



Weekly Media Report

25-29 November

International Affairs

Geneva Peace Conference on Syria to Begin January 22 – RIA Novosti, Moscow, 25 November 2013

A long-delayed international peace conference dedicated to ending the conflict in Syria will be held on January 22 in Geneva, the United Nations said on Monday. The gathering has been repeatedly postponed because of the inability of participants to agree on preconditions for talks. It would be the first time the Syrian government has negotiated directly with the country's rebel movement.

<http://en.ria.ru/russia/20131125/184971986/Geneva-Peace-Conference-on-Syria-to-Begin-January-22.html>

European Parliament approves the EU budget for 2014-2020 – www.db.lv, Riga, 26 November, 2013

After numerous months of discussions between the European Parliament and the member states, the European budget for 2014-2020 has been approved. The total EU budget for the next 7 years will be 960 billion euro in payment promises (commitments the EU will have the right to take) and 908 billion in disposable means. The main requirement of the Parliament was to divert the budget deficit which has been taken over from year to year. Member states finally agreed to this requirement by assigning 3.9 billion euro extra to the budget of 2013 to cover the shortfall. The final approval of the multi-annual budget will take place on 2 December.

<http://www.db.lv/eiro/eiropas-parlaments-apstiprina-es-daudzgradu-budzetu-405269>

Bulgaria supports granting of EU candidate status to Albania, FM Vigenin says – GazetaShqip, Albania, 26 November 2013

Bulgarian Foreign Minister Kristian Vigenin said during a visit to Tirana that Albania should be granted the EU candidacy status in December, for in his country's view Albania has met all the requirements and standards set forth by the European Commission for this purpose. He added that his government will actively work for Albania to be granted this status, especially in view of the fact that Albania has now a very dynamic and committed government that is working hard in order to advance the country's European integration agenda. He made this remarks in a joint press conference with his Albanian counterpart Ditmir Bushati. During his stay in Tirana, Vigenin met with Prime Minister Edi Rama as well.

<http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/>

Prime Minister Rama in Austria visit – Gazeta Shqiptare, Albania, 26 November 2013

On Monday, 25 November, Prime Minister Edi Rama, who is currently on a one-day visit to Austria, was received in Vienna by Austrian President Heinz Fischer. Rama thanked Fischer for Austria's continuous support to Albania and informed him about the recent reforms undertaken by the government, especially with regards to the war against organized crime and corruption. Rama said that 2014 will be the first peaceful year for the Balkans. He stressed that this moment should be used to strengthen the economic co-operation in the region and to speed up the EU integration processes. Fischer congratulated him for the results achieved and announced that he would be visiting Albania in 2014. He also offered his country's formal support for the advancement of the Albanian EU membership bid. In addition, Rama held an address at Vienna's Economic Forum later on Monday.

<http://www.balkanweb.com/indexi.php>

Integration Minister meets officials in Sweden – *GazetaShqip, Albania 27 November 2013*

Integration Minister Klajda Gjoshaj met yesterday, 26 November, with the Swedish Minister of European Union Affairs Eva Birgitta Ohlsson. Gjoshaj said that the government is determined to continue with reforms and the integration process in general. Ohlsson praised Albania's efforts and stressed that the Balkans' countries should walk together towards EU integration. Gjoshaj also met with State Secretary Frank Belfrage, who praised Albania's stabilizing role in the region. Gjoshaj said that the granting of the candidacy status to Albania would be an important step ahead in the country's integration process.

<http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/>

Prime Minister Rama attends China – Central & Eastern Europe Meeting in Bucharest – *GazetaShqip, Albania, 27 November 2013*

Prime Minister Edi Rama attended the meeting of the Prime Ministers of Central and Eastern Europe and China held in Bucharest this week. A press release issued by the PM's Office reports that the Heads of Governments discussed in the meeting the importance of the co-operation between China, who was represented in the high-level meeting by its Premier Li Keqiang, and the countries of this region, dwelling especially on the fields of trade and business exchanges. They said that this co-operation should be situated within the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and China, and expressed their readiness to host yearly meetings between China and the Central and Eastern European countries. In his address at the meeting, Rama stressed the importance of regional stability in the Balkans, adding that it should be used to encourage regional investments, especially in transport and energy sectors. Rama has also met with the Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta, a press release issued by the PM's Office reports. The strengthening of the bilateral relations, especially in the trade and business sectors, and the sharing of best practices and experiences in the EU integration process were the key topics discussed in the meeting by Rama and Ponta. Ponta made it clear in the meeting that Romanian government is a staunch supporter of Albania on its EU integration path, especially in terms of launching the EU accession negotiations. Rama, finally, praised the Romanian government's expressed intention to recognize the Kosovo independence and voiced his hope that this will happen as soon as possible.

<http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/>

National Affairs

Russia Considering Paternity Leave for Soldiers – *RIA Novosti, Moscow, 25 November 2013*

Men serving in the Russian army could soon be entitled to paternity leave if a draft law introduced by the Defense Ministry is passed. The bill, posted Monday, 25 November, on a government website of proposed legal amendments, stipulates that male professional soldiers bringing up a child on their own should have the right to take paternity leave until the child turns three years old, thereby giving them the same rights as women serving in the armed forces currently have.

http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20131125/184961137/Russia-Considering-Paternity-Leave-for-Soldiers.html

Latvia supermarket roof collapse: the tragedy has killed at least 52 people – *www.tvnet.lv, Riga, 27 November 2013*

