perilous sea and land routes to seek new lives. But the European Union is also proposing to formally resettle more refugees on EU territory, if Ankara establishes new camps and boosts its coastguard to slow the flow of people to Europe.

European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker presented the “draft action plan” to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during talks. Brussels has also renewed promises to mobilise up to one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) to help Turkey cope with its refugees. But Turkish officials, so far, are not rushing to embrace the plan.

“The EU is in a hurry but we are not,” a Turkish official, who asked not to be named, told AFP. “We’ve already been doing for four years what’s written there,” the official added, insisting Ankara had already fulfilled the EU’s additional demands of Turkey during the Syria conflict.

“The funding for Turkey needs to be increased,” the official said, insisting “some other elements” also needed to be in the draft. Erdoğan said this week that Turkey is currently hosting close to 2.5 million refugees -- 2.2 million of them Syrians fleeing the four-and-a-half year conflict in their country and also 300,000 Iraqis. Turkey bitterly complains it has so far spent \$7.8 billion on hosting the refugees and accuses the EU of failing to share the burden.

“We did not leave them to the dead. Let me say it proudly, Turkey has shouldered this burden on its own,” Erdoğan said in Brussels. The Turkish foreign ministry emphasised in a statement the draft plan was not yet formally approved and that Ankara and the EU agreed to establish a “working group” for further negotiations. EU officials were due to visit Turkey this week in an attempt to finalise the proposals laid down in the plan. Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos is due to visit.

Metin Çorabatır, president of the Ankara-based Research Center on Asylum and Migration (IGAM), said the EU was misguided if it believed giving money to Turkey to set up more refugee camps would resolve the issue. “New camps will be established but for how many refugees?” said Çorabatır, noting the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey are living outside camps.

“Building new camps could be a temporary solution for the EU but it is not practical. If the EU funds are used to build more camps, it would be waste of money,” he told AFP. He said Turkey and the EU should instead hammer out problem-oriented contingency plans to find urgent solutions to the growing humanitarian problem. The Brussels plan would also involve the EU supporting Ankara’s efforts to combat people smuggling, notably reinforcing the Turkish coastguard patrolling and surveillance capacities.

It would also suggest the opening of six new “refugee reception centres” co-funded by the EU. “The EU will also ask Turkey to police the shameful human traffickers who operate in broad daylight along the country’s southwest coast,” wrote Marc Pierini, scholar at Brussels-based think tank Carnegie Europe.

He said ultimately the screening process for asylum seekers will need to take place inside Turkey. Last month, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu rejected holding centres for migrants as “unacceptable” and “inhumane,” calling instead for migrants to be hosted in “safe zones” inside Syria. The plan however made no mention of Turkey’s calls for a safe zone in northern Syria where refugees could be housed, an idea that has been badly set back by Russia’s bombing campaign in Syria.

AKP says continued Russian airspace violations will be considered a ‘threat’

Hurriyet Daily News, 07.10.2015



A continuation of Russia’s violations of Turkish air space would be considered a “threat” to the country, Justice and Development Party (AKP) spokesperson Ömer Çelik has said.

“Russia is a friendly country, not an enemy. But if the violations continue, we will consider them a threat and we will do whatever is necessary to eliminate them,” Justice and Development Party (AKP) spokesperson Ömer Çelik told reporters. He also described Russia’s proposal for a meeting to give an explanation for the recent violations as “positive.”

Russia once again violates Turkish airspace

Hurriyet Daily News, 06.10.2015



A Russian warplane violated Turkish airspace, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official has confirmed, the second such breach over the past three days. The breach led to Ankara once again summoning Moscow's ambassador to Turkey on, the official added.

A NATO statement had first revealed that Russian warplanes violated Turkish airspace for the second time, following the first violation, but Turkish officials had yet to confirm the NATO statement on the record. "Russian military actions have reached a more dangerous level with the recent violations of Turkish airspace.

