

EU Reaffirms Strong Position on Russia over Ukraine Crisis

BRUSSELS - The European Union (EU) insisted on Monday that it will not recognize Crimea's incorporation into Russia and urged all parties to implement the Minsk agreements fully in light of the recent resurgence of violence in eastern Ukraine.

EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini Monday chaired the monthly meeting of foreign ministers from all 28 EU member states in Brussels. The situation in Ukraine, which has deteriorated significantly in the last days, was top of the ministers' agenda.

"The situation in the east in the last days was definitely extremely worrying for us. So when we refer to the full



implementation of the Minsk agreements, we obviously restate our expectation that the fighting stops there and that a process of peace can be started effectively," the High Representative said to a press conference after the meeting.

The tensions in Donetsk and Lugansk regions worsened last week as fierce fighting erupted between government troops and pro-independence insurgents in the Kiev-controlled Avdeevka town, causing dozens of combatant and civilian casualties.

The warring sides blamed each other for the escalation that has killed some 10,000 people since April 2014. After ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

Not Enough Aid Reaching Desperate Civilians in Syria: UN

GENEVA - The Office of the Special Envoy for Syria warned Tuesday that out of the 914,000 people humanitarian partners had hoped to reach last month in Syria, only 40,000 received life-saving aid, making January 2017 the worst month since March last year.

The special envoy's spokesperson, Yara Sharif, told reporters here that "there is an urgent need to move on with the other convoys as there are areas that didn't receive any humanitarian aid for more

than 100 days."

"Madaya, Zabadani, Foha and Kefraya are out of food and despite being able to evacuate 13 medical cases since 20 January, there are still critical cases in Madaya and Zabadani that require immediate medical attention," she added.

According to Sharif, an inter-agency convoy was able to deliver food, nutrition and other emergency items for 84,000 people in the hard-to-reach area of Talbiseh in rural Homs on ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

Putin, Merkel Urge Immediate Ceasefire in Ukraine

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for an immediate restoration of a truce in southeastern Ukraine, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

The two leaders expressed serious concern during a phone conversation over the recent escalation of the armed conflict between Ukrainian government troops and local militias in the Donbass region, said a Kremlin statement.

Putin told Merkel that there was "a clear desire

for Kiev to disrupt the implementation of the Minsk agreements and use the Normandy format as a cover for its destructive steps." The Normandy format is a group composed of Russia, France, Germany and Ukraine aimed at resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

According to the Kremlin, Putin and Merkel agreed to step up diplomatic efforts to promote a peaceful settlement to the crisis and hold further Normandy group meetings. A civil war broke out in Ukraine



in April 2014 after local residents in the country's southeastern Donbass region refused to recognize the new pro-West Kiev authorities and sought in-

dependence. The two sides reached a peace agreement brokered by Russia, France and Germany in September 2014 in the Belarussian ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

NATO Chief, US Trump Discuss Burden-Sharing over Phone

BRUSSELS - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and U.S. President Donald Trump stressed the need for continued efforts to ensure fair burden-sharing among the 11 NATO allies over phone, NATO said in a statement Monday.

The two leaders discussed by telephone on Sunday evening, during which they "reconfirmed the importance of the Alliance in troubled times, reviewed progress on the fight against terrorism and on NATO defence spending",

according to the statement.

They also discussed "the uptick in violence in eastern Ukraine". As for Russia, NATO chief talked about NATO's policy of strong defense and dialogue with Russia during the conversation.

The two leaders will discuss related issues at the upcoming NATO Summit in Brussels in late May, according to the statement. It was Stoltenberg's second phone conversation with Trump since his election, ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

Russia, Turkey, Iran and Jordan Discuss Syria Ceasefire in Astana

ASTANA - A technical meeting on Syrian ceasefire monitoring opened here on Monday with representatives of Iran, Russia, Jordan, Turkey and the United Nations participating. The participants agreed that mechanism for effective monitoring of the full compliance with the ceasefire was already functioning, Head of Russian delegation and Deputy Head of Main Operations Directorate of General Staff, Major-General Stanislav Gadzhimagomedov said after the meeting in Astana, the capital city of

Kazakhstan. "There is Russian and Turkish center of compliance control. We share data about violations every day, analyse them, take measures to eliminate the majority of mutual attacks and relieve the tension," he said.

