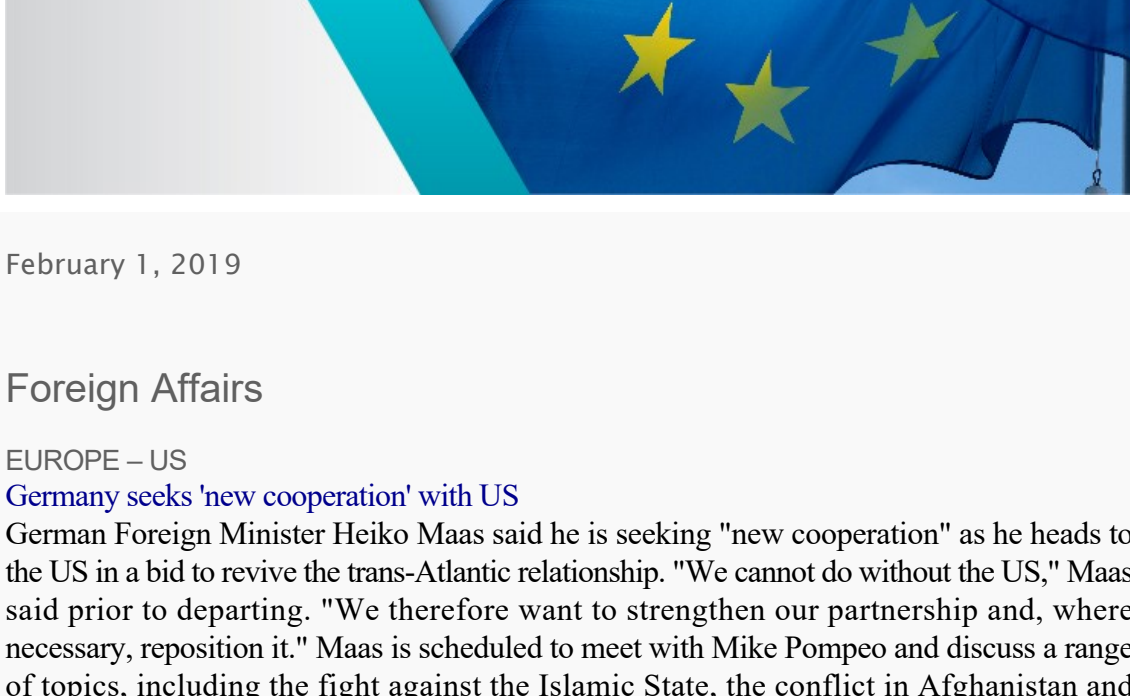




February 1, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

#### Germany seeks 'new cooperation' with US

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said he is seeking "new cooperation" as he heads to the US in a bid to revive the trans-Atlantic relationship. "We cannot do without the US," Maas said prior to departing. "We therefore want to strengthen our partnership and, where necessary, reposition it." Maas is scheduled to meet with Mike Pompeo and discuss a range of topics, including the fight against the Islamic State, the conflict in Afghanistan and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. *[Deutsche-Welle, January 23, 2019]*

#### Upcoming Mideast conference in Warsaw not aimed at demonizing Iran, U.S. Says

The United States and Poland are sponsoring an international conference February 13-14 to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. The US conveyed that the conference isn't aimed at demonizing Iran, which has denounced the gathering as America's anti-Iran "circus." The US deputy ambassador to the UN, Jonathan Cohen, stated the meeting will be a brainstorming session to "develop the outline of a stronger security architecture" in the Mideast with sessions on the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, missile development, extremism and cybersecurity. *[Haaretz, January 23, 2019]*

### EUROPE – RUSSIA

#### NATO, Russia talks fail to save arms treaty

Senior NATO and Russian officials failed to make a breakthrough in talks on saving the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, alarming a threat of a renewed arms race in Europe. Western nations claim that Russia's latest generation of medium-range missiles breach the terms of the Cold War-era INF treaty, and put European cities at risk. The United States has warned that it will begin a six-month withdrawal process from the treaty on Feb. 2 unless Russia withdraws the 9M729 ground-based missile system. *[The Japan News, January 26, 2019]*

#### In Davos, fears of Russian interference in Ukraine election

Ukrainian leadership and Western supporters expressed fears over Russian interference in Ukraine's upcoming elections, at a meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. "For Russia, this election is a final chance to get its revenge," Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko told AFP following the "Ukrainian Breakfast" event. The election comes as relations between Russia and Ukraine are in tatters. *[The Straits Times, January 25, 2019]*

### EUROPE – EAST ASIA

#### EU Tech Chief warns again on cyber threat from China

The EU's digital chief is urging member states to consider the risk of partnering with Chinese companies like Huawei. In an interview, Andrus Ansip, European Commission Vice-President for digital affairs, said China's National Intelligence Law has increased the risk in dealing with Chinese companies in Europe. The law instructs that any organization and citizen must support and assist national intelligence in their investigations and to keep information related to such investigations. The comments by Ansip come as Huawei is under mounting scrutiny by governments around the world. *[Bloomberg, January 25, 2019]*

#### Press release: European Commission adopts adequacy decision on Japan, creating the world's largest area of safe data flows.

