

Sarkozy warns David Cameron on stance over Europe and Lisbon treaty



Britain's opposition Conservative Party leader David Cameron in Manchester, northern England, October 8, 2009. (Reuters/Phil Noble)

David Cameron received further warnings over his stance on Europe as President Sarkozy signaled that the Tory leader would be unable to recalibrate his relationship with the EU.

The French leader congratulated the Conservative Party for abandoning its promise of a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, adding that Britain had already won opt-outs in a hint that no new ones could be expected.

"The treaty will allow Europe to turn the page on years of institutional debate that alienated us from the European people, wasted a lot of time and caused misunderstandings," Sarkozy said.

Poland's Europe Minister also told Cameron that the Tories should not return to the days of anti-EU sentiment. "I cannot imagine a situation where Britain would try to marginalize itself," Mikolaj Dowgielewicz told The Times. "Poland does not want a Conservative government to quit Europe."

"It is a different world now — we are not in the beginning of the 1990s, you have a huge global dimension which is completely impossible for you to do on your own."

Dowielewicz represents the mainstream center-right government, rather than the right-wing Law and Justice Party, which is an ally of Cameron's in the European Parliament. "Nobody wants to grab any more powers from London or Warsaw to Brussels. Those days are over," he added. "There will be no new treaty for a number of years, so we need to focus on delivery."

Pierre Lellouche, France's Europe Minister, who came in for heavy criticism for calling the Conservatives "autistic," renewed the offensive. "It is out of the question to reopen negotiations on the treaty," he said, standing next to Sarkozy at a press conference in the Elysee Palace.

"That would require agreement from the

26 other EU members and I do not think for a single minute that will be possible."

He added: "My message is simply to say, 'Please, have mercy, spare us further institutional debates'. And I say it with great friendship towards Britain, which we Europeans need."

William Hague, the Shadow Foreign Sec-

retary, said that the Conservatives were determined to stick to their policy of seeking to repatriate powers from Brussels. "Will we get back a bit of abuse for it? Yes, but that won't make a difference," he said.

Lellouche said that the Tories' departure from their alliance with Sarkozy's UMP party and other center-right groups in the European Parliament had already weakened them. "The isolation of their group means that their influence is infinitely less today than it was in the past."

His strong language embarrassed French diplomats and presidential advisers, but they acknowledged that his remarks reflected thinking in the Sarkozy camp.

Herve Mariton, a senior MP and member of the Parliament's Franco-British Friendship group, said that Lellouche was speaking for all of them. "We should not ignore these difficulties and we should say things frankly," he said.

Two MEPs from the Conservative front bench in the European Parliament have resigned. Roger Helmer followed Dan Hannan in quitting as a party spokesman.

(Source: Times Online)



Forgotten land could decide Turkey-Armenia peace

AGDAM (Reuters) — Brief snatches of color — a washing line, a passing car — break up the mass of rubble that was Agdam.

A handful of Armenians live off scrap metal and pipes plundered from the ruins of this Azeri town, razed in 1993 as Christian Armenian forces in the mountain region of Nagorno-Karabakh fought to split from Azerbaijan.

Largely forgotten by the outside world since, the remote territory is now the center of diplomatic attention because it could torpedo a fragile peace deal between historic enemies Armenia and Turkey.

International mediators and Turkey want the Armenians to return many of their conquests to Azerbaijan. Turkey has said that its peace agreement with Armenia cannot advance unless this happens.

The conquered territories run across seven Azeri districts in a long strip of land connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Armenians are in no mood to give them up.

"It was free land," said Gena, an Armenian who grazes cows on a former Azeri town now returning to nature. "This land was hard to conquer. To give it back is easier, but unfair."

The war killed 30,000 people and displaced 1 million. A ceasefire was agreed in 1994 and Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself independent. But no country recognized it and the specter of fresh conflict is never far away.

"Nagorno-Karabakh was the first (Armenian) military victory in 2,000 years. It's awfully hard psychologically to climb down from that," said Richard Giragosian, the American head of the Armenian Center for National and International Studies.

