

Greek, Turkish leaders seek common ground over Ukraine war

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Associated Press

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ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held talks in Istanbul on Sunday, seeking a rapprochement against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The meeting focused on the benefits of increased cooperation between the two countries" in view of "the evolution of the European security architecture," the Turkish presidency said in a statement after two hours of talks.

"Despite the disagreements between Turkey and Greece, it was agreed... to keep the channels of communication open and to improve bilateral relations," the statement added, saying the two leaders discussed the conflict in Ukraine and their differences in the eastern Mediterranean.

"We are facing so many challenges at the moment... that the most important thing is to concentrate on what unites us rather than on what divides us," the Greek prime minister told journalists after the meeting.

"We stressed the need to forge a positive agenda," Mitsotakis said.

The meeting between the leaders of the neighboring NATO members came as Ankara seeks to shore up its credentials as a regional power player by mediating in the conflict.

Last Thursday, the Turkish resort city of Antalya hosted the first talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba since the start of Russia's invasion.

They failed to broker a cease-fire.

The Turkish and Greek leaders met on Sunday mindful that the burgeoning conflict in Ukraine looms larger than the long-standing tensions between Athens and Ankara.

"From the standpoint of both countries, having a potentially new crisis between them would certainly be very unwanted at this particular point in time," Sinan Ulgen, president of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul, told AFP.

The Aegean Sea neighbors and NATO allies entered a dangerous stand-off in 2020 over hydrocarbon resources and naval influence in the waters off their coasts.

Mitsotakis then unveiled Greece's most ambitious arms purchase program in decades and signed a defense agreement with France, to Turkey's consternation.

Senior Turkish officials continue to question Greek sovereignty over parts of the Aegean Sea, but last year Ankara resumed bilateral talks with Athens.

"Obviously, Turkey is pursuing a very clear wave of normalization with regional rivals, after several years of having pursued a sort of very assertive foreign policy and being regionally isolated," said Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

“I think that both Turkish and Greek leaders understand that the world is changing and the European security order is challenged in ways they have not imagined three months ago,” she added.

This week, the Israeli president also visited Ankara after more than a decade of diplomatic rupture.

Antonia Zervaki, assistant professor of international relations at the University of Athens, says Sunday’s meeting in Istanbul would provide an opportunity to “bring the two countries closer together” after a fraught period in relations.

Before his trip to Turkey, Mitsotakis had said he was heading there in a “productive mood” and with “measured” expectations.

“As partners in NATO, we are called upon... to try to keep our region away from any additional geopolitical crisis,” he told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday. Alongside its European partners, Athens strongly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, calling it a “revisionist” attack and “flagrant violation of international law.”

Before lunch, Mitsotakis attended a celebration at the Orthodox St. George’s Cathedral, Turkey’s largest, in Istanbul.



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, fifth right, talks to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, fifth left, after attending a ceremony for Orthodox Christians at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in Istanbul on March 13, 2022. (AP)

The Greek government spokesman this week said Mitsotakis was already due to visit the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on Sunday and had been invited to lunch by Erdogan at the presidential mansion on the banks of the Bosphorus.

Bartholomew, who has said he is “a target for Moscow,” called during the mass for an “immediate cease-fire on all fronts” in Ukraine. In 2018 the patriarch recognized an independent Ukrainian Orthodox church, a huge blow to Moscow’s spiritual authority in the Orthodox world. On Sunday he praised the “vigorous resistance” of the Ukrainians and “the courageous reaction of Russian citizens.”





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Turkey, Armenia vow to continue normalizing relations
Israeli president ends Turkey trip with synagogue visit

[Chad peace talks start in Qatar](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2022-03-13 10:23

DOHA: Chad's military government and dozens of opposition groups started peace talks on Sunday in Qatar as a first step toward ending a rebellion and holding elections.

The landlocked African nation was thrown into turmoil by the killing of

longtime leader Idriss Deby Itno in battle with rebels in the country's north last April.

His son, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, took over the country after his death, fronting a 15-member military junta and vowing to hold free elections. Chad's Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacke and African Union Commission head Moussa Faki Mahamat told the opening of the conference that both sides would have to make "concessions" for the talks to succeed.

But the process risks being protracted and complicated.

Some 44 armed rebel and opposition groups were invited to the Doha meeting – though some were missing at the opening, which had already been delayed from February 27.

Diplomats said these "precursor" talks could take weeks and that a planned "national dialogue" due to start on May 10 may have to be delayed.

Under the younger Deby's plan, the dialogue would be a prelude to agreeing on a new constitution and then holding elections.

Chad has a long history of volatility since gaining independence from France in 1960 and tens of thousands have died in various conflicts.

It has a large and shifting constellation of armed opposition groups.

"The situation in Chad is very serious, we have to deliver this," the African Union's Faki said in his address to the government and armed groups.

Padacke said that "peace requires more courage and maturity than war."