The Commission has adopted an agreement with Japan, allowing for data to flow freely between the two entities, making it the world's largest area of safe data flow. This is the last step in the procedure launched in September 2018, which included the opinion of the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) and the agreement from a committee composed of representatives of the EU Member States. Together with its equivalent decision adopted today by Japan, the agreement came into effect on January 23. *[European Commission, January 23, 2019]*

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

#### Iran to 'reconsider' relations with Europe if France imposes further sanctions

Iran warned that if France imposes additional sanctions on Tehran, the Islamic Republic will reconsider its ties to Europe while continuing its missile development. Iran's foreign ministry accused France of being a destabilizing force in the region, after French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian threatened new sanctions against Tehran if it continues to develop its missile program. Le Drian also demanded that Iran change its behavior in the region, specifically regarding its military presence in Syria. *[24 News, January 26, 2019]*

#### Iran furms as Germany bans Iranian airline for security reasons

Iran reacted angrily to Germany's announcement that it would ban Iranian airline Mahan Air from German airports. "This measure is a blatant violation of all international rules, including the Chicago Convention, and there is no doubt that it has been adopted under the US pressures," said the head of the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization, Ali Abedzadeh. According to the German foreign minister, Mahan Air was involved in transferring Iranian military equipment and personnel to Syria and other regional conflict zones. A spokesman for the German government denied that the decision was a result of US pressure. "The German decision is based on considerations of our security needs," he stated. *[The Jerusalem Post, January 27, 2019]*

#### Syria's Assad suspends special visas for EU diplomats

The European Commission said that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad had suspended special visas for European Union diplomats to Damascus. The special permission to use multiple-entry Syrian visas for access to Damascus was revoked in the beginning of January with no explanation from the Syrian government, complicating efforts to distribute humanitarian aid to civil war victims. *[Reuters, January 24, 2019]*

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

#### Ireland passes BDS bill banning Israel settlement goods

Ireland has advanced legislation which will prevent the sale of goods from Israel's West Bank settlements. The lower house of the Irish parliament – the Dail – voted in favor of the bill, which was previously passed through the parliament's upper house – the Seanad. Officially known as the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill, it still needs to pass several more stages before being signed into Irish law, but it is expected to progress given its broad support from Irish opposition parties. The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that "Israel is outraged over the legislation against it in the Dail which is indicative of hypocrisy and anti-Semitism". *[Middle East Monitor, January 25, 2019]*

#### Rivlin warns Macron: Israel may have to hit Hezbollah rocket factories in Beirut

President Reuven Rivlin told French President Emmanuel Macron that Israel could be forced to strike the Hezbollah's rocket-building operations "in the heart of Beirut," a development he warned would drag Lebanon into a brutal regional war that neither side wants. Rivlin's remarks came during a meeting with the French President during an official visit to mark 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. At a press conference, Macron said that Israel's security "remains for us one of the most important principles of regional security" and that he had expressed his concerns to Rivlin over recent rocket fire from Syria directed at Israel. *[The Times of Israel, January 23, 2019]*

#### Britain's first Brexit-era trade deal will be with Israel, minister says

British Trade Secretary Liam Fox announced that his country has secured a first Brexit trade deal, and that an agreement with Israel was finalized "in principle." "As Britain prepares to leave the European Union and to ensure continuity for our businesses in both directions, we've reached agreement in principle today with our colleagues in Israel," the official said in a joint statement with Israel's economy minister Eli Cohen at the World Economic Forum in Davos. *[24 News, January 24, 2019]*

#### 'Israel must secure its existence,' Merkel says on Syria airstrikes

German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed understanding for Israel's concern over Iran, saying it was "important and right" for Israel to represent its security interests. "Iran has policies that are threatening to Israel, that's correct," said Merkel in an interview aired on Israeli radio in light of Holocaust Memorial Day. The German Chancellor continued with: "Israel must secure its existence, and the situation in Syria is naturally also very threatening for Israel." "That's also why we're working to ensure, for example, that no Iranian forces can come near the Golan Heights," *[Haaretz, January 28, 2019]*

