



January 11, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US
[U.S. downgraded E.U.'s diplomatic status \(but didn't say anything\)](#)

The Trump administration downgraded the diplomatic status of the European Union's delegation to the United States last year without making a formal announcement or informing the organization about the change. The EU's demotion from a member state to an international organization became clear at the funeral of President George Bush, when the U.S. Ambassador to the EU, Mr. O'Sullivan, was not called in the expected order, dictated by diplomatic protocols. [*The New York Times*, January 8, 2019]

[Trump speaks with Macron by phone over Syria](#)

President Donald Trump and President Macron held a phone conversation on Monday discussing the situation in Syria. In a statement released by the White House, the two leaders discussed their cooperation in Syria, including the commitment of both countries to the destruction of ISIS, "as well as plans for a strong, deliberate and coordinated withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria". [*Xinhua*, January 8, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

[Europe is fast-becoming a natural gas battleground for Russia and the US](#)

The EU, which consists of 28 countries and a combined estimated population of 512 million people, is a prized market and political battleground for the world's largest energy exporters, especially for those exporting natural gas. Russia has long dominated the role of a supplier of natural gas to Europe, but the U.S. is looking to challenge Russia by increasing its imports of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG). Europe certainly appears keen to distance itself off of Russian gas, and is looking at approaching the U.S. [*CNBC*, January 8, 2019]

[Ukraine: new Orthodox church gains independence from Moscow](#)

The biggest rift in modern history in Christianity is expected to occur after a new Orthodox church in Ukraine gains formal independence from Moscow. This move is set to heighten already strained geopolitical tensions in the region. The Ukrainian church has been under the jurisdiction of the Moscow since 1686, and its independence is a heavy blow to Moscow. The Russian church, which currently has about 150 million Orthodox Christians under its authority, could lose a fifth of its members. [*The Guardian*, January 5, 2019]

[Putin and Turkey's Erdogan to hold talks in Russia soon: Kremlin](#)

The Kremlin said that it is expecting to host Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan for talks with President Vladimir Putin soon, but that no date had been agreed to yet. Both Presidents are major players in the conflict in Syria, and reached an agreement in September aimed at demilitarizing and preventing a Syrian army offensive against the Idlib region. [*Reuters*, January 9, 2019]

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

[China poses greatest threat to UK as global super-power, claims new study](#)

In an annual report analyzing the world's wealthiest countries, Britain maintained its place as the world's second most powerful nation, behind the U.S. The report suggested however that China is the single biggest threat to the UK's position as a global superpower. The report - based on a series of factors including economic performance, technological expertise, military might and diplomatic leverage - placed China in third above France, Germany and Japan. [*The Telegraph*, January 4, 2019]

[North Korean ambassador to Italy in hiding, South Korean MP says](#)

The diplomat Jo Song-gil & North Korea's acting ambassador to Italy has gone into hiding, raising the question whether the senior official is defecting from the Korean regime. Song-gil has sought asylum, and Italian authorities are "agonising" over what to do. However, Italian officials have said that they were "protecting him in a safe place". [*The Guardian*, January 3, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

[Did Iran plot four attacks in Europe? The Dutch government thinks so](#)

The EU imposed sanctions on Iran's intelligence ministry and two Iranian nationals as the Dutch government accused Iran of their likely involvement in two assassination plots in the Netherlands. The allegations were written in a letter released by the Dutch government to parliament. The letter suggests that Iran is suspected in at least four assassination and bomb plots in Europe since 2015, which will probably bolster the Trump administration's calls for greater international isolation of the regime in Tehran. [*The Washington Post*, January 8, 2019]

[Iranians slam new EU sanctions as JCPOA hangs in balance](#)

Iran has condemned the new EU sanctions targeting its Intelligence Ministry over alleged assassination plots, especially as they are imposed when Tehran is expecting a long-stalled European payment mechanism to circumvent US sanctions. The measures taken by the EU are the first severe actions against Iran since the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The sanctions have generated many responses from Iranian officials, who are displeased with the EU's sanctions. [*Al-Monitor*, January 9, 2019]

[Mogherini: UAE is Strong Ally of European Union](#)

Dr. Amal Al Qubaisi, Speaker of the UAE Parliament, led a high-level delegation to the European Parliament in Brussels, and met with the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini. Together they discussed the future of UAE-EU relations. Dr Al Qubaisi highlighted the issue of the three UAE islands occupied by Iran and called to resolve the issue through direct negotiations or international arbitration. Mogherini stressed the importance of their partnership and noted that the EU wants to strengthen cooperation with the UAE, a valuable ally in the fight against terrorism and in achieving security and stability. [*Financial Post*, December 8, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

