Report 118
PROJECT ON BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
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This is the summary of the whole Euro-America zone (zone 3) taking into account the political, economic, socio-cultural and geo-strategic issues around North America/Canada, Western Europe, Latin America/Southern Europe, Southeast Europe Oceanesia, Russia and its Neighbour and East/Central Europe.

Report Summary

USA/Canada

Political Issue

Economic Issue

The U.S Securities and Exchange Commission setup to investigate the financial irresponsible of the Wall Street institutions is yet to figure out clues and untangle electronic trading records from the nation's increasingly high-tech exchanges.

Canadian Finance Minister Jim Flaherty said during the Group of Seven finance ministers that the group is watching the Greek debt crisis with concern and that several Euro zone countries need to exercise fiscal restraint. Greek financial crisis has become a big concern not just for Athens but the world market.

Canadians have right to put smile on their faces as the economy get stronger even as the Greek economy woes affects developed economies. Canadian private sectors open the door of employment to many Canadians during April and the month also saw a soar in the Canadian dollars.

Social/Humanitarian Issue

City Councils in Arizona are demanding the state government to repel its recent immigration law. The law was received with mixed feeling across the United States, with supporters arguing the law tackles the immigration laxity in the federal law, while opponents believe it is a witch hunt on immigrants.

Canadian Supreme Court has struck the demand by journalist to keep source of their information confidential from prosecutor. The court ruled that source confidentiality has to be weighed in comparison with public interest. Canadian journalists opined that the ruling was "a significant blow to every journalist's ability to protect whistle-blowers".

Canadian Muslim organisations are urging the immigrant Muslim community to rather get engaged with their new community than simply being concerned over the issue of mosque building. Social justice and civic responsibility are part of Islam and Muslims are expected to be part of the trend that speaks on such issues. The demand for such engagement came amid the issue of women's right among Canadian Muslim as it appears they are still under the grip of men's security.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

The ongoing NPT summit in New York has been quite dramatic as members wrestle over the increasing proliferation of nuclear weapons around the world. The Iranian nuclear issue was obvious at the summit, Ahmadinejad reiterated his opposition against the US and western-led sanction, claiming that any further sanction will damage Obama's call for change and would further widen the gulf between Iran and the United States. Iran nevertheless got the audience and support of members from developing countries, consolidated by Iran's consent to swap its nuclear substance with Brazil.

The U.S government is pushing to make the Middle East a nuclear free zone by urging the regional government to shun the intention of seeking nuclear technology for reactor instead to get their processed nuclear substance from international organization. This measure is hoped to reduce the propensity of transforming nuclear substances into weapon and to reduce the tendency of turning the region into a nuclear zone. With the Egyptian patronage, Arab leaders are demanding that Israel nuclear programme must be investigated before such international regime can work out for them.

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has created great concern for the American government as the spillage affects livelihood and sealife. However, the American government has made it clear to BP Oil Company responsible for the spill to take serious responsibility of cleansing the sea. Hence, the company has built a giant concrete-and-steel box designed with the hope of siphoning the oil away.

In a display of transparency and to project a good image of the United States on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The U.S disclosed the number of its nuclear warheads around 5,113, while some officials believe U.S houses more weapons than announced. The Obama administration was said to have debated the strategic importance before such disclosure, so as not to lay U.S military capability to bare.

Geostrategic Issues

Western Europe

Political Issue

The British inconclusive election has left the Liberal Democrat party as the king maker, whom bigger parties (Labour and Conservative) are wooing to constitute a government. Lobbying the Liberal Democrat is of course the only avenue for both parties

to get substantive majority in the parliament, even though alliance of Labour and Liberal will still fall short of majority. The possibility of Liberal-Conservative coalition is plausible. Even though these parties are dissimilar in many respects yet they are geared to cooperate on areas of common interest as in the case of economy.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's government mulls over election in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the center-right coalition is likely to win. Merkel's government has been perturbed on how to retain voters support and aiding Greek debt crisis.

