



Weekly Media Report

9 – 13 February 2014

International Affairs

EU agrees to launch negotiations with Cuba – BBC (UK), 11 February 2014

The European Union has agreed to launch negotiations with Cuba aimed at restoring full bilateral relations with the Communist-run island. The talks, which could begin as soon as next month, will try to increase trade and investment, and include a dialogue on human rights, officials said. Since 1996, the EU has restricted its ties with Cuba to encourage multi-party democracy and progress on human rights. The bloc is Cuba's second-biggest trading partner after Venezuela. It represents a major source of investment, and hundreds of thousands of European tourists visit the island every year.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-26123441>

North Korea and South Korea hold first talks in seven years – db.lv (LV) 12 February, 2014

North and South Korea held their first high-level talks in seven years in the border village of the Panumjom on 12 February. The meeting was set up with unusual speed and great secrecy at the North's suggestion last week. The North is likely to repeat its demand for the South and the United States to scrap the military drills, due to start later this month, but both sides have plenty of incentives to seek a deal that could break their long stalemate. The meeting comes a week before the two sides are scheduled to hold reunions of family members separated since the 1950-53 Korean War at the Mount Kumgang resort just inside the North.

<http://www.db.lv/pasaule/ziemelkoreja-un-dienvidkoreja-tiekas-uz-pedejos-gados-augstakalimena-sarunam-409826>

Russia criticizes Latvia's bill on denial of occupation – tvnet.lv (LV) 13 February, 2014

Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee of Latvia approved amendments to the Criminal Law, which provides the imprisonment for denying, praising or abusive and rude questioning of the Soviet Union's or Nazi Germany's implemented aggressiveness against Latvia. Konstantin Dolgov, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official on human rights, democracy and issues of rule supreme command, considers this bill to be contrary to international law and a continuation of misguided public policies implemented by Latvia to glorify Nazism. Russian politician, provocateur and populist Vladimir Zirinovsky requested to withdraw Russian Ambassador to Latvia, Alexander Veshniakov, and declared that Latvian authorities are acting despicable because "we saved them and the whole Europe from fascism."

<http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/viedokli/497418->

[krievija kritize latvijas likumprojektu par okupacijas noliegsanu](http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/viedokli/497418-krievija-kritize-latvijas-likumprojektu-par-okupacijas-noliegsanu)

Albania-Turkey to hold joint government meeting – Gazeta Shqip (Albania), 13 February 2014

Albanian Minister of Defence Mimi Kodheli, met with her Turkish counterpart Ismet Yilmaz during a two-day official visit to Turkey. A press release of the Albanian Defence Ministry quotes Kodheli as saying that a joint meeting of the two governments would benefit the two countries and the entire region. The ministers discussed about concrete co-operation projects, especially on possible Turkish investments in an airport in the south of Albania and a naval base on Adriatic coast. Yilmaz said that Turkey considers Albania an important partner and a big ally, and that they will strongly support Albania's EU candidate status. The

two praised the continuous co-operation in the military field, pointing out that over 2,500 Albanian students have received military education in Turkey.

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

Syria conflict: 'Surge' in fighting death toll – BBC (UK), 13 February 2014

Activists in Syria have reported a surge in fighting across the country, amid attempts to broker a peace deal in Geneva. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said more than 200 people had been killed every day for the past three weeks. Both government forces and rebels were trying to gain territory, it said. This was possibly to strengthen their negotiating position at the peace talks, it added. The talks between the Syrian government and opposition groups are continuing in Switzerland, but there is no sign of a breakthrough.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-26166834>

Afghanistan releases 65 prisoners against objections from US – The Guardian (UK), 13 February 2014

Group let out of Bagram detention centre by Hamid Karzai are accused by US military of killing Afghan and Nato troops. The Afghan government has released 65 prisoners who the US says are dangerous fighters with American and Afghan blood on their hands but Kabul argues are innocent men illegally locked up for years by foreign soldiers. The decision to let the men go is the latest blow to a creaking relationship between the Afghan government and its main financial backer. Plans for a long-term security deal that would keep US forces in the country after their combat mission ends this year have been put on ice since the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, stunned the US administration and much of his own cabinet by backing away from the agreement late last year. Since then he has ramped up anti-American rhetoric, and is reportedly trying to broker a last-ditch peace deal with the Taliban.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/13/afghanistan-releases-65-prisoners-against-objections-from-us>

European Affairs

Swiss immigration: 50.3% back quotas, final results show – BBC (UK), 9 February 2014

Swiss voters have narrowly backed a referendum proposal to bring back strict quotas for immigration from European Union countries. Final results showed 50.3% voted in favour. The vote invalidates the Swiss-EU agreement on freedom of movement. Fiercely independent Switzerland is not a member of the EU, but has adopted large sections of EU policy. Brussels said it regretted the outcome of the vote and would examine its implications.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26108597>

National Affairs

Italian PM Enrico Letta's government in danger of collapse – The Guardian (UK), 12 February 2014

The government of embattled Italian Prime Minister, Enrico Letta, looked close to collapse as he dug in his heels in the face of an increasingly formidable threat to his premiership from the leader of his centre-left party. Letta said it was "not in [his] DNA" to break with the agenda of his government and challenged Italy's political players – chiefly Matteo Renzi, his ambitious young rival – to "lay their cards on the table". Less than 10 months after it was born from the inconclusive mess of last February's general elections, long-running criticisms



of the coalition government's lacklustre record gathered force, putting Renzi, the 39-year-old mayor of Florence, in a leading position to take over as prime minister in an election-free process branded by the media as *la staffetta* – the relay.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/12/italian-pm-enrico-letta-government-danger-collapse>

Albania moves up in press freedom index– *Gazeta Shqip (Albania), 13 February 2014*

Albania has improved its ranking in the Reporters without Borders' Press Freedom Index, from the 102th position last year to the 85th. The Index dedicates a highlight to Albania, titled *New page in Albania's media history*. "Albania's June 2013 elections resulted in a change of government. The Socialist Party of Albania won clean elections that ended two decades of complicated electoral exercises. Its programme for the Albanian media is ambitious: draft new legislation that improves media ownership transparency, reinforce the Albanian public broadcaster's independence and guarantee media access to information held by state entities. In October 2013, the 11 members of the public broadcaster's board of governors had exceeded their term of office by one year. This gives an idea of the scale of the challenge faced by the new government, which aspires to be accepted as a candidate for European Union membership."

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

Economy

Albania, Qatar to boost co-operation – *Top Albania Radio (Albania), 11 February 2014*

On 10.02.14, during an official press release of the Albania Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the need to intensify economic and political relations between Albania and Qatar. The press release followed the visit of Albanian Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati to the Qatar Prime Minister Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani. The Albanian and Qatari governments will sign in the near future a series of agreements in fields such as tourism infrastructure, immovable properties, energy, and agriculture. Such agreements will be signed during a visit of the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama in Qatar. The organization of a joint forum of the chambers of commerce of the two countries was also discussed.

<http://stream.radiotime.com/listen.m>

Environment

Writer who exposed songbird slaughter applauds Albania's hunting ban – *National Geographic, 12 February 2014*

Last July, novelist and bird-watcher Jonathan Franzen wrote a devastating account for *National Geographic* magazine about the mass slaughter of migrating birds across the Mediterranean. The situation, he wrote, was especially dire in Albania, which lies along a major migratory flyway. Due to indiscriminate hunting, the skies above Albania were literally being emptied of birds.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140210-franzen-bird-hunt-ban-albania/>