

Chronology of Major Conflicts and Political Events

January 2008

The year begins with the scandal of the French bank Société Générale, the second largest in France, which loses 4.9 billion euros as a result of unauthorised, high risk speculative deals on the stock market carried out by rogue trader Jérôme Kerviel. Slovenia takes over the EU's six-month rotating presidency from Portugal. Malta, Slovenia and France ratify the new Lisbon Treaty. Spain dissolves its Parliament and calls a general election for March. London hosts a summit to discuss the subprime mortgage crisis, which is attended by leaders of the four largest European economies, England, France, Germany and Italy and the President of the European Commission. Amid violence in Lebanon, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Arab League meet in Cairo and agree upon a three-phase plan to achieve stability in the country. Algeria suffers two attacks in the east of the capital which claim the lives of six people.

Portugal

- On 9 January the Prime Minister José Sócrates announces in the Assembly of the Republic that plans to submit the EU Reform Treaty referendum, signed by European leaders in December 2007, will be shelved and that instead it will be ratified by Parliament.
- On 29 January the government introduces moderate reforms. Sócrates appoints Ana Maria Teodoro Jorge as Health Minister, to replace António Correia de Campos, who had been criticised for plans to reform the health service, which included a proposal to close the accident and emergency units in several hospitals in the country. José

António Pinto Ribeiro is appointed as Culture Minister following the resignation of Isabel Pures de Lima.

Spain

- On 3 January the National Court sentences Juan Antonio Olarra Guiridi, the former leader of the terrorist organisation ETA (Euskadi and Freedom), to thirty years imprisonment for ordering members of the 'Andalusian commando unit', Harriet Iragi and Jon Igor Solana, to assassinate the Chief Prosecutor Luis Portero, in October 2000. On 6 January Igor Portu and Martín Sarasola are arrested for their alleged participation in the bombing at Madrid airport's T4 terminal in December 2006. Two people died in the attack which lead to a breakdown in peace talks between the government and ETA.
- On 14 January the government dissolves the Parliament and calls general elections for 9 March. The official election campaign will begin on 22 February.
- On 19 January a police operation in Barcelona results in the arrest of 12 citizens of Pakistani origin and two of Indian origin, suspected of belonging to an Islamist network that was planning suicide attacks in the city. In subsequent interrogations, one of the suspects tells police that the attacks in Barcelona were to be followed by others in France, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

France

- On 3 January the President Nicolas Sarkozy announces his decision to create a new Defence and National Security Council, with greater powers than the

two bodies it would be replacing, the Defence Council and the Internal Security Council. Sarkozy also proposes to strengthen EU Defence policy and re-establish military ties with the US.

- On 8 January Corsica's public prosecutor announces that there were 180 attacks on the island in 2007, 30% fewer than in 2006. However, he warns that there has been an increase in the number of incidents following the imprisonment of nationalist Yvan Colonna, on 13 December 2007.
- On 24 January the greatest bank fraud in history is uncovered. France's second biggest bank Société Générale announces losses of 4.9 billion euros as a result of speculative deals made on the stock market by Jérôme Kerviel, who sidestepped the bank's control procedures. Kerviel was able to hide the losses from the company throughout 2007. Société Générale lost a further 2.1 billion euros because of the slump in the financial markets and its exposure to subprime mortgages.

Italy

- On 7 January the army clears up piles of rubbish from the doors of schools in Naples so that children can attend classes. On 31 January the EU threatens the Italian authorities with legal sanctions if they do not proceed to clean Naples within a month. 250,000 tons of rubbish have piled up in the streets since 21 December 2007.
- On 16 January the Justice Minister Clemente Mastella resigns after he and his wife come under investigation for suspected corruption. On 18 January the Prime Minister Romano Prodi assumes the post of Justice Minister, left vacant following Mastella's resignation.

- On 24 January Prodi submits his resignation to the President Giorgio Napolitano after his centre-left coalition loses in a vote of confidence in the Senate. Napolitano advises Prodi to submit his resignation and abandon plans to run in a second election to the Senate, which he is unlikely to win. On 30 January Napolitano requests Franco Marini, the President of the Senate (upper house), to form a caretaker government in order to delay elections and reform the electoral system.

Malta

- On 29 January the Maltese Parliament unanimously ratifies the EU Reform Treaty.

Slovenia

- On 29 January, the Slovenian Parliament ratifies the EU Reform Treaty with 74 votes in favour and 6 against.

Croatia

- On 1 January, despite warnings from the European Commission that it could delay entry to the EU, the Protected Ecological and Fishery Zone in the Adriatic Sea, created by Croatia in 2004, comes into full effect. According to the agreement reached with Brussels in 2004, the Protected Zone would not affect EU countries until a fishing partnership agreement had been reached between Croatia and the EU.

- On 8 January the conservative Prime Minister Ivo Sanader forms a new centre-right coalition, which includes his conservative nationalist party, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the conservative Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), the Social Liberal Party (HSLs) and the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS). The Serb official Slobodan Uzelac member of the SDSS, is deputy Primer Minister for Regional Development, Reconstruction and Return (of refugees). On 12 January the Parliament approves Sanader's cabinet.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 16 January the authority transference and command relief of the Multi-

national Battalion takes place between the Navy Marine Expeditionary Force deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina (5th FIMEX BH) and the 6th FIMEX BH. The act, presided over by General Stefano Castagnotto, commander of the EU Forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR), sees the 6th Expeditionary Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina assume command of the Multinational Battalion.

Serbia

- On 20 January Tomislav Nikolic, leader of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party (SRS), wins the first round of the presidential elections ahead of his rival, the current President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS). Nikolic won 40% of the votes against Tadic's 35%. Both will run in a second round, set to take place on 3 February.

- On 9 January, following elections to the Assembly of Kosovo (Parliament) in November 2007, a new government coalition is formed by the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), with 37 seats of the 120 that comprise the Assembly, and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), with 25. The new Prime Minister is Hashim Thaçi, leader of the PDK.

Macedonia

- On 14 January the Economy Minister since August 2006, Vera Rafajlovska, resigns for 'personal' reasons.

- On 16 January the Prime Minister of Independent Macedonia Nikola Kljusev dies at the age of 80. Kljusev is recognised for leading Macedonia through an essentially peaceful transition towards independence from Yugoslavia.

- On 21 January Macedonian and Greek leaders meet in the Macedonian city of Ohrid in a new round of negotiations over the name of Macedonia. Greece maintains that the country should be called the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (FYROM) to distinguish it from the Greek province of Macedonia. Both parties have been negotiating this issue since 1995 under the auspices of the UN. The negotiations end without any firm agreement, although the UN special envoy Matthew Nimetz describes them as 'positive.'

Albania

- On 30 January the Prime Minister Sali Berisha meets with NATO's Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer to discuss reforms the country is undertaking to join NATO.

- On 31 January the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Javier Solana meets with Berisha to discuss recent events regarding relations between Albania and the EU, as well as events in the region.

Greece

- On 22 January the Greek Defence Minister Evangelos Meimarakis calls for further negotiations over the future statute of Kosovo and warns against an imposed 'solution.' According to Meimarakis, the solution must be reached through negotiation.

Turkey

- On 15 January Turkey launches new attacks on bases of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group included in the European list of terrorist organisations, in the Kurdish-dominated territory in northern Iraq. Turkey carried out an air strike in December 2007 on bases used by the PKK to launch attacks into southeast Turkey.

- On 24 January security forces arrest 25 people suspected of belonging to al-Qaeda, in the city of Gaziantep, in the southeast of the country. Four members of al-Qaeda are killed in the cross-fire with the police. One police officer is killed and another four are injured.

- On 29 January the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), and the far-right opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP) present a joint proposal to the Grand National Assembly (Parliament) to lift the constitutional ban on women wearing the *hijab* –the Muslim headscarf– in universities. For secularists, lifting the ban undermines the separation between State and religion in Turkey. The headscarves are seen by secularist Turks as a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism.

Syria

- On 29 January the NGO National Organisation for Human Rights in Syria

(NOHR-S) announces that Riyadh Sayf, a prominent dissident, had been arrested the previous day as part of an attack on the opposition. At least 10 other public figures, mostly writers and doctors have been arrested since 2007, when the Syrian National Council was formed, a movement set up to promote democratic change.

Lebanon

- On 25 January a powerful car bomb in a district in East Beirut kills Captain Wissam Eid, a high ranking intelligence officer in the Lebanese police force. Eid was investigating the recent attacks and killings in Lebanon. The explosion kills three other people, including the driver of the vehicle.
- On 27 January violence erupts in a predominantly Shiite neighbourhood in the south of Beirut during a protest against the electricity cuts. Shiite youths block the Mar Mikhael road with burning tyres. After the death of an Amal member, the violence spreads quickly to more neighbourhoods in Beirut, as well as other areas of the country.

Egypt

- On 17 January police arrest Abdel Wahab el-Messiri, member of the opposition movement Kefaya, at a demonstration in the centre of Cairo. They release him in a district 20 kilometres away. Kefaya members have demonstrated on several occasions against the price increases and to commemorate the 1977 bread riots in Cairo, when police killed 70 people.
- On 21 January police arrest 29 members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria. Secretary General of the local Medical Union Ibrahim Zaafarani is among the arrested. On 23 January more Muslim Brotherhood members are arrested at a pro-Palestinian demonstration close to the Arab League headquarters.

Libya

- In early January Abd-al-Rahman Mohammed Shalgan, General People's Committee Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation Secretary, visits the US where he holds talks with the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

- On 31 January the *Financial Times* publishes Libya's ratification of a gas exploration deal valued at 9 billion dollars with British Petroleum (BP). The contract forms part of the agreements signed by the Prime Minister Tony Blair on his visit to Libya in May 2007.

Algeria

- On 2 January the organisation al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claims responsibility for the suicide car bomb attack on a police station in Naciria, 70 km east of Algiers. Four police officers are killed in the attack and eight others are injured.
- On 29 January a car loaded with explosives heading towards the local police station in Thenia, 65 km east of Algiers, explodes after police officers shoot the driver in an attempt to halt the attack. Two people are killed and 23 injured when the vehicle blows up near the station.

European Union

- On 1 January Slovenia takes over the EU's six-month rotating presidency from Portugal to become the first ex-communist country in the EU to hold the position. The priority for the Slovenian Presidency is the ratification in all EU Member States of the EU Reform Treaty, signed in Lisbon in December 2007, so that it enters into force on 1 January 2009.
- On 29 January the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown hosts a summit in London with Europe's four largest economies. In attendance are French President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi and the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso. The meeting discusses the subprime mortgage crisis and what the EU's response should be.

Arab League

- On 5 January Foreign Ministers of the Arab League meet in Cairo and agree a plan to end the constitutional crisis in Lebanon. On 6 January the Secretary General of the Arab League Amr Moussa announces that the Foreign Ministers have agreed on a three-phase

plan that calls for electing General Suleiman as the new President, forming a government of national unity and writing a new electoral law.

February 2008

On 17 February the Prime Minister of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi proclaims Kosovo's independence from Serbia. Although welcomed by the Albanian majority in Kosovo and recognised by the international community, Russia, Serbia's strongest ally, opposes the unilateral declaration of independence, arguing that there was neither an agreement reached with Serbia, nor approval by the Security Council. In Italy the centre-left government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi is dissolved and the President dissolves the Parliament and calls general elections. In the EU France ratifies the EU Reform Treaty in Parliament. The Turkish Parliament approves the constitutional amendments to end the ban on wearing the Muslim veil in public universities.

Spain

- On 14 February the President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero expresses his strong concerns to Manuel Monteiro de Castro, the Nuncio of the Holy See in Spain, over the statement issued on 30 January by the Spanish Episcopal Conference (CEE), in which it called people to vote for the People's Party (PP). The statement criticised the policy of the ruling Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and warned of the "danger of certain political and legislative decisions that contradict fundamental values" in reference to negotiations with ETA, support for gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia.
- On 27 February the National Court sentences 27 Islamist fundamentalists to between five and 14 years' imprisonment for belonging to or collaborating with terrorist organisations; two men are also convicted of document forgery. None, however, is found guilty of the charges of a plot to blow up the anti-terrorist court house in Madrid, and the court decides there is no evidence that the plot was anything more than an "undeveloped individual plan" by Moroccan

can Abderrahmane Tahiri. Ten Algerians are cleared of all charges.

France

- On 7 February the French National Assembly ratifies the EU Reform Treaty with 336 votes in favour and 52 against. Nicolas Sarkozy's Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) votes in favour while in the Socialist Party (PS) 125 MPs vote in favour, 25 against and 17 abstain. The communists state that they are against the treaty. The text must be ratified by the President of the Republic.
- On 8 February Jérôme Kerviel, the financial trader accused of losing Société Générale 4.9 billion euros in unauthorised, high risk stock market deals, is placed under police custody. Reports state that Kerviel may not have been acting alone, leading the judges to order his arrest and thus prevent him from 'pressurising' potential witnesses.
- On 8 February President Sarkozy unveils new plans to improve living conditions in rundown neighbourhoods with majority immigrant populations. The plans come following January's announcement of the creation of numerous new job posts. Declaring that "the very idea of the nation is at stake", Sarkozy promises 500 million euros to improve public transport and create three-year training courses for 100,000 young people. Sarkozy also announces a "war without mercy" on drug dealers and gangs.

Italy

- On 4 February the President of the Senate Franco Marini states that it is impossible to rally enough support to form a "technical government" and change the electoral law, following days of talks with political party leaders.
- On 6 February after the dissolution of Prime Minister Romano Prodi's centre-left government, the President Giorgio Napolitano dissolves Parliament and calls general elections for 13-14 April. Napolitano regrets having to call elections without reforming the electoral system of proportional representation, which grants disproportionate power to small parties and makes a

viable majority government impossible for Prodi.

- On 25 February a court in Milan suspends the trial of Silvio Berlusconi for tax evasion and fraudulent accounting practice to allow him to focus on the election campaign.

Serbia

- On 3 February the liberal, pro-Western President Boris Tadic defeats his rival, radical nationalist Tomislav Nikolic in the second round of the presidential elections. With a turnout of nearly 68%, Tadic obtains 50% of the vote against Nikolic's 48%. On 5 February Tadic's victory endangers the Serbia coalition since his partner in the coalition, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), did not support Tadic's candidature. The divide widens when Kostunica rejects the proposal for a political deal with the EU, particularly following the EU's decision to establish the civil EULEX mission, which aims to consolidate rule of law and democracy in Kosovo.
- On 16 February the Council of the EU launches EULEX in order to stabilise Kosovo following its declaration of independence. EULEX is composed of police, judicial civil servants and support staff. The mission develops beneath the umbrella of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and aims to help Kosovo's judicial authorities and institutions of law and order to move towards "sustainability and accountability" and to develop a multi-ethnic justice system and police force, ensuring that these institutions are free from interference and adhering to internationally recognised standards and European best practices.
- On 21 February around 10,000 demonstrators gather in Belgrade to protest against Kosovo's independence. Numerous embassies are attacked, including those of the United Kingdom, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 17 February in the Assembly of Kosovo, the Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi declares Kosovo's independence and

proclaims: "From this moment on, Kosovo is a proud, independent and free State." Thaçi announces that Kosovo will be a democratic and multi-ethnic State with intentions of EU accession. Kosovo's independence is welcomed by the Albanian majority in Kosovo, which had been campaigning to this end since the territory's administration was handed over to the UN in 1999. Serbia denounced the independence and the Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica issues a televised statement saying that "Kosovo is, and will always be, part of Serbia." Russia, Serbia's strongest ally, calls for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council and requests that Kosovo's independence be annulled, arguing that it violates international law since no agreement was reached with Serbia and it was not approved by the Security Council.

- On 19 February demonstrators burn down two border posts between Kosovo and Serbia, in Jarnije and Banja, approximately 20 kilometres from the divided city of Mitrovica.

Montenegro

- On 20 February the President Filip Vujanovic appoints Milo Djukanovic as Prime Minister. Djukanovic maintains most of the ministers appointed in November 2006. On 29 February the Parliament approves the nomination of Djukanovic, which had been delayed until the end of January for health reasons.

Greece

- On 7 February the Prime Ministers of Greece and Romania Kostas Karamanlis and Calin Tariceanu sign an energy cooperation agreement for the oil, natural gas and electricity sectors.

