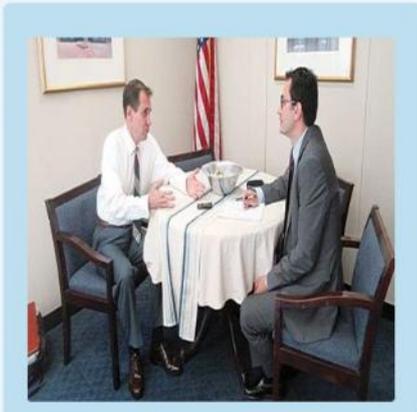


We'd like to see more media freedom in Turkey, says US spokesperson

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.09.2015



The U.S.-Turkish bilateral relationship will continue yet recent attacks on Turkey's press have worried Washington, U.S. State spokesperson John Kirby has told daily Hürriyet, while also pledging continued cooperation against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Kirby commented on the current situation of media freedom in Turkey, vowing that Washington would continue cooperation despite the distressing situation. "We have been very clear about what our hopes and expectations are for Turkey moving forward. It is distressing to see media freedoms curtailed for any purpose," he said.

"We said all along that we're going to work with whatever government is installed. Turkey is a NATO ally. As a NATO ally, we have commitments to Turkey; Turkey has commitments to us," Kirby added. In this regard, Kirby highlighted that the U.S. would continue to clearly express disagreements, saying press restrictions had not resulted in any concrete consequences on the U.S.-Turkish relationship. "We are not just there yet. We've expressed our concerns. We'd like to see more media freedom. And we'll continue to press those issues as we need to. At the same time, we must and will continue to work with Turkey on other issues, particularly the threat of ISIL," said Kirby.

Kirby cited Russia as an example of being able to continue bilateral relationships despite disagreements. "We don't like some of the things that we have seen inside Turkey right now, particularly with media freedom. And so we are having frank and honest, candid conversations with Turkish leaders about this as we do with governments all over the world. That we don't agree on this, and that this is distressing to us, does not mean that we've tossed the relationship out. In fact, quite the opposite; it is because we have a strong relationship with Turkey and a long history with Turkey that we can have these very frank and honest conversations, and we can continue to pursue these issues that we have worries about," Kirby said.

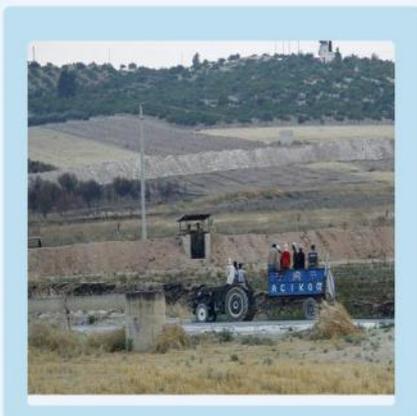
"We work with countries all around the world on lots of issues, and we disagree with countries all around the world on other issues. Look at our relationship with Russia," he said. Kirby also made clear that his comments last week on the Turkish constitution, in which he said, "There are actions that they are taking which in our view don't comport with their own core values as mentioned in their own constitution," regarded how political leaders had encouraged attacks targeting daily Hürriyet. "What I was referring to was comments made by some political leaders encouraging these attacks against Hürriyet and against opposition offices and buildings. And that is obviously troubling to us because Turkey is a democracy. Turkey has a strong constitution and democratic institutions," Kirby said.

In this perspective, he explained the significance of Turkish democracy to the U.S., noting that Turkey was a close ally. “I said Turkey’s democracy matters to us. And it does. We did not decide to make Turkey a democracy. The Turkish people did. And we are grateful for that and Turkey’s democracy, Turkey’s success and prosperity – all that matters to us because we are a close friend and partner,” he said.

“We simply want to see Turkey’s democracy continue to flourish. That means respecting the right of free speech, respecting the right of opposition members and parties to exist, to flourish and to challenge the policies they object to,” Kirby said. Kirby also acknowledged the Turkish support in the anti-ISIL fight, emphasizing the country’s role. “We are grateful for their cooperation which has recently expanded,” he said. He also said the U.S. did not wait for the formation of a new government in Turkey before agreeing to a deal that allowed them to attack ISIL from Turkey’s Incirlik Air Base because the jihadist group is a serious threat that needs to be immediately addressed. “The timing was months to get to that point to make the agreement in which Turkey allowed us to use three of their bases and participated in the coalition’s air operations,” he said.

400 Turks killed in ranks of jihadists in Syria, Iraq, Turkish official says

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.09.2015



Some 400 Turks who joined the ranks of jihadist fighting in Syria and Iraq have been killed so far, as 900 more were still with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a foreign ministry official told Hürriyet Daily News during a meeting. In addition to the 900, some 200 to 300 joined al-Nusra, a jihadist group in Syria linked to al-Qaeda.

