

WORSENING

CYPRUS: The negotiating process collapses after the failure to reach an agreement on land issues in the intensive round of dialogue conducted in Switzerland, leading the procedure to uncertainty

The peace process in Cyprus collapsed after the negotiating retreat between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders and their negotiating teams ended without agreement in Switzerland. The talks had focused on soil issues and other pending key points. UN Special Advisor for Cyprus Espen Barth Eide reported on 21 September that despite the efforts, it had not been possible to achieve further agreement on these issues, so the parties decided to return to Cyprus and re-evaluate the way forward. The negotiating retreat held its first phase between 7 and 11 November and concluded with the request of a recess by the Greek Cypriot leader. The second phase, which took place between 20 and 21, came to an end without an agreement, though the talks had focused on agreeing on the criteria for territorial adjustment, including issues such as the proportion of territory, the figures of returning displaced persons and the stretch of coast for each of the constituent states of the future federation. There were also efforts to draw up a map based on those criteria and to set a date for an international multi-party conference on security and guarantees. According to various media outlets, the negotiating parties were unable to agree upon criteria, with significant disagreements regarding the number of people to return. In addition, there were disagreements over the sequence of steps, with the Turkish Cypriot side pointing out that once the territorial criteria had been agreed upon, it was necessary to set the date for the multi-party conference on guarantees, while the Greek Cypriot side made the establishment of that date dependent on the previous presentation of the agreed criteria on a map. Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı blamed the Greek Cypriot side for the collapse of the process. Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades attributed the lack of flexibility to the Turkish Cypriot delegation, while indicating his willingness to continue negotiating. International stakeholders like the UN Secretary-General called on the parties to continue negotiating. (UN, Cyprus Mail, Hürriyet, The Guardian, 1-30/11/16)

THAILAND (SOUTH): The new leadership of the main armed group in southern Thailand does not include any representative of the negotiating team with the government

A media outlet has claimed that the leadership of the BRN, suspected of being the main armed group responsible for most daily violence in the southern part of the country, has been renewed and that the new governing body, known as Dewan Pimpinan Parti, does not include any member of MARA Patani, the umbrella organisation grouping together six main insurgent organisations from the southern part of the country that has been conducting exploratory negotiations with the government since it was publicly established in August 2015. According to some experts, if this information is confirmed, it is not good news for the ongoing peace process. In the last two rounds of talks, the government and MARA Patani have been looking at establishing security zones. This would bring greater trust between the parties and show that MARA Patani has some degree of control and influence over the groups that are carrying out violence in the three southern Muslim-majority provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. Indeed, both in the talks between the current military junta and MARA Patani and in the previous dialogue process initiated by Yingluck Shinawatra's government, one of the issues that has blocked progress has been the government's lack of trust that its interlocutors had some kind of influence over the most active armed groups. Thus, according to some, the lack of direct coordination between the leadership of the BRN and MARA Patani would make it difficult to establish the aforementioned security zones as well as to improve trust between the parties. In recent months, some analysts have argued that some BRN factions, especially the BRN-C, may boycott MARA Patani's negotiating efforts. The media outlet that published this information referred to documents leaked by law enforcement members. According to this information, the new president of the Dewan

Pimpinan Parti is Safie Basoe (also known as Spae-ing Basoh), while his secretary is Abdullah Wan Mat Noor (aka Doonloh Wae-mano). MARA Patani stated that they have no information about these changes. (Benar Nwes, 21/11/16)

YEMEN: John Kerry announces an agreement on a new ceasefire at mid-month, but the 48-hour truce is not renewed and violence persists

