



April 1, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

EU holds position on Golan Heights despite Trump: Tusk

European Council President Donald Tusk said the EU was holding its line on the Golan Heights despite U.S. President Donald Trump's move to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the territory seized in war. "The EU's position is well know and has not changed," Tusk told a news conference. *[Reuters, March 22, 2019]*

Pompeo: sees joint action with NATO allies next week on Ukraine

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he hoped to announce with NATO allies visiting Washington next week additional steps to pressure Russia over its aggression in Ukraine. "Next week I am hopeful ... I will be able to announce another series of actions that we will jointly take together," Pompeo told a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on the State Department's budget request for 2020. Pompeo also acknowledged that Washington could have done more to address Moscow's activity in Ukraine. *[UNIAN, March 27, 2019]*

'Die Linke' demands Berlin expel outspoken U.S. ambassador

Germany's far-left Die Linke party demanded that parliament vote to expel the controversial US ambassador Richard Grenell, a close confidant of President Donald Trump. The small opposition party wants Grenell to be declared persona non grata for having "actively interfered" in German politics on issues from Iran to defense spending. Although the motion has little chance of succeeding, the fact that it has been made at all is a sign of the strained transatlantic relations with the Trump administration. *[The Local DE, March 29, 2019]*

EUROPE – RUSSIA

In Ukraine, Russia tests a new Facebook tactic in election tampering

Campaigning for Ukraine's presidential election had just begun to heat up when the authorities announced they had thwarted a Russian plot to use Facebook to undermine the vote. Allegedly, Russians tried to circumvent Facebook's new safeguards by paying Ukrainian citizens to give a Russian agent access to their personal pages. In a video confession published by the S.B.U., Ukraine's domestic intelligence service, a man it identified as the Russian agent said that his Russian handlers had ordered him "to find people in Ukraine on Facebook who wanted to sell their accounts or temporarily rent them out." *[The New York Times, March 31, 2019]*

Russian Navy escorts NATO ships in Black Sea on way to Ukraine

Two Russian naval vessels are closely escorting NATO warships in the Black Sea that are headed toward Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry announced. The commander of a NATO maritime group said Dutch, Spanish, Canadian, Turkish, Romanian and Bulgarian frigates entered the Black Sea and are part of the alliance's defense cooperation exercises taking place on April 8-12. *[The Moscow Times, March 29, 2019]*

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

Defying allies, Italy signs on to new Silk Road with China

Italy became the first of the Group of 7 nations to take part in China's "One Belt One Road" project, which makes enormous infrastructure investments to move Chinese goods and resources throughout Asia, Africa and Europe. It resisted the entreaties and warnings of its European Union and American allies by signing an agreement with President Xi Jinping, a move that crystallized shifting geopolitical balances and the populist Italian government's willingness to break with its traditional partners. *[The New York Times, March 23, 2019]*

Macron, Xi call for greater EU-China cooperation

Chinese President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron called for increased cooperation between the EU and China. Speaking at the Elysee Palace following talks with Xi at a time of growing concern over Beijing's massive investments on the continent, Macron called for a "strong Europe-China partnership," adding that it must be based on "strong multilateralism" and "fair and balanced" trade. The statements followed the inking of deals on nuclear power, cultural exchanges, clean energy, and a huge contract which will see China buy 290 Airbus A320s and 10 A350 airliners from Europe's Airbus conglomerate. *[The Asia Times, March 25, 2019]*

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

Iran leader dismisses EU trade mechanism as 'bitter joke'

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollahi Ali Khamenei dismissed a trade mechanism launched by European countries to bypass renewed US sanctions as a "bitter joke" and said Europe could not be trusted. At a televised congregation, Khamenei said Iran "should completely forego [any hope] of help or cooperation from Westerners in strengthening our economy, we shouldn't wait for them;". "Once again the Europeans have stabbed us in the back, they have betrayed us," cursing Western politicians as "savages." *[The Times of Israel, March 21, 2019]*

German divisions over Saudi arms embargo upsets EU allies

Tensions between Germany and its EU allies are mounting after Berlin failed to reach an agreement on lifting an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia. Germany imposed an embargo in October after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but the measure has annoyed France and Britain, whose giant arms makers require German components that are now banned. *[POLITICO, March 27, 2019]*