[Israel welcomes European sanctions on Iran over plots to attack dissidents](#)

In a rare show of support for EU policies towards the Middle East, Israel welcomed the EU's declaration that it would implement sanctions towards Iran over suspicions that the regime planned to kill opposition activists in Europe. "The newly imposed sanctions offer some hope that a growing number of countries are willing to take an active, clear stand against Iran's global campaign of terrorism" the Foreign Ministry tweeted. [*The Times of Israel*, January 9, 2019]

[Dutch pensions group removes top Israeli banks from blacklist](#)

PGGM, a large Dutch pensions group, has reversed its blacklisting of Israeli banks from 2014. Its decision to divest from all five leading Israeli banks over "ethical concerns" was due to their presence and actions in the West Bank. The decision to blacklist was seen as a major victory for the BDS movement. The newspaper the Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad, revealed that now the Israeli banks have been taken off the blacklist and are now eligible for investment and other transactions by PGGM. [*Haaretz*, January 10, 2019]

[Jeremy Corbyn filmed applauding Jewish extremist who called for 'dismantling' of Israel](#)

The leader of the British Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn, was filmed applauding in 2011 a speaker at a conference who called for the dismantling of Israel, which he also said "kidnapped" Judaism. The footage which was published was taken at a pro-Palestinian conference that Corbyn attended in 2011 alongside several anti-Israel activists who have been accused of anti-Semitism. [*Haaretz*, January 4, 2019]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

[Migrant crisis: Illegal entries to EU at lowest level in five years](#)

The number of people caught trying to enter the EU illegally has fallen to its lowest level in five years, the bloc's border agency said. An estimated 150,000 illegal crossings were registered by Frontex last year, the lowest amount since 2013. The agency highlighted a sharp decrease in refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Italy, where a populist government has refused to allow rescue boats to dock. However, Spain had doubled for the second year in a row with refugee arrivals. The recent fall in the number of migrants attempting to take the central Mediterranean route to Italy follows the election of a populist government that has taken a hardline stance on immigration. [*BBC*, January 4, 2018]

[Head of the EU Commission: Juncker supports EU unemployment insurance](#)

The President of the EU Commission expressed his support for the idea of creating an unemployment insurance in the EU. He justifies that this could help cushion sudden economic crises in a country. However, Juncker stated: "Although I am very much in favor of European unemployment insurance, it should not be a free ticket for countries that are not reforming and therefore are entering difficulties." [*Newsbreezer*, January 5, 2019]

[Brexit: PM 'working to get further EU assurances'](#)

Theresa May said that after delaying last month's vote in the House of Commons, there was "some further movement from the EU" at December's European Council. However, Labour members accused ministers of trying to "run down the clock" to coerce the UK into accepting a "botched deal". Labour sources said that they will back moves by MPs to block a no-deal exit. More than 200 MPs have signed a letter to Prime Minister May, urging her to rule out a no-deal Brexit. [*BBC*, January 7, 2019]

[EU nations reach deal on stranded migrants, Malta announces](#)

The Prime Minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat, announced that the 49 people onboard two private rescue ships in the Mediterranean, would disembark in Valletta before being sent to Italy, France, Germany, Portugal, Ireland, Romania, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The deal also decides the future of another 249 rescued migrants already in the island nation. [*BBC*, January 9, 2019]

[Matteo Salvini says Italy and Poland could build new Europe](#)

Italy's interior minister, Matteo Salvini, stated that Italy and Poland could trigger a "European spring" that could break the dominant "Germany-France axis" as he strives to forge far-right alliances before the European parliamentary elections in May. Salvini travelled to Poland for strategy meetings with politicians of the ruling Law and Justice party. Salvini's & the Law and Justice parties share similar anti-immigration rhetoric, as well as anti-Muslim and Eurosceptic views. [*The Guardian*, January 9, 2019]

[EU puzzled by downgrade of its ambassador to Washington](#)

The EU is discussing the implications of the change in diplomatic protocol in the US, which resulted in the EU having been downgraded to the level of an international organization, together with the African Union. The downgrade was probably implemented in late October or early November and was not widely publicized. When EU diplomats asked for explanations, they were told that the US side forgot to notify them. [*EURACTIV*, January 8, 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

[Spain sees new record in migrant arrivals in 2018](#)