Switzerland hasn't taken part in a foreign war since 1815, but has one of Europe's largest armies in part because of long-standing fear of foreign invasion after the neutral nation was surrounded by fascist armies during World War II. Meanwhile, according to a leaked memo from the defence ministry, the small European country is considering cutting funds for new weapons systems and reducing the size of the army and reducing chances of Swiss army getting involve in foreign mission.

Debate over ban of veil in France remains contentious in the parliament. President Sarkozy and his conservative party are demanding a total ban, but a softer proposal was submitted by the opposition Socialist party arguing that total ban will be difficult, the ban should nevertheless include government buildings, hospitals, public transport and banks.

Economic Issue

The political atmosphere in Britain has a great deal to tell about the British economy. The economy was one of the latecomers from the last financial recession. Economists are of the view that a hung parliament will further harden the economic problem amid the deficit economy. The hung parliament where coalition government will rule might be slow in taking fast decision in solving the deficit problem.

After a protracted debate on plausible way to solving the Greek crisis, the EU and IMF finally resolved to bail Athens with 110 billion-euro aid package. The EU will provide 80 billion euros of it, while the rest will come from the IMF. Germany is expected to give euro22.4 billion ($29.3 billion) in aid for debt-ridden Greece. It is said that failure to act exigently will further dampen the Eurozone economies. Meanwhile, in return for the aid, Greece must implement sweeping austerity measures, that have already caused huge nationwide protests.

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Recent UN report shows that child labour has fallen across the world by 3%. The report states that Asia and Latin America showed certain degree of improvement while sub-Saharan is still relatively slow.

A British court has ruled against the position of the government to keep secret evidence of Gitmo former prisoners. The court ruled that former inmates have the right to

know what they have been arrested for and their lawyers said such ruling supports open justice of the British system.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

As the NPT concludes its New York summit, members of the international nuclear watchdog (IAEA) are also geared at tabling the Israeli nuclear issue for discussion in its forthcoming meeting. The discussion is said to be remarkable as it would show the sway of Arab countries demanding that Iran should not be singled out while Israel controversial nuclear capability is kept uninvestigated.

Outgoing U.N. climate chief Yvo de Boer said the world will fall short of producing a climate treaty the year even after the hype Copenhagen climate summit that failed to draft a treaty. Meanwhile, the world is looking forward for the Mexico summit later this year with the hope that that might be an operational architecture on climate change

Geostrategic Issues

EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele made a clear statement that value and not religion should be the yardstick to becoming EU member. The statement was directed to Turkey-EU member that has been at stake. Fuele however notes that Cyprus will remain the big elephant for Turkey.

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden was in Spain to reiterate U.S intention of installing anti-missile system in Europe and to strength U.S-Spain relations. Biden is expected to talk on the current Greek financial trouble.

Southeast Europe

Political Issue

Amid the political impasses between the Albania ruling party and opposition Socialist party recently punctuated by a massive protest and hunger strike outside the building, Institute for Research and Development Alternatives reports in its survey that 91% of citizens believe that corruption is rampant in the public sector, with the health sector viewed as most corrupt. The political tussle is linked to the June 2009 election which the opposition said was rigged. Meanwhile, speaker of Italy's Lower House of Parliament, Gianfranco Fini has said that Albania’s road towards the EU visa liberalization scheme will be conditioned on fighting crime and illegal trafficking.

Conditionality has always been the rule of the EU to all aspiring Balkan countries. As in the case of Albania where fight against corruption and crime is the prerequisite for EU visa liberalization, Bosnia which is also seeking the visa liberalization but asked to amend its constitution. The European Court of Human Rights demands of Bosnia to

amend its Constitution by removing the aspects that are constitutionally discriminatory against minorities.

The Bosnian Central Election Commission (CEC) has announced that parliamentary and presidential elections will be held on October 3rd.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov said he will stay in office till his mandate expires in 2013 and he does not wish to be a presidential candidate in the 2011 general election. Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov will be the ruling Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party.