Cyprus

- On 17 February the first round of the presidential elections is held in which none of the candidates obtains 50% of the vote. On 24 February Dhimitrios Christofias, Secretary General of the main opposition party, the communist Progressive Party for Working People (AKEL), obtains 53.37% of the vote in the second round of the presidential

elections in the Greek part of Cyprus. Khristofias receives support from the two parties of the ruling coalition, the centre-right party, the Democratic Party (DIKO) and the Movement of Social Democrats (EDEK).

Turkey

- On 9 February the Grand National Assembly (Parliament) approves the constitutional amendments proposed by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the far-right opposition party Nationalist Action (MHP), with 411 votes in favour and 103 against. The reform ends the ban on wearing the Muslim veil in public universities in Turkey.
- On 9 February the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announces at an international conference on security in Munich that Turkey wants full membership to the EU and does not consider the option of a 'privileged association', proposed by some European leaders, as an alternative.
- On 21 February the Turkish army sends 10,000 soldiers to the Zap region of northern Iraq in a large-scale offensive on bases of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an organisation included in the European list of terrorist organisations. On 26 February, despite Turkey allegedly warning Iraq and the United States of the operation, the Iraqi government condemns the attack as a violation of its sovereignty and calls Turkey to withdraw forces from the region. Iraq fears the situation may lead to a conflict with the Kurdish *peshmerga* militia, loyal supporters of the government of the autonomous region of Kurdistan, which may cause greater instability in the country. On 29 February the Turkish army announces the return of troops from northern Iraq. To end speculation that external pressure had led to the sudden withdrawal, the chief of the Turkish general staff announces that goals have been achieved; in the course of the operations 240 PKK members were shot down and 24 Turkish soldiers died.
- On 22 February President Abdullah Gül signs into law two constitutional reforms that lift the ban on women in universities wearing the *hijab*, the Muslim headscarf. The reform raises alarms among secularist Turks.

Syria

- On 6 February the National Organisation for Human Rights in Syria (NOHR-S) announces that the authorities have released human rights activist Adnan Makiah, arrested for actions against the opposition. The NGO reports that 12 pro-human rights activists remain in prison.
- On 13 February the US President George W. Bush signs an executive order to expand sanctions against officials in the Syrian government and their associates, accused of having benefited from public corruption.

Lebanon

- On 12 February Imad Mughniyah, a leader of the Lebanese Shiite movement, Hezbollah and top of the US Most Wanted Terrorist list, dies in a car bomb attack in Damascus. Mughniyah was considered to be head of both Hezbollah Intelligence and the group's military wing. On 14 February thousands of Hezbollah supporters demonstrate in southern Beirut as a show of strength at Mughniyah's funeral. Iran's Foreign Affairs Minister Manuchehr Motaki is present at the funeral.

Egypt

- On 12 February the Muslim Brotherhood's website, *Amlalommah*, reports the formation of a new opposition movement, Alternative Current. The article reveals that the new movement includes elements from diverse political factions, is liberal and complies with the constitution.

Libya

- On 1 February the project to build a 266-kilometre gas pipeline between Melitah, on the west coast of Libya, and Ghabes, in southeast Tunisia, is reportedly put on hold because of doubts regarding Libya's gas supply.

Algeria

- On 7 February eight Algerian police officers are killed in an ambush in the province of El Oued, 500 km southeast of Algiers. The organisation al-Qaeda

in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) claims responsibility for the attack.

Morocco

- On 18 February Morocco's official news agency, *Maghreb Arabe Presse* (MAP), reports the dismantling by security forces of a "terrorist network" and the arrest of its leader Abdelkader Belbiraj along with 31 other members. On 20 February the Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa announces that the dismantled group had links with extremist organisations such as al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and was attempting to organise training with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The group was also plotting attacks on government and army officials, as well as Jewish citizens in Morocco.
- On 27 February the television station Al-Jazeera reports the formation by Fouad Ali Himma, former Delegate Minister to the Interior and friend of King Mohammed VI, of the new political party Movement for All Democrats. The group is formed with the aim of working on "social, ideological, economical and development actions to consolidate the achievements in the construction of democracy and modernisation."

European Union

- On 6 February the Romanian President Traian Basescu signs the ratification act for the EU Reform Treaty, approved in Lisbon in December 2007.

March 2008

In Spain ETA is blamed for the death of the former socialist councilman Isaias Carrasco two days ahead of the general elections, eventually won by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). In France the local elections result in major losses for Nicolas Sarkozy's ruling centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). The result is interpreted as punishment for decisions taken by President Sarkozy, whose popularity has sunk to its lowest since he was elected in 2007. In Kosovo clashes and displays of unrest continue following the country's declaration of independence from Serbia in February 2008. A European summit is held mid-month in Brus-

sels which sees the approval of "the principle of a Union for the Mediterranean", proposed by President Sarkozy. At the end of the month the Arab League holds its regular meeting in Damascus. Lebanon boycotts the meeting accusing Syria of preventing the election of the new Lebanese President. As a mark of solidarity with Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan only send low-level representatives to the summit.

Spain

- On 7 March the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP) abruptly suspend the election campaign following the murder of former councilman Isaiás Carrasco by the organisation Euskadi and Freedom (ETA).
- On 9 March the PSOE wins the general elections with 43.64% of the vote (169 seats of the 350-strong Congress of Deputies, lower house). The result represents an increase of five seats with respect to the previous elections in March 2004, although the party remains seven seats short of an absolute majority. The main opposition party the PP gains 40.11% of the vote (153 seats), five seats more than in the last elections. These results reflect the polarisation of Spanish politics. After the election results are revealed, the United Left (IU) leader, Gaspar Llamazares, announces that he will not run for re-election as General Co-ordinator of the IU due to the poor results; the party lost 25% of its voters.

France

- On 8 March Jérôme Kerviel, the stock market trader who has been accused of causing losses of 4.9 billion euros at Société Générale, is released on bail by the Paris Appeal Court.
- On 9 and 16 March the local elections result in major losses for the ruling centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), largely to the benefit of the opposition Socialist Party (PS). 25 of the 37 cities with populations of over 100,000 will be governed by the PS. The result is seen as punishment for decisions taken by the President Nicolas Sarkozy, whose popularity has sunk to its lowest since he was elected in May 2007. On 18 March, in

response to the election results, Sarkozy declares that the government will not abandon its compromise of total reform and orders a cabinet reshuffle, changing five ministers and seven secretaries of State.

- From 10-14 March the Israeli President Shimon Peres pays a state visit to France on the occasion of the Paris Book Fair, dedicated this year to Israeli writers. French ministers condemn the response of many Arab countries to boycott the fair.
- On 21 March Sarkozy announces the reduction of the French arsenal to fewer than 300 nuclear warheads, although he says that the so-called *Force de Frappe* (Strike Force) continues to be necessary due to Europe's new strategic challenges, which include Iran.

Italy

- On 14 March the trial begins against 56 people charged with the bankruptcy of the dairy group Parmalat.
- On 20 March the outgoing Prime Minister Romano Prodi announces his retirement from politics. Walter Veltroni will be the Democratic Party (PD) candidate in the upcoming legislative elections.

Malta

- On 8 March the ruling Nationalist Party (PN), led by the Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, defeats the opposition with a margin of less than 1%, with 49.34% of the vote. The Malta Labour Party (PLM), led by Alfred Sant, gains 48.79% of the vote. Despite its majority, the PN only gains 31 seats in the 65-strong House of Representatives (Parliament), against the 34 seats obtained by the PLM, which benefits from the seats of the minor parties as permitted in the constitution. On 10 March the leader of the PLM submits his resignation with immediate effect.

Croatia

- On 11 March the trial begins at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) against Ante Gotovina, Ivan Cermak and Mladen Markac, three Croatian generals accused of crimes committed in 1995 when the Croatian army re-took the Kra-

jina enclave, a self-proclaimed Serb republic inside Croatia.

- On 14 March the state-run HINA news agency announces that the Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU) has elected Silvano Hrelja as its new leader. Hrelja was the party's only representative in the Sabor, the unicameral Parliament, and had won his seat in the 2007 elections.

Serbia

- On 8 March Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica announces the dissolution of the ruling coalition formed in May 2007, due to the deterioration in recent months of relations between the main parties, the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and the Democratic Party (DS). While Kostunica's DSS maintains that if the EU does not recognise Kosovo as part of Serbia there can be no negotiations, Boris Tadic's DS defends progress towards EU accession independent of the Kosovo issue.
- On 13 March President Tadic officially dissolves the National Assembly (Parliament) and announces new elections for 11 May.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 14 March hundreds of Serbs storm a courthouse run by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in the northern town of Mitrovica. The intruders take control of the building and raise a Serbian flag to replace that of the UN.
- On 31 March 36 of the 192 sovereign states that form the UN have already formally recognised the Republic of Kosovo.

Macedonia

- On 13 March the President of the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH) Menduh Thaçi announces that his party is abandoning the coalition formed in August 2006 with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and other parties, in protest against the refusal of the VMRO-DPMNE to recognise Kosovo's independence.

Greece

- On 19 March a 24-hour general strike is called to protest against plans to reform the pension system set out by the government of conservative Kostas Karamanlis. The reform eliminates most early retirement schemes, increases the retirement age in certain sectors and establishes a ceiling for complementary pensions. The measure particularly affects women, who have to work for five more years before they can retire. On 20 March the Vouli (Parliament) approves the Reform Bill with 151 votes in favour, 13 against and 136 abstentions.

Cyprus

- On 21 March in Nicosia the new Greek Cypriot President Dhimitrios Christofias and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Mehmet Ali Talat, meet for the first time since Christofias was elected. Both leaders commit to resuming peace negotiations in three months under the auspices of the UN, with the aim of reunifying the island. One of the approved measures aimed at building confidence consists in reopening Ledra Street in the historical centre of Nicosia, considered a symbol of the country's division.
- On 25 March Cyprus imposes emergency water rationing and makes a request to import water from Greece to solve the shortage, made worse by four years of drought. Low levels of rainfall since 2003 have reduced the water reserves to 10% and the desalination plants are unable to meet demand.

Turkey

- On 7 March the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani visits the country for the first time as Head of State. During his visit Talabani offers Turkey his support in their fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), whose members have been carrying out attacks in the south-east of Turkey from their bases in northern Iraq.
- On 29 March Turkey bombs PKK positions in northern Iraq with aircraft and artillery, killing at least 15 of its members as they prepared to attack targets in Turkey.

- On 31 March the Constitutional Court votes unanimously to hear a case that calls for the dissolution of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and a five-year ban from political activity for 71 members of the AKP, including the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the President Abdullah Gül for an alleged attempt to impose Islamic law in Turkey, a constitutionally secular country.

Lebanon

- On 28 March Daniel Bellemare, the new commissioner of the UN's International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC) which is investigating the death of Rafiq Hariri in 2005, presents the Commission's final report to the UN Security Council.

Egypt

- On 5 March *The Guardian* reports that the Egyptian security forces have arrested hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood in a series of operations aimed at preventing their participation in the local council elections scheduled for April.
- On 25 March Egypt and Russia sign an agreement that opens the way to Russian participation in the construction of the Egyptian nuclear industry. The agreement is reached during talks in Moscow between the President Hosni Mubarak and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. The agreement is signed by the Egyptian Minister of Electricity and Energy Hasan Yusuf and by Sergey Kiriyyenko, Director General of the Russian atomic energy agency Rosatom.
- On 26 March the criminal court of the Abu Al-Ala district in Cairo sentences Ibrahim Issa, editor of the weekly publication *al-Dustur* to six months' imprisonment. The case dates back to September 2007 when a member of the ruling Democratic National Party (NDP), filed a complaint regarding an article that echoed rumours about the health of the President Hosni Mubarak. Issa was convicted for publishing information "liable to harm the general interest and the country's stability."
- On 27 March the *Financial Times* reports on the wave of demonstrations

and clashes across the country in response to the price increases on basic products like bread. The article points out that civil servants, industry workers and even groups considered to be privileged like doctors, lawyers or university teachers have taken part in strikes calling for a salary increase to alleviate the rising prices, which have reached 50% on some basic food products.

Libya

- On 3 March the People's General Congress (legislative body) reshuffles the People's General Committee (Council of Ministers): Al-Baghdadi Ali al-Mahmudi continues as Secretary (Prime Minister) and Mubarak Abdullah al-Shamikh is appointed Vice Secretary (deputy Prime Minister). The Committee dissolves the Committee of Youth and Sport. The Congress also appoints Miftah Mohammed K'uyayba as the new Secretary (speaker). The People's General Congress also approves the budget for 2008.

Tunisia

- On 10 March the news channel Al-Jazeera, created by the government of Qatar, announces that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping on 22 February of Austrian tourists Andrea Kloiber and Wolfgang Ebner. However, the Tunisian government issues a statement saying that the kidnapping took place outside of Tunisian territory.

Algeria

- On 2 March the State Minister for Justice Tayeb Belayez announces that a high-level Algerian delegation had recently visited the Guantanamo Prison in Cuba and had been able to confirm the identity of 17 Algerian prisoners. It is the first time that a precise number has been given of the Algerians held at Guantanamo.

Morocco

- On 10 March the official news agency, *Maghreb Arabe Presse* (MAP), reports that the Moroccan Court of First Instance has sentenced three youths

to prison for their participation in a series of suicide attacks that took place in Casablanca in March and April 2007. Youssef Khoudri receives a 15-year sentence and Othman Raydi and Abdelhadi Raybi both receive 10-year sentences.

European Union

- On 13-14 March a regular European summit is held in Brussels that sees the approval of “the principle of a Union for the Mediterranean”, proposed by President Sarkozy. The new structure will encompass the Member States of the EU and non-member Mediterranean countries and will be called the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean (PB:UfM), maintaining continuity with the existing Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In Brussels the proposal for new European Commission directives are studied, which aim to reduce greenhouse emissions and achieve levels of energy efficiency agreed in March 2007. At the summit a series of commitments are agreed regarding important reserves by some Member States. The summit also launches a new three-year cycle regarding the ‘Lisbon Strategy’ for growth and employment and the current financial instability is discussed. Before the summit, the EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and the High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Javier Solana present a report which warns that “there will be millions of environmental immigrants, with climate change as one of the driving factors”, who will create “major migratory pressure for Europe.”

Arab League

- On 29-30 March the Arab League celebrates its twentieth regular meeting in Damascus. Lebanon boycotts the conference accusing Syria of preventing the new Lebanese President from being elected following the pro-Syrian President Émile Lahoud’s departure at the end of November 2007. As a sign of solidarity with Lebanon another three countries allied with the West, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan send low-level representatives to the summit.

Abril 2008

In Spain José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero is elected President of the government by the Parliament. In Italy Silvio Berlusconi wins the legislative elections and achieves a third term in office. Kosovo writes a Constitution, which establishes that the country is a ‘Parliamentary Republic.’ In Cyprus the Ledra Street checkpoint, a symbol of the country’s divide, is reopened. Also at the beginning of the month, local elections are held in Egypt amid threats of a blockade by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Portugal

- On 17 April Luís Filipe Menezes leader of the centre-right opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) announces publicly that he is incapable of solving his party’s internal problems and steps down as party leader.
- On 23 April the Parliament approves the EU Reform Treaty with an overwhelming majority.

Spain

- On 11 April the Congress of Deputies officially elects José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as President of the government in a second round of elections, with 169 votes in favour, 158 against and 23 abstentions. It is the first time since democracy was restored in Spain that the candidate from the winning party in the legislative elections has not been elected as Head of Government in the first round. On 12 April Zapatero is sworn in as President of the Spanish government.
- On 14 April Zapatero appoints his new cabinet which has a female majority. Two new ministries are created: the Science and Innovation Ministry, led by Cristina Garmendia, and the Equality Ministry, led by 31-year-old Bibiana Aído, the youngest minister in Spanish history.

France

- On 24 April following the defeat of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) in the March local elections, President Sarkozy offers a televised interview in the Elysee Palace in an attempt to revitalise

his administration. Almost a year since achieving a decisive majority in May 2007, the opinion polls reflect a drop in popularity for the French President with public approval at less than 40%.