#### Israel to host summit for Europe's emerging nationalist bloc

Israel will host the next summit meeting of the Visegrad nations – Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia – on February 18 and 19 in Jerusalem. The Visegrad, or V-4 group, are considered to be the most nationalist and right-wing countries in the European Union, and Netanyahu has cultivated relations with them over the past year as part of a plan to weaken EU consensus on issues concerning the Palestinians and Iran. *[Haaretz, January 28, 2019]*

#### Germany considering Israeli defense system to protect tanks from RPGS

Israel's active protection systems (APS) might soon be supplied to Germany for it's Leopard 2 main battle tank. A spokesman for Rafael Advanced Defense Systems confirmed reports that the company will be testing the system on the Leopard 2 later this year, along with the tank's manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann. A total of 17 tanks will be equipped with the APS, with a unit training and qualifying to operate it by the following year. *[The Jerusalem Post, January 27, 2019]*

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

#### No renegotiation, says EU after MPs back plan to replace backstop

Theresa May immediately hit a brick wall in Brussels after being backed by MPs to reopen the withdrawal agreement, as the President of the European Council Donald Tusk, with the backing of French President Emmanuel Macron, said the EU would not renegotiate. Tusk, urged Prime Minister May to explain her next steps, claiming the agreement negotiated over the last 20 months "remains the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union". *[The Guardian, January 29, 2019]*

#### Brexit: MPs reject move to delay departure date

MPs have voted against a proposal to delay Brexit in order to prevent the UK leaving without a deal. Prime Minister May has urged MPs to back another amendment that would propose "alternative arrangements" to the controversial Irish backstop plan. The backstop is the insurance policy in Mrs May's plan to prevent checks on goods and people returning to the Northern Ireland border, which some MPs fear could leave the UK tied to the EU's rules indefinitely. *[BBC, January 29, 2019]*

#### EU publishes survey on perceptions of antisemitism and the Holocaust

A survey investigating the perceptions of antisemitism in the 28 EU Member States was presented in Brussels by European Commissioner Věra Jourová. In this survey, 27,643 respondents were asked about their perception of antisemitism as a problem, its evolution over the last five years and the specific manifestations of antisemitism. At a speech in the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Commissioner Jourová said that the survey suggest that: "The lower the education level, the lower the awareness" of the Holocaust. "Education is key to not only understanding the Shoah as the abyss of humanity, but also to increasing awareness of antisemitism and how it is still very much alive in Europe today." Jourová announced she is setting up a working group to help educate people on the matter. *[European Jewish Congress, January 22, 2019]*

#### Facebook tightens EU political ad rules, adds 'paid for by' disclaimers

Facebook says it's tightening requirements for political ads in the European Union ahead of bloc-wide elections scheduled for May. It is part of an increased effort to fight misinformation and grow transparency on its platforms. The social media platform said that starting in late March, political ad buyers will need to have their identities confirmed before placing ads. Each ad will also be entered into a publicly searchable archive with detailed information on who paid for it and the people it has reached. Hundreds of millions of people in 27 EU member countries are set to vote in May for 705 lawmakers in the bloc's parliament. *[The Japan Times, January 29, 2019]*

#### Big parties' power grab sparks outrage in European Parliament

Leading parties in the European Parliament want to tighten the rules on forming a group in the assembly in a move that anti-establishment politicians say is designed to deprive them of power and influence. The proposal was put forth by the Socialists, which they claim is meant to end "fake groups" of parties that work together to access money and privileges from the Parliament, but who don't vote together — or even meet up. MEPs will vote on the measure, which could be significant in determining who wields power in the legislature, particularly in the next parliamentary term following May's European election. *[Politico, January 29, 2019]*

#### Hungary to shun Italian-led euroseptic alliance, stick with allies: official

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's ruling Fidesz party will not join the euroseptic alliance spearheaded by Italy's Matteo Salvini in the run-up to European Parliament elections despite their common hard line on immigration. Early in January, Salvini proposed that Italy and Poland join forces to reshape Europe. Orban initially indicated his support for Salvini's alliance, but a senior aide to Orban stated that Fidesz would work on bolstering the poll showing of Hungarian candidates for the European People's Party. *[Reuters, January 30, 2019]*

#### European Union continues to fund BDS - Israeli report

The EU continues to fund organizations that boycott Israel, according to a report published by the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. The Money Trail Second Edition presented the ministry's updated research regarding financial aid granted by EU institutions to Palestinian and European non-governmental organizations that promote boycotts against the State of Israel. The report investigates the millions of euros used in funding between 2017 and 2018, for which full data has still not yet been released by the EU. In particular, the research highlights ten NGOs that are active in promoting boycotts on Israel, based mainly on data published by the EU's Financial Transparency System (FTS) and on data released by European and Palestinian organizations. However, the research covered direct financial aid regardless of the purpose of such funding. *[The Jerusalem Post, January 23, 2019]*

