

US and Europe Must Stand Together Over Ukraine: Biden

BRUSSELS - U.S. Vice President Joe Biden said on Friday that the United States and Europe needed to stand together over Ukraine and accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of calling for peace while rolling his troops through Ukrainian countryside. "This is a moment where the United States and Europe must stand together, stand firm. Russia cannot be allowed



to redraw the map of Europe because that's exactly

what they are doing," Biden said as he arrived for a meeting with European Council President Donald Tusk. "So we have to stand, we the United States and Europe as a whole, has to stand with Ukraine at this

moment. Ukraine needs our financial assistance and support as it pursues reforms. Even in the face of this military onslaught they are attempting to push forward with the reforms," Biden said. He made no mention of possible U.S. arms supplies to Ukraine to fight separatists in the east of the country, which some European leaders fear would merely escalate the conflict. (Reuters)

Tunisia's Secular-Islamist Coalition Takes Office

TUNIS - A secular-led coalition government that includes Islamists took office in Tunisia Friday, three months after the North African state's first free parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Habib Essid and his team took the oath of office in front of President Beji Caid Essebsi before an official handover from interim premier Mehdi Jomaa. Essid vowed to fight for greater democracy and greater ... (More on P4)... (24)

Nieghbor News

Iranian, US Top Diplomats to Meet on Saturday

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his US counterpart John Kerry are due to hold a meeting in Munich, Germany, on Saturday.

"Secretary Kerry will meet with Iranian Foreign Minister (Mohammad Javad) Zarif in Munich, Germany, on Saturday to discuss the ongoing nuclear negotiations," a senior US State Department official said. Zarif and Kerry held intense negotiations in the Swiss city of Geneva in January to help speed up the ongoing negotiations between Iran and Group 5+1 (the US, Russia, China, France and Britain plus Germany) over Tehran's peaceful nuclear program. The 10th round of negotiations between Iran and the six world powers was held in Vienna from November 18 to 24, where the seven nations decided to extend the talks until July after they failed to strike an agreement. The latest round of the nuclear talks between

the two sides was held at the level of deputy foreign ministers in Geneva, Switzerland, on January 18.

The two sides decided to continue their talks in February.

Both Iran and the G5+1 negotiators have underlined that cutting a final deal before the July 10 deadline is possible.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani stressed on Sunday that US President Barack Obama should account for any possible failure in the nuclear talks between Tehran and the world powers. "The US president has said recently that they pressure Iran to accept their view on the nuclear issue. Now the goal that they pursue through holding negotiations with Iran has become clearer, they say that we should surrender to their demand. In which part of the world such a behavior is called negotiation," Larijani said, addressing an open session of the parliament in Tehran. (FNA)

German, French Leaders Head for Moscow to Press for Ukraine Peace

MOSCOW/KIEV - The leaders of Germany and France will fly to Moscow on Friday on a dramatic initiative to try to end fighting in Ukraine that they fear could threaten peace elsewhere in Europe.

The planned trip by Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Francois Hollande to see Russia's Vladimir Putin on Friday evening follows five hours of late-night talks with Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko in snow-bound Kiev on Thursday.

Back in their respective capitals in between, Hollande called the talks "the first step", while Merkel said it was unclear whether the meeting in Moscow would secure a ceasefire. Their initiative follows fierce fighting and territorial gains in eastern Ukraine by Russian-backed separatists since a peace blueprint was agreed in Belarus in September. The conflict has killed more

than 5,000 people and the Ukrainian military reported that two more soldiers had been killed in the past 24 hours in the east, with 26 wounded.

The growing military pressure has shaken the Ukrainian economy and driven a debate over the possibility of the United States providing Kiev's hard-pressed army with arms.

Merkel said she and Hollande were not on the road as neutral mediators but were representing European interests. "These interests are peace, maintaining Europe's peaceful order."

Her spokesman Steffen Seibert said there "was no sign whatsoever" of a breakthrough so far.

A statement on Poroshenko's website said the sides had expressed the hope that "Russia had an interest in" a peaceful settlement of the conflict. For Moscow's part, Russia's ambassador to France Alexander Orlov told Europe 1 radio there



was an urgent need to avoid war. "I wouldn't say it's a last chance meeting, but it's not far off," he said.