As Croats marked the 15th anniversary of Operation Bljesak (Flash), in which Croatian forces removed Serb forces from the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina. President Ivo Josipovic described it as a "milestone in the Homeland War.

Kosovo Minister for Integrations Besim Beqaj said that despite Serbia’s efforts, Belgrade will not hinder Kosovo's EU integration. He affirmed that Kosovo is a functional state recognised by 65 countries and 22 of EU members and hopes to receiving roadmap of EU visa liberalization scheme. In a separate development, Kosovo Foreign Minister Skender Hyseni told EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele that Kosovo will participate in the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sarajevo only as an equal partner with other participants. A similar meeting was hosted by Slovenia in March in which Serbia conditioned its attendance only if Kosovo is not represented as a state, the meeting of course was held without Serbia. Will Serbia avoid the forthcoming Sarajevo summit after getting the message that without Belgrade, summit will still hold?

Meanwhile, European Commission (EC) Liaison Office in Pristina, Renzo Daviddi discussed with Kosovo Minister of Public Administration Edita Tahiri that the commission will support the government in conducting a national census.

In Macedonia, Ali Ahmeti, leader of ethnic Albanian junior coalition partner Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), opposes any scenario that could lead to the partition of Macedonia after a border skirmishes with Kosovo.

Montenegro moved a step forward on its road for the EU membership. The bloc has officially offered Podgorica its associate membership. Meanwhile, leaders of the opposition coalition "A Better Montenegro" kicked off their campaign for the upcoming local elections.

As Romanian prepare for the next parliamentary elections scheduled for 2012, Crin Antonescu, leader of the opposition National Liberal Party, wants Prime Minister Emil Boc to resign, and said President Traian Basescu should either step down or find an actual solution to the economic crisis. Meanwhile, two other opposition parties have drafted a no-confidence motion against the government of Prime Minister Emil Boc, criticizing the government's economic policy, particularly spending cuts.

Serbia does not only have right to condemn crime against other ethnic but also have right to condemn crime committed against Serbs during the 1990s Balkan war. Parliament Speaker Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic said lawmakers will be discussing a declaration condemning war crimes committed against Serbs.

Economic Issue

Romanian President Traian Basescu predicted that authorities will have to cut public sector wages by 25% and reduce pensions by 15% to prevent substantial tax hikes. The cuts will take effect as of June 1st.

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Greece-Macedonia name dispute is one of the troubling issues in the neighbourhood. But such issue has not stopped Greeks from crossing border into Macedonia for recreational and health services. It is believed that many Greeks are seeking dental health care in Macedonia despite the tussle between the two governments. The extent to which the dental diplomacy can help in resolving the name dispute is yet to be known.

In Bosnia, Serbs are marking the 18th anniversary of an attack against a Yugoslav National Army (JNA) convoy that left more than 40 soldiers dead.

Fighting organised crime is one of the state duties and the Bulgarian government is ready to reduce crimes as it establishes a special anti-mafia court by this summer. The court will handle organised crime and corruption case and that will lessen the workload on courts around the country.

Telephone connections in Serb dominated parts of Kosovo are still blank. Last week Kosovo government dismantled Serbian telephone companies on the grounds that they evade tax and are not legitimate. Meanwhile, through Brussels, negotiation is reported ongoing between Kosovo and Serbia that will allow a Serb virtual mobile operator in Kosovo.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

As the Balkan countries strive for EU visa liberalisation scheme, Romania inks an agreement with Washington on visa free regime that will allow Romanian citizens to stay for 90 days in the U.S without visa.

Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic dismisses media reports in Pristina about secret negotiations on the partition of Kosovo. He said Belgrade stands with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the only framework within which Kosovo's status could be discussed.

Lawmakers voted unanimously Monday to hold a referendum on the arbitration border agreement with Croatia on June 6th. Slovenians will be asked whether they back the law on ratification of the arbitration agreement between the two neighbours.

Oceanesia

Political Issue

The inability of the Rudd's government to make the parliament pass gas cut emission law has affected his Labour party in recent poll. The poll showed the opposition Liberal party was leading Labor by 51 to 49 percent in a two party race. Australians are soon going for election and it is less likely that gas emission will turn out a political issue during the election.

