

Turkey PM says returns under EU migrant deal to begin on April 4

Hurriyet Daily News, 01.04.2016



PM Davutoğlu said a key migrant deal concluded with the European Union to curb the flow of illegal migration would begin to be implemented on April 4 with the return of some migrants from Greece to Turkish territory.

Davutoğlu confirmed, under the scheme agreed with the EU, one Syrian refugee would be settled in Europe legally in return for every migrant who arrived on Greek islands and Turkey received back. “With the one-for-one method, the number of refugees in Turkey will not increase and also nobody will sustain any human loss with the ambition of travelling to Europe,” he was quoted by AFP.

“This practice will begin as of April 4.” Davutoğlu was referring to the deaths of around 4,000 migrants who drowned crossing the Aegean from Turkey to the islands of EU member Greece, of them more than 400 died alone since the beginning of 2016.

Turkish and EU leaders agreed mid-March on a deal to curb the influx of migrants that has plunged Europe into its biggest refugee crisis since the end of World War II. Turkey agreed with the EU this month to take back all migrants and refugees who cross to Greece illegally in exchange for financial aid, visa-free travel for Turks and “accelerated” EU membership talks.

An EU source told AFP in Athens earlier that 500 people were set to be sent back to Turkey on Monday “barring a last-minute problem.” It remains unclear how the migrants will be transported from Greece and where in Turkey they will be taken to.

Daily Hürriyet reported that the readmission of first batch of migrants could be delayed due to the excessive amount of refugees continuing to cross the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece in hope of a better life, and the processes of sending back having not been finalized.

Turkey ‘won’t fall out with US over PYD

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.03.2016



Turkey and the United States will not fall out over their differing stances on the PYD, FM Çavuşoğlu has said. “Not every two countries can be like-minded on every issue. For example, they [U.S.] think differently, we think differently, but we will not fall out because we have differing thoughts,” Çavuşoğlu told, after lecturing at George Washington University.

“We are two significant partners and we have common targets but we can think differently on some topics. When we express our thoughts, then it is perceived as though there is a problem between the two countries,” he added.

Turkey’s relations with the U.S. have been strained due to their differing stances regarding the PYD and its military wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG). The U.S. sees the two organizations as “reliable” and important partners in its fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in northern Syria and supplies them with military logistics.

Turkey meanwhile says the PYD and YPG are terrorist organizations as they are the offshoots of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which the country has been in an armed conflict with since the mid-1980s. “Why do we need to convince each other that we think differently; we have proof in our hand.

We give [them] the documents and information that the PYD/YPG is no different than the PKK,” said Çavuşoğlu. “Therefore, there is no deterioration in the relations between the U.S. and Turkey. On the contrary, our strategic partnership marks even more importance,” he said. Çavuşoğlu also said U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was planning to visit Turkey, without disclosing any details of a possible visit.

Obama to hold informal talks with Turkish President Erdoğan

Reuters, 30.03.2016



U.S. President Obama will hold informal talks with President Erdoğan in Washington, the White House said. Erdoğan will be among more than 50 world leaders attending a Nuclear Security Summit in Washington and April 1, during which time he is due to have a formal meeting with U.S. Vice President Joe Biden.

There had been intense speculation in the Turkish media over whether Obama would meet Erdoğan, with some suggesting a failure to do so would mark a deliberate U.S. snub amid differences over Syria and Washington's concerns over the direction of Turkey's domestic policies.

At a news conference in Istanbul before leaving for the United States earlier, Erdoğan said a meeting with Obama at the nuclear summit was planned, although he said he did not know how long it would last. Biden's office later said the vice president would host Erdoğan for a meeting in Washington.

"I would expect that over the course of the visit, the president will have an opportunity at some point to have at least an informal discussion with President Erdoğan," White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters traveling with Obama. Earnest said the lack of a formal meeting should not be interpreted as a snub, noting Biden's planned meeting with Erdoğan as well as the large number of foreign leaders due to attend the summit.

"There obviously is a lot of important work to do with our allies in Turkey ... It also includes continuing to intensify our coordination on key aspects of our counter-ISIL [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] strategy, including ramped-up efforts to secure the Turkey-Syria border," he said. Turkey, a NATO member, is part of the U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

Though allies, Washington and Ankara are sharply divided over the Kurdish forces fighting in northern Syria. The forces have enjoyed U.S. military support but Turkey, objects to it receiving such support from the U.S. as Turkey sees the Kurdish forces in northern Syria as an extension the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) inside Turkey.

