

„Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues“

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About CRP News & Background

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How to tackle the EU's economic setback?

Is austerity a viable solution?

The eurozone has been in recession for the sixth quarter in a row, which is the longest declining period in the history of the EU. Nine out of the 17 Eurozone-states are currently going through recession with an overall average of -0.2% economic output in the eurozone as a whole in the first quarter of this year. France is the newest member in the club of declining eurozone-countries with a rising unemployment-level and a budget deficit overstepping the bloc's 3% limit. The widespread implementation of austerity measures across Europe do not seem to live up to expectations. On the contrary, shrinking economies go hand in hand with decreasing economic output and higher debt ratios.



Angela Merkel at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Photo: Remy Steinegger [swiss-image.ch]

The eurozone crisis, which is an economic phenomenon combining a sovereign debt crisis, a banking crisis and a growth and competitiveness crisis, seems to last longer than experts would have predicted before. Despite huge bailout packages and

extensive spending cuts, the financial crisis is still an actuality. Although Germany, EU's powerhouse is currently showing a slight growth of 0.1% in the first quarter of this year, its most important partner, France has significant difficulties concerning its economy. The European Commission urges France to reduce public spending, to reform its generous pension system, to cut labour costs and to bring back its budget deficit under the 3% ceiling. German Chancellor, Angela Merkel is deeply concerned about the neighbour's alarming situation, which in her opinion is threatening the efforts to strengthen the eurozone economy. Francois Hollande, however refuses to obey to the instructions of the EU institutions and executives. In his view, the European Commission does not have the right to dictate, it can only require the financial stability of a country, not the exact provisions taken by the government. Nevertheless the Commission offers France to raise the retirement age in the frame of the reform of the pension system. Notwithstanding the fact that there is some significant tension between the two countries, Merkel and Hollande reaffirm their commitment to strong interstate relations and effective cooperation. In the light of this attitude they agreed on the need of a full-time president of the Euro group, the eurozone's finance ministers' meeting. Such a position would enable to oversee the economic issues of the eurozone and to be able to intervene more

effectively and more successfully. Hollande also suggested on a meeting with Merkel to bestow more powers upon the prospective president in order to deal with financial matters more effectively as well as to establish an own budget and tax system within the eurozone. While the German Chancellor is more focused on austerity, Hollande puts the priority on growth. Latter leader considers austerity measures as a harmful method, which is to blame for the region's unrelenting recession. To counteract one of France's biggest problems, youth-unemployment, his policy aims at encouraging new investments, which is also supported by the release of European funds worth €6 billion. Youth unemployment is a huge challenge in the European Union, standing at 23.5% in the union and at 24% across the eurozone. In Spain this number surpassed 56%.

According to Jose Manuel Barroso it's time to slow down the pace of consolidation in the EU, because of the good progress made so far. The emphasis should rather be put on structural reforms instead of stimulus measures. The measures implemented up to the present concentrated mainly on brutal spending cuts, which lead to social unrest and shrinking economies. Street protests evolve regularly as the one in May 2013, when demonstrators blocked the roads leading to the seat of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany. Public patience is reaching its limits as the prospect of growth in the EU seems more and more further in the future. Barroso also added that although he thinks the policy made so far by the EU was right, it's not a good solution to apply the same policy to



Photo: Till Westermeyer/Flickr

all EU countries. Megan Greene, chief economist of Maverick Intelligence goes along with Barroso regarding the need to change the focus of dealing with the financial crisis. In his opinion it was a mistake to follow the austerity-policy as the most important element of the crisis-handling mechanism. He suggests to rethink this standpoint and to try to deal with the problem from a completely different approach. He offers a possible policy, namely to get stimulus from the stronger countries and at the same time to put across less austerity in the weaker states. Several economists, US officials and the International Monetary Fund agree on urging the EU to lighten up austerity and modify the policy carried out up to now, which should switch to concentrating on growth. The European Central Bank showed willingness at a conference held in May 2013 to loosen its monetary policy further by cutting the eurozone interest rate by a quarter point. Another alarming sign of the failure of the policy driven so far is the fiasco concerning the bailout-programme applied on Greece. In this case the country slid into an even stronger depression as a result of farfetched

austerity measures. The difficulty of the weaker countries is that they fall into deeper recession due to the drastic adjusting proceedings. The European Union's strongest economy, Germany however refuses to finance other countries' reckless policies indefinitely from the money of German taxpayers. Berlin goes so far as to propose to make austerity plans and spending limits part of EU law. Angela Merkel adheres to the principle of cost-cutting as a tool without any other alternatives. Critics of this paradigm say that although seeing reason in austerity, which was necessary to treat the most urging problems of the crisis, it was done so widespread and so fast, that it crippled the whole region. Notwithstanding that the shift in the EU's policy has already begun, the exact path of future decisions remains still vague.



Photo: Johannes Jansson/norden.org

**“IT’S TIME TO SLOW DOWN THE PACE
OF CONSOLIDATION IN THE EU”**

Though immigration bill introduced “Attract people who will contribute and deter who will not”

“**The government** has a reality problem. This gracious speech was their [great] chance to answer (UKIP),” – said Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party in the Parliament after the Queen's annual opening speech. Her Majesty introduced 20 new bills planned to be implemented next year. She set out the Government's prior aim as “cutting the deficit and strengthening Britain's economy” by introducing various social and economic measures designed to boost Britain's stagnating economy.

The Business Bill, assisting companies and charities by reducing National Insurance expenses; the High Speed 2 plan, promoting the construction of a high-speed rail link between London, Birmingham and the north of England and the Deregulation Bill, to lift the crippling burden of bureaucracy on business enjoyed partial success; while the restrictions imposed on immigrants received a chilly welcome.

The new Immigration Law will facilitate deporting foreign criminals; it will also punish businesses who take advantage of illegal workforce as well as landlords who let/sell their properties to people staying unlawfully in Britain.

Furthermore, temporary migrants will also have to make financial contributions to the health care system, if they want to receive



Queen Elizabeth's annual speech to mark the formal opening of parliament. Photo: VOA

full NHS treatment. Does it mean that people who are desperately in need will not be provided with proper cure unless they show a valid passport or any other justificatory document? Since, the bill is still not scrutinised, its draft version raises further, even more pivotal questions too.

The greatest critics of the new proposal resent the fact that the government seemingly wants to make employers and businessmen responsible for monitoring the immigration system, instead of inefficient UK Border Agency officials. Moreover, the exact date when the bill is going to be put into action is also surrounded by uncertainties. Since the EU plans to lift migration restrictions next year on Romanians and Bulgarians, the PM has act fast if he wants to convince its possible voters about his ability to protect the country against a flood of immigrants.



Photo: Sergeant Adrian Harlen. <http://www.defenceimages.mod.uk>

The number of those who are campaigning for stricter migration laws has grown considerably, as it was manifested in last week's local election results, where the UKIP gained clear advantages at the expense of the Conservatives. The UKIP offers such prospects for migrants, which

used to be considered racist thoughts, still they are increasingly popular among British people, striving to defend their home land. David Cameron has to come up with a viable alternative, if he is intended to win next year's national elections without forming a coalition.

While bits of information about an inefficient migration policy were included in the Queen's speech, other pivotal issues such as the EU referendum were not mentioned at all. Critics say that Cameron was desperate to react upon the UKIP's immigration policy, but he neglected the Independence Party's other "wunder-waffe": which is its strong determination to quit the EU.

If David Cameron really aims at winning next year's national elections, he had better include more provisions designed to stimulate the economy and promote welfare in the Queen's speech. Mere reactionary policy, which means nothing more than bidding unsuccessfully against the UKIP will not result in a victorious election for the Conservatives.

“THE GOVERNMENT SEEMINGLY WANTS TO MAKE EMPLOYERS AND BUSINESSMEN RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM”

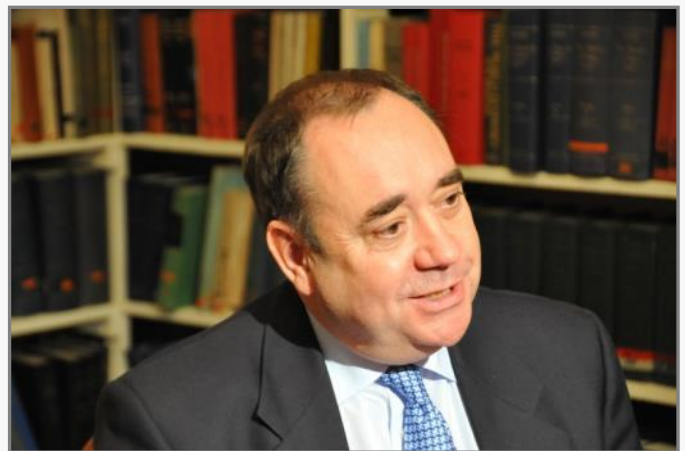
Not a yes-or-no question: WHY should Scotland be an independent country?

Studies, essays and all other kinds of scholarly papers are published every month arguing scientifically for or against breaking up the 300 years old union of Scotland with the rest of the United Kingdom as the proposed date of referendum is approaching.

Next year on 18 September Scottish people will make a choice about their future by simply answering a yes-or-no question: "Should Scotland be an independent country?" However, weighting the possible positive and negative consequences of establishing a sovereign Scottish state shows that the answer to this question is not obvious at all.