In mid-November, US Secretary of State John Kerry announced a new cease-fire agreement between Houthi rebels and the Saudi-led international coalition. In what could be his last trip to the area before the end of Barack Obama's second term, the US diplomat met with Houthi representatives in Oman and also held talks in the UAE, a key member of the Riyadh-led coalition. According to Kerry, the Houthis accepted the ceasefire proposal and it was also well received by the Saudis and Emiratis. The truce would have the same terms as the one that took effect from April until late August. However, the internationally recognised Yemeni government, which was deposed by the Houthis, rejected this announcement, saying that it had not been consulted on the decision. Foreign Minister Abdel Malek al-Mekhlafi denounced an attempt to sideline Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi's government, which depends on Saudi Arabia's political, economic and military support. Despite this controversy, days later UN Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed announced the resumption of the ceasefire starting on 19 November for an initial period of 48 hours. He also welcomed the parties' decision to keep working with the De-escalation and Coordination Committee in cooperation with UN experts. However, the truce was not renewed and violence persisted. During the second half of November, a number of incidents were reported, such as an air strike by the Saudi coalition that killed 12 people in the northwestern Hajja governorate and clashes around the city of Taiz that left more than a dozen people dead. The Red Cross also warned of the dramatic situation in Taiz, where around 300,000 people have been besieged by Houthi forces for more than a year. The population fears the action of snipers and the indiscriminate bombings. The head of the Red Cross delegation in Yemen said that the people trapped in the midst of the violence are unable to meet their most basic needs, hospitals are overwhelmed in caring for injured people and dead people remain in the streets. In this context, the special envoy for Yemen initiated a new visit to the region. Ould Cheikh Ahmed travelled to Riyadh and Muscat and may have held talks in Aden with the government of Hadi, who arrived in the city in late November. The intention of the UN diplomat was to promote a new and short round of talks, which should not exceed seven or ten days, in order to reach a final agreement. Sources close to the Hadi government said they would not participate in the dialogue until the special envoy introduced changes to his road map which, in Hadi's view, contradicts previous UN resolutions on the conflict. (The Guardian, 15/11/16; Reuters, 15/11/16; UN News 19/11/16; BBC, 23/11/16; al-Jazeera, 22/11/16; Ashraq al-Awsat, 28/11/16)

ALERT

BURUNDI: The peace talks remain stalled as President Nkurunziza seeks to remove presidential term limits from the Arusha Accords

Peace talks between the Burundian government and the armed, political and social opposition facilitated by the East African Community (EAC) remained stalled as the president continued to promote a political agenda aimed at eliminating a crucial part of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (known as the Arusha Accords) that restricts presidential terms of office. The Arusha Accords, mediated by former presidents Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela, set the limit to two terms. If Pierre Nkurunziza gets away with it, he will render EAC mediation useless and will question Africans' ability to solve their own crises. The EAC mediation process, which began in July 2015, has not made any specific proposal. Its start is slow, even though China gave a push to the process with a donation of \$200,000 in September. Although the chief mediator of the EAC, former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, said that talks could begin in November, one of

Mkapa's assistants believes that much fieldwork needs to be done beforehand. The government has stalled the talks by refusing to participate in them on the grounds that some key opposition figures should be excluded from the process. Nevertheless, the procedure to remove the limit on the number of terms of office may begin in December. It has been brewing since 2015, when a commission of enquiry initiated nationwide consultations to weigh popular opinion on the issue. This commission is expected to present its findings in December. Meanwhile, in a recent report the ICG confirmed the government's desire to abolish the presidential term limits. (The East African, 05/11/16)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: The president names a new prime minister following controversial peace talks

President Joseph Kabila chose opposition member Samy Badibanga to be the new prime minister, in compliance with the agreement reached between the government and part of the political opposition in October that most of the opposition rejected. Only one of the leading opposition figures, Vital Kamerhe, head of the UN party, participated in the Congolese dialogue. The appointment of Badibanga was a surprise since Vital Kamerhe was expected to take the position. Violent riots and protests against Kabila in September caused at least 53 deaths, according to the UN. (Iran Press TV, 05/11/16; AFP in Daily Nation, 17/11/16)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE: Right-wing Israeli groups celebrate Donald J. Trump's victory in the US election and renew appeals to quit the two-state solution

Donald J. Trump's victory in the US presidential election was welcomed by wide sectors of the Israeli right and encouraged further calls to reject the two-state solution to resolve the conflict. The Israeli education minister and leader of the pro-settlement party the Jewish Home, Naftali Bennett, publicly stated that political changes in the US, in Europe and in the Middle East offered a unique opportunity for Israel to reconsider everything and stressed that the era of the Palestinian state was over. Likud members called for the expansion of Israel's sovereignty in the West Bank and announced they would promote the reactivation of plans to build new settlements in East Jerusalem. The interior minister, the ultra-Orthodox Aryedh Deri, even described Trump's victory as a miracle and as a good sign for the people of Israel. However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opted for a more cautious response. Although he described the US president as a "true friend" of Israel, he also asked members of his government to make proposals regarding the future of the country and the region through diplomatic channels and not in statements to the press. Media outlets pointed out that Trump issued some contradictory messages about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the campaign, although he generally made statements in favour of Israeli interests, for example, by announcing that he would recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Some of his advisors also said that building settlements in the occupied West Bank would not be considered an obstacle to peace by Trump, unlike the position held by the administration of Barack Obama and other predecessors. Other experts said that the important issue is who will become secretary of state, a position for which they have names like Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton, both opposed to the idea of a Palestinian state. At the end of November, the media reported that Trump was delighted with the possibility of reaching a peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis and that he considered naming his son-in-law Jared Kushner, an Orthodox Jew and a strong supporter of Israel, as special envoy to the Middle East to help in the process. It should be noted that the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories warned of the consequences of a legal initiative that seeks to legalise more than 100 settlements built on private Palestinian land. The move has already passed its first step and is seen as another blow to the prospects of a two-state solution. (New York Times, 14/11/16; The Guardian, 17/11/16; al-Jazeera, 23/11/16; UN News, 21/11/16)