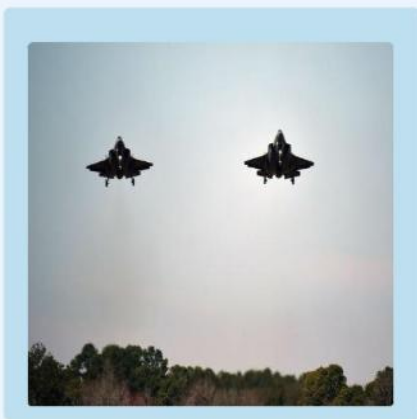
One U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, acknowledged there were strains between the United States and Turkey on a range of issues, but added that Washington regards Ankara's assistance as essential to fighting ISIL.

The United States has also grown increasingly critical of Turkey's record on freedom of expression. Biden said during a visit in January that Turkey was setting a poor example in intimidating media and accusing academics of treason.

Erdoğan, meanwhile, said that he wanted U.S. authorities to take steps against a network of schools run by a movement affiliated with Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based Turkish scholar whom he has accused of running a “parallel” state and of plotting to overthrow him.

US orders diplomatic, military families out of south Turkey

AP, 29.03.2016



The State Department and Pentagon ordered the families of U.S. diplomats and military personnel on March 29 to leave posts in southern Turkey due to security fears.

The two agencies said dependents of American staffers at the U.S. consulate in Adana, the Incirlik air base and two other locations must leave. The so-called “ordered departure” notice means the relocation costs will be covered by the government. In a statement, the military’s European Command said the step “allows for the deliberate, safe return of family members from these areas due to continued security concerns in the region.”

The State Department order covers the Adana consulate and the military order covers personnel based in Incirlik, İzmir and Muğla. The move comes amid heightened security concerns throughout Turkey due to the ongoing fight against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in neighboring Syria and Iraq and was to be accompanied by an updated travel warning advising U.S. citizens of an increased threat of attacks. It also comes as Turkey’s president is set to arrive in Washington to attend President Barack Obama’s nuclear security summit.

“We understand this is disruptive to our military families, but we must keep them safe and ensure the combat effectiveness of our forces to support our strong ally Turkey in the fight against terrorism,” the European Command statement said.

It was not immediately clear how many family members would be affected in total. The Pentagon said the order would affect about 680 family members. The State Department and Pentagon had begun a voluntary drawdown of staff at the two posts last September after Turkey announced it would take a greater role in the fight against ISIL militants. At the time, military officials said they had recommended the voluntary departure from Incirlik because of specific calls by militants for lone wolf attacks against the air base.

Turkey, Jordan boost ties amid Syrian crisis

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.03.2016



Turkey and Jordan, the two regional countries suffering the most from the growing Syrian refugee crisis, have vowed to boost ties in various fields, with expectations that the five-year long Syrian tragedy will soon come to a peaceful end.

PM Davutoğlu, accompanied by Turkey's foreign, industry, transportation and water ministers, paid a two-day trip to Amman to sign a score of agreements to boost bilateral ties with Jordan, as well as exchange views on the ongoing Syrian problem. Davutoğlu said Turkey and Jordan supported the cessation of hostilities in Syria as well as the termination of the crisis in the neighboring country.

"The ferocity of terrorist organizations like Daesh [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant - ISIL], the YPG [the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party - PYD] and the PKK [the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party] is not just an attack targeting our countries but also regional stability," he said.

Expressing Turkey's wish for the successful completion of the Geneva talks aimed at ending the Syrian crisis through diplomatic means, the Turkish prime minister said, "We want to see that the territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq is protected."

Describing the ties between Turkey and Jordan as a perfect example of a regional relationship, Davutoğlu underlined Turkey has been in favor of developing economic relations along with political priorities. "Thanks to the free trade agreement we have signed, our trade volume has doubled and reached a level of \$1 billion. 2017 will mark the second phase of this agreement. I am sure this will bring about new momentum to our trade ties," he stressed.

One potential cooperation area is the launch of Ro-Ro transportation between the ports of Iskenderun in southern Turkey and Aqaba in Jordan. "The Aqaba port is strategically important for us. We want to take advantage of Ro-Ro transportation between Iskenderun and Aqaba in the aftermath of the crisis in Syria and Iraq," Davutoğlu stated.

Following a meeting between the two countries' delegations under the leadership of Davutoğlu and his host, Jordanian Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, the two countries signed 10 different agreements.

The agreements envisaged deepening cooperation in the fields of labor, employment, trade policies, protection and promotion of mutual investments, meteorology, forestry and air transportation. Jordan's Petra and Turkey's Anadolu Agency news agencies also signed a protocol over news exchange and cooperation.