3 and Oct. 4 by Russian Air Force SU-30 and SU-24 aircraft in the Hatay region. The aircraft in question entered Turkish airspace despite Turkish authorities' clear, timely and repeated warnings," NATO said following a meeting on Russia's military action in and around Syria. In accordance with NATO practice, Turkish fighter aircraft responded to these incursions by closing to identify the intruder, after which the Russian planes departed Turkish airspace, read the NATO statement.

NATO allies "strongly protest these violations of Turkish sovereign airspace and condemn these incursions into and violations of NATO airspace," said the alliance, calling on the Russian side to take all necessary measures to ensure that further violations do not take place in the future. Turkey, a NATO member with its second biggest army, scrambled two F-16 jets after a Russian aircraft crossed into its airspace over its southern province of Hatay. The U.S. and its NATO allies denounced Russia for the Oct. 3 incursion and Ankara threatened to respond if provoked again, raising the prospect of direct confrontation between the Cold War enemies.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu chaired a security summit late, at which the violations of Turkish airspace, the "terror threat from Iraq and Syria," and operations carried out against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, were all discussed, a written statement said. "Steps to be taken in the event of violations of the border region" were discussed at the meeting, the statement added.

NATO prepared to defend ally Turkey against Russia

Reuters, 09.10.2015



NATO has said it was prepared to send troops to Turkey to defend its ally after violations of Turkish airspace by Russian jets bombing Syria and Britain scolded Moscow for escalating a civil war that has already killed 250,000 people.

Officials at the U.S.-led alliance are still smarting from Russia's weekend incursions into Turkey's airspace near northern Syria and NATO defense ministers are meeting in Brussels with the agenda likely to be dominated by the Syria crisis. "NATO is ready and able to defend all allies, including Turkey against any threats," NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters as he arrived for the meeting.

"NATO has already responded by increasing our capacity, our ability, our preparedness to deploy forces including to the south, including in Turkey," he said, noting that Russia's air and cruise missile strikes were "reasons for concern". "Above all, Turkey is an ally of the U.S. and a member of NATO. So can you imagine that these two states [the U.S. and Russia] would be on the same line in any wrongdoing against Turkey? It's not possible," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said late on, speaking to journalists en route from Brussels to Tokyo.

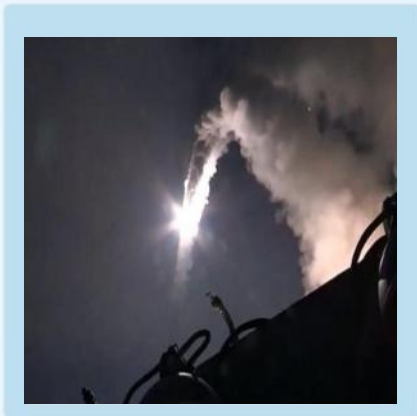
As Russian and U.S. planes fly combat missions over the same country for the first time since World War II, NATO is eager to avoid any international escalation of the Syrian conflict that has unexpectedly turned the alliance's attention away from Ukraine following Russia's annexation of Crimea last year. The incursions of two Russian fighters in Turkish airspace on Oct. 3 and 4 has brought the Syria conflict right up to NATO's borders, testing the alliance's ability to deter a newly assertive Russia without seeking direct confrontation.

"There has to be a political solution, a transition," Stoltenberg said. "Russia is making a very serious situation in Syria much more dangerous," Britain's defence minister, Michael Fallon said, calling on Moscow to use its influence on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to stop bombing civilians. Turkey appealed to its NATO allies to shore up missile defenses in the country aimed at shooting down Syrian rockets, as Germany said again that it will withdraw its Patriot batteries and the United States was set to do the same. Days after Russian jets violated Turkey's airspace near Syria, Ankara's NATO envoy urged the U.S.-led alliance to continue to deploy air defense systems, according to two people briefed on talks at a defence ministers meeting in Brussels.

