



February 21, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

#### Trump: EU must take back 800 Isis fighters captured in Syria

US President Donald Trump told the EU that it must take back its 800 ISIS fighters captured in Syria by US-backed forces and put them on trial. The president's call came as he prepared to claim the end of the caliphate's physical presence in north-west Syria with the fall of the final ISIS-held town. Some EU countries, notably France, have said they are preparing to take back their former jihadists, but the UK has been more resistant: it says the fighters held by the west's Syrian Kurd allies can only return if they seek consular help in Turkey. *[The Guardian, February 17, 2019]*

#### EU says it will react swiftly if Trump hits it with car tariffs

U.S. President Donald Trump has promised European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker that he will not impose additional import tariffs on European cars for the time being. "Trump gave me his word that there won't be any car tariffs for the time being. I view this commitment as something you can rely on," Juncker told the German *Stuttgarter Zeitung* in an interview. The Commission's President added if Trump imposed tariffs on European cars nonetheless, the EU would react immediately and not feel obliged to stick to its promise to buy more soybeans and liquefied gas from the United States. *[CNBC, February 18, 2019]*

### EUROPE – RUSSIA

#### EU to Blacklist More Russians Over Tensions in Sea of Azov

The European Union is set to sanction more people in connection with Russia's intrusion in Ukraine, seeking to display a firm stance in defense of Ukrainian sovereignty. EU foreign ministers agreed in principle to expand from 164 the number of individuals subject to asset freezes and travel bans as a result of the conflict, where Russia annexed the region of Crimea in 2014 and has supported separatist rebels. The latest move to expand the EU blacklist is a response to a naval clash in the Sea of Azov last November, when Russia fired on and captured three Ukrainian vessels and 24 sailors. *[Bloomberg, February 18, 2019]*

#### NATO Defence Ministers meet to address Russia's violation of the INF Treaty

Allied Defence Ministers discussed at NATO Headquarters the consequences of Russia's breach of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said after the meeting that Russia's SSC-8 missile system is a significant security risk to the members of the North-Atlantic Alliance. Stoltenberg stressed that Russia still has a six month window to return to the INF Treaty and should take part in this opportunity. *[NATO Press Release, February 19, 2019]*

### EUROPE – EAST ASIA

#### China rejects German appeal to join endangered cold war-era nuclear treaty

China has rejected German Chancellor Angela Merkel's appeal for Beijing to sign up to a key US-Russia nuclear arms control treaty that is about to collapse, saying it would place unfair limits on its military. "Disarmament is something that concerns us all and we would of course be glad if such talks were held not just between the United States, Europe and Russia but also with China," Merkel said at the Munich Security Conference. *[South China Morning Post, February 17, 2019]*

#### European Parliament approves EU-Singapore free trade, partnership agreements

The European Parliament gave its consent to the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA), EU-Singapore Investment Protection Agreement (EUSIPA) and EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (ESPCA) following a vote. The EUSFTA and EUSIPA are the first trade and investment agreements concluded between the EU and a member state of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Singapore will remove tariffs on all EU products entering Singapore, while the EU will remove tariffs on 84% of all Singapore products entering the EU within the first year, with the remaining 16% to follow over a period of three to five years. The EU is Singapore's third largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in goods exceeding \$81.14 billion in 2018. Singapore is the also largest EU trading partner in ASEAN, with more than 10,000 EU companies established there to serve the Pacific region. *[Channel NewsAsia, February 13, 2019]*

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

#### Absent Iran takes center stage at Mideast talks in Poland

Although it is absent from the stage, Iran is nevertheless taking the spotlight at a Middle East security conference co-hosted by the United States and Poland that has highlighted deep divisions between the U.S. and some of its traditional allies. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence attended along with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his counterparts from numerous Arab nations. But France and Germany did not send Cabinet-ranked officials, and European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said she could not attend either. Iran denounced the meeting as a "circus" aimed at "demonizing" the Islamic Republic. *[The Washington Post, February 13, 2019]*

#### Merkel defends European stance on Iran as Pence campaigns against nuclear deal

German Chancellor Angela Merkel defended European powers' decision to stand by the Iran nuclear deal in the face of U.S. criticism as she delivered a spirited backing of her multilateral approach to global affairs. Merkel's comments at the Munich Security Conference, followed days of tension between Washington and Europe over Iran. *[Haaretz, February 16, 2019]*