After the meeting at the prime minister's office, Davutoğlu met with King Abdullah before addressing the Turkey-Jordan Business Forum and a conference held by a Jordan-based think tank. During the visit Davutoğlu also inaugurated the opening of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) office in Amman.

Turkey and Jordan have always been in close dialogue and cooperation with their Western allies as part of their efforts to establish peace and stability in the Middle East. Facing similar challenges in the refugee crisis and the existence of ISIL on their borders, the two leaderships held in-depth assessments on the future of the region.

During the talks Jordan, which hosts around 1.2 million Syrians on its soil, expressed a willingness to cooperate with Turkey. Turkish and Jordanian leaders also discussed recent developments in Palestine and international efforts to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process.

After his talks with Jordanian officials, Davutoğlu also had a meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who was in Amman as part of a regional tour. The two men reviewed the U.N.-led ongoing talks aimed at accomplishing a political transition process in Syria, as well as other important regional developments.

Turkish envoy foresees vibrant cooperation with Africa

Anadolu Agency, 25.03.2016



Newly appointed Turkish Ambassador to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union, Fatih Ulusoy, on March 25 expressed readiness to take his country's cooperation with Ethiopia in trade and investment to new heights.

Ulusoy made the remarks a day after submitting his letter of credentials to Ethiopia's president, Dr. Mulatu Teshome, to head Turkey's oldest diplomatic mission to Africa. "With foreign direct investment that to date has stood at \$2.5 billion, we are leading statistically," he said, pointing to Turkey being the largest investor in Ethiopia.

Turkey's trade volume with Africa at end-2015 stood at \$19.5 billion, he said. "We export \$12 billion worth of goods while importing commodities valued at \$7 billion." According to the ambassador, Ethiopia is Turkey's fourth-largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa. "We will make it soon number one," he pledged. Out of the \$6 billion in Turkish direct investment in Africa, Ethiopia's share has stood at \$2.5 billion, making the horn of Africa country the largest recipient of Turkish FDI to date. Ulusoy said Turkey has been very proactive in promoting longstanding cultural ties with Ethiopia through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA).

“We have two big restoration projects, the biggest in Tigray,” he said, explaining that restoration of the Tomb of Al Nejashi in Wukro Woreda in Northern Ethiopia’s Tigray Regional State is set to wrap up this year.

Turkey leads resolution in favor of peaceful protest in Geneva

Hurriyet Daily News, 31.03.2016



Amid growing global concerns over the deterioration of civil rights and freedoms, the Turkish government has led a resolution favoring people’s right to peaceful protest at the U.N. URC, prompting a leading human rights organization to call on Ankara to harmonize its national level of implementation with its acts in the international field.

The resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protest was adopted late last week by the HRC during their 31st session in Geneva. The resolution was the third adopted by the HRC in an initiative led by a core group of Switzerland, Turkey and Costa Rica.

It is the “core group” of states which initiate, draft and table resolutions for adoption, thus Turkey was among those who initiated the resolution. While speaking with Hürriyet Daily News, a civil society advocate group underlined that the Turkish government had been involved in the core group drafting the resolution back in June 2011, long before the anti-government Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013.

“We welcome Turkey’s leadership at the U.N. to steer through this important resolution on human rights in protest, but this lies in stark contrast to the deterioration in respect for fundamental freedoms at the national level,” Thomas Hughes, the executive director of London-based free speech and human rights organization Article 19, told the Daily News.

“We would welcome Turkey now taking a leading role in implementing the U.N. guidance it commissioned by ensuring that its domestic laws and practices relating to protest are brought into compliance with international human rights law,” Hughes added. The resolution enjoyed the co-sponsorship of 60 states and was adopted by a vote with increased support compared to two years ago.

“Crucially, the adopted resolution shows significant international support for efforts towards the domestic implementation of the special procedures’ report. Specifically, the resolution praises the special rapporteurs’ report as a useful tool for states fulfilling their international human rights law obligations and commitments, suggesting that the recommendations be operationalized in domestic laws, procedures and practices.

It encourages the full and effective participation of all stakeholders, including civil society, in any follow-up to the report,” Article 19 said in a separate statement concerning the adoption of the resolution, which it welcomed.

Turkey is currently not a member of the HRC council of 47 member states, which are elected by the majority of members of the U.N. General Assembly through a direct and secret ballot. However, it is involved in the work of the HRC via different mechanisms such as the co-sponsorship of draft resolutions or by being a member of core groups tabling resolutions, despite not being able to vote.

Rights groups and the West have regularly criticized Ankara for its track record on human rights, yet the 28-member EU still sealed a deal with Ankara to return all migrants and refugees reaching European shores from the Turkish coast.

