



March 21, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US
Donald Trump: Theresa May ‘didn’t listen’ to me on Brexit
U.S. President Donald Trump said Theresa May “didn’t listen” to his ideas on how to negotiate Brexit, and a second vote on EU membership would be “very unfair to the people that won.” Trump added that he gave the British prime minister “my ideas how to negotiate” Brexit but “she didn’t listen to that and that’s fine, she has to do what she has to do. I think it could have been negotiated in a different manner. I hate to see everything being ripped apart right now.” *[POLITICO, March 14, 2019]*

German defense spending is falling even shorter. The U.S. isn’t happy
Germany, which had already announced that it will fall significantly short of NATO’s defense spending goals, annoying the United States, risks provoking Washington further by failing to reach even its own slimmed-down target. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government had a falling-out with the Trump administration last year when it said that, despite signing a commitment to work toward spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense by 2024, its target would instead be 1.5 percent. *[The New York Times, March 19, 2019]*

EUROPE – RUSSIA
Russia will respond to new EU sanctions — reports
Russia will respond to new European Union sanctions, its Foreign Ministry said in a statement, without clarifying what actions it would take. Prior to the announcement, the EU added eight more Russians to its sanctions list over a stand-off between Russia and Ukraine in the Azov Sea, including senior security service officials and military commanders that the EU accuses of preventing Ukrainian ships from reaching port. *[The Moscow Times, March 16, 2019]*

Russia still paying price for Crimea five years after annexation
Half a decade has passed since Vladimir Putin annexed Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula. For Russia, the costs continue to mount. The accession treaty signed to bring the Black Sea territory into Moscow’s fold is still unrecognized by most countries and the U.S. and European Union led a broad effort to punish Russia with sanctions. Undeterred, Russia has kept integrating Crimea into its economy, investing billions in new power plants and building a giant bridge to the peninsula last year. *[Bloomberg, March 17, 2019]*

EUROPE – EAST ASIA
European Commission - Press release: Commission reviews relations with China, proposes 10 actions
Against the backdrop of China’s growing economic power and political influence, the European Commission and the High Representative review European Union-China relations and the related opportunities and challenges. The document put forth sets out 10 concrete actions for EU Heads of State or Government to discuss and endorse at the European Council of 21 March. *[European Commission Press Release, March 12, 2019]*

Silk Road opens a rift in Italy’s government
Italy’s government has split over whether to sign onto China’s landmark “One Belt, One Road” infrastructure program that runs across Asia to key European trade hubs. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and Luigi Di Maio of the 5Star Movement, one of two deputy prime ministers, said a proposed agreement with Beijing would undermine Italy’s alliances with the U.S. and the EU. Matteo Salvini, leader of the League, who serves as the other deputy prime minister, has taken a more cautious stance, however. He warned that he would say no to any Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) “colonizing” Italy, and said Rome must “carefully assess the implications for strategic sectors such as telecommunications and infrastructure.” *[Politico, March 13, 2019]*

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST
Brussels III Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’: co-chairs declaration
The Third Conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” took place on 12-14 March 2019. It was hosted by the European Union and co-chaired by the United Nations. Members present discussed the future of Syria, including their reaffirmation that a sustainable solution to the conflict in Syria can only be based on the Geneva Communiqué (2012) and the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Delegates also discussed humanitarian efforts in the conflict, and future steps that need to be taken. *[European Commission Press Release, March 14, 2019]*

Belgium eager to maintain trade ties with Iran
European countries, other than the founders of INSTEX, namely France, Germany and the UK, are willing to join the special purpose vehicle that facilitates trade with Iran, the economic and commercial counselor of Belgian Embassy in Iran said. Christoph Smitz, the Economic Counselor at the Belgian Embassy in Tehran, made the announcement in a meeting with Mohammad Reza Karbasi, the head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture’s International Affairs Department. He said: “European small- and medium-sized businesses are waiting for the implementation of INSTEX and for the elaboration of its mechanism. Belgian companies are eager to maintain interactions with their Iranian counterparts.” *[The Financial Tribute, March 18, 2019]*