“Currently, we believe that there are about 900 in ISIL, and close to 300 hundred with al-Nusra,” the official said, while responding to a question on the number of Turks among foreign fighters in neighboring Syria and Iraq. “We suspect there might be more people going and coming back.

We do not know if any of them are opportunistic money-mongers, fixers, radicals or how many of them are there for curiosity. But our tendency is not to believe them when they say they were just a cook there,” the official said, adding the ministry is demanding more international coordination in its efforts to block the movement of foreign fighters. Commenting on recently escalating attacks by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the official said more than half of the 120 fallen police officers and soldiers were killed in Body-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (BBIED) and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks rather than direct clashes. Many of the 16 soldiers killed the in the roadside bomb attack in southeastern Hakkari’s Dağlıca were not a part of the personnel involved in the direct fight but responsible for detecting road bombs.

“There have been only one or two clashes in the sense of a ‘real’ clash,” the official said, adding the PKK has chosen instead to attack with bombs. “This is going to be a long effort,” the official said, on the efforts to cut the PKK’s resources. The official also said the act of going to a place and receiving terrorism training should be criminalized, as many young people who receive training usually return after three months with knowledge which makes them a risk to society.

Turkey spent \$7.6 billion hosting 2.2 million Syrian refugees

Reuters, 18.09.2015



Turkey, which hosts the largest refugee population, has so far spent \$7.6 billion caring for 2.2 million Syrians who have fled strife there, Turkish Deputy PM Numan Kurtulmuş said.

Turkey has been on the front lines of the biggest refugee crisis since WWII. It shares a 900-km border with Syria and has adopted an “open-door policy” towards those fleeing the civil war. Europe is seeing a record influx of migrants fleeing war, persecution, economic hardship this summer. A record 300,000 or more Syrians and other migrants have arrived in Greece, mostly setting off from Turkey’s Aegean coast, according to the International Organisation for Migration.

“Our Coast Guard units have rescued 53,228 people, while 274 people have died” in Turkish waters, Kurtulmuş said at a news conference.

OpEd: The Kurds, Turkey, Oil And Israel

Eurasia Review, 18.09.2015



One picture dominated the world’s TV and press – a Turkish coastguard bearing the lifeless body of a little boy, drowned with his mother and elder brother in a doomed attempt to reach the Greek island of Kos. The dead child epitomized the humanitarian catastrophe that is overwhelming the world in general and Europe in particular. Like literally millions before them, the family were fleeing from a war-ravaged region of the Middle East.

Virtually every report about the incident described the youngster and his family as Syrians. Few mentioned the fact that Aylan, his brother Galip, mother Rehan were Kurds.



The home they were abandoning was situated in Kobane, the town captured by Islamic State (IS) in October 2014, fought over for months, and finally recaptured in January by the gallant Kurdish Peshmerga fighting force. Their personal tragedy brings the Kurds and their problems into the forefront of the unfolding disaster.

The Kurds are not Arabs but an ethnic group who historically inhabited a distinct geographical area referred to as Kurdistan. No such location is depicted on current maps, for after the first world war the old Kurdistan, together with its 30-plus million inhabitants, was divided between four states – Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Modern Kurdish history is replete with uprisings against one or other of them in a continuous battle for independence. The near-century of struggle has not been in vain. The Kurds have slowly but surely been gaining political clout.

With Kurds forming some 20 percent of its population, Turkey has always been intolerant of the Kurdish independence movement, regarding it as a threat to national unity. In 2014, prior to national elections, then-prime minister – soon to be president – Recep Tayyip Erdogan, seeking the Kurdish vote, promised some relaxation of the restrictions placed on them. The result was a dramatic reversal in Kurdish political fortunes. In the June 2015 elections, much to Erdogan's chagrin, his Justice and Progress Party (AKP) lost its overall majority, and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) won 13 percent of the vote and gained parliamentary representation for the first time.

For one reason or another, the Turkish electoral system failed to deliver an effective government out of this result, and Erdogan doubtless hopes that new elections, to be held in November, will enable his AKP to regain a majority, thus ensuring the sweeping constitutional changes he is seeking in order to transform the Turkish presidency into an autocracy. Erdogan's policy towards the Kurds is contradictory. Domestically, he is opposed root and branch to any hint of separatism, autonomy, or independence, and in this he has the support of the majority of Turkey's establishment. Kurdish demands run counter to the national unification achieved by Kemal Ataturk's revolution in the 1920s. Repeated offensives by successive Turkish governments, aimed at crushing the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), have however left the so-called "Kurdish problem" unresolved.

The PKK are strong in the Kurdish area just across Turkey's border with Syria. If anything like Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan were to be established in Syria, it would feed demands by Turkey's Kurds to be linked to it in some way. "We will never allow a state to be formed in northern Syria, south of our border," declared Erdogan in Istanbul on June 26. "We will maintain our struggle whatever the cost. They are trying to...change the demographics of the region. We will not condone it."

