



April 11, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

**Donald Trump says spending by NATO countries is up like a ‘rocket ship’, but wants more**  
US President Donald Trump said that his pressure on NATO nations to pay more for their defense is leading to tens of billions of dollars more in contributions, but that the allies may need to boost their budgets even more. Trump used a well-worn script about burden-sharing with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in talks at the White House. The meeting came a day before NATO foreign ministers sit down in Washington for what is expected to be a session dominated by concerns about Russia. [*The South China Morning Post*, April 3, 2019]

**Polish Nationalists protest Holocaust Restitution Bill in N.Y.C. using anti-Semitic rhetoric**  
Polish nationalists protested in New York City against a bill designed to help Holocaust survivors and their descendants reclaim lost property in Poland. Hundreds of people participated in the protest and some employed anti-Semitic rhetoric. One protester held a sign calling to the “stop Holocaust industry,” while others questioned how many Polish Jews were killed during World War II. The new law requires the U.S. State Department to report on how certain European countries have progressed in returning wrongfully confiscated or transferred Holocaust-era assets. It does not mention Poland specifically, but Poland is the only European country that has not passed laws to compensate those who lost their property and other assets during World War II. [*Haaretz*, April 4, 2019]

### Trump slams ‘brutal’ EU’s Brexit approach

U.S. President Donald Trump criticized the European Union’s “tough” treatment of Britain following its decision to grant the U.K. a further extension at the special Brexit summit. “Too bad that the European Union is being so tough on the United Kingdom and Brexit,” the U.S. president tweeted after the summit concluded, adding: “The E.U. is likewise a brutal trading partner with the United States, which will change.” Earlier in the week, Trump issued a fresh threat “to put tariffs on \$11 billion of EU products” as part of a longstanding dispute over airplane manufacturing subsidies. [*POLITICO*, April 11, 2019]

### EUROPE – RUSSIA

#### WTO sides with Russia in landmark national security ruling

Russia was right to impose transport restrictions on Ukraine in the name of national security, the World Trade Organization (WTO) said in a landmark ruling. The decision is of crucial importance because, for the first time, a WTO dispute settlement panel ruled whether a country can use the Article 21 exemption to invoke national security as a justification for introducing trade restrictions that cannot be challenged by the affected state. Moscow introduced its transit restrictions in early 2016 amid conflict in eastern Ukraine. Kiev had complained that the measures cut Ukrainian exporters from key markets in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which they can only reach by Russian roads. In September 2016, Ukraine launched a WTO dispute to test whether Russia was allowed to invoke Article 21. [*POLITICO*, April 5th, 2019]

### Turkey's Erdogan to discuss possible operation in Syria with Putin

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he planned to discuss a possible Turkish military operation in Syria when he visits Moscow for talks with President Vladimir Putin. Erdogan has vowed to crush US-backed Kurdish fighters east of the Euphrates in Syria and said last year that preparations were complete for an operation. [*The Jerusalem Post*, April 10, 2019]

### EUROPE – EAST ASIA

#### EU, China stumble over trade, human rights ahead of summit

Tensions over trade, investments and minority rights are preventing China and the EU from agreeing a joint declaration at a summit, multiple sources in Brussels said, sapping a European push for greater access to Chinese markets. Alarmed by potential Chinese dominance of strategic European industries, EU leaders last month sought to prepare for the April 9 summit - flagged as an opportunity to cement bilateral ties - by agreeing what they said was a more assertive stance toward Beijing. [*Reuters*, April 5, 2019]

### For NATO, China is the new Russia

NATO has spent most of the past 70 years focusing on how to defend the Continent against Russia. To survive the decades ahead, it’s beginning to think more about a threat farther east. China is top of mind as NATO officials gather in the American capital this week to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty. Questions about whether and to what extent alliance members should allow Chinese network supplier Huawei to operate in their countries, along with Italy’s move to join Beijing’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, have put the question of how NATO should respond to the Asian power front and center. [*POLITICO*, April 4, 2019]

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

#### Iran FM says Europe incapable of bypassing US sanctions

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said European powers were incapable of bypassing sanctions imposed on Tehran by the US after it withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal. “The Europeans at first viewed the JCPOA (nuclear deal) as an achievement, but maybe they were not prepared to, and certainly they were not capable of standing up against U.S sanctions,” Zarif said in an interview. “We will continue pressing the Europeans to implement their commitments. Europe must know that they cannot shy away from their responsibilities with a few statements and some unaccomplished plans,” he added. [*24 news*, April 4, 2019]

### Jamal Khashoggi: EU divided over arms sales to Saudi Arabia six months after murder

The brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi triggered a wave of condemnations and soured relations between Saudi Arabia and European countries. Then, in the weeks after the killing, MEPs called for the imposing of an EU-wide arms embargo on the kingdom. Now, half a year on from the Khashoggi’s killing, that article investigates how much of Europe’s words were put into concrete action, country by country. [*Euronews*, April 2 2019]

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

#### Emmanuel Macron meets with Yair Lapid four days before Israeli elections

Four days before Israel’s general elections, Blue and White party No. 2 Yair Lapid met privately with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace in Paris. Israel’s Channel 12 suggested the meeting was a move initiated by Macron to “help Lapid win the elections” on April 9th. Lapid’s staff told the television channel only that the politician would discuss with Macron “the Middle East, the Iranian threat and the war on anti-Semitism in Europe.” [*The Times of Israel*, April 5 2019]