Many pro-independence politicians (mainly members of the Scottish National Party, SNP) have their own overwhelmingly economic and financial supporting evidence for the separation. Let's analyse them one by one:

Britain started extracting oil from sea resources in the 1970's, which still provides the country reliable fuel supply and steady income. 90% of maritime oil and gas fields belong solely to Scotland by simply judging the territories according to their geographical location, which causes considerable grievances to the economy



Alex Salmond. Photo: Saül Gordillo [ACN]

of the rest of the union. Though, critiques say that relying merely on "volatile and declining resource without diversification isn't credible" –said the former treasury minister under Tony Blair's government, Alistair Darling who has Scottish origins. Meanwhile, the First Minister, Alex Salmond a firm independence supporter believes that Scotland has fuel fields, which are long-lasting enough.

Further ambiguities are connected to transport and communication. Obviously, in a unified country such activities do not pose any obstacles. People are worried about roaming charges, extra travel expenses and tariffs. SNP members claimed that worrying about the first two is unreasonable, as they will be abolished in the interest of both Scotland and the rest of

the UK. However, tariffs will raise some highly-disputed questions.

Further issues are connected to the monetary union and the single currency. "Let's stop speculating and look at the evidence. Could a situation where an independent Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom share the pound and the Bank of England be made to work?" – asked the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne. Scots still do not have a definite solution to the problem, but they showed willingness to negotiate. Though, the issue with the greatest intricacy is connected to Scottish participation in international organizations and treaties, especially in the European Union. José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission (EC) has already replied to the Scottish question according to which if the region becomes independent, its government needs to re-submit its membership application. There are examples in Europe such as Switzerland or Norway which are tightly connected to the EU through separate treaties without technically being a member of the organization. So, it is not sure whether the (in theory) independent Scotland separate from the EU will suffer at all from serious economic consequences because of this very reason.



Photo: subberculture [Flickr]

Due to such controversies as the ones listed above the people of Scotland will make an extremely hard decision on the upcoming referendum. Their "YES" either could be a nod to unreasonable childish nationalism, which leads to economic decline or an agreement on being more prosperous. Of course such claims are extremes, but these are the possible prospects which are introduced in most of the papers in line with the ideological views of the one who is the author.

Long-time no seen riots in Stockholm

According to Swedish officials, the recent riots throughout Sweden could be the largest event of its kind in the century. Tensions rose in early May following a local incident, which resulted in a lethal shootout in Stockholm's Husby district. According to the police investigation, an elderly Portuguese man, wielding a machete threatened two police officers on patrol, and one of them shot the man.



Riots in Stockholm suburb of Husby

Local residents of Husby have already accused members of the police with racism and discrimination. The district is mostly inhabited by immigrants from various populations of different countries, but in one thing they share a common feature: they are all immigrants. Local police departments have always been suspicious about these accusations of racism, however it cannot be doubted that

tensions between the police officers and local residents are at a constantly high level.

According to Kjell Lindgren, Stockholm Police spokesman, his organization is investigating the case, however it is still highly doubted, that accusations in these amounts are true. They are investigating a specific member of the police department whom had been accused with racism.

All of Sweden has been shocked by the recently unfolding events, mainly because of the sudden amount of violence presented on the streets for days now. The "immigrant issue" and the problem of the country's welfare system, in the scope of the economic crisis, caused many problems in the recent years.

Places like Husby, which are inhabited mostly by immigrants (in the case of Husby it is 80%) are a home to many issues that are waiting to be tackled by the Swedish government. The most acute problem is the frightening amount of undereducated, unemployed people in deprived districts between the ages of 16 and 29. As a recent study showed, unemployment in the deprived districts, amongst the mentioned ages are around 30%, and while unemployment amongst immigrants are around 16%, native Swedes are in a much

better condition with their 6% rate of unemployment.

The country's situation is worsened by a rapidly rising number of asylum seekers, who are also mostly undereducated and are coming from countries stricken with war or general unrest, like Syria or Somalia. 15% of Sweden's total populace is foreign born, which is the highest amount amongst the Nordic countries.

The last 7 years of central-right government somewhat modified the welfare system, that was previously called miraculous all around the world. As a response to the emerging economic crisis, countries like Sweden also had to cut the expanses. With these events, immigrants recently arrived to the country had to face slightly different possibilities than those who came before them. According to OECD, while absolute poverty is still uncommon in Sweden, the growing rate of the gap between the wealthy and the deprived earned Sweden an illustrious place amongst the nations.

Despite the fact that the riots in Sweden are nowhere in comparison to the recent riots in London or Paris, their importance cannot be neglected.

According to police officers, the rioters are a very mixed group of people, ranging from 5 to 100, and including Swedes also amongst many immigrants. In addition to this motley crew, the targets of these riots are also very interesting. Mostly libraries, schools, police stations. Of course, rioters use pretty much everything they can get their hands on to cause damage to property, however, it is a strange way of behaviour to put a car to the torch, then wait until the fire-fighters and the police arrives, and pelt them with stones. This

aggressive behaviour towards institutes of different social services and authorities makes the Stockholm riots a little different from others. In fact, it is no longer contained in Stockholm, recent reports show that the riots have spread to Orebro and Sodertalje, where also the arriving authorities have been waited for and pelted with stones.



Katarina Church and the minaret of the Stockholm Mosque. Photo: Poxnar [Wikimedia Commons]

Furthermore, if we look at the composition of the rioters, and the way they choose their targets, we can evaluate that their problem is mainly with the social system itself. In addition to the rapidly spreading unrest and the lack of cooperation with authorities, minor riots have also been reported from districts that are referred "normal" according to Swedish officials. Unfortunately as it seems, local community leaders, despite the amount of work they put into it, fail to prevent the spreading of these riots previously unheard of by Swedish people.

As the events continue to ravage Sweden's daily life, it is yet to be decided, how the government will answer to these challenges, and whether their answer will be successful or not.

Prospects of the Arab-Israeli conflict: negotiations in sight

Talking about resuming Arab-Israeli negotiations is not far-fetched at all after recent claims of Binyamin Netanyahu and currently revealed intentions of the Arab League.

The Israeli PM stated that peace should be established between Israel and Palestine in order to avoid creating a single country where two nationalities are merged together. He made similar remarks when he met five US congressmen later on 1 May. "We're engaged right now in an effort that we appreciate, led by President Obama and the US Secretary of the State to restart the peace negotiations"- he said in The Jerusalem Post.

Nevertheless, Netanyahu is also convinced that the conflict between Palestine and Israel did not arise from territorial concerns, but Palestine's unwillingness to recognise Israel as a legitimate sovereign state. "You saw what happened when we left Gaza. We uprooted the last settler, and what did we get in return? Missiles." he added.

On the other side of the same coin Palestine and her allies also showed readiness to compromise despite their considerable fears. The Qatari Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on 29 April announced that the Arab League would



United States President Barack Obama talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as they walk across the tarmac at Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, in March 2013. Photo: Pete Souza [White House]

accept a two state solution with slight modifications of the pre-1967 borders, which practically means re-launching the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

John Kerry, the US Secretary of the State

also welcomed very warmly the proposal, since it means that if the two disagreeing countries establish a resolution, 22 member states of the Arab League would also come to peaceful terms with Israel. Furthermore, the document also offers a possible solution to the refugee issue based on UN Resolution 194.



Graffiti on the wall in Palestine. Photo: ISM Palestine

However, the opposing sides have a lot to do until peace will be established.

First of all, mutual suspicion must be eliminated to overcome the obstacles. On the one hand Israeli E-1 settlement hinders prospects of a unified Palestine while on the other hand constant intimidation of nationalist fundamentalist organizations put constantly Israel on alert.

Secondly, both Palestine and Israel should represent a unified firm standpoint throughout the negotiations, which is still not clarified due to inner conflicts. In Palestine two competing organizations, the Hamas and the Fatah have to reconcile primarily. Meanwhile, in Israel contradictory views on a possible referendum concerning the future of the Palestinian issue throws a shadow on peace negotiations.

Nonetheless, opposing sides are trying to do their bests in order to make Palestine and Israel sit together to the same negotiation table. An Israeli official claimed that Yitzhak Molcho – the chief negotiator of Israel on the behalf of the PM – makes frequent visits to Washington and there is further evidence for thorough coordination of work between Netanyahu's and Obama's office on the renewed peace initiative of the Arab League.

Thus, again considerable effort has been devoted to the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to get negotiation processes back on the right track. Even though, conflicting states are still defiant concerning several issues, at least it is sure now that both of them believe in a two state solution and they do not want to hinder possible sequels of peace negotiations.

Slow progress in Syria, prospects of Geneva 2

Despite several months of lamentable incidents such as blasts in the Turkish town of Reyhanlı or the onslaught in Qusayr surrounding the Syrian conflict, slight progress could be traced in negotiation processes. While Syrian opposition groups seem to be still disorganised and indecisive, international actors, both supporters of the regime (Russia and Iran) and backers of the rebels (US, UK, France, Turkey) gave the impression of being fully committed to make an end of the bloodsheds.