Germany's defense minister said Berlin would go ahead with plans to switch off its Patriot batteries in Turkey next week and withdraw most of the soldiers operating them before Christmas. All soldiers and materiel are due to be withdrawn by the end of January. "This decision [to withdraw the Patriots] is right," Ursula von der Leyen said as she arrived for the meeting. "The question is what danger can be warded off in which way," she said.

US Official: Russian missiles aimed at Syria crashed in Iran

AFP, 09.10.2015



Four Russian cruise missiles aimed at targets in Syria crashed in Iran, a US official said, as regime troops backed by Lebanon's Hezbollah pressed a "vast offensive" against rebels in the war-torn country's west. The missiles were thought to be among a salvo fired from Russian warships in the Caspian as part of a nine-day-old air war targeting foes of President Bashar al-Assad.

Russia hit back at the claims, saying all the shots were on target, and the defence ministry posted a graphic on its website showing 26 missiles flying over Iran and Iraq before striking inside Syria. Tehran made no comment.

"Any professional knows that during these operations we always fix the target before and after impact. All our cruise missiles hit their target," ministry spokesman General Igor Konashenkov said in a statement. Moscow launched an air war in Syria at the end of last month it said was aimed at the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group and other "terrorist" organisations fighting in the country's four-year-old civil war.

Russia's air force hit 27 "terrorist" targets in central and northern Syria night, the defence ministry said, including eight IS strongholds in Homs province and 11 training camps in Hama and Raqa provinces. Western powers have dismissed these claims as window-dressing for a campaign that primarily seeks to prop up Assad's embattled regime against a much broader group of rebels.

Washington said more than 90 percent of Russian raids have targeted groups other than ISIL or Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Al-Nusra Front. Another US official said the missiles that landed in Iran were Kalibr-NK cruise missiles, which Russia had "used for the first time in a combat setting".

"They appeared to help operations by Iranian-backed Hezbollah" in Syria, where the powerful Lebanese Shiite group has been fighting alongside regime forces, the official added. The Russian air war has provided cover for Assad's ground troops, who have lost swathes of the north, east and south of the country to jihadists and rebel groups since the conflict erupted in 2011.

A Syrian military source said the Russian strikes had helped regime forces take back territory in an area that has been the focus of a months-long offensive by a rebel alliance, including Al-Nusra. "They have seized most of the hilly region of Jeb al-Ahmar," which overlooks the strategic Sahl al-Ghab plain to the east and Assad's western coastal stronghold of Latakia, the source said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitoring group, confirmed the advance.

Tensions have been rising between Russia and Western powers over the air campaign, which has seen Russian jets violate the airspace of NATO member Turkey at least twice. US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter forecast Oct. 8 Russia would soon begin to suffer casualties of its own. "This will have consequences for Russia itself which is rightly fearful of attacks... In coming days, the Russians will begin to suffer from casualties," Carter said at a NATO defence ministers meeting in Brussels.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said there had been a "troubling escalation" in Moscow's air campaign and pledged to "assess the latest developments and their implications for the security of the alliance". The Melkite Greek Catholic archbishop of Aleppo Jean-Clement Jeanbart welcomed Moscow's intervention, which he told Swiss television "serves the Christians' cause".

Syria's army appeared to regain ground Oct. 8, after chief of staff General Ali Abdullah Ayoub announced "a vast offensive to defeat the terrorist groups" and restore control over opposition-held areas. State TV said the army had targeted "terrorist positions" in the central province of Hama, killing 32 militants and destroying four armoured vehicles, while Russian and Syrian warplanes also hit Al-Nusra positions in Latakia province. A military source in the Sahl al-Ghab plain told AFP Russia had targeted at least three villages there Oct. 8 morning. Backed by allied militia and Russian air cover, regime troops have retaken around a dozen villages in Hama, according to Syrian daily Al-Watan, which is close to the government. At least 13 regime fighters and 11 rebels were killed, the Observatory said.

Rebel forces shot down a low-flying military helicopter, but it was unclear if it was Syrian or Russian, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said. In Aleppo province, the monitor said a car bombing blamed on ISIL in the town of Hreitan -- controlled by a group of Islamist rebel factions including Al-Nusra -- killed 12 people and wounded a similar number.

