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REFUGEE PRESSURE PILES UP ON GREECE

EKATHIMERINI.COM

More than 12,000 refugees and migrants found themselves trapped in Greece on Tuesday as Athens took diplomatic action to counter the border restrictions to its north that are causing the buildup.

The Greek government issued a demarche to Austria over its decision to limit the number of asylum seekers it will accept, as well as the number of migrants that can pass through its territory in transit.

Vienna is also hosting a conference on Wednesday to discuss the refugee crisis. A number of Western Balkan countries will attend but Greece had not been invited, prompting Athens to accuse the Central European country of making a "unilateral" move. "The exclusion of our country at this meeting is seen as a non-friendly act since it gives the impression that some, in our absence, are expediting decisions which directly concern us," said Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras also called his Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte to discuss Athens's grievances as the Netherlands currently holds the six-month rotating EU presidency. Athens feels that there was an agreement at last week's leaders' summit in Brussels that none of the Union's members should take any unilateral actions concerning refugees until the planned meeting with Turkey takes place on March 6.

The limitations put in place by Austria have had a knock-on effect along the rest of the so-called Balkan Route for migrants, particularly on Greece's border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), where only a few dozen people were allowed to cross on Tuesday.



Brussels has warned of a brewing "humanitarian crisis" in Greece and the western Balkans after a series of border restrictions in recent days prompted backups and unrest along the main route used by nearly 1m migrants to reach Europe.



BELGIUM BRINGS BACK BORDER CHECKS OVER CALAIS MIGRANTS

THELOCAL.FR



Belgium on Tuesday said it had temporarily reintroduced border controls with France to halt the arrival of migrants from the Calais "Jungle" camp, in a new blow to the EU's passport-free travel area.

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CAMERON: BORIS HAS GOT IT WRONG OVER BREXIT

TELEGRAPH.CO.UK



David Cameron expressed his disappointment today at Boris Johnson joining the Brexit campaign to leave the EU. The Prime Minister urged the public to choose "security, safety and certainty" by voting to remain in the EU in June's referendum - as he visited one of dozens of top businesses whose bosses backed his case in a letter.

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FISCAL FRAMEWORK: SCOTTISH AND UK GOVERNMENTS AGREE DEAL

BBC.COM

The Scottish and UK governments have reached a financial deal enabling new powers for Holyrood. Negotiations over the fiscal framework have been going on since March 2015, with a lengthy deadlock over the issue of Scotland's block grant.

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GERMANY BLASTS COUNTRIES THAT WON'T TAKE BACK MIGRANTS

THELOCAL.DE

The German government has sent angry letters to the 17 countries most reluctant to take back their nationals who've had asylum applications rejected in Germany.

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CHECHEN LEADER KADYROV 'THREATENS WHOLE OF RUSSIA', OPPOSITION SAYS

THEGUARDIAN.COM

Vladimir Putin's handpicked leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, is a corrupt and merciless dictator whose growing political ambitions pose a serious danger to Russia's future, a damning opposition report has claimed.

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"HELP US IMPROVE EU FIREARMS LEGISLATION", URGES CONSERVATIVE MEP

ECRGROUP.EU

Gun owners are being urged to engage positively with efforts to amend EU legislation aimed at keeping firearms out of terrorists' hands. ECR MEP Vicky Ford said although many organisations had contacted her to strongly oppose the European Commission's initial proposals, few had yet put forward alternative ideas.

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FRANCE SEEKS GUARANTEES FOR NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN ADOPTION OF TTIP

EURACTIV.COM

Paris has argued that the transatlantic trade deal should have to be approved by the EU's national parliaments before it can take effect, not just the European institutions.

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24 FEBRUARY, 2016

THE AGENDA

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

• 15:00 **the plenary session starts in Brussels**. On the agenda: DEBATES: Resumption of session and order of business, Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 18 and 19 February 2016 - European Council and Commission statements. JOINT DEBATE - European Semester 2016: European Semester for economic policy coordination: Annual Growth Survey 2016 (rapporteur **Maria João Rodrigues**, S&D), European Semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2016 (rapporteur **Sofia Ribeiro**, EPP), Single Market governance within the European Semester 2016 (rapporteur **Catherine Stihler**, S&D), Commission decision adopted on the European Semester package, including country reports - Commission statement, European network of Employment Services, workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets (rapporteur **Heinz K. Becker**, EPP). JOINT DEBATE: EU-Tunisia trade relations: Introduction of emergency autonomous trade measures for Tunisia (rapporteur **Marielle de Sarnez**, ALDE), Opening of negotiations for an EU-Tunisia Free Trade Agreement - Commission statement, Preparation for the UN General Assembly special session on drugs - Council and Commission statements, One-minute speeches (Rule 163).

• 11:00 President of the European Parliament **Martin Schulz** will meet His Excellency Monsignor **Alain Paul Lebeaupin**, Apostolic nuncio (PSH, President's office).

• EU and NATO coordination has started to tackle the refugee crisis and will be further deepened, EU foreign policy chief **Federica Mogherini** and NATO Secretary **General Jens Stoltenberg** told MEPs and national MPs in the Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday.

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

• 14:30 **Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council** takes place in Brussels. Ministers will discuss how to better connect education, the labour market and society, focusing on issues related to development of skills. The outcome of this debate will provide input to the Commission's forthcoming communication on a new skills agenda for Europe (Justus Lipsius building, Brussels).

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

• The **European Investment Fund** and **Compañía Española de Reafianzamiento** - part of the Spanish Ministry of Industry - have signed the first **InnovFin** and **COSME** counter-guarantee agreements in Spain. These transactions benefit from the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the heart of the Investment Plan for Europe, and they are expected to trigger nearly €2 billion in fresh loans.

• The Commission published yesterday a Flash **Eurobarometer** on '**Possible obstacles to using the euro in international trade**' as perceived by companies in France, Germany, Italy and the UK in the aircraft and shipbuilding, energy, financial services, and electrical and mechanical engineering industries.

• Yesterday the EU and Brazil signed an agreement to develop 5G, the next generation of communication networks. The Commission also started work on an action plan to deploy the technology in the EU by 2020.

• The Commission welcomed yesterday's entry into force of the **Insurance Distribution Directive** which aims to create a level playing field between insurance distributors across the European Union. It will guarantee that customers get the same standards of choice and service when buying insurance, regardless of the Member State in which the insurance was bought.

COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EU

• The Court ruled that certain aspects of the **SZÉP leisure-card and Erzsébet meal-voucher schemes**, under which employers in Hungary may provide their employees with benefits in kind under favourable tax conditions are incompatible with EU law. According to the Court the schemes represent an obstacle to the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services (C-179/14).

WHO WHEN WHERE

• The 6th edition of the '**International Conference on Ocean Energy**' is organised and hosted by RenewableUK. Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries **Karmenu Vella** gives a speech there (Edinburgh, Scotland).

TODAY CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS



Jean-Marie CAVADA
ALDE
(76)



Janusz Władysław ZEMKE
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(67)