

UN: Turkey world's top refugee hosting country

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.12.2015



Turkey was the country hosting the most refugees in the world in the first half of 2015, with 1.8 million registered refugees on its territory as of June 30, according to a new U.N. report.

The change marks a big shift, as Turkey was not listed in the top 20 refugee-hosting countries until 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a report released. Syrians accounted for 98 percent of all registered refugees in the country and most of them were located in urban areas. The number of Iraqi refugees in Turkey remained around 20,000.

In the first half of 2015, the number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants in Turkey was 24, the report stated. Syrian refugees benefitted from the government's Temporary Protection Regime, it said, adding that Turkey continued to witness high numbers of individual asylum applications registered with UNHCR.

Turkey recorded more than 43,600 asylum applications filed with UNHCR during the first half of 2015, making the country the fourth-largest recipient of individual asylum applications worldwide. With almost a million people having crossed the Mediterranean as refugees and migrants so far this year, and conflicts in Syria and elsewhere continuing to generate staggering levels of human suffering, 2015 is likely to exceed all previous records for global forced displacement, UNHCR warned in the report.

The global refugee total, which a year ago was 19.5 million, had as of mid-2015 passed the 20 million threshold (20.2 million) for the first time since 1992. Asylum applications were up 78 percent (993,600) over the same period in 2014. And the numbers of internally displaced people jumped by around 2 million to an estimated 34 million.

Indications from the first half of the year suggest 2015 is on track to see worldwide forced displacement exceeding 60 million for the first time. In a global context, that means that one person in every 122 has been forced to flee their home. "Forced displacement is now profoundly affecting our times. It touches the lives of millions of our fellow human beings – both those forced to flee and those who provide them with shelter and protection," said High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres.

Turkey says Russia should not violate its airspace to avoid repeat plane shoot down

Hurriyet Daily News, 16.12.2015



Turkey has made clear that Russian military airplanes should stop violating Turkey's airspace if they wish to ensure Turkish forces will not shoot down any more Russian airplanes.

“If the Russian Federation also guarantees that there will not be any airspace violations, a similar incident will not happen again,” Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Bilgiç told while commenting on remarks by Russian Deputy FM Meshkov. Meshkov said Turkey should guarantee a similar incident will not happen in future and added Turkey should compensate Russia for shooting down a military plane.

Bilgiç ruled out compensation to Russia as well as the other two conditions set by Moscow, saying, “The Russian airplane was shot down because it violated our airspace. Meeting of the Russian side's demands is not possible.”

Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrey Karlov recently set an apology from the Turkish side for the downing of the Russian jet leading to the deaths of two Russian soldiers as the first condition, while he said they expected the people responsible for this act to be found and held accountable. The third condition was for Turkey to pay compensation for the damage of the incident.

Turkish PM in Brussels ahead of EU summit

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.12.2015



Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu held meetings with the leaders of Germany and several other nations in Brussels before a full European Union summit to discuss the recent cooperation deal struck between Turkey and the European Union.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told reporters in Brussels that all leaders have “strongly supported” Turkish government’s initiatives on the migrant issue. He also praised German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her strong leadership on the issue and taking the initiatives on relations between Turkey and the Europe.

The meeting, held at the Austrian Embassy in Brussels before a broader EU summit, was attended by nearly a dozen European leaders, including Merkel, who is counting on Ankara to stem the flow of hundreds thousands of Syrians from Turkey into Greece and onward to Germany and other EU countries.

It took place as a report from the government of Luxembourg, in its capacity as president of EU ministerial councils, said there was little evidence that Turkey had managed to reduce departures of migrants for Greek islands in the two weeks since it signed an “action plan” with the EU to do so.

Despite that, the deputy head of the European Commission, First Vice President Frans Timmermans, who has led EU executive’s negotiations with Turkey and attended the “mini-summit,” expressed hope that the deal struck on Nov. 29 would work.

“For us it is important to continue work with Turkey on the implementation of the action plan,” Timmermans said. “I’m strongly encouraged to do that because of the positive and proactive attitude of Prime Minister Davutoglu.”

Another official who attended the meeting with Davutoğlu said the leaders agreed tentatively that the Netherlands, which takes over the EU presidency from Luxembourg next month, would invite all 28 EU member states to a meeting next year to discuss the resettlement plan, with the aim of discussing it at the bloc’s next regular summit in mid-February.