France bans Iran's Mahan Air for flying arms, troops to Syria, elsewhere

France has banned flights in and out of the country by Iran's Mahan Air, accusing it of transporting military equipment and personnel to Syria and other Middle East war zones. The decision to revoke Mahan's license to operate in France was made after Germany banned the airline in January. *[Haaretz, March 25, 2019]*

Jordanian King cancels Romania trip over PM's Plan for Jerusalem Embassy

King Abdullah II of Jordan has cancelled his planned trip to Romania in response to the Romanian prime minister's announcement at AIPAC Policy Conference that the country plans to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Jordan has emphasized dozens of times over the past two years that it will only support a peace plan that includes the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. *[Haaretz, March 25, 2019]*

EUROPE – ISRAEL

All EU countries say no to recognition of Israeli Golan Heights

The European Union said that it was not altering its view on the status of the Golan Heights, despite this week's US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the area, and that it was maintaining a stance in keeping with UN Security Council resolutions. "In line with the international law and UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 497, the European Union does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights" the EU's foreign affairs department said in a statement. *[The Times of Israel, March 27, 2019]*

Romanian President contradicts 'Ignorant' Prime Minister: Embassy won't move to Jerusalem

Hours after Romania's prime minister told the AIPAC conference that her country will move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, the statement was strongly contradicted by the country's president, who opposes the move and has a final say on foreign policy issues. President Klaus Iohannis called his prime minister, Viorica Dancila, "ignorant" for making the statement, which had received strong applause from those attending the pro-Israeli conference. *[Haaretz, March 25, 2019]*

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

Tusk urges European Parliament to consider long Brexit delay

The President of the European Council Donald Tusk urged the European Parliament to be open to a long Brexit extension and not to ignore the "increasing majority" of British people who wanted to remain in the European Union. EU leaders granted Britain a short extension to the March 29 Brexit day, saying if Britain's parliament did not back the divorce deal agreed with Prime Minister Theresa May, then the British government would have to indicate what it wished to do before April 12. *[Reuters, March 27, 2019]*

EU recalls ships helping in Mediterranean refugee rescues

The European Union announced it will suspend maritime patrols that have rescued thousands of refugees and asylum seekers attempting the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. The decision followed deep resistance from Italy, where the anti-migrant government said it would no longer receive those rescued at sea. Instead, the new agreement on Operation Sophia, the EU mission to reduce people-smuggling in the Mediterranean, will rely on extended air patrols and close coordination with Libya, the main point of departure by sea for refugees and migrants seeking to cross from North Africa to Europe. *[Al Jazeera, March 27, 2019]*

European Parliament approves overhaul of online copyright rules

After more than two years of lobbying, EU lawmakers voted to approve the controversial copyright reform with 348 votes in favor and 274 against. The outcome will subject platforms like YouTube and Facebook to a set of new obligations to strike licensing deals that will be put to the test in coming months as EU countries transpose the directive into national law, a process that allows for some margin of interpretation. *[POLITICO, March 26, 2019]*

Brexit: MPs reject May's EU withdrawal agreement

MPs have rejected Theresa May's EU withdrawal agreement on the day the UK was due to leave the EU. The government lost by 344 votes to 286, a margin of 58, and means the UK has missed an EU deadline to delay Brexit to 22 May and leave with a deal. The prime minister said the UK would have to find "an alternative way forward", which was "almost certain" to involve holding European elections. *[BBC, March 30, 2019]*

British rebel MPs to form political party in EU election bid

The Independent Group of British MPs announced that it has applied to register as a political party to compete in the European election. The group, made up of 11 MPs who have broken away from the Conservatives and Labour, submitted an application to the U.K.'s electoral commission to become a party called "Change UK — The Independent Group." *[POLITICO, March 29, 2019]*

Populist surge in EU Elections to be contained, new poll shows

The European Parliament's two biggest political alliances trimmed losses in the assembly's latest projection of election results in May, while the populist party of Italian Deputy Premier Matteo Salvini largely maintained a big gain. The predictions signal a broader coalition of pro-EU political families will be needed to advance European legislation and other common projects during the forthcoming five-year term. That's because the two largest factions, both traditional mainstream actors, will see their combined share of seats fall below 50 percent. *[Bloomberg, March 29, 2019]*

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Theresa May seeks fourth Brexit vote, reports say