"Real courage does not mean brandishing your weapon but to have the courage to lay it down," added the prime minister.

He also said success in the talks would help stabilize the whole Sahel region where radical Islamist groups have staged regular attacks.

Libya's Foreign Minister Najla Al-Mangoush also said that the peace process would be crucial to improving stability and help "fight terrorism" in the Sahel.

As a condition for the Doha talks, Chadian rebels called for a general amnesty and the release of "prisoners of war" and the return of confiscated assets.

The military government says it has released hundreds of prisoners and amnestied several prominent leaders.

However, it has so far excluded the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) – the Libya-based group that launched the offensive in which Idriss Deby Itno was killed.

FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali was not at the talks.

Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, a 38-year-old four-star general, took the helm last April.

The elder Deby himself came to power at the head of a rebel force in 1990. In 2008 and again in 2019, columns of fighters came close to forcing him out, but each time were thwarted by French military power.



مفاوضات السلام التشادية في الدوحة
Chad Peace Negotiations in Doha
Les Négotiations de Paix du Tchad à Doha

الدوحة ١٣ مارس ٢٠٢٢م - Doha, 13 March 2022



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Chad junta accuses rebel head of seeking Russian mercenary help
Chad to halve its troops fighting Sahel militants

Cash or card? Confusion rages over Lebanon's new payment system

Author:

Sat, 2022-03-12 22:11

BEIRUT: Supermarket owners in Lebanon have blamed "hard-line measures" from the Banque du Liban for the introduction of a new payment system for their customers.

The central bank's change requires the payment of 50 percent of the value of purchases in cash, and 50 percent through bank cards, on account of "low liquidity" in markets, according to Nabil Fahed, head of the Syndicate of Supermarket Owners.

This development came the same day as gas station owners decided to stop accepting full payments for fuel via bank card.

Dr. Jassem Ajaka, an economist, described the repercussions as "economically catastrophic, as long as the amount of banknotes in Lebanese pounds that a citizen can withdraw from banks is limited while prices are rising."

This situation, he claimed, would make people consume less, causing a decline in GDP and a larger contraction in the economy.

Charles Arbid, president of the Economic and Social Council, said that Lebanon "is experiencing inflationary depression: That is, consumption and economic movement are stalled."

Operational prices are also rising for sectors such as energy and transportation, developments which, he said, require the immediate launch of a three-dimensional participatory dialogue at government level with employers and workers to devise solutions and take action.

He added: "No solutions are magical and readily available."

The Association of Banks in Lebanon, meanwhile, will pay the government-approved social assistance to public sector employees, including the military.

This assistance is equivalent to half of an additional salary per month, with a minimum of 1.5 million Lebanese pounds (\$993) and a maximum of 3 million pounds. Sixty percent of this is paid in cash, and other means of payment are being adopted to transfer the remaining 40 percent by bank card or check.

Nawal Nassr, president of the Public Administration Staff Association, said: "We can no longer afford to be approached with this level of absurdity.

"So far, we are committed to a day of attendance and we will stop doing so if this procedure is applied."

The repercussions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has exacerbated the world's oil crisis and its derivatives, have also reached Lebanon.

A gallon of gasoline in the mediterranean country currently costs 500,000 pounds, and must now be paid for in cash.

Abdo Saade, head of a group of private generator owners, warned on Saturday that monthly subscription charges would increase between 30 percent to 40 percent due to the high price of diesel for his generators.

Prices currently range between 800,000 and 2 million pounds, and possibly even more depending on consumption, he said,

"After March 15, we may turn off generators in most areas because of people's inability to pay consumption fees and (the) lack of liquidity," Saade added.

The severe economic crisis that Lebanon has faced for two years has prevented bank transfers abroad, with several banks introducing new rules to manage deposits.

Withdrawal ceilings in Lebanese pounds and dollars are no longer commensurate with the amount of money that citizens need to pay for their expenses.

Traders argue that they have resorted to this procedure because they pay importers in cash for their goods.

Ajaka explained: "Why do they want to pay cash? The first reason is that suppliers accept only cash, meaning that the problem is with the supplier, whose reasons to do so need to be investigated. The second reason is that traders work with illegal people. The third reason is to keep the money in cash as a safety margin in the event of a deterioration in the situation."

He pointed out that traders "argue that banks ask them to put their daily income in (the) banks for them to transfer money in cash to their employees when paying their salaries."

Ajaka added that reliance on cash increased tax evasion, because traders then declare less of their business, and deprived the banking sector of resources to pump back into the economy.

One Beirut bank manager, who declined to be named, told Arab News that the BdL "works by activating a banking text to dry the market from the Lebanese lira (pound), in addition to taking other measures aimed at curbing the black market that manipulates the dollar exchange rate.

"At the same time, it has decided not to respond to the banks' requests for liquidity in the Lebanese lira, asking them to get it from the market."

The bank manager added: “The central bank believes that the liquidity in lira that came out of it in huge quantities did not return to the central bank through the circulation. So where did this money go? It either went to storage or to supply the black market.”

