

# U.S., Russia Trade Barbs at European Security Meeting



Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz (R) and his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier address media at the 23rd OSCE Ministerial Council organized by Germany's OSCE Chairmanship in Hamburg, Germany.

HAMBURG (Reuters) - The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) remained divided over the conflict in eastern Ukraine at the end of a two-day meeting in Hamburg, with the United States accusing Russia of blocking a resolution.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, OSCE chairman for the past year, said that even though no formal resolution on eastern Ukraine had been signed, ministers agreed on the need for the

parties involved in the war to meet their commitments to end the violence.

But the U.S. ambassador to the OSCE, Daniel Baer, blasted Russia for what he called its ongoing "obstructionism".

He said many of the few resolutions ultimately adopted were "weakened considerably" by Russia, while others, notably on human rights and the Ukraine crisis, were blocked outright.

"It's really important to recognize

that on most things in the OSCE today there is still consensus among 55 or 56 of the 57 participating states," Baer told reporters. "It sends a political signal that Russia is isolated."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in turn accused Washington of stalling talks about evacuating remaining terrorists-held parts of the Syrian city of Aleppo, which is on the verge of falling to Moscow-backed SYRIAN government forces.

The OSCE, a 57-member human rights and security watchdog, skipped issuing a joint communique but ministers did reach agreement on several resolutions, including one condemning Islamic State and other militant groups.

Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz, who becomes its chairman in January, said the fight against terrorists would be a centerpiece of his year at the helm.

Kurz said it was critical to combat the ideology of the terrorists inside Europe as well as fighting it in the Middle East.

"We have over 10,000 people in the OSCE countries that have gone to Iraq and Syria to support the group of Daesh," Kurz told reporters. "And when they get back into our societies, they pose a massive security risk for us all."

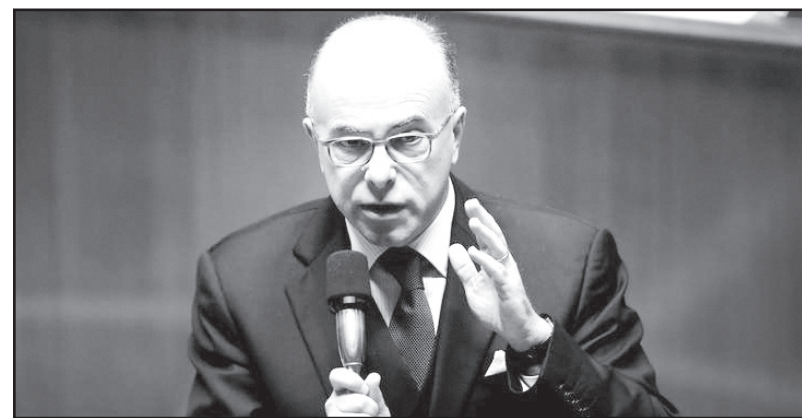
## France Seeks to Extend State of Emergency

PARIS (Reuters) - The French government will propose extending the country's state of emergency until July 15, 2017 due to presidential and parliament elections in spring next year, Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said on Saturday.

The socialist government imposed the state of emergency - which gives police extended powers to search and arrest - in November last year following the attacks on Paris.

The extension needs to be approved by parliament, which will debate the proposal on Tuesday. The senate will review it on Thursday.

The state of emergency, which was set to end in mid-January, has already been extended four times as the government considers that the risk of armed attacks by Daesh



Newly appointed French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve speaks during the questions to the government session at the National Assembly in Paris, France, December 7, 2016.

remains high.

France will hold presidential elections in April-May, followed by parliament elections in June.

The state of emergency is criticized by some as at best inefficient and at worst an infringement of civil rights.

## Muslim Leaders Call on Trump to Reject Anti-Muslim Administration Appointments



Muslim leaders call on Trump to reject anti-Muslim administration appointments

WASHINGTON (Yahoo News) - More than 300 American Muslim leaders are imploring Donald Trump to reject the anti-Muslim policies he touted during his presidential campaign, as well as administration appointments that will bring Islamophobic attitudes into the White House.

"It is deeply concerning that you have announced the appointment of individuals to your upcoming administration with a well-documented history of outright bigotry directed at Muslims or advocating that Muslims should not have the same rights as their fellow Americans," reads the letter the leaders sent to the president-elect this week. "We urge you to reconsider and reject such candidates."

Though the letter does not reference any specific Trump appointees by name, the Council of American Islamic Relations — the country's largest Muslim rights advocacy organization and one of the letter's main signatories — has spoken out separately about

what CAIR government affairs director Robert McCaw called "a concerning Islamophobic trend" in Trump's appointments.

"The letter took nearly two weeks to draft, and every three days or so there would be a new appointment," McCaw told Yahoo News.