The EU hopes the migration agreement, badly criticized by rights groups, would give it breathing space as it struggles to control an influx of people fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East and beyond.

Russian OSCE delegation to visit Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.03.2016



A delegation from Russia will visit Turkey as part of an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) evaluation trip. A written statement issued by the Turkish General Staff said the three-member Russian assessment team will be in Turkey from March 28 to March 30, adding the delegation will visit the Marine Amphibian Infantry Brigade Command in the Aegean province of İzmir’s Foça district.

During the Russian delegation’s visit, a team of three Turkish staff members from the General Staff 1st Intelligence Analysis and Assessment Office’s Arms Control and Verification Branch will accompany them.

The Russian delegation is scheduled to leave Turkey after finalizing their assessment trip. This visit comes at a time when relations between Turkey and Russia continue to be tense due to Turkey’s downing of a Russian warplane on Nov. 24, 2015, on its border with Syria on grounds of a border violation.

Responding to a question regarding the Russian delegation’s visit to Turkey, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş said neither Russia nor Turkey would dispense relations with the other. “Two countries with many years of neighborly relations and competitive but cooperative relations would not end their relations by using a crisis as an excuse,” he said, adding they already knew this from the very beginning. “We have done everything to ease the tension. Let the delegation come; let’s see what will be said and what they will do. Then we will talk more clearly,” he said.

Turkish army ‘ready’ to shell YPG positions if it crosses Azaz-Jarablus line

Hurriyet Daily News, 31.03.2016



Ankara is closely following reports of a planned operation by the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in the northern Syria, held by fighters of the ISIL, Turkish military officials have stated, expressing readiness to shell Syrian Kurdish forces in the event of a violation of “Turkey’s red line.”

Confirming recent moves in the region, military sources said Turkey would launch the “required response” from inside Turkish territory in the event of seizure of the so-called “Azaz-Jarablus line” by the YPG, the militia forces of the PYD, both of which are regarded as off-shoots of the outlawed PKK.

In such a case, Turkish artillery units deployed near the border would launch intense fire at the PYD forces, the sources said. PYD-YPG mobility in the field, which is apparently aimed at moving towards the Azaz-Jarablus line after seizing Manbij from ISIL, has been closely followed by aerial and ground intelligence units, military sources said. They noted that they did not yet have information indicating that the U.S.-led coalition forces would lend support to this planned operation from the air.

“The required response would be given from inside Turkey without entering Syrian territory,” the sources said. In such a situation, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) plans to use the South Korean-designed T-155 Fırtına howitzers, in retaliatory shelling of its southern neighbor.

Turkey had also used Fırtına howitzers in mid-February, while shelling YPG targets in the Azaz town of northern Syria, after the group seized the Menagh air base north of Aleppo. A leading U.K. daily newspaper recently reported that Washington has been pushing Turkey to close “the last border exit” from Syria used by foreign ISIL fighters to gain access to Europe for terrorist attacks.

“Western intelligence agencies believe that some of the terrorists involved in the bombings in Paris and Brussels travelled along a 60-mile highway that runs through the [ISIL]-controlled town of Manbij, south of the Syrian-Turkish border, before making their way to France and Belgium,” The Times reported. “The American plan is to back up Kurdish fighters who would seize the road leading out of Manbij and take control of the border,” it said.

Obama reaffirms commitment to Turkey's security as Erdoğan visits

Reuters, 01.04.2016



U.S. President Barack Obama reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Turkey's security during a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, while also discussing both countries' efforts to fight the ISIL, the White House said.

"The president extended condolences to President Erdoğan on behalf of the American people for those killed and injured in today's terrorist attack in Diyarbakır, and reaffirmed the support of the United States for Turkey's security and our mutual struggle against terrorism," the White House said. "The leaders also discussed how to advance our shared effort to degrade and destroy ISIL," it said.

In a statement, Turkey's presidential office said the two NATO leaders discussed cooperation on resolving the refugee crisis and how partners in the fight against ISIL can ramp up their efforts. Erdoğan is in Washington to attend the Nuclear Security Summit.

White House says Assad role in Syria unity government a 'non-starter'

AFP, 31.03.2016



The White House indicated Syrian President Assad should not be part of any transitional unity government, echoing views from regime opponents inside the war-shattered country. Responding to an interview in which Assad argued his regime should take part, White House spokesman Earnest said Assad's own participation would be a "non-starter."

"I don't know whether he envisioned himself being a part of that national unity government. Obviously that would be a non-starter for us." A row over Assad's fate has helped paralyze diplomatic efforts to end the country's brutal five-year conflict.