But before that happens, the official said, Turkey must show that it is cracking down on illegal migration through its territory. “All agreed that is a common task to handle the refugee crisis and reduce illegal migration,” the official said. Germany, by far the top destination for asylum seekers in Europe, has been the driving force behind the voluntary resettlement idea, saying it would help Turkey, as well as EU member states to have more control over who gets to Europe.

The idea is linked to a wider deal with Turkey under which Ankara would prevent migrants leaving for Greece in return for 3 billion euros from the bloc, accelerated visa-free travel for Turks to the EU and reviving long stalled membership talks.

In addition to Merkel and Davutoğlu, the meeting was attended by nine other EU leaders, as well as Timmermans, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Parliament President Martin Schulz.

The report by the Luxembourg government, in its current capacity as president of EU ministerial councils, said about 4,000 people a day had arrived from Turkey since the accord on Nov. 29, a “slight reduction” from the 5,000-6,000 seen earlier in that month. But this was not necessarily due to Turkish action.

“This decrease may ... also be attributed to other factors,” said the report, seen by Reuters and sent to EU leaders. EU border agency Frontex has said arrivals in Greece in all of November were 108,000, roughly half the figure for October, largely because weather conditions had deteriorated.

Ankara wants to open more chapters with EU

Hurriyet Daily News, 09.12.2015



Turkey aims to open more chapters in its accession process to the European Union and finalize the process as soon as possible, Turkish PM Davutoğlu has said a day after the EU decided to open its first chapter in more than two years.

“Our aim is to open more chapters, including the 23rd and 24th chapters that hold great importance, in the coming months; close the opened chapters with the developments to be reached on the Cyprus issue, and thus complete Turkey-EU integration and the accession process,” Davutoğlu said in the Bulgarian capital Sofia during a press conference with Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov.

The opening of Chapter 17, one of 35 in the EU’s membership talks, marks not just the first formal discussions since 2013 but what many in Brussels see as a fresh start for EU-Turkey ties after years of uneasy relations, according to Turkish and European officials.

The bloc and Ankara accelerated the accession process after signing a deal to stem the flow of refugees from Turkey to the EU with an agreement late November, with Davutoğlu saying relations between the two parties have progressed “a great deal” since the summit in Brussels. “Following the last EU-Turkey summit, relations with the EU have accelerated a great deal. A new chapter has been opened after nearly four years,” Davutoğlu said.

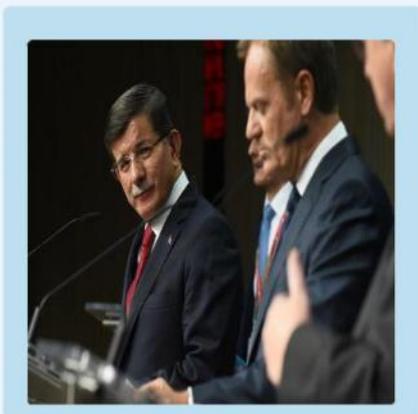
Davutoğlu said that EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker had sent him a letter, where Juncker noted the will to not only open the 17th chapter, which covers the EU's economic and monetary policies, but other chapters as well.

“The new momentum that the Turkey-EU relations have gained provides us a new environment,” said Davutoğlu. “Together we will make this climate worthy.” Davutoğlu also thanked the states that have been involved in and contributed to the new momentum.

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Şimşek, in Brussels for the opening of a new accession chapter with the EU, said he expected quick progress on bringing Ankara in line with the EU's economic and monetary policy, in regards to the newly opened chapter. “Turkey does not have major shortcomings regarding this chapter,” Şimşek, who is also in charge of the economy in the new Turkish government, told a news conference, as quoted by Reuters.

Turkey, eight EU countries to meet to discuss Syrian refugees

Hurriyet Daily News, 16.12.2015



Turkey and eight EU countries as well as the EU Commission will come together to discuss the Syrian refugee issue at a meeting in Brussels, where Ankara hopes to learn the number of refugees these countries will receive in the coming year.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and leaders from Germany, Austria, Sweden, Greece, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium and Finland will come together at the Austrian Embassy with the participation of EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Under the leadership of German Chancellor Merkel, this group of countries is considered like-minded because of their similar positions vis-a-vis the refugee issue.

EU countries will also determine the number of refugees they would accept from Turkey legally, although the discussion within the organization has not yet produced a common position over a compulsory quota.

The EU Commission has been trying to encourage EU countries to accept a substantial number of refugees in order to stop the illegal flow of migrants towards the European continent. In addition to the 28 bloc countries, the commission also requested the support of four non-EU Schengen countries, namely Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Lichtenstein, for this plan.