The Ukrainian presidential statement said he and the German, and French leaders had called for a quick ceasefire, the withdrawal of foreign forces from Ukraine, the pull-back of heavy weapons and equipment, the closure of the border and the release of all prisoners. The major powers were due to come together again on the Ukraine crisis at an international

security conference in Munich, Germany, at the weekend. In Brussels, en route for Munich, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden said the United States and Europe had to stand together over Ukraine and accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of calling for peace while rolling his troops through Ukrainian countryside. "This is a moment where the United States and Europe must stand together, stand firm. Russia cannot be allowed to redraw the map of Europe because

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EU Surplus in Trade in Services up Significantly in 2013

BRUSSELS - The European Union (EU) surplus in trade in services increased to 178 billion euros (about 203 billion U.S. dollars) in 2013, compared with the level of 161 billion euros (183 billion dollars) in 2012, EU's statistical office Eurostat said on Friday.

EU exports of services rose by 5 percent from 676 billion euros (770 billion dollars) in 2012 to 710 billion euros (809 billion dollars) in 2013, and imports increased by 3 percent, from 515 billion euros (587 billion dollars) to 532 billion euros (606 billion dollars), said Eurostat.

EU international trade in services were mainly composed of "other business services" (R&D, business, professional and technical services), which accounted for 25

percent of EU's total exports and 29 percent of imports, followed by transport services, travel services, telecommunications, computer and information services and financial services.

The services that contributed most to the surplus were financial services at 43.5 billion euros (50 billion dollars), followed by Information Communication Technology (ICT) services and other business services.

The United States and the four European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries continued to be the two main partners of the EU in international trade in services, while the largest surplus was observed in trade with the EFTA countries, followed by the United States, Russia and Japan. (Xinhua)

Japan Readies First Robot to Probe Melted Fukushima Reactor

HITACHI, Japan - A snake-like robot designed to examine the inside of one of three melted reactors at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant is ready to begin its expedition. Assessing the damage inside the reactors is a crucial step in the decommissioning of the plant, which was badly damaged by a 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Use of a remote-controlled robot is essential because no humans can go close to the reactor chambers because of their fatally high radiation levels.

Using information gathered by the robot, the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., plans to repair the damaged

chambers enough so they can be filled with water in preparation for the removal of melted radioactive debris, planned in about a decade.

The 60-centimeter (2-foot)-long robot, developed by electronics giant Hitachi and its nuclear affiliate Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy, was demonstrated this week at a Hitachi-GE facility in Hitachi, northeast of Tokyo. It has a lamp at the front and is designed to crawl like a snake through a 10-centimeter (4-inch) wide pipe into the containment vessel. From there it must dangle and descend onto a steel-mesh platform just below the reactor core. (AP)

Turkey Pulls Out of Munich Conference to Avoid Israeli Delegation

ANKARA - Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Friday pulled out of a security conference in Munich at the last minute, saying he did not wish to attend a joint session with an Israeli delegation. Relations between Israel and Turkey remain strained since a major rupture in 2010, when Israeli soldiers killed nine Turks traveling in a Turkish-led humanitarian aid convoy attempting to break a blockade of Gaza. "I was going to attend the conference but we decided not to



after they added Israeli officials to the Middle East session at the last minute," Cavusoglu told a news conference in Berlin, where he has been meeting Turkish ambassadors based in Europe. Withdrawing from the

meeting was nothing to do with Turkey's relationship with Germany, he said in the remarks broadcast by Turkish state television TRT. Despite being major trading partners, Israel and Turkey - former allies - fre-

quently engage in bitter verbal exchanges. President Tayyip Erdogan, an outspoken advocate of the Palestinian cause, last year likened the actions of Israel to those of Hitler, in comments that led Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accuse him of anti-Semitism.

Last month Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in turn likened Netanyahu to the Islamist militants who killed 17 people in Paris, saying both had committed crimes against humanity. (Reuters)

EU Leaders to Broaden Anti-Terror Drive At Summit Next Week



BRUSSELS - European Union leaders plan to call next week for tougher border checks to stop foreign fighters, the swift adoption of an air passenger information deal and increased intelligence sharing.

A draft of the statement for next Thursday's summit, obtained by The Associated Press on Friday, said "the security of citizens is an immediate necessity. We must better implement the tools we have and develop them further."

The leaders will also call for the monitoring and removal of Internet content that promotes terrorism and new projects

to boost the counter-terrorism abilities of Middle East and North African countries.

The 28-nation EU has been spurred into an anti-terror drive by the deadly terror attacks in France last month and a series of police raids targeting those who go abroad for jihad.