This explains why Erdogan, on joining the US-led anti-IS coalition in Syria in July, began air-strikes against IS and the Kurds indiscriminately, tarring both with the terrorist brush. But wherever they are sited the PKK remain prime targets for Turkey. Turkish warplanes bombed PKK targets in Iraq, in retaliation for an assault on the army in which dozens of Turkish troops were killed. The PKK is one thing, oil revenues are another. Take Erdogan's policy in respect of the Kurdish autonomous administration in Iraq – to say nothing of his duplicitous stance towards Israel. The authoritative Financial Times reported that roughly 77 percent of Israel's oil is currently being imported from Kurdistan via the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. In short, while Turkey maintains its strong anti-Israel stance for public consumption, it is daily providing Israel with thousands of barrels of oil and reaping the consequential rewards. "Diplomatic hypocrisy at its finest," was the verdict of the Saudi Arabian newspaper Al-Arabiya on August 30.

This oil traffic reflects a weakening of the Iraqi government's authority over its Kurdish component, which it certainly suspects of eventually planning to bid for complete independence. Meanwhile the oil sales to Israel have provided a revenue lifeline for the Kurdistan authorities, strapped as they are for the cash required to fund the Peshmerga military operations against IS. The emergence of Israel as one of the biggest buyers of Kurdish oil, comments the Financial Times, illustrates the widening gap between Kurdistan and the Iraqi government on fundamental policy. Baghdad, like many Middle Eastern capitals, refuses to recognise Israel and has no official ties with the country. On the other hand, relations between the Kurds and Israel, both small non-Arab entities battling against discrimination, have historically been close.

A recent visit to Iraqi Kurdistan left two Israeli journalists with no doubt of the genuine empathy felt by many Kurds towards Israel: "Old Peshmerga fighters cradling AK-47s reminisced about the 1960s, when Israel helped them in the war against Saddam Hussein." Bookshops in the capital, Erbil, sold history books about the Jews of Kurdistan with a Star of David on them – an impossibility in much of the Middle East.

What they found accords with statements by Kurdish leaders reported in June 2014. In a letter to Israel's then President-elect Reuven Rivlin, the leader of the Kurdish Left, Mahsum Simo said plainly: "Israel isn't our enemy." Amir Abdi, the head of foreign relations for the Kurdish Party, when asked what kind of relationship his party envisages with Israel, responded: "We share a strong relationship with the friendly State of Israel." It seems clear that if Iraqi Kurdistan eventually emerges as a sovereign state, Israel will be among the first to recognize it. And if any sort of united or autonomous Kurdistan straddling Syria, Iraq and Iran emanates from the current turmoil, Israel might find itself with a valuable friend and ally within the very heartland of the Middle East.

Turkey reiterates disagreement with Russia over Syria, hopes for resolution

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.09.2015



Turkey's top diplomat has reiterated Ankara disagreed with Moscow over ways of handling the Syrian conflict, with a particular difference of view of the regime being run by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"Our view is that al-Assad cannot play a role in Syria reaching stability again because he is the principal one who is responsible for this matter and is on top of those who are responsible for the division in Syria. But the Russians state that this should be decided by the Syrian people," Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioğlu said, in an interview with the state-run Anadolu Agency.

“The Syrian people have already made their decision. The rule of a country by a person who declared war against his own people is never possible. But there is no use for anybody in extending this debate. What matters is how Syria will get out of this chaotic environment,” Sinirlioğlu said. Sinirlioğlu’s remarks followed a working visit to Sochi where he held talks with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. “By keeping differences of views in parenthesis with Sergei Lavrov, we discussed things that should be done to reveal a political resolution that would pay regard to Syria’s unity, integrity and stability,” he said, expressing hope that Turkey and Russia would agree on the principles which would lay the ground for working together on the Syrian conflict.

Earlier, speaking to reporters in Sochi following his meeting with Sinirlioğlu, Lavrov said Moscow and Ankara were interested in fostering a political dialogue in Syria under the auspices of the United Nations. “In regard to the Syrian settlement, we have a common interest in promoting the start of a meaningful, specific, results-oriented political process under the auspices of the United Nations,” Lavrov was quoted as saying by Sputnik news agency.

EU term president: EU will not close its doors to refugees

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.09.2015



The European Union will not close its borders to refugees, its term president Luxemburg FM Jean Asselborn has said in Ankara, while noting that the EU is working on financial aid for Turkey to contain Syrian refugees within the country.

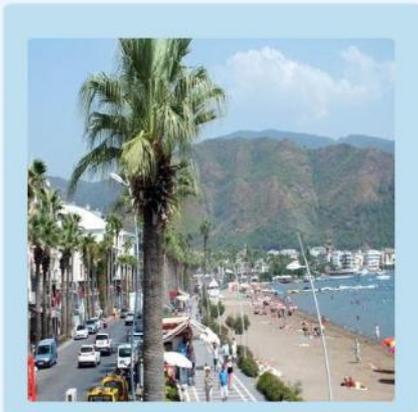
“We will not close our doors. We will establish an admission mechanism. EU member states should receive refugees in an equal way, otherwise we will not be able to handle this case”“ Asselborn said, speaking at a press conference with his Turkish counterpart Feridun Sinirlioglu. “Wire fences cannot be a solution of this crisis. The EU’s response should be solidarity,” he added.