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### Germany sees drop in asylum claims in 2018

German government figures unveiled that a total of 185,853 asylum applications were lodged in 2018 — a 16 percent drop from the previous year. Of those claims, around 161,931 came from first-time applicants, while just under 24,000 were follow-up requests. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who presented the data along with the government's 2016-17 migration report in Berlin, said a "steady decline" over the past two years indicated policy measures to restrict migration were working. *[Deutsche-Welle, January 23, 2019]*

#### Macedonia and Greece: Vote settles 27-year name dispute

Greece's parliament has voted narrowly to back a historic agreement ending a 27-year dispute over its northern neighbor's name, which will now become North Macedonia. Failure to find an appropriate name meant that Greece frustrated Macedonia's drive to join both NATO and the European Union. Opposition to the deal is strongest in the northern Greek region of Macedonia, and polls suggest more than 60% of Greeks dislike it. *[BBC, January 25, 2019]*

#### Italy evicts more than 500 people from refugee centre

More than 500 people are being forcibly removed from a refugee reception center in a town close to Rome in accordance with new immigration measures in Italy. The move is the first major eviction since rightwing government enacted Salvini's hardline migration law. The bill scrapped humanitarian protection status and suspended the refugee application process for those considered "socially dangerous" or who have been convicted of a crime. *[The Guardian, January 23, 2019]*

#### New France-Germany treaty aims to revive EU

For the 56th anniversary of the Elysee Treaty, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel signed a new friendship treat, designed to deepen the Franco-German friendship. This new extension is intended to send a political message, namely that Berlin and Paris want to tackle the next stage in Franco-German cooperation and prepare the ground for EU reform. At the same time, the intensified partnership is seen as a challenge to the rising populism and nationalism in Europe. In the new declaration, Merkel and Macron have addressed initiatives in various policy areas that would strengthen cooperation between the two states. *[Deutsche-Welle, January 22, 2019]*

#### Poland's democratic spring: the fightback starts here

Thousands of Poles are determined to secure clean, democratic governance promised to them in the wake of the collapse of communism 30 years ago. From air quality to sex education and corruption, citizens across the country are taking on the authorities. Poland has become a byword for nationalist populism in recent years. But behind the scenes there seems to be a flourishing grassroots movement against the flaws in the country's democratic culture on which the populists feed. *[The Guardian, January 30, 2019]*

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

#### Germany 'must tell stories' of Holocaust victims to combat anti-Semitism, Merkel says

Ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Merkel released a video addressing the responsibility to ensure "zero tolerance" of xenophobia and all forms of anti-Semitism. The German chancellor called for new forms of remembrance due to the dwindling number of survivors from the Nazi era, and because of persistent hatred and incitement arising. Merkel also expressed deep regret about anti-Semitism among Germans, as well as hatred of Jews among Muslim migrants and a hatred of Israel that she said could not be tolerated. *[Haaretz, January 26, 2019]*

#### Far-right AfD barred from Buchenwald concentration camp memorial services

Politicians from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) have been barred from attending Holocaust remembrance ceremonies at the Buchenwald concentration camp, the camp's memorial foundation stated. The foundation said the AfD could not take part in any future services "until it has convincingly distanced itself from the anti-democratic and anti-human rights stances and historical revisionism within the party." *[Deutsche-Welle, January 27, 2019]*

#### Jewish journalist announces Belgium Parliament Bid, seeks reversal of slaughter ban

Michael Freilich, the former editor-in-chief of Belgium's largest Jewish newspaper, Joods Actueel, announced that he is running for parliament, joining the New Flemish Alliance (NVA) center-right party, the largest in the federal parliament. He is running for office partly to reverse recent bans in the country on the slaughter of conscious animals for meat, meaning this would ban kosher meat from being sold. The NVA has placed Freilich in the fifth slot of its ticket for the May 26 regional elections, ensuring that Freilich will become a lawmaker the lower house. A victory would make him the first Orthodox Jew to serve there. *[Haaretz, January 23, 2019]*

#### One in 20 Britons does not believe Holocaust took place, poll finds

One in 20 British adults do not believe the Holocaust happened, and 8% say that the scale of the genocide has been exaggerated, according to a poll marking Holocaust Memorial Day. Almost half of those questioned said they did not know how many Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and one in five grossly underestimated the number, saying that fewer than two million were killed. *[The Observer, 27 January 2019]*