A number of leaders and prominent officials of countries engaged in the Syrian conflict entered into individual dialogues and came to a fruitful conclusion concerning how to make the opposition and the rebels sit together to the same negotiation table at Geneva 2 peace talks, proposed by the US.

Russia has proven to be an obstacle in previous peace talks, though the initiative of both Moscow and Washington to set up a temporary government with the help of significant international allies of opposing sides in Syria gave considerable hopes to those who are determined to resolve the conflict as soon as possible.

While John F. Kerry, US Secretary of the State and Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister announced on 7 May in Moscow that the two countries are about to launch a new diplomatic campaign in cooperation on the crisis; three days later in Sochi David Cameron also declared that he and the Russian President, Mr Putin



A Syrian rebel sniper in Khan al-Assal, Aleppo province. Photo: Patrick Wells [VOA]

could point out their common aims concerning Syria in spite of their several conflicts. The PM of the UK said to the Guardian that both of them are intended to "stop Syria from fragmenting, let the Syrian people choose who governs them, and prevent the growth of violent extremism."

Furthermore, in mid-May Erdogan, the Turkish President and Obama discussed the possibility of involving highly pro-regime Russia and even officials of the Assad government in Geneva 2 peace talks. "I do think that the prospect of talks in Geneva (...) about a serious political transition that all the parties can buy into may yield results,"- said Mr Obama in Today's Zaman.

Even though, the leaders of super powers and other international actors involved in Syria made significant attempts to enhance a viable resolution at Geneva 2, there are still seemingly insurmountable obstacles both in the international arena and within the internal affairs of Syria that may hinder the prospects of the proposed

peace negotiations.

Investigations on the usage of chemical weapons resulted in complete stalemate. On the one hand David Cameron is assured that Assad-supporters deployed chemical weaponry, while on the other hand a UN representative gave voice to his suspicion of rebels using nerve gas. Despite the uncertainties both London and Paris are constantly urging the EU to lift its arms embargo against Syrian rebels in order to respond “properly” to the assumed illegal actions of the regime. Consequently, the pro-Assad Putin administration also refused to halt backing the Syrian government with missiles. Thus, this very scandal seemingly culminates into a vicious, irresolvable circle of problems.

Mr Cameron and the French PM also insisted on that the US should provide the rebels with lethal arms besides humanitarian aid. Though, the President refused to increase intervention in Syria due to lack of substantial evidence for unlawful deeds of the regime. Until the investigations show sufficient proof, cautious negotiation and waiting are the only actions that Obama can do, if he does not want to become the George Bush of Syria.

Moreover, public opinion both in the EU and the US fiercely opposes deploying lethal weapons in Syria.

Besides international disturbances, internal commotion between the two opposing sides and within the rebel groups of Syria also throws shadow on the proposed peace talks. The conference of the key resistance groups (including one of the most numerous one, the National Coalition) of Syria in Istanbul became a seven-day marathon meeting without showing any positive results. Accordingly, rebel groups are still fragmented being unable to

decide whether they would participate in the Geneva 2 peace talks.

Inviting top diplomats and officials of various countries (France, US, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia), which exclusively help the rebels of Syria did not facilitate at all the negotiations. Quite the opposite, the fact that all the supporting international participants wanted to force one's own individual view on rebel groups caused even more confusion.

Lastly, neither the Assad regime nor the chiefs of resistance groups expressed willingness to compromise. The Syrian PM does not want to give up his position; meanwhile the opposition claimed that its members will not attend the peace conference unless Assad vows to resign.

In conclusion, after analysing the circumstances of the forthcoming Geneva 2 conference, it can be stated that despite greatly optimistic expectations of international actors, the discussions will be most probably locked in stalemate as a result. However, at least international supporters of the two differing poles in Syria showed that it is not impossible to enter into diplomatic dialogues. If people really want to resolve the Syrian issue, they need to understand that direct fights on military ground will cause nothing, but grievances and bloodshed.



Doctors and medical staff treating injured rebel fighters and civilians in Aleppo.
Photo: Scott Bobb [VOA]

Power struggle in Bahrain

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa ratified the newest amendments to the constitution of Bahrain. The Bahraini government hopes that this act will abolish the on-going turmoil in the Gulf country. On the other hand, opposition forces to the king stated their discontent with the recent acts of the king, calling them merely symbolic.

Amongst the many issues lying between the king and his people, different religions is just a single issue, since the king and the government is of the Sunni faith, and the country is mostly dominated by Shia people, it is hardly surprising that the king refrains from enacting reform that would drastically change the current balance of power.

In contrast to the oppositionists, the king expressed his high hopes in connection with the currently on-going reform process. In fact, His Royal Highness intends to create a national accord in the questions currently poisoning Bahrain's daily life. King Hamad is strong in his decision, he said that the government's doors will be opened to any further negotiations, a remarkable counteraction to the crushing of the pro-democracy protests earlier last year.

With the current amendments in force, the king from now on, has to consult with the head of the elected parliament and the appointed Consultative Council prior to dissolving the legislature. The elected chamber has been granted the right to withdraw its cooperative attitude from the prime-minister and after their decision was



King Hamad. Photo: Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs

referred to the king, he has the final choice to dismiss or keep the PM in office.

These changes however are far from the opposition's standpoint. Their demands, namely an elected government and the trimming of the appointed upper house.

The critics of the amendments mainly cite the fact that it is still the king appointing and dismissing the government.

Opposition forces started a dialogue with Crown Prince Salman at a very early stage of the protests. However, these negotiations were interrupted by the Bahraini government's act of asking foreign military assistance from nearby states to crush the protesters on the streets.

Seemingly the problem of governmental reforms is still undecided in Bahrain, after more than a year of public unrest and difficulties in the daily life of the state.

Consequences of US foreign policy shift on the national interests and security of Pakistan

The relationship between the US and Pakistan can be best determined with the notion of mutual dependency. The superpower needs Pakistan's cooperation to fight against extremist Islamic terrorist movements and organizations, such as the Al Qaeda or the Pakistani Taliban. On the other hand, Pakistan has a stake in good relations with the US concerning the huge amount of military aid (\$17 billion) and other forms of financial and other support arriving from Washington. Obama's shift in US foreign policy, namely the gradual withdrawal of US forces from Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to concentrate its military power to the Asia-Pacific region, causes ambivalent feelings in Pakistani leaders. Some celebrate the exit of the US from the region, while others have fears that - similarly to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in the beginning of the 1990's - Islamist groups will proliferate primarily in the north-western part of Pakistan next to the Afghan border. Pakistani leaders relate Janus-faced to the muscular presence of the US in their country. On one hand they condemn the US drone strikes, which cause many civilian deaths and casualties, heavily in public. On the other hand they secretly provide support for the strikes to help the CIA assassinate certain jihadist leaders. The leadership also pursues a two-

faced policy regarding Islamist groups. While Pakistan helped the C.I.A. liquidate some people considered as persona non grata, at the same time it gave shelter to militant groups like the Afghan Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which serve the interests of Pakistan in India and Afghanistan. The Pakistani leadership used the United States' presence as a scapegoat in front of the Pakistani public. The exaggerated tales of American espionage and attacks were useful to hide the severe local economic and social problems.



Surveying damage in Pakistan. Photo: The U.S. Army [Flickr]

According to Obama's announcement in May 2013, the US will reduce the number of drone strikes, as well as the scale of so called signature strikes, and will only target people, who pose an imminent threat to the superpower. The attacks will diminished though, but continue. The Pakistani

government needs US support to stabilize its military power and to keep its economy alive, latter being in a doubtful situation. In addition the leadership wants to keep a check on extremist groups like the Pakistani Taliban, the goal of which is to establish an Islamist caliphate in the whole of Pakistan. The American withdrawal from the region threatens Pakistan's internal stability as the Pakistani Army is not strong enough to secure the country's stable order from its own financial and military potentials. Pakistan, being a key player in global counterterrorism efforts, would lose its prestige, financial support and political importance, if the mutual dependency



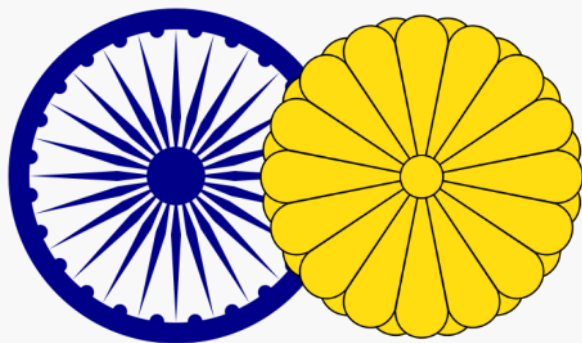
CH-47 Chinook in Pakistan. Photo: The U.S. Army [Flickr]

with the US would break off. The liaison between the two states will persist in the future due to the complex system of dependencies, however with more threats, than possibilities.

**“THE GRADUAL WITHDRAWAL OF US FORCES
FROM PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN CAUSES
AMBIVALENT FEELINGS IN PAKISTANI LEADERS”**

India and Japan: an Alliance

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh addressed a three-day visit to Japan at the end of May, where Shinzo Abe, Japanese Prime Minister called Singh a „mentor-like leader“. The visit was important because several deals on infrastructure technology and defence were signed, as well as a consensus has been reached on nuclear cooperation and naval exercises. After the meeting, the two Prime Ministers signed the joint statement: Strengthening the Strategic and Global Partnership between Japan and India beyond the 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations.



