

Other News (1-15 December 2013) Russia

RUSSIA PROMISES CHEEP GAS TO UKRAINE IF IT JOINS THE CUSTOMS UNION LIKE ARMENIA

/Dec 2/armradio.am/

Russia will offer cheaper natural gas to Ukraine if the government in Kiev opts to join a Moscow-led economic bloc after halting free-trade talks with the European Union, according to First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov. Ukraine's economic difficulties will be best resolved if it chooses integration with Russia, Shuvalov said in an interview with Bloomberg. No one other than Russia can provide Ukraine with the necessary funds so quickly and in such a quantity," Shuvalov said. "A gas agreement could help relieve Ukraine of a huge problem. We can also give them a loan, but we will not help them without commitments on their part."

At the same time, Ukraine knows that it will get "a different price for gas" by making a commitment to become a member of the customs union like Armenia, which decided in September to join the group instead of striking an EU pact, he said.

"We are negotiating in an open and transparent manner with Armenia about our ties and everyone understands that we are giving Armenia a specific price for gas because they are signing the whole package of agreements on the customs union," Shuvalov said.

RUSSIA, GREECE INK MILITARY COOPERATION DEAL

/Dec 4/PanARMENIAN.Net/

Russia and Greece signed an intergovernmental agreement Tuesday, December 3 on military cooperation, Russia's defense minister said, according to RIA Novosti.

"We signed an agreement that opens new frameworks and new boundaries for our further work in the sphere of military-technical cooperation," Sergei Shoigu told journalists after talks with his Greek counterpart Dimitrios Avramopoulos in Athens.

The deal concerns armaments supplied previously as well as military hardware, maintenance and new hardware supplies, Shoigu said.

A Russian deputy defense minister, Anatoly Antonov, said after the talks that Shoigu had proposed that Avramopoulos consider working out an agreement to streamline the procedure for Russian navy vessels calling at Greek ports.

Antonov said the two defense ministers had also discussed the possibility of holding personnel training events and exchanging experience in the fight against terrorism and piracy, as well as other areas of cooperation.

He added that Shoigu had invited a Greek tank crew to take part in the international Tank Biathlon in 2014.

Russia's first tank biathlon took place in the Moscow Region in August.

Négociations Ukraine-Russie sur le gaz, mais pas d'accord

/Dec 4/armenews.com - AFP/

MOSCOU - Le vice-Premier ministre ukrainien Iouri Boïko, à la tête d'une délégation ukrainienne présente à Moscou, a rencontré mercredi le patron de Gazprom, sans annoncer d'accord sur la dette gazière de Kiev, qui dépasse les deux milliards de dollars.

M. Boïko et Alexeï Miller ont eu "une rencontre de travail" au siège de Gazprom dans le sud de la capitale russe et ont évoqué "les questions actuelles de coopération dans le domaine gazier", a indiqué le groupe public russe dans un bref communiqué.

Le gaz est un sujet sensible entre la Russie, qui couvre 60% de la consommation ukrainienne, et son voisin qui constitue aussi le principal pays de transit du gaz russe exporté vers l'UE.

Gazprom avait haussé le ton en octobre face à Kiev, lui reprochant de ne pas régler ses factures et menaçant d'exiger désormais des paiements à

l'avance. Il avait ensuite accordé un délai supplémentaire après l'annonce du renoncement de l'Ukraine à un rapprochement économique avec l'UE.

Dans un autre communiqué rendu public mercredi, M. Miller a déclaré que la dette de l'opérateur public ukrainien Naftogaz représentait 2,2 milliards de dollars. "Nous avons des négociations mais aucun accord n'a été trouvé pour le moment", a-t-il souligné.

Le patron du premier producteur mondial de gaz apporte un cinglant démenti à des déclarations des dirigeants de Naftogaz mardi : ils avaient affirmé que Gazprom leur laissait jusqu'au printemps pour payer le gaz consommé en octobre, novembre et décembre.

La dette gazière de l'Ukraine a pris une ampleur considérable au vu de la situation financière de ce pays en fort déficit public, qui a vu ses réserves en devises étrangères s'effondrer ces derniers mois et que les analystes et les investisseurs jugent au bord du défaut de paiement.