Israeli-Palestinian violence intensifies; Arabs and Jews stabbed

Reuters, 09.10.2015



A Jewish man stabbed and wounded four Arabs in southern Israel in an apparent reprisal attack for Palestinian violence during the worst spell of civil unrest in the region for several years. Four Israelis have been shot or stabbed to death in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, and at least a dozen have been wounded by Palestinians wielding knives or screwdrivers in stabbings in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities.

Three Palestinians have also been killed, and scores wounded in clashes with Israeli security forces during stone-throwing demonstrations in East Jerusalem and across the West Bank, leading to talk Palestinian uprising, or intifada.



Palestinian anger is largely focused on events at the al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City and fears that Israel is trying to change the status quo at the holy site, revered by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and by Jews as the Temple Mount.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has denied wanting to change conditions under which Jews are allowed to visit the site but bans non-Muslim prayer, but his assurances have done little to quell Palestinian anger. Both Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas have called for calm and Palestinian police are continuing to coordinate with Israeli security forces to try to restore order, but there are few signs of the tension and violence dying down.

Palestinian protests were planned in Jerusalem and West Bank cities after Muslim prayers on Friday, and Israel has deployed thousands more police and soldiers. Muslim access to al-Aqsa has been restricted to men over 45 and women. In the latest attack, a Jewish man in his 20s stabbed four Arab men in the southern Israeli city of Dimona, police said, adding that the motive was "nationalistic". The mayor of Dimona said the assailant was a resident of the city who was known to police. During questioning, police said the attacker described all Arabs as "terrorists".

Hours later, a 14-year-old Jewish boy was stabbed and wounded by a Palestinian in the Old City of Jerusalem, a woman believed to be Palestinian tried to stab a guard at a bus station in north Israel, and a Palestinian stabbed a policeman near a Jewish settlement in the West Bank, Israeli police said. The policeman's attacker was shot dead, police said. Seven Israelis were stabbed in four separate incidents across the country, including the commercial capital Tel Aviv, fuelling concerns about a wider uprising following those of the late 1980s and early 2000s.

The violence now is on a much smaller scale than then but mistrust between Israel and the Palestinians is deep after their last negotiations ended in April 2014 without progress. A new intifada would further complicate efforts by world leaders to resolve conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and there is little appetite to re-engage in peace efforts between Israel and the Palestinians after many failures in the past. The chances of peace talks resuming before U.S. President Barack Obama's term ends appear slim.

Netanyahu has accused Abbas, his Fatah party and the Islamist group Hamas of inciting the violence in East Jerusalem in recent weeks. He reiterated that message at a news conference, adding that there was no "quick fix". "We are in the midst of a wave of terrorism with knives, firebombs, rocks and even live fire," he said. "While these acts are mostly unorganized, they are all the result of wild and mendacious incitement by Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, several countries in the region and... the Islamic Movement in Israel."

Abbas has praised Palestinians for defending al-Aqsa, a rallying point for Muslims throughout the region, but also urged people to engage in "peaceful popular resistance". The leader of Hamas in Gaza urged Palestinians to step up attacks. "We give souls and blood for Jerusalem, Jerusalem and Aqsa is part of the religion," Ismail Haniyeh said at Friday prayers. "We call for escalating and deepening the intifada... We are proud of you, the heroes of knives."

Israeli troops opened fire on Palestinians holding a rally near Gaza's border fence with Israel, wounding 12 people, medics in Gaza said. As well as tensions over al-Aqsa, Palestinian anger has mounted as Israeli forces took a tougher line against protesters who are violent.

Netanyahu has told troops and police they can shoot Palestinian stone-throwers if they have reason to believe an Israeli life is threatened. There is also frustration at the failure of Israeli police to track down the Jewish perpetrators suspected of an arson attack on a Palestinian family in the West Bank two months ago in which a child and his parents were killed. In turn, Israelis are on edge after deadly stone-throwing attacks by Palestinians and the killing of an Israeli couple in the West Bank 10 days ago. They were shot as they drove in their car with their four children.

