

# Parisians Urge France to Leave NATO



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PARIS (Press TV) - Protesters in Paris have staged an anti-NATO rally demanding withdrawal of the country from the military alliance amid rising skepticism in the nation towards super national institutions, Press TV reports.

The protesters taking part at the Saturday demo believe that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is doing far more harm than good, while many argue that the alliance brings about a loss of autonomy and increased military spending for the country.

"We want France out of NATO because they have engaged in so many wars all on the pretext of humanitarian intervention or to allegedly increase human rights," said one of the demonstrators.

Back in 1966, former French President Charles De Gaulle withdrew from NATO arguing it undermined France's sovereignty. Under ex-president Nicholas Sarkozy, an ardent admirer of the United States, Paris rejoined NATO after over 40 years. Many in France, however, believe that it is not too late to re-

verse course. "NATO means that Europe is simply a tool for American imperialism ... every year we have one or two declarations of war on the nations in the south. That's why we want out of NATO," said another protester.

Recent polls indicate that the French are even more opposed to being in NATO today than they were in 2009, but mainstream politicians such as the Socialist President Francois Hollande show no inclination to re-assess the country's membership in the alliance.

## Merkel Promises to Work With Britain's Cameron on Reform of EU

BERLIN (Reuters) - German Chancellor Angela Merkel promised on Friday to work with David Cameron to clinch a deal on reforming the European Union that would keep Britain in the bloc, saying "where there's a will there's a way".

Both leaders, fellow conservatives with a good personal rapport, dodged the question of whether Cameron's demands for changes to the EU treaty were achievable before Britain holds a referendum on its membership of the bloc.

Merkel herself has backed the idea of treaty change in past years to bed down closer integration of euro zone countries, but German officials now acknowledge there is little appetite for this in other European capitals, making it unrealistic. "I will go into these discussions constructively. I want to find a solution," Merkel said.

Cameron, who won a second term as prime minister on May 7, said he hoped and believed that Europe would show flexibility toward one of its "larger countries, a big contributor, a major European player".

"It is a strength to be able to accommodate different nation-states with their different desires and different beliefs," said Cameron, who was greeted with a guard of honor in Berlin.

He reiterated that his preference was to stay in a reformed European Union but made clear nothing could be ruled out if Britain's demands were not met.

"We're two centre-right leaders and we have a similar outlook on many issues, we believe in fiscal responsibility, both at home and in the European Union, we believe in free markets, we believe in the Atlantic relationship, we believe in

free trade," Cameron said. A source in Cameron's office said Merkel's approach showed a welcome open-mindedness to the possibility of treaty change.

Cameron wants to restrict EU migrants' access to British welfare, improve the single market, and win safeguards to ensure countries outside the euro zone are not put at a disadvantage by greater integration.

He also wants to make sure Britain is not bound by the bloc's aim of ever-closer integration. Cameron is due to set out his reform proposals in more detail on June 25-26.

Cameron's meeting with Merkel, the most powerful leader in the EU, was seen as the headline stop in a four-country diplomatic tour of Europe which also included visits to the Netherlands, France and Poland.

## Opposition Protesters Rally In Venezuela

CARACAS (Press TV) - The supporters of Venezuela's opposition have held rallies in several cities in the country, including in the capital, Caracas, to call for the release of political prisoners.

The rally in the capital was the largest, with some 3,000 people taking to the streets on Saturday in response to a call by imprisoned opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez.

The 44-year-old has been behind bars since 15 months ago in connection with protests that

killed over 40 people and left hundreds injured last spring.

In a short video filmed in the Ramo Verde military prison outside Caracas, Lopez urged people to go out "peacefully" to demand that political prisoners be freed and a firm date be set for the South American country's legislative elections for this year. The Venezuelan government has not scheduled the polls, yet.

Several other protest rallies were reported in the cities of San Cristobal, Maracaibo, Barquis-

meto, Valencia, Maracay, Maturin, Puerto La Cruz, Puerto Ordaz and San Fernando.

Venezuela witnessed a wave of pro- and anti-government protests for several months last year, with the opposition blaming the administration of President Nicolas Maduro for the high crime rate and economic hardships in the country.

Maduro, however, said the United States was backing the opposition to launch a coup d'etat in the South American country.

## China, U.S. Tone Down Rhetoric But Far From South China Sea Solution

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - After a months-long row over Beijing's island-building in the South China Sea, the United States and China were relatively restrained at Asia's top security forum this weekend, but no closer to any solution.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter told the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore that China was threatening security in the region with its maritime construction work, but acknowledged other claimant countries to the disputed sea were also at fault.

"There's no progress in the South China Sea (dispute), but the atmosphere has calmed a bit, thanks to reasonable consideration by all parties," said Major General Jin Yinan of China's National Defense University, a delegate at the conference. "The U.S. has adjusted its stance a little."

Admiral Sun Jianguo, a deputy chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army who headed the Chinese delegation, refrained from singling out the United States for criticism in his address and emphasized China's commitment to peaceful relations.

