

EU Lawmakers Slam Trump's Mideast Plan

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) – Members of the European Parliament have voiced harsh criticism for the United States' so-called Middle East 'peace' plan during a plenary session.

The overwhelming majority of EU lawmakers agreed U.S. President Donald Trump's plan goes against international law and is biased towards the Zionist regime, Anadolu news agency reported.

"The proposal clearly challenges the internationally agreed parameters" of a resolution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, EU's Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell said.

"It's difficult to see how it can bring both sides to the table," he added.

Borrell acknowledged the plan could be a starting point for negotiations but he clearly denied it can be an endpoint for a long-term solution in the Middle East.

He said most EU member states did not even consider the plan "a good starting point".

Dutch Social Democrat lawmaker Kati Piri called Trump's plan "one-sided, illegal and intentionally pro-



Tunisian demonstrators hold up placards against U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East proposal during a protest on February 5, 2020 in Tunis.

vocative," that aims at "legalizing settlement and annexation of the West Bank" and risks bringing "more suffering for the Palestinian people".

She called the proposal "a cynical plan of two far-right leaders seeking support ahead of elections", referring to Trump and Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

MEP Hilde Vautmans said the plan is a "one-state solution".

The Belgian centrist-liberal politi-

cian urged the EU to use its "credibility to intervene as an honest broker" and suggested Borrell initiate a peace conference.

Spanish far-left lawmaker Manu Pineda called the "Deal" the "fraud of the century".

Slovenian center-right politician Tanja Fajon warned the "EU should not reject the deal because it hates Trump".

MEPs backing the plan remained in

the minority during the plenary's debate.

The U.S. president unveiled the controversial "Deal of the Century," on January 28 to end one of the longest-running disputes in the Middle East.

Trump proposed an independent Palestinian state but with the recognition of the Zionist regime's alleged "sovereignty" over the West Bank and al-Quds as the regime's "undivided capital".

The plan unilaterally annuls previous UN resolutions on the Palestinian issue and suggests giving the Zionist regime almost everything it demanded.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu slammed the so-called "peace" plan as an effort to "justify Israeli occupation and annexation of al-Quds and the West Bank".

The EU doesn't recognize the regime's sovereignty over territories it has occupied since 1967.

EU foreign affairs ministers will discuss the topic at meeting in Brussels next Monday. U.S. State Secretary Mike Pompeo was invited to join the debate.

Turkey Seeks EU Accession Amid Dispute

ANKARA (Xinhua) – Turkey has expressed willingness to start the frozen EU accession process, but chronic differences and rising tensions with the bloc over energy resources in eastern Mediterranean are on its way, experts say.

"We think it is time to open a new page in the accession process," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said last week in Ankara at a meeting with the ambassadors of EU countries, calling on the bloc to review its decision to suspend high-level meetings between the two sides.

"We see a constructive approach of EU's term president Croatia on this issue," Turkey's top diplomat noted, warning of a growing "distrust between the two sides" at a time when one of the biggest countries of the bloc, Britain, has pulled out.

Analysts expressed skepticism on a tangible result of Turkey's keenness to get the accession process back on track.

"If there is an initiative from both the EU and Turkey, there could be some progress," Murat Onsoy, a scholar of international relations from Hacettepe Uni-

versity, told Xinhua. Onsoy said the general attitude toward Ankara's membership of the two biggest EU members, Germany and France, does not seem favorable.

"As in the past, France is still opposed to Turkey's full membership and a domestic political crisis within Germany's largest national party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), may hamper a possible reconciliation," said the expert.

Turkey has been a candidate country to EU since 2005 but accession negotiations have been

at a standstill for several years, following a prolonged period of state of emergency declared by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the wake of a botched coup aiming to topple his government in 2016.

Ankara has launched a massive crackdown on U.S.-based preacher Fethullah Gulen and his followers, blaming them for the coup. However, the EU said that Erdogan used the coup as a pretext to silence all dissent, officially freezing accessions talks, accusing his administration of baffling the rule of law.

Dubai Court Rules Against Superyacht Freeze Order in Divorce Battle

DUBAI (Dispatches) – A Dubai appeal court has dismissed a freezing order on a \$436 million superyacht belonging to a Russian billionaire at the center of one of the world's costliest divorce battles, according to a copy of the final ruling reviewed by Reuters.

But it is still not clear whether superyacht M.V. Luna, impounded in 2018, will be able to depart Dubai after a British court's freezing order was dismissed on Feb. 5.

Oil and gas tycoon Farkhad Akhmedov was ordered to pay about 40% of his fortune to his former wife Tatiana Akhmedova by London's High Court in 2016, in one of the largest divorce settlements in legal history.

But he failed to pay the 453 million pound (\$588 million) divorce bill and the London court granted a worldwide freezing order, under which Akhmedov's yacht was impounded in the Persian Gulf Arab emirate.

A spokesman for Tatiana Akhmedova, who is trying to enforce the freezing order, said an injunction from the Marshall Islands prevents the yacht from setting sail.