- On 5-6 April 148 Muslim graves are desecrated in the Notre Dame de Lorette military cemetery in Arras, northern France. A pig’s head is found on one of the gravestones along with insults written against the Justice Minister Rachida Dati, who is of Maghreb descent. Other incidents take place in France, such as racist graffiti in a prayer room or the attacks on a mosque in Colomiers, in the Haute Garonne region in southern France on 20 April.

- On 25 April the leader of the far-right National Front (FN), Jean-Marie Le Pen, provokes a new controversy when in an interview given to the magazine *Bretons* he reiterates his 1987 declaration that the gas chambers used by the Nazis were “a detail” in the history of the Second World War. Without denying the reality of the deportations or the extermination of the Jews among other groups, Le Pen asserts that the victims were not as numerous as is thought and that concentration camps like Auschwitz were essentially forced labour camps.

Italy

- On 13-14 April early legislative elections give Silvio Berlusconi his third term as Prime Minister when his centre-right party the People of Freedom (PdL) wins with 46% of the vote against the centre-left alliance of the Democratic Party (PD), led by Walter Veltroni, which obtains 37% of the vote. Berlusconi gained 344 of the 630 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) and 174 of the 315 that form the Senate (upper house). Turnout for the elections stands at 80.4 %. Berlusconi’s coalition partner, the right-wing North League (LN), increases its percentage of votes to 8%, more than doubling its presence in both houses.

- On 28 April Giovanni Alemanno, candidate of the dissolved far-right party the National Alliance (AN) and ally of Berlusconi, is elected Mayor of Rome in a second round, thus bringing an end to the centre-left municipal government. Alemanno obtains 46.4% of the vote ahead of Francesco Rutelli, the Mayor of Rome between 1993 and 2001, and

Deputy Prime Minister and Culture Minister of the outgoing government.

- On 29 April senator Renato Schifani of the PdL is elected President of the Senate and on 30 April Gianfranco Fini, leader of the dissolved AN, is elected President of the Chamber of Deputies.

Croatia

- On 6 April the state-run HINA news agency reports the election of Radimir Cacic as President of the opposition party, the centrist Croatian People's Party (HNS), with the support of 995 of the 1,368 delegates present at the party's ninth election meeting.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 2 April the Foreign Affairs Minister writes a letter to Dimitrij Rupel the Foreign Affairs Minister in Slovenia, which currently holds the EU Presidency, in which he asks to participate in the Barcelona Process arguing that "Bosnia and Herzegovina geographically belongs to the Mediterranean Basin and shares a common cultural heritage with other Mediterranean countries."
- On 10 and 16 April the National House of Representatives and the House of Peoples (the lower and upper houses of the Bosnian Parliament respectively) approve major legislative reforms that pave the way to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU signing the pre-accession agreement, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), for which negotiations had begun in December 2007 after leaders of different political parties adopted an "action plan" aimed at police reform.
- On 24 April the election commission accuses the Foreign Affairs Minister Sven Alkalaj and two deputy ministers Senad Sepic, Deputy Civil Affairs Minister, and Igor Crnadak, Deputy Defence Minister, of a conflict of interests and bans them from participating in elections for the next four years.

Serbia

- On 29 April Serbia and the EU sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in Luxemburg. Although negotiations had begun in November 2007, the signing had been delayed because

of Serbia's failure to arrest war crimes suspects, particularly General Ratko Mladic, commander of the Serbian Bosnian army during the war. According to the agreement reached by the Member States, Serbia will not benefit from the SAA until it considers collaborating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY). Signing the Agreement implies recognition of the pro-EU Serbian forces for the legislative elections on 11 May.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 3 April the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) clears Ramush Haradinaj and Idriz Balaj of charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Kosovo during the 1997-1999 war. The third person accused, Lahi Brahimaj, is sentenced to six years' imprisonment for cruel treatment and torture of two people in the barracks of the now-disbanded Kosovo Liberation Army in Jablanica.
- On 9 April the Assembly of Kosovo adopts a new constitution for the Republic of Kosovo, approved by 103 members of the Assembly, which will enter into force on 15 June. With 40 chapters and 160 articles the constitution declares that Kosovo is a "parliamentary republic and the highest power lies with the President."
- At the end of April the number of countries that formally recognise the Republic of Kosovo increases to 39.

Montenegro

- On 6 April Filip Vujanovic, the current President and candidate of the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPSCG) wins the presidential elections with 52% of the vote, ahead of his three opponents. Observers from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) declare that in practically all aspects the elections met with the requirements for democratic elections.

Macedonia

- On 12 April the Sobranje (Parliament) votes for its dissolution and to hold ear-

ly elections for 1 June following a period of instability in the ruling coalition. The proposal to hold early elections is supported by the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Democratic Party of Albania (PDHs).

Greece

- On 18 April the Greek office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) asks EU countries to stop asylum seekers returning from other EU countries to Greece in accordance with the Dublin II Regulation. The document stipulates that asylum seekers' requests must be examined by their country of arrival into the EU. The UN agency declares that since it is impossible for Greece to guarantee the essential rights in the procedure, such as supplying interpreters and legal aid, asylum seekers face "undue hardships in having their claims heard and adequately adjudicated."
- On 29 April the Primer Minister, Kostas Karamanlis, and the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, sign an agreement in Moscow for the construction of the South Stream gas pipeline which will transport natural gas from Russia to the EU.

Cyprus

- On 3 April thousands of Cypriots, Greeks and Turks celebrate the opening in Nicosia of Ledra Street (or Lokmaci, as it is known in the Turkish part), symbol of the country's division in the city's largest commercial district.
- On 22 April the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) orders Turkey to pay €830,000 to Greek Cypriot John Demades for the loss of his house in Kyrenia when Turkish forces invaded northern Cyprus. The compensation is granted to the Demades family, who have not had access to the house since 1974.

Turkey

- On 1 April the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a speech to the legislators of his Justice and Development

Party (AKP), criticises the decision in March taken by the Constitutional Court to hear the case for the dissolution of the AKP. The party is charged with threatening the separation between State and religion in Turkey, a country with a Muslim majority but constitutionally secular. Erdogan describes the case as an “attempt to weaken politics” and asserts that it will damage the country at a time when the Turkish people are demanding greater “democracy, freedom and welfare.”

- On 1 April the police arrest 45 alleged members of al-Qaeda, suspected of planning terrorist attacks in a number of operations carried out simultaneously in different areas of Istanbul. It is believed that one of the suspects, known as Halis B., was the leader of al-Qaeda in Turkey.
- On 24 and 26 April Turkey launches fresh attacks on bases of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq that the PKK use to carry out offensives on southeast Turkey.
- On 30 April the Grand National Assembly (Parliament) approves a law that amends the controversial article 301 of the Penal Code, with 250 votes in favour and 65 against. The amendment replaces an insult to *Turkishness* (Turkish national identity), which is perceived as an obstacle to Turkey's proposal to join the EU, with an insult to the “Turkish Nation”. Article 301 has been used to try well-known writers, including the Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk, and is criticised by the EU for restricting freedom of expression.
- On 30 April the AKP delivers its preliminary defence to the Constitutional Court, in which it denies charges of carrying out activities against secularism claiming its actions were politically motivated.

Syria

- On 24 April in a series of closed-door meetings the CIA shows video tapes belonging to members of the US Congress and other evidence that proves that North Korea is helping Syria to build a nuclear reactor in the north east of the country, which was bombed by the Israeli Air Force on 6 September 2007.
- On 24 April the Qatari newspaper *Al-Watan* reports that the President Bashar

al-Assad has confirmed Turkey's mediation in negotiations between Syria and Israel. However, Assad insists there will be no direct negotiations with Israel until the new US administration takes over at the beginning of 2009.

Jordan

- On 8 April Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a report that reveals the CIA's transfer of 14 suspected terrorists under Jordanian custody for their interrogation and torture following the attacks on 11 September 2001.
- On 12 and 24 April the *Jordan Times* reports the dissolution of certain political parties following the political party reform that entered into force in April 2007. The report shows that only 12 of the 36 parties have been able to obtain the license needed to operate beyond the 15 April deadline. The new legislation stipulates that each party must have at least 500 founding members equally distributed over five different governorates. The parties have a year to adapt to the new requirements and register with the Interior Ministry.

Egypt

- On 7 April the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood call a boycott of the local elections. Human rights organisations report that around 800 members of the Muslim Brotherhood have been arrested and detained by the authorities. On 8 April local elections are held in Egypt.
- On 29 April during a speech in Cairo to the Trade Union Federation the President Hosni Mubarak proposes a 30% salary increase for public sector employees, in response to unrest throughout the country as a result of price increases on basic products and low salaries.

Libya

- On 16-17 April the Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Libya to meet with Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Russia agrees to cancel the 4.5 billion dollar debt incurred during the cold war in exchange for civil and military contracts between Libyan and Russian companies. Among the commercial deals reached, Gazprom, the Russian state-run gas

company, agrees on a joint venture with the Libya National Oil Corporation to explore, produce, transport and commercialise gas and oil.

Algeria

- On 27 April several Algerian newspapers announce that government security forces have killed 14 members of the organisation al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and the destruction of refuges the armed group held in the mountains east of Algiers. Four of its members, including one of the group's leaders, die in the province of El Oued, 700 kilometres southeast of Algiers. The army, supported by helicopters, also shoots down 10 militants and destroys the organisation's hideouts in different operations in the province of Boumerdès, some 50 kilometres to the east of Algiers.

Morocco

- On 7 April the Justice Ministry announces that nine people, convicted for their involvement in the attacks carried out in Casablanca in May 2003, have escaped from the Kenitra prison, 40 kilometres to the north of Rabat.

European Union

- In April the EU Reform Treaty, signed in Lisbon in December 2007, is ratified by the parliaments of Poland, Slovakia, Portugal, Austria and Denmark.

May 2008

In the elections of 11 May in Serbia the pro-European coalition led by the President Boris Tadic emerges as the group with most votes. In Spain ETA carries out another attack in the Basque Country causing the death of a civil guard. Silvio Berlusconi is appointed Prime Minister of Italy after winning the April elections. In Lebanon mounting unrest provokes fears of a civil war between Hezbollah and the pro-government forces. Finally on 21 May an agreement is reached between the parties at the Arab League meeting in Doha, which ends the crisis regarding the appointment of the Lebanese President and elects General Michel Suleiman as the

new President. Also, Israel and Syria announce that they are holding peace talks mediated by Turkey.

Portugal

- On 16 May MPs adopt a controversial standardisation law regarding the Portuguese language that implies using the Brazilian spelling rules for many Portuguese words. The change reflects a turnabout in the economic weight of Portuguese speaking countries, with over 230 million lusophones in countries such as Brazil (with around 190 million), Portugal (with 10.6 million), Mozambique or East Timor.

Spain

- On 14 May a civil guard dies and another four are injured when a bomb placed in a van explodes in front of the Civil Guard barracks in Legutiano, the Basque Country. The Interior Minister Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba blames the terrorist attack on the Euskadi and Freedom organisation (ETA). Politicians from all parties join to condemn the attack. This is the first time that the opposition People's Party (PP), offers its support to the government of the President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero since June 2006.
- On 20 May ETA's military and political head Francisco Javier López Peña, alias "Thierry", and three suspected collaborators are arrested in the city of Bordeaux in southeast France, in a joint operation involving the Civil Guard and the French police. Thierry had been on the run for 20 years and had put pressure on ending the ETA truce.
- On 28 May the government announces that it will block any initiative proposed by the President of the Basque government Juan José Ibarretxe to hold a referendum on 25 October 2008 to determine the level of public support for an ETA-negotiated solution and for independence for the Basque Country. According to Zapatero, Ibarretxe's plan violates the constitution.

France

- On 14 May a Paris court sentences seven men to seven years in prison for planning terrorist attacks. The men re-

cruited militants in France to be trained in Iraq.

- On 22 May the Mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoë announces his candidature to take over from François Hollande as First Secretary of the Socialist Party (PS), following Hollande's resignation in November 2007. Delanoë says he will also stand as candidate in the 2012 presidential elections. Delanoë believes that the PS should turn towards market economies and a social democracy that avoids the anti-capitalist debate.
- On 28 May the President Nicolas Sarkozy announces that from 1 July France will lift employment restrictions on citizens from eight former communist countries of the EU.

Italy

- On 6 May the European Commission (EC) announces that it will take Italy before the European Court of Justice over its failure to end the rubbish crisis in Naples, where rubbish has been piling up in the streets since December 2007.
- On 8 May the opposition leader Silvio Berlusconi head of the centre-right party, People of Freedom (PdL), becomes Prime Minister of Italy for the third time when he and his Council of Ministers are appointed by the President Giorgio Napolitano, following their election victory in mid-April. Franco Frattini steps down as Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security in the EU to join Berlusconi's team as Foreign Minister, a post he occupied from 2002 to 2004 also with Berlusconi.
- On 15 May over 400 immigrants are arrested as part of a government measure against illegal immigration. On 21 May the Council of Ministers announces a security package that will make illegal immigration a crime punishable by up to four years' imprisonment.

Malta

- On 1 May Sir Anthony Mamo, former President of Malta from 1974 to 1976 and the last (and only Maltese) Governor-General of the country (1971-74) dies in Mosta at the age of 99. Mamo played an essential role in Malta's transition towards independence from the United Kingdom in 1964. Malta continued to

form part of the Commonwealth and was finally proclaimed a republic in 1974, with Mamo as the first elected President.

Croatia

- On 30 May a Croatian court sentences the retired general Mirko Norac to seven years' imprisonment for failing to prevent the murder and torture of Serb civilians at the hands of soldiers under his command, in 1993 in south Croatia. The same court acquits the retired general Rahim Ademi of identical charges. The case against both men had been officially transferred to the Croatian judiciary by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 5 May the Serbian media reports that the Prime Minister Nikola Spirić has initiated the process to dismiss Foreign Affairs Minister Sven Alkalaj, member of the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBIH), and other deputy ministers for irregularities exposed in a report from the Central Election Commission.

Serbia

- On 11 May elections are held in the National Assembly (Parliament) following the dissolution of the ruling coalition in March due to disagreements over Kosovo and relations with the EU. In the elections the coalition For a European Serbia, led by the President Boris Tadić, emerges as the strongest political force gaining over 38% of the vote and 102 seats in the 250-member Parliament. The ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party (SRS) obtains 78 seats, three less than in 2007, when the party gained the maximum number of seats. The SRS had campaigned for closer ties with Russia and advocated breaking the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) signed with the EU on 29 April, if the EU does not recognise Kosovo as part of Serbia.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- At the end of May the number of countries that formally recognise the Republic of Kosovo increases to 43.

Montenegro

- On 20 May the President Filip Vujanovic is sworn in for his second five-year term after winning the presidential elections held on 6 April. In his inaugural address, Vujanovic calls Montenegrins to put aside their differences and join “forces” adding that “the EU requires us to unite.” Montenegro signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in October 2007.

Macedonia

- On 1 May the MIA news agency reports that the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) has signed an election coalition agreement with 17 other parties, many of which supported the VMRO-DPMNE in the legislative elections held in July 2006. The agreement enables the parties to run together for the elections scheduled for 1 June.

Greece

- On 12 May, following a week of transport strikes, Greece faces major fuel shortages as well as shortages in fresh food unable to reach sales points. The Truck Owners Federation demands a 13% increase in salaries and pensions, rejecting the Ministry’s proposal of a 5% increase.

Cyprus

- On 23 May the Greek Cypriot President Dhimitrios Christofias and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Mehmet Ali Talat, meet at the residence of the new special envoy of the United Nations to Cyprus Taye-Brook Zerihoum. They review the achievements of the 13 bicomunal technical committees and working groups, set up after the two leaders reached an agreement in March to resume peace negotiations under the auspices of the UN with the aim of reunifying the island.

Turkey

- On 1-2 May the Turkish army launches an air strike on members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), included on

Europe’s list of terrorist organisations, in the mountainous region of Quandil, in northern Iraq. 150 members of the PKK are killed in the strike.

- On 3 May the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announces he will create a new political party if the Constitutional Court bans the Justice and Development Party (AKP), charged with threatening the separation between State and religion in Turkey. Erdogan says there will be no changes in the constitution to halt the closure of the party since this would cause social unrest. Erdogan, concerned because the case may affect foreign investment in Turkey, proposes an end to the legal proceedings.