However, there was a not-so-friendly side of the meeting to regional superpower China. At the end of April an incident of border incursion between India and China occurred - India announced that a group of Chinese soldiers crossed the de facto border and set up a camp six miles inside the Indian-claimed territory. The incident triggered a standoff that yet remains unresolved. Chinese Foreign Ministry denies

the claims of crossing the Indian border. Both New Delhi and Beijing say they will not let the border dispute jeopardize diplomatic ties between them. Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid said the row could easily be solved.

Nonetheless, two weeks into the standoff, three meetings have failed to address the problem. Also, this situation complicates two official visits between the two Far East countries. "Diplomacy requires time and space," Indian Foreign Ministry's spokesperson said. China is likewise in constant territorial dispute with Japan concerning some mineral-rich islands in the East China Sea; therefore the goal of Japan and India now is to make China limit its territorial ambitions in the region.

India views the visit of Abe as a logical extension of the country's twenty-year-old "Look East"-policy. "Our discussions were guided by the fundamental belief that at a time of global uncertainties, change and challenges, India and Japan are natural and indispensable partners for advancing prosperity in our two countries and for a peaceful, stable, cooperative and prosperous future for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions," Manmohan Singh said in his official speech. "We attach particular importance to intensifying political dialogue and strategic

consultations and progressively strengthening defence relations, including through naval exercises and collaboration in defence technology. Cooperation in high technology, space, energy security and rare earth minerals will also add rich content to our strategic partnership. (...) We will seek reforms in the United Nations Security Council, an open, rule-based and balanced regional architecture and deeper regional economic integration and connectivity."

Shinzo Abe, at the banquet held after the summit, said: "India from the west, Japan from the east, the confluence of the two deep-rooted democracies is already one important part of the international common goods for the 21st century. I am of a belief that it is the important task that Japan and India should shoulder to ensure that Asia remain in peace and prosperity."

Nevertheless, the pleasant meeting of the two excludes China, who, according to former Indian diplomat Lalit Manhsingh, has reasons to be worried. "It is quite clear that all this is happening with China as a backdrop, because both Japan and India look upon China as a threat... The Japanese Prime Minister wants to redefine



the Indian Ocean and the Pacific region as a community of maritime democracies. That automatically excludes China. This is an important and clever move by India, too," he said.

As a result, after the summit, Chinese newspaper People's Daily described India and China as essential partners, and emphasized the "wisdom" of India in handling its relationship with China, "undisturbed by internal and international provocateurs". "Some politicians just made themselves petty burglars on China-related issues," the article referred unpleasantly to Shinzo Abe, criticizing the leader's attempts in different Southeast Asian countries to contain China's influence.

Burmese doubts

Recent changes in governmental policies resulted in a sudden change of attitude towards former outcast state. Despite the remarkably fast reform process on-going in the country, everybody is cautious concerning the final outcome of the current situation. As the long-time reigning junta slowly gives up power to the civilian government, old grudges and conflicts re-emerge from the depths of society.

One of Burma's serious issues is the public unrest and communal violence caused by the dispute between Muslims and Buddhists living in the country. As the biggest minority in the country, ethnic Muslims mostly live separated along the Western borderline territory, composing the state of Rakhine. However, Muslims are an essential part of the local economic life, thus many wealthy Muslims live in the cities of the Irrawaddy River's valleys. The local disputes after decades of suppression from the military junta, recently erupted into waves of public violence throughout the country.

Disturbed by inner difficulties, Burmese president Thein Sein is determined to continue with the reform process in the country that has already changed Burma's place amongst the countries. The president's reforms resulted in a thawing process on an international scale and despite the on-going unrest, coaxed optimistic attitudes from foreign powers such as the USA. After a long time Burmese president will once again visit the White House and will also meet with the

representatives of the United States Chamber of Commerce.

While supportive on the surface, the Obama administration, among many other governments, demands much from the Burmese leadership. This ambiguous attitude is caused by the human rights concerns echoed by many in the United States. The Congress itself is divided over the issue also. Many Congressmen are emphasizing the fact, that reformers like Thein Sein should get all the possible support from the American government, while their counterparts argue the achievements of the Burmese government, and criticize their effortless actions to stop the violence and unrest caused by religious tensions.



Thein Sein. Photo: The Official Site of The Prime Minister of Thailand



Aung San Suu Kyi: Freedom To Lead. Photo: Eva Rinaldi [Flickr]

These background disputes are a major force in shaping the official opinion of the Obama administration on Burma. This is the reason why the suspension or lifting of economic and visa restrictions (bans in case of visa) are coming at a very high price for Burmese residents. Last year's normalization of diplomatic relations (namely the appointment of Derek Mitchell, Ambassador of the United States of America to Burma) and the suspension of broad economic and investment restrictions came with the release of hundreds of political prisoners and the

release and election to parliament of Aung San Suu Kyi. Furthermore the US administration also extended the targeted sanctions against some Burmese officials and cronies of the former regime, this way aiming to make the democratic transition process irreversible in the country.

In spite of the fact that many countries are normalizing their relations with Burma, they are also concerned with the religion caused tensions and human rights abuses in the country. While reorganizing their relations on one side, powers like the US and the European Union put constant emphasis on these problems in their announcements.

The dual attitude towards Burma, and the rapidly changing environment in which investor countries found themselves in South Asia in the last few decades are somewhat related to each other. The sudden changes in this region resulted in a really cautious attitude in companies investing in the area. However, with the last, relatively untouched market in the region of South Asia, with a population of 60 million and an undoubtedly strategic position between India and China, Burma can be a key to the future of this region, with great assets, and this is a tempting offer to any possible future investor.

“ONE OF BURMA’S SERIOUS ISSUES IS THE PUBLIC UNREST AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE CAUSED BY THE DISPUTE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS LIVING IN THE COUNTRY”

Philippines apologizes for Taiwan row

Taiwan carries out more sanctions for the Philippines, not accepting the apology after Taiwanese fisherman Hung Shih-cheng was shot on 9 May by Philippine authorities on waters that both states consider their own. He was in the sea north of the Philippines and south-east of Taiwan, waters that are in the 200 nautical mile-from-shore exclusive economic zone of each country, therefore claimed by both. Taiwanese Prime Minister Jiang Yi-huah calls the apology of the President of the Philippines unacceptable.

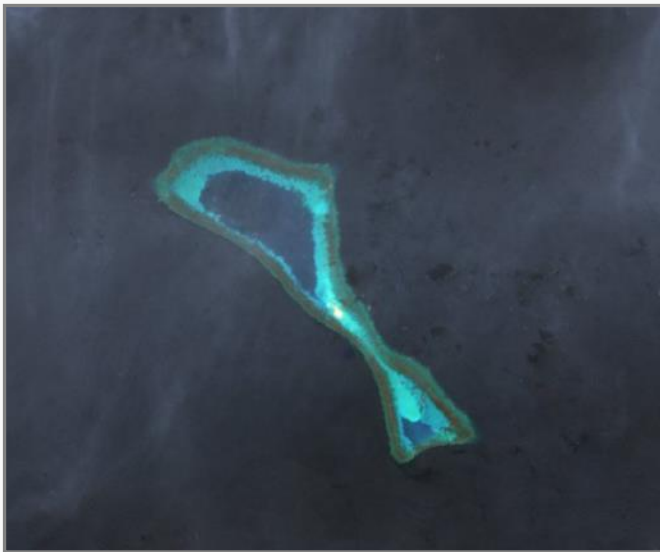
The Taiwanese Prime Minister called for a formal apology from Manila. His administration also has issued a number of sanctions since the incident, including a travel alert. At first, Taiwan recalled his envoy and froze the mobility of Philippines' workers in the country. Jiang, later, when the deadline for the Philippines to issue a satisfactory response expired, announced that Taiwan would hold military drills in the South China Sea. The threat of more sanctions is still present.

"The [Philippine] President has appointed Chairman Amadeo R. Perez as his personal representative who will convey his and the Filipino people's deep regret and apology to the family of Mr Hung Shi-chen as well as to the people of Taiwan over the

unfortunate and unintended loss of life. Upon orders from the President, the National Bureau of Investigation has already started the investigation and is committed to a thorough, exhaustive, impartial and expeditious investigation of the incident. The NBI has given this case the highest priority... We understand the grief and hurt of the family and of the people of Taiwan over this unfortunate loss and we empathize with them," the statement of Secretary Edwin Lacierda of the Philippines said. He also urged Taiwan not to involve Philippine workers as they are "working for an honest living". There are about 88,000 Philippine workers in Taiwan, and about 3,000 requests are received each month.



However, Jiang objects, and demands a better explanation of the incident, saying the fishing boat was shot “in all corners”. While he requested for bilateral fishing talks, he also reminded the Philippines of their obligation to compensate the victim’s family.