PHILIPPINES (MINDANAO-MILF): The government urges the MILF and the MNLF to agree on a common road map for peace

President Rodrigo Duterte signed an executive order to extend the composition and competencies of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which has a mandate to present a new Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by July 2017. The law would replace the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) with a new region called Bangsamoro, with greater territorial scope and levels of self-government. The new composition of the BTC makes it grow from 15 to 21 members. Eleven of the members will come from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), including the chairman, and 10 will be nominated by the government, three of which will come from the MNLF-majority faction led by the former mayor of Cotabato, Muslimin Sema. Thus, the government hopes that the new BBL will incorporate aspects not implemented in the final peace agreement signed in 1996 between the government and the MNLF, as well as the contents of the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (2012) and the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (2014) signed with the MILF after several years of negotiations. In this regard, the government announced that alongside the work of the BTC, Manila would negotiate with the MNLF faction led by the founder of the group, Nur Misuari. He has been a fugitive from justice since 2013, but met with Duterte in the presidential palace to address the future of the peace process in Mindanao in early November. When the BTC presents its draft of the law and the MNLF does the same with the agreements reached with the government, Congress should combine both proposals into a single law, allowing the establishment of a new autonomous region in the south of the country. Duterte has stated on several occasions that the establishment of this region bolsters his bid to transform the Philippines from a unitary state into a federal one. Recently, both the MILF and the MNLF expressed support for this new territorial organisation promoted by the new government. In fact, MILF leader Al Haj Ebrahim Murad stated in November that the provisions of the peace agreement signed by both sides in 2014, especially the division of powers between the central government and the new Bangsamoro region, are in full harmony with the functioning of federal states in several countries of the world. The new BTC also has powers to propose legislative changes to Congress for the BBL to be fully constitutional. It should be noted that the office of the presidential advisor on the peace process offered to help the MILF and the MNLF to resolve their differences regarding programme and strategy, thereby preventing blockage of the BTC's work. In recent months, the MILF and the MNLF faction led by Sema have expressed their commitment to cooperate to achieve a common road map in the peace process in Mindanao. The MILF stated that the establishment of a separate panel for the MNLF, announced by the government earlier this month, should not pose any problem as long as the new BBL that is finally passed by Congress is based on the peace accords signed with the MILF in 2012 and 2014. (Mindanews and GMA News, 07/11/16; Rappler, 05 and 07/11/16; Philippine Information Agency, 09/11/16)

PHILIPPINES (NPA): The government and the NDF make progress in negotiating a permanent ceasefire and the release of political prisoners

The government was optimistic about signing a bilateral and permanent ceasefire with the NPA on 10 December, International Human Rights Day. Should this be the case, it is the first time that an agreement of this kind has been signed since the NPA emerged in the late 1960s. This agreement was due to be signed on 26 October, as agreed by the parties in the second round of formal negotiations in Oslo at the end of August, but neither the government nor the NDF were able to agree on key aspects, including ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, the definition of buffer zones, the separation between the two parties and the definition and parameters of an act of hostilities. Regarding this last point, the government asked whether extortion and the collection of the so-called revolutionary tax should also be considered a hostile act. In addition to the lack of consensus on some points, during October and November tensions between the government and the NPA increased after they reported several ceasefire violations. If signing a permanent bilateral agreement is not

