

## World News Roundup

## Brexit

## N. Ireland fears loss

## 'Seize Brexit chance to forge tighter EU'

STRASBOURG, Sept 13, (RTRS): European Commission chief **Jean-Claude Juncker** called on EU governments on Wednesday to seize a window of opportunity from Brexit and economic growth to forge a tighter union built around the euro currency and a pivotal role in global trade.

In his annual State of the European Union speech, Juncker sketched out a vision of a post-2019 EU where some 30 countries would form a euro zone, with an EU finance minister running key budgets to help states in trouble.



Juncker

Tax and welfare standards would converge and Europe, rather than the United States, would be the hub of a free-trading world.

The Commission president — effectively the EU's chief executive — stressed his wish to heal divisions between eastern and western, poorer and richer member states; he sees that as vital to countering a drive, including by founding powers France and Germany, to set up new structures within the bloc that would exclude some ex-communist members.

"The wind is back in Europe's sails," Juncker told the European Parliament, citing faster economic growth and the easing of a succession of crises — Greek debts, refugee crowds, Britain's exit — that seemed to threaten the EU's survival.

"Now we have a window of opportunity, but it will not stay open for ever," he said, emphasising a need to move on from and even profit from the British vote to leave the bloc come 2019.

"We will keep moving on because Brexit isn't everything, it is not the future of Europe," he said in a speech that Brexit supporters said showed they were right to take Britain out of a bloc set on creating more powerful, central institutions.

In a carefully balanced, hour-long discourse in Strasbourg, he called on nationalist eastern leaders — though not by name — to stop defying EU courts over civil rights, and on westerners to drop attempts to keep out cheaper eastern workers or palm off inferior food products in poorer national markets.

But his core proposal for countering what is known as a "multispeed Europe" by encouraging all states to join the euro and other EU structures faces resistance in both non-euro zone countries and potentially in Paris and Berlin, where the newly elected President Emmanuel Macron and about to be re-elected German Chancellor Angela Merkel are readying their own plans.

## Group

"If we want the euro to unite rather than divide our continent, then it should be more than the currency of a select group of countries," Juncker said. "The euro is meant to be the single currency of the European Union as a whole."

Meanwhile, the British government needs to provide more clarity and less ambiguity on Brexit for negotiations to succeed, French junior economy minister Benjamin Griveaux said during a visit to London on Wednesday.

Asked what impact a "no-deal Brexit" scenario would have on France, Griveaux told reporters that it would be felt by the whole of Europe, but would be even worse for Britain.

"If it goes wrong, it will go wrong for everyone," he said.

Griveaux, who helped President Emmanuel Macron set up the En Marche political movement that propelled him to power in May, is part of the 39-year-old leader's inner circle.

He was in London to meet company executives, predominantly in the financial services industry, with a view to persuading them to move some of their operations to France after Brexit.

In related news, the European Union has long aided efforts to heal the deep divisions that plague Northern Ireland, and many people on both sides of the sectarian rift fear what might happen when Brexit forces it to walk away.

Since a 1998 peace deal ended three decades of violence between Protestant pro-British unionists and Catholic Irish nationalists, in which 3,600 died, the EU has pumped about 1.5 billion euros (\$1.8 billion) into projects to shore up that peace — more than any other body apart from the British state.

## Neutral

It has enjoyed broad support and influence as a force viewed by both sides as a neutral broker separate from the British government, which is distrusted by many nationalists, and the Irish government, distrusted by many unionists.

It has been able to take on projects others shy away from, such as the reintegration of former militants, both IRA and pro-union loyalists, and support for relatives of dead fighters.

Brexit is already rattling the region by raising concerns it will lead to a hard border with EU member Ireland. For some in both communities, the idea of a new, rigid frontier stirs painful memories of the British Army watchtowers and checkpoints that peppered the border during the decades of bloodshed.

"It's a very fragile situation here, and in Westminster there seems to be a lack of consideration for Northern Ireland," said Kate Clifford, director of the Rural Community Network, a community group that has received peace funding in the past.

