



Global Political Trends Center
Istanbul Kültür University

Istanbul Kültür University, Ataköy Campus,
Bakırköy, 34156, Istanbul, Turkey
Phone: (90) 212 498 44 76 | Fax: (90) 212 498 44 05
www.gpotcenter.org

Regional Updates

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CYPRUS

Cypriot President Nikos Anastiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı made a joint appearance before global leaders in the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland to pronounce their aim to build peace. After his meeting with the two leaders in Davos, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged them to “capitalize on the current positive momentum” to reunite Cyprus under a federal government. “Significant progress has been made in this leader-led process over the past eight months, demonstrating that with political will, it is possible to reach an understanding on all issues,” he said.



UN Special Adviser Espen Barth Eide commented to a newspaper that he is optimistic that a solution in Cyprus is near. He emphasized that this time compared to the 2004 Annan Plan, the documents with the points agreed are derived from both communities’ leaders and not from outsiders. Several media outlets in northern Cyprus reported that President Anastasiades has allegedly told Turkish Cypriot leader Akıncı that he intends to apply to the EU for making Turkish an official language.

Former Turkish Cypriot President Mehmet Ali Talat said in an interview that if no solution found in Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriot side would “inevitably” grow closer to Ankara.

Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) leader Andros Kyprianou visited Turkey in January and met Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. He called their meeting as “remarkably friendly” and added, “[...] these meetings are good [...] they shape a positive climate, but of course problems are solved at the negotiating table and not in such meetings.” He said “the Turkish prime minister specifically said they would be interested in a partnership with Greece and Cyprus after the solution of the Cyprus problem in order to help develop the region.”

Kudret Ozersay, former Negotiator from the Turkish Cypriot side, has launched his People’s Party on 7 January at the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce.

EGYPT

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Egypt's Ministry of Interior provided details on 120 people suspected to have been the victim of forced disappearances by the government.
2. Egypt has re-stationed an Egyptian ambassador, Hazem Khairat, in Tel Aviv after three years of an ambassadorial presence to strengthen Egypt's role in the Palestinian issue. The move was welcomed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
3. The Religious Endowments Ministry distributed a leaflet to mosque imams instructing them to utilize Friday sermons to prohibit participation in protests on January 25.
4. President el-Sisi, once again, attended the Coptic Christmas mass to deliver a short speech at the religious event.
5. The ISIS-affiliated group Wilayet Sina (formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis) claimed the bombing of a natural gas pipeline that transports gas to Jordan through North Sinai.
6. Egypt's court upheld the three-year prison sentence for former President Hosni Mubarak and his two sons for corruption. Mubarak was deprived of privileges granted to former presidents and his sons banned from political practice for five years. They were all fined to pay a total of LE 146 million (\$ 18.6 million).
7. Egyptian Parliament convened its first session in three years to swear in the newly elected MPs. Live airing of the sessions was, however, temporarily banned to "prevent grandstanding" by some MPs. It will be resumed after the revision of 93 laws promulgated by Presidents Adly Mansour and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.
8. Egypt has extended the state of emergency in North Sinai until April in an effort to further security efforts in the areas of Arish, Rafah, and Sheikh Zuwayyed.
9. A number of prisoners were pardoned by President el-Sisi in commemoration of the January 25 uprising and Police Day.
10. Following an attack killing five policemen in North Sinai, Interior Minister Magdy Abdel-Ghaffar was appointed head of security of the governorate.
11. El-Sisi praised the January 25 Revolution in a speech, as the country marked the 5th anniversary of the uprising amid heavy security.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. In the fiscal year 2015/2016, Egypt's budget deficit increased by 3.3 percent, amounting to a total of EGP 96.7 billion (\$ 12.3 billion).
2. The World Bank has forecasted a decrease in Egyptian economy growth by 3.8 percent in the fiscal year 2015/2016.

REGIONAL UPDATES: EGYPT

3. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Egypt on January 19 and signed 21 aid deals and investments worth billions of dollars in the fields of infrastructure, transportation, electricity, housing, and agriculture.
4. The 10th meeting of the Egyptian-Russian joint committee for trade, economic, scientific, and technical cooperation took place on January 31st to bolster cooperation in several fields.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. On January 1, Egypt officially began its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.
2. Egypt condemned the attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran following Saudi Arabia's execution of prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr.
3. Egypt received Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdel Malek al-Mekhlafi to discuss the current developments in Yemen.
4. Egypt's Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) announced that the number of tourists visiting Egypt, following the Russian plane crash in October, has declined by 38 percent.
5. Turkey's foreign ministry intends to invite Egypt to the 13th Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul in April.
6. A council meeting presided over by President el-Sisi agreed to extend the deployment of Egyptian Armed Forces in the Gulf area, the Red Sea, and the Bab el-Mandab strait for another year.
7. President el-Sisi met with the US Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) John Brennan in Cairo, to discuss counter-terrorism in context of North Sinai and the MENA region.
8. Members of the Great Britain's ruling Conservative Party met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry to discuss developments in the context of the Egyptian Parliament and to confirm their recommendation to resume British air flights to Sharm el-Sheikh.
9. Turkish paper Cumhuriyet Daily published a report claiming that on-going Saudi-mediated talks between Egypt and Turkey aim to reconcile the countries through an agreement where Turkey recognizes the Sisi administration and Egypt lifts the death sentences from the Muslim Brotherhood members. The efforts were denied by Egypt's foreign ministry.
10. Russia's transport ministry will require additional requirements before flights to Egypt are resumed, to ensure the full security of its citizens.
11. El-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn agreed on the need to strengthen trade, investment, and cooperation between Egypt and Ethiopia in different fields, including water.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