EUROPE – ISRAEL
Hungary opens ‘first European diplomatic mission to Jerusalem in decades’
Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto formally opened a diplomatic trade mission in Jerusalem on Tuesday, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed as “the first European diplomatic mission opened in Jerusalem in many decades.” The opening of the delegation comes a month after Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban pledged to open a trade delegation with “diplomatic status” in Jerusalem. It is the “diplomatic status” that distinguishes the Hungarian delegation from other offices which European countries have established in the city. *[The Jerusalem Post, March 20, 2019]*

Germany deports Palestinian convicted of terror, cancels BDS event at Israel’s request
Germany announced it would revoke the visa of a Palestinian woman convicted on terrorism charges in Israel, preventing her participation in a cultural event in Berlin organized by a group that supports the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. The Israeli Embassy in Germany, in cooperation with the Strategic Affairs Ministry, has acted to block Rasmea Odeh from taking part in a protest event in Berlin’s Kreuzberg neighborhood. Odeh, a former member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was involved in a bombing attack in Jerusalem that killed two Israeli students in 1969. *[Haaretz, March 16, 2019]*

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS
Brexit: Theresa May asks EU for delay with cabinet in deadlock over ‘crisis’
Theresa May will not request a long delay to Brexit from European leaders. She was forced to write to the Union’s leaders and beg them to push back Brexit, with her cabinet deadlocked over the best way out of what Downing Street now concedes is a “crisis”. The government had maintained until the last possible moment that Brexit could go ahead as planned on 29 March or after a brief “technical extension”.But after the Speaker, John Bercow, ruled the prime minister could not put her deal to parliament unchanged for a third “meaningful vote,” her spokesman conceded it was now too late to leave with a deal. *[The Guardian, March 20, 2019]*

Juncker raises prospect of emergency Brexit summit next week
Jean-Claude Juncker has raised the prospect of an emergency summit of EU leaders next week to decide on a Brexit delay, blaming ongoing chaos in Theresa May’s cabinet. The European commission president said a letter from May requesting an extension to article 50, delaying the UK’s exit beyond 29 March, had not arrived overnight as expected. *[The Guardian, March 20, 2019]*

Decision on UK participation in EU elections due by mid-April: EU official
A decision on whether Britain should participate in the European Parliament election needs to be taken by mid-April, an EU official said, as British Prime Minister Theresa May is asks the EU for a short delay to Brexit. Ballots have to be printed in time and clarity over how to distribute parliamentary seats among member states is needed, the source added. *[Reuters, March 20, 2019]*

Leading liberals join EU election fray
Months after the Continent’s other major political groups chose their lead candidates for the European Parliament election in May, Europe’s liberals are poised this week to present not just a single standard-bearer but a whole “Team Europe.” European Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager of Denmark, former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt and ex-commissioner Emma Bonino of Italy are among those on the seven-member slate of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). *[POLITICO, March 19, 2019]*

Orban enters showdown as Europe’s biggest party weighs expulsion
Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s role as a trailblazer for resurgent nationalist forces in the European Union faces a reckoning as the bloc’s largest political family weighs whether to suspend his illiberal party two months before crucial EU elections. The verdict by the European People’s Party in Brussels will signal whether the EU is ready to start reining in wayward members seen as undermining the rule of law and spreading euroskeptic ideology, which have contributed to watershed decisions including Brexit. *[Bloomberg, March 20, 2019]*

EU accelerates moves to block China’s market access
Europe is moving unexpectedly quickly to restrict Chinese access to big public projects ranging from railways to telecoms. Only a week after Brussels branded Beijing as a “systemic rival”, EU leaders attending a summit are expected to yield to pressure from Berlin and Paris and “endorse” a law that will restrict the access of Chinese companies to the EU’s €2.4 trillion-per-year public procurement market. *[The South China Morning Post, March 19, 2019]*