Assad told Russian state news agency RIA Novosti it would be “logical for there to be independent forces, opposition forces and forces loyal to the government represented” in the new authorities. But he pushed back against opposition demands that it should be put in place without his participation, insisting that the transitional body they are calling for is “illogical and unconstitutional”. “Neither in the Syrian constitution nor in the constitution of any other country in the world is there anything that could be called a transitional body of power,” Assad said.

US, three allies urge UN action against Iran for missile tests

AP, 30.03.2016



The US and three allies called for a Security Council meeting to respond to Iran’s recent ballistic missile tests which they say were carried out in defiance of a U.N. resolution.

A report from the U.S., France, Britain and Germany by The Associated Press calls the launches “destabilizing and provocative.” It said the Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missile and Qiam-1 short-range ballistic missile fired by Iran are “inherently capable of delivering nuclear weapons.” A Security Council resolution adopted after the Iran nuclear deal was signed last year calls for Iran not to launch any ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear weapon.

But when the Iranian test-firings were raised in the council, Russia said the launches did not violate the resolution because “a call” is not a demand. Russia’s stance makes any council action unlikely because as a permanent council member it has veto power. Iran’s U.N. Mission said at the time that the country “has never sought to acquire nuclear weapons and never will in the future.” It said the missile tests “were part of ongoing efforts of its armed forces to strengthen its legitimate defense capabilities ... against security threats.”

The report from the four Western nations was sent to Spain’s U.N. ambassador who has been designated by the Security Council to receive communications about Iran’s compliance with the resolution.

It asked U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to report “fully and thoroughly” on Iranian ballistic missile activity “inconsistent” with the council resolution, and for the Security Council to discuss “appropriate responses.” The four nations condemned the threats against Israel in Iranian statements about the launches.

Israel’s U.N. Ambassador Danny Danon welcomed the council’s call for action. “There must be consequences for Iran’s hostility towards Israel,” he said in a statement. “The international community must take action and impose sanctions against the Iranian regime.”

Greece to employ loudspeakers at border after rumour chaos

AFP, 28.03.2016



Greece said it would make use of loudspeakers at a migrants' camp on the Macedonia frontier to dispel "irresponsible rumours" that the border is about to reopen. "We are trying to step up efforts to address refugees and migrants in their own language and without an intermediary," said Giorgos Kyritsis, spokesman for the government's coordination panel on the migration.

Additional interpreters would be sent to the camp and a loudspeaker system -- currently operated by the UN refugee agency -- would be employed to make official announcements, he said.

Several hundred migrants, including people in wheelchairs or carrying babies, dashed for the border following rumours it would be opened. Greek police and other migrants helped to calm the situation.

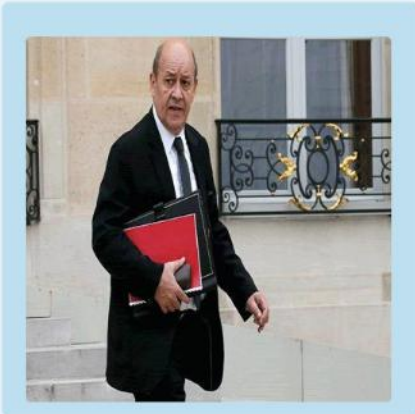
The commotion appeared to be triggered by a rumour that journalists and Red Cross officials would help migrants force their way across the fence, a young Syrian refugee told the Athens News Agency (ANA). The rush came two weeks after hundreds marched from Idomeni towards the Macedonian border, even crossing a surging river to do so, before they were stopped by Macedonian troops.

Kyritsis, interviewed on the News247 website, condemned "irresponsible rumours and disinformation" that "spread like wildfire... among people who are under pressure and living in very difficult conditions". More than 50,000 migrants are stranded in Greece after other European countries sealed off the so-called Balkan trail. Many are Syrians fleeing war. Over 11,000 of them are currently camped around Idomeni.

The trail leads from Greece -- the landing point for hundreds of thousands of people coming from Turkey -- to northern Europe where many have relatives or seek a better future. The human influx has eased since an agreement between European Union (EU) and Turkey went into effect for returning any migrants who reach Greece. A total of 1,331 have arrived since March 21, the day after the accord took effect, according to official figures.

France to end military operation in Central Africa this year

AFP, 30.03.2016



France will end its military intervention in the Central African Republic this year as it has achieved its objectives of restoring security to the country after three years of communal violence, the French defence minister said.