"Without a (EU) peace programme behind that, without the impetus of the external force that is Europe, that honest broker, things will become very difficult," she said.

While no one expects a return to the widespread violence of Northern Ireland's "Troubles" of the 1960s to 1990s, sectarian tensions still run high and intermittently erupt into rioting.

Some British ministers argue that savings from leaving the bloc would allow the government to match all EU funding and last month British Prime Minister Theresa May said that her government would consider replacing that European money.

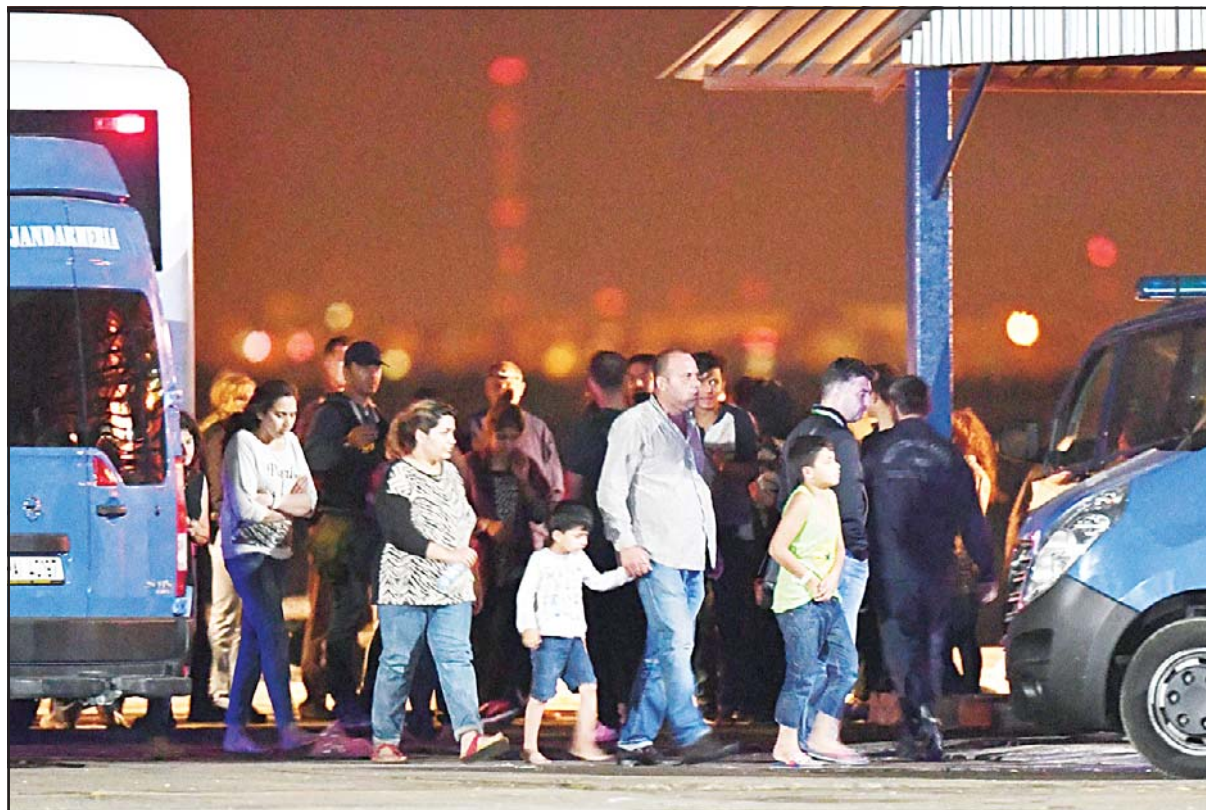
Yet London has offered no guarantees and, with Brexit negotiations between London and Brussels in their infancy, there is little certainty about how leaving the bloc will affect Britain's finances.

The British government's Northern Ireland office and the EU's Belfast office declined to comment.

Since the EU's Northern Ireland PEACE programme was founded in 1995, funded groups have worked with hundreds of thousands of Northern Ireland's 1.8 million citizens on conflict resolution, anti-sectarianism and supporting victims.