"The delegations have confirmed their readiness to continue interaction in order to achieve the full implementation of the cessation of hostilities in Syria," he said. However, as noted by all the participants, the ceasefire efforts were often interfered by international ter-



rorist groups, the general added. According to him, the mechanism of ensuring full compliance with the ceasefire mode was already in force and the participants of the the peace

talks discussed measures of mutual trust building to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to the war-torn areas. The Joint Task Force on Syria was established in accordance ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

EU Council Gives Nod to Extending Border Control in Five Schengen Countries

BRUSSELS - The European Council on Tuesday gave its nod to extending temporary internal border controls in five Schengen countries for another three months, as the bloc is still bearing the brunt of secondary movements of irregular migrants.

In the wake of a European Commission proposal put forward on Oct. 25, the Council announced in statement that starting from Feb. 11, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway should pro-



long "proportionate temporary border controls" for a maximum period of three months at certain internal borders. The tempo-

rory border checks -- currently in place at certain borders in the five countries -- was last extended on ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

Erdogan and Trump to Hold Telephone Conversation

ANKARA, Turkey - Turkish officials say President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will hold a telephone conversation with U.S. President Donald Trump -- their first since the American leader took office.

Officials from Erdogan's office said Tuesday the conversation would take place shortly after midnight (2100 GMT). They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government regulations.

Turkey's relations with the United States under the Obama administration have been strained, with Ankara frequently expressing frustrations over what it perceives as U.S. reluctance to extradite U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey accuses of orchestrating the failed July 15 military coup.

Turkey has also been angered by U.S. support to Syrian ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

British Parliament Speaker Opposed to Trump Addressing Westminster

LONDON - The speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow said Monday he was strongly opposed to U.S. President Donald Trump addressing the Houses of Parliament during his proposed state visit to Britain. Dozens of members of parliament (MPs) have already signed a motion opposing Trump from following in the footsteps of other U.S. presidents by addressing politicians in the centuries old Westminster Hall. But Bercow's comment is the strongest message so far against the honor being granted to Trump.

Political commentators in Westminster predicted that Bercow's very public declaration would enrage 10 Downing Street. It was British Prime Minister Theresa May who invited Trump to a state visit last month when she became the first national leader to meet the new president after his inauguration. Bercow's unexpected message took politicians by surprise when he outlined his opposition, which earned applause from some MPs. Under the rules in force at the Palace of Westminster, Speaker Bercow is one of three officials required to agree to any visitor addressing MPs and peers from the House of Lords.

Without his agreement, it will not be possible for Trump to address parliament. Bercow told MPs that before the imposition of Trump's controversial migrant ban, he would have been strongly opposed to an address by the U.S. president in Westminster Hall.

"After the imposition of the migrant ban, I am even more strongly opposed to an address by President Trump in Westminster Hall," Bercow said. (Xinhua)

Pub Rules Apply for Brexit Bill: EU

BRUSSELS - Britain must pay to leave the EU in the same way as friends going to the pub must pay for their round of drinks, the European Commission said Tuesday.

Margaritis Schinas, a spokesman for Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, said the divorce bill is an "essential element" of an orderly Brexit.

"It is like going to the pub with 27 friends," Schinas told a daily briefing. "You order a round of beer but then you cannot leave while the party continues, you still have to pay for the round you ordered." Britain's former ambassador to the EU said last week that the EU is set to demand up to 60 billion euros (\$64 billion) from Britain to settle ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

EU Top Diplomats Meet on Thorny Regional Issues Amid Widening Crack with U.S.

BRUSSELS - Top diplomats of the 28-nation European Union (EU) on Monday wrapped up a one-day gathering in Brussels, seeking to tackle thorny regional issues ranging from Ukraine crisis to Middle East Process, in the context of a widening crack between the bloc and the new U.S. administration.

"We will have intense exchanges in the coming weeks with our U.S. counterparts," said EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini at a press conference after the Foreign Affairs Council.