The acceptance process of these refugees will be held upon the recommendations of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and is expected to begin in the first six months of 2016. To this end, a detailed plan will be established to determine the pace of refugee acceptance by EU countries.

The plan can be suspended in the case of no substantial decrease in the number of refugees reaching EU countries through illegal ways. How will the 3 billion euros be used? A deal reached earlier between Turkey and the EU suggested the latter would provide 3 billion euros to the Turkish government in a bid to share the burden of around 2.2 million Syrian refugees sheltered in the former's territories.

In an interview with the Anadolu Agency, Turkish EU Minister Volkan Bozkır addressed the perception that the financial assistance to be provided by the EU will be spent on building new camps to keep all Syrians in Turkey. "There should not be such a perception. This is not true," he said. "The 3 billion euros is for one year and will be used only for Syrians."

We want to control where this money will be used. Talks are ongoing about it. The EU, on the other hand, is suggesting the establishment of a commission to decide together. But what we say is that they are our guests and therefore it's us who should take decisions about them. We have a plan on how to use this money and we'll soon disclose this," he said.

Turkish PM discusses reorganization of Turkish troops in Iraq with Biden

Hurriyet Daily News, 09.12.2015



U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has welcomed the partial withdrawal of Turkish troops from a camp in northern Iraq and urged Turkey to continue trying to cooperate with Baghdad during a phone call with Turkish PM Davutoğlu.

In a call with Davutoglu, Biden said the removal of some of the Turkish troops from the Bashiqa Camp near Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-held city of Mosul was "an important step to de-escalate recent tensions," the White House said in a statement. Biden reiterated that Iraq's government must consent to any foreign military presence there.

A number of Turkish troops were transferred to a region under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in a convoy that included tanks from the Bashiqa Camp near Mosul, Turkish sources told the Hürriyet Daily News. "The vice president encouraged the Turkish government to continue its dialogue with Baghdad on additional measures to improve relations between Turkey and Iraq," the White House statement said.

Meanwhile, the state-run Anadolu Agency cited prime ministry sources as saying the request for the call had come from the United States, adding that the two also discussed the cooperation in the fight against ISIL. Davutoğlu and Biden have also agreed to hold talks once again according to developments in the coming days, Anadolu Agency reported.

This call is the second conversation between Davutoğlu and Biden. The two talked over the phone Dec. 10 about efforts by the U.S. and Turkey to combat ISIL and the importance of defusing recent tensions between Turkey and Iraq in a manner that respects Iraqi sovereignty and fully coordinates efforts against ISIL with the coalition.

Turkish Foreign Ministry: No Islamic military force yet

Hurriyet Daily News, 16.12.2015



A 34-state Saudi-led Islamic alliance does not aim to establish a military force, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Bilgiç said. “Establishing a military force is beside the point yet,” he said speaking at a press conference. Bilgiç stated the alliance aimed for coordination in terms of military, intelligence and ideological issues in the fight against terrorism.

He underlined efforts should be coordinated in order to prevent Islam being mentioned with terror. “It’s important countries that struggle against terror give a common voice. We think this meeting is an important step taken towards the right way,” he added.

Bilgiç said the alliance should be considered as “cooperation against circles that try to associate terror with Islam.” Turkey is ready to lend support to efforts against terror, he noted. Turkey joined the 34-state Islamic military alliance which consists solely of Sunni states to fight terrorism amid a continuing war on jihadists in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that Turkey would lend support to all initiatives against terror, noting that its participation in the military alliance against terrorism was a reflection of such resolve, reiterating his government’s resolve in fighting against global terror.

“The countries here mentioned have decided on the formation of a military alliance led by Saudi Arabia to fight terrorism, with a joint operations center based in Riyadh to coordinate and support military operations,” the statement said, according to Saudi Arabia’s official news agency SPA. The Saudi-led alliance does not include the kingdom’s Shiite regional rival Iran, or Syria and Iraq. States from the Middle East, Africa and Asia will participate in the coalition.

Erdoğan: ‘Pilot’s mistake’ mustn’t hurt Russia-Turkey ties

Hurriyet Daily News, 14.12.2015



Relations between Ankara and Moscow must not be affected by a “mistake of a pilot,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said, in another bid to smooth tensions following the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkish jets.