Pour de nombreux experts, Moscou pourrait récompenser Kiev de son renoncement à l'accord d'association proposé par l'UE d'un rabais sur le gaz. En visite en Arménie lundi, le président russe Vladimir Poutine a annoncé que cette ex-république soviétique du Caucase achèterait son gaz en Russie 189 dollars le millier de mètres cubes, contre plus de 400 dollars pour l'Ukraine.

Ukrainian, Russian presidents discuss drafting of strategic partnership agreement

/Dec 7/Nyut.am/

The presidents of Ukraine and Russia met in the Russian southern Black Sea resort of Sochi to discuss the drafting of a strategic partnership agreement, Ukrainian Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov told the foreign mass media.

"On his way back from China the Ukrainian president made a stopover in Sochi, where he had a previously agreed meeting with his Russian counterpart," the Ukrainian government's public relations department quotes Azarov as saying. "The issue on the agenda was drafting a major strategic partnership agreement with Russia, complemented with a road map eliminating disputes over trading and economic issues."

Ukraine and Russia are determined to fully eliminate the contradictions that have piled up in bilateral relations over the past three and a half years, including controversies over the gas supply contract and the disruption of industrial cooperation," Azarov said. "This sort of work is now underway."

As it was reported earlier, President Vladimir Putin held a working meeting with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich.

"The two men discussed the current issues of bilateral Russian-Ukrainian relations, as well as preparations for a forthcoming meeting of the Russia-Ukraine inter-state commission in Moscow," presidential press-secretary Dmitry Peskov said.

Ukraine's president decides to join Customs Union

/Dec 7/Tert.am/

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich has allegedly signed an agreement with Russia including Ukraine's commitment to join the Customs Union in the near future, The Voice of Russia reported, citing British journalist Edward Lucas, international editor of The Economist.

Lucas has written on Twitter that Yanukovich signed a strategic agreement with Russia in Sochi today. The agreement comprises \$5bln with advanced payment, \$200 gas price and joining the Customs Union. In addition, he reports, Yanukovich may receive \$15bln from Moscow.

Lucas has written that western governments are shocked. This is unconfirmed information but the sources are good, he added.

RIA Novosti, Voice of Russia to be absorbed into new media conglomerate

/Dec 9/armradio.am/

The Kremlin announced Monday the dissolution of RIA Novosti, the country's major state-run news agency, amid a significant reorganization of state-owned media assets.

News agency RIA Novosti and the state-owned Voice of Russia radio will be scrapped and absorbed into a new media conglomerate called Rossiya Segodnya, according to a decree signed by President Vladimir Putin.

In a separate decree published Monday, the Kremlin appointed Dmitry Kiselyov, a prominent Russian television presenter and media manager to head Rossiya Segodnya.

Head of the presidential administration Sergei Ivanov said the changes were about saving money and making state media more effective.

'Russia has its own independent politics and strongly defends its national interests: it's difficult to explain this to the world but we can do this, and we must do this,' Ivanov told reporters.

The direct translation of Rossiya Segodnya is Russia Today, but the new body will apparently be separate from RT, the Kremlin-funded English-language television channel originally known as Russia Today, RIA Novosti reports.

Russia Plans to Increase Arms Exports to \$50Bln by 2020

/Dec 12/RIA Novosti/

MOSCOW - Russia could quadruple its annual arms sales to \$50 billion by 2020 in a race for the top spot on the global arms exporters list, a senior government official said Thursday.

'Not counting inflation, I think we could reach \$50 billion [in arms exports] annually by 2020,' Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin told reporters in Moscow. 'It is four times the current amount.'

Rogozin said there was no doubt that Russia would not only maintain second place on the list of top arms exporters but would also narrow the gap between second and first place, which is currently occupied by the United States.

The US sold \$69.1 billion worth of weaponry to foreign customers last year, according to the US Department of Defense.

Russia became the world's second-largest arms exporter in 2011, generating \$13.2 billion in revenues.

Last year, Russia exported \$15.2 billion worth of weaponry while adding Afghanistan, Ghana, Oman and Tanzania to a list of about 80 foreign customers.

Russia to Focus on Robotic Weaponry in Arms Procurement

/Dec 12/RIA Novosti/Vladimir Fedorenko/

MOSCOW - The Russian army should focus on the acquisition of robotic weaponry and reduce its overall number of different types of military equipment in use, a deputy prime minister said Wednesday.