"Today's discussions, on Ukraine and the

Middle East Peace Process in particular, were very useful to take stock of where the EU stands, that it is united, and has very clear positions," she stressed.

As to the recent resurgence of violence in eastern Ukraine, the council said in a statement that EU foreign ministers expressed their concern, "in particular with regard to the humanitarian situation."

"They discussed how to increase EU support for the implementation of the Minsk agreements," the council said, hinting that the bloc will not budge on its sanctions against Russia, ...*(More on P4)...(29)*

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Chinese, Australian FMs Call for Strengthening of Bilateral Ties

CANBERRA - Foreign ministers of China and Australia called for further strengthening of bilateral ties here on Tuesday.

At the two countries' fourth round of diplomatic and strategic dialogue, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said relations between China and Australia have maintained healthy development, adding that the free trade agreement between the two sides has yielded good results. This year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Australia, Wang said, calling on the two sides to take this opportunity to review past experience and plan for the future.

He urged the two sides to expand cooperation,

add new content to bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership on the basis of mutual trust and mutual benefit.

As the international situation is facing uncertainties, China and Australia need to strengthen strategic communication, jointly deliver to the world positive signals including building an open world economy, promoting greater inclusiveness and broader shared benefit, as well as safeguarding global trade system and combatting protectionism.

He said the two countries need to promote business and trade cooperation toward a more diversified, more sustainable direction, enhance collaboration on such areas as international production capacity ...*(More on P4)...(30)*

Pakistan is Moving Towards Development, Economic Growth: World Bank CEO

ISLAMABAD - World Bank's Chief Executive Officer Kristalina Georgieva said that since her last visit to Pakistan in 2011 she has seen that the country has worked through three tough years that brought improvements in security and a more stable economy.

Much of the economic growth has benefited poor people and Pakistan's levels of inequality compare favourably to many middle-income countries, she added.

"Speaking to leaders in government, political parties, civil society, the private sector and various thought leaders, I sensed an optimism that

the country had found its footing and is moving up the ladder of development," World Bank CEO added.

She highlighted following opportunities and challenges for Pakistan: In my discussions with the government in Pakistan we focused on three areas of opportunity and challenge: the first is higher growth and jobs.

The government wants annual economic growth of 6 to 7 per cent compared to 4.7 per cent achieved in fiscal year 2016. But this will only happen if investment doubles to 30 per cent of Gross Domestic Product ...*(More on P4)...(31)*

Iran Deal Incorporated Almost None of US Demands: Zarif

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister says the United States could push through almost none of its demands regarding the Iranian nuclear program in a deal that the US negotiated along with five other countries with the Islamic Republic in 2015.

In remarks made in an interview with Iranian daily Ettela'at and published on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif enumerated a series of demands that the US attempted but failed to impose on Iran as part of the nuclear deal.

"America wanted Iran not to have even one

centrifuge... When it did agree to centrifuges, it wanted to oppose our research and development [program]; [then] the Americans were saying until the last day of the talks that we only do research and development work on lower-model centrifuges such as the IR-1," he said, explaining that Iran is now using IR-8 models.

Zarif then referred to US President Donald Trump's hostile attitude toward the Iran deal and called attention to the fact that the agreement is multilateral.

Trump has been speaking ...*(More on P4)...(32)*

Uzbekistan Approves State Program Against Corruption

TASHKENT - Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has approved the state program on fighting corruption for 2017-2018.

The state program envisages measures for prevention of corruption in all spheres of activity of the government and society, timely detection and suppression of corruption offenses, elimination of their consequences, causes and conditions, as well as improvement of legislation in the field of fighting corruption.

The state program also provides for the development of the draft laws "On state service", "On public and private partnership", "On public pro-

cedurement", "On distribution of legal information", "On public control", "On protection of victims, witnesses and other participants of criminal proceedings" and "On administrative procedures." It is planned to implement additional anti-corruption measures in the field of ensuring transparency of the process of formation and spending of budgetary funds, as well as the availability of information on the distribution of these funds.

Shavkat Mirziyoyev by his decree created the Uzbek Republican Interdepartmental Commission headed by Attorney ...*(More on P4)...(33)*