The vessel was still moored on Wednesday, according to Refinitiv ship tracking data.

Luna, an expedition yacht built for Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich before Akhmedov bought it in 2014, has at least nine decks, space for 50 crew, two helipads, a vast swimming pool and a mini-submarine.

The Dubai court of appeal's final decision, English and Arabic copies of which were provided to Reuters by Akhmedov's spokesman, came after two years of legal battles in the emirate over the freezing order.

Lawyers acting for Akhmedova said on Wednesday they would not comment on possible next steps until they assess the reasons for the court ruling, but said the yacht still could not sail.

"An injunction imposed by the Marshall Islands authority, the flag state of the yacht, prevents it from doing so. That injunction has never been challenged and demonstrates the undoubted rights of [her] position," said the lawyers' statement, provided by the spokesman.

Akhmedova began divorce proceedings in Britain in 2012. Akhmedov said he and his wife had already divorced in Russia in 2000, but various Russian and British courts have found no evidence to support this assertion.

Smoke, Soot and Sweat: Egypt's Charcoal Workers

INSHAS, EGYPT (AFP) – To fuel Egyptians' love for shisha pipes and barbeques, Said Mahrous and his men toil in an open-air furnace, inhaling thick plumes of smoke day in, day out.

Covered in soot and sweat, their faces blackened, they labor in a village near Cairo over burning mounds of charcoal, without gloves, facemasks or health insurance.

Health and environmental concerns fall by the wayside when lumps of charcoal must be bagged at the end of the day and transported across the country.

"The smoke doesn't really affect me -- I've gotten used to it working here for over 35 years," says Mahrous.

"I'm an old fahham from way back," adds the 48-year-old, using the local term for a coal worker.

"My father plucked me out of school, and I

have continued the tradition because he was one too."

The site in Inshas, in the fertile Nile River delta north of the Egyptian capital, employs dozens of men working for about 2,000 pounds (\$125) a month.

The workers take tree trunks sourced from nearby towns, clear them of branches and stack them according to their girth.

They then throw them on 40-square-metre (430-square-foot) patches of field that become smouldering furnaces.

The trunks must be dried out first, a task that takes about a year, says Mahrous.

"Then we build the furnace, add rice straw and start the fire, which burns for about 10 to 15 days."

Dirt and rice stalks trap the heat and stop the fire from spreading.

Mahrous explains that different trees pro-

duce specific types of charcoal.

Wood from mango and orange trees is charred for smoking shisha, while the charcoal from casuarina, camphor and olive trees is used for barbeques.

The mounds are then hosed down with water to cool them, but the tinders still smoulder underneath as smoke rises up into the air.

Using shovels, the workers dig down and break up the charcoal, sifting and then bagging it.

About two tons of wood (4,400 pounds) produce one ton of charcoal.

Mahrous admits the work is taking a toll, telling AFP that "the heavy lifting of tree trunks sometimes hurts my back".

"For my kids, I hope they can get well paid jobs," he says.

"But if they can't find any, then they will work with me."

Senate...

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worked with Democrats over the years on war powers issues. "So the War Powers Act vote for me is just an opportunity to discuss whether or not we should still be at war in Afghanistan or Iraq or any of these places."

"I'm just ensuring that Congress fulfills our article one responsibilities, that's all this is about," added Young.

Democrats and even some Trump allies questioned the justification for the terrorist attack as well as Trump's authority to carry it out without congressional approval.

Trump himself has expressed disparate views on U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts. While he has campaigned on "ending endless wars," he has steadfastly resisted congressional efforts to curb U.S. military incursions abroad. Paul, who informally advises Trump on foreign policy and national security matters, has tried to veer the president toward a more non-interventionist posture. But, he added, "We've just got to get him some better advisers."

In the face of a likely veto from the president, Democrats are casting the vote as a symbolic rebuke but also a re-affirmation of Congress' authority.

"The president will veto it, but it sends a shot across his bow that the majority of the Senate and the majority of the House do not want the president waging war without congressional approval," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said. "And once again, the American people are overwhelmingly on our side."

Kaine said that even if Trump vetoes the resolution, the measure could nevertheless influence his behavior and decision-making when it comes to U.S. policy in the Middle East.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said on Tuesday that he expects the House to vote on the Senate bill later this month.

tested positive for the virus.

People were forced to leave as health officials in masks and white overalls scrambled to work out whether the virus had spread through the complex of about 3,000 people.

"Of course I'm scared," a 59-year-old resident, who gave her surname as Chan, told AFP.

The United States said Tuesday it had authorized non-essential consulate staff to leave Hong Kong "out of an abundance of caution" linked to the virus.

Chinese authorities dismissed two senior health officials from Hubei and tightened restrictions in the capital Wuhan, forbidding people with fever from visiting hospitals outside of their home districts and sealing off residential compounds.

Most deaths and cases are in Hubei.