Syrian army and Russian jets target rebels in western Syria

Reuters, 07.10.2015



The Syrian army and allied militia carried out ground attacks on insurgent positions in Syria backed by Russian air strikes, in what appeared to be their first major coordinated assault since Moscow intervened last week, a monitor said.

Russia's air strikes hit northern parts of Hama and areas in Idlib, targeting towns close to the main north-south highway that runs through major cities in western Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Ground attacks using heavy surface-to-surface missile bombardments targeted at least four insurgent positions in the area and there were heavy clashes on the ground, Rami Abdulrahman said.

Although combined assault marked a military escalation, it was not immediately clear whether there would be rapid gains in a conflict that has already dragged on more than four years. "There is no information yet of any (government) advances on the ground, but the air strikes have hit vehicles and insurgent bases," Abdulrahman said. A regional source familiar with the military situation in Syria said forces including Hezbollah fighters were taking part in the ground attack against four rebel-held areas.

Reuters reported that allies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, including Iranians, were preparing a ground attack in Syria, aimed at recapturing territory lost by the government to rebels in rapid advances this year. Abdulrahman, who tracks the conflict using sources in Syria, said the ground assault was being carried out by "regime forces" and their allies, with no immediate sign of Russian involvement on the ground. Syrian state media and regional pro-government channels made no mention of new Russian strikes or the ground attacks.

Russia, a top ally of Assad, started air strikes in Syria a week ago, saying they were targeting hardline Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants. But fighters on the ground and Western countries have said the Russian campaign is mainly focusing on other rebel groups that have seized government-held areas in the west, and is aimed at shoring up Assad rather than combating hardliners.

Russia's strikes targeted the towns of Kafr Zita, Kafr Nabudah, al-Sayyad and the village of al-Latamneh in Hama province and the towns of Khan Shaykhun and Alhbit in Idlib, the Observatory said. Most of Idlib province is held by an insurgent alliance that includes al Qaeda's Syria wing Nusra Front and other Islamist factions.

European ministers confront Greece on daunting bailout

AFP, 05.10.2015



Eurozone finance ministers meet for the first time since Greek voters re-elected Tsipras, who now faces the daunting task of implementing the cash-for-reforms bailout deal. Returning as Greek finance minister is Tsakalotos who must hurry through a raft of reforms agreed in return for a 86-billion-euro rescue, the country's third in five years.

The three-year rescue package came after six months of acrimonious negotiations led by then-finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, who so angered his 18 eurozone counterparts that Greece was left on the cusp of a humiliating eviction from the single currency.

"Difficult decisions lie ahead," Prime Minister Tsipras warned lawmakers from his Syriza party, launching a crucial week that sees a confidence vote in Greek parliament. The challenge comes as the country is also struggling to cope with a huge influx of migrants and refugees arriving on its shores, mostly Syrians fleeing civil war. On returning to office Tsipras pledged to "quickly implement" the terms of the EU bailout he initially rejected in an anti-austerity referendum in early July, confounding his European partners.

His U-turn at a dramatic summit shortly after split the Syriza party and forced Tsipras to step down, but he comfortably won re-election last month with a pledge to soften the impact of the bailout. Tsipras also promised to win debt forgiveness, which Greece's eurozone partners have accepted in principal, though the talks to clinch a deal promise to be difficult. "We need to quickly wrap (up) the first review, so that the indispensable discussion on the restructuring of the debt can begin," Tsipras said.