Diplomats say that under peace principles being negotiated by Armenia and Azerbaijan, at least five of the districts would return, in exchange for greater international legitimacy for Nagorno-Karabakh and a future popular vote to decide its status.

A trio of U.S., French and Russian mediators say they are closer to a deal than ever before.

But years of official secrecy surrounding the talks, and zero Western engagement on the ground, has seen sentiments harden in Nagorno-Karabakh. Its leaders are barred from direct participation in the negotiations due to Azeri opposition.

"They (Azeris) should understand that this is all Armenian land," said Luda Airapetyan, a 59-year-old Armenian and former school teacher in the Nagorno-Karabakh town of Shusha, 15 km (9 miles) from the breakaway capital Stepanakert.

"We took those lands with blood and we must keep them."

Shusha is a shadow of the 19th century town once among the greatest in the Caucasus. During the 1990s war, Azeris used its 700-meter (2,290 ft) height advantage over Stepanakert to pound the Armenian stronghold, before Shusha also fell.

For Shusha and the rest of Nagorno-Karabakh, the seven surrounding districts represent a security guarantee against an Azeri attack, and a vital land corridor to Armenia.

Nagorno-Karabakh survives almost totally on budget support from Armenia and donations from the huge Armenian diaspora, but rejects trading its "independence" for the prospect of sharing in Azerbaijan's burgeoning oil revenues.

Honduras pact stalls over unity government

TEGUCIGALPA (Reuters) — Ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya said early on Friday that an accord to end a four-month political crisis had failed after de facto leader Roberto Micheletti moved to form a new government without him.

The rival leaders had agreed last week to end a four-month political crisis and form a so-called unity and reconciliation cabinet by Thursday, but they then disagreed who would lead the cabinet.

Zelaya declined to name any members to the cabinet, and Micheletti said he was going ahead without them.

"We've completed the process of forming a unity government ... It represents a wide spectrum despite the fact that Mr. Zelaya did not send a list of representatives," Micheletti said in a televised speech to Hondurans.

Zelaya said through a spokesman that the U.S.-brokered pact was dead and blamed the de facto government for its failure.

"It was a pantomime to act like they were engaging in a dialogue when what they've done is, like the coup d'etat, destroy Honduras' democracy," Zelaya representative Jorge Reina told reporters.

Earlier, ministers from the de facto cabinet resigned to make way for the new government, which Micheletti said will include names put forward by different political factions.

Zelaya had said elections scheduled for Nov 29 will not be legitimate unless he is first restored to power to finish the remainder of his term that ends in January.



MANUEL ZELAYA

Under the accord between the two leaders, Honduran lawmakers in Congress were to decide if Zelaya can return to the presidency. The United States and the Organization of American States have stopped demanding Zelaya's reinstatement.

The U.S. Senate confirmed on Thursday a nomination to the key Latin American policy job in the Obama administration that had been blocked for months by conservative

Republicans who opposed U.S. efforts to reinstate Zelaya, an ally of leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

On a voice vote, the Senate confirmed Arturo Valenzuela for Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Republican Jim DeMint had barred a Senate vote on Valenzuela since July to protest what he said were the Obama administration's efforts to try to force the restoration of Zelaya's left-leaning government.

DeMint said on Thursday he was no longer objecting to confirmation because Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had pledged to him that Washington would recognize the outcome of the Honduran elections later this month, regardless of whether Zelaya is returned to office.

Zelaya was forced out of the country by the military after a secret Supreme Court ruling said he had violated the constitution by launching a drive to have a referendum to determine whether to change term limits on the presidency.

Congress quickly installed Micheletti as interim leader, but his government has failed to win recognition abroad.

Lawyer imposed on Karadzic, trial delayed to March 1

THE HAGUE (AFP) — A UN warcrimes court Thursday imposed a lawyer on Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic and put off to March 1 the genocide trial he has boycotted since it started last week.

"The overall interests of justice are best met by the appointment of counsel," said a written decision by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

"The trial chamber hereby ... orders that the trial will resume on March 1, 2010."

