

Central European Leaders Discuss Brexit, Migration Policy in Warsaw

WARSAW - Prime ministers from the Visegrad Group (V4) countries on Tuesday said they are against an obligatory refugee quota and linking migration with European funds. Officials also adopted a joint position on Brexit and European Union (EU) migration policy during a meeting held here. During a joint press conference, Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo emphasized that the EU needed reforms and Brexit might be a good opportunity to discuss them. Her Czech counterpart Bohuslav Sobotka said V4 countries would press for a strong and clear European Council



mandate for the forthcoming Brexit talks. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico underlined that after Britain could not end up in a better position than when it was an EU member state, as it would set a bad example and work against EU unity. V4 countries also disagreed to the proposed EU quota refugee allocation system and said they were against linking the migration debate to EU funds. EU migration policy must be based on true compromise between member states, Szydlo said, adding the EU's migration policy was not effective and should be reconsidered. (Xinhua)

EU to Unveil Brexit Guidelines on Friday: Tusk

BRUSSELS - European Council President Donald Tusk announced on Wednesday that the European Union (EU) will unveil its Brexit guidelines on Friday. "On Friday I will share a proposal of the negotiating guidelines with the member states, to be adopted by the European Council on April 29," he said at a press conference after receiving the Brexit letter from British Ambassador to the EU Tim Barrow. Underlying that "most Europeans, including almost half the British voters wish that we would stay together, not drift apart,"

Tusk said "there's no reason to pretend that this is a happy day, neither in Brussels, nor in London." However, he insisted that "Brexit has made us, the community of 27, more determined and more united than before." Describing the forthcoming Brexit negotiations as "damage control," Tusk said the EU's goal is to minimize the costs for EU citizens, businesses and member states. "We will do everything in our power - and we have all the tools - to achieve this goal. And what we should stress today is that, as... (More on P4)...(16)

British PM Makes Farewell Phone Calls to EU Leaders, Merkel

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May made telephone calls Tuesday night to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Downing Street said. A Downing Street spokesperson said the phone calls were aimed to "update them ahead of the letter giving notification of the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Union being delivered tomorrow."

"In separate calls, they agreed that a strong EU was in everyone's interests and that the UK would remain a close and committed ally. They also agreed on the importance of entering into negotiations in a constructive and positive spirit, and of ensuring a smooth and orderly exit process," the spokesperson said. After the phone calls, May signed the Article 50 notification letter which



will officially begin Britain's exit from the European Union (EU), local media said. May will officially trigger Article 50 in the letter that will be hand delivered to Tusk at 1:30 p.m. Brussels time on Wednesday, the BBC reported. (Xinhua)

Indonesia, France to Cooperate in Anti-Terror, Energy, Defense Fields

JAKARTA - The governments of Indonesia and France have pledged to strengthen cooperation in the fields of fighting terrorism, defense and energy sectors. Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday held a meeting with his French counterpart Francois Hollande at the state palace, discussing efforts on how to bring bilateral ties to a higher level. Both sides pledged a strong commitment to combating extremism and exchanged

similar views on the importance of scraping xenophobia. Both Indonesia and France have been targeted by the IS terrorist group that left dozens of casualties. During the visit, Hollande brought 40 businessmen and pledged a 2.6-billion-dollar investment in energy, infrastructure and retail sectors, according to Widodo. "We agreed to strengthen our commitment to step up bilateral cooperation," ... (More on P6)...(17)

Food, Emergency Items Delivered to 25,000 Syrian People in Rural Damascus

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent jointly delivered food and emergency items to 25,000 Syrian people in rural Damascus, the first convoy to the area since June 2016, a UN spokesman said here Tuesday. "Today, a UN-International Committee of the Red Cross-Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy is delivering food and emergency items to 25,000 people in need in Bludan in

rural Damascus," Farhan Haq, the deputy UN spokesman, said at a daily news briefing here. "The last interagency convoy to that area was in June last year." There is also a UN-Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy delivering assistance for 84,000 people in Talbiseh, in Homs, a location that was last reached on Feb. 5, he said. "We continue to call for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need in Syria, particularly the



close to 5 million people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas," Haq added. The current Syrian crisis, which broke out in March 2011, has taken its toll on the humanitarian situation in the Middle East country, which has progressively deteriorated over the past six years. (Xinhua)