“We wouldn’t have wanted to come across such a [situation], but looking from another perspective a mistake has been made in our sovereign area. Who made this mistake? Not the manager, of course. It is the pilots who were negligent and did not hear the warnings,” Erdoğan told reporters aboard the presidential plane returning to Turkey from the Turkmenistan capital Ashgabat.

He was referring to the two pilots inside a Russian Su-24 warplane that was shot down by Turkish F-16 fighter jets after violating Turkish airspace along the border with Syria. Turkey claims that it warned the warplane five times in 10 minutes and the identity of the aircraft was not visible, but Moscow denies such allegations and says its aircraft remained inside Syrian airspace.

Russia has been conducting airstrikes in Syria since Sept. 30 in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. A U.S.-led coalition made up of more than 60 states to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), another party in the already mixed geography, says Russia has been targeting anti-Assad opposition groups.

Stating that Turkish pilots are obliged to take action within the rules of engagement in such situations, Erdoğan said a “mistake” on the Russian side such not lead to such negative consequences on bilateral relations.

“An incident that occurred due to the mistake of a pilot, who did not listen to the warnings, should not affect the relations of two nations, particularly not strategic relations. The effect of the incident on bilateral relations really saddens us,” he added.

Since the downing of the jet, Russia has imposed a raft of economic sanctions on Turkey, particularly on agricultural products imported from Turkey. Erdoğan said he held talks with the heads of states of countries that are neighbors to or have close ties with Russia in the region, stating that those states were also trying to help find a solution to the crisis.

The Turkish president was in Turkmenistan to attend an international conference attended by a number of regional leaders with close ties to both Moscow and Ankara. Stating that he held bilateral meetings with Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili, Iranian First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Erdoğan said they had all asked what could be done to solve the crisis.

“We are not in favor of tension. We want to continue our strategic partnership and relations with Russia in the same way as we have up to now. We have worked together successfully for the past 10 to 11 years. We want to continue this,” he stated. In response to a question about whether any new message had come from Russia that had not been conveyed to the media, Erdoğan said “we are waiting, let’s wait and see.”

Strong signals for removal of Greek Cyprus’ veto on EU chapters, Turkey says

Hurriyet Daily News, 03.12.2015



Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has said there were “strong signals” that Greek Cyprus would remove its veto on five negotiation chapters Ankara has demanded the opening of in a bid to accelerate Turkey’s EU accession process.

“There is a new era and a window of opportunity [between Turkey and the EU]. I hope everyone will capitalize of this,” Davutoğlu told reporters following the meeting of the Reform Action Group. The action group is composed of foreign, EU, interior, justice minister and a deputy prime minister who are tasked with coordinating governmental acts to harmonize Turkish *acquis* with that of the EU.

A joint statement by Turkey and the EU underlined the nearly suspended negotiation process would be re-energized with the opening of a number of chapters. A letter sent by EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker named these chapters, with messages that the commission would conduct preparatory work for the opening of these chapters in early 2016. All of these five chapters are under the blockade of the Greek Cyprus.

Davutoğlu admitted the blockade on these chapters but stressed there were strong signals the veto would be removed. “We will hopefully open Chapter 17. This will be the second chapter opened in the last five years. At this pace, we can only conclude the accession process in the next century,” he said. “But we are working as if we will open all chapters tomorrow and we will close all opened chapters in a short span of time,” he stressed.

Another important issue Davutoğlu mentioned was the government’s work to accomplish the visa liberalization process in late 2016. “We will introduce all required draft laws to parliament in February [2016] in a package under the title ‘visa liberalization package.’ We therefore call on the opposition to lend support to our task to complete the entire legislative work by March [2016] so that all Turks can enjoy visa-free travel to Europe in late 2016,” he said.

Turkish official: Turkey, Israel in talks, may reach deal soon

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.12.2015



A Turkish government official has confirmed Israeli and Turkish officials held talks in Switzerland over the broken ties and may reach a deal. “We have not reached an agreement yet,” official said the two countries had reached a preliminary deal. “But [talks] may result soon,” the official said.

Talks with Israel have been ongoing, Turkish Prime Ministry officials told, adding that talks were continuing in a positive manner, but no consensus had been reached. Israel and Turkey have reached a preliminary agreement to normalize relations, including the return of ambassadors to both countries, Reuters quoted an Israeli official.

A Turkish Foreign Ministry official told Hürriyet Daily News that the two countries have come to an understanding. The official said Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu represented Turkey at the talks in Switzerland.

