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About CRP News & Background

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Edward Snowden discloses top-secret NSA files to unveil US and British surveillance methods

In May 2013, Snowden fled to Hong Kong from his Hawaiian residence with 4 laptops containing data of the NSA's interceptions of telephone and internet communication as well as of internal information of the agencies operation. The 30-year-old former technical contractor, who worked for the National Security Agency and also for the CIA, leaked the information in a Hong Kong hotel to Glenn Greenwald, journalist of The Guardian on May 20th. His revelations are among the most remarkable breaches in NSA security in the history of the Republic. After gradually uncovering parts of his secret data, he boarded the flight to Moscow with the help of Wikileaks' jurist, Sarah Harrison on June 23rd, where he is still stranded in the terminal of Sheremetyevo International Airport. Meanwhile the United States has invalidated Snowden's passport, hence he cannot leave the Russian Federation, so he has recently applied for temporary refugee status to Russia. He also requested refuge from 27 other states, but only three of them – Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela – indicated that they were willing to provide political asylum for the computer analyst. He accepted Venezuela's offer, however he cannot take advantage of it for the present due to his lack of a valid passport. His future plans include settling in Latin-America, however he rather aims to receive a temporary document in the short run, which enables

him to freely move throughout the Russian Federation. According to anonymous sources, Snowden has already received the documents from the Russian Immigration Office necessary for gaining the temporary refugee status on July 24th, and may be able to leave Sheremetyevo Airport shortly. There is no extradition treaty in force between Russia and the US, therefore the FBI-agents working at the US-embassy in Moscow do not have the right to arrest Snowden. If he receives the documents for a political asylum, he will be able to live in Russia, and to travel abroad, e.g. to South-America, however this is quite unlikely because of his fears from being caught by the US.



Edward Snowden. Photo: Laura Poitras [Praxis Films]

Snowden revealed numerous pieces of information regarding the telephone and internet communication data collected by the NSA, as well as the operations and programs used by the agency in order to fulfil its goals to be able to observe virtually



Edward Snowden's supporters in Warsaw

any citizen of the world. It turned out that the NSA intercepted several tens of millions of American's phone conversations with reference to a court decision. According to Snowden's leaks, the agency also observed the data traffic of giant Internet companies and services, such as Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, Facebook, YouTube, Skype, AOL, Apple and PalTalk via its PRISM system. However, most of the affected firms intensely exclaimed against these accusations. It came to light that the British intelligence agency (GCHQ) also used PRISM to collect data, and recorded the traffic of international telephone and Internet network cables, which transfer huge amounts of information. In addition, GCHQ intercepted the telephone and Internet data traffic of participants of the G20 summit in London. The NSA observed Hong Kong and China, for instance computer systems of Chinese telecommunication companies, and performed cyber-attacks against Tsinghua University, China's educational and research centre. They also targeted Hong Kong's Internet service provider company, Pacnet. The NSA spied against several institutions of the European Union in Europe and in the United States, intercepting EU's

offices based in Washington, just as the EU's agency to the UN in New York. The number of embassies and diplomatic missions observed by the US adds up to 38, including target-countries such as Italy, Greece, and what is more the United States' regional allies like Japan, South Korea and India. Furthermore the NSA observes data traffic of the optical cables running at the bottom of the oceans with the aid of its program called Upstream. It was also unraveled that Microsoft has been cooperating with American intelligence agencies long since in order to conduce to the interception of users' communication. Microsoft denied the allegation that it provided full and limitless access to its services to the NSA, however on the other hand the company remarked that it operates in absolute compliance with the legal commitments in force in the US. Snowden also alluded to the fact that Western European countries have been cooperating with the NSA for a long time, yet they showed signs of outrage publicly after the outburst of the scandal. It is assumed that German spies use NSA-methods to analyze information acquired from the Middle-East.

After former NSA director, Michael Hayden, Snowden's leaks cause serious damage in three major ways to the US and to American companies. In the first place the revelations have the detrimental effect to provide America's enemies with information on the superpower's intelligence tactics, techniques and procedures. Moreover the unraveled data gives an insight not only into concrete pieces of information, but also into the internal mechanisms of the NSA, how it operates, how it is built. As Glenn Greenwald puts it, Snowden's disclosures are equivalent with an instruction manual

of the NSA's construction. Secondly, American businesses will also suffer severe damage just for observing the rules of American law, because users of Internet and cloud services may not entrust big companies to store their data, when it is known, that the government is capable of intercepting it. The third harmful impact of Snowden's activity to the US is that the



Hong Kong Rally to Support Snowden on 15 June 2013. Photo: See-ming Lee [Flickr]

government may lose the people's confidence, as the unraveled information shows, that the superpower cannot keep top-secret data disguised.

According to reports, Snowden's lawyer, Anatoly Kucherena has given him Dostoyevsky's and Chekhov's works to study Russian literature and culture, which is a sign of the leaker's acculturation in Russia, just as an indicator of the state's willingness to authorize Snowden's settlement in the country. It is questionable though if the young man will ever dare to leave the Russian Federation, which means, that he presumably paid a high price for his actions, losing his homeland, residence, girlfriend and probably even his family for quite a long time, if not for ever. Nevertheless, the whistleblower's leak will probably prove to be the most costly one in the history of the United States.

“SNOWDEN REVEALED NUMEROUS PIECES OF INFORMATION REGARDING THE TELEPHONE AND INTERNET COMMUNICATION DATA COLLECTED BY THE NSA”

Obamas speech as an inspiration for an US-Russian shutdown-race?

During Obama's journey through Europe accompanied by his family, he delivered speeches in Berlin and Belfast and joined a two-day G-8-Summit. In tradition of Kennedy, he delivered his speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate reminding the audience of the great achievements in the German-American friendship. He shined by his rhetoric and skipped captious questions like internet surveillance by National Security Agency's vast secret data-collection including the spy-affair Prism in Germany, the postponed closing of Guantanamo or the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drone warfare. He set his focus on the "work toward a world without nuclear weapons" addressing Russia directly "to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures". Russia's answer concerned the missile defence systems and the more effective non-nuclear weapons which will be built instead. Yuri Ushakov, President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy adviser, stated that a greater worldwide involvement of "countries possessing nuclear arms [would be needed] in the process of nuclear potential reduction". The announced delivery of American weapons to Syrian rebels worsened the relation with Russia before.

Before the American president attended the G-8-summit to celebrate the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement between the EU and the USA, he spoke in Belfast about how hard it is to achieve peace and to



United States President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on 19 June 2013. Photo: Pete Souza [White House]

sustain its fragile beauty. He addressed the young audience to overcome the hardened prejudices towards a lasting reconciliation and reassured support by telling them that the USA is "for those who choose the path of peace". The notion of the still existing system of separate housing and schooling and attacks against the peace showed that Obama believes in change and in a personal choice for peace.