The source said although Greece adopted this measure during its economic crisis, it cannot be adopted for a long time.

Ajaka believes that the authorities are likely to “issue laws and decrees to oblige traders to accept payment by bank cards because it is not possible to continue with cash in this way.”



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Lebanon central bank seeks names of those who failed to repatriate funds amid crisis
Will the debate over ‘mega centers’ delay Lebanon’s parliamentary elections?

Egypt condemns targeting of Riyadh oil refinery

Author:

Sat, 2022-03-12 21:40

CAIRO: Egypt has condemned in the strongest terms a drone strike targeting an oil refinery in Riyadh.

In a statement, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Cairo “reaffirms once again its total condemnation of these terrorist acts that target vital installations and the security and safety of energy supplies in the Kingdom.”

The ministry also said Egypt would “stand by Saudi Arabia in the measures it is taking to protect its security and sovereignty in the face of these despicable terrorist acts.”

The Saudi Ministry of Energy announced that the Riyadh refinery was attacked by a remote drone on Thursday morning, which resulted in a small fire that was controlled, and did not result in any injuries or deaths.

It added that the works of the refinery and the supply of petroleum and its derivatives were not affected.



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Saudi energy ministry condemns oil refinery drone attack in Riyadh
Saudi Arabia condemns suicide attack on Pakistan mosque

[Billion-dollar property grab as Houthi 'gangs' seize rivals' homes](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-03-12 20:16

AL-MUKALLA: Armed Houthis are stepping up a campaign to seize the homes, land and property of opponents who challenge their authority, Yemeni officials and victims of the raids said on Saturday.

Some of the properties are sold or passed on to Houthi fighters, while others are turned into secret detention centers.

Unlike previous campaigns that mainly targeted properties in Sanaa, Houthi rebels have stormed dozens of houses and plots belonging to government officials and activists in Hajjah, Ibb, Al-Bayda, Dhamar and Al-Mahwit provinces, as well as other areas in northern Yemen.

The Iran-backed Houthis say they are carrying out orders from judicial authorities to confiscate the property of Yemeni figures who support the internationally recognized government of Yemen and the military operations of the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen.

However, relatives of the victims say that militia fighters have confiscated the properties of former ministers, activists, tribal leaders and even ordinary people who happened to be living in government-controlled areas.

Sadam Maoudah, a former Houthi prisoner who now lives in government-controlled Marib city, told Arab News that the militia raided his seven-flat apartment block in Al-Mahwit city and told the other tenants in the building that property belonging to "the traitor Maoudah" was being confiscated.

The Houthis then wrote a new contract with the tenants that allowed them to receive the rent.

Maoudah said that the tenants later were ordered to leave the building after they revealed plans to turn it into a hotel.

"We don't know what they will do with the building," Maoudah said, adding that his family, including his disabled father who was hit by a car in Marib, is penniless after losing their only source of income.

"We appeal to the international community and humanitarian organizations to intervene to stop the crimes of the Houthis and their looting of displaced people's properties," Maoudah said.

Yemen's Rased human rights organization documented 32 cases of Houthis looting and confiscating private assets of displaced people, including houses, cars and cash, in the province of Al-Mahwit alone.

The organization described the confiscation campaigns as "a collective punishment" that targets civilians who fled the Houthi-held areas.

Other victims of the campaigns have authorized local lawyers to challenge the confiscation orders, and complained that Houthi judiciary guards occupied their houses and refused to leave despite receiving orders from the attorney general.

Mohammed Murshed Al-Arshani, the son of a former justice minister, said on Friday that a Houthi judicial guard, Mohammed Saleh Dubaish, and a number of militia fighters occupied his family home in Sanaa's Rawadha neighborhood under the pretext of executing a judicial order.

The Houthi occupants later added a new floor, ignoring orders from the militia-controlled public prosecution to leave.

"It seems that the gang will remain a gang even if it wears the dress of the state," Al-Arshani said.

On Saturday, Yemeni officials and activists voiced their support for Saleh Samae, a former minister and governor of Al-Mahwit, whose properties in Sanaa were stolen by the Houthis.

Samae was among hundreds of Yemeni ministers, officials, politicians, military and security officials and journalists who left Sanaa in late 2014 after the Houthis launched a crackdown on dissidents.

Last month, the Geneva-based SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties said in a detailed report that the 38 confiscated properties owned by the Houthis' opponents in Sanaa alone, including real estate and major companies, have a combined value of more than \$2 billion.

The Houthis also looted more than \$1.7 billion in revenues from the confiscated companies, hospitals and other institutions.

Yemeni analysts believe that the militia have stepped up the seizure of opponents' property to destroy any hopes of returning home under a peace agreement.

"The militia moves to a new stage, removing any trace of their opponents and telling the society that they cannot return," Ali Al-Fakih, editor of Al-Masdar Online, told Arab News.



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