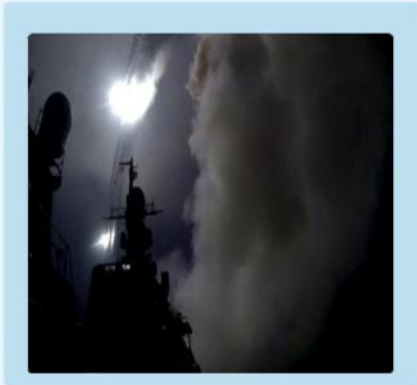
"Our main goal is to exit as soon as possible the supervision and regain access to the foreign markets," he said. The first review of whether Athens is abiding by the strict bailout programme agreed to pull Greece back from the brink of economic collapse is due later this month. At stake for the new government will be the release of a new 3-billion-euro tranche of aid, a rescue of Greek banks and the talks on slashing debt. Several European sources told AFP that the review would be delayed, but this was not seen as an immediate issue. "It seems clear that this will be postponed, no date is fixed," a top European diplomat said.

Another source added: “The first review I presume will start in October but not finish in October.” The bailout includes provisions deeply opposed by Greeks such as reforming state pensions, tax increases on farmers, privatisations of state companies, and freeing up of closed markets like pharmacies. In all, Greece’s parliament will have to pass 15 reforms in October alone.

A European source said the recapitalisation of Greece’s banks would be handled separately from the toughest part of the bailout review, which involves cutting pensions. Up to 25 billion euros of Greece’s bailout are earmarked for the recapitalisation of the banking sector. Of this, 10 billion euros is immediately available to be injected into the financial system once the European Central Bank has assessed the fallout of bank closures suffered by Greece at the height of the crisis this summer. The so-called bank recap would take place by November 15 in return for financial sector reforms that are not considered controversial, the European source said.

Poll: More than 70 percent of Russians support Moscow’s bombing campaign in Syria

AFP, 25.09.2015



More than 70 percent of Russians support Moscow’s bombing campaign against ISIL in Syria but the danger of getting sucked into a protracted war is not lost on the public, a new poll showed. The study conducted just days after President Vladimir Putin secured permission from parliament to launch air strikes in Syria found that most Russians approve of his latest decision to use force abroad.

The launch of strikes in Syria is Russia’s first major military involvement outside former Soviet Union territory since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Seventy two percent of respondents said they approved of the bombing campaign and 46 percent said they agreed with the decision of the rubber stamp parliament’s upper house to allow Putin to use force abroad, said the independent Levada Centre. But the pollster cautioned that those figures likely reflected public attitude to Moscow’s latest salvo of television propaganda more than genuine support for involvement in a protracted conflict.

“Support for actions of the Russian military in Syria is an approval rating of a television programme rather than an indicator of the mobilisation of Russian society,” said Levada Centre researcher Denis Volkov. “Declaring one’s readiness for war reflects perceptions about the might of the Russian military machine and the army’s symbolic authority rather than one’s readiness to take up arms.”

Last month 69 percent of respondents to a similar Levada poll said they opposed Moscow's deployment of troops in Syria, with just 14 percent in favour. "If the numbers of Russian troops in Syria do not increase, then for a majority this war would remain virtual and worry-free," Volkov wrote. The start of the aerial campaign has pushed the Ukraine crisis off the airwaves as Russia's state-controlled television puts the Syria crisis centre stage. But the risk of getting involved in a protracted conflict similar to Afghanistan has not been lost on the population, according to the Levada Centre.

Forty-six percent said the Syrian crisis may become a "new Afghanistan" where more than 14,000 Soviet troops were killed over a decade, while 38 percent ruled out that possibility. On a brighter note, 49 percent of respondents said they believed Russia and Syria would be able to find "common language" with a US-led coalition in their fight against the jihadists, the poll found. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin would not change its course on Syria as long as the general public supported it. The poll was conducted on October 2-5 among 1,600 people in 46 Russian regions.

Britain: Europe needs to 'crack down' on asylum abuse

AFP, 08.10.2015



R The EU must speed up deportation of economic migrants and "crack down" on abuse of its asylum system, British interior minister Theresa May said as ministers met to discuss Europe's refugee and migrant crisis.

In a sign of the EU's tougher stance, May said her colleagues had to move on from fraught discussions about relocating refugees around the EU and instead talk about sending "economic migrants" back to their country of origin. "We need to ensure that we break the link between people making a dangerous journey to Europe and being able to stay in Europe," May told as she arrived for the talks in Luxembourg.