Addressing lawmakers from Russia's lower house of parliament, Dmitry Rogozin listed robotic weaponry and automated combat management systems with highly secure and fast communication links as key items to be included in the new state arms procurement program for 2016 to 2025.

Rogozin said robotic technologies should be present in the development of all types of military hardware for use on the ground, in the air and under water.

Rogozin, who oversees the defense and space industries, stressed the need to reduce the variety of similar types of weaponry manufactured in small batches because of the heavy burden on defense companies and significant production costs.

The development of modular universal combat platforms that could be used as a basis for a variety of military hardware should also be a priority, he said.

Russia is currently implementing an ambitious rearmament program through 2020, with a budget of some 20 trillion rubles (\$640 billion). The program will see the share of modern weaponry in Russia's armed forces reach 30 percent by 2015 and 70 percent by 2020.

Russia Ready to Continue Overhaul of Indian Subs

/Dec 13/RIA Novosti/Aleksey Filippov/

MOSCOW - Russia's Zvyozdochka shipyard said Friday that it could receive by mid-2015 at least two Indian Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines for an overhaul that would extend their service life for another 10 years.

'We are expecting the Indian side to deliver one or even two Project 877EKM (improved Kilo-class) submarines for repairs and upgrades with service life extension,' Zvyozdochka general director Vladimir Nikitin told RIA Novosti. Russia has built 10 Kilo class submarines for India and has already overhauled five of them: INS Sindhuvir, INS Sindhuratna, INS Sindhughosh, INS Sindhuvijay and INS Sindhurakshak.

A fire on board the ill-fated Sindhurakshak in the port of Mumbai in April reportedly damaged the boat beyond repair, according to Indian navy sources.

The Indian Defense Ministry has not yet made a final decision about the future overhaul of its Russian-made Kilo-class submarines, although it has been considering fast-tracking a second midlife upgrade for the boats.

The upgrade program includes a complete overhaul of the vessels, including their hull structures, as well as improved control systems, sonar, electronic warfare systems and an integrated weapon control system. The upgrade is reported to cost about \$80 million.

The overhauled Indian submarines are equipped with 3M-54 Club-S (SS-N-27) anti-ship cruise missiles, the Indian-developed USHUS sonar, the CCS-MK radio communications system and the Porpoise radar.

Russia's Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines are well-known for being extremely quiet boats, and have been purchased by China, India, Iran, Poland, Romania, Vietnam and Algeria.

Russia urges U.S. to drop missile shield plans after Iran deal

/Dec 13/PanARMENIAN.Net/

The United States should abandon its plans for a missile defense system in Europe, as the breakthrough deal last month with Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions 'has completely changed the geopolitical situation,' a Russian foreign ministry official said Friday, Dec 13, according to RIA Novosti.

'We have always heard from our partners that their reasons for taking steps to build the missile defense system were over concerns about Iran's nuclear program,' Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Meshkov told reporters in Athens.

'Now, we see it, those concerns are no longer valid. Let's see what our partners do.'

Iran struck a deal last month with a group of six nations to abandon elements of its nuclear program in exchange for \$7 billion in relief from sanctions. The agreement stipulated that international inspectors be allowed into Iran's nuclear sites and uranium enrichment work be abandoned. The missile defense plans have soured U.S.-Russian relations in recent years. The United States maintains the system is necessary to defend its NATO allies from emerging-threat states such as Iran and North Korea, while Russia insists it may undermine Russia's nuclear deterrent.

Meshkov also announced the launch of a pilot project with NATO members Germany and Poland to remove unexploded ordnance in Kaliningrad, Russia's westernmost district.

Meshkov did not say where the munitions concerned originated, but vast amounts of leftover ordnance from World War II were dumped off the Baltic coast after that conflict, and the exclave has since been a major Russian naval base.

Customs Union in talks with non-EU Europe - Lavrov

/Dec 14/tert.am/

Representatives of the Russian-led Customs Union are in talks over creation of a free trade zone with New Zealand and some non-EU European nations, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Saturday.

'Talks on creation of a free trade zone between the Customs Union and Vietnam are already started... at around the same time as Vietnam, talks are underway on creation of a free trade zone between the Customs Union and New Zealand, and also between the Union and the European Free Trade Association that includes those western European nations (in particular Switzerland and Norway) that are not EU members,' Lavrov said in an interview with Rossiya 24 TV.