Economic Issue

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Latin America

Political Issue

Argentina opposition party remains on the neck of the ruling party over bribe case involving Venezuelan businessmen and Argentina government officials. A court petition has been filed against current serving planning minister and the ex president of Argentina Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007).

According to the Times magazine the Brazilian President Lula da Silva is the most favorite leader in the world then followed by the U.S President Barack Obama, while no European leaders rank the list of the top 25.

Former Colombian defense minister Santo and an aspirant presidential candidate has asked the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to respect Colombian political structure and not to interfere in its domestic affairs. He also diffused the fear championed by Chavez that if elected as president he will attack Venezuela and Ecuador. The US Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere also added that Venezuela should not meddle in other countries' affairs

Economic Issue

Both blocs are prepared fostering their ties and that could be spelt out through trade liberalization between the EU and Mercosur. EU remains the largest trading bloc with Mercosur. EU farmers are however skeptical of the liberalization nurturing the fear

of South America's cheap agro products into EU, even though the latter's poultry and beef sector will benefit from the process.

As part of the plan to consolidate Brazilian President Lula last phase in government, his Labour minister has promised to create more 2.5 million jobs this year than 2 million earlier announced.

Being the world largest sugar producer, Brazil is expected to reap greater gain of its sugar plantation this year due to drier weather in Center Southern Brazil which produces almost 90 percent of the country's total production.

Attending the short climate summit in Germany will opportune the Mexican president to strengthen trade relations with the German government, currently both countries have $13 billion dollars trade deals.

Peruvian president has shown discontentment towards Venezuelan economic policy which according to Peru harms the region. Peruvian footwear is now facing trouble entering into Venezuela. Meanwhile, Venezuela's state oil company has increased its stakes to 49 percent in Dominican Republic. Chavez believes it is in the interest of both countries.

Venezuela's National Institute of Statistics (NIS) has published a report that the private sector of Venezuela failed to produce jobs for the citizens while the public sector produced more jobs after the nationalization of the country's institutions.

Venezuelan former minister of mining and industry has called on the government to define areas where the private sectors could invest in order to save the economy from further shrink.

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Argentina will be the first Catholic Latin America country to legalize same-sex marriage. The Senate is expected to pass the bill after the contentious passage of same bill in the lower house.

The (IBSA) India-Brazil and South Africa are expected to be the largest countries among 200 other countries to participate at the forthcoming Child Labor summit in The Hague, Netherlands. The summit is expected to set 2016 as deadline and new rules for all countries on of child labour.

As much as the Chilean president wants Korean technology of early earthquake alarm, the Latin America country is also demanding Seoul to participate in the post-earthquake reconstruction, which the Koreans are dodging owing to language barrier.

Fight against violence and crime will be a protracted fight in Mexico, the president made this known in view of the ongoing crime rate in the country.

The revolutionary Simon Bolivar, whose iconic name is revered and has triggered lot of revolutionary changes in the region died in Colombia in 1830 and a latest doctor report from United States asserts that he was rather poisoned than been killed by tuberculoses or assassinated.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

As the Argentina's gas production is falling and the country increasingly reliant on spot LNG cargoes so the government has turned to Bolivia to secure its long-term gas-supply requirements. Argentina is going to be the big consumer of Bolivia's gas.

Paraguay is demanding equal and just share from Brazil over the Itaipu dam. Both countries share border along the dam as source of energy, but Paraguay claims it only enjoy 5 percent of the energy supply, while Sao Paulo the industrial hub of Brazil takes the lion share.

Being part of the non-permanent UNSC members and having different approach to global issues, Brazil and Turkey are taking the challenge to mediate between the west and Iran over the latter's nuclear issue. This of course will add to the profile of both countries as global players. Ankara and Rio de Janeiro will also be using the avenue to nail their oil trade talk with Iran.

As a great player in the climate change debate, Mexican president attended a primary climate change conference in Germany before Mexico will host the world later this year for another global climate summit.