Turkey's EU Bid Hangs in Balance as Decisive Referendum Looms

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that relations with the European Union (EU) will be reviewed after a constitutional referendum which would endow him with new extended powers. He has said it before but does he mean business this time? Local experts think that is not impossible. His irate remarks after his ministers were banned from campaigning for the massive Turkish diaspora in Germany and the Netherlands for security concerns reflect a sharp shift in



the country's traditionally western diplomacy and close relationship with European nations. With an outpour of daily statements ahead of the crucial referendum on

April 16, Erdogan appears bent on taking on the 28-nation bloc which has kept his country waiting at its gate for decades now. "If a 'yes' follows the April 16... (More on P6)...(18)

Merkel Pledges to Minimize Impact on Immigrants

LONDON - Chancellor Angela Merkel says Germany will push for the impact of Brexit on Germans and other European Union citizens living in Britain to be as minimal as possible. She says she wants Britain and the EU to remain "close partners." Merkel said during a speech in Berlin that the divorce talks triggered Wednesday must first focus on undoing in an orderly fashion four decades of ties between Britain and the EU. She said: "Only when these questions are cleared up can we subsequently - but hopefully soon - talk about our future relationship." Merkel also says the remaining EU member nations will negotiate with Britain "in a fair and constructive manner." She says: "I hope that the... (More on P6)...(19)

U.S. Envoy to UN: Syria's Assad 'Hindrance to Moving forward'

NEW YORK - U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, said on Wednesday that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad is a "big hindrance in trying to move forward" to find an end to the country's six-year conflict. "I'm not going to go back into should Assad be in or out, been there, done that, right, in terms of what the U.S. has done," she told the Council of Foreign Relations. "But I will tell you that he is a big hindrance in trying to move forward, Iran is a big hindrance in trying to move forward." With Russian and Iranian military support, Assad has the upper hand in a war with rebels who have been trying to topple him with backing from states including Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United States. A U.S.-led coalition has also been targeting Islamic State militants in Syria.

"This is one of those situations where the U.S. and Russia could definitely talk and say 'OK, how can we get to a better solution.' But the issue of Assad is going to be there," Haley said. U.N.-led peace talks are currently being held in Geneva. Haley said U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura "desperately" wants the United States to be part of finding a solution for the conflict in Syria. "When you have a leader who will go so far as use chemical weapons on their own people you have to wonder if that's somebody you can even work with," she said. Assad's government has denied using chemical weapons. (Reuters)

China, EU Reaffirm Climate Action after Trump Backs Away

BEIJING/OSLO - Nations led by China and the European Union rallied around a global plan to slow climate change on Wednesday after U.S. President Donald Trump began undoing Obama-era plans for deep cuts in U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Trump's order on Tuesday, keeping a campaign promise to bolster the U.S. coal industry, strikes at the heart of an international Paris Agreement in 2015 to curb world temperatures that hit record highs in 2016 for the third year in a row. Many nations reacted to Trump's plan with dismay and defiance, saying a vast investment shift from... (More on P6)...(20)

14th ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials' Meeting Held in Lao Capital

VIENTIANE - The Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the 14th ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) on Wednesday in capital Vientiane to review recent cooperation. The meeting was co-chaired by Lao Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Laos' ASEAN SOM Leader Thongphane Savanphet, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and SOM Leader of the Russian Federation Igor V. Morgulov. The meeting reviewed the cooperation between ASEAN and Russia over the past year, especially in following up on the outcomes of the ASEAN-Russia Commemorative Summit to mark the 20th Anniver-

sary of ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Relations held in March last year in Sochi, Russia, Lao News Agency (KPL) reported. In addition, the meeting discussed priority areas for cooperation, based on the recommendations of the ASEAN-Russia Eminent Persons Group, and charted out the future direction for ASEAN-Russia cooperation spanning across political-security and economic and socio-cultural areas through encouraging closer cooperation and coordination between the sectoral bodies of ASEAN-Russia to ensure the effective implementation of the ASEAN-Russia Comprehensive Plan of Action 2016-2020, aiming... (More on P6)...(21)