With Italy's harsh implementation of a 'Security Law' to stop the flow of migrants arrivals, Spain now seems to be the main gateway for African migrants who are finding their way to Europe. In 2018, Madrid saw a dramatic increase in undocumented migration to the country with more than 57,000 arrivals, which represents around 50% of undocumented migrants who crossed the Mediterranean this year. [*El Pais*, January 2, 2019]

[Thousands in Budapest march against 'slave law' forcing overtime on workers](#)

At least 10,000 people marched through Budapest, denouncing Hungary's harsh new legislation that has been nicknamed the "slave law". The law, which was passed in December, allows companies to demand that staff work up to 400 hours overtime a year: the equivalent of an extra day a week. Many who attended the protests also channelled their wider concerns of Orban's attacks on academia, the judiciary and media. [*The Guardian*, January 5, 2019]

[Italian government rift over fate of 49 people stuck on rescue ships](#)

Political turmoil is occurring within Italy's populist coalition government over the fate of 49 people who remain stranded at sea. They have been denied entry since Interior Minister Matteo Salvini implemented a "security law", aimed at alleviating immigration. Salvini appears to be at odds with his coalition partner Luigi Di Maio, deputy prime minister and leader of the Five Star Movement (M5S). On Saturday Di Maio insisted Malta take responsibility for those onboard but that Italy. In addition, dozens of mayors across Italy have refused to implement the security bill. [*The Guardian*, January 7, 2019]

[Yellow Vests: French PM seeks new law to prevent known rioters from joining protests](#)

Eight weeks into the anti-government Yellow Vests protests, the French Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, announced that the government would back a "new law punishing those who do not respect the requirement to declare [protests], those who take part in unauthorised demonstrations and those who arrive at demonstrations wearing face masks". Philippe also stated that the plans would ban "troublemakers" who encourage violence and who are known to the authorities from taking part in these demonstrations. [*France24*, January 7, 2019]

[Germany charges Syrian for killing that sparked Chemnitz violence](#)

German prosecutors officially charged a Syrian asylum-seeker with manslaughter and serious bodily harm in the killing of a German citizen, which triggered violent protests in Chemnitz. Prosecutors said Alaa S. stabbed the man in his arm and chest, along with another alleged perpetrator, known as Farhad A. The protests in Chemnitz fueled a nationwide debate about integration and Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow hundreds of refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East into the country. [*Deutsche-Welle*, January 9, 2019]

[Spanish far-right party to back rightwing coalition in Andalusia](#)

The far-right Spanish political party Vox has agreed to support a new, rightwing Andalusian regional government after dropping its demands for the expulsion of 52,000 "illegal immigrants" and the repeal of laws on domestic violence and gender equality. made a major breakthrough in December's regional election, winning 12 seats, 11% of the vote and becoming the first far-right party to win representation since Spain returned to democracy after Franco's death. This week, both the EU and the French government have expressed concerns over the rhetoric and maneuverings since December's election. [*The Guardian*, January 9, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

[Belgian ban on Kosher slaughter has Jews worried about what's next](#)

A Belgian law banning methods used in ritual slaughter came into effect, part of a clash across Europe over the balance between animal welfare and religious freedom. Antwerp, home to many orthodox Jews, now must switch to importing customs-free kosher meat from elsewhere within the European Union trading bloc. Many of them view the law both as a declaration that they are not wanted in Belgium, and as the opening shot of further hostile action. [*Haaretz*, January 5, 2019]

[Poland picks former hate group boss to police internet, says Jewish organization](#)

According to a European Jewish group, Adam Andruszkiewicz, the man appointed by Poland to fight hate speech on the internet, belongs to a group with racist and anti-Semitic views. "In 2015-2016, Andruszkiewicz was the president of the All-Polish Youth, a movement known for its nationalist doctrine, " the American Jewish Committee's Central Europe office said in a statement. [*The Times of Israel*, January 8, 2019]

[London mosque cancels Holocaust exhibition after Muslim protest](#)

Following protests by Muslims, a mosque in London dropped plans to host an exhibition on Muslims who saved Jews during the Holocaust. The Centre for Islamic Understanding in Golders Green did not say why it cancelled the event. Calls for a boycott were lead by Roshan Salih, an editor of the British Muslim news site 5 Pillars, who said: "commemorations must never be done in conjunction with Israeli oppressors or their supporters". Jews who helped community leaders at the mosque set up the exhibition had said prior to the cancellation that they believed the event was a significant moment in Jewish-Muslim relations in Golders Green, which is one of Britain's most-heavily Jewish areas. [*Haaretz*, January 5, 2019]

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