possible, the government announced that it would extend the existing unilateral agreement. The NPA mirrored the government's move and announced a unilateral ceasefire. Meanwhile, the government stated that it was working intensively on the release of between 40 and 50 political prisoners for humanitarian reasons. Although Manila initially aimed to carry out this measure in November, later in the month it declared that this release could coincide with the Christmas holidays. The government also stated that it was working on providing amnesty to 434 prisoners included on a list that the NDF sent to it. However, Manila maintains that this does not depend on the executive and requires congressional approval, so it asked the NDF for time and patience. For its part, the NDF recalled that the release of political prisoners would be an important incentive to be able to sign the aforementioned permanent bilateral ceasefire agreement. If the release of prisoners takes place, it will be the second under Duterte's presidency. Previously, the government had ordered the temporary release of 22 NDF consultants so that they could participate in the first round of formal talks. (Philippines News Agency, 07/11/16; GMA News, 08/11/16; Interaksyon, 07/11/16; MindaNews, 13/11/16)

SERBIA – KOSOVO: Deadlock on negotiations over the association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo continues, while progress is made in telecommunications

Negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo over the creation of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in northern Serbia remained stagnant in a context of permanent veto by Kosovo's political opposition, including a parliamentary boycott. The agreement on the autonomy of the municipalities was reached in mid-2015, when four months were given for drafting its statutes. However, progress has not been made so far. The political coalition Serb List, which also boycotts the Kosovo Parliament due to divergences over legislation affecting the town of Trepca, announced that it might be willing to return to Parliament to facilitate the approval of the future association of municipalities. However, the Kosovo government said that preparations could not begin until the coalition returned. Meanwhile, the Kosovo-Albanian opposition warned that it would continue to oppose any further attempt to create an association of Serb municipalities. In other developments, Serbia and Kosovo reached an agreement on telecommunications as part of the dialogue facilitated by the EU, which helps to implement the related agreement reached in 2013 and in the 2015 action plan. According to this plan, the frequency bands and spectrum are given to the newly established Serbian company MTS, which means Serbia retains ownership over telecommunications, while it is agreed to assign to Kosovo its own dialling code. (BIRN, EEAS, 1-30/11/16)

PROGRESS

COLOMBIA: The government and the FARC-EP sign a new peace agreement with demands from the opposition

After several meetings, the Final Agreement for the End of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace was reached on 12 November. This follows the "no" victory in the referendum held on 2 October, which blocked the ratification of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC-EP. The reworked text includes 57 points raised by various sectors that banned the signing of the peace agreement between the government and the guerrillas on 26 September in Cartagena de Indias. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said that the new agreement reflects the views of all social sectors and improves upon the original one, so it should serve to unite the country. Santos has also said that only one of the 57 raised points, which allows the FARC-EP leaders to be elected to public office, was not modified. Humberto de la Calle, the chief negotiator for the government, said that the new agreement reached "is better" than the initial one signed on 26 September, "without sacrificing" its spirit. The FARC-EP said that the guerrilla has yielded to the "limits of what is reasonable and acceptable" and that its signature should begin the construction of the "country of consensus." Sergio Jaramillo, the high

commissioner for peace in Colombia, has urged the parties to implement the new agreement as soon as possible to avoid risking the ceasefire that began on 29 August. In a joint statement released on 22 November, the delegations of the Colombian government and the FARC-EP announced their agreement to officially sign the document on 24 November in Bogota. The statement said that the Congress of the Republic would be the mechanism to endorse the agreement and that they would specify the necessary procedures. Álvaro Uribe, the former Colombian president and head of the opposition party Democratic Centre, which led the “no” position in the previous vote, has rejected the plan for the new peace agreement to be ratified by Congress, reiterating that there are serious issues that were not modified in the text. On 24 September, the peace agreement between the government and the FARC-EP was re-signed in a ceremony held in Bogota before more than 800 guests. That same day, Minister of the Interior Juan Fernando Cristo submitted the new peace agreement to Congress for its endorsement. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated Colombia on the new agreement signed to end the armed conflict and has encouraged the Colombian people to move forward in the peace process together. (Efe, 13, 16, 22-24/11/2016)

GEORGIA (ABKHAZIA) – RUSSIA: A new round of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism begins, with an emphasis on humanitarian and preventive aspects

The delegations of Georgia, Abkhazia and Russia participated in the 41st round of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, promoted by the EU, the OSCE and the UN. This is the sixth meeting since the talks were resumed in May of this year, after a four-year boycott by Abkhazia. The facilitators highlighted the constructive atmosphere and the humanitarian and preventive approach, as well as the focus on security. The round also addressed recent security incidents, including the killing of a Georgian citizen in May by gunfire from a border guard from Abkhazia. The next round is scheduled for the end of January 2017 and the parties agreed to use the hotline provided by the EU mission in the meantime. (EUMM, 11/11/16)