"China has always kept in mind the larger interests of maritime security," Sun said, reiterating that his country's "indisputable" claims over the waters were based on legal and historical evidence.

Nevertheless, Washington is under huge pressure to respond forcefully to the Chinese land reclamation, with Republican Senator John

McCain, one of the participants at the dialogue, suggesting that U.S. ships and aircraft ignore the 12-nautical mile zone around the artificial islands.

"If we respected a 12-mile zone, then we would be making a mistake of enormous proportions because that would be de facto recognition of Chinese sovereignty," said McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

If U.S. vessels enter the zone, tensions would escalate sharply and there is no saying how Chinese forces based there would respond.

"If you look at the rhetoric, they are going to fight back," said Jia Qingguo, Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University. "If you look at their interests, they may opt for rhetoric instead of action. But here the danger is of an accident-led conflict."

Admiral Harry Harris, newly appointed chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, told reporters his forces would continue to operate in the region "without limitation and in accordance with international law."

But he also said he wanted increased military-to-military ties with China, including the U.S.-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) joint naval exercises in 2016.

McCain and other critics of the administration have said China should be barred from RIMPAC to show U.S. disapproval of its actions.

## International Effort Rescues Over 5,000 Mediterranean Migrants



Migrants wait to disembark in the Sicilian harbour of Augusta, Italy, May 30, 2015.

ROME (Reuters) - The corpses of 17 migrants were brought ashore in Sicily aboard an Italian naval vessel on Sunday along with 454 survivors as efforts intensified to rescue people fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East.

More than 5,000 migrants trying to reach Europe have been saved from boats in distress in the Mediterranean since Friday and operations are in progress to rescue 500 more, European Union authorities said on Sunday.

In some of the most intense Mediterranean traffic of the year, migrants who left Libya in 25 boats were picked up by ships from Italy, Britain, Malta and Belgium, assisted by planes from Iceland and Finland, the EU's border control agency Frontex said.

Naval and merchant vessels involved in rescue operations also came from countries including Germany, Ireland and Denmark.

The 17 corpses found on one of the boats arrived in the Sicilian port of Augusta aboard the Italian

navy corvette Fenice. Italian prosecutors are investigating how they died.

Frontex is coordinating an EU rescue mission in the Mediterranean known as Triton, which was stepped up after around 800 migrants drowned off Libya in April in the Mediterranean's most deadly shipwreck in living memory.

"This is the biggest wave of migrants we have seen in 2015," Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri said in a written statement. "The new vessels that joined operation Triton this week have already saved hundreds of people."

Italy has so far borne the brunt of Mediterranean rescue operations. Most of the migrants depart from the coast of Libya, which has descended into anarchy since Western powers backed a 2011 revolt that ousted Muammar Gaddafi.

Calm seas are increasingly favoring departures as warm spring weather sets in.



ROME (Reuters) - Italians go to the polls on Sunday in local elections that will be the biggest test for Prime Minister Matteo Renzi since his center-left Democratic Party (PD) triumphed in a vote for the European parliament a year ago.

Some 22 million voters will elect new governments in seven of Italy's 20 regions and more than 1,000 municipalities following a campaign dominated by corruption allegations against one of Renzi's most prominent candidates.

The 40-year-old premier needs a convincing result to maintain momentum for labor and education reforms which have met fierce resistance from trade unions, the political opposition and the left wing of his own PD.

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BOGUTA (Dispatches) - At least two rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been killed in a gunfight with Colombian soldiers in the western department of Narino.

The military said in a statement on Saturday that the latest clash took place near the town of Tumaco, located about 605 kilometers (376 miles) southwest of the capital, Bogota.

The statement added that the body of one of the rebels was recovered but the other was "violently snatched away by the civilian populace."

Soldiers also seized a grenade launcher, a mortar round, three handguns, and other munitions as well as 5.7 kilograms of cocaine paste from the scene of the skirmishes, the military said.

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TEHRAN (Press TV) - Schools have formally reopened in Nepal, following a devastating earthquake that killed thousands of people.

Tens of thousands of children returned to their classrooms on Sunday, marking the end of a school closure enforced by the government last month.

On April 25, the Asian country was rocked by an 8.1-magnitude earthquake. Nearly 9,000 people were killed and many others were injured or displaced.

Some schools were so badly damaged that the government had to build temporary classrooms with bamboo or tents. Some of these temporary schools were set up in soccer pitches of schools technically deemed "safe."

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BEIJING (dispatches) - Chinese authorities say they have dismantled 181 terrorist cells in the northwest of the country, while human rights groups argue that Beijing has carried out a harsh crackdown on its minority citizens in Xinjiang.

Beijing has jailed or detained hundreds of people in the largely Muslim region of Xinjiang, while scores of others have been sentenced to death over what China calls terror-related charges.

Beijing launched its operation "strike hard" on April 30 after 39 people were killed last May in a bloody market attack, which was attributed to Urumqi separatists in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, home to over 10 million of the mainly Muslim Uighur minority.