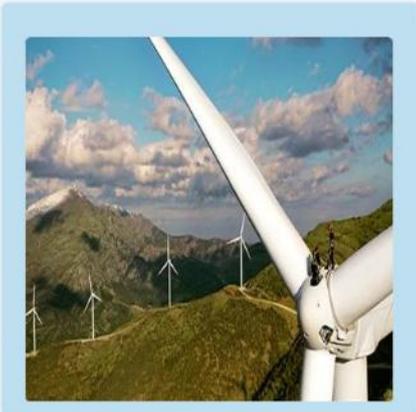
A preliminary deal was reached during a recent meeting in Switzerland between the incoming head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, Yossi Cohen, Israeli envoy Joseph Ciechanover and Sinirlioğlu, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declined comment and there was no immediate comment from the Turkish Foreign Ministry. According to the report, under the preliminary agreement, Israel will establish a compensation fund for the Mavi Marmara incident during which Israeli marines killed 10 Turks aboard an aid ship that tried to break Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip in 2010. After the fund is established, Turkey will drop all claims against Israel.

The Israel-Turkey alliance ties deteriorated greatly after the incident. Efforts to reconcile the countries, including in a 2013 phone call between Erdoğan and Netanyahu that was brokered by U.S. President Barack Obama, have yet to yield a final deal restoring full diplomatic ties.

Zorlu shares surge on hopes Turkey normalizing Israel ties

Reuters, 18.12.2015



Shares in Turkey's Zorlu Energy, which is involved in energy projects in Israel, surged as much as 10 percent after an Israeli official said a preliminary deal had been reached with Turkey to normalize relations.

The announcement, which comes at a critical time for both countries, could have widespread implications, particularly when it comes to energy. Turkish officials confirmed that talks had taken place but denied any agreement had been finalized, adding efforts to normalize relations were continuing. In the early morning, Zorlu Energy shares were 10.32 percent higher at 1.39 liras.

Zorlu Energy has a 25 percent stake in Dorad Energy, which owns an 840 megawatt (MW) power plant in Israel built with an investment of \$1.2 billion that came online in May 2014. "The company's shares are on the rise on expectations that ties between the two countries will be restored," Oyak Securities analyst Alper Erginol said.

"The company's name was also among those interested in the potential construction of a natural gas pipeline between the two countries," Erginol added. Reuters reported in October 2013 that Zorlu Energy was in talks with Israeli firms over the potential for a pipeline to carry Israeli gas to Turkey, but a political rift was holding up the process.

Separately, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed a deal giving long-awaited approval for the development of the Leviathan natural gas field off Israel's coast. Israel has also recently held discussions with Greek Cyprus and Greece on developing regional ties, including on energy, with their most recent trilateral talks.

US brings ambitious Syria peace plan to UN

AFP, 18.12.2015



Senior international envoys gather in New York to seek U.N. backing for an ambitious U.S. and Russian plan to bring about a negotiated end to Syria's civil war. Secretary of State Kerry traveled to Moscow to assure President al-Assad's key ally that Washington is not seeking "regime change" in Syria.

And the top U.S. diplomat met Saudi FM al-Jubeir to reassure Assad's most implacable foe that the US is not going soft on the Syrian strongman. Kerry's high-stakes diplomatic balancing act aims to keep both Moscow and Riyadh on board as the 17-nation ISSG struggles to cobble together peace talks.

To address questions regarding the Syrian crisis, the International Syrian Support Group will meet at U.S. invitation morning at a New York hotel to try to narrow their disagreements. Diplomats will then travel the short distance to the United Nations to seek, and likely obtain, approval of the UN Security Council for the process.

"So the big result for the afternoon session is obviously this resolution, and the secretary remains confident that we can get there," U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby said. On the eve of the U.N. talks, Assad warned in an interview with Dutch television that misguided efforts to bring about regime change would make the conflict "drag on" and that only backers Russia and Iran - not the West - were ready to resolve his country's nearly five-year conflict.

Washington and U.N. Syrian envoy Staffan de Mistura want Assad's regime and the armed groups ranged against him to send delegates to peace talks some time on or after January 1. If a ceasefire can be reached in Syria's four-and-a-half-year-old civil war, then Syrian troops, Russia and a U.S.-led coalition can focus their fire on the hardline jihadist the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Iran's foreign minister said that there "seems to be no agreement" on two key issues just hours before the latest round of Syria talks in New York. Mohammad Javad Zarif told The Associated Press that his country has seen "no lists we can agree upon" of Syrian opposition groups that should be included in peace negotiations, or of Syrian groups that should be considered terrorist organizations instead.