“I can confirm to you the end of Operation Sangaris during the course of 2016,” Jean-Yves Le Drian said in the capital Bangui. France launched the mission in December 2013 as thousands were dying in ethnic violence between Christians and Muslims. At the time, “the country was in the throes of civil war, torn by religious tensions, plagued by chaos, on the brink of pre-genocidal scenarios,” Le Drian said.

“In the space of two years, the Sangaris force restored calm and prevented the unacceptable. “Of course everything is not resolved but we can finally see the country emerging from a long period of trouble and uncertainty”, he said, speaking before French soldiers stationed at the M’Poko airport.

The CAR plunged into chaos in March 2013 when mostly Muslim Seleka rebels ousted President Francois Bozize, a Christian, and installed their leader Michel Djotodia in power for 10 months. A transitional government was brought in under international pressure in early 2014. Le Drian is in the country for the swearing-in on Wednesday of new President Faustin-Archange Touadera, elected in a run-off vote.

France, the former colonial power, had around 2,500 troops deployed as part of Operation Sangaris at its peak, supporting around 10,000 UN peacekeepers. But this has been reduced to about 900. Le Drian did not indicate when the troops would be withdrawn this year.

But he said the pullout will be in parallel with the buildup of the 12,000-strong UN force, MINUSCA, and the European Union’s training mission (EUTM RCA). Around 300 French troops will remain in CAR, who will rejoin MINUSCA and take part in EUTM RCA, he said.

Some French units will also continue to provide security at the airport, and some troops based in Ivory Coast and in the Sahel region will be “ready to rapidly intervene” if necessary. International operations in CAR have been dogged by sexual scandals after a slew of accusations of child sexual abuse against French and UN troops.

British EU exit campaign backed by 250 business leaders

Reuters, 27.03.2016



The campaign for Britain to leave the EU has been backed by 250 business leaders including the former chief executive of HSBC, the Vote Leave group said, hoping to counter the view that UK businesses back staying in the bloc.

The camps arguing for and against Britain staying in the EU ahead of a referendum on British membership on June 23 have both made the economic impact of a 'Brexit' a cornerstone of their campaigns. The bosses at more than a third of Britain's biggest companies including major oil companies Shell and BP and its largest telecoms group BT said leaving the EU would put jobs and investment at risk.

Vote Leave, one of the groups supporting a British exit, unveiled its own list of backers including Michael Geoghegan, former Chief Executive of HSBC Group and Tim Martin, the boss of pubs group JD Wetherspoon. "With our growing list of business supporters, Vote Leave will make that case that whilst the EU might be good for big multinationals, for smaller businesses it acts as a job destruction regulatory machine," Matthew Elliott, Chief Executive of Vote Leave, said.

However, the Sunday Times newspaper reported that two of the well-known names on the list, John Caudwell, founder of Phones4U, and David Ross, the co-founder of Carphone Warehouse, had not signed up. "You have to question how this list has been compiled," the paper quoted a spokesman for Caudwell as saying.

Vote Leave also said it was forming a Business Council to argue that EU membership was holding back business. That group will be headed by John Longworth, who quit as director general of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) lobbying group after he spoke out in favour of leaving the EU, accusing Prime Minister David Cameron of trying to scare voters into backing his case to stay in the bloc.

Meanwhile, the Times newspaper reported that hedge funds were planning to use exit polls to make big profits on the day of the referendum. Under electoral law, it is illegal to publish the results of such polls while people are still voting but a private poll could allow traders to exploit moves in the currency market, with sterling expected to rise sharply against the dollar on the back of an "In" vote but decline if Britons vote for an exit.

Sterling fell to multi-year lows this week on a perceived rise in the chances of an EU exit, and on companies and fund investors hedging against it, though the currency later steadied. "There is a lot of interest around Brexit, particularly from the big U.S. funds," one unnamed broker told the Times. The odds of a Brexit narrowed as the Brussels bombings were seen boosting the 'Out' campaign.

Japanese journalists allege government pressure on media

AP, 24.03.2016



Five Japanese journalists accused Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government of pressuring broadcasters to reduce criticism of its policies, but also lamented what they called a failure by media to live up to their convictions.

They spoke at a news conference after Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Sanae Takaichi warned broadcasters last month that their licenses could be revoked if they failed to be impartial in political coverage. Japan's broadcast law says programs must be "politically fair," and Takaichi said several times in parliament that a station that repeatedly fails in this regard could have its license revoked.

Despite multiple protests that her comments constituted a threat to freedom of the press, she has not backed down. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, the government's top spokesman, also has defended her comments as "common sense."