Geostrategic Issues

Latin American leaders have reacted angrily to the new Arizona immigration law during the UNASUR summit held in the northern city of Argentina. The twelve UNASUR members slammed the Arizona's policy particularly as an affront to Latino immigrants. Meanwhile, the summit elected former Argentine President Nestor Kirchner as its new secretary general because of his stature and problem solving abilities. According to the UNASUR covenant the secretary general should solely focus on the union's issues rather than his country's national issues.

In response to the Arizona law, the Mexican Congress has asked Mexican President Felipe Calderon to boycott commercial ties with Arizona state.

Russia and East/Central European Neighbours

Political Issue

The political unsettledness in Kyrgyzstan will make the Central Asian Countries absent at the forthcoming Collective Security Treaty Organization and CIS informal summits scheduled for May 8.

Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has not totally off-hook itself from the sway of Russia. It has witnessed series of elections characterised by anti-Russia and pro-Russia politicians, while the latest election and the new ties between Ukraine and Russia is a pointer to Russia spirited influence.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov owns no cars and lives in a cramped 36-square-meter apartment in Grozny, making him one of Russia's poorest regional leaders at least on paper.

Economic Issue

Spreading its economic tentacle beyond its neighbourhood, Russia is eyeing the Banana Republic for economic relations. The republic has always been the neighborhood of Washington; hence one would expect certain degree of economic conflict between the two rivals. Meanwhile, Russia is renewing and patching up its relations with Cuba, a traditional Cold War ally.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov has acknowledged that his newly elected pro-Russian government was seriously considering Moscow’s proposal to merge its state-run behemoth Gazprom with Ukraine’s national energy company Naftogaz

Social/Humanitarian Issue

According to a recent report on press freedom, Russia is still ranked among countries where press freedom is unchanged. The report noted that press freedom in Russia in 2009 almost unchanged from 2008. Meanwhile, the Nordic countries - Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - rank first in the list as the states with the freest media

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin does not hide his Russian centric feelings and support for Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Meanwhile, recent President Dmitry Medvedev criticism of Stalin’s era and against the wide attack on individual liberties during the Soviet era could be a diving line between the two leaders.

Russian republic of Dagestan was affected by a huge flood caused by heavy rain which affected some 210 private houses, where about 1,000 people live.

The leader of the Russian Orthodox Church has called upon the faithful to have more children in order to repopulate their vast nation.

According to a Nextep agency poll, Russia is ranked along with Pakistan and Croatia as countries on top list where people sitting behind shop and office counters have a surly attitude and finds it difficult to smile.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Turko-Russia relation has moved a step forward as both countries have agreed all the details and commercial terms for the construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant geared at ameliorating Turkey’s electricity issue.

Effort towards non-proliferation of WMD is getting momentum and the nuclear power states like the U.S and Russia are ready to ensure a nuclear free Middle East. A proposal has been drafted involving the appointment of a special coordinator to conduct exploratory talks with Israel, Iran and the Arab states.

Geostrategic Issues

Russian forces have disbanded Somali pirated and liberated the crew and ship seized by the pirates who earlier have demanded for $50 million in ransom.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko has assured the Iranians that come what may, Russia position on Iranian nuclear issue will not change.

On a separate development, Tehran and St Petersburg have reached an agreement on launching two satellites into orbit in order to study distance communication. The agreement was reached during Iran's Communications and IT Minister's last visit to Russia. Both satellites will be launched into orbit during the current year.

After several meetings and weapon reduction treaty signed but still awaiting parliamentary approval of both countries, Russian Medvedev is expected to visit US to consolidate the new US-Russia relations. Similarly, Medvedev is expected to pay the interim Polish President Komorowski a visit on May 8, after the plane crash which stole the lives of many Polish leaders.

The new phase of Russia-Ukraine ties characterised by base leasing and cheap gas received mixed reactions. One, those who felt the country will be too dependent on Russia, while other believes it is good for Ukraine economy. But more importantly is the Geostrategic implication for US engagement in the region.