"Card-carrying members of al-Qaida do not satisfy the conditions that we set for members of the opposition," Zarif told reporters, ruling out any affiliates of the extremist group. "The opposition should be serious, and it should be inclusive." Zarif also said "we still don't know" if there will be any concrete progress in the talks that are aimed at bringing an end to Syria's conflict.



Under a deal struck last month in Vienna, government and rebel negotiators would have six months to form a transitional government and 18 months to organize national elections. Will Assad and his foreign backers Russia and Iran agree to sit down with rebel groups they routinely denounce as “terrorists?”

And, will the rebels and their foreign backers countenance talks with a regime that has slaughtered thousands of its own citizens with barrel bombs and poison gas? Kirby said Jordan would give an update on its role in the process - drawing up a list of which “terrorist” groups should be blacklisted from talks.

International envoys - including in particular Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov - want to hear from Saudi Arabia how its efforts to mediate a rebel coalition are progressing. Even if a ceasefire is possible, who would monitor it? And who would lead the fight against ISIL and others, such as al-Qaeda’s al-Nusra Front, left outside the peace process?

U.S. diplomats concede that the plan is ambitious and that success is not certain, but they hope that Russia and Saudi Arabia will cajole their rival Syrian allies to the table. President Vladimir Putin, they reason, will not want to see the Russian forces he sent to Syria to shore up Assad’s beleaguered regime bogged down in an indefinite conflict.

Meanwhile, the threat of ISIL attacks and waves of Syrian war refugees spilling out from Syria into the Middle East and Europe has concentrated minds in other foreign capitals. But the United States appears to have already made its own compromises in the search for peace. Where once it shunned Russia and imposed sanctions on its economy to punish Putin for his aggression against Ukraine, now Kerry publicly thanks Moscow for its “constructive” role in Syria.

And - while the State Department insists there is no change in its policy that Assad has lost all legitimacy to lead Syria - Washington has noticeably toned down calls for him to step down. “We emphasized today that the United States and its partners are not seeking regime change, as it is known, in Syria,” Kerry said at the Kremlin after talks with Putin. “What we have said is that we don’t believe that Assad himself has the ability to lead the future Syria,” he said.

It was only after talks with Kerry that Russia - which had previously been cautious about convening another meeting of the Syrian Support Group - agreed to take part. Assad, in his interview with Dutch television, turned sarcastic when asked whether he was comforted that the West’s stances on his departure were seemingly softening. “I was packing my luggage, I had to leave, but now I can stay,” he said sardonically. More than 250,000 people have died since Syria’s conflict erupted in March 2011, and millions more have fled their homes.

UN Security Council puts sanctions focus on ISIL

Reuters, 18.12.2015



The U.N. Security Council warned that some countries are failing to implement long-standing sanctions against the ISIL, as an unprecedented meeting of finance ministers put the global focus on cutting off the militant group's funds.

The 15-member council unanimously adopted a U.S. and Russian-drafted resolution that ties together existing measures targeting ISIL's finances and offers guidance on implementation in a bid to push more countries to act. It builds on a Security Council action in February that banned trade in antiquities from Syria.

And threatened sanctions on anyone buying oil from ISIL and al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front militants and urged states to stop kidnap ransom payments. "This resolution is a critical step, but the real test will be determined by actions we each take after adoption," U.S. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew told the council after the vote. "We need meaningful implementation, coordination and enforcement from each country represented here, and many others."

The resolution "expresses concern about the lack of implementation" of previous resolutions targeting al Qaeda and ISIL, including an "insufficient level of reporting" by states on measures they have taken to implement U.N. sanctions. The council renamed its al Qaeda sanctions regime the "ISIL and al Qaeda Sanctions Committee" and called on states to report within 120 days on their implementation of sanctions.

"Unfortunately the obligations ... are not being implemented by all and everywhere," Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told the council, adding that "special responsibility for suppressing the channels for financing of ISIL unavoidably rests with states neighboring on Iraq and Syria."

The council also specifically asked states to report on "interdictions in their territory of any oil, oil products, modular refineries, and related material being transferred to or from (ISIL or Nusra Front)." Lew, chair of the meeting because the United States is the council president for December, said ISIL had reaped an estimated \$500 million from black-market oil sales and "millions more from the people it brutalizes and extorts."