It stays questionable if he will achieve peace by a mutual Syrian resolution. Britain had pushed America for an intervention in Syria although it wasn't possible for Prime Minister Cameron to receive a majority in the House of Commons. The proof of the use of chemical weapons was for Obama the crossing of a "red line" which is on the one hand a final request for peaceful negotiations with the regime leader but on the other hand it nails Washington to take action as soon as possible.

UN reports highest level of refugees in the last decade

Global number of refugees is reported to be the highest since 1994, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports. In 2012, more than 45 million people have fled their homes or have been displaced internally. War remains the number one cause for seeking asylum, with the five war-torn countries giving 55 per cent of all refugees: Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq and Syria. A total of about 900,000 claims have been submitted around the globe, showing that the number of asylum seekers is also on the rise.



"These truly are alarming numbers. They reflect individual suffering on a huge scale and they reflect the difficulties of the international community in preventing conflicts and promoting timely solutions for them," Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says. "The number of individual asylum applications registered with governments or UNHCR in

2012 reflects a continued increasing demand for international protection throughout the year," the report said.

The report came out in the midst of the reform of the Canadian refugee policy. The government plans to narrow the number of people that will have their resettlement claims accepted to three to five populations. "The three to five populations are being chosen in consultation with international partners such as the UNHCR and other resettlement countries," spokesman for the Citizenship and Immigration department said. The new rules will only apply to the ones resettled by the government, but other restrictions may affect wider groups. Last year the USA accepted 66,300 refugees for resettlement, while Canada took one seventh of this number.

Many of the ones displaced choose not to settle somewhere else but live in an UNHCR provided accommodation until they can return home. Lately, UNHCR has difficulties resettling refugees due to restrictions, security policies and lack of space in government provided refugee camps.

Syria has produced 1.6 million refugees seeking safety mostly in the neighbouring countries, hoping to return home later. Canada has given over \$100 million to help Syrian refugees; however, it does not actively participate in resettling them.

Nonetheless, Canada now aims to accept 13,000 claims and provide further help. "We have nearly completed processing all of the family reunification applications for people in Syria who were already in our system," Immigration Minister Jason Kenney said.

To make matters worse, UNHCR reported further increase in the number of children

seeking asylum on their own. Waves of refugees mostly arrive to the country via ships and a new bill that has passed recently made the detention of the people who arrived in such manner mandatory. Adult asylum seekers have the right to keep their children with themselves; therefore, sadly, kids are kept in detention too.



Working with UNHCR to help refugees in South Sudan.
Photo: DFID - UK Department for International Development [Flickr]

Violence in Sudan

About 63,000 people have fled a town in Sudan after suffering an attack of the Sudan Revolutionary Front. Abu Kershola was then retaken by government forces but some 8,000 people went to seek safety in Khartoum, and 44,000 have fled to neighbouring regions. "The security situation remains fragile," the UN said. Sudan has been torn by clashes for decades. The violence has strained relations with South Sudan.

"WAR REMAINS THE NUMBER ONE CAUSE FOR SEEKING ASYLUM"

US Secretary of State John Kerry to make the best of a bad job



Syria as the peak of the Arab Spring might become the challenge and (dis)approval of John Kerry's career as the 68th US Secretary of State which he started at the beginning of February 2013. Determining in this connection is also the progress in bilateral relations with Russia who took a familiar contrasting position to the USA.

The Syria conference in Geneva planned for the end of May is threatened to be cancelled due to irreconcilable differences between Russia and the US about the American armament of Syrian rebels, the involvement of the Hezbollah by the Assad regime, US President Barack Obama's announcement about the reduction of nuclear weapons or the case of Edward Snowden, the former CIA employee disclosing the secrets about American espionage in Europe.

Regarding the statement of the American armament of Syrian rebels, it stays questionable whether it will put sufficient pressure on the Assad government to bring

a negotiation and a political transition. Definitely, Russia would like America to exercise more pressure on the rebels itself rather than having a consolidation with them. In addition to it the Hezbollah, a militant Lebanese group, and "arms [from] the Iranians have flown to Damascus through the skies of Iraq" helping the governmental groups to gain ground.

The Hezbollah had also already confronted North-Israel in the past and John Kerry decided to make the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle-East his own challenge. He introduced peace negotiations about the main topics of the conflict: borders, refugees, security and Jerusalem. There is a need for a sensitive balancing between especial Israeli security concerns and a two-state-solution which grants Palestine state recognition with access to the membership in the International Criminal Court and other



international agencies. Likewise, a new demarcation would need the financial as well as the diplomatic help of the neighbouring countries.



The US President Barack Obama's announcement in Berlin about the reduction of nuclear weapons directly

addressing Russia has been a bad take-up as Russia concerns the promise to be hypocritical asking for a wider range of countries to join.

Also the case of Edward Snowden for allegedly leaking classified information about the NSA's secret tapping program PRISM, called "a traitor" by State Secretary Kerry, could damage the relations with Russia and China as it is not clear how far he was a protégé staying in the Transit area of the Moscow airport. Russia stated that he did not cross the border so there was no need to hand him out while the USA pledged for "standards of behaviour between sovereign nations".

The future will show if Kerry can deal with the centralisation of foreign policy decision-making in the White House or if this would pose an obstacle to his ambitious plans.

"JOHN KERRY DECIDED TO MAKE THE SOLUTION OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE-EAST HIS OWN CHALLENGE"

Violence in Turkey

At the end of May, Turkey experienced an unusual strong expression of disapproval after the violent clearing of Gezi Park. 50 environmentalists had appeared to demonstrate peacefully against the demolition of the park with its old trees in favour of another shopping centre. Rumours exist that the Erdoğan family has a special economic interest in the erection of the mall. By the police's heavy-handed tactics to break up the peaceful sit-in, the protest reinforced and became during the month of June a battle between the police using Mass Incident Intervention Vehicle (TOMA), pepper spray, tear gas and water cannon against the violent demonstrators who were using fireworks, stones, Molotov cocktails. This behaviour led to many arrests and even more injuries on both sides. Neither the shutdown of the public transport in Istanbul, nor Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's words and means increasing the aggressive police action could stop the people from joining the anti-government marches spreading all over the country. Suddenly the trees stood for all the oppression and restrictions, e.g. "on alcohol sales and warnings against public displays of affection", the young, libertarian and pluralist generation does not want to bear anymore. A questionnaire of the Istanbul Bilgi University showed that over 90% claimed to use the protest against the

authoritarian region, the police's aggression and the violation of human rights as the free self-expression.

