VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence has strongly criticized European allies for their stance on Iran and Venezuela in a speech at the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Pence told delegates it was time for the EU to stop undermining U.S. sanctions against Iran.

"The time has come for our European partners to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and join us as we bring the economic and diplomatic pressure necessary to give the Iranian people, the region and the world the peace, security and freedom they deserve."

Pence's remarks came after German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a spirited speech defending Europe's decision to stand by the Iran nuclear deal and a multilateral approach to global affairs.

Pence also called on the EU to recognize Venezuelan National Assembly leader Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of that country.

The United States has demanded that President Nicholás Maduro step down because his last election is considered illegitimate.

The chairman of Nigeria's Electoral Commission says the decision to delay presidential elections until February 23 was painful but necessary to preserve Nigerian democracy.

Speaking in Abuja, Mahmood Yakubu said that logistical setbacks mean that all polling stations would not have been open in time for the vote.

The INEC chairman also said more time was needed to adjust equipment that reads voters' identity cards.

"Our lCT Department advised us that it would require 5 to 6 days to reconfigure about 180,000 Smart Card Readers earlier programmed to work only on election day."

President Muhammadu Buhari is running against Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president.

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Theodore McCarrick, the first American cardinal accused of sexual abuse, is no longer a Roman Catholic priest.

Reuters correspondent Francis Maguire reports.

McCarrick was once the archbishop of Washington, D.C. and had gathered reputation as a power broker before the scandal hit.

When he was initially demoted from the rank of cardinal last July, it was the first time someone had been stripped the such a title in almost hundred years.

And Saturday's announcement comes just days before a major summit at the Vatican where top clergy will discuss the global sexual abuse crisis.

A range of allegations against McCarrick date back five decades and include sexual abuse of a 16 year old boy, which he says he doesn't recollect.

Several current and former clergy also claim he used his authority to force subordinates to have sex with him.

It's unclear where McCarrick may go from here.

Francis Maguire of Reuters.

Fifteen Egyptian military personnel were killed in an attack at a military checkpoint outside the northern Sinai town of el-Arish.

Edward Yeranian reports from Cairo.

Arab media reported the terrorist attack Saturday took place at a military checkpoint outside the northern Sinai town of el-Arish, not far from the town of Sheikh Zuweid, the scene of previous terror attacks.

Egyptian army spokesman Tamer el-Refai wrote on his Facebook page that "14 soldiers and an officer were killed or wounded," adding that the army responded by killing seven Islamic militants. The attack reportedly took place about dawn.

Islamic State is claiming responsibility for the attack through its AMAQ news agency though the group offered no proof for its claim.

Edward Yeranian, for VOA news, Cairo.

Fighters from the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces battled the Islamic State group in the Syrian town of Baghouz in Deir el-Zour province on Saturday.

An SDF commander said his forces are closing in on Islamic State militants in a tiny area of less than one square kilometer and will soon declare the defeat of the militant group.

The capture of the last pocket still held by IS fighters would mark the end of a four-year global campaign to end the extremist group's hold-on territory in Syria and Iraq.

Thousands of "yellow vest" protesters marched through Paris, Bordeaux and Toulouse for the 14th straight week on Saturday though the numbers were smaller than previous weeks.

There were clashes and arrests in several cities and police in Paris detained at least 15 people. But the violence appeared down from last weekend.

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