In particular, the leaders want to toughen the rules governing passport controls on the EU's external borders.

It would allow for "systematic checks against all relevant databases" to find suspect movements, including those of foreign fighters, the draft says.

Under the current rules of the Schengen free movement zone, random, but not systematic, checks are allowed.

The leaders will urge lawmakers to "urgently adopt" an airline Passenger Name Record deal. The EU has PNR deals with the United States, Canada and Australia but a system for sharing data among its own members has been held up over privacy concerns. France and Belgium say such a system is vital for tracking fighters heading to Syria and Iraq.

Fighting Internet radicalization is another key concern, and the leaders call for greater cooperation between public authorities and the private sector at the EU level.

The EU's counter-terror coordinator wants EU agencies to help companies like Google remove extremist videos from its sites. (AP)

Australia's Polarizing Prime Minister Faces Political Crisis

CANBERRA - Australians are quick to criticize their polarizing, gaffe-prone and unpredictable prime minister, Tony Abbott. But his critics within the conservative government have largely held their tongues in the interests of presenting a united administration - until now.

Halfway through his first 3-year term, Abbott will face a move within his own party to oust him Tuesday. Lawmaker Luke Simpkins said Friday in an email to colleagues that he will enter a motion at a ruling Liberal Party meeting calling for Abbott to declare that his job and that of his deputy Julie Bishop are open to a ballot of 102 government lawmakers. Abbott and his backers warn that changing prime ministers a sixth time in eight years would be a bad move for a country that has prided itself



on political stability. The popularity of Abbott's government took a dive last May, when it introduced its first annual budget, which was widely criticized as being toughest on the poorest and most vulnerable.

Unpopular bills to make the sick pay for medical services that are currently free, and to allow universities to raise their tuition fees to compensate for dwindling federal funding, have been blocked in the Senate. "Not only do they look shift, they look incompetent as well - that's all of them and Abbott's just the figurehead," Monash

University political scientist Nick Economou said.

But one of Abbott's handicaps is that he has never been especially well liked, even when his conservative coalition ousted the Labor Party from power in 2013. Public dislike of Abbott is blamed in part for conservative governments taking big election losses in Victoria state in November and Queensland state on Jan. 31. "He's persistently unpopular," said Martin O'Shannessy, chief executive of the respected pollster Newspoll. For ... (More on P4)... (25)

Chinese President Expected to Visit Pakistan This Year: FO

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Foreign Office (FO) spokesperson Tasneem Aslam, during a media briefing on Friday, said that Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to visit Pakistan this year.

"The exact dates are being worked out," said Aslam. "Once we have confirmed the dates, we will make an announcement in Islamabad and Beijing as per practice."

The spokesperson also confirmed the visit of Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, adding that the dates of the visit are being worked out.

A source had earlier told Dawn that Yi will be arriving in Islamabad on Feb 9 on a two-day official visit. Late last year, following consultations between the governments of

China and Pakistan, the visit of Chinese president to the country had been cancelled in light of protests in Islamabad led by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT). As the ruling Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) blamed PTI chief Imran Khan and firebrand cleric Tahirul Qadri's protest in the capital for the cancellation of Chinese president's visit, counterpart India rolled out the red carpet for Xi Jinping on his maiden visit to India.

Know more: Chinese FM to visit Pakistan, president's trip to be discussed. Responding to a question regarding Afghan refugees, Aslam added that Pakistan is hosting 1.6 million Afghan refugees. (Monitoring Desk)

Russian Military Base Specialists Train Tank Crew Members of Tajik Army

DUSHANBE - Specialists from the Russian military based deployed in Tajikistan are reportedly training tank crew members for the Tajik national army. An official website of the Central Military District of the Ministry of Defense of Russia reports that academic exercises for junior specialists (drivers and gunlayers) concluded on February 5 and practical exercises began at the Lohour, Sombuli and Momirak training grounds on February 6.

The Russian military base is Russia's largest non-naval military facility outside the country. It was officially opened in Tajikistan in 2004 under a previous agreement, which was signed in 1993, and hosts Russia's largest military contingent deployed abroad.

A total of some 7,000 Russian troops are stationed at three military facilities collectively known as the 201st military base - in Dushanbe, Qurghon Teppa, some 100 kilometers from Dushanbe, and Kulob, about 200 kilometers southwest of Dushanbe. (Asia-Plus)