"The problem of human-to-human transmission has still not been solved in Wuhan," the official Xinhua news agency quoted Zhong Nanshan, a renowned scientist, as saying.

"I believe that with enough venues, enough doctors, better protective gear and our various support teams, the situation in Wuhan should improve quickly, but it is still at a rather difficult stage," he said, forecasting a mid- to late-February peak in the outbreak.

White...

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employing "a tactic to try to get eyes onto their ideas in a way that's cheap, and that brings it to a new generation of people who are learning how to even make sense out of these messages."

The propaganda incidents tracked for the Anti-Defamation League's report, set for release on Wednesday, encompass 49 states and occurred most often in 10 states: California, Texas, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Virginia, Kentucky, Washington and Florida.

Last year's soaring cases of distributed propaganda also came as the Anti-Defamation League found white supremacist groups holding 20% fewer events than in 2018, "preferring not to risk the exposure of pre-publicized events," according to its report. That marks a shift from the notably visible public presence that white supremacist organizations mounted in 2017, culminating in that summer's Charlottesville, Va., rally where a self-described white supremacist drove into a crowd of counterprotesters.

About two-thirds of the total propaganda incidents in the new report were traced back to a single white supremacist group, Patriot Front, which the Anti-Defamation League describes as "formed by disaffected members" of the white supremacist organization Vanguard America after the Charlottesville rally.

The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913, has tracked Patriot Front propaganda using messages such as "One nation against invasion" and "America First." The report to be released Wednesday found that Patriot Front played a major role last year in boosting circulation of white supremacist propaganda on campuses through a push that targeted colleges in the fall.

Hook...

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Joseph is a longtime MKO ally, and signed up to lobby directly for the terrorist group in January 2019. He told the U.S. Department of Justice at the time that he planned to "interact with Albanian officials, U.S. Embassy, State Department staff, White House, and any other U.S. personnel as required, as well as UN officials." He's being paid \$15,000 per month for his services.

Prior to his private sector work, Joseph oversaw nuclear nonproliferation and arms control policies as a senior official in George W. Bush's State Department. He took a hard line on Iran in that position, according to contemporaneous reports.

More recently, at an MKO event in March 2019, Joseph expressed his hope that Tehran's government would soon fall.

Salehi...

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Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the nuclear deal is officially called.

The Iranian official said the implementation of the nuclear deal was initially "successful", but France later failed to fulfill its commitments, including with regard to cooperation with Iran on nuclear fusion.

The IAEA, Salehi said, has confirmed Iran's commitment to its obligations under the JCPOA for 16 times, but Iran's minimum expectations have not been met.

"Public opinion in Iran is seriously dissatisfied and demands reciprocal action," he said.

Jacq, for his part, voiced his country's regret over the US withdrawal from nuclear deal as well as Iran's decision to roll back its commitments, saying France continues to support the JCPOA.

Syrian...

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encountered a checkpoint occupied by pro-government forces.

Hundreds of U.S. troops are illegally stationed in northeastern Syria, working with Kurdish militants. The U.S. carries out patrols in northeastern Syria, but it was not immediately clear why the convoy drove into a government-controlled area.

The incident marks a rare confrontation involving U.S. and Syrian troops in the crowded region and is certain to further escalate tensions.

State-run Al-Ikhbariya TV aired a cellphone video showing an armored vehicle flying a U.S. flag standing on a rural road while a car appeared to be blocking its way.

Locals are seen walking past the U.S. armored vehicle, with at least two soldiers inside, one of whom steps down as civilians approach. One civilian is seen tearing a U.S. flag as he approaches the soldier.

The TV said protests spread, preventing reinforcements from coming to help the U.S. convoy. The report said the wounded civilian and was being treated at the Qamisli hospital.

The Observatory said residents in Khirbet Ammu blocked the path of a U.S. convoy. A Russian convoy arrived on the scene to defuse the tension, it said.

WHO...

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province of Hubei, the central province where around 56 million people are under lockdown.

The mortality rate remains relatively low at around 2 percent.

Several governments have banned arrivals from China and major airlines suspended flights in a bid to keep the disease away from their shores.

Most cases overseas have involved people who had been in Wuhan, the quarantined central Chinese city where the virus emerged late last year, or people infected by others who had been at the epicenter.

The Briton caught the virus while attending a conference in Singapore and then passed it on to several compatriots while on holiday in the French Alps, before finally being diagnosed back in Britain.

The 53-year-old said Tuesday he had fully recovered, but remained in isolation in a central London hospital.

"The detection of this small number of cases could be the spark that becomes a bigger fire," Tedros said on Monday.

The biggest cluster of cases outside China is aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship moored off Japan, where 135 people have been diagnosed.

The ship has been in quarantine since arriving off the Japanese coast early last week after the virus was detected in a former passenger who had disembarked in Hong Kong.

More than 100 people were evacuated from a 35-storey Hong Kong housing block Tuesday after two residents in different apartments