

# EU's Juncker Pushes for Deal With Greece



EU chief executive Jean-Claude Juncker

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - EU chief executive Jean-Claude Juncker and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called on Friday for European governments to show solidarity with Greece and resolve a credit crunch that risks dumping it out of the euro zone.

Their comments, as the bloc's German paymaster presses its demands that Athens' new leftist government honor commitments to international creditors, highlighted Juncker's concern over a risk of grave damage to the EU, but may also fuel suspicion in Berlin that the EU Commission could try to water down any deal.

On the day after German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said publicly that Greece might stumble out of the euro zone because its leaders had failed to negotiate new borrowings, Juncker sounded a note of urgency to EU governments.

"I don't think we have made sufficient progress," he told reporters as he welcomed Tsipras to the European Commission.

"I will make certain proposals to my friend Alexis," he added. "I'm totally excluding a failure ... This is not a time for division. This is the time for coming together."

Commission officials say Juncker, a long-time premier of Luxembourg who took over the EU executive last November, fears some leaders may be underestimating the damage "Grexit" -- or "Grexident" -- would do to European integration.

Schaeuble told an Austrian broadcaster on Thursday there was a risk of Greece losing the euro if negotiations failed: "As the responsibility, the possibility to decide what happens lies only with Greece and because we don't exactly know what those in charge in Greece are doing, we can't rule it out," he said.

While many Greeks resent the terms under which Europeans and the International Monetary Fund bailed them out since 2010, a majority wants to keep the single currency. That would be in jeopardy if the government ran out of credit, prompting Greek banks to lose access to euros from the European Central Bank.

In a ray of good news for Athens, the Greek Finance Ministry said that although tax revenues had dipped in February, there was no repeat of the calamitous fall seen in January, when many people withheld payments ahead of a Jan. 25 snap election.

This will give the state more breathing space as it scrambles to pay back some 1.2 billion euros owed to the International Monetary Fund by the end of the month, as well as meet its usual salary and pension obligations.

Tsipras, trying to satisfy lenders while also retaining the support of voters who elected him to end years of spending cuts, said Greece was doing its bit and others must now help ease its "humanitarian crisis" and mass youth unemployment.

"Greece has already started fulfilling its commitments ... so we are doing our part and we expect our partners to do their own," Tsipras said before his talks with Juncker.

"I'm very optimistic ... we will find a solution because I strongly believe that this is our common interest. I believe there is no Greek problem; there is a European problem."

Juncker, a former chairman of the Euro Group of euro zone finance ministers, said he was trying to help promote an accord after weeks of mounting frustration and mutual incomprehension between the novice Greek leadership and the likes of Schaeuble and the Euro Group's current Dutch chairman Jeroen Dijsselbloem.

## Spain Arrests 8 Suspected Militants

MADRID (PRESS TV) - Spanish authorities have arrested eight suspected members of a terrorist group during raids across the nation, says the country's Ministry of Interior.

The arrests were made in Spain's northeastern provinces of Barcelona and Girona, and the central areas of Avila and Ciudad Real, the ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The eight suspects are accused of encouraging attacks to be carried out in Spain, as well as recruiting people to fight alongside terrorists in the Middle East.

No further details were given regarding the arrests.

Spanish authorities have arrested dozens of people in recent years as part of efforts to

a role in recruiting women to join the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group.

The US National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) said in an estimate on February 10 that more than 20,000 individuals from around the world, including some Americans, have traveled to Syria to join the ISIL and other extremist groups.

Foreign militants from over 90 countries, including at least 3,400 people from Western states and more than 150 Americans, have traveled to Syria to join the terrorist groups there, the NCTC added.

The ISIL militants control parts of Syria and Iraq, and have been carrying out horrific acts of violence such as public



A Spanish police van is shown in the city of Madrid. (file photo).

stop young citizens from joining militants in Syria or Iraq.

On March 7, police detained a female Moroccan resident of Spain, Samira Yerou, in Barcelona on suspicion of playing

decapitations and crucifixions against all communities.

The return of the foreign terrorists to their home countries has triggered concern among the Western officials.

## Bulgaria, US to Start Military Drills

SOFIA (Reuters) - NATO allies Bulgaria and the United States will stage a series of joint military drills over the next three and a half months, the Bulgarian defense ministry said on Friday, amid increased tensions with Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

Some 350 U.S. Army officers will arrive in the Balkan country to take part in the bilateral drills, which begin on Sunday and will be conducted at the Novo Selo training range in southeastern Bulgaria.

The exercises will also involve U.S. armored personnel carriers, helicopters and tanks.

"The Bulgarian Army will use the drills to test its ability to react in crisis situations," a defense ministry official told Reuters. "Of course, we cannot underestimate what is happening in Ukraine."

Defence Minister Nikolay Nenchev said the United States would spend about

\$30 million to modernize the infrastructure at and around the training range of Novo Selo.

Bulgaria and other ex-communist countries in eastern Europe that are now inside NATO and the European Union have been rattled by Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Black Sea peninsula of Crimea and its support for separatists in eastern Ukraine.