#### Saudi Arabia makes the EU's "Dirty Money" blacklist

The European Union maintains a list of countries that it considers a threat to the EU financial system. The EU added Saudi Arabia to this list along with 16 other countries, because they deemed these countries are too lenient with regards to money laundering, suspects them of potentially financing terrorism or accuses them of providing too little transparency to EU regulators. The Saudi kingdom is still trying to attract foreign businesses to Saudi Arabia as part of its economic diversification plans. This will be a challenge with its new "dirty money" label. *[Forbes, February 13, 2019]*

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

#### Netanyahu sparks fresh Polish anger over Holocaust collaboration comments

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu potentially sparked a fresh quarrel with Poland when he appeared to point at Polish collaboration with the Nazi regime. In some news reports, Netanyahu was quoted as saying "The Poles cooperated with the Nazis," though Netanyahu's office clarified that he did not say "the" and played a tape recording of the comments to reporters to confirm this. Some Poles expressed unhappiness with the comments, made while the Netanyahu was visiting Warsaw for a Mideast security conference hosted by the US and Poland. *[The Times of Israel, February 14, 2019]*

#### Visegrad Summit in Israel canceled after Poland pulls out over Holocaust row

The Visegrad summit in Israel has been canceled after Poland pulled out over Israeli remarks regarding Polish complicity in the Holocaust. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed Yisrael Katz as interim foreign minister on February 17th. The same day, in an interview to Israel's i24 News, Katz said: "I am the son of Holocaust survivors, we will never forgive and never forget, and there were many Poles who collaborated with the Nazis." Poland summoned again Israel's ambassador Anna Azari, who was called in earlier in the week following Netanyahu's remarks about Poland's involvement in the Holocaust. *[Haaretz, February 18, 2019]*

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

#### EU officials: UK only 'pretending to negotiate' over Brexit impasse

The British government is "pretending to negotiate" with the EU and has not presented any new proposals to break the Brexit deadlock, according to EU officials. The British side thinks a crucial process has begun and hopes progress will have been made by 27 February when MPs are expected to have another important Brexit vote. European Council president Donald Tusk said the EU27 was still waiting for proposals, tweeting: "No news is not always good news." *[The Guardian, February 12, 2019]*

#### EU to take action against Poland if judges harassed for consulting ECJ

The European Commission will take action against Poland if its government is harassing judges for consulting the European Court of Justice on the legality of Polish reforms. Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans announced these measure Tin response to a letter from Poland's biggest judge association Iustitia, which asked him to act. *[Reuters, February 19, 2019]*

#### EU presented with 'first-ever' action plan to combat anti-Semitism

Following the sharp rise of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe, the American Jewish Committee's Transatlantic Institute and B'nai B'rith International have presented a first-ever action plan to combat antisemitism to the Council of the European Union and the EU's Coordinator on combating antisemitism, Katharina von Schnurbein. The document makes several recommendations to the EU, including using the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism, bettering its assistance to member states, having closer cooperation with communities on security issues, and creating common guidelines "for countering antisemitism in education that will provide long-term positive effects for Jewish communities in Europe." *[The Jerusalem Post, February 20, 2019]*

#### Brussels accuses Orbán of peddling conspiracy theory with Juncker poster

The European Commission has accused Viktor Orbán's government of a propagating a "shocking" and "ludicrous conspiracy theory", after Hungary launched a poster campaign targeting Jean-Claude Juncker. The poster shows the European commission president alongside the Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros, a familiar target in Hungary. The decision to use an image of Juncker is an escalation in the Orbán government's vendetta with the EU's most senior leaders. It also exposes the rift in the centre-right European People's party in the European parliament. *[The Guardian, February 19, 2019]*

#### Brexit backstop: Theresa May to put new proposals to EU

Prime Minister Theresa May will present the EU with new legal proposals to solve the Irish backstop issue, as she hopes that this will be enough to convince Eurosceptics to back her Brexit deal. In Brussels, May will meet with Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, and present her plan in hopes to secure legal assurances that the backstop would not permanently bind the UK into a customs union. *[The Guardian, February 20, 2019]*