- On 7 May the President Abdullah Gül signs the amendment to article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which classifies an insult to *Turkishness* (national Turkish identity) as a crime, and which has been a stumbling block in the proposal for EU accession.

- On 14 May secular Turks accuse the AKP of having a hidden agenda to gradually eliminate drinking in public by passing a controversial law that prohibits the sale of alcoholic drinks and tobacco outside of their original packaging. The AKP insists that it is a necessary measure to prevent unlicensed premises from serving alcohol.

- On 21 May, in a report on Turkey’s progress towards EU accession, the European Parliament expresses its concern over the lack of reforms and the closure of the case against the AKP. According to the report, the case raises doubts over the independence and impartiality of the Turkish judiciary. The European Parliament urges Prime Minister Erdogan’s government to pursue further reforms and warns that further delays may “seriously affect the pace of negotiations.”

Syria

- On 21 May the Syrian and Israeli governments confirm their participation in indirect Turkish-mediated talks aimed at reaching “a comprehensive peace agreement.”

Lebanon

- On 6 May the Prime Minister Fouad Siniora declares that the Hezbollah telecommunications network in south-

ern Beirut is illegal and against the constitution, provoking clashes with the Shiite Hezbollah opposition movement and its allies. The government also announces the dismissal of General Wafic Chucair as security chief at Beirut airport because of alleged connections with Hezbollah. On 7 May Hezbollah supporters block several roads and take over the airport, while at the same time a workers’ strike turns into a political conflict. On 8 May Hezbollah’s Secretary General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah appears on television and warns that the government’s actions represent a declaration of war. On 9 May Hezbollah takes control of West Beirut and during the day members of the Shiite movement surround the houses and offices of pro-government leaders, including the Prime Minister and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. On 10 May the fighting extends to Tripoli in northern Lebanon. On 11 May Hezbollah takes key positions in Aley, a northern Druze village in the Chouf mountains, close to the road that joins Beirut with Damascus.

- On 25 May in accordance with agreements reached in Doha on 21 May, the Lebanese National Assembly appoints the Christian Maronite General Suleiman, as President. On 28 May Suleiman invites Siniora to create a new government of national unity.

Jordan

- On 2 May the *Jordan Times* reports that following the internal elections at the Shura Council of the Muslim Brotherhood, Haman Sa’id, will replace Salem al-Falahat as leader of the group. Falahat belonged to the “centrist movement” and had been its leader since 2006.

- On 14 May the State Security Court (SSC) sentences Nidal Mumani, Satam Zawahra and Tharwat Daraz to 15-year prison terms for plotting to assassinate the US President George W. Bush during his visit to Jordan in November 2006. The SCC commuted their original death sentence to a prison sentence arguing that the accused, all of who are under 30, “are still young and deserve a second chance in life.”

Egypt

- On 2 May the *International Herald Tribune* reports that the Egyptian author-

ities have been shaken by a series of workers' strikes in protest against the price increase on basic food products, job cuts and privatisations.

- On 5 May the People's Assembly (Parliament) approves increases in fuel and cigarette prices and vehicle taxes to cover the cost of the 30% salary increase for civil servants proposed by the President Hosni Mubarak.
- On 9 May the ration card system extends to 17 million more people and rice rations are doubled to counteract the effects of price increases on basic commodities.
- On 26 May the People's Assembly approves a government request to extend emergency law for a further two years. The law, in force since 1981, gives the executive powers to suspend basic rights such as prohibiting demonstrations, censoring newspapers, monitoring personal communications or detaining people without charge.

Tunisia

- On 9 May the TV channel Al-Jazeera reports that the capital's Court of First Instance has sentenced 14 men to between five and 14 years' imprisonment for belonging to a "terrorist organisation" and for attempting to prepare explosives.

Morocco

- On 19 May the TV channel Al-Jazeera reports the dismantling by police of an 11-member terrorist network, which included a Moroccan resident in Belgium. The report reveals that the cell was "connected to the Iraqi recruitment operation" and that it was preparing attacks in Belgium.

European Union

- On 5 May the EU, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria agree at the Conference on Energy Cooperation between the countries of the EU, Turkey, the Mashreq countries and Iraq in Brussels, to continue with the development of the regional cooperation in the natural gas sector. The goal is to unify the regional market through the development of interconnected infrastructures in the region and to contribute to the rap-

id completion of the Arab gas pipeline project and its connection with Turkey, Iraq and the EU. Running from Egypt, through Jordan to Syria, the Arab gas pipeline currently transports 10 billion m³ of gas per year.

- On 20 May the European Commission adopts the structural and functional proposals of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, with the aim of applying the agreement, approved at the EU summit in March, to create the new entity that will unite the EU Member States and the non-EU member Mediterranean countries. The inaugural summit of the Union will take place in Paris on 13 July.
- On 26-27 May 27 EU Foreign Affairs Ministers meet in Brussels to adopt the mandate to renew the EU's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, signed in 1997 between the EU and Russia. Russia's lifting of its ban on Polish meat exports in December 2007 has eliminated one of the main obstacles to negotiations. The negotiations with Russia will include issues such as the unresolved conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Trans-Dniester in Moldova, judicial cooperation and the energy chapter.

Arab League

- On 14 May the Arab League delegation, headed by the Prime Minister of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr al-Thani, arrives in Beirut in an attempt to stop civil war breaking out in Lebanon. On 15 May Sheikh Hamad announces that the opposing parties agree to "refrain from using weapons or violence" and to wait for "political dialogue" in Qatar, which will continue until an agreement is reached. Between 17 and 21 May talks take place in Doha, Qatar, in which both parties commit to resolving the political crisis that has plagued the country since November 2006. On 21 May it is agreed that the commander of the Lebanese army General Suleiman, will be appointed President to take over from General Émile Lahoud, whose term in office ended in November 2007. Reform of the Lebanese electoral system is also agreed and dialogue is called for regarding the arms issue. Hezbollah gains veto power.

June 2008

The Italian President Silvio Berlusconi, facing a corruption trial, begins his third term in office with a series of legal measures designed to save him from the pending trial. The new Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo comes into force mid-month, while Serb critics continue to consider Kosovo as a Serbian province. The European Parliament approves the Return Directive, which establishes a common policy on illegal immigration and the return of immigrants without papers. The Directive specifies a maximum 18-month detention period prior to expulsion and a five-year EU entry ban.

Portugal

- On 23 June the Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries Minister Jaime Silva announces government measures to help Portuguese fishermen, which compensate the cost increases resulting from the rise in fuel prices. These measures are adopted in the wake of demonstrations of fishermen across different European countries. Silva announces the creation of a new credit line and the three-month suspension of social security contributions for the sector.

Spain

- On 1 June a bomb explodes in Zaratuz in the Basque Country, following a warning from the Euskadi and Freedom organisation (ETA). The target of the attack is the construction firm Amenabar which is part of the consortium responsible for building the high-speed train between Bilbao, San Sebastian and Vitoria. Three people suffer minor injuries. On 8 June another bomb explodes at printing facilities belonging to the Basque newspaper, *El Correo*, in Zamudio, to the east of Bilbao. None of the workers are injured.
- On 5 June the National Court judge Ismael Moreno convicts five Islamist fundamentalists for belonging to an armed group. The accused were plotting suicide bombings on Barcelona's public transport network, that would have taken place between 18 and 20 January 2008.

- On 9 June around 75,000 lorry drivers call an indefinite strike against the rise in fuel prices, which spreads to France and Portugal. The hauliers demand a guaranteed minimum price for their transport services to compensate for costs which have risen by 36% in a year. The road block prevents food supplies and fuel from reaching supermarkets and petrol stations. On 11 June the Interior Minister Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba deploys more than 25,000 police officers to unblock the roads and move strikers away from two French border crossings. On the same day the government announces an agreement with the trade unions that are not part of the strike which includes 54 measures designed to minimise the impact of the rise in the cost of fuel, but does not establish the hauliers' demands of a guaranteed minimum price.
- On 17 June the Labour Minister Celestino Corbacho announces that unemployed illegal immigrants who want to return to their countries of origin can claim all their unemployment benefit at once. The proposal forms part of a package of reforms designed to cushion the impact of the economic slowdown in the job market. Corbacho predicts that the incentive, aimed primarily at less qualified workers from Latin America and North Africa, will benefit between 10 and 20% of the more than 100,000 immigrants that are currently claiming the subsidy.

France

- On 9 June in Paris two suspected activists from the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) appeal against their sentence in July 2007, together with six others, for collaborating with the perpetrators of the Casablanca bombings in May 2003.
- On 17 June the President Nicolas Sarkozy unveils the first major reform of the French defence policy since 1994, which implies a significant reduction in the number of soldiers and a major investment to modernise military equipment. Designed by a commission of defence experts and political representatives, the revision defines France's first official security strategy, which will be overseen by the Defence and National Security Council. The reform in-

cludes France's reintegration into NATO's integrated military command.

Italy

- On 18 June the Senate approves a reform according to which all trials for alleged crimes committed before June 2002 that carry prison sentences of under 10 years are suspended. The reform is intended to enable judges to focus on more serious cases or those that involve violence. The law, approved by the Chamber of Deputies and the President Giorgio Napolitano will freeze all legal proceedings currently open against the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who, together with his former British lawyer David Mills has been on trial for corruption since March 2007.
- On 27 June the government presents a law proposal that would grant immunity to the four highest ranking State officials: the President, the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Berlusconi is the only top ranking official awaiting trial.
- On 31 June the government approves a new law that limits the judicial use of telephone intercepts to investigations of more serious crimes, and that carries a prison sentence for those who publish conversations illegally.

Malta

- On 6 June the opposition Labour Party (PLM) elects Joseph Muscat, member of the European Parliament, as its new leader. None of the five candidates gained more than 51% of the votes needed in the first round on 5 June, leading to a second round on 6 June between the two most voted candidates.

Slovenia

- On 4 June the authorities shut down a nuclear plant in Krsko, in the southeast of the country close to the Croatian border, after the Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning Janez Podobnik announces a "harmless water leak."

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 16 June Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA),

which represents the first step towards EU accession. Both parties had begun talks in December 2007 but the Member States insisted that Bosnia and Herzegovina complete its police reform to create a multi-ethnic national police force before signing the SAA.

Serbia

- On 11 June Stojan Zupljanin, the Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect, is arrested by police near Belgrade. On 21 June he is transferred to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY).
- On 26 June, following the elections to the National Assembly (Parliament) on 11 May the main pro-European faction For a European Serbia, led by the President Boris Tadic, signs a coalition agreement with the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). With the support of minority parties like the Hungarian Coalition (MK) and the List for Sandzak, the coalition controls 128 of the 250 seats in the National Assembly.
- On 27 June Tadic appoints Mirko Cvetkovic, the outgoing Finance Minister, as the new Prime Minister.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 15 June the recently adopted Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo enters into force. On the same day the President of Serbia Boris Tadic declares that Serbia considers Kosovo as "its southern province" and that it will defend "its integrity through peaceful means, using diplomacy and without resorting to force."
- On 15 June Skender Hyseni becomes Kosovo's first Foreign Minister. Hyseni, the hitherto Culture, Youth and Sport Minister, had been nominated for the post in March.

Macedonia

- On 1 June the centre-right Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), until now leader of the coalition For a Better Macedonia (ZpM), wins early elections in the Sobranje (Parliament).
- On 1 June Macedonia's hopes of entering the EU are shaken when on

election day a person is killed and nine others injured in acts of election violence in the country's Albanian-majority regions.

Greece

- On 8 June an earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale shakes a large area of southeast Greece killing at least two people and injuring dozens. Hundreds of buildings are affected. The epicentre of the earthquake has been located in the northeast of the Peloponnese, 200 km to the west of Athens. Rescue teams report that several people are trapped beneath collapsed buildings.
- On 11 June the Greek Parliament ratifies the Lisbon Treaty with 250 votes in favour and 42 against.

Cyprus

- On 13 June the UN Security Council approves Resolution 1818 (2008), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) by a further six months. The Council, which welcomes the Cypriot leaders' agreement on 21 March and their joint declaration on 23 May, urges both parties to take advantage of the current situation to continue working together.
- On 16 June the Foreign Ministers agree on measures to reduce the commercial isolation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), in an initiative that aims to strengthen efforts to reunify the island. The measures include lifting taxes from agricultural products and reducing restrictions on service companies close to the UN-controlled separation zone that divides the island (the Green Line).

Turkey

- On 16 June the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), currently facing illegalisation for endangering the separation between State and religion, delivers a defence document to the Constitutional Court. Denying the charges, the AKP argues that illegalisation of the party would represent a reversal of democratic election results. It

also claims that there is no evidence to prove that the party represents a risk for democracy.

- On 17 June Turkey opens two new negotiation chapters with the EU on "company law" and "intellectual property law."

Syria

- On 10 June the Culture Minister Riad Naassan Agha arrives in France for a meeting with his French counterpart Christine Albanel. The visit follows the decision taken by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy to renew ties with Damascus in response to the breakthrough in Lebanon's political crisis.
- On 12 June Sarkozy invites his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad to participate in the 14 July celebrations, France's national day. Assad is also invited to participate in the lunch organised in Paris for the Union for the Mediterranean on 13 July.
- Between 22-24 June a delegation from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) visits Syria to investigate claims that the country is developing a clandestine nuclear programme. According to the reports, the inspection will focus on the Al-Kibar installation, in the northeast of Syria.

Lebanon

- On 1 June the Shiite Hezbollah movement returns the remains of Israeli soldiers killed in the 2006 war. According to the *Herald Tribune*, Israel sees this as a gesture of goodwill and a possible prelude to a prisoner exchange that will include the two Israeli soldiers whose capture by Hezbollah triggered the 2006 war.
- On 2 June the UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1815 (2008), which extends the mandate of the International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC), currently investigating the assassination of former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, to 31 December.
- On 16 June the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visits Lebanon. Rice meets with Lebanese President General Michel Suleiman to whom she pledges "US support for his Presidency and his new government."

Jordan

- The State Security Court confirms the death sentence for the Iraqi citizen Ziyad Khalaf al-Karbuli which was passed in March 2007. Al-Karbuli, in collaboration with the most recent al-Qaeda leader in Iraq Abu Musab Zarqawi, had been found guilty of murdering a Jordanian lorry driver in Iraq, as well as being a member of a group affiliated to al-Qaeda, Tawhid and Jihad.

Egypt

- On 7 June the former Prime Minister Mustapha Khalil dies in a hospital in Cairo aged 88. Khalil had been Prime Minister from October 1978 to May 1980 and played a fundamental role in the Camp David negotiations that led to the signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in September 1979.

Libya

- On 27 June the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi visits Libya and holds talks with the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to discuss the illegal African immigration across the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy. During the meeting Gaddafi upholds his opposition to the French initiative of the Union for the Mediterranean, which he believes divides the Africans and Arabs "in two."

Algeria

- On 14 June the online newspaper, *Tout sur l'Algérie*, reports that the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb organisation claims responsibility for the latest attacks in Algeria.
- On 21-22 June the French Prime Minister François Fillon arrives in Algeria on an official visit. Both parties sign a framework agreement on nuclear energy for civil purposes that specifies a joint study, and which opens the door for France to build nuclear centres in Algeria. Both countries had signed a nuclear cooperation agreement during the French President Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Algeria in December 2007.
- On 23 June the President Abdelaziz Bouteflika appoints Ahmed Ouyahia

as the new Prime Minister. Ouyahia, who held the post of Prime Minister between 2003 and 2006, was the Secretary General of the National Rally for Democracy (RND), one of the regime's main supporting parties.

Morocco

- On 5 June the official news agency *Maghreb Arabe Press* (MAP) announces that the counter-terrorism criminal court has passed a two-year prison sentence to Mohammed Leksere, who had been extradited from Spain in 2007 to be brought to trial for his involvement in terrorist activities. Leksere is found guilty of forming an illegal group to perpetrate terrorist acts and recruit young Muslims for Jihad (Holy War) in Iraq.