"That's why the UK has always argued that we should be sending economic migrants back to their countries of origin, it's why we need to crack down on people abusing our asylum system," she said. May added: "The UK has a good record in this area, we need to see Europe upping its game and we stand ready to support that." May and her colleagues will debate draft proposals to increase the ability of member states to speed up returns of migrants seeking jobs rather than fleeing wars.

The proposals call for both voluntary departures and forced deportations in cooperation with their countries of origin. May defended Britain's policy of taking genuine refugees direct from camps in countries bordering Syria, instead of participating in an EU-wide scheme to relocate refugees from the overstretched frontline states of Greece and Italy.

Europe has seen more than 600,000 illegal arrivals this year as people flee conflict in Syria and other countries, while more than 3,000 people have died while making the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. Luxembourg minister Jean Asselborn -- whose country holds the rotating presidency of the EU -- said the issue of returning failed asylum seekers to their countries of origin was "important". He said the issue would be addressed at a summit of EU and African leaders in the Maltese capital Valetta in November "so that we can concretise returns."

Austrian chancellor casts doubt on EU migrant 'hotspot' plans

Reuters, 08.10.2015



Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann cast doubt on the workability of the so-called migrant hotspots European leaders plan to create by the end of next month in Greece and Italy to help manage large numbers of refugees.

Of the more than half a million refugees and migrants to arrive in Europe across the Mediterranean this year, almost 400,000 have come through Greece and 131,000 through Italy, making them frontline states in the continent's biggest refugee crisis since World War Two. An EU plan agreed last month foresees setting up hotspots in these and other border countries to screen the incoming migrants more carefully.

"I am only optimistic (for the hotspots to work) even by the end of the year if there is central coordination, significantly more means, significantly more staff," Faymann told Austrian ORF radio after visiting the Greek island of Lesbos. The EU's plan was aimed in part at helping the bloc's border countries deal with the surge by relocating asylum seekers to non-border countries. Italy has agreed to open six hotspots and the European Commission said Greece will model its own hotspot network on Italy.

"To believe that once you make a decision that this is already reality, you just have to be there to see that of course a lot of things are lacking," Faymann said. After his visit to Lesbos with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras earlier this week, Faymann, who has called for binding quotas for the distributions of migrants across Europe, said he saw that in some centres fingerprints were taken on paper because there were no computers available. "Significantly more must happen than is currently being prepared to achieve border security with the possibility of guaranteeing the right to asylum through a door called 'distribution centre'," Faymann said.

Austria, a nation of around 8.5 million people, has become the main thoroughfare for migrants travelling to Europe via Greece and the Balkans. In September alone, 200,000 migrants crossed into Austria from Hungary. Faymann also said the European Union needed to negotiate common agreements for sending migrants back to countries such as Pakistan. "It would be best if single countries don't negotiate this."

IMF told that amid ‘new mediocre’ no room for mistakes by central banks

Reuters, 09.10.2015



Central banks have little room for error in a low-growth world in which over-leveraged and commodity-dependent emerging economies and a slowing China are major risks, top international financiers told the International Monetary Fund’s meeting. Despite \$7 trillion in quantitative easing from banks in industrial nations since the global financial crisis, the world is stuck in a “new mediocre” growth pattern, IMF chief Christine Lagarde said.

In a bid to shore up finances and punish companies that arbitrage tax regimes, governments pushed ahead with plans to improve tax collection.

The IMF meeting comes as the Bank of Japan looks poised to extend its money printing program, known as quantitative easing, as it stares down the barrel of a fifth year of recession. The European Central Bank is also expected to extend quantitative easing, while the two major central banks closest to raising rates, the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of England, are holding their fire.

“It is not the kind of economy in which you can make a mistake,” Bank of England Governor Mark Carney told the meeting. For both the Fed and the Bank of England, inflation targets are far out of reach, although both central banks insist they are ready to hike rates. The Fed’s chair, Janet Yellen, has said the U.S. Federal Reserve (Fed) is on track to raise rates this year. Markets, however, are not pricing in hikes until next year for both.