DOMESTIC POLITICS
French government unprepared for gilets jaunes riots, critics say
The French prime minister, Edouard Philippe, has held talks with ministers after opposition politicians accused the government of being unprepared for rioting during gilets jaunes (yellow vests) protests on the Champs Elysées in Paris. The president, Emmanuel Macron promised to come up with strong measures to prevent further violence after rioters threw paving stones at police and restaurants, luxury stores, news kiosks and cars were torched, ransacked and looted. *[The Guardian, March 17, 2019]*

Merkel may be in office longer than you think
It has become something of a game both in Germany and abroad to guess just how much longer Chancellor Angela Merkel will remain in office. Many on the right wing would like to see her gone. Many on the left have tired of her leadership as well. And even some in her own Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, and especially in its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), have pressured her to step down. *[Spiegel Online, March 15, 2019]*

3 dead, 5 injured in Utrecht attack after carjacking: police; woman targeted says witness
Three people were killed, and five others were injured in an attack on a tram at the 24 Oktoberplein in Utrecht, The Netherlands, according to the police and the city’s mayor Jan van Zanen. While terrorism is under suspicion as the primary motive according to the mayor, witnesses said it looked as though the suspect was targeting a woman and then anyone who tried to help her. *[NL Times, March 18, 2019]*

Italian authorities order seizure of migrant rescue ship
Italian authorities have ordered the seizure of a charity rescue ship after it defied the government’s order not to bring refugees and migrants to Italy. The day before, volunteers onboard the Mare Jonio rescued about 50 people from a rubber boat off the coast of Libya, prompting Italy’s far-right interior minister, Matteo Salvini, to say he was ready to stop private vessels “once and for all” from bringing rescued people to Italy. *[The Guardian, March 20, 2019]*

Serbia’s protests aren’t the beginning of a Balkan spring
Over the past three months, thousands of Serbians in Belgrade gather to protest near Republic Square to march against the political violence, democratic backsliding, and deterioration of media freedoms that have become widespread under the current government and its autocratic president, Aleksandar Vucic. The protests, which started on Dec. 8 last year, have spread to several dozen cities across Serbia and have even inspired similar protests in Albania and Montenegro, where activists have risen up against their own political establishments. On March 16, the demonstrations reached a new crescendo when protesters and opposition leaders in Belgrade stormed the headquarters of state broadcaster Radio Television Serbia, which led to their forced removal by riot police. *[Foreign Policy, March 19, 2019]*

Anti-corruption campaigner wins first round of Slovakia elections
Government critic Zuzana Caputova secured a huge first-round win over the ruling party candidate in Slovakia’s weekend election, putting her one step closer to becoming the country’s first female president. Provisional results showed Ms Caputova securing more than twice the votes of her rival Maros Sefcovic, suggesting the electorate had shunned the political establishment following last year’s shock murder of an investigative journalist probing corruption. *[The Telegraph, March 17, 2019]*

JEWISH COMMUNITIES
BBC Host Suggests anti-Semitism Isn’t as Bad as Other Forms of Racism
Justin Webb, the host of BBC Radio 4’s “Today” program, suggested that anti-Semitism isn’t as bad as other forms of racism. Webb later apologized for his remarks during an interview with American pollster John Zogby about the controversy over Rep. Ilhan Omar’s tweets and statements about the pro-Israel lobby in the United States. A BBC spokesperson released a statement: “He intended to highlight a growing trend among U.S. Democrats of suggesting that anti-Semitism is not comparable with other forms of racism. He was certainly not expressing any personal view” *[Haaretz, March 15, 2019]*

British Holocaust Denier David Irving Leading Tour of Nazi Death Camps
British Holocaust denier David Irving is planning to lead a tour of Nazi death camps. Irving is taking deposits on his website for the tour of Nazi historical sites scheduled for September, the U.K. Jewish News reported. The nine-day tour, which costs \$3,650, is scheduled to visit Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec and Majdanek. Publicity for the tour calls the death camps “controversial.” *[Haaretz, March 19, 2019]*