At least 52 people are thought to have been killed when the roof of a Maxima supermarket in Riga collapsed on Thursday. Workers were building a roof garden on the supermarket's roof when it collapsed. Rescue workers did manage to free many survivors in the first few hours



after the collapse, but there is no hope, that there could be more survivors under the ruins. Among the dead are three firefighters, and 11 other fire crew members have been taken to hospital. And while the death toll currently stands at 52, police say it could rise as they have been told of seven missing people who could be under the rubble. Police are now looking for evidence of whether failure of design or construction of the store could have caused the collapse.

http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/kriminalzinas/487239-tragedija_veikala_zolitude_lielaka_latvija_boja_gajusi_52_cilveki

Romania at 27% absorption degree of EU funds, to reach 30% in 2013 - *Agerpres, Romania, 29 November 2013*

"We started at 7%. We are the country that in 2013 has had the highest significant increase, double from Italy, which ranks second, or Greece. The 30% objective by the year's end will be met," the prime minister Victor Ponta said at the Ministry for Information Society during the signing of several funding contracts from structural funds in the IT&C field, worth over 140 million euros. The prime minister congratulated the representatives of the management authorities on their effort to solve 5,000 funding cases drawn up in 2010.

<http://www1.agerpres.ro/english/2013/11/29/we-are-at-27-absorption-degree-of-eu-funds-to-reach-30-in-2013-pm-ponta--17-12-34>

AFET discusses resolution recommending granting of EU candidate status to Albania – *GazetaShqip, Albania, 28 November 2013*

The Foreign Committee at the European Parliament (AFET) discussed a draft motion for a resolution on the 2013 Progress Report on Albania, compiled by the new country Rapporteur, Croatian MEP Nikola Vuljanic, who was congratulated by his colleagues, since this particular report for the first time was presented in time, same as with other countries of the region. The Draft-Resolution recommends the Council to avoid "unnecessary delays" for granting EU candidate status in December, while asking Tirana to promote political dialogue and implement sustainable reforms for guaranteeing the independence of institutions and the judiciary, the integrity of the public administration, and the freedom of media, together with an enhanced fight against corruption, organized crime, and trafficking. In addition, the Draft-Resolution calls attention to the on-going political developments, the difficult economic situation, the human rights' concerns, in particular related to the social inclusion of Roma, and the property issue.

<http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/>

Survey: 85% of Albanians support full EU accession – *GazetaShqip, Albania, 28 November 2013*

A recent survey carried out by the think tank Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) with the support of the European Commission, concluded that 85% of the interviewed persons said they would be in favour of European Union (EU) membership if there were a referendum. The 6% who were against, said that they fear the economic crisis in the Eurozone and the increase of prices in the country. Some 73% believe that the country would benefit from integration, but 40% were against the replacement of the Albanian currency with the Euro. "Albania has shown that it is pro-European and naturally Albanian citizens wish Albania to become an EU member country," head of the Delegation of the EU to Albania, Ettore Sequi, said at the presentation of the survey. "The survey clearly shows the reasons why the majority of Albanians are in favour of Albania's EU membership. This has something to do with the living standard, better employment opportunities, the rule of law, less poverty and more democracy."

<http://www.balkanweb.com/indexi.php>

Economy

Economy, growth under 1% - Bank of Albania launches the alarm that the economic growth could fall in the lowest levels since the start of the crisis – Top Channel TV, Albania 25 November 2013

After the disappointing pace in the first semester, the Albanian Bank says that the Gross Domestic Product growth has slowed down even in the third trimester, meaning that the economic growth for this period has been less than the minimal 1.1% reached in the first trimester. According to the Bank, the slowdown is related to the further drops in consumption and private investment, and also with the government's withdrawal from high spending right after the election. From the beginning of the year, the Bank has declared that the economic growth for 2013 would be in the same levels of one year ago, at around 1.6%. But the newly published report of the monetary policy has been put in doubt for the first time, since there are more risks for the plunge to continue. The only hope for the economy to stay at least in the minimal level of last year, according to Bank experts is increasing the government spending in the last trimester, by bringing the public debt level to a new record. But besides 2013, the biggest concern is year 2014. The consumption crisis and the internal investment crisis now has also the negative effect of foreign demand. With the public debt in dangerous levels and with the export slowdown, the fate of economy for the next year is related to the family spending. If the consumption crisis will continue, same as it did this year, the danger for the economy to fall into stagnation is probably even higher.

<http://www.top-channel.tv/english/artikull.php?id=10452&ref=fp>

The Albanian government will start a detailed audit of all concessionary agreements signed by the previous government in the last years - Top Channel TV, Albania, 25 November 2013

The Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Enterprising, announced that interest groups have notified them of several concessions given to different sectors which damage free competition and put benefiting businesses in dominating conditions. For this reason, the Minister of Economic Development, Arben Ahmetaj, asked all Ministries that have given concessions to bring a list of all agreements with all the accompanying regulations and legal packages. In his letter, Minister Ahmetaj asked the identification of practices that could have exclusivity elements which limit market competition. If it will be proved that agreements could have unjust exclusivity elements, this ministry will present a package of measures that need to be taken for eliminating monopoly elements and to guarantee free competition in every sector. The Ministry of Economic Development says that the decision for auditing these concessionary agreements comes after some business representatives submitted complaints about the practices followed for winning the agreements. <http://www.top-channel.tv/english/artikull.php?id=10461>

BelleAir Company suspends flights, cites freezing of accounts as motive – Gazeta Panorama, Albania, 26 November 2013

Airline Company Belle Air announced on 25 November that it is suspending all flights indefinitely. In the official statement, the company said that, after eight years of successful operation in the market, it had to shut down for reasons mainly related to the difficult financial situation and the freezing of the company's bank accounts for over 18 days. The company apologized for the inconvenience and advised on the ways passengers can be reimbursed. The company said that they will undergo a restructuring process and invited foreign and domestic investors to participate in it. <http://www.panorama.com.al/>