One of the reefs of the Spratleys. Photo: NASA

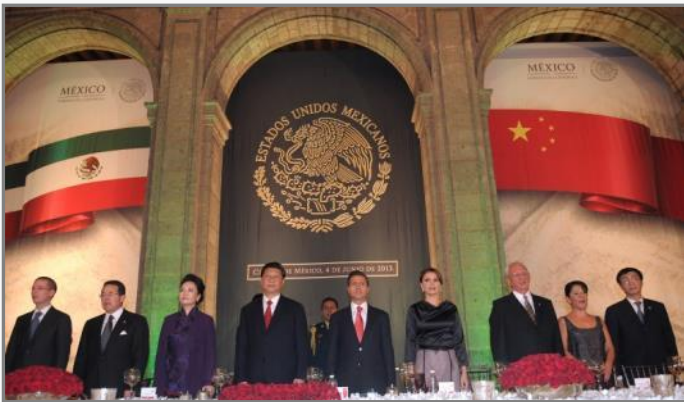
“Experts say underlying these clashes is long-time resentment in the Philippines over Taiwan’s bigger and more sophisticated fishing industry, which is able to tap the

marine resources near the Philippines in ways its fishermen cannot. Another root cause for conflict is that the two sides are located so close to each other that their exclusive economic zones overlap. They have never negotiated a sea border, partly because the Philippines recognises China, not Taiwan. Beijing is unhappy when other countries sign territorial deals with Taiwan, which it considers its province,” Cindy Sui reported for BBC.

The number of such territorial disputes between South China Sea’s maritime nations has increased significantly in the past years, supposedly caused by China’s new, provocative approach to the question. This recent row worsens strained relations and Taiwan’s long-time frustration over the treatment of their fishermen on disputed waters - many have been detained, shot dead or had their boats destroyed. Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei also have competing claims in the South China Sea.

“THE TWO COUNTRIES ARE LOCATED SO CLOSE TO EACH OTHER THAT THEIR EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES OVERLAP”

China's new conquest: Central America



Official dinner in honour of the Chinese delegation. Photo: Angélica Rivera de Peña [Flickr]

The new Chinese leader of the Communist Party Xi Jinping extended his journey to Trinidad and Tobago to enlarge the list of energy suppliers of China. It is an obvious example of the country's genuine attempts to engage in energy import in the Latin American region.

With the intention of establishing a strategic position in Central America, Xi planned other stops in Costa Rica and Mexico before he meets the US President.

The special purpose of Xi Jinping's visit in Trinidad and Tobago was to get access to liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies. It is in line with China's future energy policy, which aims at increasing the ratio of natural gas in the fuel mix up to 10% by 2020 (from the recently measured less than 5%). China's energy companies such as PetroChina are fighting for preserving their

access to LNG in order to provide sufficient electricity services.

US officials mainly see this trip as part of a commercial struggle of quickly developing, but energy-scarce Asian countries, who want to diversify and extend their partners supplying LNG or other types of natural fuels. "Mr. Xi's trip to the Caribbean and other parts of Central America should be seen as mainly a commercial endeavour" said Eric Farnsworth, vice president of the Council of the America to The Wall Street Journal.

However, patterns show that China not only aims at finding new energy supplies in the region, but also wants to establish stronger economic bonds with Central America.

As a part of Xi's Latin American tour, he will visit Mexico with the purpose of strengthening trade ties, reducing import tariffs on Mexican products and establishing more benevolent relations. Mexican government officials also welcomed this step, as the two countries used to be former challenging rivals concerning manufacturing.

China's former trips to Central America aimed at persuading firmly anti-communist countries to recognize the island of Taiwan

as part of the People's Republic of China. Costa Rica was one of the few countries in Latin America, which preferred establishing Taiwanese economic bonds instead of Chinese commercial influence. Though, since 2007 China and Costa Rica started to gravitate towards each other and established increasingly diplomatic relations. Thus, it would be far-fetched to presuppose that China has ideological interests in the Central American region. Meanwhile Asian influence is constantly raising, the USA gradually withdraws from the territories. Recently discovered source of natural gas from shale-rock formations in Northern America left less space for Central American gas on the US fuel market. Moreover, in the past few years declining trend of US aid to Latin American countries could be observed. Even focusing solely on



Official dinner in honour of the Chinese delegation. Photo: Angélica Rivera de Peña [Flickr]

the 2013 US budget proposal a 9% drop from last year can be detected.

Of course, between the US and Latin America there are several bonds which connect tightly the two regions' economy. Nevertheless, the US needs to deal with new Chinese economic conquests with caution and scrutinize further plans of the communist country.

**“CHINA NOT ONLY AIMS AT FINDING NEW ENERGY SUPPLIES
IN THE REGION, BUT ALSO WANTS TO ESTABLISH STRONGER
ECONOMIC BONDS WITH CENTRAL AMERICA”**

Obama-Nieto meeting: new era in relations?

On the first stop of his diplomatic trip in Latin America, Barack Obama met the Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto in order to discuss security and economic issues. In his speech – held at the National Anthropology Museum – the US President emphasized the importance of strengthening the two states economic ties and minimizing the American's dominant position in the fight against drug cartels.



Mexico's President, Enrique Peña Nieto, greets United States President, Barack Obama, at the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City on 2 May 2013. Photo: Pete Souza [White House]

Generally, US-Mexican relations are based on trade and immigration since the United States is the Latin American country's largest trading partner and likewise, Mexico is the States' third largest, behind Canada and China. Demographically they are connected through those one million US citizens who are living in Mexico and those thousands of Mexican immigrants who are staying in the US illegally.

Although the trip was Barack Obama's fourth official visit to Mexico, this was the first time he met Enrique Peña Nieto as President of Mexico, since he took office on 1 December 2012, succeeding Felipe Calderón. His election victory marks the return to power of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) after a 12-year hiatus – the party that ruled Mexican politics for 71 consecutive years.

The meeting focused mainly on the economic cooperation, the two Presidents have made clear that they want to turn the spotlight back on commercial ties. As Obama said: "We've spent so much time on security issues between the United States and Mexico that sometimes I think we forget this is a massive trading partner responsible for huge amounts of commerce and huge numbers of jobs on both sides of the border".

Although politicians emphasize the picture of Mexico on the rise, indicators show that the country's economy grew by only 1% in the first quarter of 2013 and poverty remains deep. In addition, violence and fight against drug cartels continue, causing the death of thousands. As a possible solution, Peña Nieto's government has launched a new strategy including a crime

prevention program and a new attitude in the way Mexico will cooperate with US law enforcement. The Mexican administration wants to channel all security matters through the powerful Interior Ministry, which coordinates the country's growing fight against organized crime as well. This change would mean the end of the previous practice that has been characterized by allowing US agencies to deal directly with Mexican counterparts. It seems that Obama is ready to accept the Mexican decision. As he said: "I agreed to continue our close cooperation on security even as the nature of that cooperation evolves. It's obviously up to the Mexican people to determine their security



Press conference. Photo: Pete Souza [White House]

structures and how it engages with other nations, including the United States."

The two Presidents mentioned the immigration reform only in a few words. Barack Obama emphasized that he is optimistic, the Congress will strike a deal and his counterpart added, his country understand this is a domestic affair for the United States, however he appreciates Obama's efforts.

Following the meeting, US President travelled to Costa Rica for a summit with Central American leaders, including politicians from Nicaragua, Panama, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic.



Photo: Pete Souza [White House]

**"VIOLENCE AND FIGHT AGAINST DRUG CARTELS
CONTINUE, CAUSING THE DEATH OF THOUSANDS"**

US - Venezuela relations: beginning of a “new” friendship?

Following the death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, experts say that stronger diplomatic ties may be on the horizon.



Nicolás Maduro, president of Venezuela. Photo: Agência Brasil

Relations between the two states have traditionally been characterized by an important trade and investment activity and cooperation in fighting against the production and transit of illegal drugs. However, after Venezuela accused the Bush administration of supporting a failed coup against Chávez in 2002, relations cooled down and hostility increased. Venezuela and the US have not had ambassadors in each other's capitals since 2010, when the government of late President Hugo Chávez reversed the approval of the designated US ambassador. Following this decision, the Obama-administration revoked the visa of the then-ambassador of Venezuela.

Some have hoped that this situation could change with Chavez's death and indeed, the first signs have already been seen. Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Elias Jaua said in an interview that the move to name Calixto Ortega as charge d'affaires for Venezuela in the United States could be the initial step to restore full diplomatic ties and ambassadors between the two countries. "Calixto Ortega is a man with a lot of experience and knowledge of US society and we believe he can play an important role in bringing the truth about Venezuela to continue opening up understanding so that, sooner rather than later, there is respect for Latin America, the Caribbean, respect for the Bolivarian Revolution." – said Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's President.

The surprising turnaround seems a bit strange after Maduro has accused the United States of causing the cancer of Hugo Chávez. The conspiracy theory originates from Argentine President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and other prominent leftist Latin American politicians' diagnosis of cancer in recent years. In December 2011, Chávez speculated that the US could be infecting the region's leaders with the disease.

Considering these facts, question can be asked: Why would Venezuela or even the US normalise relations? The answer is simple.

As Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Elias Jaua said: “Because the US remains our top trade partner.” Despite any hostility of the last decade, trade continued. The United States is still the largest recipient of Venezuelan oil while it exports machinery, cars, natural gas and petroleum products to the Latin American country. Although several private companies have been nationalised and price is controlled by the state, some US corporations still work in Venezuela. It seems that on the one hand these economic relations are vital to the well-functioning of Venezuela’s economy and society, however, on the other hand they serve as important ongoing links between the two states. Furthermore, there are more than 200.000 Venezuelans living in the US who can make a connection as well through their family members and friends.