Even the media experienced restrictions which led to a limited coverage of public news but gave a boost to social networks



Photo: Mstyslav Chernov

at the same time. The circumnavigation of the censorship inspired the Prime minister to call the protestors “vandals” while Twitter was entitled to be a “troublemaker” after they refused to build a state-controlled office in Istanbul. Furthermore he accused the demonstrators of walking “arm-in-arm with terrorists and extremists”.

Even the decision of an administrative court that the construction of the shopping centre was a violation of plans for the preservation of the park was not published by the government for four weeks, even if it could have appeased the masses and would have prevented several casualties: The numbers climbed up to 7,500 injured and four dead persons.

The excessive use of force has been condemned by supranational organizations and national governments which will burden or even block further EU accession negotiations.



Photo: Mstyslav Chemov

“THE PROTEST BECAME DURING THE MONTH OF JUNE A BATTLE BETWEEN THE POLICE AND VIOLENT DEMONSTRATORS WHO WERE USING FIREWORKS, STONES, MOLOTOV COCKTAILS”

Iran elects new president

Over the half of the Iranian participating voters casted their ballots for the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani, who had been the white hope of many Western leaders before the elections. Although he had almost been banned from it due to discussing classified information in the television, he was warmly welcomed by people celebrating his win on the street. Another candidate chose withdrawal freely, Conservative former parliament speaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, and warned the participants to look at the criteria very carefully. After the green revolution and the remaining question of voter fraud in 2009, two candidates took two third of the votes which is clear sign towards moderation and a constructive



Hassan Rouhani's supporters. Photo: Tabarez [Wikimedia Commons]



Hassan Rouhani. Photo: rouhani.ir

dialogue with the West after the collision course of Ahmadinejad. The first conciliatory steps were already initiated during his campaign where he pledged to set the political prisoners free who had been arrested after participating in the mass protests erupting after losing reformists had disputed the election results in 2009.

Iran's position in the Syrian conflict is still to sustain Assad's regime, also by delivering arms, which contrasts the hesitating position of the USA supporting the rebels. The Syrian religious rivalries between Sunnis and Shiites will be aggravated by Iran's role. Another critical point will stay the atom program as Iran could use the opportunity to rise as a nuclear power but most certainly the recognition of the Jewish state Israel is not imminent yet.

Syrian war death toll hits 100,000

At the end of June, the number of death crossed the mark of 100,000 deaths of which almost one third were civilians. The numbers of casualties on the part of the rebel-fighters with more than 18,000 equals almost the death toll of the pro-regime militia with more than 17,000 deaths. As the fights continue, the tendencies are daily rising, causing everyday new refugees whose numbers went beyond 2 million posing difficulties to the neighbouring countries. The conflict dominates the whole country: The economy broke down, unemployment and inflation rose enormously and the UN predicts a humanitarian crisis, most likely in terms of a famine. According to the UN, there could be more than 10 million Syrian internal and exterior refugees until the end of the year.

While the humanitarian situation is worsening, two French reporters brought samples which prove the use of the chemical nerve agent Sarin as a chemical weapon against the rebels. Sarin has been banned since 1993 by the Chemical Weapons Convention which did not hinder the regime to use it even against civilians in the months of April and May on the front lines. These results increased the pressure on the international community who was mainly waiting for a reaction of the USA. The UK reacted by giving the rebels protections against chemical weapons

concerning any use of chemical weapons a war crime under international law whilst Prime minister Cameron promised financial support for humanitarian concern. The rebels who had asked for military aid in forms of heavy artillery diminished the doubts about a Russian involvement in the chemical attacks whereas Russia wanted the US to put more pressure on the rebels. Washington announced to deliver weapons as answer to the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, as well for reason of putting more pressure on Assad so that he might join negotiations. The hope of supporting the moderate rebels is to prevent a rise of radical Islamists.

But this hope might be already destroyed by the involvement of Lebanon's Hezbollah supporting Assad's forces to combat the rebels while Lebanon cannot cope with the burden of the refugee crisis and is calling for international support. The answer of the "UN Security Council was to call on Lebanese Hezbollah militants to end any involvement in the conflict in neighbouring Syria". The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has to face another new opponent: Extremists who fight for an "Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)" settled close to the extremist Al-Nusra. By using car bombs and recruiting soldiers from abroad, they try to weaken the rebels in support for the Assad regime.

Clashes in Egypt

Egypt's on fire due to clashes between Mohammed Morsi's opponents and followers. The current political row only worsens the situation as the country has been in crippling economic crisis and has suffered widespread insecurity since 2011, when Hosni Mubarak was overthrown. Morsi took office in June last year. A petition that aims to withdraw confidence from him has been circulating for weeks, and, as claimed by the organisers, has already reached over twenty million signatures. However, forthcoming changes do not mean significant alterations on the ground level. Al-Tahrir, independent Egyptian daily summed up the impact in this headline: "Everything is invalidated, everything carries on."

Last year, Egyptian top court has ruled over the legitimacy of the current legislature and constitutional panel, claiming that the elections were unconstitutional. The Supreme Constitution Court said that not only the elections, but also the selection of the committee that drafted the constitution was illegal. As both the lower and upper houses were elected under the same law, the judgment initiated the parliament to be dissolved. The Shura Council that took legislative role will maintain its power until the elections later this year.

Morsi called the elections for April, but later postponed them to October. Only after the elections will the country complete the

democratic transition after Mubarak's regime. A date has yet to be set for the vote.



Anti-Morsi protests in Egypt, 28th June 2013. Photo: Lilian Wagdy [Flickr]

As for the constitution, it stays in place. "The constitution, which the people voted for and was approved by a majority, is the reference that must be applied, defended, protected and respected by all state institutions," a statement of the presidency said.

Morsi, marking one year in office at the 30th of July, dismissed opposition's calls for an early vote, saying it would be "absurd and illegal". The opposition scheduled mass demonstrations to that date, saying that Morsi, since in power, has caused severe polarization in politics. Morsi blames the opposition of initiating violence.

Morsi's Islamist supporters have also called for a mass march. The Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim

Brotherhood from which Morsi hails, have called for a “million-man march to protect the revolution” and “face the counter-revolution”. The march was a demonstration of power before the opposition’s planned protest on the 30th. The president’s supporters call the protests as a “coup against democracy”. The Brotherhood “stands firm against violence as a means of change. Those who want change should participate in elections, create solutions and campaign,” Brotherhood spokesman Gehad Al Haddad wrote on Twitter.