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker delivers his State of the Union speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Sept 13. (AFP)



Migrants prepare to board buses at a refugee centre in the Media Port, at the Black Sea coast, next to Navodari city on Sept 13. EU member Romania is not part of the bloc's passport-free Schengen zone and until now has largely avoided the kind of influx of refugees and migrants seen

elsewhere on the continent over the last few years. Bucharest fears that the Black Sea could become an alternative route for migrants seeking a new life in Europe as the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean becomes increasingly difficult. (AFP)



Former British prime minister Tony Blair smiles as he arrives to greet Pope Francis during the weekly general audience at St Peter's Square on Sept 13, in Vatican. (AFP)

## Europe

'Restore power-sharing gov't': British Prime Minister **Theresa May** has spoken with the leaders of Northern Ireland's two main parties to press them to restore a power-sharing government that collapsed in January.

Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and its nationalist rivals Sinn Fein have failed so far to agree on how to reform the devolved administration, limiting the province's influence in Brexit negotiations.

A government spokeswoman said on Wednesday that May had made separate phone calls to DUP leader Arlene Foster and the leader of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland, **Michelle O'Neill**, to make clear "the importance of restoring a power-sharing executive to Northern Ireland as soon as possible".

"They discussed key outstanding issues that remain for both parties and the prime minister encouraged both leaders to come to an agreement soon in the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland." (RTRS)

'Reject EU withdrawal bill': Scotland's devolved government has recommended that its parliament at Holyrood withhold consent for legislation to withdraw Britain from the European Union, on the grounds that it could water down their powers, a document filed by the Scottish government said on Tuesday.

The approval of the devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales does not represent a veto to the Brexit process, although it would stretch Britain's constitutional tensions yet further by forcing the UK government of Prime Minister Theresa May to ignore the expressed wish of the devolved bodies.

Scotland would work with the Welsh government to propose amendments to the bill which, if agreement were reached,

## Migrants

Romania rescues 157 from Black Sea  
Take in refugees: EU

BRUSSELS, Sept 13, (Agencies): Eastern European Union states must drop their resistance and accept their share of refugees who arrived in the bloc, officials and diplomats said on Tuesday after a court ruled they must abide by the quota.

The EU's highest court ruled last week that member states must take in a share of refugees who reach Europe, dismissing complaints by Slovakia and Hungary and reigniting an east-west row that has shaken the bloc's cohesion.

Brussels and other capitals hope member states will respect the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling.

Poland and Hungary are opposed to accepting anybody, their reluctance shared by ex-communist peers Slovakia and the Czech Republic, who have, however, accepted a handful of people under a 2015 EU scheme designed to move 160,000 from Italy and Greece.

"All members of the EU must respect the ruling," Manfred Weber, the head of the of the largest faction in the European Parliament, told a news conference. "The legal fight is over."

"Migration is still a political wound of the political landscape all over Europe ... All the reasonable and all the responsible politicians have to go now (towards) a compromise."

EU officials and diplomats say they will make another push this autumn to try to bridge the divisions. EU interior ministers will debate the matter in Brussels on Wednesday.

However, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has said he will fight on. Poland, whose nationalist government is now engulfed in spiralling feuds with the bloc, said its migration stance has not changed.

would allow it to recommend its passage in the devolved assemblies, the document



May



O'Neill

said.

The bill will end the supremacy of EU law in the UK and convert all existing EU laws into domestic ones.

"Along with the Welsh government, the Scottish government cannot recommend to the parliament that it gives consent to the bill as currently drafted," the document filed with the Scottish parliament said.

"The Scottish government is also clear that the result of withdrawal from the EU should not be centralisation of power in Whitehall and Westminster. However, that is what the bill proposes." (RTRS)

## France foiled 12 terror attacks:

Twelve terror plots have been thwarted in France since the start of the year, Interior Minister **Gerard Collomb** said Tuesday, warning that the threat remains "strong".

Among the previously unpublicised cases was a planned attack, foiled in May, on an air force training school in the southern town of Salon-de-Provence, the minister said, without giving details.

Another plot targeting "a barracks, a police station or a supermarket with hostage-taking," was averted in January.