Elias Jaua, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela. Photo: Miraflores Press

The nomination of Calixto Ortega could make these ties even stronger and serve as starting point of the resumption of diplomatic relations. Hopefully, the Obama-administration appreciates this important step. As Maduro said referring to the US government: “If you want to have relations based on respect, conversations and cooperation, that is welcomed”.

“TO NAME CALIXTO ORTEGA AS CHARGE D’AFFAIRES COULD BE THE INITIAL STEP TO RESTORE FULL DIPLOMATIC TIES”

A historical step in the peaceful rapprochement of the FARC and the Colombian government

New talks are on sight between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government.

The FARC was built as a wing of the Communist Party in 1964 when the government started to act against rural Communist enclaves. The violent operations of FARC ranged from kidnap to ransom, and the production and distribution of illegal drugs which classified them for the governments of Colombia, the United States, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, and the European Union as a terrorist organization. In contrast, FARC sees itself as a peasant army defending the rights and values of rural Colombia against the establishment, the state and the military, further more against (neo-) imperialism, monopolization and repression.



Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) insurgents in 1998. Photo: INSS



Areas containing FARC presence. Source: NCTC

According to their interest in agrarianism, they reached landmark agreement with the government on an agrarian reform gives hope for constructive negotiations which shall find a conclusion until November, one year after the start of the talks. The reform includes a redistribution of land which would also benefit to the IDPs and the landless.

The negotiations will continue between the voices of sceptics and supporters because favourable occasions to move on towards a common future are rare occasions.

Ethnic-political violence rocks Guinea before elections

More than fifty people have been killed in Guinea due to ethnic-political clashes since February, reports say. The West-African nation's fragile social structure and the forthcoming parliamentary elections in June have led to fights between government forces and the opposition. President Alpha Condé's administration and its followers are dominated mostly by the Malinke ethnic group, while the opposition is led and supported by the Peuhls.

The last week of May, twelve people have been killed and about ninety injured. According to the opposition, the injuries were caused by gunshots of the government's security forces; yet the official report says the origins of the shots remain unknown. However, there are different viewpoints. "Young bandits, claiming to be part of the opposition, took over entire neighbourhoods of Conakry, sowing terror," a resident said. Nevertheless, a widely circulated list of the names of the ones killed reportedly contain mostly of Peuhl surnames.

The Peuhls represent about 40%, the Malinke about 30% of the population; therefore ethnic clashes are not a new problem to the country inhabited by about ten million. Reportedly, politicians coming



Voting line in Guinea, 2007. Photo: United Nations Development Programme

from each ethnic group show a tendency of gathering support among their own community.

After the 2008 military coup, a mass slaughter of the Peuhls rocked the group when the government's security forces committed mass rape and murder on pro-democracy protesters at a stadium in Conakry.

Alpha Condé, president since the elections in 2010, supported by Tony Blair and George Soros, has been in bitter battles with the Peuhls over the forthcoming elections which have been pushed to this year's 30th of June from last year.

Opposition suspects a special connection between Condé and South Africa, with South African company Waymark supervising voter registration lists. "They suspect (...) that this choice is not innocent" said Vincent Foucher, analyst of the

International Crisis Group. Waymark, of course, denies any such claims. Opposition also demands voting rights for the people of Guinea living abroad, and says that if the demands are not met, the elections will be boycotted and blocked (the “how” yet remaining unclear.)

However, some Peuhls are unsatisfied with the way the opposition handles the situation. “I think they have fuelled the conflict, and ever since September 2009 they have just gotten used to sending people to the street to just get killed to gain political credit,” said a Guinean Peuhl man, who lives abroad.

The country, bearing low living standards and poor infrastructure, suffers even more after electricity and water cuts in the capital, opposition says, because the infrastructure is managed by the government instead of experts of each field. Given these circumstances, tension is rising even quicker.



Condé, along with most of the international community, insists that the elections be held on the proposed date, but many citizens doubt that the elections would bring an end to the violence in the country. During the one-month campaign before the elections, no one feels safe.

“THE FRAGILE SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE FORTHCOMING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HAVE LED TO FIGHTS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT FORCES AND THE OPPOSITION”

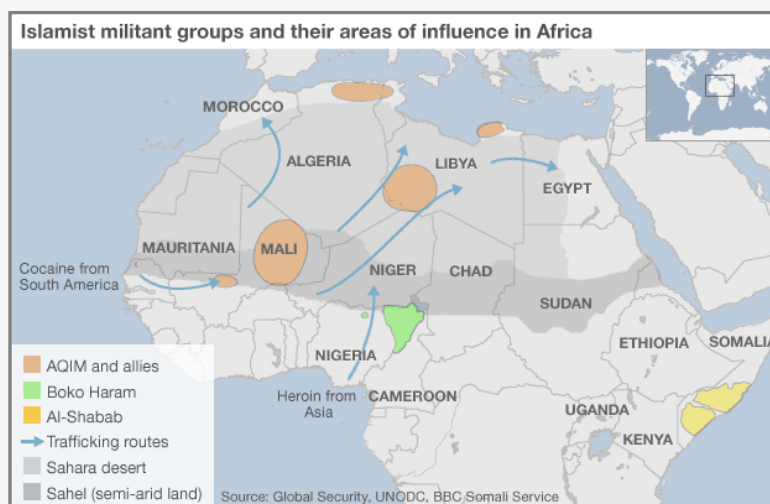
Militant Islamists pose a threat to the West-African security

Lately Ghanaian President, John Dramani Mahama opened up about his worries concerning the Islamists and at the same time, he called for a stronger solidarity between the African countries to fight this harassment. The destabilization of the whole West-African region, even if Ghana is not a direct neighbour to the Sahel and Sahara area, could damage the uprising Ghanaian tourism sector. The Sahel and Sahara belt is concerned the refugium of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and of the Boko Haram (literally means “Western education is sinful”).

Even though the Ghanaian leader praised the French intervention in Mali as a progress, it was still possible to keep a foothold for insurgents. By menacing the population and setting asymmetric attacks, the Islamists spread fear and terror, but use it as propagandistic recruitment as well. As

the urban elites rule by arrogance and corruption and most of the children stay unschooled turning into unemployed young people, the AQIM and Boko Haram is given plenty of rope in the failed states. The fact that “Northern Nigeria has some of the highest unemployment and school dropout rates in the world” is an appreciated opportunity to enrol child soldiers who will be “stuffed with tramadol – a narcotic used to tranquilize horses – before being sent on missions”. This treatment is facilitated by the widespread drug trafficking which uses West Africa as a transfer site between South America and Europe where the peak price is fetched, not to mention the enrichment of militant groups.

The call for the African Union's plan to create a rapid reaction force appears appropriate to the situation.



Report on Somalia famine makes Europe act

Nearly 260,000 people were killed in the famine that hit Somalia from 2010 to 2012, study says. Half of the victims were children under the age of five, according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network's (FEWS Network) report. "By nature, estimating mortality in emergencies is an imprecise science, but given the quantity and quality of data that were available, we are confident in the strength of the study," says Chris Hillbruner, official at FEWS Network.



A woman holding her young malnourished baby queues for food at the Badbado camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Photo: Stuart Price/UN Photo

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says there is a need for helpers to respond more quickly to crises. "I think the main lesson learned is that the humanitarian community should be ready to take early action - respond early on," Rudi Van Aaken, deputy head of the FAO operation for Somalia said. UN says already

half of the casualties were there before the famine was declared in July 2011, and that the enormity of this tragedy was only realised with the release of FEWS Network's recent report.

The food crisis, causing more deaths than the 1992 starvation that killed 40,000 less, began because of a drought, and was worsened by the conflict of rival political parties. The country has seen more than twenty years of civil war; sadly, the presence of terrorists, militants and warlords has allowed the country to slip into lawlessness. In September 2012, a new, UN-supported government came into power, bringing some stability to the country. Businesses are booming at the ports and some embassies, including the British, were reopened recently. "My vision is for a federal Somalia at peace with itself and its neighbours and which poses no threat to the world; a Somalia with a resurgent economy," Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said. However, his administration remains weak, with rival militant groups occupying parts of the country.

The regions which were first declared to be hit by famine in mid-2011 were under control of militant Islamist group al-Shabab. The group, linked to al-Qaeda, denied the claims of famine and banned Western aid

agencies to avoid humanitarian intervention. The crisis then spread to other regions under the government's control as well as the capital, Mogadishu. The worst drought took place in 2011, when tens of thousands of people left their homes in search of food. Al-Shabab militants were driven out of Mogadishu in September 2011, but it has not stopped the group from carrying out further violent attacks in different regions. As a result, more than a million Somalis are refugees in neighbouring countries and another million displaced within Somalia.

Even though the UN declared the famine to be over in February 2012, the crisis has not ended: the rates of child malnutrition and infant mortality are still of the highest in the world. The report says that about 4.6% of the country's population was killed. Overall 10% of the country's children under the age of five died, while in some regions, including the capital and Lower Shabelle, this number reaches tragic 18%.