The journalists said both Takaichi's comments and the government response have been unacceptable, and vowed to continue their protest. Abe's government has been criticized as being too sensitive to critical reporting. Media experts say mainstream media have been shunning critical reporting to avoid trouble with officials who are increasingly touchy about how Japan and government policies are portrayed by both domestic and foreign media.

"Of all ruling Liberal Democratic Party governments, the Abe administration is most nervously checking what the media say, because what's said on television affects his support ratings," said Shuntaro Torigoe, a former Mainichi newspaper journalist and news anchor on TV Asahi. "In Japan today, rather than the media watching the authorities, the government watches the media." The journalists also said media outlets haven't fought hard enough for press freedom.

"It's not so much about political pressure, it's about deterioration in the media," said Soichiro Tahara, one of Japan's most respected journalists, who is known for asking tough questions to politicians. "To me, the most serious problem is self-restraint by higher-ups at broadcast stations."

The resignation of three outspoken newscasters this month has prompted further speculation of interference from the government as it attempts to build public support for contentious policies, such as a broadening of Japan's military role and a revision of the war-renouncing constitution. Shigetada Kishii, an anchor for the Tokyo Broadcasting System Television's popular program News 23, has announced he is stepping down as of March 31. Kishii told the news conference that media seem to be increasingly intimidated, but he has never been directly pressured by the government or higher-ups at the broadcaster.

Kishii angered Abe supporters when he voiced his opposition to security legislation allowing Japan's military to defend the U.S. and other allies under attack. He was later criticized in ads placed by ultra-conservative groups, saying he violated the broadcast law.

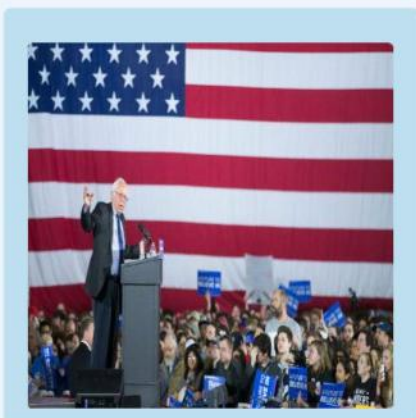
Another respected journalist, Hiroko Kuniya, a presenter for NHK public television's prime-time news show Close-up Gendai, angered Suga when she pressed him with unscripted questions about the security legislation, reportedly triggering a strong protest from the Prime Minister's Office. Following her last appearance on the show last week, Kuniya issued a statement to Japanese media saying that "expressing things has gradually become difficult," without elaborating.

Abe's ruling party summoned an executive of the liberal-leaning TV Asahi over its political coverage, and another from NHK over a separate allegation of staged material in a news program. Even though there is no evidence directly connecting Takaichi's remark with the resignation of the three newscasters, her warning was enough to scare Japan's media, journalists say.

"It's a measure that the Chinese government might take, but there is a (Japanese) minister who nonchalantly says that may happen here. It's utterly shocking," respected journalist Akira Ikegami wrote in a column in the Asahi newspaper last month. "It was a remark that could even topple the government in a Western democracy." Can Japan's media resist the pressure? Torigoe said he is not optimistic. "I don't know," he said after the news conference. "Younger journalists don't seem to have a fighting spirit."

US Democrat Bernie Sanders wins Alaska, Washington, Hawaii caucuses

Reuters, 27.03.2016



Democratic presidential contender Bernie Sanders won nominating contests in Alaska, Washington, Hawaii, chipping away at front-runner Hillary Clinton's commanding lead in the race to pick the party's candidate for the White House.

Sanders still faces a steep climb to overtake Clinton but the big victories generated more momentum for his upstart campaign and could stave off calls from Democratic leaders that he should wrap up his bid. Sanders appeared headed to victory margins of more than 50 percentage points in both Alaska and Washington, and led by about 40 points in Hawaii with some 90 percent of the results tallied there.

"We are making significant inroads in Secretary Clinton's lead and ... we have a path to victory," Sanders told cheering, chanting supporters in Madison, Wisconsin. "It is hard for anybody to deny that our campaign has the momentum." Clinton, the former secretary of state, has increasingly turned her attention toward a potential Nov. 8 general election showdown against Republican front-runner Donald Trump, claiming she is on the path to wrapping up the nomination.



Heading into Saturday, she led Sanders by about 300 pledged delegates in the race for the 2,382 delegates needed to be nominated at the party's July convention in Philadelphia. Adding in the support of superdelegates - party leaders who are free to back any candidate - she has 1,690 delegates to 946 for Sanders.

Sanders, a U.S. senator from Vermont, needs to win up to two-thirds of the remaining delegates to catch Clinton, who will keep piling up delegates even when she loses under a Democratic Party system that awards them proportionally in all states.