European Union

- On 10 June the US President George W. Bush attends the summit of EU leaders in the Brdo Castle north of Ljubljana in Slovenia. The meeting is seen as the consolidation of the close relations between the United States and the EU, confirmed in the previous meeting in Washington D.C. in April 2007. The summit declaration describes the "strategic partnership" between both parties as the base for joint action "to meet the most serious global challenges and to advance our shared values, freedom and prosperity around the globe." Between 10-16 June Bush visits Germany, Italy, the Vatican, France and the United Kingdom, in what is considered to be his last major European visit before standing down as President.
- On 18 June the European Parliament adopts the Return Directive, approved by the Interior Ministers on 5 June. The Directive sets out a common policy for dealing with irregular immigrants and regulates their expulsion. It specifies a maximum 18-month detention period prior to expulsion and a five-year EU entry ban. It also stipulates that unaccompanied minors cannot be returned to their countries of origin.
- On 19-20 June the regular meeting of EU leaders in Brussels, under the presidency of the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa discusses Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty. Given that 19 of the 27 Member States have ap-

proved the Treaty in Parliament and the ratification process continues, the European leaders decide to reconsider Ireland's position in the next meeting in October.

July 2008

On 1 July France assumes the six-month presidency of the EU. On 13 July the inaugural summit for the Union for the Mediterranean is held in Paris. Leaders from the 27 Member States and 16 non-member Mediterranean countries attend the summit. The vice-presidency is held by the French and Egyptian Presidents. This new partnership plans to focus on fighting sea pollution, the development of alternative energy sources and the improvement of transport connections. Cyprus, Spain and Italy ratify the Lisbon Treaty taking the number of EU countries that have recognised the treaty to 24. On 16 July Hezbollah hands over to Israel the bodies of the two Israeli soldiers, whose capture caused the war in mid-2006.

Spain

- On 15 July the Senate (upper house) approves the Lisbon Treaty with 232 votes in favour and six against, following the approval on 26 June of the Congress of Deputies (lower house) with 322 votes in favour, six votes against and two abstentions.
- On 17 July the European Court of Justice rules that Spain is not complying with European laws of "free movement of capital" and "freedom of association" in its attempt to safeguard national companies from being sold to foreign companies. These conditions were introduced in 2006 during the takeover bid of the Spanish company Endesa by Germany's EON. Endesa was finally bought by the Italian company Enel and its Spanish partner Acciona in a controversial last-minute deal.
- On 17 July the Supreme Court acquits four defendants who had been convicted, together with 17 others, in October 2007, of involvement in the Madrid bombings in March 2004.
- On 20 July five bombs explode in northern Spain, four in popular seaside resorts. The first device explodes outside

the Getxo bank in the Basque Country, causing damage to a car dealership and breaking several windows. Two more bombs explode on beaches in Laredo and Cantabria and the last two in Noja, where a woman is injured. The blasts follow a warning issued by the Euskadi and Freedom organisation (ETA). On 29 July a small device explodes in Torremolinos in Andalusia.

France

- On 1 July a Paris Appeal Court confirms the sentences passed in July 2007 on Redouane Aberbri and Attila Turk, both suspected of being activists in the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) for helping the perpetrators of the Casablanca bombings in May 2003, in which 45 people died.
- On 1 July General Bruno Cuche steps down as Chief of Staff of the French Army following a military demonstration in Carcassonne on 29 June in which 17 people were injured when a soldier accidentally fired real ammunition.
- On 11 July the Council of State (the highest administrative court) issued a decision to reject an appeal made by the 32-year-old Moroccan woman Faiza Mabchour Silmi when her application for French citizenship in 2005 was denied. The court argues that she failed to integrate, particularly through her use of the *burka*. This is the first time an application for naturalisation has been denied on these grounds.
- On 21 July deputies and senators, in a joint session of Congress at Versailles, approve the reform bill for the French Constitution of the 5th Republic proposed by Nicolas Sarkozy. The amendments are approved by 539 votes to 357, one more than the required number to obtain the necessary three-fifths majority. The text grants new powers to the Parliament and to citizens and reduces presidential powers, limiting the President to two consecutive terms in office. However, it does allow the Head of State to directly address the Parliament, a right he has been denied until now. The Parliament will also be able to set approximately half of its own agenda and veto certain presidential appointments, while the deployment of troops abroad for more than four months must be approved in Parliament. The text upholds

the requirement to hold a referendum prior to any enlargement of the EU, but opens the way to allowing the Head of State to choose ratification through parliamentary vote.

Italy

- The EU, UNICEF and the Council of Europe declare the Italian government's proposal in June to take fingerprints of all members of the Roma population as racist and xenophobic. The proposed measure aims to crackdown on street crime and help identify illegal immigrants. On 16 July in an attempt to assuage protests against the proposal, the government announces that all Italian citizens will have their digital fingerprints taken when the new identity cards enter into circulation in 2010. The violence continues in the streets of Rome when on 23 July a camp is attacked in Via Condino, on the outskirts of the city.
- On 23 July the Senate (upper house) approves the Lisbon Treaty with 296 votes in favour and none against. On 31 July the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) approves the treaty with 551 votes in favour and none against.
- On 23 July the Senate finally approves a security package proposed by the centre-right government, with 161 votes in favour, 120 against and eight abstentions. The new measures will see around 3,000 soldiers deployed in various Italian cities to help the police in their fight against crime and illegal immigration. Also, illegal immigrants convicted of crimes will face prison sentences three times longer than those for Italians who have committed the same crimes. The situation leads the government to call a state of emergency in Italy.
- On 23 July the President Giorgio Napolitano signs a law that grants immunity to the State's four highest ranking officials (President, Prime Minister and the presidents of the upper and lower houses) during his term in office. The law had been approved by the Senate with 171 votes in favour and 128 against.

Croatia

- On 17 July the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) convicts the retired lieutenant general

Pavle Strugar former commander of the Yugoslav Navy, of two additional charges: devastation not justified for military needs and illegal attacks against civilian targets in the Croatian coastal city of Dubrovnik in 1991.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 3 July the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) acquits Naser Oric, former commander of Bosnian Muslim forces in Srebrenica, of war crimes committed against Serbs during the Bosnian war (1992-1995). The decision annuls the two-year prison sentence handed down in the court of first instance in June 2006.

Serbia

- On 7 July the new seven-party coalition led by the Democratic Party (DS) and the outgoing Finance Minister Mirko Cvetkovic assumes control of the government.
- On 21 July the office of the President Boris Tadic announces the arrest of Radovan Karadzic by security officers. Karadzic was wanted for genocide and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY). Karadzic's arrest comes two weeks after the formation of the new Serbian government, supported by President Tadic who had promised complete collaboration with the TPIY to improve relations with the EU.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 11 July representatives of 37 countries and 16 international organisations meet in Brussels at a donor conference, hosted by the European Commission, to support the country's social and economic development. Participants pledge 1.2 billion euros in aid.

Macedonia

- On 10 July the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) acquits the former Interior Minister Tjube Boskovski of war crimes during the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. Another of the accused, the high-ranking police officer Johan Tarculovski is sentenced to 12

years' imprisonment for crimes committed against Albanians in the city of Ljuboten, near Skopje, on 12 August 2001.

- On 26 July the Sobranje (Parliament) approves the new government of the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, the leader of the conservative Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), with a margin of 79 to none. However, the main opposition parties, including the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH), boycott the process.

Greece

- On 13 July a court in Athens dismisses the request of three plaintiffs from the Island of Lesbos, in the north of the Aegean, to stop the gay rights organisation Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece from using the term 'Lesbian'. The plaintiffs argue that the modern use of the term to refer to gay women usurps their national identity. However, the court rules that the term does not define the identity of the island's inhabitants and that it can therefore be used by gay rights groups in Greece and abroad.
- On 22 July the fires that began the previous week on the holiday island of Rhodes destroy more than 5,000 hectares of forest, scrubland and vineyards.

Cyprus

- On 3 July the Chamber of Representatives (Parliament) approves the Lisbon Treaty by 31 votes in favour to 17 against, which correspond to the members of the President Dhimitrios Christofias' Progressive Party for Working People (AKEL).
- On 25 July the President Christofias and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Mehmet Ali Talat, agree to open formal direct negotiations aimed at the reunification of the island. The negotiations are scheduled to begin on 3 September.

Turkey

- On 10 July during a visit by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Iraq,

the Iraqi government offers Turkey its support in the fight against the organisation Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This is the first visit by a Turkish Prime Minister in 18 years. Both countries commit to strengthening political and economic ties.

- On 23 July Turkish war planes bomb PKK positions in the Zap region, in Iraqi Kurdistan. The PKK has been leading attacks on southeast Turkey from Iraqi territory.
- On 27 July two bombs explode in a busy shopping street in the district of Gungoren, in Istanbul. 17 people are killed in the terrorist attack and another 150 are injured. On 30 July nine people are arrested under suspicion of being involved in the attacks.
- On 28 July, following a three-day trial, six of the 11 judges of the Constitutional Court vote in favour of the prohibition of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), four call for the suspension of state financial assistance and one dismisses the case. However, the illegalisation of a political party requires the vote of a minimum of seven judges from the Court.

Syria

- From 12-14 July the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad makes an official visit to France, where he meets with his French counterpart Nicolas Sarkozy. On 12 July the *Financial Times* describes Assad's visit as a "diplomatic meeting" following years of isolation.
- On 12 July Assad holds a round of talks in Paris with his Lebanese counterpart General Michel Suleiman, in the presence of Sarkozy and the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Lebanon

- On 9 July violent clashes erupt between government supporters and allies of Hezbollah in the city of Tripoli, endangering the formation of the Council of Ministers. Four people die and 50 are injured including five soldiers in two districts, one with a Sunni majority and the other Alaouite. Clashes were reported in the same neighbourhoods at the end of June.
- On 11 July a new Government Council is formed after an agreement is adopt-

ed in Doha on 12 May between the country's rival factions.

- On 16 July Hezbollah hands over to Israel the bodies of two Israeli soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, whose capture caused the war in mid-2006. Despite Israel's certainty of the death of its two soldiers this is the first confirmation for their families. In return Israel hands over five prisoners to Lebanon (the last five Lebanese prisoners of the State of Israel), as well as the remains of 199 Lebanese and Palestinian soldiers killed in different clashes in recent years.

Egypt

- On 21 July the *International Herald Tribune* reports that the police have arrested 39 members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the north of Cairo.
- On 27 July a court acquits the owner of a ferry that sunk in the Red Sea in February 2006, causing the death of 1,300 people.

Tunisia

- On 12 July a Tunisian court passes sentences of four to nine years' imprisonment on several Jihadist Salafis, including two security agents. The group had been plotting an attack against police who were maintaining surveillance over a bank in Kairouan, 150 km from the capital.

Morocco

- On 10 July the creation of a new political party the Green Left (*Gauche Verte*) is announced at a press conference in Rabat. Omar Zaidi, the coordinator of the national commission responsible for preparing the party's founding congress scheduled for December, says that the new party's manifesto is based on improving the environment, particularly through water rationing, investment in renewable energy sources, protection of marine resources and fighting pollution.

European Union

- On 1 July France assumes the six-month presidency of the EU, taking over from Slovenia. The priorities proposed

by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy include the resolution of the crisis caused by Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty and the development of new relations between the EU and the Mediterranean.

- On 13 July the inaugural summit for the Union for the Mediterranean is held in Paris. Attending the summit are leaders from the 27 Member States and 16 non-member Mediterranean countries (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey). The most notable absence is that of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who has described the initiative as an "insult" to non-European countries. President Sarkozy, and the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak are the first co-presidents of this new partnership, which plans to focus on fighting sea pollution, the development of alternative energy sources and the improvement of transport connections. One of the main activities of the Union is to decide on the location of the Secretariat.

G-8

- From 7 to 9 July the leaders of the member countries of the G-8 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia) meet in Toyako, Hokkaido, in Japan. The major items on the agenda are the current credit crisis and the consequent slowdown of the world economy, the effects of the price increases on basic food products, policies against climate change and aid commitments for developing countries. In an unspoken acknowledgement of the group's lack of effectiveness in developing policies that solve global issues, the Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda also invites the group known as the G-5, comprising China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa, as well as the leaders of Australia, Indonesia and South Korea.

August 2008

In Spain 154 people die in a plane crash. In Italy the government of Silvio Berlusconi begins the deployment of 3,000 soldiers in Italy's largest cities to end street crime and illegal immigra-

tion. In Syria at the beginning of the month one of the President Bashar al-Assad's closest advisors is murdered. Libya and the United States sign an agreement mid-month to compensate the victims of attacks carried out by both countries during the eighties.

Spain

- On 14 August the President of the government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, calls an emergency meeting for the Council of Ministers to approve measures to lessen the effects of the declining economy. The measures include the abolition of wealth tax and the generalisation of the monthly Value Added Tax (VAT) reimbursement system. Zapatero announces a 5 billion euro credit line from the Official Credit Institute (ICO) to facilitate families accessing state-subsidised housing.
- On 17 August two bombs explode in Guadalmar and Benalmádena on the Costa del Sol causing minor damages. A third device is found on the A7 motorway near Malaga and is defused. The attacks are blamed on the Euskadi and Freedom organisation (ETA).
- On 20 August a McDonnell Douglas MD-82 plane from the airline Spanair travelling from Madrid to Las Palmas explodes during takeoff at Barajas Airport killing 153 of the 172 on board, and seriously injuring the other 19. One passenger dies later in hospital.

France

- On 11 August the leader of the far-right National Front party Jean-Marie Le Pen announces that his party has decided to sell its headquarters in Saint-Cloud, in the west of Paris, to a Chinese university that plans to convert it into a language school. The sale is an attempt to overcome the financial difficulties the party is facing.
- From 29-31 August the annual Socialist Party (PS) summer school takes place in La Rochelle. The event reveals the strategies of candidates running for the post of First Secretary, following François Hollande's resignation in November. Among the candidates are the 2007 presidential candidate Ségolène Royal and the Mayor of Paris Bernard Delanoë.

Italy

- On 2 August the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, an opponent of tax increases, announces the need for budget cuts following a sharp 7% drop in VAT revenues in July. On 5 August in the middle of an economic recession, the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) approves a cut of almost 30 billion euros in public spending to fulfil EU requirements to balance the budget for 2011.
- On 4 August Berlusconi's government begins the controversial deployment of 3,000 soldiers in Italy's major cities as part of a series of measures aimed at cracking down on street crime and illegal immigration.

Malta

- On 27 August a Maltese fishing boat rescues eight shipwreck survivors 70 km south of Malta who had been travelling on a boat coming from the Libyan port of Zuwara, along with 70 other immigrants.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 29 August Radovan Karadzic fails to respond to the 11 charges brought against him, including genocide and complicity in genocide, by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY).

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 5 August the Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi appoints Fehmi Mujota as Defence Minister. 45-year-old Mujota was a senior official in the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), member of the Assembly of Kosovo (Parliament) and Mayor of Shtime, a small town southeast of Kosovo.

Turkey

- On 5 August an explosion near Refahiye halts the oil flow through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. On 7 August the organisation Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) claims responsibility for the terrorist attack. On 25 August, following repair work, the pipeline is reopened.

- On 11 August the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) publicly discredits the draft Protection of Youth bill announced by the vice-President of the AKP Edibe Sozen. Secularists warned that this draft was further evidence of the AKP's Islamist hidden agenda. The law proposal requires all educational centres to provide prayer rooms and proposes that consumers of pornography be made to give their details to shopkeepers, who will be obliged to pass them on to the police.
- On 15 August *The Guardian* announces that Turkey has backed down, under pressure from the United States, from an agreement to buy gas from Iran. The United States fear that the deal would enhance Iran's nuclear ambitions. The energy deal was due to be signed during the visit of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on 14-15 August. Several Turkish officials state that the deal could not be closed due to high prices and unfavourable investment conditions.
- On 28 August the Land Forces Commander, General Ilker Basbug, is appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces. 65-year-old Basbug is a secularist who has publicly described political Islam as a threat to Turkey.

Syria

- On 1 August Brigadier General Mohammed Suleiman, one of the most influential aides to the President Bashar al-Assad, is assassinated in the port city of Tartus. Israeli and Syrian opposition sources claim that Suleiman was working as a liaison with the Lebanese group Hezbollah.
- On 7 August the authorities release a dissident economist who was serving a 10-year sentence for demanding freedom of expression and association.
- On 20-21 August al-Assad makes an official visit to Russia, where he holds talks with senior Russian officials. The *International Herald Tribune* reports that al-Assad has gone to Russia "with a shopping list of sophisticated weapons he wants to buy."