PHILIPPINES (MINDANAO-MNLF): The new Philippine president meets with the founder of the MNLF to address the peace process in Mindanao

President Rodrigo Duterte met with MNLF leader and founder Nur Misuari in the presidential palace to address the future of the peace process. Previously, a local court had overturned the search and arrest warrants against Misuari for crimes against humanity after his participation in the siege of Zamboanga in 2013, where more than 200 people died and tens of thousands were displaced. Since then, Misuari had been a fugitive from justice. Following the aforementioned court ruling, which lasts six months, the new presidential advisor on the peace process, Jesus Dureza, moved to Sulu to travel personally with Misuari to Manila. Since his election last May, Rodrigo Duterte had repeatedly urged Misuari to speak with him directly. Following this meeting, the government said that the MNLF would shortly form a five-person panel and talks would be held to complete the dialogue process. The so-called Tripartite Review Process is formed by the government, the MNLF and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to implement the peace agreement signed in 1996 by the government and the MNLF, with the help of the OIC. One of its main objectives was the amendment of the law responsible for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), created after the signing of the aforementioned peace agreement. Consequently, reports confirmed that the MNLF will not participate together with the MILF and the majority faction of the MNLF (led by the former mayor of Cotabato, Muslim Sema) in reviewing and improving the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). The BBL should gather the main aspects of the peace agreement signed by the government and the MILF in 2014 and should allow the replacement of the current ARMM by a new autonomous region called Bangsamoro. However, Congress did not approve the law, so Duterte signed an executive order to expand the composition and functions of the

Bangsamoro Transition Commission, the body that aims to review the law and present a new draft by around July 2017. According to Jesus Dureza, Congress will accommodate the two drafts presented by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and the MNLF faction led by Misuari. Shortly after his meeting with Duterte, Misuari strongly criticised the MILF leadership and said that they should be incarcerated. He also openly condemned the government of Malaysia, which in recent years has facilitated peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF. (Rappler, Inquirer, Sun Star, 03/11/16; Philippine Star, 09/11/16)

SOMALIA: Calm returns after the violations of the ceasefire between Galmudug and Puntland

After several ceasefire violations and serious clashes between the Armed Forces of the Puntland and Galmudug regions, peace returned at the end of the month. The incidents followed five weeks of combat in the city of Galkayo that left at least 45 people dead and over 160 injured, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The organisation said that about 90,000 people have been displaced as a result of the unrest. Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement promoted by the United Arab Emirates and Somali Prime Minister Ali Shamarke, troops from both regions were to withdraw from the combat zone. (Al Jazeera, Dalsan Radio, 12/11/16)

SUDAN: Armed movements sign the ceasefire in Darfur

On 31 October, a ceasefire came into effect. It was decreed unilaterally for a period of six months by the Darfuri armed groups Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minnawi (SLA-MM) and Justice and Equality Movement-Gibril (JEM-G). Both groups also joined the ceasefire set up by the Sudanese government on 10 October, in force until the end of this year. The hybrid mission of the African Union and the UN in Darfur (UNAMID) welcomed the end of hostilities and invited Abdul Wahid El Nur, the leader of another SLA faction, Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) to join the ceasefire to work on peacebuilding in Darfur. Meanwhile, more than 80 SLM-AW members who had defected from the Jebel Marra units in October, led by El Amin El Tahir (alias "Toro"), Abu Jamal Bakr and Shihabeldin Hagar, signed another peace agreement with the Central Darfur government in Zalingei on 6 November. Although the parties of the agreement do not represent the entire SLA-AW armed movement, its leaders have been active members of the SLM-AW, so this agreement has been valued as a historic step. Days after signing the accord, which is known as the "Korona Peace Agreement", Sudanese President Omar al Bashir instructed the minister of defence, Major General Ahmed Bin Auf, and the governor of Central Darfur, Jaafar Abdelhakam, to begin its implementation. In more good news for the country, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), which operates in the regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, signed an action plan with the United Nations on 23 November to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict. The SPLM-N became the first non-state armed group to sign the Child Protection Act in 2015. (UN News, 03/11/2016; Radio Dabanga, 03, 09, 14, 25/11/2016)

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Edifici MRA (Mòdul Recerca A), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona)

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