Meanwhile, Morsi decided to trigger the opposition. He appointed 17 new provincial governors, among them he named governor of Luxor a member of the Islamist Party which is responsible of the killing of 58 tourists in the 90’s. The move led to clashes in the Nile region. “The regime is sending a message that it is not willing to respond to the demands of the people and is pushing forward with policies that are increasing anger and polarisation,” Amr Mussa, a leader of the opposition said.

On the 29th of June, two were killed in anti-Morsi protests, including a 21-year-old American volunteer, when protesters stormed the Muslim Brotherhood’s Alexandria office. A third man was killed in Port Said. The United Nations, the United

States and the European Union are urging consensus in this civil war-like situation. The United States has withdrawn its non-essential embassy staff and warned its nationals not to visit Egypt. Mostly the heavily populated areas see violent movements with revolution-like motifs. The Egyptian army warned that it was willing to intervene to support the “will of the people”.

“We all feel we’re walking on a dead-end road and that the country will collapse. All Egypt must go out tomorrow to say we want to return to the ballot box, and build the foundations of the house we will all live in,” says Mohamed ElBaradei, former UN official and liberal party leader, encouraging citizens to participate in the protests scheduled on the 30th.



Anti-Morsi protests in Egypt, 28th June 2013. Photo: Lilian Wagdy[Flickr]

“THE ARMY WARNED THAT IT WAS WILLING TO INTERVENE
TO SUPPORT THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE”

Fight for Nile water between Ethiopia and Egypt

Ethiopia is constructing a massive \$4.2 billion hydro-electric 6000 MW dam dubbing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance and leaving the neighbour Egypt with doubts about the downstream water levels as Egypt relies on the Nile River for 90%. On the one hand, Egypt believes in its 'traditional, historic rights' as an abutter guaranteed by two treaties from 1929 and 1959 which allow it to use 87% of the Nile's flow and give it veto power over upstream projects, but on the other hand, Ethiopia argues that the old agreements keep the colonialism up which unfairly favoured Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia's answer was the ratification of a new, controversially discussed treaty which will ensure its access to the Nile and abolishes the Sudanese-Egyptian majority in water rights. The new Nile River Cooperative Framework Agreement, in tradition of the 2010 Entebbe Agreement which was refused by Sudan and Egypt, is already signed by six other Nile River countries (Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi), potential consumer of the electricity generated by the dam with an interest to reallocate Nile waters on a "more equitable" basis.

While Cairo requests further investigations to make certain that its water supply would not diminish and that the retained water wouldn't evaporate faster, Addis Ababa already brought expert – evidence that the



Bridge over the Blue Nile. Photo: Emil Sjöblom [Flickr]

dam with its hydro power projects would not "significantly affect" the water flow to Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia will not give up on its dam – and Egypt answer looks more like a divisionary tactic to distract from the bleak domestic political situation which does not hinder the to perform psychological warfare by mentioning the detonation of the dam in order to protect the country. But maybe the financing could fulfil Egypt's wishes as the World Bank withdrew and Ethiopia wanted to finance the project itself which will cause every Ethiopian to give a monthly salary for the completion of the dam. Egyptian farming highly depends on the Nile Water and "Egypt will require an additional 21 billion cubic metres of water per year by 2050, on top of its current annual allotment of 55 billion cubic metres, to meet the needs of a projected population of 150 million."

UN Security Council prepares for taking over peacekeeping in Mali

After a long negotiation period the Malian government signed a ceasefire with the Tuareg rebels, providing a fragile, but still fairly peaceful moment in the country's life since the rebellion started. The Tuareg rebellion started in January 2012 pushing the country into turmoil. The rebels wanted to create a breakaway state from the Northern part of Mali, which has a rather different composition in many aspects than the Southern part. Eventually the rebels did not succeed, however the carnage and military movements caused a huge wave of refugees, uprooting hundreds of thousands since 2012 January.

As the peacekeeping mission currently named AFISMA is going to be replaced by UN directed mission, MINUSMA, the Security Council calls for Member States to provide the resources that are currently undersupplied. Mission MINUSMA suffers from severe shortages in many important aspects at the moment. The lack of military personnel, key enables, key resources, vehicles and much more are jeopardizing the success of the whole mission. Furthermore the area that will be put under UN peacekeeping has a very harsh climate least to say. The temperature can rise to 48 degrees Celsius meaning that the mobile communication devices cannot be deployed in the Northern region, because they would simply melt. The infrastructure of the aforementioned region is unfortunately

not fitting for using large aircrafts and other big-sized vehicles.

MINUSMA is further hindered by the fact that many of the former rebel armed groups are still active and sworn to attack UN units in the area.



MINUSMA Office in Kidal. Photo: MINUSMA/Blažje Grulic (Flickr)

The aim of the UN mission is to fortify the currently fragile peace and make sure that the Malian government can conduct the upcoming elections on July 28th. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon assured the local government that any possible help will be provided from the UN. This is an important part of the mission, first to provide the seamless transition between the AFISMA

and MINUSMA then to prevent any power vacuums in the region.

With the vastness of the territory and the odds against the UN peacekeeping mission, it is still not sure whether MINUSMA will be successful as planned or won't meet up to the expectations. UN officials have the opinion that if the Member States called upon can provide the necessary resources and can cooperate efficiently, then even against these odds MINUSMA can be successful.



Blue helmets in Kidal. Photo: MINUSMA/Blagoje Grujic [Flickr]

Robert Mugabe claims that Western countries are the cause of conflicts in Africa

As the fifth TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) goes on many African presenters deliver their speeches. Robert Mugabe incumbent Zimbabwean president delivers a scorching speech on the real background of African conflicts. He claims that these sad events are a result of a neo-colonial agenda pursued by Western countries. The president also called upon African states to refuse the unilateral removal of elected governments on the continent and stated that the inability of the continent should not be used to justify the interventions of Western states.

He also stated that the African Union has its tools for solving such conflicts and to maintain the peace on the whole African continent, which it did for many years.