Russia's Churkin said ISIL also made \$250 million a year from the sale of phosphates, \$200 million from barley and rye and \$100 million from cement. He said ISIL leaders allocated \$30 million a month to buy weapons and ammunition, using shell companies in Eastern Europe. The adoption of the U.N. resolution was the result of a planned 18-month review of the al Qaeda sanctions regime. There are currently 243 individuals and 74 entities on the ISIL and al Qaeda sanctions list. They are subject to an arms embargo and a global asset freeze and travel ban.

French Finance Minister Michel Sapin said the new council resolution would “not be a deterrent if it does not lead to the U.N. Security Council adding names to the list.” The resolution makes clear that states are required to stop their citizens from funding or providing services to “terrorist organizations or individual terrorists for any purpose, including but not limited to recruitment, training, or travel, even in the absence of a link to a specific terrorist act.” United Nations experts have said about 22,000 foreign fighters from some 100 countries are linked to al Qaeda and ISIL.

Russia challenges Turkey over Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.12.2015



Russian President Putin has continued to lay down the gauntlet to Ankara over Syria, asking whether Turkish jets have been able to fly over Syrian territory since Russia increased its military presence there.

“Do they think we would run away now? Russia is not that kind of country,” AFP quoted Putin as saying, speaking of Moscow’s increased military presence in Syria. “Turkey was flying there all the time before, breaching Syrian airspace. Well, let’s see how they are flying there now,” he added. Sputnik cited Putin as mentioning Russia’s deployment of a sophisticated S-400 air defense system in Syria.

“We have increased our presence in Syria, have increased the number of combat aircraft deployed there. There was no Russian air defense system there – now there’s the S-400,” Sputnik him as saying. S-400 air defense systems are known for their large tubular launchers and associated radar and command vehicles.

Ties between Russia and the NATO member have hit rock bottom since the Nov. 24 incident, which led to deaths of two Russian military officers. Turkey has said the Russian jet strayed into its airspace and ignored repeated warnings, but Moscow insists it never left Syrian territory.

Putin ruled out any reconciliation with Turkish leaders, accusing Ankara of shooting down a Russian warplane to impress the United States. In comments littered with crude language, Putin dismissed the possibility that the downing of the warplane over the Turkey-Syria border last month was an accident, calling it a “hostile act.”

“We find it difficult if not impossible to come to an agreement with the current leadership of Turkey,” the Kremlin strongman said at his annual news conference. “On the state level, I don’t see any prospects of improving relations with the Turkish leadership,” he said of Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Putin said he did not rule out that Ankara was acting with tacit approval from Washington, possibly so that the United States would look the other way to let Turkey “go onto Iraqi territory and occupy part of it.” “I don’t know if there was such a trade-off, maybe there was,” Putin said.

“If somebody in the Turkish leadership decided to lick the Americans in one place... I don’t know, if they did the right thing,” he added. Meanwhile, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu was reported as saying by the RBK news agency that Russian operations in Syria would continue “until Syrian forces reach the Euphrates River.”

Ruling out the deployment of any Russian ground troops to the area, Shoigu said it was Syrian regime forces that needed to lay their boots on the border between Syrian and Iraq. Turkey has announced the western part of the Euphrates as a “red line” and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that the Turkish army hit the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in northern Syria twice for violating the red line.

EU leaders set to extend Russia sanctions at summit

AFP, 15.12.2015



EU leaders will debate sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine conflict at a summit this week and are expected to extend them for six months, foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said.

Italy has called for a discussion at the two-day summit after blocking the sanctions rollover from taking place as planned at a meeting of ambassadors from the 28 European Union nations in Brussels. The EU imposed broad economic sanctions targeting Russia’s banking, oil and defence sectors after the July 2014 shooting down of a Malaysia Airlines jet, widely blamed on pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine.

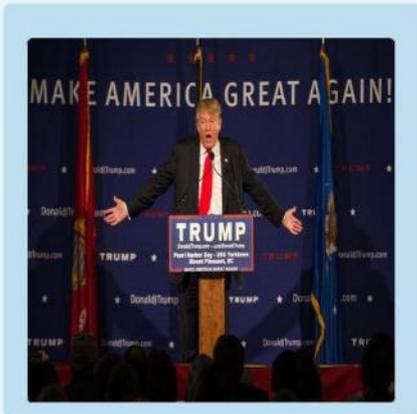
Speaking after a meeting of EU foreign ministers, Mogherini said there was agreement that February’s Minsk peace accord was “still far from having a full implementation” -- the benchmark set by EU leaders for sanctions to be lifted.