The EU is currently working on a financial package for Turkey to deal with the refugee crisis, Asselborn said, while stressing that it does not aim to stop refugees by simply “giving money to Turkey.” The EU ministers for refugees will hold a meeting and then the European Council will gather to draw up the EU’s policy on refugees, Asselborn said, noting that they will also discuss aid for Turkey. “I don’t want to be misunderstood: I am not talking about keeping them in Turkey. But we have to give financial assistance. Turkey has taken on a big responsibility and it’s our duty as the EU to help,” he added.

Asked about whether Turkey wanted to host all refugees or allow them to cross into Europe, Minister Sinirlioğlu said they all have “free will.” “We have to help them go wherever they want, but in an orderly way. Turkey does not have a policy of locking these people in,” the Turkish foreign minister said. He also stressed that all parties should prioritize eliminating conditions in Syria that caused people to flee the country in the first place, emphasizing a “political solution.”

Sector representative: Turkey to close year with 41 million tourists

Anadolu Agency, 18.09.2015



Turkey will reach last year’s tourist numbers of 41 million despite all the negativities in neighboring countries, said the head of the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TÜRSAB). “Despite the negativities in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and others, Turkey will reach 2014’s figures in tourism,” said TÜRSAB head Başaran Ulusoy.

With the coming nine-day Eid al-Adha holiday, many local people will have the chance to have a vacation, increasing income in the sector, he added. Local tourists are opting for Greece and Greek islands, Antalya and the Central Anatolian spot of Cappadocia this year, Ulusoy added.

He noted that the sector had been growing continuously for the last five years. “Around 40,000 new beds are added in the sector every year. This requires around 1 million incoming tourists,” Ulusoy said. “Turkey has succeeded in not seeing dramatic losses in tourist numbers despite several problems in neighboring countries and will close the year with around 41 million in tourist numbers. There has, however, been a decline in hotel occupancy rates of around 5-10 percent this year, but this is mainly caused by additional new beds that have recently become available. We should therefore shelve our new investments on beds for a while to make the existing capacity full.”

He noted there has been deterioration in several segments in Turkey, mainly in civil society development and media freedoms. Acemoğlu said the recently announced growth figure for Turkey at 3.8 percent in the second quarter was mainly based on the rise in consumer demand and public spending. Acemoğlu had also said the end of the Kurdish peace process would have disastrous effects on Turkey’s political system and economy, in another interview with the Anadolu Agency in August.

“The peace process should continue in Turkey. The end of this process will be a disaster for both the political system and economy of the country. Additionally, the existence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant [ISIL] is a big problem for Turkey and the whole region,” he had said then, adding a number of changes and structural reforms needed to be made to strengthen the Turkish economy’s base.

Turkey's economy ministers at odds over reform agenda, economic outlook

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.09.2015



Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek and Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci have differed on Turkey's reform agenda and economic outlook, amid a slowdown in domestic growth and turbulent international headwinds.

Şimşek recently warned of potential economic losses unless political stability is maintained and Turkey returns to a reform agenda, but Zeybekci said he disagreed and Turkey's economy was already in solid shape. "Our budget figures are one of the best. There has been around 40 percent improvement in Turkey's current account deficit. Our exports have been declining, our imports are dropping in faster pace.

The coverage ratio of exports to imports will have increased to 80 percent," he said, adding that there has also been an increase in foreign capital inflow to Turkey. Zeybekci said the loss of the Turkish Lira's value against the U.S. dollar is not an economic indicator but rather a "financial result" and "mainly speculative." "Yes, Turkey's currency has lost around 29 percent in value over this year. But we have seen an average 21.5 percent decrease in six currencies, and our currency was in a better position than the remaining five until June. Despite escalating terror attacks, our currency is now been rebounding," he said, adding that Turkey's total debt is below \$400 billion.

"I think the Fed will not raise interest rates this week, or in this period. Even if it raises [them], it will be a very minimum level. The markets have already priced in a rate hike," the economy minister added. The Fed is expected to announce its long-awaited rate decision after a two-day meeting. Speaking in an interview on Kanal 7, Şimşek said that "unless we maintain political stability and return to a reform agenda again, we cannot preserve existing economic gains let alone achieve our 2023 economic targets."

UN Security Council urges calm, restraint at Al-Aqsa

AFP, 18.09.2015



The UN Security Council appealed for calm and restraint after three days of clashes this week at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound between Israeli police and Muslim protesters. In a unanimous declaration, the 15-member panel also expressed its "grave concern" and called for maintaining the rules governing the sensitive site seen as holy by both Muslims and Jews.