Answering Somalia's silent cry for help, London hosted a conference in the



London Conference on Somalia 2013: Aid coordination roundtable. Photo: Michael Haig [DFID]

beginning of May concerning the East-African country's economic and political situation. The representatives of about fifty countries and international organizations such as the UN, IMF and the African Union tried to find a solution in order to contain the effects of drought and establish political stability in the Horn of Africa country.

European aid to Somalia

The European Union has offered €44 million (\$58 million) in aid to Somalia. Andris Piebalgs, the EU Commissioner for Development said that the aid was given to help Somalia build up the justice system and police force. "In Somalia, like anywhere else, there can be no development without security," he said. The EU has given about €1.2 billion euros of aid to the war-torn nation since 2008.

British Prime Minister David Cameron emphasized the need for the solutions to be successful this time; otherwise the failure to rebuild Somalia would lead to terrorism and mass migration. "To anyone who says this isn't a priority or we can't afford to deal with it, I would say that is what we've said in the past and look where it has got us," he said. "These challenges are not just issues for Somalia. They matter to Britain — and to the whole international community. Why? Because when young minds are poisoned by radicalism and they go on to export terrorism and extremism, the security of the whole world is at stake."

The next international conference on Somalia – focused on stopping sexual violence – will be held in Istanbul four months later.

■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Merkel's surprise visit to Afghanistan

■ German Chancellor, Angela Merkel and Defence Minister Thomas de Maiziere arrived to Afghanistan on the 10th of May to visit the memorial of 53 deceased German soldiers. The actuality of the visit laid in the recent death of a German soldier of ISAF. After paying a visit to the German forces' headquarters in Mazar-i-Sharif, the pair travelled to the Bundeswehr base at Kunduz. "Every fallen soldier is a heavy blow for us" Merkel said. She expressed high hopes for the Afghan presidential election in 2014 and stressed that the world would not forget Afghanistan after the withdrawal of international troops.

Serbia and Kosovo to normalise ties

■ Serbia took a major step towards reaching EU membership as Serbian Prime Minister and his Kosovo counterpart agreed on a plan to normalize their historic and political relationship. Although no details of the draft have yet been made public, the process outlines an end for the conflict and allows former Yugoslavia to finally recover from its collapse in the 1990's. The agreement brokered by the EU, nonetheless, does not prove to be enough to accept Serbia as a member state; the bloc wishes to see a plan and progress in both political and economic ways.

Expulsion of US diplomat in Russia

■ An American diplomat in Moscow, Ryan Fogle was declared persona non grata on the 14th of May after being detained. The man, later released, was caught "during an attempt to recruit a representative of one of the Russian security services," the Foreign Ministry statement said. Reports say that a full "spy arsenal" was found with him: wigs, sunglasses and knives along with a large amount of foreign cash. "I very much doubt that a highly trained CIA operative is going to be walking the streets of Moscow wearing a really bad blond wig. It is poor trade craft, and it looks like a setup to me," said Eric O'Neill, former FBI counterintelligence officer. "Such provocative actions in the spirit of the cold war in no way help to strengthen mutual trust." Russian foreign ministry said.

Turkey and Japan sign billion dollar nuclear deal

■ Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Shinzo Abe signed a deal of \$22 billion on the 3rd of May which allows Turkey to move forward to setting up its second nuclear plant in the Black Sea. As this project is Japan's first after the tragedy of Fukushima, Abe emphasized the importance and priority of safety. According to the plan the units of the new nuclear plant will come alive from 2023 to 2028. French company Areva will help build the plant in collaboration with Mitsubishi. Turkey has also been in talks with China, South Korea and Canada on the Sinop plant.

US lifting sanctions on the trade of telecommunication equipment to the Iranian people

■ Providing access to the Internet and other forms of communication to the Iranian folk is a move taken by the Obama-administration in order to hinder the Iranian government in its effort to restrict civil liberties in the country. The US aims to secure the right to the freedom of speech and to enable the Iranians to communicate with the outside world. Although these measures build good relations with the people, they don't ameliorate the nexus with the Iranian government. According to some experts, the relationship between the two states cannot be normalized without stepping on a diplomatic track. The US, but also the EU should immediately grab the opportunity to strengthen their diplomatic ties and actions in order to build a good relationship with Iran.

Kerry in Oman for talks

■ US Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Oman to finalise a deal of \$2.1 billion. The deal on a US-manufactured ground-based air defence system is not yet ready in detail. "Oman has also recently brought a second tranche of F-16s so this is a way of continuing our relationship in the defence arena and will have pluses in terms of interoperability," an official said, referring to the Gulf Cooperation Council. After Kerry's arrival in Muscat, he headed for talks with Sultan Qaboos, the leader of the Gulf country. The Secretary will also discuss the war in Syria, trying to bring together the Al-Assad administration and the opposition to hold peace talks to end the war. "Oman is not a key player in Syria, but as an important player in the Gulf it will be good to hear the Sultan's views on the situation in the region," a State Department official supposes.

Clash resumes on Afghan-Pakistani borders

■ Frequent border clashes continue between Pakistani and Afghan forces along the two countries' shared border. The situation is becoming worse, as Allied forces are withdrawing from Afghanistan, and Pakistan as an important US ally, is considered to be the one to support Afghanistan in the region after the US exodus. However relations amongst the two countries became soured after recent exchange of gunfire between Afghan and Pakistani soldiers guarding the Durand-line, the British-mandated border, which is not unequivocally recognized by the two neighbours. The relationship between the two countries have always had a hint of mistrust, but as the foreign forces are withdrawing from Afghanistan, the future stability of country depends on how the Afghan government and the neighbouring countries can settle their difficulties.

Pakistan releases Indian prisoners

■ Mir Khazar Khan Khoso, Caretaker Prime Minister Justice of Pakistan ordered the release of the 51 Indian fishermen kept in Pakistani prisons. The fishermen have already served their sentences. The Prime Minister expressed his hope of the goodwill gesture to be returned. According to him, 482 Indian prisoners are in Pakistan, and 496 Pakistani are in Indian prisons, meaning there is no great difference in amount. The Pakistani Prime Minister ordered the Foreign Ministry to initiate dialogue with India aiming for the exchange of the prisoners.

Pentagon accusing China for cyber attacks

■ Several American newspapers and authorities reported in 2012, that they observed intrusions into their computer systems, which are likely to be attributable directly to the Chinese government and military. It is said that China is using its cyber capabilities to collect intelligence against the US regarding defence, diplomatic and economic matters. The Pentagon's report also added that China's devices are suitable to conduct cyber-warfare against the US. US officials are urging more intensive dialogue with Beijing about the matter. The report also underscores China's military progression in the frame of which it strains after broader strategic objectives to ensure its core interests in the world.



Qatar would import fresh water from Chile?

■ According to an article published by "Gulf Times", Qatar would use super tankers to import fresh water from Chile's Southern Patagonian Ice Field. Having the world's highest per capita water use and one of the lowest levels of rainfall, Qatar could really use the ice melt water which is currently being lost to the sea second by second. During his recent visit to Doha, Chilean Ambassador, Jean Paul Tarud said that "It is everyone's hope that the private sector companies are able to provide such critical solutions in the short term, and this initiative would certainly have a strong positive impact if successful." A Chilean company has already got concessions exceeding 8000 litres per second and allegedly, a trial project to start the exportation of fresh water is currently being underway.



Ice desert in Chile. Photo: NASA

■ News in Brief

International relations

Workers protest on May Day

■ The traditional day for demanding workers' rights has brought demonstrations around the world. Streets turned into a parade in Cuba where the working class celebrated the governing Communist Party and remembered former Venezuelan president and ally Hugo Chavez. In Caracas the governing party and the opposition held rival marches. Chicago protesters fought against the deportations of illegal immigrant workers. Larger clashes shook Istanbul as the government banned May Day protests on Taksim square. "There is a tug of war under way between the government and people" Al-Jazeera's reporter Hashem Ahelbarra says. There also have been protests in Cambodia, the Philippines, Greece and Russia demanding better circumstances for workers.

Turkey must do better on accession talks

■ The EU says Turkey's efforts to join are going nowhere as Ankara keeps failing to fulfil its obligations. Recently, the progress has slowed down due to human rights issues and commitment to democratic values. "It takes more than one flower for it to be spring... without Turkey, the EU will not be complete, it will not have strategic or geographic continuity" Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told a press conference. It is "in the interest of both parties that accession negotiations gain further momentum," a statement said after the meeting of the EU-Turkey Association.

Russia urges consensus among Lebanese rivals

■ Moscow, in the favour of next Lebanese parliamentary elections, urges consensus between rival parties in the Middle-Eastern country, Russia's ambassador to Lebanon said. He also mentioned that concerning the upcoming international conference on Syria, there should not be any preconditions from each side. "The Lebanese will find a breakthrough to their crisis without foreign intervention in order to preserve civil peace and co-existence," Zasyarkin said. Obama also vowed recently to bring the rivals to the table in Geneva in the near future.

China joins Arctic Council

■ China has gained permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. At the meeting of the organization bearing eight permanent members – Norway, Canada, Russia, the USA, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden - India, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Singapore were also accepted as observers. The status does not include the ability to make decisions, but the presence of the new observers show the changing nature of the body. There are six European states in observer status; however the application of the EU, albeit received affirmatively, is still being discussed by the members.