On Tuesday, NATO's Black Sea members Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey joined four other alliance states - the United States, Canada, Germany and Italy - in a multinational naval exercise in the Black Sea.

Bulgaria, a close ally of Moscow in communist times, joined NATO in 2004 and is one of six eastern European countries due to host new command units staffed with national and NATO soldiers being set up in response to the Ukraine crisis.



STOCKHOLM (Reuters) - Swedish prosecutors want to question Julian Assange in London over allegations of sexual assault, potentially ending an impasse that left the WikiLeaks founder holed up for almost three years in Ecuador's embassy.

Swedish prosecutors said on Friday they had asked for Assange's approval to question him in London, a U-turn after years of insisting he must go to Stockholm for questioning about alleged assaults against two women in 2010.

Assange denies the allegations, which are not related to WikiLeaks' publication of U.S. military and diplomatic documents, also in 2010. He refused to go, arguing Sweden could send him on to the United States where he might face trial.

One of Assange's lawyers said he welcomed the request but expressed concern the process could take time because approval was needed from British and Ecuadorian authorities.

"He has been nagging for this for four years. He wants nothing more than to have an opportunity ... to give his version of what happened and to clear his name," Assange's lawyer Per Samuelson told Reuters.

Ecuador's embassy in London could not immediately be reached for comment.

Assange, an Australian citizen, has been unable to leave Ecuador since claiming asylum there in 2012.

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WASHINGTON (Press TV) - US President Barack Obama has acknowledged that police have been "oppressive" in Ferguson, Missouri, but said there is "no excuse" for violence against law enforcement agents.

"I think that what had been happening in Ferguson was oppressive and objectionable and was worthy of protest, but there was no excuse for criminal acts," Obama said Thursday on ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live."

The US president made the comments hours after two police officers were shot early Thursday morning outside the Ferguson Police Department during protests against the police force.

One officer was shot in the face, while the other was shot through the shoulder, according to St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar. Both officers were treated and released from hospital.

The officers, who appear to have been targeted, did not work for the Ferguson police.

Ferguson, a predominately black city with a mostly white police force, has been embroiled in mass protests since last August, when a white police officer fatally shot Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager.

Obama offered his prayers to the injured officers, but added the protesters "don't want to be stopped and harassed just because of their race."

"What we need to do is make sure that like-minded, good-spirited people on both sides" are able to "work together to try and come up with some good answers," the president noted.

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BEIJING (Press TV) - China is building a second aircraft carrier in a move to boost Beijing's maritime power, a media report says.

Beijing has "accumulated a lot of experience" from the first vessel and has now taken the "next step," Chinese media quoted senior colonel and professor at the National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Liang Fang, as saying.

A second carrier would mark a significant upgrade to China's current Liaoning carrier, a refurbished Soviet-era ship that Beijing acquired from Ukraine.

"The reason we imported the first aircraft carrier is so that we could be capable of building our own in the future," the official said, adding, "And now, just like what some media have revealed, that is what we have done - built the second aircraft carrier."

Her statements follow recent reports from senior PLA officers on the building of the vessel.

Chinese officials sporadically report - and oftentimes delete - news of a second domestically built aircraft carrier.

The announcement comes as China and some of its neighbors have been involved in bitter territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Beijing claims the South China Sea in its entirety, while other countries, including the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam also have claims to the area and are in dispute with China.

## Asylum Seekers Stage Hunger Strike in UK Detention Centers



A view of Harmondsworth detention center near London's Heathrow Airport

LONDON (PRESS TV) - Asylum seekers in several immigration centers in the UK have staged hunger strikes and demonstrations to protest living conditions in the facilities.

Several hundred asylum seekers at Harmondsworth detention center, Britain's largest immigration center, have been on strike since Monday.

About 300 refugees are attending the strike at the detention facility, located near London's Heathrow Airport,

to protest overcrowded, prison-like conditions which they say are "comparable to animal cages."

Similar strikes have also been staged in other detention centers across the UK since last week, with many of the detainees resorting to Twitter and Facebook to share their experiences.

An asylum seeker, who attended the hunger strike in Harmondsworth, said in a tweet message that several people had passed out from lack of food and

water in the center.

The detainees have also protested their condition in an open letter to the Home Office, complaining of inadequate healthcare and lack of access to legal service.

The protests come in the wake of a UK parliamentary inquiry which urged an end to the indefinite detention of asylum seekers in centers that resemble high-security prisons.

In a report released earlier this month, a panel of British MPs confirmed alleged abuse and inhumane conditions in detention centers for asylum seekers in the UK. It added that the indefinite detention of asylum seekers in the facilities is "expensive, ineffective and unjust."

The UK is the only country in the EU that has no limit in the length of time that asylum seekers can be detained.

According to Britain's Home Office, more than 30,000 migrants and asylum seekers are estimated to have been detained indefinitely in the country with many held for months or even years.