“Politically let me say the general assessment today was clearly going in the direction of a rollover of sanctions,” Mogherini added. “There is a European Council (EU summit) so my factual assessment is that most probably it will be on that agenda.”

Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni said he did “not foresee a long discussion” on sanctions at the summit. Italy, one of Russia’s principal trading partners in Europe, said it wants to keep communication channels with Moscow open despite the Ukrainian crisis. There have long been divisions in the EU over the economic sanctions, which have resurfaced in recent months as Brussels and Washington try to get Russia on board to end the Syrian war. It has also imposed travel bans and asset freezes on Russian and Ukrainian individuals held responsible for backing the pro-Moscow rebels, as well as sanctions targeting those involved in Moscow’s annexation of Crimea.

Trump defends call for banning Muslims from United States

The AP, 16.12.2015



Republican front-runner Donald Trump defended his provocative call for banning Muslims from the United States night's presidential debate as the candidates pushed their own plans for fighting ISIL militants.

The debate was dominated by national security, reflecting the reshaping of the 2016 presidential contest by the recent attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California. Hours before the debate began, officials in Los Angeles closed all schools after an emailed threat that was later deemed a hoax. Trump insisted his proposal, which was roundly condemned by his rivals, wasn't an attempt to discriminate.

"We are not talking about isolation, we're talking about security," he said. "We are not talking about religion, we are talking about security." Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush dismissed Trump's proposal as unserious, saying, "Donald is great at the one-liners, but he's a chaos candidate and he'd be a chaos president." But Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio said they understood why Trump had raised the idea and avoided directly criticizing the front-runner.

Instead, the two senators debated at length their differences over government surveillance programs. Rubio has accused Cruz of weakening the government's ability to track terrorists because he voted in favor of legislation to eliminate the National Security Agency's bulk phone-records collection program and replace it with a more restrictive effort to keep the records in phone companies' hands.

Cruz insisted the new law gives the government more access to cellphones and other technology that terrorists are more likely to use - a contention Rubio disputed. "There is nothing we are allowed to do under this bill that we were not allowed to do before," Rubio said.

Beginning after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, the NSA secretly collected the daily calling records - but not contents of conversations - for most Americans, including people never suspected of any crime. A new law, called the USA Freedom Act, passed in June with broad, bipartisan support. It ordered the NSA to end bulk collection after a six-month transition that expired last week. Cruz and Rubio have been sparring from afar over national security for weeks. The Texas senator is on the rise, particularly in Iowa's leadoff caucuses, where he's challenging Trump's months-long lead.



“Donald is great at the one-liners, but he’s a chaos candidate and he’d be a chaos president,” former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush said as the fifth Republican presidential debate opened in Las Vegas. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio said of Trump’s proposal, “It isn’t going to happen.”

Trump insisted he wasn’t seeking to discriminate against Muslims. “We are not talking about isolation, we’re talking about security,” he said. “We are not talking about religion, we are talking about security.”

Tuesday’s debate was the first for Republicans since the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, that increased concerns about terrorism in the United States. Hours before the debate was to begin, officials in Los Angeles closed all schools after an emailed threat that was later deemed a hoax.

Security fears have reshaped the presidential race, though outsiders like Trump continue to dominate the Republican contest. The billionaire is facing a new challenge from Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who has been rising in polls, particularly in Iowa, which holds its leadoff caucuses on Feb. 1.

Cruz, along with Rubio, said he understood why Trump had made his proposal for banning Muslims, and he avoided directly criticizing the front-runner. Cruz said he believes a more narrowly focused approach would more effectively target Islamic militants. “It’s not a war on a faith,” he said.



Announcements & Reports

► *Can A Global Climate Risk Pool Help The Most Vulnerable Countries?*

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2015/11/macprudential-supervision-from-theory-to-policy/>

► *Public Hearing on the EU's Future Trade and Investment Strategy*

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2015/11/public-hearing-on-the-eus-future-trade-and-investment-strategy/>

► *Southeast Asia From Scott Circle: Southeast Asian Nations Watch Paris For Deal To Cut Greenhouse Gases*

Source : CSIS

Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/southeast-asia-scott-circle-southeast-asian-nations-watch-paris-deal-cut-greenhouse-gase>

Upcoming Events

► *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

Date : 23 December 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 December 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 December 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 December 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 December 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 : 28 December 2015
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

► *The Future of the Welfare State*

Date : 29 December 2015
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>