"The members of the Security Council called for the exercise of restraint, refraining from provocative actions and rhetoric, and upholding unchanged the historic status quo" at the compound "in word and in practice," a statement said.

The third-holiest site in Islam, the compound is also the holiest site in Judaism, which venerates it as the Temple Mount. It is located in East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel in 1967 and at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both sides see the site as a symbol of religion and nationalism. Under longstanding regulations, Jews are allowed to visit but cannot pray there to avoid provoking tensions. Palestinians are deeply suspicious that Israel will seek to change rules governing the site, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly said he has no intention of doing so.

Netanyahu assured UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that his country was determined to strictly apply the status quo. The council said both worshippers and visitors should be without fear of violence or intimidation while at the compound. Council members called for an end to the clashes, so that "the situation returns to normality in a way which promotes the prospects for Middle East peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians."

Monitor: Barrel bombs kill 21 civilians near Syria's Daraa

AFP, 18.09.2015



Barrel bomb attacks by Syrian regime helicopters killed at least 21 civilians in a rebel-held town near Daraa city, a monitoring group said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said regime helicopters “dropped barrel bombs on in Daraa province,” killing at least 21 people.

Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said the strikes had killed 17 people in southern Syria. Rebel groups seized full control of Busra al-Sham, an ancient town with both Sunni and Shiite Muslim residents. It was a major setback for forces loyal to embattled President Assad in the province where protesters first rose up against his rule in March 2011.

Assad's forces waged a bloody crackdown on the demonstrations, before people took up arms, leading to a full-blown war. Since then, more than 240,000 people have been killed and millions have been forced to flee their homes.

US general: Only handful of U.S.-trained Syrian rebels still fighting

Reuters, 17.09.2015



U.S.-trained Syrian rebels are still fighting in Syria, a top U.S. general told Congress, a stark admission of setbacks to a fledgling military program that critics have already pronounced a failure. The U.S. military began training in May for up to 5,400 fighters a year, in what was seen as a test of President Barack Obama's strategy of having local partners combat ISIL militants and keep U.S. troops off the front lines.

But the program was troubled from the start, with some of the first class of less than 60 fighters coming under attack from al Qaeda's Syria wing, Nusra Front, in their battlefield debut. Some were captured and killed while others scattered.

U.S. officials, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity, acknowledged that a review is underway that could result in scaling back and reenvisioning the program. U.S. General Lloyd Austin, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that at the current, slower-than-expected pace, the initial training targets were unrealistic. Asked how many fighters were still in Syria, Austin said: "It's a small number. The ones that are in the fight ... we're talking four or five." Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth told the committee that only 100 to 120 Syrian fighters were in training. Wormuth said the Pentagon was considering options that include scaling back the program's goals to insert small numbers U.S.-trained rebels with larger units in northern Syria. That contrasts with previous goals of creating individual units.

"We are looking at that option as well as others," Wormuth told the committee. U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters the option cited might significantly reduce the size of the program, creating an "enabling" force that could, for example, help call in U.S.-led coalition airstrikes.

'Alexis betrayed us': Young Greeks turn their backs on Syriza

AFP, 16.09.2015



Greece's radical-left Syriza party channelled the anger and hope of a generation when it swept to power -- but winning young voters over again in the elections will not be so easy. In Exarchia, a bohemian Athens neighbourhood beloved by students and anarchists, any mention of Syriza's leader Alexis Tsipras prompts either a resigned sigh or an expletive.

Young people have been hit disproportionately hard by six years of financial crisis; nearly half are unemployed. Syriza's pre-election promise to stand up to Athens' creditors and end austerity was music to the ears of the twenty-somethings who have been labelled Greece's "lost generation".

With its blunt-talking, casually dressed ministers, Syriza itself seemed to embody a youthful new defiance. Tsipras, inaugurated at 40, was the youngest prime minister in 150 years. Then came his spectacular U-turn in July, when he agreed to sweeping new tax rises and spending cuts in exchange for a new international bailout worth 86 billion euros (\$96 billion). He resigned, triggering the early elections, after suffering a major party rebellion over the rescue deal.

It is difficult to find anyone in Exarchia, where the graffitied walls are sprinkled with anarchist symbols, who plans to put their faith in Syriza again when Greece votes. "Alexis betrayed us," said Spiros, a 25-year-old drama student, as he sat smoking and drinking coffee with friends -- all of whom voted for Syriza in January. Bitterly disappointed by the party and unimpressed by any of the alternatives, this group is considering not voting at all, like many others in this neighbourhood.