Moscow is also hoping that if talks with Vietnam are successful, they could serve as a template for similar negotiations for a free trade zone between the ASEAN group of Asian nations and the EU, he said.

Lavrov's comments come as Russia and the EU are locked in a struggle to secure a free trade agreement with Ukraine. Kiev turned its back on a widely expected association deal last month, saying it would harm economic relations with Russia, prompting mass demonstrations by pro-EU protesters and throwing the country into a political crisis.

Both the EU and Moscow have accused the other of using strong-arm tactics to secure economic ties with Kiev.

Greece tests Russian-made S-300 air defense system

/Dec 14/PanARMENIAN.Net/

Greek armed forces test-fired a Russian-made S-300 air defense system on Friday, Dec 13, for the first time since it was bought 14 years ago, RIA Novosti reported.

Greece is the only NATO member that has an S-300 in service. The system was initially purchased by Cyprus in the mid-1990s, and was later transferred to the Greek island of Crete following objections from Turkey.

The launch was carried out as part of the White Eagle 2013 military exercise and was described as 'successful.'

'It may sound paradoxical, but this successful S-300 launch is a message of peace and stability in Southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean,' Greek Defense Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos said in a statement.

'The S-300, one of the most modern defense systems that ensure the efficiency of our country's air defense, was test-fired after 14 years in service,' he said. 'The launch saw immense success.'

Turkey's White Russians concerned for churches' fate

/Dec 14/Hürriyet Daily News/

There are three Russian churches in Istanbul, including the Hagia Andrea, which is seen in this picture. DAILY NEWS photo, Emrah GÃ`REL

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Only months after reopening their churches after decades closed, Turkey's Russian community says the Fener Greek Patriarchate has asked them to hand back the keys.

Russians have three churches in Istanbul ` Hagia Andrea, Hagia Pantalameon and Hagia Elia ` which were recently reopened for their first rituals in 41 years.

The properties belong to the Russian Monastery at the Ayanaroz Monastery Complex in Greece, and the Fener Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul is in charge of the churches.

Turkey's Russian community is largely made up of White Russians who settled in Turkey after fleeing the Bolshevik government in 1921. While many moved on to various Western countries, a considerable number stayed in Istanbul. According to data by the PAE Fukaraperver Association, which represents the Russian émigrés, the total number of Russians in Turkey is approximately 100,000.

The latest plans for the Galataport project in the Karaköy neighborhood of Istanbul have stirred the city's Russian community to take legal action to preserve the historical Hagia Elia church, which is at risk of being demolished as part of the project.

PAE Fukaraperver Association Deputy President Kazmir Pamir spoke to the Hürriyet Daily News, and said they were very concerned about their churches' future.

`The Fener Greek Patriarchate said they wanted the keys back because restoration will start in the church, but if we give back the keys, it means that we will lose our churches forever,' Pamir said.

`We would like to restore our church to suit Russian church traditions. We found sponsors for the restoration, but we want to take back the property rights,' he added.

The Patriarchate did not respond to the Daily News' questions, saying there was no spokesman available.

Pamir said a group from the PAE Fukaraperver Association would go to the Ayanaroz Monastery to request the properties' rights from the Patriarchate.

`We would like to establish a Russian Church Foundation here in Istanbul. We would like to gather our churches under the one roof,' he added.

RUSSIA TO BEGIN ARMS SHIPMENTS TO KYRGYZSTAN SOON: REPORT

/Dec 16/PanARMENIAN.Net/

Russia will begin arms shipments to Kyrgyzstan in the near future as part of a \$1 billion deal signed last year to modernize the Central Asian country's military, Kyrgyzstan's president said, according to RIA Novosti. "After reaching a historic agreement with Russia to reorganize our armed forces, all of the paperwork has been completed and we will soon receive deliveries of artillery pieces, tanks, shoulder-fired antiaircraft missiles and other military equipment," Almazbek Atambayev told a news conference Monday, Dec 16.

He said the newly modernized army will be ready to defend the country by 2017.

The two former Soviet nations signed a 15-year agreement in September 2012 on maintaining Russian bases in the Central Asian country.

Kyrgyzstan will be forgiven \$500 million in debt as part of that agreement. Last month Kyrgyzstan officially notified the United States that American access to Kyrgyzstan's Manas airbase will be suspended next summer. The airport has been a major transit point of troops and equipment for the war in Afghanistan since 2001. The U.S. expects to end combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of next year.