As violent incidents between Israelis and Palestinians continued throughout the month, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas warned Palestinian groups that are encouraging youth to take part in the surge of violence: “all the nation and political parties are supporting the national uprising. But we support the peaceful national uprising,” he said in a news conference on January 23.



Regarding Israel-Turkey reconciliation efforts, Egypt has approached Israel and expressed its reservations regarding granting Turkey a role in the Gaza Strip. On the other hand PM Netanyahu said in an interview that the normalization process with Turkey continues, and that he is hopeful they would reach an agreement.

Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström called in the Swedish Parliament to investigate whether Israel was guilty of extrajudicial killings of Palestinians during the current wave of violence.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced France’s plan to initiate an international peace summit to renew diplomatic efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. He added, should the diplomatic offensive fail, France will formally recognize a Palestinian State. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas welcomed the Minister’s remarks.

Moreover, Chinese President Xi Jinping has also called for the establishment of a Palestinian state within the pre-1967-war borders by stressing “China supports the peaceful process in the Middle East [and] the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital being eastern Jerusalem.”

The United States has released a reminder that products from the West Bank or Gaza should not be labeled as “made in Israel”. On the other side, on January 17, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to foreign ministers from Eastern Europe and the Balkans to encourage them to oppose the EU Foreign Affairs Council’s resolution, which would sharpen the distinction between Israel and the settlements.

On January 27 PM Benjamin Netanyahu met Greek and Greek Cypriot heads of government in Nicosia, in an effort to strengthen Israel’s ties in the eastern Mediterranean and to advance building a gas pipeline to Europe.

The United States’ Ambassador to Israel remarked that Israel applied laws differently to Israelis and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. The ambassadors critical comments were condemned by Israeli officials.

SYRIA

1. Saudi-Iranian diplomatic relations were severed following harsh Iranian criticism and attack of Saudi Arabia's Consulate in Tehran, in response to the execution of Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Subsequently, a sectarian reaction broke out among Middle Eastern countries, dividing them into Sunni and Shia supporters. This escalation raised concerns of increasing regional instability and threatened the conflict resolution process relating to Syria.
2. On January 4, representatives of the Syrian opposition made demands for confidence-building measures such as the release of prisoners, halt the bombardments of towns, and end the blockades on rebel-held areas. The demands, communicated to UN envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, were expected to be met prior to the January 25 negotiations in Geneva.
3. Syrian Observer reported that Members of the High Committee for Negotiations (HNC) reached a clear consensus in Riyadh on four red lines, which will guide the negotiation process: first, the establishment of a pluralistic regime, representative of the full spectrum of Syrian people, and void of Bashar al-Assad and current regime figures; second, adhering to the integrity of the Syrian territory; third, preserving and reforming the architecture of state institutions; and fourth, rejecting terrorism.
4. De Mistura met with Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Muallem, to discuss the peace talks scheduled for January 25. In the meeting, Muallem confirmed that the Syrian government is ready to participate in the Geneva peace talks on condition of receiving a list of the attendees.
5. Syrian rebel groups claimed that they will reject peace talks unless the Syrian government implemented articles 12 and 13 pertaining to humanitarian aid and cease of attacks against civilians.
6. Following a six month surrender-driven siege by the Syrian government, the mountainous, rebel-held town of Madaya received aid convoys from the International Committee of the Red Cross, to alleviate the dire conditions of its 40,000 people.
7. Confirming the EU's active role in the International Syria Support Group, High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini met with Chairman of the Syrian High Committee for Negotiations Riad Hijab, to emphasize the importance of a political opposition united behind a common approach; underline the need for creating a political process leading to a peaceful transition; and stress the urgency of providing humanitarian aid throughout the country.
8. Russian military supported the civilian population of Deir ez-Zour by delivering 22 tons of humanitarian aid using airdrop systems.
9. The Russian government released the text of a Russian-Syrian Agreement that was signed in August 2015 outlining Russia's open-ended military presence in Syria. Its stipulated aim is to protect the "sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic".



REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA

10. Hundreds of combatants and civilians were killed as fighting between the Assad regime forces and ISIS raged in the province of Deir ez-Zour, where ISIS has reportedly made significant advances.
11. In a joint press statement, US Vice President Joe Biden and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the US and Turkey are prepared to pursue a military solution in Syria against ISIS if a political settlement proves impossible.
12. With the help of Russian airstrikes, the Syrian regime captured rebel-held towns and supply routes, Rabia and Salma in the northern province of Latakia
13. Key differences prevailed between the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and before the Geneva III Talks: Russia proposed a mixed opposition list or two delegations; Saudi Arabia opposed the presence of Russian-backed groups; Turkey opposed the presence of Syrian Kurds; and Syrian rebel groups demanded the implementation of “goodwill” measures by the Syrian regime.
14. De Mistura sent out invitations to the attendees for the delayed talks on January 29. A senior French diplomat noted that although the Kurdish PYD party would not be included at this stage, they will have to be part of the final solution.
15. The Syrian opposition HNC initially boycotted the Geneva “proximity talks”, claiming that no confidence-building measures have been implemented; the Assad regime is not serious about a political settlement; and the situation on the ground is concerning. However, on January 30, they headed to Geneva to assess the seriousness of the regime and the international community in the negotiations.

WESTERN BALKANS

1. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

On January 26, the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Dragan Covic announced that Bosnia and Herzegovina will submit an application for EU membership on February 15. On January 25, Bosnian police arrested Fahrudin Radoncic, a member of the Bosnian parliament and the leader of the ruling coalition party Union for Better Future. Radoncic was arrested on suspicion that he illegally influenced witnesses. The trial of former Bosnian Army commander in Srebrenica Naser Oric started in January 26. The Prosecution is charging Oric for committing war crimes in 1992 in the area of Srebrenica.



2. KOSOVO:

A special court is being set up in The Hague to try war crimes committed by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army during the Kosovo War, confirmed Dutch government on December 15. The decision was made after consultations between officials of the EU, the Dutch and the Kosovo governments. The leader of the Kosovo Serb political party SDP Oliver Ivanovic was convicted of war crimes at the Basic Court in Mitrovica on January 21, and sentenced to nine years in prison. A Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union and Kosovo was signed on January 27th in Strasbourg. New rounds of negotiations between Serbia and the EU started in Brussels on the same day. The main topics of the talks between the Kosovo's PM Isa Mustafa and Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic were the establishment of Community of Serbian Municipalities, as well as the verdict on Oliver Ivanovic case.

3. FYR MACEDONIA:

Nikola Gruevski resigned as prime minister of Macedonia on January 14. Shortly after that, on January 18, MPs of the ruling coalition (VMRO-DPMNE and DUI), decided to dissolve the Macedonian Parliament. These decisions are in accordance with the agreement —that has overcome political crisis in Macedonia—reached between the four major political parties last year. The agreement also defined that the extraordinary parliamentary elections will take place on April 24. Zoran Zaev, leader of the strongest opposition party SDSM, said on January 29 that the conditions for holding fair elections have not been met and that his party will not participate in the election process.

4. MONTENEGRO:

After three days of debate, the Montenegrin parliament voted confidence to the government of Milo Djukanovic on January 28. On the same day, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said during a press conference in which he presented the Annual report, that Montenegro will start the negotiations for NATO accession in mid-February.

REGIONAL UPDATES: WEST BALKANS

5. SERBIA:

Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic announced the decision to call early parliamentary elections on January 17, the same time without giving an exact date. On January 28, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament adopted a draft resolution on Serbia. The draft resolution calls for the opening of negotiation chapters 23 and 24 with Serbia, but also emphasizes the need for harmonization of Serbian foreign and security policy with EU policy.

Global Political Trends Center (GPoT Center) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institution established under the auspices of Istanbul Kültür University in 2009.

GPoT Center was founded with the aim to support reconciliation and non-violent solutions to international as well as domestic issues through dialogue. Our mission is to contribute to stability, democratization and peace through organizing multitrack diplomacy meetings, conducting innovative and independent research, and encouraging informed debates in the media on key issues affecting Turkey and the world.

GPoT Center serves as a platform for the free exchange of views and information on political, social and economic matters concerning a variety of parties and segments of society. We aim to achieve our mission by routinely bringing together opinion leaders, government officials, policy makers, analysts, scholars, experts and members of the media from Turkey and abroad.

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CONTACT DETAILS

Global Political Trends Center (GPoT)

Istanbul Kültür University
Atakoy Campus, Bakirkoy
34 156 Istanbul, Turkey

www.gpotcenter.org

info@gpotcenter.org

Tel: +90 212 498 44 76/65

Fax: +90 212 498 44 05