**“THE AIM OF THE UN MISSION IS TO FORTIFY
THE CURRENTLY FRAGILE PEACE”**

US-Japan war games

The territorial conflict in the Southeast Asian Sea gets deeper as the US plans a common military exercise with Japan, its major non-NATO-ally, in front of the Californian coast and offers a destroyer to the military of the Philippines. The bilateral strategic alliances are meant to boost cooperation, also in terms of counter-terrorism, not intend to offend China, who accused them of planning an invasion to the contested Senkaku Islands (known as well as Diaoyu Islands) as Japan took a more assertive attitude towards territorial disputes with China. Accordingly the far-right nationalism of the Abe administration wouldn't use its armed forces only for self-defence anymore but for retaking islands in its South in solidarity with the USA. The reason of the widely spread interests into the islands might be the discovery of deposits of natural gas, oil, minerals and the profusion of fishing areas or just a trial of maritime strengths between Japan and China. Thereby the Spratly Islands are claimed by China as well as the whole Sea, by the Kalayaan Islands belonging to the Philippines, by Vietnam claiming as well the Paracel Islands and by Malaysia issuing the Southern part of the islands. The Chinese occupied Scarborough Shoal (known as Huangyan Island in China), a rich and traditional fish ground for Filipinos, was the arena for clashes in the waters, often related to claims of illegal fishing or violations of China's unilaterally imposed fishing moratoriums. However the moment when China as the current dominator of the region will start a military cooperation

with Russia as an answer to the US-Japan alliance, it might appear as a kind of continuation of the cold war blocks, even if they have been exercising joint naval drills on a regular basis since 2005. This behaviour as a next step would also argue against the Chinese statement of being against an exacerbation and for maintaining peace in the region. The disequilibrium of who may exercise power in which way in the South Chinese Sea will probably be continued the Chinese domination, only a common decision by combined regional pressure group could force a turn. China's economic boom contrasting with Japan's decline is based mainly on trade relations with the greater South East Asian region, so it should aim to solve its territorial disputes in a peaceful way.



Discussions between the two Koreas cancelled

Following the proposal of Seoul, the two Koreas planned high-level talks on 12 of June to normalize the ties between them. But Pyongyang changed its mind and less than 24 hours before the date North-Korea cancelled the meeting. The talks could have terminated months of debates and nuclear threat on the peninsula.

The talks would have had high importance because such meeting has not happened since 2007. The ties between the countries have been at the worst level mainly because of two recent events. The first one is the closing of the Kaesong industrial park. It was the most remarkable symbol of the cooperation, North and South Koreans worked together there for years. But in April Pyongyang pulled its workers out of the factory, and then in May Seoul also withdrew its workers. The other main problem is the incident of Geumgang tour. The tour was halted in July 2008, when a North Korean soldier shot dead a South Korean tourist. North Korea has never apologized, even though it was asked several times by the South. The reopening of the Kaesong industrial park and of the joint tour to Mount Geumgang would have been discussed at the meeting, meaning the end of these conflicts.

The talks would have been vital, could have meant a milestone in the reconciliation. The Unification Ministry was hoping that the talks would improve the ties



Propaganda in Kaesong. Photo: John Pavelka [Flickr]

between North and South Korea and would give the opportunity to build trust. The North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification intended to reopen the communication lines for the successful negotiations and to help to reunite separated families. The two Koreas also wanted to celebrate together the anniversary of the first inter-Korean agreement of 1972. Besides they would

have discussed many economic, cultural, and social cooperative projects.

The cancellation is not profitable for Pyongyang neither. In the opinion of a Korean professor the talks would have given a chance to tone down the sanctions against North in the USA-China and also in the South Korea-China summit. It could have changed the attitude of Western countries towards the North and give a better basis for talks with them.

Furthermore, later in July North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun said that they will not give up their nuclear weapons and program unless the United States ends its “hostile” policy towards it. He called the USA to hold direct talks with Pyongyang- if they sincerely want peace and stability in both Koreas. Since the 2005 joint statement North Korea should have stopped its program and return to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1994, but kept on continuing it. US Secretary of State John Kerry says that the North has to respect the



Pyongyang-Kaesong motorway. Photo: Nicor [Wikimedia Commons]

decision of the neighbouring countries. He also added that Washington, Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo are absolutely united in convincing the North of stopping its program. Meanwhile Seoul and Washington called China to put more pressure on Pyongyang and even though Beijing accepted it, they will do it only as far as it does not bother their national interests.

“TALKS WOULD HAVE HAD HIGH IMPORTANCE BECAUSE SUCH MEETING HAS NOT HAPPENED SINCE 2007”

US-China rivalry over Latin-America

After the visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to three Latin American countries (Trinidad and Tobago, Costa Rica and Mexico) at the beginning of June, the question stays who will win the battle of influences in the Southern sphere. For China's manufacturing and infrastructural construction sector, Latin America and the Caribbean could provide commodities and energy. Whereas the US demands for cooperation there are also conditions like exercising pressure on other trading partners which causes complications, while the Chinese focus on a strictly economical and commercial interest.

The Chinese Prime minister Wang Yi likes to point out how important the reciprocate support "in their fight for national independence and endeavour for development" is and he is concerned that the "Chinese dream will reinforce world



Photo: Angélica Rivera de Peña [Flickr]

peace and bring about development opportunities for the world" as he sees "China [as] an important force in maintaining world peace, stability and development". Thereby he conceals that his country creates its overwhelming influence due to foreign direct investment.

In a soon future, Mexico could become the most important trade partner of the US displacing Canada while China is as well planning a free trade agreement with Mexico which is concerned to be too early from the Mexican side. But China is already considering joining other negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP), a proposed free-trade agreement among Asia-Pacific, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Canada, and the United States. Nevertheless, Latin America found a new self-confident image and the concerned countries might take the chance to form



Photo: Angélica Rivera de Peña [Flickr]

stronger inner ties before tending to one of the superpowers.

After the trip, Xi Jinping paid a visit to California for a weekend-summit during which the both presidents debated their "new model" of cooperation. The meeting

in an informal surrounding was arranged to build trust in the complex relations between the two nations. Obama demanded to fight cybercrime more strictly even if his position concerning this topic was weakened by the international spy affair.

China & Mexico: a tequila deal

After Chinese President Xi Jinping's three-nation Latin American tour, the Chinese-Mexican relation is taken to the next level by the Chinese liberalization of import restrictions which were actually planned since 2010.

The liberalization just-in-time has two reasons: First, Tequila had been considered to have detrimental health effects because of too high methanol content which was proven wrong now and Second, China's ruling party wants the country to evolve from reliance on exports and foreign investments to "more self-sustaining growth based on domestic consumption" including more restaurant visits where the most alcohol is consumed.

Until now, the favourite alcoholic drink is beer followed by distilled spirits like Cognac and Whisky. But the Tequila could have an advantage to realize the plans of making China its 2nd biggest market: it is new and exciting targeting the "nouveau riche" and it tastes alike the Chinese traditional wine.

For sure, the glasses will be raised in China when the free trade agreement with Mexico or even Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP) will be settled but first clink the glasses to a "contribution for safeguarding world peace, development and prosperity" – as Xi Jinping said during his visit in Mexico City to emphasize where the joined efforts will lead to.