Of those that have been announced so far, McCaw pointed to Trump's selection of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who has called Islam a "vicious cancer," for national security adviser, and Kansas Rep. Mike Pompeo, who has blamed American Muslim leaders for violent attacks by extremists, for head of the CIA, as two particularly troubling examples.

"When you have people who have anti-Muslim policy positions put into positions of power, you are going to end up with bad policy that will negatively impact American Muslims and not make us any more secure," McCaw said.

## Gambia's Longtime Ruler Refuses to Bow Out, Demands Fresh Polls



Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, seen on December 3, 2016, had originally said he would accept the presidential election results showing his loss to opponent Adama Barrow.

BANJUL (Gambia) (AFP) - Gambia's longtime leader Yahya Jammeh announced he would no longer accept defeat in recent elections, plunging the West African country into turmoil with a demand for fresh polls.

Investigations into the December 1 vote have revealed a string of "unacceptable errors" on the part of electoral authorities, Jammeh said in a speech broadcast on state television, adding that he would no longer concede to opponent Adama Barrow.

"In the same way that I accepted the results faithfully believing that the Independent Elector-

al Commission was independent and honest and reliable, I hereby reject the results in totality," he said.

"Let me repeat: I will not accept the results based on what has happened," he added, warning Gambians not to take to the streets to protest his decision.

Soldiers were seen placing sandbags in strategic locations across the capital Banjul, a development which triggered widespread unease among the already-spooked population, who had been panic-buying food before the vote due to fear of unrest.

## News in Brief

WASHINGTON (Press TV) - U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's possible appointment of retired military general and former CIA director David Petraeus as secretary of state would be "outrageous," a former U.S. diplomat says.

Petraeus, who created a scandal in 2012 for allegedly providing classified information to Paula Broadwell, with whom he was having an extramarital affair, is not qualified to head the U.S. State Department, said J. Michael Springmann, the former head of the American visa bureau in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

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SOFIA (CNN) - A cargo train carrying propane-butane derailed and exploded early Saturday in a northeastern Bulgarian village, killing five people and injuring at least 27, the country's Interior Ministry said.

The blast damaged more than 50 houses and public buildings in the village of Hitrino, and dozens of homes have been evacuated, the ministry said.

At least 12 people were rescued from the damaged buildings, according to the ministry. Firefighters were trying to extinguish flames, cool the overturned gas tankers and search for any other survivors.

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JAKARTA, Indonesia (Fox News) - At least 45,000 people have been displaced by the powerful earthquake that hit Indonesia's Aceh province, authorities said Saturday, as the government and aid agencies pooled efforts to meet the basic survival needs of shaken communities.

The estimate of the number of homeless people continues to grow while relief efforts fan out across the three districts near the epicenter of Wednesday's magnitude 6.5 quake, National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho told a press conference.

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SEOUL (Press TV) - Hundreds of thousands have taken part in a celebration rally in the South Korean capital of Seoul a day after the country's legislators voted to impeach scandal-hit President Park Geun-hye.

Police forces were present in Seoul during the massive candle-lit rally on Saturday. For seven straight weeks, rallies have become the signature of a major movement aimed at removing the widely unpopular president from office.

Despite the impeachment vote by lawmakers on Friday stripping Park of her executive powers, activists insist they plan to keep up the pressure. The impeachment process, which requires a final approval from the Constitutional Court, could take months to be ratified.

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PARIS (AFP) - Kazakh opposition figure Mukhtar Ablyazov was released from prison after France's highest administrative authority blocked his extradition to Russia, where he is accused of embezzling billions of dollars.

The 53-year-old Ablyazov, who has been held in French custody since July 2013 when he was arrested on the Cote d'Azur, walked out of the Fleury-Merogis prison in a Paris suburb smiling, an AFP photographer saw.

Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine all accuse him of having embezzled billions of dollars during his time as head of the Kazakh bank BTA. The bank has also filed complaints against him.

## Germans See Refugees as Biggest Problem Despite Falling Numbers



FILE - In this Sept. 5, 2015 file picture a man holds a cardboard with a 'Welcome' slogan during the arrival of refugees at the train station in Saalfeld, central Germany

BERLIN (Reuters) - More than half of Germans see refugees and integra-

tion as Germany's biggest problem, a survey showed, despite the number of

newcomers falling significantly on the year.

A record 890,000 mainly Muslim refugees from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere arrived in Europe's largest economy in 2015, prompting concerns about security and integration.

Arrivals have slowed this year, with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) saying around 305,000 new asylum seekers were registered in its 'EASY' computer system in the first 11 months of 2016; but 'EASY' numbers are seen as too high as some refugees get registered more than once.

The BAMF received 26,438 asylum applications in November - a fall of around 54 percent on the year.