Lebanon

- On 12 August the National Assembly (Parliament) approves the national

unity government formed on 11 July with 100 votes to five. Hezbollah and its allies represent 11 of the 30 members of the government, giving the organisation veto power.

- On 13 August a bomb explodes in a bus station in an area frequented by soldiers, in Tripoli. 15 people are killed by the blast and another 50 are injured. The Lebanese army suspects the involvement of Islamist militants.
- On 13-14 August the President Michel Suleiman makes an official visit to Syria, where he holds talks with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Both countries agree to establish full diplomatic ties. The announcement marks Syria's first formal recognition of Lebanon's sovereignty. A series of measures to reduce the tension are agreed, including the demarcation of the border, a long-standing Lebanese demand.
- On 27 August the UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1832 (2008) which extends the mandate of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to 31 August 2009.

Libya

- On 14 August Libya and the United States sign an agreement to compensate all US and Libyan citizens, or their families, who were victims of the attacks carried out by both countries. The agreement paves the way to re-establishing full diplomatic ties between both countries. The American victims comprise the people who died in the attack in December 1988 on the Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and the bombing in April 1986 of a nightclub in what used to be West Berlin. The Libyan victims include the people who died in April 1986 when US planes bombed Tripoli and Benghazi.
- On 30 August the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi visits Benghazi and holds talks with the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Berlusconi promises Libya 5 billion dollars' compensation for the 32 years of Italian colonial rule.

Algeria

- On 9 August a suicide car bomb attack on the security forces leaves six civilians dead in Algiers; the targets of

the attack were the coast guard barracks and the adjacent police station in the coastal town of Zemmouri el-Bahri, 45 km east of Algiers. On 19 August a car bomb explodes at a police training school in the district of Les Isserse, in Boumerdès, 55 km east of Algiers. 43 people die in the attack, most of whom are civilians waiting in a queue to be examined. On 20 August another car bomb kills 11 people in Bouira, 95 km southeast of Algiers. On 23 August the *Economist* reports that the bomb attacks appear to be the work of the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb organisation.

Morocco

- On 7 August the official news agency *Maghreb Arabe Presse* (MAP) announces the formation of a new political party, the Authenticity and Modernity Party (Al-Asalah wa al-Mu'asara), which unifies five existing parties: the National Democratic Party (PND), the Al Ahd Party, the Environment and Development Party (PED), the Alliance of Liberties and the Citizenship and Development Initiative (ICD). According to the MAP agency, Hassan Benani is the party's Secretary General.

European Union

- On 7 August the Executive Board of the European Central Bank (ECB) decides to hold the benchmark interest rate at 4.25%. The decision reflects the ECB's priority to combat inflation ahead of stimulating growth.
- On 14 August the official figures show that the aggregate GDP in the Eurozone has fallen 0.2% in the second quarter of 2008, after a growth of 0.7% in the first quarter. This fall is related to credit restrictions caused by the subprime mortgage crisis and the global price increase on basic food products and energy.

September 2008

The European Pact on Immigration and Asylum is approved at a summit of EU Interior Ministers. The pact aims to unify the criteria of the 27 Member States regarding the detention of irregular im-

migrants, treatment of asylum seekers and immigration policy. The pact is harshly criticised by human rights groups and some left-wing parties. The Serbian Parliament ratifies the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), signed between the government and the EU in April. In Italy the rescue package is approved for the airline Alitalia. In Egypt 61 people die in a landslide that hits a shanty town on the outskirts of Cairo.

Spain

- On 10 September the President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero announces a 3 billion euro rescue plan to inject liquidity in property developers and halt the job losses in the construction industry. The rescue package will see government-approved developers benefit from tax cuts, intended to encourage renting and investment in the sector.
- On 11 September the Constitutional Court declares the *lehendakari* (President of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country), Juan José Ibarretxe's plan to hold a referendum of self-determination in the Basque Country as unconstitutional.
- On 16 September the preliminary report is issued on the 20 August plane crash at the Barajas airport in Madrid that reveals that the wing flaps, which are essential for takeoff, did not activate and that the warning alarm did not sound. However, the report does not specify that the problem with the flaps caused the accident.
- On 21 September a car bomb explodes close to the headquarters of the Caja Vital Kutxa bank, on the outskirts of Vitoria in the Basque Country, causing minor damages. Hours later a second car blows up in front of the Ondarroa police station, in the Basque Country, causing serious material damage and injuries to 10 people. On 22 September a soldier is killed and eight others injured when a car bomb explodes in the town of Santoña, in Cantabria. The blast occurs as police evacuated the military academy after receiving a bomb threat from the Euzkadi and Freedom organisation (ETA).

France

- On 11 September the police detain five French citizens of North African ori-

gin in Rennes, western France, under suspicion of preparing terrorist attacks to coincide with the seventh anniversary of al-Qaeda's attacks in the US.

- On 18 September the Prime Minister François Fillon issues a decree for the creation of a database known as *Edvige* (*Exploitation documentaire et valorisation de l'information générale*), which will store information on people who have occupied or occupy important public posts or who have played an important public role, as well as anyone in a position to threaten public order. Opposition parties and civil rights groups criticise the measure saying it threatens civil liberties. Edvige includes data on political and philosophical beliefs, religious orientation, union membership or ethnic origin of persons over the age of 13, if requested by police.
- On 21 September the senatorial elections allow the opposition Socialist Party (PS), to substantially increase their representation in the Senate (upper house) although President Sarkozy's ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) retains a majority. The First Secretary of the PS François Hollande describes the result as "punishment for the government."

Italy

- On 7 September Giovanni Alemanno, the Mayor of Rome and former youth leader of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), says in an interview with the Milan newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, that he has never considered and will never consider that fascism was "absolute evil." Alemanno argues that it was the racial laws imposed by the dictator Benito Mussolini in 1938 that ousted Jews from public work posts that were "absolute evil", rather than the ideology itself. On 8 September the Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa, in a speech at the anti-fascist memorial to commemorate those who died defending Rome from the Nazi occupation, also paid homage to the members of the Nembo parachute division of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, who fought alongside German troops to prevent the allied forces advancing.
- On 29 September the takeover deal begins which aims to save Alitalia from what seemed to be certain bankruptcy.

The deal follows the approval of the 1.5 billion euro rescue package proposed by the Italian Air Company (CAI), an investor group composed of 16 national companies. Alitalia is merged with its national rival Air One giving the new airline CAI the monopoly on the Rome-Milan route, one of the most profitable in Europe.

Slovenia

- On 21 September parliamentary elections are held for the National Assembly (lower house), which conclude with the defeat of the ruling Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), which only gains 28 of the 90 seats. The centre-left Social Democrats (SD) wins most votes with 29 seats and is expected to form a new government with the support of the other left-wing parties.

Croatia

- On 15 September the President of the European Commission José Manuel Durão Barroso recognises the "good progress" of recent months, but reminds the Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader that it is necessary to push forward with the country's judicial reform, consolidate human rights and restructure the shipyards to be able to finalise membership negotiations before the end of 2009.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 15 September the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) sentences Rasim Delic, former General of the Bosnian Muslim army, to three years' imprisonment for war crimes committed against Serbs in the Bosnian war (1992-1995).

Serbia

- On 9 September the National Assembly (Parliament) ratifies the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) signed between the government and the EU in April, with a parliamentary majority. The SAA will only enter into full effect following the arrests of General Ratko Mladic and former President of the self-proclaimed Serbian Republic of Trajina, Goran Hadzic, as requested by the

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY).

- On 9 September the National Assembly approves a strategic energy pact with Russia, which will allow the pan-European South Stream gas pipeline to pass through Serbia in exchange for Russia's purchase of the state-run oil monopoly.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 3 September the President Fatmir Sejdiu announces that Kosovo will send envoys to 10 of the countries that have recognised its independence: Albania, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Montenegro

- On 2 September the President of Slovenia Danilo Turk meets with his counterpart Filip Vujanovic, the Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, and the parliamentary President Ranko Krivokapic, on his visit to Montenegro to talk about the economic cooperation between both countries, particularly in the banking, insurance, construction and tourism sectors. Turk emphasises that relations with Montenegro are excellent. The President of Slovenia reasserts his support of Montenegro's application to join the EU and NATO.

Macedonia

- On 4 September the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, asks Macedonia for "greater political stability" before initiating the EU accession process. Rehn congratulates the executive on its progress in judicial and security matters, but states that "efforts still need to be made."

Greece

- On 12 September the Greek Minister for Mercantile Marine and Island Policy, Georgios Voulgarakis, resigns after being accused of unethical trade deals. On 16 September despite denying the accusations he submits his resignation to the former Justice Minister Anastasios Papaligouras. On 23 September the

Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis sacks the government adviser and former Interior Minister Yiannis Kefaloyannis, charged with harbouring a criminal and inciting perjury in a drug trafficking case.

- On 26 September *The Guardian* reports the creation of a new political party by several companies on the island of Corfu. The companies accuse the government of failing to invest in Corfu and of the consequential deterioration of the infrastructure.
- On 30 September Karamanlis dismisses the legislator Stavros Dailakis from the New Democracy (ND) party, for criticising the government's decision to ask for the resignation of Theodoros Roussopoulos Minister of the State and government spokesman, and Yiannis Angelou Director of the Prime Minister's office. The dismissal reduces the ruling ND party's majority to a single seat in the Vouli (Parliament) since Dailakis refuses to give up his seat and declares himself independent.

Cyprus

- On 3 September the Greek Cypriot President Dhimitrios Christofias and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (RTNC), Mehmet Ali Talat, begin formal direct negotiations aimed at reunification of the island. Both leaders meet in the UN-controlled separation zone in Nicosia by invitation of the Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in his capacity as special envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations. On 11 September Christofias and Talat meet again.

Turkey

- On 1 September after Russia begins to slowdown authorisation of the entry of Turkish food across its borders, the Trade Minister Kursad Tuzmen announces that Russian products that enter Turkey will be subject to the same meticulous inspections as those that Turkish products entering Russia are subjected to. The government suspects that Russia is applying the restrictions in response to Turkey's authorisation for US ships carrying humanitarian aid to Georgia to cross the Bosphorus.
- On 3 September the Foreign Minister Ali Babacan and his counterparts

from six member countries of the Golf Cooperation Council (GCC) –Bahrein, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)– sign in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia a memorandum of understanding to prepare the ground for a future free trade agreement between these countries and Turkey.

- On 17 September a court in Frankfurt, Germany, convicts three Turkish citizens of diverting some 18.6 million euros from the religious foundation based in Germany, Deniz Feneri, that raises money for Muslims in need, including Palestinians, Turks without resources and Pakistani refugees. The opponents to the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan maintain that part of the stolen money could have been sent to Kanal 7, an Istanbul television channel with government links. Legal experts announce that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) will be illegalised if the accusation of accepting the money is proved correct.
- On 25 September 10 Turkish planes bomb 16 suspected positions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the organisation included in the EU list of terrorist organisations, in the mountainous region of Qandil, in Iraqi Kurdistan. The PKK has used the bases to launch attacks into southeast Turkey. Nine soldiers die in attacks on the PKK along with 16 PKK members, including the militant Kurd, Ahmet Tefvik, a Syrian citizen who had been leader of the PKK in the Bingol region since 2002.

Syria

- On 3-4 September the French President Nicolas Sarkozy makes an official visit to Syria, where he holds talks with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.
- On 27 September a car bomb explodes near the security complex on the outskirts of Damascus killing 17 people and injuring 14 others, all civilians. The pro-government newspaper *Al-Thawra* publishes that the attack was prepared outside of Syria and that it was perpetrated by foreign citizens.

Lebanon

- On 10 September the pro-Syrian Druze leader Sheikh Saleh Aridi dies in a booby-trapped car bomb attack in the tourist town of Alley, east of Beirut. Ari-

di was a senior official in the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP).

- On 29 September a car bomb explodes in the northern city of Tripoli by a bus that was transporting Lebanese troops, killing four soldiers and three civilians. The attack is attributed to Fatah al-Islam, a Sunni fundamentalist organisation who the Israeli army had fought against in 2007 near the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp. On 1 October however, *The Guardian* publishes that some Lebanese sources relate the attack with Syrian intelligence agencies.

Egypt

- On 6 September 61 people die when a landslide hits Manshiyet Nasr, a shanty town on the outskirts of Cairo.
- On 21 September 11 European tourists (five Italians, five Germans and a Romanian) and Egyptian officials and guides are kidnapped in the southeast of the country. The authorities quickly announce that the aim of the kidnapping is the payment of a ransom and that it is not an act of terrorism. On 22 September the Tourism Minister announces that the group has asked for a 6 million dollar ransom. On 23 September the Foreign Minister announces that the kidnappers have taken the Europeans to the northeast of Sudan, 25 km from the Egyptian border. On 28 September the Sudanese army announces that it has killed six captors, but on 29 September all captives are released.

Libya

- On 5-6 September on an official visit the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meets with the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and other officials, including Abd-al-Rahman Mohammed Shalgam, Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaisons and International Cooperation.

European Union

- On 17 September the Prime Minister of Luxemburg Jean-Claude Juncker becomes the first leader to declare that he does not believe the Lisbon Treaty will enter into force before the European Parliament elections scheduled for June 2009, as was originally planned.

After the Irish voted overwhelmingly against the Reform Treaty in June, it is unlikely that the Irish government will hold a second referendum before the European elections.

- On 25 September in a meeting of EU ministers in Brussels the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum is approved, according to which the 27 Member States commit to adopting common policies to encourage the entry of qualified immigrants and harmonise the treatment of asylum seekers.

October 2008

With the financial crisis taking hold several countries, such as Spain, Portugal and Italy, announce packages to facilitate liquidity for banks and attempt to survive the economic recession. A summit in Paris of the four largest European economies concludes with the participants pledging their commitment to act together to combat the crisis, although the decision was made not to apply a large-scale bail-out package to the financial system, as has been done in the United States. At a summit in Vienna the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), decides to cut back production by 1.5 million barrels a day, about 5% of its output, to curb the falling oil prices. In Algeria, the President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announces his intention to reform the constitution allowing him to run for re-election as President, a post currently limited to two terms.

Portugal

- On 12 October the Finance Minister Fernando Teixeira dos Santos announces that the government will provide a 20 billion euro state guarantee for banks with headquarters in Portugal. Teixeira dos Santos expresses the importance of creating conditions that stimulate an increase in inter-bank transactions, which have been reduced because of the global financial crisis. The measure intends to facilitate banks' access to liquidity, which in turn allows them to finance their economic activity.
- On 19 October parliamentary elections are held in the Autonomous region of the Azores. The turnout stands

at 46.8%. The ruling Socialist Party retains its absolute majority winning 30 of the 57 seats, which represents more than 51% of the vote. The Social Democratic Party (PSD) gains 18 seats, while the Democratic and Social Centre-People's Party win five.

Spain

- On 4 October a bomb explodes outside the court in the city of Tolosa, in the north of the country, causing material damage. On 30 October 17 people suffer minor injuries after a car bomb explodes at the University of Navarra, in Pamplona. The blast follows a warning call in the name of the terrorist organisation ETA. The attack comes two days after police arrest four suspected ETA members.
- On 7 October the President of the government José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero announces a rise in the minimum guaranteed for bank deposits from 20,000 to 100,000 euros. In response to the financial crisis Zapatero also announces the creation of an emergency fund of between 30 and 50 billion euros that allows the State to buy shares in solvent financial institutions in order to inject liquidity into the financial system.
- On 16 October the police arrest 13 people, the majority Moroccan, following a series of raids in Barcelona. They are accused of harbouring Islamist radicals, including suspects of the Madrid bombings in March 2004, and helping them to leave the country.
- On 16 October the National Court's judge Baltasar Garzón launches a legal investigation into the atrocities committed during the Civil War (1936-1939), in which he intends to pass judgement on the dictator Francisco Franco, accusing him, and 34 of his generals and ministers, of crimes against humanity. Garzón requests that 19 mass graves be exhumed and asks the Interior Minister to identify the members of Franco's state party to determine if they are still alive and if so charge them with the corresponding crimes.