"The threat remains strong," Collomb told a parliamentary committee considering government proposals for new anti-terror laws.

"We see that we are moving from an outside threat to an internal threat, and we have to be able to adapt to the evolution of this threat," he added.

In the most recent foiled plot, homemade explosives ready for use were found in an unoccupied flat near Paris last week.

The parliamentary deputies are considering the controversial terrorist law plans which are designed to replace, on November 1, the state of emergency which France has been under since Islamic State jihadists struck in Paris in November 2015, killing 130 people.

The new laws — a campaign pledge of President Emmanuel Macron — will give authorities the power to place people under house arrest, order house searches and ban public gatherings without the prior approval of a judge. (AFP)



**UK releases image of jogger:** British police released a new image on Wednesday in a fresh bid to trace a male jogger who appeared to push a woman into the path of an oncoming bus on a busy London street four months ago.

Video footage of the apparently callous incident on Putney Bridge, southwest London, has been repeatedly screened on British television but the runner has yet to be found.

Footage shows him jog past one man on the bridge on May 5 before knocking into the 33-year-old victim. She tumbled head-first into the path of an oncoming bus, which managed to swerve out of her way, missing her by inches.

The new CCTV still was taken from the bus, and shows a white man in a grey top and dark shorts. Police said he came back the other way across the bridge 15 minutes later but did not acknowledge the victim when she tried to speak to him.

"Images of this alarming incident have been circulated widely and we continue to work through the information received to identify the man responsible," said Detective Sergeant Chris Griffith. (RTRS)



## French PM shrugs off protests:

French Prime Minister **Edouard Philippe** has shrugged off nationwide protests against planned reforms to France's strict labour regulations, saying on Wednesday he was "listening" but would nonetheless press ahead with the bill.

In a sign that popular protest could gain momentum, truck drivers belonging to France's second and third largest unions said they would launch a rolling strike on Sept 25 to force the government into a reversal. Trucker strikes previously brought large parts of France to a halt, hurting the economy.

More than 200,000 trade unionists turned out on Tuesday for the first mass protests against the labour market reforms on Macron's agenda for change. Others, including reform to the unemployment benefits and pension systems, are likely to be even more contested.

The government plans to adopt the decrees on Sept. 22.

"I am listening and I am paying attention. But let me state that the French, when they vote, also have a right to be treated with respect," Philippe told France 2 television. "And the reform that we are putting in place was announced by the president at the time of his election."

Labour unions have thwarted previous attempts by governments on the political right and left to weaken France's strict labour code. In a change of tack, Macron's administration spent weeks negotiating its proposals with union bosses over the summer.

Last month, the government set out measures including a cap on payouts for dismissals judged unfair and greater freedom for companies to hire and fire. The reform makes no direct reference to the 35-hour week, a totem of the labour code, though it hands firms more flexibility to set pay and working conditions. (RTRS)



## Saakashvili to face court:

Former Odessa governor **Mikhail Saakashvili** has been served legal notice by Ukrainian authorities after the stateless politician forced his way across the border from Poland, a move that puts him on a collision course with the government in Kiev.

Ukrainian border guards and police turned up at the hotel in the city of Lviv where Saakashvili was staying Tuesday and presented him with an official document detailing his alleged violation of crossing the border illegally.

Local media reported that the ex-Georgian president and former governor of Ukraine's Odessa region was ordered to appear at a court hearing over the incident on Monday. (AP)



## 'IS flags not flying in Bosnia':

Islamic State flags are not flying in Bosnia, Prime Minister **Denis Zvizdic** said on Tuesday, dismissing allegations by some European leaders that radical Bosnian Muslims in the Balkan country were posing a terrorist threat for Europe.

Bosnian Muslims generally practise a moderate form of Islam but some have adopted radical Salafism from foreign fighters who came to the country during its 1992-95 war to fight alongside Muslims against Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats.

Some joined Islamic State in Syria and Iraq but police said departures had stopped completely in the past 18 months and more than half of those who returned have been jailed under a law prohibiting people to fight in foreign countries. (RTRS)