South-American spring? Protests spread over Brazil

The initial point which hyped a local protest to mass-movement was a peaceful demonstration against the rise in public transport prices in Sao Paulo. The protest was led by an organization called "Free Fare", which was mostly supported by students. It is not clear who provoked the escalation of violence: Some demonstrators who damaged a metro station and burned buses or the police who used rubber bullets and tear gas, which was officially concerned as professional behaviour.

In the next days while the Confederations Cup was happening as a try out for the Football World Cup in 2014, the protests spread over the country like a wildfire. Suddenly it was not only the rise of prices but it opened up about a whole complex of problems the country is facing: The anti-government- and anti-corruption-demonstrations showed the people's fear and anger that public funds could be wasted for expenses of staging the World Cup and the Olympic Games in 2016, while there is money lacking for better education, hospitals and security. The richness in resources of Brazil contrasts with the great gap between the rich and the



Photo: Flickr

poor. Especially the middle class sees itself confronted with an economic boom that only leads to an unequal distribution of wealth. For the inhabitants of the Favelas, a suburban shanty town or quarter, who are criminalized already by living in a certain district, the difficulty is to stay in their familiar surroundings. Some favelas will be pacified by the government; others will be evacuated to sell the land to foreign investors. The preparations for the huge sport events seem to stir urbanization and gentrification, in particular in big cities like Rio de Janeiro. The infrastructure, notably the public transport, is not constructed to take all the relocated former favela-inhabitants who now live in newly-build, expensive neighbourhoods to their now remote workplaces in the city centre. In a televised speech, President Dilma Rousseff called “peaceful demonstrations

legitimate” but violence would be no solution to the demands. She stated the government would work on the transparency of institutions and that no public funds had been used to finance the World Cup.

Probably there will not be a “Latin-American spring” but as the protestors chanted slogans, including “The people have awakened”, the democratizations – process cannot be reversed.



Photo: Semilla Luz [Flickr]

“THE RICHNESS IN RESOURCES OF BRAZIL CONTRASTS WITH THE GREAT GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR”

■ News in Brief

Domestic issues affecting international relations

US nuclear bombs “based in Netherlands” - ex-Dutch PM Lubbers

■ Ruud Lubbers, the Netherlands' prime minister between 1982 and 1994, said that about 22 US nuclear weapons were stored in strong-rooms underground at an air base on Dutch territory. He revealed the information in an interview for a documentary made by National Geographic. For the past few decades, there has been constant rumour and speculation about nuclear weapons being stored on Dutch soil. “I would never have thought those silly things would still be there in 2013!” Mr Lubbers said in the documentary.

Silvio Berlusconi sentenced to seven years in jail

■ The former Italian PM was claimed guilty in a court decision made in June in Milan. He was convicted for misdeeds concerning his sexual affairs and corruption. According to the verdict, the former politician organized orgies in his private mansion, involving 17 year-old Karima El Mahroug, nicknamed “Ruby, the heart-stealer”. Hereby he committed the crime of paying a prostitute under the age of consent money for sexual services. Ex-premier, who was recently found guilty of tax fraud, will not necessarily go to jail due to his age and Italy's lengthy appeal processes.

Greek strike over state broadcaster's (ERT) reform pending

■ Strikes are spreading throughout the country in Greece on account of the temporary suspension of the state television's and radio broadcaster's transmission. The walkout expanded to several fields of public service, from public transport to offices, hospitals and even air traffic controllers. The government decided to provisionally close ERT due to its unprofitable operation, which involves 2,600 people losing their jobs. Prime Minister Antonio Samaras declared that ERT will resume its operations in a different way. The broadcaster, which costs the government €300 million per year, needs to be restructured in the frame of Greece's pledge to the EU to cut public sector jobs, public spending and to implement tax hikes.

Nigeria banned two terrorist organizations

■ After launching armed forces offensive against the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Ansaru in May, the Nigerian government has to take the next step to re-establish peace in the country: The ban of the two groups include a punishment for helpers which can imply 20 years in jail. Human rights organizations fear that the rule will lead to despotism of the troops while looking for terrorists. Meanwhile the state of emergency has been imposed because of the continuing attacks in the Northwest of Nigeria.

Demonstration against Putin's rule in Moscow on national holiday

■ Thousands of opposition activists expressed displeasure over Putin's regime, and demanded the release of those political prisoners, who had been detained at the protest against the President's inauguration to a third term last year. The crowd headed to Bolotnaya Square in the capital's centre, where yesteryear the unrest turned into violence. Critics of the current leadership conceive of the "Bolotnaya case" trials, which are still in progress, as the government's effort to silence the opposition. The march, led inter alia by opposition leader and anticorruption blogger Aleksei Navalny, bore the slogan "March for our and your freedom". Navalny is facing charges of embezzlement, which he attributes to Putin's revenge for his activities. There were no major incidents occurring at the demonstration on June 12th.

Government for the people in China?

■ Results of recent public opinion polls in China show that – contrary to the belief of numerous foreign China-watchers – the ruling communist government possesses a very high level of popular support. According to these surveys, the average Chinese citizen's approval towards governmental actions would rate at about 8.0 on a 10-point scale. The people's trust in the CCP turns out to be successfully accumulated by a variety of factors, such as constant economic development, media control, cultural traditions and, most importantly, the government's efforts to respond to public demand.

Cambodia passes a bill against genocide denial

■ The law will prosecute anyone who "does not acknowledge, denies or diminishes ... crimes committed under the Democratic Kampuchea" and can be compared to the ones covering Holocaust denial in Europe. Phnom Penh wants a coming to terms with the past as the regime of the Khmer rouge caused the death of over 2 million people, almost one quarter of the Cambodian population. But critics are afraid that the menace of a two-year-imprisonment could restrict the freedom of speech and the real coming to terms with the past including genocide crime detection.



*Stupa in Choeung Ek, the Genocide Center or Killing Fields.
Photo: Michael Darter [Wikimedia Commons]*

■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

US-EU trade pact

■ The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and the European Union shall become the biggest bilateral trade deal in history. After two years of negotiations and preparations, the two future partners began the talks to “create the world's biggest free-trade zone covering nearly 50 per cent of global economic output, 30 per cent of global trade and 20 per cent of the world's foreign direct investment. Trans-Atlantic trade alone was worth \$646 billion (503 billion euros) last year.” It would be an enormous facilitation for firms doing transatlantic businesses but the controversies are not far: There are different conceptions about agriculture and genetically-modified foods, about data privacy and the large-scale NSA eavesdropping program. Social media giants as Google and Facebook are also looking for more favourable terms of privacy and guarding data.