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### Spain's PM calls snap general election for 28 April

Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, has called a snap election for 28 April after Catalan secessionists joined rightwing parties in rejecting the socialist government's national budget. The country's third general election in less than four years was seen as an inevitability following Sánchez's defeat. Sánchez's PSOE is ahead in opinion polls, ranking them at about 30% of the national vote. But the two main right-of-centre parties together poll more than 30%. In Spain's most populous region, Andalusia, socialists were unseated during the past with the help of the far-right party Vox. *[The Guardian, February 15, 2019]*

#### Angela Merkel's successor seeks tougher line on immigration

Christian Democrat (CDU) leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said the party had to prevent any repeat of the 2015 refugee crisis, which saw thousands of migrants and refugees arrive in Germany. "We must do everything we can to prevent this from happening again," the CDU leader said. "We have learned our lesson." Following a series of workshops with migration and security experts, Kramp-Karrenbauer called for a "comprehensive and conclusive monitoring of migration" to provide an "early warning system". *[Deutsche-Welle, February 11, 2019]*

#### Thousands rallied against anti-Semitism in France

In Paris, thousands rallied against anti-Semitism, summoned by France's major political parties, the country's Jewish organizations, and by a sharp spike in anti-Semitic incidents, including the desecration of a Jewish cemetery the night before. French news estimated that 20,000 people, and Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, several former presidents, and many of the country's leading politicians attended. Thousands more rallied against the surge in anti-Semitism at smaller gatherings elsewhere in France. *[The New York Times, February 20, 2019]*

#### Italian senators reject call to lift Salvini's immunity

An Italian Senate committee rejected a request to lift Interior Minister Matteo Salvini's immunity after prosecutors sought to investigate him for holding migrants on board a ship last year. The investigation would have allowed prosecutors to examine possible charges of abuse of power and the kidnapping of the 177 migrants, including children. The Diciotti vessel was stranded at sea for 10 days in August after Salvini declared all Italian ports closed. *[POLITICO, February 20, 2019]*

#### Seven MPs leave Labour Party in protest at Jeremy Corbyn's leadership

Seven British lawmakers part of the Labour Party announced their resignation in protests to Jeremy Corbyn's approach to Brexit and anti-Semitism. The seven MPs, who all back a further EU referendum, are not launching a new political party - they will sit in Parliament as the Independent Group. One of these MPs, Chuka Umunna, said they had "taken the first step" and urged other Labour MPs - and members of other parties - to join them in "building a new politics". *[BBC, February 18, 2019]*

#### Sweden-Hungary relations turn frosty as diplomatic row escalates

A diplomatic rift over Budapest's new family policy heated up between Sweden and Hungary. Sweden's Social Affairs Minister Annika Strandhäll tweeted that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's seven-point family planning policy "reeks of the 1930s" and that "what is happening in Hungary is alarming". In response, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said Sweden's ambassador had been summoned and informed that Strandhäll's comments were "unacceptable". Szijarto stated: "Hungary is spending money on families and Sweden is spending it on migrants." After these comments, Sweden said it had summoned Hungary's ambassador to the foreign ministry. *[The Local Sweden, February 20, 2019]*

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

#### Vandals desecrate Jewish cemetery in France, paint swastikas on graves

A Jewish cemetery was vandalized with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on roughly 90 graves in eastern France, shortly before nationwide marches would commence against a rise in anti-Semitic attacks. French President Emmanuel Macron visited the cemetery in the village of Quatzenheim, following the overnight desecration, walking through a gate daubed with a swastika as he entered the graveyard. *[Haaretz, February 19, 2019]*

#### Polish Jewish leaders slam Israeli minister's anti-Semitism remark

Jewish leaders in Poland said that they were offended by Israel's acting foreign minister comments regarding the Poles, who "suckled anti-Semitism with their mothers' milk." The leaders issued a statement in which they condemned accusing all Poles of anti-Semitism, especially as thousands of Poles have been honored by Israel's Holocaust memorial center, Yad Vashem, for helping Jews during the Holocaust. *[Haaretz, February 18, 2019]*

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