Karadzic, 64, has boycotted his trial since it opened on October 26, demanding more time to prepare his defense, which he insists on conducting himself.

He stands charged with 11 counts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the 1992-95 Bosnian war in which some 100,000 people died and 2.2 million were forced to flee their homes.

The judges ordered the court registry to appoint counsel to represent Karadzic's interests when the trial resumes. This did not necessarily mean that he would lose his right to self-representation, they said, though warning that this would change if he continues his boycott.

"The accused has indeed substantially and persistently obstructed the proper and expeditious conduct of his trial by refusing to attend the proceedings," it said.

Russia welcomes "constructive" U.S. proposals on new START treaty

MOSCOW (Chinaview) — The U.S. has made "constructive" proposals to Russia on a nuclear arsenal cut deal, raising hopes of reaching a new accord to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1) that expires Dec. 5, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Thursday.

"We hope the constructive propos-

als that U.S. National Security Advisor James Jones made in Moscow last week would help bring our positions closer and forge a balanced document meeting the two countries' interests and strengthening international security," Andrei Nesterenko told the Interfax news agency.

"The atmosphere at the negotiations was business-like and constructive," he

said, adding that "there is progress."

The spokesman did not reveal any details of the ongoing negotiations, as both sides agreed to keep the discussions confidential from the very start.

Meanwhile Nesterenko also pointed out several remaining disagreements between Russia and the United States.



Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic appears in the courtroom of the ICTY War Crimes tribunal in The Hague November 3, 2009. (Reuters/Michael Kooren)

strongman Slobodan Milosevic in pursuit of a "Greater Serbia", which was to include 60 percent of the territory of Bosnia.

Milosevic died midway through his own genocide trial in March 2006, while Karadzic's former military general, Ratko Mladic, is still on the run.

12 dead, 31 hurt in Texas military base rampage



This photo from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress Web Site shows Nidal Malik Hasan. (AP Photo)

FORT HOOD (AFP) — A army officer about to be deployed to Iraq shot dead 12 people and wounded 31 others at a sprawling Texas military base before being gunned down himself and captured.

Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. army psychiatrist, opened fire with two handguns at a processing center at Fort Hood for troops being deployed on missions to Iraq

and Afghanistan.

"There was a single shooter that was shot multiple times at the scene," said Lieutenant General Bob Cone, commander of the base. "He was not killed as previously reported. He is currently in custody and in stable condition."

Further bloodshed was narrowly prevented when the gunman was blocked from reaching a graduation ceremony attended by some 600 people, just meters away from the scene.

"Thanks to the quick reaction of several soldiers, they were able to close off the doors to that auditorium," Cone said, adding that a "female civilian officer" was thought to be the first to shoot Hasan and end the rampage.

"There were initially three held. All have been interviewed, and at this time we believe the evidence indicates it was a single shooter," said Cone, who wrongly told the media earlier that the gunman was dead.

President Barack Obama, who had been kept informed of the shooting as the drama was tracked in the White House situation room, denounced the attack as a "horrific outburst of violence."

"My immediate thoughts and prayers are with the wounded. And with the families of the fallen," Obama said.

"It's difficult enough when we lose these brave Americans in battles overseas. It is horrifying that they should come under fire at an army base on American soil."

The U.S. Senate held a moment of silence late Thursday in somber acknowledgement of the shooting rampage.

The shooting spree dealt a blow to an American military already under severe strain from years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan and plagued by a rise in suicides and depression.

Fort Hood, which is the size of a small town and houses tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, was locked down after the shooting for several hours as the shocked community searched for a possible motive.

Hasan's parents are believed to be from the Middle East but he grew up in the United States, including in Virginia, where he attended Virginia Tech university. He was reported to be 39 years old.

Many of the victims, most of whom were military personnel, were taken to the Scott and White Memorial Hospital, which put out an urgent call for blood donations as streams of wounded poured into its emergency rooms.

The facility in central Texas, the biggest U.S. military base in the world, is the headquarters of the Army 3rd Corps, the 4th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division.

Fatal shootings are rare at U.S. military bases.