The IMF has urged the Fed and the Japanese and European central banks to wait for more signs of recovery before tightening. Lagarde repeated her plea to Yellen to stay her hand. Many emerging markets, once the world’s fastest-growing economies which had been expected to shape a new world economic order, are now in turmoil. Brazil, Latin America’s largest economy, is facing a leadership crisis and is in recession. Russia is engaged in conflicts in Ukraine, and Syria and has been hammered by low oil prices. China’s growth is slowing, although Lagarde was optimistic that the slowdown was manageable.

While the world’s central banks’ money-printing programs have staunch losses in the financial sector, they have failed to reach their goal of boosting global credit. With widening current account balances and excessive lending to local companies, the IMF estimates that emerging market companies are overleveraged by the equivalent of 15 percent of their economic output, raising the risk of a sudden collapse in credit and of banking crises. The IMF cut its estimate for growth in emerging economies for a fifth successive year this week, citing the collapse of the “commodities supercycle” in which buoyant demand for raw materials had boosted prices.



From a record of \$145 per barrel in 2008, oil prices have fallen to around \$50, driving holes in the budgets of major producers like Russia and Angola, among emerging economies. Brazilian Finance Minister Joaquim Levy called for cash-rich pension funds and institutions to invest in infrastructure projects, although few seem willing to do so as returns are uncertain in a low-demand world with the risk of financial contagion. “There are plenty of savings in the world,” he told the IMF meeting.

The G-20 group of leading emerging and developed economies is also pushing at the IMF meeting to move ahead with measures to end a situation that allows multi-national companies such as Apple Inc and Vodafone Group Plc to pay almost no tax on their profits in many jurisdictions. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development estimates the amount of money moved by companies into tax havens was \$100 billion to \$240 billion annually, suggesting tens of billions of dollars in lost tax revenue. That would be a tiny amount relative to the size of budget deficits across the world.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew urged countries to cooperate on higher standards. “The question here is on base erosion in taxes. Will countries agree to have a high standard or will we revert to a system where there is a race to the bottom?” Lew said.



Announcements & Reports

► *Issues and Insights Vol. 15, No. 9 - Maritime Fulcrum: A New U.S. Opportunity to Engage Indonesia*

Source : CSIS

Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/issues-and-insights-vol-15-no-9-maritime-fulcrum-new-us-opportunity-engage-indonesia>

► *Southeast Asia from Scott Circle: Washington Debut: A Strategic Jokowi?*

Source : CSIS

Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/southeast-asia-scott-circle-washington-debut-strategic-jokowi>

► *Why is Europe Lagging on Next Generation Access Networks?*

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2015/10/why-is-europe-lagging-on-next-generation-access-networks/>

Upcoming Events

► *12th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)*

Date : 17 October 2015

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

► *Secular Stagnation in Europe and Japan*

Date : 17 October 2015

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/secular-stagnation-in-europe-and-japan/>

► *The Role of The Nordic Social Model in The Future*

Date : 18 October 2015

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/the-role-of-the-nordic-social-model-in-the-future/>



► *Lebanon's Deepening Domestic Crisis*

Date : 19 October 2015
Place : Washington DC – The USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/10/12-lebanon-domestic-crisis>

► *The Politics of The Fed: Past, Present and Future*

Date : 22 October 2015
Place : Washington DC – The USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/10/22-politics-of-the-fed-past-present-and-future>

► *Supporting Military Families and Veterans, Sustaining The All-Volunteer Force*

Date : 29 October 2015
Place : Washington – The USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/10/29-military-families-veterans-lifestyle-survey>

► *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

Date : 23 November 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

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

Date : 24 November 2015
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

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

Date : 26 November 2015
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 November 2015
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 November 2015
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 : 01 December 2015

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 : 17 December 2015

Place : Berlin - Germany

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>