"These wins will help him raise more funds for the next few weeks but I don't think it changes the overall equation," said Democratic strategist Jim Manley, a Clinton supporter. "Hillary Clinton has too big a lead."

But Sanders has repeatedly said he is staying in the race until the convention, pointing to big crowds at his rallies and high turnout among young and first-time voters as proof of his viability. After raising \$140 million, he has the money to fight on as long as he wants. He has energized the party's liberal base and young voters with his calls to rein in Wall Street and fight income inequality, a message that resonated in liberal Washington and other Western states. Sanders won in Utah and Idaho this week.

"Don't let anybody tell you we can't win the nomination or the general election," Sanders told supporters in Wisconsin, which holds the next contest on April 5. "We are going to do both." All three contests were caucuses, a format that has favored Sanders because it requires more commitment from voters. They also were in states with fewer of the black and Hispanic voters who have helped fuel Clinton's lead.

"He was just more aligned with my values. I am young and I never knew there could be someone like him in politics," said Samantha Burton of Seattle, who said Sanders was the first candidate who had inspired her to make a donation. A birthing assistant at a Seattle hospital, said she backed Clinton because she believed the times called for someone who could get things done. "She knows how to make things happen," she said. "I think Hillary is more likely to win against a Republican."

After Wisconsin, the Democratic race moves to contests in New York on April 19 and a bloc of five states in the Northeast, led by Pennsylvania, on April 26. There were no contests in the Republican race featuring Trump and rivals U.S. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas and Ohio Governor John Kasich.

The New York Times published a lengthy foreign policy-focused interview with Trump. The New York billionaire told the newspaper he might stop oil purchases from Saudi Arabia unless they provide troops to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Trump also told the Times he was willing to rethink traditional U.S. alliances should he become president.

Falklands rejects Argentine claims over UN maritime ruling

AFP, 30.03.2016



The Falkland Islands rejected Argentina's claims that a maritime border judgment by U.N. experts had strengthened its hand against Britain in their dispute over the South Atlantic territory.

Argentina's government said a U.N. scientific commission bolstered its case when it endorsed the country's claim that its continental shelf extends to include waters around the Falklands, known in Spanish as Las Malvinas. Officials said the move did not affect the centuries-old claims of sovereignty over the islands in the South Atlantic, over which Britain and Argentina fought a bloody war in 1982.

"Argentine statements which suggest that the sovereign position in the Falkland Islands has changed as a result of this decision are wholly misleading," the islands' government said in a statement. "The U.N. statement makes no adjudication on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and has no implications for the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands or our right to develop our territorial waters."

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters that the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLCS) adopted, without a vote and with amendments, an Argentine recommendation dated April 2009 seeking to extend its continental shelf. But he stressed that "the commission did not consider and qualify the parts of the submission that were subject to dispute."

A U.N. statement on the adoption of the Argentine recommendation added that the commission had previously decided it was not position to consider areas that were subject to dispute. London downplayed the impact of the U.N. body's decision. "This is an advisory committee. It makes recommendations, they are not legally binding," said a spokeswoman for British Prime Minister David Cameron.

"What is important is what the Falkland Islanders themselves think. They have been very clear that they want to remain an overseas territory of the UK and we will continue to support their right to determine their own future." Britain and Argentina fought a war in 1982 after Argentine forces occupied the islands.

The conflict claimed the lives of 649 Argentine soldiers, 255 British soldiers and three islanders. Argentine Foreign Minister Susana Malcorra said that the new maritime boundary expanded the area of continental shelf under Argentine sovereignty by 1.7 million square kilometers. "We have taken a great step forward in demarcating the outer limit of our continental shelf," she said in a statement.



Announcements & Reports

▶ *A proposal to revive the European Fiscal Framework*

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

▶ *The United States Dominates Global Investment Banking: Does it matter for Europe?*

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/03/the-united-states-dominates-global-investment-banking-does-it-matter-for-europe/>

▶ *As Ethiopia Moves toward Tuberculosis Elimination, Success Requires Higher Investment*

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/ethiopia-moves-toward-tuberculosis-elimination-success-requires-higher-investment>

Upcoming Events

▶ *Governing for Infrastructure Delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa*

Date : 02 April 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/governing-infrastructure-delivery-sub-saharan-africa>

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

Date : 03 April 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/uk-and-eu-managing-euro-and-single-market>

▶ *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

Date : 04 April 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>



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

Date : 04 April 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

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

Date : 10 April 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

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

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

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Date : 15 April 2016
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► *Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives*

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