“I voted for a leftist government. I wanted to stay in Europe, but one with good rules,” said Alex, 30. “Syriza has done everything it said it wouldn’t.” Two weeks ago, Syriza’s own youth wing announced that it could no longer support the party in the elections. More than half of the young activists quit the committee, issuing a blistering statement titled “The Bankruptcy of Syriza”. Among young Greeks in general, a recent poll published by the Ethnos newspaper showed that just 18.6 percent of 18 to 34-year-olds plan to back Syriza -- a huge drop from January, when more than 30 percent in the equivalent age group supported the party. “In January, Syriza represented youth, hope and change,” said Manos Papazoglou, a political scientist at the University of the Peloponnese. “But they have lost this image very quickly. It’s very rare in Europe to see a party lose its political capital like this so fast.”

Young supporters seemed thin on the ground at an election rally in Athens earlier this month. Waiting to hear Tsipras speak, 19-year-old Antonios Kaisaris, one of only a couple of dozen activists still left in Syriza Youth, said the government needed more time to show what it can do. “We are staying to fight for Syriza,” the Athens University student said, insisting that the party could renegotiate the terms of the bailout and Greece’s huge mountain of debt if it is voted back in. “We don’t want the right wing to come back for another four years. And just because we lost the battle, it doesn’t mean we won’t win the war.” Analysts say that with around 15 percent of voters still undecided, this election is still wide open. Among 18 to 34-year-olds, seven percent plan to abstain and another 14 percent are still undecided, according to the Ethnos poll. “In the coming days we could see very dramatic changes,” Papazoglou said. Of the youths still planning to back Syriza, many say resignedly that the party is the best of several bad options.

Many of those who voted Syriza into power see a return of the conservative New Democracy party, currently neck-and-neck with Syriza in the polls, as an unappealing prospect. New Democracy and the socialist Pasok ruled alternately for much of the past four decades, and Syriza’s rise was widely seen as a break with a political elite regarded as corrupt, beholden to powerful interests and responsible for Greece’s current crisis.

US open to talks with Russia on Syria

AFP, 18.09.2015



The White House said it was open to limited talks with Moscow following the controversial deployment of Russian troops and heavy weapons to war-torn Syria. White House spokesman Josh Earnest said President Obama’s administration was willing to hold “tactical, practical discussions” on operations in Syria and fight against the ISIL.

The decision signals a newfound willingness to engage with Russia, after months of giving Vladimir Putin the cold shoulder over his actions in Ukraine and Syria.

Many Western officials suspect the assets will be used to further prop up President Bashar al-Assad, despite claims they will be used to tackle ISIL extremists. “It’s difficult to discern exactly what their most important priority is,” Earnest said. Putin has provided vital support to Assad throughout a popular uprising against his regime and as the conflict has metastasized into a brutal civil war that has killed 240,000 people and displaced four million. But Moscow has also sought to portray Assad’s army as a bulwark against Islamist rebels, including ISIL. Washington and European states view Assad as a pariah who shoulders blame for driving Syria into chaos and allowing ISIL to thrive. But with Western efforts to tackle ISIL floundering, and the moderate Syrian opposition losing ground to radical groups, the White House may hope to enlist Russia in the fight.

It was not immediately clear whether the US-Russia discussions on Syria would be held by the military or civilians, or at what level. Military dialogue between Russia and the United States has been virtually suspended since 2014 in response to Moscow’s annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine had resulted in international sanctions that have hollowed the Russian economy and left Putin isolated. Western diplomats say Putin may now be trying to come in from the cold by exploiting the West’s desire to end Syria’s bloody conflict that has prompted a stream of refugees to Europe. The Russian leader is expected to use his speech at the United Nations General Assembly later this month to push for a diplomatic solution to the conflict that allows Russia to retain its bulwark of influence in the Middle East. The White House has so far rebuffed suggestions that Obama would meet Putin on the sidelines of the meeting. Instead, the administration said it would use lower level talks to urge Russia to focus its actions in Syria on countering ISIL.

“We have made clear that Russia’s military actions inside of Syria, if they are used to prop up the Assad regime, would be destabilizing and counterproductive,” Earnest said. “That all being said, we have long indicated we could welcome constructive contributions from the Russians to the anti-ISIL coalition,” he said.

Germany: EU members that don’t help with refugees won’t get money

Reuters, 16.09.2015



Countries that do not share European values of human empathy and solidarity cannot count on receiving money from the bloc, German Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel warned in an interview with the newspaper Bild.

Gabriel said that while Germany was opening gymnasiums, barracks and homes to refugee families, other countries were “laying barbed wire on their borders and closing the gates”. The comments were a thinly veiled jab at Hungary, which has built a fence along its border with Serbia and is building one on its border with Croatia to prevent refugees fleeing war make it into Europe’s frontier-free Schengen zone.

“Europe is a community of values based on human sympathy and solidarity. And those that don’t share our values can’t count on our money over time,” said Gabriel. “If it continues like this, then Europe is in danger, more than it was from the financial crisis or the Greece crisis.” Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s closing of the border and introducing laws making it easier for his government to crack down on migrants has helped reduce the flow of asylum seekers travelling through Austria and into Germany.