Hollande on Foreign Policy

■ In an exclusive interview Francois Hollande outlined France's foreign policy of the near future, stressing North Africa and further areas of crisis. In Mali, where France took part in removing al-Qaeda-linked jihadists through its operation Serval, the intervention proved to be successful. However, Hollande did not forget to emphasize that France would not be Africa's "police" in the future. The success of July's elections in Mali is essential for France to begin withdrawing its troops. Hollande said he was confident concerning the matter, and also he agrees with the African Union's plan to put an intervention force in place. "We have not been asked by the Libyan government for help, and the UN has not proposed an intervention" Hollande said, declaring no intervention in Libya; however, France is still working on a democratic transition in Syria that "does not include Bashar al-Assad".

Kofi Annan warns corruption in Africa

■ Ex-UN chief Kofi Annan said that secret mining deals and financial transfers block Africa from benefiting from its resources boom. "Africa loses twice as much money through these loopholes as it gets from donors," he said. He also supposes that African countries need to improve governance and rich nations should help introduce global rules on transparency and taxation. The Africa Progress Report is released every May and this year it has brought the Democratic Republic of Congo as a negative example, where five mining deals were sold way under price in "highly opaque and secretive deals". "This Africa cannot do alone. The tax evasion, avoidance, secret bank accounts are problems for the world... so we all need to work together (...) to ensure we have a multilateral solution to this crisis," he said.

ICC-accused Uhuru Kenyatta to meet David Cameron

■ Kenya's President, Uhuru Kenyatta, who has been indicted at the International Criminal Court, addressed a three-day visit to meet UK's Prime Minister David Cameron. He denies the allegations of "crimes against humanity", including the slaughter that killed about a thousand after his election in March. Mr Kenyatta will face trial at The Hague in July. "During the visit, President Kenyatta will attend the London conference on Somalia and also hold bilateral meetings with UK Prime Minister David Cameron and other UK government officials," the statement of Kenyatta's office read. Although the UK had said it would maintain only "essential contact" with him, Kenyatta was invited to the conference on Somalia. UK Foreign Office says Kenya should not be left out of such an important discussion, and that this "constitutes essential contact".

Iran infiltrating South American countries

■ Alberto Nisman, Argentine prosecutor has accused Iran of trying to infiltrate several Latin American countries to sponsor, foster and carry out terrorist attacks. According to him, the targeted countries included Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Surinam. Nisman has also repeated the often-made claim that Iran sponsored a bombing in Buenos Aires in 1994 that killed 85 people in a Jewish centre. He claimed that Mohsen Rabbani, Iranian cultural attaché was the coordinator of the alleged infiltration operation.

■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Libya crisis deepens

■ Rebels in Libya have extended the list of demands, adding the resignation of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, the freezing of the recently released state budget and the right to form a committee that takes charge of the Foreign Ministry. The rival group supporting the government warned the rebels that it was willing to use force to dislodge them. "If you do not respond to our demands, we will form a common national force from all the cities of Libya to handle this situation," the group said. Zeidan promised that he would replace remaining seniors that were in office under Gaddafi's regime. "We don't have militias in Libya, we have revolutionaries," he said, in defence of the rebel group, saying they had a right to pronounce their demands. Meanwhile, the Foreign Office withdrew some staff from the British Embassy in Libya. "Given the security implications of the ongoing political uncertainty, the British Embassy is temporarily withdrawing a small number of staff, mainly those who work in support of government ministries which have been affected by recent developments," Foreign Office spokesman said.

Iran's presidential candidates finally revealed

■ About thirty women have registered to be presidential candidates in Iran, but Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, member of the constitutional supervisor team said the "law does not approve" of women running as candidates. A total of 686 people registered to replace President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Abbas Ali Kadkhodai, another electoral watchdog would only let physically able candidates to run for presidency. This could disqualify former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani from the race. One of the candidates promised if he was elected, he would promote resistance against the West. Iran currently bears the second highest number of journalists in detention in the world.

India approves nuclear plant

■ Despite the violent protests against the planned nuclear plant extension in Tamil Nadu state, the New Delhi Supreme Court decided in favour of the extension and set aside the numerous petitions given in by the protesters. The Supreme Court in its ruling stated that the extension serves the benefit of the people of India. The Court also inquired for a final report on the nuclear waste disposal arrangements from the constructors in order to ensure the local peoples' safety. The case of the Kudankulam plant is a good example of the situation that the construction is not just about fears connected to nuclear plants, it is also about the constant dispute between state and national authorities in India. In spite of the fact that protests against nuclear power plants rise from time to time in India, the country is determined to make nuclear power plants its first source of energy.

North Korea threatening the US and South Korea with nuclear attacks

■ While large-scale tests including rocket launches and underground detonations have been recently realized by the North Korean leadership, there are doubts about how long it would take the Stalinist state to develop a fully operable nuclear weaponry. According to reports from US agencies, it is assumed that North Korea is not yet able to fit a nuclear warhead on its missiles, although it has already launched a long-range rocket to put a satellite in orbit. If configured as an ICBM with a nuclear payload, it would be able to reach the US mainland. The obscurity of the Communist country's decisions and capabilities can lead to miscalculations concerning its expected behaviour, however there is no threat of a serious attack from North Korea due to its fear from adequate responses from the ROK and the US. In the meantime Kim Jong Un threatened the US-South Korean alliance to strike five South Korean islands if the joint naval drills of the allies would cause shells falling on North Korean territory. Obama and the South Korean President, Park have recently reaffirmed their strong alliance and firm resistance against North Korea on a meeting in Washington.

Rebels of Central African Republic exploit diamond industry

■ Diamonds are a rebel's best friend, headlines report sarcastically as Central African Republic's rebels are solidifying their control over the country's diamond industry. After the overthrow of President Francois Bozize, in rebel-controlled areas fighters are blocking diamond trade, residents say. Rebels have even sold some of the stones. The new government insist that the Kimberley Process, which aims to stop the trade of blood-diamonds, be completed. Blood-diamonds have caused many conflicts in the area, because usually rebels that have access to the precious stones tend to sell them to be able to afford military equipment.

Zimbabwe – constitution approved, elections ahead

■ The Lower House of Zimbabwe's Parliament approved the draft constitution in the beginning of May. "The number of affirmative votes, 156, is not [less] than two-thirds of the total members of the house," parliament spokesman said. The new constitution takes away the immunity of the president after leaving office, gives greater power to the courts and the president, abolishes the post of prime minister and sets up a peace and reconciliation commission. The Constitutional Court has ruled that presidential and parliamentary elections must be held by 31 July this year. The new constitution was backed by main parties and current President Robert Mugabe.

Nigerian militia against Islamists

■ Nigerian Army started a vast offensive against Boko Haram Islamic insurgents in to North-Eastern part of the country. According to Nigerian Army officials, the offensive is full-fledged now, attacks against terrorist training camps are both coming from air and on land. With mobile phone networks being jammed in the mentioned section of the country, Boko Haram's communicational lines are disrupted, thus governmental forces are secure about their victory. Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, assured the World, that the governmental forces will take any necessary action to oust the insurgent Islamist militants and prevent them from creating a breakaway state from the currently disputed three semi-deserted federal states of Nigeria.

Madagascar postpones elections

■ Madagascar's government decided to postpone elections that could have ended four-year political deadlock in the country. The interim government decided to call on the election commission to propose a new date for the elections, opening a way to the new election date. The change of date occurred because the electoral court found the suspension of donor funds and international rejection of three presidential candidates. Andy Rajoelina, a former disc jockey who seized power from former President Marc Ravalomanana in 2009, asked to postpone the vote by one month. Although required, he also refused to resign from his position two months before elections.

Ríos Montt, ex-President of Guatemala denies charges of genocide

■ The 86-year-old ex-politician declared himself innocent before court in Gutemala City, claiming that he never ordered attacks against people of any race. Prosecutors accused him of committing genocide during the height of the civil war from March 1982 to August 1983 under his presidency. According to the verdict he was finally sentenced to 80 years in prison, which the crowd welcomed with loud cheers. This case was the first time the state officially acknowledged that a genocide had occurred during the 36-year-long civil war in Guatemala. In the mean time former Guatemalan President, Alfonso Portillo was extradited to the United States, where he is accused of money laundering and embezzling tens of millions of dollars in public funds.

New law helps Evo Morales reach third term

■ Bolivia's lawmakers have passed a new law which allows Evo Morales to run for presidency for the third time. The controversy that lies in the move is that the Bolivian constitution only approves a person to serve two terms as president. However, the highest court pronounced that because the constitution was changed during Morales' presidency, his first four years do not count. Opposition says that the new law is unconstitutional, and that in the previous constitution also only one re-election was allowed. New elections are due next year, but Morales has not yet announced his will to run again.

Chilean students protest for education reform

■ Chilean police have used tear gas and water cannons to put an end to a demonstration organized by students who are demanding free education and better circumstances in the education system. According to the organizers more than 150000 people went to the streets. City officials said the number was only the half of it, though it does not change the fact that this demonstration was the largest march since 2011 when thousands dressed as superheroes and zombies took the capital. The education reform has become one of the key electoral issues ahead of November's presidential election. Demonstrators are complaining of poor public schools, unprepared teachers, expensive private universities and unaffordable loans.



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