Japanese-French friendship deepened by nuclear cooperation

■ During the visit of the French President Francois Hollande in Tokyo, an agreement for a mutual project on building Turkey's second power plant was reached. Hollande's entourage included the head of France's nuclear energy giant Areva, Luc Oursel, who will work with Mitsubishi. The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is concerned about the use and export of atom energy despite the Fukushima catastrophe and the growing anti-nuclear movement which mobilized tens of thousands after the plans became public.

Pakistan lodges protest, stresses “immediate end to US drone strikes”

■ Despite President Barack Obama's promise in early May to scale back drone strikes over Pakistani territory, reports say that two sets of missiles hit Taliban commanders' convoys in the duration of ten days during late May and early June. According to the Pakistani Foreign Office, the drone strikes highly violate Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, thus the events urged the Foreign Office to summon US Ambassador Richard Hoagland and register a complaint towards him about the drone strikes.

Afghanistan angry at Pakistan's Kabul-Taliban power-sharing formula

■ In late June, Pakistani national security adviser Sartaj Aziz presented a concept about a federalist Afghanistan in which some provinces were to be controlled by the Taliban. The idea of a power-sharing arrangement between Kabul and the Taliban was received with indignation in the Afghan capital. Seemingly, the suggestion ruined any chance for an upswing in the relationship between the two neighbours regarding the near future.

The case of Staff Sgt. Robert Bales

■ During his fourth deployment, Staff Sgt. Robert committed a massacre in two villages during two killing tours causing sixteen civilian deaths, leaving six people injured and their families traumatized as the casualties were mostly children and women. The soldier who had been diagnosed with PTSD suffering from a brain injury, had also “been drinking contraband alcohol and snorting Valium – both provided by other soldiers – the night of the killings” which might have stimulated his bloodlust. These conditions could be the extenuating circumstances which could save him from a death penalty which was demanded by the relatives of the victims. In fact, “no US service member has been executed in more than 50 years” but the fear is present that family-members could look for revenge or that villagers would take retribution against other American soldiers for his actions.

US-Taliban peace talks

■ The planned trilateral negotiations to secure sustainable peace in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal in 2014 is threatened to be boycotted by the Afghan government. The Afghan government reacts to the Taliban’s office opening in Qatar opposing the title of the office – the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”. As a consequence they suspended the BSA (Bilateral Security Agreement) talks with the US while the US tries a resuscitation of the planned dialogues. Pakistan who has been a backer of the Taliban sees the hindrance more in the capricious Afghan President Karzai while the Pakistani public position favours reconciliation with following protagonists: “United States, the Taliban, and the Northern Alliance, a group of Afghan ex-warlords who fought the Taliban in the 1990s and now wield significant influence in Kabul”.

Hagel chides China for cyber-spying

■ At the annual security summit known as The Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel said that an increasing number of cyber-attacks on US government and industry portals “appear to be tied to the Chinese government and military.” The Obama administration has been looking forward to challenge China in a dialogue over the issue. China vigorously denied the accusation, saying that it does not need to steal information from the US as it is capable to produce its own military-hardware blueprints.

Relocation of ethnic Tibetans by Chinese policy

■ The ordered relocation of Tibetans by the Chinese government, in favour of a “new socialist countryside with new socialist villages”, contradicts the maintenance of the human rights. The Mass rehousing happens partly without an appropriate financial compensation and without having consulted the inhabitants. This means a radical incision in the lives of Tibetans facing repression without the chance to make an impact. Often the Tibetans have to bear the costs of rebuilding their “new purpose-built housing estates”. During his visit in the autonomous region, the US-ambassador to China raised the importance of preserving the Tibetan culture, shortly mentioning the repeated self-immolation by monks and the organization of Human Rights Watch which had been accused of lying and “consistently making irresponsible remarks and groundless accusations against China”.

Religious violence spills over Myanmar-Malaysian border

■ An anew outbreak of violence against Muslims in the West of Myanmar caused many refugees fleeing to Malaysia where already one of the biggest Rohingya Muslim refugee communities exists. But their leaving does not solve the conflict so that Malaysia now faces a spill-over of violence causing the killing of four Myanmar refugees. By calling for bring the perpetrators to justice, the Malaysian Foreign minister tried to exercise power against Myanmar which has repeatedly failed to protect its Muslim minority. Malaysia has given the refugees the right of residence but refuses to give them a legal status which would include the right to work for becoming self-supportive.

Kyrgyz Parliament passed the bill proposing the shutdown of key US airbase in Bishkek

■ The Kyrgyz legislature voted 91 to 5 in favor of closing the airbase with a deadline of July 11th, 2014. According to the lease agreement, the Kyrgyz government has to give a 180-day notice to US forces to pull out. The American leadership has been using the facility since 2001 in order to supply its anti-Taliban operations in Afghanistan. US Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Pamela Spratlen considers the base a very important logistical facility, which contributes to the stability of the region. Russia, which also has an airbase in the country with a lease effective until 2032, has been intensely lobbying to the Kyrgyz government to close the US airbase with an offered credit line of \$2 billion in 2009. The bill is now waiting for President Almazbek Atambayev to sign off on.

US migration talks with Cuba

■ After two years, talks about Cuban immigration into the USA were restarted as there are coming about 200,000 Cubans annually via legal immigration creating bicultural cities like Miami. Furthermore the US accepts under the “wet foot, dry foot policy” the ones who reach the U.S. coast, while it returns the ones who were picked up at sea. This policy came under criticism of Cuba. The bilateral negotiations should continue at least quarterly to boost a “successful cooperation in migration, including advances in aviation safety and visa processing,” but also for “safeguarding the lives of intending immigrants.” The re-establishment of a secure instant mail service between the countries is concerned impossible from the Cuban side as long as America keeps up its economic embargo policy. From the American side, there is the demand to set Alan Gross – a US government subcontractor, who is serving a 15-year jail sentence in Havana – free and the “issue of a North Korean ship caught in Panama last week smuggling arms from Cuba in contravention of UN sanctions”. If the dialogue turns out to be successful, there is the possible of an extended B2 non-immigrant visa for Cubans which is used for family visits and personal travel.

John Kerry maintaining negotiations with Venezuela's foreign minister

■ After several years lacking high level dialogue between the US and Venezuela, US Secretary of State and foreign minister, Elías Jose Jaua met on the sidelines of the 43rd General Assembly of the Organization of American States in Antigua, Guatemala on June 5th. The discussion came about just hours after American filmmaker Timothy Tracy was released by Venezuelan authorities, so as to temper tense relations at least by removing one nuisance. Washington has been striving to rebuild relations with Venezuela since the death of Hugo Chavez, who had pursued malevolent policies towards the United States. Each of the politicians assessed the meeting as a positive encounter, emphasizing the necessity of a more constructive and positive relationship between the two countries. Furthermore they agreed on the establishment of a high level committee, which would enable them to discuss issues of shared interest and facilitate good relations between the two states.