British Prime Minister Theresa May is expected to bring her EU withdrawal bill back to Parliament for a fourth vote, according to reports in UK media. May's proposals have already been voted down three times in a bitterly divided Parliament, although the scale of each defeat has been falling. March 29 marked the latest loss, by a margin of 58 votes, as the Brexit saga rumbles on amid a deepening political crisis. In a statement directly after her deal was defeated, May indicated that the parliamentary process was running out of road. "I fear we are reaching the limits of this process in this House," she said. *[CNN, March 30, 2019]*

5 things to know about Dutch far right's new figurehead

The populist Forum for Democracy last week stunned the Dutch political establishment. Its leader Thierry Baudet thus seems to be more powerful, if less high-profile, than the long-standing face of Dutch populism, Geert Wilders. Baudet has called for less immigration, improved relations with Russia, and for the Netherlands to leave the EU — although he has also said he will see how Brexit plays out first. "I am ideologically against the EU, against the internal market, against the open borders, against the euro, against the whole thing," he told de Volkskrant last month. *[POLITICO, March 25, 2019]*

Poland bashes immigrants, but quietly takes Christian ones

The far-right Law and Justice party came to power in 2015, at the height of Europe's migrant crisis, after running a campaign that inspired choruses of "Poland for Poles." With national elections due in October, the governing party is once again promoting its vision of "Poland First." So it may come as a surprise that the Polish government has, very quietly, presided over the largest influx of migrant workers in the country's modern history — though they are mostly Christians from neighboring Ukraine. *[The New York Times, March 26, 2019]*

Political outsider wins Slovakia's presidential election

Political novice and activist Zuzana Čaputová is on course to become the first female president of Slovakia, swept into office by public outrage at the 2018 killings of an investigative journalist and his fiancée. With around 97% of the votes counted, the 45-year old lawyer's tally stood at 58.3 percent of the vote in Saturday's runoff against European Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič. *[POLITICO, March 31, 2019]*

Ukraine election: Comedian is front-runner ahead of first round

Polls have opened in Ukraine as the country votes in the first round of presidential elections. Current leader Petro Poroshenko is seeking re-election but the surprise front-runner is comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Both candidates, along with former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, have expressed largely pro-European views during campaigning. Mr Zelenskyy, is aiming to turn his satirical TV show - in which he portrays an ordinary citizen who becomes president after fighting corruption - into reality. He has run quite an unusual campaign, as he has done no rallies and few interviews. Mr Zelenskyy appears to have no strong political views apart from a wish to be new and different. His extensive use of social media appeals to younger voters. *[BBC, March 31, 2019]*

Conservative congress on family sharply divides Italy

Verona was the backdrop for a culture clash over the weekend, as it hosted both a conservative congress on family values and a march by civic groups who denounced the event as a movement to limit LGBT and women's rights. The World Congress of Families, revealed yet another rift in Italy's governing coalition, as well as providing a platform for right-wing extremists seeking to reopen the debate over abortion, which was legalized in Italy in 1978. Tens of thousands of demonstrators marched through Verona against what they saw was as an assault on hard-won rights for homosexual unions, abortion and divorce. *[The Washington Post, March 30, 2019]*

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Holocaust denier drops out of race for Congress in Spain

A Holocaust revisionist who had been tapped as a congressional candidate of a far-right party in Spain has resigned. Fernando Paz announced that he was dropping out of the race, citing a "media hunt" against him as part of his decision. Paz has said the facts concerning the Holocaust are "far from having been established with accuracy" and called the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals a "farce." *[The Times of Israel, March 23, 2019]*

Poland's Foreign Minister says British Holocaust denier David Irving not welcome in his country

Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz said at a news conference: "British Holocaust denier David Irving probably will not be able to enter Poland due to the fact that his opinions are unacceptable from the point of view of Polish law". Irving is planning to spend 9 days in Poland in September. In addition to the former Nazi death camps, he plans to visit the bunker headquarters of Adolf Hitler known and the headquarters of SS chief Heinrich Himmler. Czaputowicz said that the Polish government had "already taken some steps" to prevent Irving from entering the country. Irving was sentenced in 2006 by an Austrian court to three years in prison for his Holocaust denial, and Irving lost a libel suit he brought against Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt in 2000. *[Haaretz, March 24, 2019]*

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