France

- On 1 October the trial begins in Paris against Moroccan Hamid Bach, Reda Barazzouk and Yousef Bousag, and

French Algerian Amine Liassine, accused of setting up a Muslim recruitment network for Holy War (Jihad), in and around Montpellier.

- On 1 October Gérard Larcher, from the ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), is elected President of the Senate (upper house) following the mid-term elections of 21 September.
- On 3 October the government admits France is entering a recession after registering a GDP growth of 0.1% between July and September and a 0.3% contraction in the second quarter. On 20 October the Economy, Industry and Employment Minister Christine Lagarde recognises that the government is unlikely to achieve the 1% growth it predicted for 2008 and 2009.
- On 13 October the government approves a 360 billion euro economic rescue plan for French banks. The State will provide a guarantee for inter-bank lending of up to 320 billion euros and another 40 billion for the recapitalisation of banks in difficulty. The lending will be subject to various conditions, including restrictions in terms of management salaries.
- On 17 October Nicolas Sarkozy sues Yves Bertrand, the director of *Renseignements Généraux* between 1992 and 2003, for "invasion of privacy, malicious accusation and forgery" for the publication of extracts from handwritten notebooks in which the former intelligence service chief describes details concerning major rivals of former President Jacques Chirac. The notebooks, used by magistrates in the investigation of the Clearstream affair, connected Sarkozy allegedly to blacken his name. Some of the extracts had been leaked to the magazine *Le Point*. The notebooks contain rumours of drug trafficking, blackmail and corruption among politicians. Although most of the names had been removed from the published extracts, Sarkozy was quoted as having had an extramarital relationship with the wife of a politician who is now a minister. An entry regarding Jacques Chirac claims he went to Canada in 2003 for a facelift.

Italy

- On 8 October the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announces a rescue package in which banking institutions in

difficulty will be partially nationalised, although no specific budget has been applied to the measures. Strict Italian regulations have, until now, curbed banks' exposure to the global financial crisis. The Economy and Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti makes it clear that the package should not be considered as a rescue package and that each case will be studied individually. On 31 October the Bank of Italy commits to providing 40 billion euros in treasury bills. It also increases the guaranteed bailout amount for deposits up to 103,000 euros.

- On 23 October the trial begins against the former governor of the Bank of Italy Antonio Fazio, and 17 other defendants, who have been accused of favouritism during ABN Amro's takeover bid of Antonveneta, which failed in 2005 due to the intervention of Popolare di Lodi. Another 64 of the accused have already been convicted and 326 million euros in profits have been confiscated.

Croatia

- On 2 October the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) begins the trial of General Momcilo Perisic, Yugoslavian Chief of Staff between 1993 and 1998. Perisic stands accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes, which include murder, inhumane acts and attacks on civilians committed during the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, in Sarajevo, Srebrenica and Zagreb.

- On 6 October the Prime Minister Ivo Sanader announces the immediate dismissal of Berislav Roncevic as Justice Minister and the replacement of the Chief of Police Marijan Benko by Vladimir Faber. The decision follows the death in Zagreb of Ana Hodak, the daughter of Zvonimir Hodak, a prominent lawyer, allegedly at the hands of the mafia. On 10 October both appointments are approved in the Sabor (Parliament). On 23 October in another act of organised crime, two journalists are killed by a car bomb in the centre of Zagreb. On 24 October Sanader announces that the authorities will do all they can to end organised crime, which he likens to terrorism.

- On 8 October the TPIY Appeals Chamber affirmed the 35-year prison

sentence of the Croatian Serb leader Milan Martić, passed in June 2007 for crimes committed in the early nineties against Croats and other non-Serbs in Croatia.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 31 October the number of countries that formally recognise the Republic of Kosovo increases to 35, with the incorporation of Portugal, Montenegro, Macedonia, the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia. As former Yugoslav republics, Montenegro and Macedonia's announcements to recognise Kosovo's independence represent a major setback to the diplomatic efforts of Serbia to reclaim authority over Kosovo. Serbia reacts to the news expelling the ambassadors of both countries.

Greece

- On 6 October the Finance Minister Georgios Alogoskoufis reveals that Greece has not met its 2007 and 2008 deficit target. In 2007 the projected deficit was 2.7% of the GDP, while the actual deficit stood at 3.4% and for 2008 a deficit of 1.6% was forecast, which actually reached 2.3%. Alogoskoufis estimates the 2009 GDP at 1.8%, claiming that the economy will grow by 3% during that year.

- On 23 October Theodoros Rousopoulos resigns as State Minister and government spokesman following a scandal over land exchange. Valuable state property was exchanged in 2007 for less valuable land belonging to Vato-pedi monastery in Mount Athos, a semi-autonomous republic in northern Greece. The exchange represents the latest scandal for the centre-right government of Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis.

Cyprus

- On 10, 13 and 22 October several meetings are held between the Greek Cypriot President Dhimitrios Kristofias and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Mehemet Ali Talat. The meetings deal with the powers of the proposed federal government and the structure of the federal executive.

Turkey

- On 3 October the terrorist organisation the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) attacks a military post near Semdinli, killing 17 soldiers. On 7 October, in response to the attack, Turkish planes bomb 21 suspected PKK positions in the Avasin Baysan region, in Iraqi Kurdistan, from where the PKK launches attacks into southeast Turkey. On 24 October the army reports the death of 42 PKK members in the air strike on Iraq and the land operations in Turkey.

- On 14 October the Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin announces the dismissal of 19 prison officers following the death of Engin Ceber, a 29-year-old left-wing activist who died in hospital on 11 October from a brain haemorrhage caused by an alleged beating during his detention at Metris prison in Istanbul. The case reopens the controversy over the human rights situation in Turkey and the fulfilment of EU accession requirements.

- On 20 October the trial begins against 86 people, including military officers, writers and lawyers, accused of belonging to the illegalised ultra-nationalist Ergenekon organisation and plotting a coup to overthrow the government. The group is accused of preparing the assassination of prominent figures, among them the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Literature Nobel Prize Winner Orhan Pamuk. The charge links Ergenekon with the attack in May 2006 on the secular newspaper *Cumhuriyet* and the assassination on 17 May 2006 of the judge Mustafa Yucel Ozbilgin. Ergenekon members are also connected with the protests in April 2007 against the candidature of Abdullah Gül, a practicing Muslim, as President of the country.

Syria

- On 26 October the government announces that US military helicopters have entered Syria from Iraq and attacked a farm, killing eight civilians. On 28 October the *Financial Times* quoted US officials as stating that US forces have killed an important member of al-Qaeda, Abu Ghadiya, responsible for smuggling foreign fighters from Syria into Iraq and defined by the United

States as one of the region's most prominent foreign fighter facilitators. On 27 October on a visit to the United Kingdom, the Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu'allim condemns the attack, describing it as an act of "criminal and terrorist aggression." On 28 October the government decides to shut down a North American school and cultural centre in Damascus.

- On 29 October according to the BBC, an official from the National Organisation For Human Rights in Syria announces that a court in Damascus has reduced the six-year prison sentences of 12 pro-democracy activists to 30 months.

Lebanon

- On 14 October the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad approves a decree that paves the way to being able to send a Syrian ambassador to Beirut. The Lebanese President Michel Suleiman had visited Syria in mid-August and both countries declared their intention to establish full diplomatic ties.

Jordan

- On 4 October King Abdullah appoints Nasir Ahmad al-Lawzi as the head of the Royal Hashemite Court. On 29 September King Abdullah II accepted Bassam Awadallah's resignation as Chief of the Royal Hashemite Court. Awadallah had recently been the target of attacks from politicians and the local press for allegedly defending the privatisation of Jordanian businesses, encroaching on the powers of the Prime Minister Nader Dahabi and forming a type of shadow cabinet at the Royal Court.

Libya

- On 31 October Colonel Muammar Gaddafi visits Russia to hold talks with Russian officials including the President Dmitri Medvédev and the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. According to *The Guardian*, Gaddafi offers Russia the chance to open a permanent naval base in the port of Benghazi. The meeting also focuses on the purchase of fuel and arms. Both countries sign a civil nuclear cooperation deal.

Tunisia

- On 31 October Andrea Kloiber and Wolfgang Ebner, the two Australians who were kidnapped in March by the organisation al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, were reportedly released in Mali.

Algeria

- On 29 October the President of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika declares his intention in a speech broadcast from the Supreme Court to reform the constitution to allow him to run for re-election. Currently, the presidency is limited to two terms. For Bouteflika, the removal of this limit "will allow the people to exercise their legitimate right to choose those who govern them and renew their confidence in them in all sovereignty." The reform would allow Bouteflika to stand for a third term in office.

European Union

- On 4 October the government leaders of the four largest EU economies (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) meet in Paris together with the President of the European Commission José Manuel Durão Barroso, the European Central Bank Chief (ECB) Jean-Claude Trichet and the President of the Eurogroup Jean-Claude Juncker to end unilateral action taken by the Member States in response to the crisis. Although it is agreed to coordinate actions, the meeting ends with no significant commitments. The government leaders agree not to apply a large-scale bail-out package to the banking system, as has been done in the United States, but do commit to bailing out banks in difficulty.
- On 15-16 October Brussels hosts a summit under the French Presidency, which is marked by the global financial crisis and deals with the coordinated response of Member States and the ECB to the crisis. The summit also seeks a common agreement on climate change, as well as immigration and asylum policy.

OPEC

- On 24 October a summit is held in the Vienna headquarters of the Organ-

isation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which concludes that the fall in demand for oil caused by the global crisis has led to a surplus on the global oil market. Energy Ministers from the OPEC member countries expressed concern at the fall in oil prices, after dropping to 66.2 dollars the day before the summit. With the aim of halting the falling prices they decide to cut back production by 1.5 million barrels a day, about 5% of output, starting from 1 November.

November 2008

The global financial crisis shaped events throughout November. Portugal nationalises the Portuguese Bank of Business before the threat of an imminent suspension of payments. The governments of Spain and Italy present packages to reactivate the economy, while in France Nicolas Sarkozy reveals details of a strategic investment fund. At the European level, a meeting takes place between the Member States to prepare a common European position in view of the G-20 meeting in Washington. Unrelated to the crisis, in Italy controversy ensues the Constitutional Court's ruling to allow the father of 37-year-old Eulana Englaro, who has been in a coma since 1991, to disconnect the feeding tube that keeps his daughter alive.

Portugal

- On 2 November the Finance Minister Fernando Teixeira dos Santos announces the nationalisation of the Portuguese Bank of Business (BNP), which has an accumulated debt of 700 million euros and faces an imminent suspension of payments. Teixeira dos Santos declares that he has ruled out the possibility of a government bailout believing that this would not be in the taxpayer's interests. The entity will remain under the control of the state-run savings bank Caixa Geral de Depositos (CGD).
- On 22 November the government declares that Portugal will be the first country in Europe to receive electric cars from the French company Renault and its Japanese partner Nissan. As part of the deal Portugal will install a nation-

al network of 1,300 charging points for the zero-emission vehicles by 2011, when the first delivery is due. The cars will be exempt from road taxes and individual buyers will benefit from tax benefits of 800 euros. The government also pledges that 20% of its public fleet will be emission-free by 2011.

Spain

- On 3 November the President of the government José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero announces a partial two-year moratorium on mortgage payments for the unemployed and pensioners who support families. It also announces a 1,500 euro subsidy for companies that hire unemployed workers with families as part of a 170 million euro package aimed at stimulating the job market. On 27 November the government unveils a new 11 billion euro package to reactivate the economy and create 300,000 new jobs.
- On 17 November the French police arrest Miguel de Garikoitz Aspiazu Rubina, alias Cherokee, a suspected military head of the Euskadi and Freedom organisation (ETA), in the French ski resort of Caunterets. A woman suspected of belonging to the group is also arrested. Aspiazu is suspected of having ordered the terrorist attack at the Barajas airport in December 2006, which ended peace talks between the government and ETA. It is believed that Garikoitz assassinated two plain clothes civil guards in the French city of Capbreton, in December 2007. Cherokee's arrest comes as a hard blow for ETA, six months after the arrest in May of its political leader Francisco Javier López Peña.

France

- On 6 November three French citizens of Moroccan origin Hamid Bach, Reda Barazzouk and Yousef Bousag, and a French Algerian Amine Liassine, are convicted by a Paris court, accused of creating a recruitment network in the south of France to send Muslims to fight "Holy War" abroad. The Moroccans will be deported after serving their sentence and banned from entering the country for the following ten years.
- On 18 November the former Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin is tried for

his role in the Clearstream affair and accused of "complicity in libel." In this case in an attempt to destabilize Nicolas Sarkozy, a minister at the time, he alleged that Sarkozy had received bribes in exchange for major arms contracts. Also facing trial are Jean-Louis Gergrin, former senior official at the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS), computer expert Imad Lahoud, the former auditor Florian Bourges and the journalist Denis Robert.

- On 20 November the President Nicolas Sarkozy reveals details of a strategic investment fund, proposed in October, which aims to invest in major French companies in an attempt to protect them from being bought or controlled by foreign investors. The fund will initially be endowed with 20 billion euros and be managed by the government and the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (CDC). Jean-François Dehecq, the Chairman of Sanofi-Aventis, will head the fund's advisory council.

- On 25 November Martine Aubry is elected by a narrow margin as First Secretary of the opposition Socialist Party (PS), defeating the 2007 presidential candidate, Ségolène Royal. Considered the most left-wing of the candidates, Aubry becomes the first woman to lead the PS and takes over from François Hollande, who had held the position since 1997.

Italy

- On 13 November a protest erupts at a court in Genoa after police accused of brutally beating a young anti-globalisation demonstrator during the G-8 summit in Genoa 2001 are acquitted of the charges against them. Some of the operational commanders are handed out prison sentences of up to four years. They will not have to serve their sentences, however, as their crimes will expire at the beginning of 2009. Some of the victims accuse the police of acting outside of "the democratic order" and of knowing that they enjoy "total impunity."
- On 13 November the conservatives denounce a decision taken by the Constitutional Court as "the legislation of euthanasia." The court's ruling allows Beppe Englaro to disconnect the feeding tube that has been keeping his 37-year-old daughter, Eluana Englaro, alive

since an accident in 1991 left her in a vegetative state. The court upholds a ruling from a court in Milan in July that certifies that Eluana's coma was irreversible, and that before the accident she had expressed her wishes to die rather than being kept alive artificially.

- On 28 November the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announces the launch of an 80 billion euro rescue package to stimulate the economy. According to the package, one-off payments will be made to Italy's poorest families, tolls on motorways will be frozen, and banks will be required to restrict mortgage rates. Analysts describe the measures as a relatively modest stimulus. The government has no room to manoeuvre after the Italian economy, the third largest in the Eurozone behind Germany and Italy, entered into a recession in the third quarter of 2008.

Slovenia

- On 3 November the President Danilo Turk officially appoints Borut Pahor as the new Prime Minister, following the National Assembly elections (lower house) on 21 September. Pahor is the leader of the centre-left party the Social Democrats (SD), who received most votes in the elections and gained 29 of the 90 seats in the Parliament.
- On 13 November the SD signs a coalition agreement with three other centre-left parties: Zares (New Politics) with nine seats in Parliament, the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS) with seven seats and Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) with five.

Croatia

- On 5 November the European Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn announces in his annual report that accession negotiations with the Croatian government will end at the end of 2009. Ratifying a treaty to integrate Croatia into the EU will take another year, potentially opening the door to their accession at the end of 2010 or early 2011. Although mostly positive, the report highlights certain obstacles for Croatia's accession, among them the territorial dispute with Slovenia.
- On 18 November the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decides that Croa-

tia has the right to bring a genocide case against Serbia. Croatia maintains that Serb attacks that caused the death and displacement of thousands of Croats during the Croatian independence war of 1991-1995 were acts of genocide, and therefore asks the International Court of Justice to order Serbia to pay compensation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- On 5 November by order of the Special Department for War Crimes of the State Prosecutor's Office, members of the Bosnian State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) arrest two men suspected of being involved in the genocide against Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, in July 1995.
- On 20 November the United Nations Security Council approves Resolution 1845 (2008), which extends the mission of the EU peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, the EU's Stabilisation Force (EUFOR), by one year.