■ News in Brief

International relations

UN-report predict the world-population to reach 9.6 million in 2050

■ The official UN-report *World Population Prospects: the 2012 Revision* predicts two trends for the population growth concerning the future: While “the population of developed regions will remain largely unchanged at around 1.3 billion from now until 2050 or rather will face a population decline, the 49 least developed countries are projected to double in size from around 900 million people in 2013 to 1.8 billion in 2050.” The rise from 7.2 now to 9.6 million in 37 years is mostly affected by three factors: fertility, mortality and migration, at which fertility is concerned to be the most influencing. Whereas the developed regions will have to cope with a reduction of birth rates dropping under the replacement level which will cause ageing societies with difficulties in providing care for older persons, the mostly sub-Saharan, least developed countries will deal with high levels of fertility especially and rapid growth as long as there will not be a wide provision and social acceptance of affordable contraception.

G8 Leaders' Lough Erne Communique, 2013

■ The United Kingdom hosted the latest G8 leaders' meeting during 17-18th June, 2013. On their 39th summit, while also releasing the Open Data Charter and the Lough Erne Declaration, the G8 produced a joint communique, which emphasizes current foreign policy challenges. The foreign policy section focuses primarily on Syria, but it also expresses deep concern about recent events in North Korea, and praises the political progress lately shown by Afghanistan and Libya.

Latvia likely to gain access to the euro zone on January 1st, 2014

■ According to an announcement of the European Commission released on June 5th, Latvia had reached a high level of sustainable economic convergence with the euro area. The country's auspicious economic state is largely due to the drastic fiscal adjustments and austerity program, the Baltic state has implemented in recent years. EU Economy Commissioner Olli Rehn appreciated the efforts made by the Latvian government to counteract economic challenges during the global economic crisis. He also added that the country emerged stronger from the crisis owing to its successful and efficient policies taken. The Commission's review of Latvia's application, including checks on the most significant economic indices, stated that the institution approved the country's accession to the euro zone. The final steps to make concerning the process are up to the European Parliament, the ECOFIN Council, and the Council of Ministers, which will also evaluate Latvia's economic condition.

EU member states go along with initiating membership talks with Serbia by January, 2014

■ Serbia achieved recognition of the EU by improving relations with its secessionist region, Kosovo as well as for implementing thorough reforms. It is assumed that the EU's recommendation will be endorsed by the EU ministers' meeting, which has recently proposed Belgrade to tighten relations with Kosovo in order to set up closer ties with its neighbor. The Balkan country hopes the negotiations will encourage foreign investment and enable Serbia to get access to the pre-entry EU funds. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle also appreciated the two countries' efforts to ameliorate their relations, and added that this attitude deserves a positive response from the Union. Serbia has already pushed through significant reforms; however EU membership talks may last years due to the far-reaching requirements of harmonisation of law.

Talks between Ivanishvili and Rasmussen on NATO and Russia

■ Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen met in Tbilisi in June to discuss issues of the Caucasian country's way to the North-Atlantic military alliance as well as Georgia's ties to Russia. After Ivanishvili, they had an interesting and in-depth talk, discussing further cooperation between Georgia and NATO, the former's relations to Russia, and the country's internal progress. Tbilisi's nexus with Moscow have been strained since the Russian-Georgian military conflict of August 2008 on the separatist region of South-Ossetia in Georgia. One of the main reasons of hostility between the two countries is that Russia recognized the independence of Georgia's both separatist regions (South Ossetia and Abkhazia).

Landmark UN arms trade treaty opens for signature

■ The ratification of the landmark UN arms trade treaty began with an overwhelming participation so that over one third of the member states already signed. To reach the ratification, there are 50 supporting countries needed which might still take a while. In order "to make the world a safer place" – as German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said –, the treaty should prevent the weapons from falling into wrong hands and causing genocide and war crime against humanity. This moral minimum standard seems still too high for some big fishes like Russia and the USA, who make over 50% of the global arms exports; like China who receives almost 30% of its arms from Russia and France and sells over 50% to Pakistan, and India who takes 35% of arms delivery from Russia). Syria, North-Korea and Iran stayed nonconformist.

Human traffic report downgrades Russia and China

■ The latest Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report has downgraded Russia and China for a lack of efforts in anti-trafficking. To achieve the highest ranking, Tier 1, a country must acknowledge the problem and continuously work on it to keep the rank. The report focuses on the topics modern day slavery including exploitation but also on victim care and psychosocial advice. China and Russia experienced the automatic downgrade provision from Tier 2 Watch List after 8 and 9 years where a country usually can only be for two consecutive years. Critics see a tool of despotism in it following the “political sympathies or antipathies of the US State Department”.

Mujahadin-e-Khalq to take up lobbying in Washington

■ The Mujahadin-e-Khalq (MEK/MKO) is known as a dissident group participating in the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, being a guerrilla movement in the Iraqi exile sponsored by Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran wars in the 1980s. Since then they have been residing near the Baghdad Airport at Camp Liberty which was a former US military camp, renouncing violence and waiting for their status as a terrorist organization to be deprived in 2009 by the EU and now after one year of negotiations by the USA. A return of the members of MEK seems impossible as being held responsible for the assassination of 12,000 people in Iran and only Germany and Albania might provide asylum to the members of the former terrorist organization. Their possible right to take influence in American politics threatens Teheran with an American invasion being accused by MEK of building a nuclear site.

Power struggle in the Sub-Saharan region between the USA and China

■ After US President Barack Obama's three nation Africa trip, he pledged \$7 billion to help combat frequent power blackouts in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as two-thirds of the local population lacks access to electricity at all. With the new initiative “Power Africa” he wants to expand the access to electricity up to the double which sees as key factor for development, especially also in rural areas. Through the development of new sources of green energy, he hopes to bring light into the current darkness. But his speech did not reveal two other truths: The profit of America from the project and the power struggle for influences in Africa with China. Compared to China's investment of \$600 million for a 400 mw hydropower plant, \$7 billion is not a lot of money and the US would need to invest at least half of the amount to finish the project. Obama has implicitly advertised the US-style investment and partnership as superior in due consideration of the general public interest to Beijing's own Africa push. For General Electrics, the initiative already brought a billion deal with Ghana including federal guarantees which “will reduce G.E. financial risks in Africa and will help it compete better against Chinese companies”.



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