But images of Hungarian police blasting refugees with tear gas and water cannon have also tarnished Europe’s image and underscored divisions over how to respond to the influx of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children from the war-torn Middle East.

British PM, new opposition leader spar politely in parliament’s ritual joust

Reuters, 16.09.2015



The new leader of Britain’s Labour Party, veteran leftist Jeremy Corbyn, confronted PM David Cameron in parliament for the first time and said the house’s raucous weekly question-and-answer session should be less theatrical and more about hearing ordinary people’s voices.

Kicking off with questions on unaffordable housing, mental health and welfare, Corbyn’s low-key performance did little to ruffle Cameron, who gave detailed answers in an unusually muted manner. The session had been eagerly awaited between Corbyn, a bearded stalwart of left-wing causes and opponent of austerity the upper-class Conservative Cameron.

Known as “PMQs” - Prime Minister’s Questions - the weekly verbal jousts have become combative in the age of rolling 24-hour news, with witty put-downs that appeal to television often drowning out questions about government policy or direction. Corbyn, elected Labour Party leader at the weekend, shrugged off a reference by Cameron to a World War Two remembrance service where he was criticised for not singing the national anthem. Instead, he launched into an attack on PMQs.

“Many told me that they thought...parliament was out of touch and too theatrical, and that they wanted things done differently,” Corbyn told a packed parliament, where some lawmakers were forced to stand on the stairs. “And above all, they wanted their voice heard in parliament.” In response to the prime minister saying he did not want Britain to become a place where people did not want to work, Corbyn said some needed welfare and that providing it was the “decent, civil thing” to do. Labour lawmakers congratulated Corbyn, with some praising him for deflating his Conservative opponents, who often try to score points from the opposition with well-timed barbs. Cameron was bolstered when he became leader of the Conservative Party in 2005 in his first exchange when he told the then prime minister, Tony Blair, that he had been “the future once”.

Fukushima dumps first batch of once-radioactive water in sea

AFP, 11.09.2015



Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant began releasing contaminated water into the sea, but the man tasked with preventing another meltdown warned other highly radioactive fluid still stored on site could pose a major threat.

TEPCO which operates the plant in eastern Japan, discharged 850 tons of formerly contaminated water it had extracted from the ground near the plant into the sea, saying a filtration process had made it safe. The plant, whose reactors went into meltdown after being hit by tsunami, has released once radioactive water into nature after a long battle with fishermen, who feared it could destroy their livelihood.

But Dale Klein, the chairman of a committee created to ensure the nuclear meltdown is never repeated, said other highly radioactive water used to cool the reactors four years ago and which is still kept in tanks in the plant could be dangerous. "The risk that you run is that you have all these tanks full of water," Klein told AFP in an interview. "The longer you store the water, the more likely you are going to have (an) uncontrolled release," he said, adding that he would like to see the supplies released from storage in the next three years. TEPCO has faced criticism for its handling of the meltdown, which saw thousands of people evacuated as radiation poisoned the air, land and water and has already cost some \$57 billion in compensation for residents.

Four years later it is still extracting some 300 tons of contaminated water from the ground every day, which had been stored in tanks before TEPCO started releasing it into the sea after purification. The move is a milestone for the company, which said a filtration system removing highly radioactive substances like strontium and caesium meant the groundwater was now safe to release into the natural environment.

Fishermen had argued that the discharge even of the groundwater would heighten contamination concerns and hurt their already battered reputation. They had fought to stop the water being released into the sea, even after it is filtered, but eventually bowed to pressure from TEPCO, which is struggling to find space to store the tainted supplies. But it has yet to find a solution to deal with another highly radioactive 680,000 tons of water that was used to cool the reactors during the meltdown, which is still stored on site. Fishermen are opposed to the fluid being released into the sea, even after it is filtered.

"I would much rather see Japan move to a long-term solution of the controlled release, rather than have an unexpected release" that could be caused by pipebreaks or other failures, said Klein. Torrential flooding in an area not far south of the plant added to contamination concerns, flushing away at least 293 plastic bags of plants and soil that had been collected in the clean up.

The tsunami, following a 9.0 magnitude quake, triggered the world's worst nuclear disaster in a generation and prompted Tokyo to shut down the 50 reactors nationwide used to generate electricity. This month saw the evacuation order lifted for Naraha, the first of seven municipalities fully emptied after the explosion whose residents can return permanently, but the full clean up is expected take decades.

Netanyahu to visit White House for 'make up' summit

AFP, 17.09.2015



US President Obama will host Israeli PM Netanyahu at the White House -- their first meeting after a deep row over the Iranian nuclear deal. The fence-mending meeting, announced by the White House, comes as US-Israeli relations are at their lowest point in decades. Obama and Netanyahu - after years of frosty personal relations - clashed over the agreement that would give Iran sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

The Israeli leader publicly and stridently opposed a deal, championed strongly by Obama as the best way of preventing Tehran from getting a nuclear weapon.