Neighbor News

China, UN Launch new Plan for Hunger Reduction Cooperation

BEIJING - China's Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) on Tuesday jointly announced the launch of a strategic plan in a bid to reduce hunger in China and other developing countries. As a collaboration among the MOA, WFP and other partners, the five-year plan lasting from 2017 to 2021 aims to help realize the goal of ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, one of the 17 goals raised by the UN for its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, according to the launch event.

By implementing the plan, China and WFP hope to bring about several outcomes, including reducing the stunting rate among Chinese children, providing smallholder farmers with better con-

ditions and access to markets, as well as improving South-South cooperation between China and other developing countries. The plan will not only help people in remote and poor areas in China, but also serve as an example for other developing countries to reduce poverty and hunger, said Sui Pengfei, director-general of International Cooperation of the MOA. He added that this will be a new starting point for cooperation between China and the WFP. More than 30 million Chinese people were assisted by WFP's projects from 1979 to 2005. China, for its part, lifted 700 million people out of poverty over the past 30 years and has vowed to eradicate poverty in the country by 2020, making its experience in reducing hunger an example for countries seeking to replicate such success. (Xinhua)

Pakistan, Germany's Defence Authorities Discuss Professional Matters

RAWALPINDI - Defence authorities of Pakistan and Germany Tuesday discussed professional matters, prevailing political and security situation in the region. Branch Head of International Security Policy and Bilateral Relations of Germany Captain (Navy) Axel Ristau, along with Defence Attache Col Klaus Wilhelm Wolf called on Additional Secretary Defence Admiral Faisal Rasul Lodhi here at Ministry of Defence and discussed matters of mutual interests. According to a press release, the both sides agreed to collabo-

rate with each other in all fields of bilateral interest. Later, the visiting German delegation held a formal meeting with the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Defence. During the meeting, matters of defence interest were discussed. The two sides unanimously agreed that there was a wide scope of moving forward and sharing experiences with each other on matters including border management, handling of refugees/temporarily displaced persons and sharing knowledge on radicalization issues. (APP)

Russia, Iran Sign Economic Cooperation Deals

MOSCOW - Russia and Iran signed Tuesday a string of cooperation agreements in various fields including the energy sector as President Vladimir Putin hosted his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani for his official visit to Moscow. The two leaders discussed during the meeting prospects for expanding bilateral trade, economic and investment ties and agreed to deepen Russian-Iranian cooperation in various areas, primarily the economy. "We noted with satisfaction that trade between Russia and Iran grew by more than 70 percent in 2016. This is a truly good result, since we managed to achieve it amid an unstable global economy and persisting volatility on the commodity and currency markets," Putin said. According to a joint statement published by the

Kremlin, with a consensus of accelerating the implementation of the Roadmap for Cooperation in Trade and Industry, both sides expressed their support for facilitating bilateral product deliveries and developing interbank ties, as well as welcomed an early completion of the preparation work for signing an interim agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and Iran with regard to the formation of a free trade zone. The two countries are set to expand cooperation in multiple energy sectors and continue coordinated efforts to stabilize international markets, with "particular attention" being paid to bilateral projects in the nuclear power industry, the statement said. Russia's Rosatom state nuclear corporation and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran... (More on P6)...(22)

Turkmenistan Ready to Intensify Co-Op with Italy

ASHGABAT - President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the Italian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Marco Mancini, the Turkmen government said in a message. Turkmenistan, which is implementing peaceful foreign policy, will continue to pay special attention to building cooperation with Italy, including within constructive dialogue established with the

EU in recent years, as well as within other major international organizations and structures, the Turkmen president said. The sides exchanged views on the prospects for cooperation on a bilateral and multilateral basis. Energy sector, trade and economy sphere, agriculture and other areas were defined key vectors for building up interstate cooperation between Turkmenistan and Italy. (Trend)