Greece

- On 3 November five cars parked in front of the Greek navy offices in Athens and a mobile telephone shop are set on fire. On 4 November a homemade bomb explodes in the entrance of the office of Evangelos Meimarakis in the Defence Ministry. The explosion causes material damages and nobody claims responsibility for the attack. On 13 November suspected anarchist pyromaniacs set fire to five banks: Eurobank, ATE Bank and Geniki Bank in the northern town of Salonica.

Cyprus

- On 3, 11 and 13 November after commencing direct formal negotiations in September with the aim of reunifying the island, the Greek Cypriot President Dhimitrios Khristofias, and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Mehmet Ali Talat, meet to discuss a power sharing formula for the federal government proposal. On 17 November both leaders discuss the need to create independent institutions for the proposal of a federal judicial system.

Turkey

- On 2 November clashes break out in Yuksekova in the south-eastern province of Hakkari, between police and about 3,000 supporters of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party, who are demonstrating against the visit by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the Kurdish-dominated region. The previous day, two people had been injured in an explosion at the Justice and Development Party (AKP) building.
- On 3 November the President Abdullah Gül reasserts Turkey's ambition to form part of the EU and meet all criteria set by the member countries. On 5 November in its progress report the European Commission (EC) criticises the Turkish government for the slow pace of reforms, especially in reference to freedom of expression and human rights.
- On 9 November Prime Minister Erdogan says in an interview published by the *New York Times* that Turkey is prepared to act as mediator between the administration of the new US President and Iran. Erdogan argues that Turkey's status as a member of NATO and as a Muslim country with significant ties with Iran ideally positions it to serve as a bridge between both countries, with the aim of solving the long-standing dispute over Iran's nuclear ambitions, as well as the antagonism the State feels towards Israel.
- On 16 November divisions appear in the secular opposition as the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP) Deniz Baykal, when discussing woman wearing *hijab*, the Muslim headscarf, declares that "it is not right to discriminate against people because of what they wear." Baykal had previously opposed the lifting of the ban on wearing the *hijab* in public places. Critics interpret the change as an attempt to gain support in view of the upcoming local elections, scheduled for March 2009.
- On 26 November the Economy Minister Mehmet Simsek, and the Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Motaki sign two memorandums of understanding in Tehran with the aim of expanding economic cooperation between Turkey and Iran. The volume of trade between the two countries, which stood at 1.3 billion euros in 2002, is expected to reach 10 billion euros in 2008.

Syria

- On 6 November Syrian television broadcasts what it describes as "confessions" by those responsible for the car bomb attack on the outskirts of Damascus on 27 September, which killed 17 people. The terrorists say they belong to Fatah al-Islam, a Sunni Islamist faction that fought against the Lebanese army in 2007 in the Palestinian Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon.
- On 12 November newspapers reveal that unnamed diplomats have leaked details from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report. The report makes reference to traces of uranium supposedly found at the site where an alleged Syrian nuclear reactor was bombed by the Israeli air force in September 2007. IAEA inspectors visited the Kibar installation, in northeast Syria in June.
- On 17-18 November the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, David Miliband, visits Syria, where he meets with the President Bashar al-Assad, as well as other high-ranking government officials. This is the highest-level British visit since the Prime Minister Tony Blair visited the country in 2001 and held talks with al-Assad.

Lebanon

- On 19 November the IMF's Executive Board approves the sum of 37.3 billion dollars for emergency post-conflict assistance to Lebanon in support of the Lebanese government's programme for 2008-2009. The amount is added to the 74 million dollars given to Lebanon in May 2007.

Tunisia

- On 6 November the *Financial Times* reports that the Tunisian authorities have pardoned and released 21 prisoners with long prison sentences, including some with life sentences, for belonging to the Islamist group Hizb al-Nahda (Renaissance Party). The pardons mark the twenty-first anniversary of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's ascension to power.

Morocco

- On 4 November the government reportedly bans an issue of the French

publication *L'Express International* claiming that several articles that analyse the relation between Islam and Christianity contain insults to Islam. Khalid Naciri, Communications Minister and Government Spokesman, describes the issue as "offensive" and warns that it may undermine public order.

- On 8 November the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) celebrates its eighth congress in the western town of Skhirat. The USFP formed part of the coalition government in October 2007. The congress elects Abedlwahed Radi the Justice Minister as the party's new Secretary General.

European Union

- On 4 November, at a meeting in Marseille in France, Barcelona is chosen as the seat of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean. The Palace of Pedralbes will physically house the technical body of the 43-country union.

- On 6 November the Central European Bank (CEB) reduces official interest rates applicable in the Eurozone from 3.75% to 3.25%. At the same time the Bank of England reduces its base interest rate from 3% to 1.5%.

- On 7 November an informal summit, presided over by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the EU for the second half of 2008, is held to find common positions among the Member States for the upcoming G-20 summit. The meeting, which will take place on 15 November in Washington, will deal with the reform of the global financial system. The European Commission presents the controversial proposals for a massive fiscal stimulus of the EU economies, in view of the recession that 15 Eurozone countries have already entered. On 15-16 November the leaders of the G-20, the world's leading industrialised and emerging economies, meet in Washington DC to tackle the global financial crisis and agree on a plan to reform international financial institutions.

- On 21 November the Lisbon Treaty is ratified by the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag, with 243 votes in favour, 39 against and 67 abstentions. The ratification increases the number of countries that have ratified the text from 25 to 27. Ireland voted "no" in June 2008 and in the Czech Republic the Senate, the Par-

liament's upper house, is yet to ratify the treaty.

December 2008

Most European parliaments, including, Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Turkey approve budgets for 2009 with public spending cuts and a lower growth forecast than in 2008. During the month numerous packages are also approved aimed at stimulating the economy to tackle the global financial crisis. In Greece violent clashes break out after a 15-year-old boy is killed by police triggering protests and riots across the nation against the rising levels of poverty and unemployment. In the middle of the month in Paris, the Prime Minister of Montenegro submits his country's formal request to join the European Union to the current President of the EU Nicolas Sarkozy. Lebanon announces the appointment of its first ambassador in Syria, constituting the first step towards the normalisation of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Portugal

- On 12 December the government unveils a 2.2 billion euro economic recovery package as the country approaches recession amid the global financial crisis. The package allocates 800 million to "tax incentives", 500 million to schools, 250 to energy and infrastructures and 850 to employment programmes. The Prime Minister José Sócrates announces that the measures, which amount to 1.25% of the GDP, will lead to a 3% budget deficit in 2009, above the government forecast of 2.2%.

Spain

- On 18 December the Congress of Deputies (lower house) approves an austere budget for 2009, with 178 votes in favour and 163 against. The plan forecasts a 1% growth increase, which the Economy Minister Pedro Solbes describes as unrealistic following the collapse of the Spanish property market and the crisis in the financial markets. Solbes announces a deficit forecast of about 3% of the GDP for 2008, which will rise in 2009. The opposition People's

Party (PP) describes the budget as "legal fraud."

- On 31 December a car bomb explodes outside the offices of the regional television channel EITB in Bilbao. No one is hurt by the blast, which followed a warning issued by the ETA terrorist organisation.

France

- On 4 December the French President Nicolas Sarkozy reveals a 26 billion euro package equal to 1.3% of the GDP aimed at stimulating the economy, in light of the recession of the second and third quarter of 2008. The package represents France's contribution to the European fiscal stimulus, approved at the summit in Brussels on 11-12 December.

- On 11 December Ahmed Bentaieb, Mourad Loghmani, Karmel Mosbah and Fredj Aloulou, of Tunisian origin, are sentenced by a court in Paris to varying prison terms for attempting to recruit Muslims for the Iraqi insurgency. It is believed that the four are connected with a cell in Belgium that had recruited the converted Muslim Muriel Degauque, who became the first female European suicide bomber in Iraq in 2005.

- On 17 December Sarkozy unveils a plan to help members of poorer communities access secondary education and employment. The plan requires elite institutions to increase their quota for students receiving grants while the 100 largest companies will carry out a pilot test of employee selection with anonymous resumes, which do not reveal the candidate's origin.

Italy

- On 1 December Venice suffers its worst floods since 1986. On 11 December the fire service has to rescue dozens of people trapped in their cars in the streets of Rome. Four people die as a consequence of the heavy rainfall.

- On 3 December the *Financial Times* reports that the Italian industry's 30% reduction in electricity consumption in October and November is a clear sign of the economic recession. Steel and car production is sharply reduced in response to the falling national and international demand for cars, which is down

29% compared with the same month in 2007.

- On 12 December hundreds of teachers take part in a general strike against government cuts in education spending.
- On 18 December the founder of the dairy corporation Parmalat, Calisto Tanzi, is sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment charged with manipulating share prices, hindering auditors and false accounting in relation with the company's bankruptcy in 2003.

Malta

- On 30 December a Maltese patrol rescues 140 sub-Saharan immigrants from Somalia, Nigeria and Ghana found drifting in a small boat, who intended to enter the EU via Malta.

Croatia

- On 17 December the Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor announces his country's veto on new chapters in the process of Croatia's EU accession due to a territorial dispute.

Serbia

- On 12 December the United Nations Security Council authorises the UN Secretary General to appoint, as a temporary measure and within existing resources, additional *ad litem* judges to the court, in order to complete pending trials and begin new ones. The measure is intended to allow the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (TPIY) to meet its completion strategy.
- On 30 December the President Boris Tadic dismisses General Zdravko Ponos as Chief of General Staff, a post he had held since December 2006. On 31 December the *Financial Times* reports that Ponos, a reformist general, had discredited the Defence Minister Dragan Sutanovac declaring that he "lacked strategy". The paper adds that Ponos had not submitted a single report to Sutanovac in a year.

Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244

- On 9 December following months of misunderstandings between coun-

tries, the police and judicial mission deployed by the EU (EULEX) in Kosovo assumes full responsibility of security and initiates its operations in the territory. At a press conference together with President Fatmir Sejdiu and the Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, the head of EULEX Yves de Kermabon, announces that the mission has been deployed throughout the country, including the Serb-majority northern region.

- On 26 December troops from the Serbian Interior Ministry arrest 10 former members of the dismantled Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) for alleged war crimes in the Kosovo war between 1998-1999. The arrests are made in a raid in the Presevo region, which borders Kosovo and has an ethnic Albanian majority.

Montenegro

- On 15 December in Paris the Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic presents Montenegro's formal application for European Union membership to the EU President Nicolas Sarkozy. The EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn recognises Montenegro's "important progress" in its preparations for "European integration" and welcomes the EU accession candidature of the Balkan state.

Macedonia

- On 19 December the Agence France-Presse reports that Macedonia has decided to end its military commitment in Iraq and that its troops will leave the country on Friday 17 December.

Greece

- On 6 December Greece experiences its largest protest in the last ten years after 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoriopoulos is shot dead by police in the district of Exarchia, in central Athens. According to the police, they were assaulted by teenagers who threw stones at them. On 7 December 24 banks, 35 businesses, 22 cars and 12 houses in Athens alone were set on fire, when groups of left-wing and anarchist youths clash with police. The attacks, initially directed at the police, become protests against the rising levels of unemploy-

ment and poverty. On 10 December a court orders that two police officers be detained pending trial for the death of the boy. Epaminondas Korkoneas, the officer who fired, is charged with premeditated manslaughter and his partner Vasiliios Saraliotis as an accomplice.

- On 10 December the party of Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, New Democracy (ND), loses a seat in the Vouli (Parliament) when he expels Petros Tatoulis for having distanced himself from the party. The expulsion leaves ND with a parliamentary majority of just one seat.
- On 22 December the Vouli approves the State budgets for 2009 by 151 votes to 147, which foresee a 2% deficit, a 2.7% growth, compared with 3.2% in 2008, and 3% inflation.

Cyprus

- On 2 and 16 December the Greek Cypriot President Dhimitrios Christofias and the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Mehmet Ali Talat, hold fresh meetings to discuss the island's reunification after formal direct negotiations were initiated in September. On 22 December both leaders admit that progress until now has been insufficient but reassert their wishes to continue working for a solution to the dispute.
- On 12 December a prisoner charged with rape escapes from a private hospital in Nicosia. On 17 December, as a result of the incident, Kipros Khrysostomidhis resigns as Justice Minister. On 22 December Loukas Louka is appointed as the new Justice Minister.
- On 12 December the United Nations Security Council approves resolution 1847 (2008), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) by six months.
- On 12 December the former Greek Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos dies aged 74. Papadopoulos convinced the Greek Cypriots to reject the UN's plan for reunification of the island and oversaw the EU accession of the Greek side in May 2004.
- On 17 December the Council of Ministers decides to reduce the length of military service from 25 to 24 months.
- On 18 December the House of Representatives (Parliament) approves the

fiscal budget for 2009 by 33 votes to 20. This constitutes the first budget adopted since the euro was brought into circulation in Cyprus.

Turkey

- On 4 December Leyla Zana, a known Kurdish activist and former member of the now-defunct and banned pro-Kurdish Democratic Party is sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for praising the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), included on Europe's list of terrorist organisations.
- On 15 December 200 intellectuals and writers issue a public apology over the Internet for the murder of 1.5 million Armenians in Ottoman Turkey, between 1915 and 1923. The apology, in the form of an open letter extended to all Turks who want to put their name to it, provokes protests by nationalists who consider it to be a national betrayal. The Turkish authorities consider the death of the Armenians as collateral damage during the war. The organisers declare that more than 11,000 people have signed the letter in two days.
- On 16 December the Turkish army launches air strikes against PKK positions in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Three Turkish soldiers and two PKK members are killed in clashes in December. Following a meeting on 26 December with his Iraqi counterpart, Nouri al-Maliki the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announces that both countries will work together to fight PKK members operating along the border between Turkey and Iraq.
- On 19 December Turkey opens two new chapters of negotiation with the EU, with reference to the free movement of capital and the information society and media, bringing the total number of chapters opened since accession negotiations began in 2005 to 10 out of 35. On 21 December the EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn urges Turkey to overcome internal divisions and resume long-delayed reforms as

soon as possible, declaring that 2009 will be a key year for determining whether Turkey is serious about EU accession.

- On 27 December the Grand National Assembly (Parliament), approves the fiscal budget for 2009, which foresees a deficit of 10.4 billion new Turkish lira, by 324 votes in favour and 117 against. As a result, budgets allocated to most ministries are reduced by up to 16% to cut overall spending.

Syria

- On 18 December the Lebanese Information Minister Tarek Mitri names the first Lebanese Ambassador to Syria, although the name will not be disclosed until Syria gives its approval. The appointment constitutes the first step towards normalisation of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Lebanon

- On 16 December the UN Security Council adopts resolution 1852 (2008), which extends the mandate of the United Nation's International Independent Investigation Commission for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri up to 28 February 2009.
- On 17 December Russia strengthens its influence over the Middle East by announcing the donation of 10 MiG-29 Fulcrum planes to Lebanon. Russian officials assert that the gift of these second-hand planes is part of a cooperation deal on defence in which Russia will also provide training to the Lebanese military.

Jordan

- On 22 December the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on water takes place, which had been delayed due to disagreements between the Arab League and Israel. At the inauguration Jordan calls for regional cooperation to create a sustainable management system of water resources in the Middle East.

Libya

- On 27 December Libya receives US career diplomat Gene Cretz, the first US ambassador to Libya since the seventies.

Tunisia

- On 13 December Sadok Chourou, former leader of the banned Islamist organisation Al Nahda, is imprisoned accused of resuming activity with the group. Chourou had served 18 years' imprisonment for leading the organisation and had been released thanks to a government pardon for 21 members of the group, coinciding with the twenty-first anniversary of the Tunisian President Zine al Abidine Ben Ali's accession to power.

Gulf Cooperation Council

- On 29-30 December the 21st meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) takes place in Muscat, the capital of Oman. The GCC leaders approve a security strategy between six of the Member States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). The GCC leaders strongly condemn the "flagrant aggression" against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and call for unity between the Palestinian factions.

Climate Change

- Between 1-13 December the United Nations Climate Change Conference is held in Poznań in Poland. This is the last of a series of meetings to try to give the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change a treaty successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which ends in 2012. The different parties commit to preparing a draft for the Bonn Conference in Germany scheduled for June 2009, in preparation for a final text that will have to be agreed in Copenhagen in December 2009.