The US administration indicated that the meeting could move beyond tensions caused by Netanyahu's strident opposition to the deal and focus on getting Israel's support for its implementation. "Prime minister Netanyahu's visit is a demonstration of the deep and enduring bonds between the United States and Israel," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. "The president looks forward to discussing with the prime minister regional security issues, including implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," said Earnest, using the Iran accord's formal title.

Israel could be a help or hindrance to Obama in keeping the deal on track, ratcheting up domestic pressure on the White House should Iran stall or falter on implementation. "You are not going to see a transformation in the relationship, but you are going to see an improvement, because there is no reason to fight," said Aaron David Miller, a former advisor to Republican and Democratic presidents. They will "try to change the channel from this incredibly dysfunctional soap opera-like relation to something much cooler and calmer," Miller said. Israel, he said, has an interest in being in the loop on Iran's nuclear program, while Obama can neutralize a line of attack by Republican foes ahead of next year's election. Netanyahu had described the accord, an important piece of Obama's foreign policy legacy, as a "stunning, historic mistake."

The White House regarded Netanyahu's appearance before a joint session of Congress in April -- to call directly on US lawmakers to scupper the deal -- as an affront. Obama had pointedly refused to meet Netanyahu when he was in Washington to make the address. The two men clashed again during Netanyahu's re-election campaign, when he rejected a two-state solution for peace with the Palestinians -- an issue sure to come up in the talks. With the peace process in deep freeze, there are growing fears that tensions like those flaring at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound could spark a broader Palestinian uprising.

"The president also looks forward to discussing Israel's relations with the Palestinians, the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the need for the genuine advancement of a two-state solution," Earnest said. Security ties between the United States and Israel will also be on the agenda. The White House has floated the idea of a deeper security compact with Israel, but has said the offer has not yet been taken up.

It is likely to include the extension of a memorandum of understanding, the sale of high-tech fighter jets and perhaps precision-guided bunker buster bombs. "The president has indicated on a number of occasions his desire to begin consultations with our Israeli allies about how to further deepen that cooperation," Earnest said earlier this month.

US warns Kremlin that Assad has no role in anti-ISIL fight

AFP, 16.09.2015



Washington warned Russia that Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad has no role in coalition operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and must step down to allow a political settlement.

Secretary of State John Kerry called his Kremlin counterpart Sergei Lavrov to restate the US position after Russia's President Vladimir Putin promised to maintain military support for Assad. "Secretary Kerry made clear that Russia's continued support for President Assad risks exacerbating and extending the conflict, and undermining our shared goal of fighting extremism," his office said.

Kerry "reaffirmed the US commitment to fight ISIL with a coalition of more than 60 countries, of which Assad could never be a credible member, and emphasized the US would welcome a constructive Russian role in counter-ISIL efforts," it added. "The secretary stressed that there is no military solution to the overall conflict in Syria, which can only be resolved by a political transition away from Assad."



The United States had hoped to convince Russia, a long-standing ally of Damascus, to help convince Assad to step down and permit a transitional regime to negotiate an end to Syria's civil war. Washington and its allies are bombarding ISIL positions inside Syria, and supporting "moderate" rebel forces there, but insist the Damascus government itself is part of the problem. But Moscow sees Assad's army as a bulwark against Islamist rebels, including ISIL, and has continued to send military equipment and trainers to bolster its position.

Announcements & Reports

► *Beyond the Iran Deal*

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/beyond-iran-deal>

► *The Future of Russia-Japan Relations*

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-55-future-russia-japan-relations>

► *The Globalisation of Angel Investments*

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2015/09/the-globalization-of-angel-investments/>

Upcoming Events

► *Productivity, Innovation and Digitalisation: Which Global Policy Challenges?*

Date : 20 September 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/productivity-innovation-and-digitalisation-which-global-policy-challenges/>

► *Capital Requirements and Loss Absorbing Capacity for Large Banks*

Date : 21 September 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/538-capital-requirements-and-loss-absorbing-capacity-for-large-banks/>

► *The Meaning of Russia's Nuclear Threats*

Date : 21 September 2015
Place : Washington DC – The USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/07/08-russia-nuclear-threat>



► *Financing The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda: What Are The Issues and What Is The Role of The IMF?*

Date : 22 September 2015
Place : Washington DC – The USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/07/08-financing-post-2015-sustainable-development-lagarde>

► *The Productivity Gap: Why is Innovation Not Increasing Growth?*

Date : 22 September 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/544-the-productivity-gap-why-is-innovation-not-increasing-growth/>

► *The Kuwait Crisis 25 Years Later*

Date : 23 September 2015
Place : Washington – The USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/07/15-kuwait-crisis-25-years-later>

► *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

Date : 23 September 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 September 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 September 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 September 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 September 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 October 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 November 2015

Place : Berlin - Germany

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