### A brief history of EU-Israel relations

The European Union is Israel’s largest trading partner. Bilateral cooperation is extensive in many areas, such as in transport, industry and agriculture, but also in justice and home affairs. Cooperation on security issues, antiterrorism and antisemitism is also growing. Of course, the EU also has disagreements with the Israeli government, and engage in those both privately and publicly. But the EU is united when it comes to Israel and its security. [*The Jerusalem Post*, April 6, 2019]

### Germany vows close ties with next Israeli gov't

Germany says it will work closely with any new Israeli government and stressed the two countries’ “cordial” ties despite recent differences on Israel’s settlement policies. Government spokesman Steffen Seibert said that Berlin was waiting for the official result of Tuesday’s parliamentary elections. [*Ynet*, April 10, 2019]

### Israel imprisons French Consulate staffer for smuggling weapons to West Bank

An employee of the French Consulate in Jerusalem who was convicted of smuggling arms from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank was sentenced to seven years in prison. Romain Franck was sentenced as part of a plea bargain under which he confessed to having received 26,000 shekels (\$7,200) in exchange for smuggling 30 guns. [*Haaretz*, April 8, 2019]

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

#### Matteo Salvini launches campaign to forge far-right alliance

With lofty rhetoric and classic populist messaging, Italy’s Matteo Salvini launched what he called “a vision of Europe for the next 50 years” in Milan, in an attempt to bring the far right from across Europe into an alliance. Italy’s deputy prime minister and leader of the nationalist League party shared a stage with politicians from three other nationalist parties, pledging to create a new bloc that would shake up the European parliament after elections in May. Salvini’s League, Marine Le Pen’s National Rally in France and the Freedom party in Austria are all expected to do well at the elections, boosting the number of far-right populist MEPs. [*The Guardian*, April 8, 2019]

### May asks for Brexit extension to 30 June as Tusk offers up to a year

Theresa May has written to Donald Tusk to ask for Brexit to be delayed until 30 June while she battles to win cross-party agreement on a way forward. Rather than the year-long flexible extension to article 50 recommended by the European council president, the prime minister suggested 30 June as the new departure date, but with an option to leave earlier if the necessary legislation has been passed. That is the same date requested by the government last month but rejected by EU leaders in Brussels. Unless a new date is signed off at an emergency EU summit on Wednesday, Britain is due to leave without a deal on 12 April. [*The Guardian*, April 5, 2019]

### Brexit: UK and EU agree delay to 31 October

European Union leaders have granted the UK a six-month extension to Brexit, after five hours of talks in Brussels. The new deadline - 31 October - averts the prospect of the UK having to leave the EU without a deal this Friday April 12th, as MPs are still deadlocked over a deal. European Council president Donald Tusk said his “message to British friends” was “please do not waste this time”. Theresa May, who had wanted a shorter delay, said the UK would still aim to leave the EU as soon as possible. The UK must now hold European elections in May, or leave on 1 June without a deal. [*BBC*, April 11, 2019]

### Macron enrages EU leaders after opposing long Brexit extension

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, enraged fellow leaders after speaking last alone against a long extension to Britain’s membership of the EU. Macron insisted on standing up during a working dinner in Brussels during which he set his stall against a longer extension up to 31 December backed by the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. During the meeting, it soon emerged that France was nearly isolated, with only a handful of member states, such as Belgium, sounding sympathetic to his arguments. The French president angered some EU leaders with his attempt to block a long extension of nine to 12 months that was favoured by the majority. [*The Guardian*, April 11, 2019]

### Italy says Italy's slower growth might trigger spending freeze

Italy may be forced to freeze some of its planned public expenditures this year as the country’s growth is slower than forecast, European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said. Brussels had predicted in February a meager 0.2 percent expansion in Italy this year, but Dombrovskis said that growth could turn out to be “even slower” as global and domestic factors had dampened the outlook. A possible downward revision would further widen the gap with growth estimates made by Italy’s euro-sceptic government, which based its free-spending 2019 budget on the assumption of a 1 percent expansion. [*Reuters*, April 6, 2019]

### EU scores at China summit with assist from Trump

EU and Chinese officials meeting in Brussels proclaimed their summit as a win-win, but far more striking was the big loser: Donald Trump. European Council President Donald Tusk declared a “breakthrough” on some of the EU’s major trade disagreements — including a joint pledge to back tough World Trade Organization rules on industrial subsidies. Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said: “Today, we are making good on our joint commitment to uphold and to update the rules-based global order that has served us so well.” And Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang, appearing at a news conference with Tusk and Juncker, declared the agreements reached at the summit “something good for China’s reform and opening-up endeavors, and good for European unity and prosperity.” [*POLITICO*, April 11, 2019]

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### Twelve Western nations urged Romania to ditch judicial changes

Twelve Western nations urged Romania to scrap two planned emergency decrees altering judicial legislation, in a rare joint intervention that underlined U.S. and EU alarm over the threat to the rule of law. The embassies’ joint statement coincided with a warning from the European Commission in Brussels saying it would take swift action against Romania if it failed to address its concerns over the independence of the judiciary. The decrees “apparently under discussion have the potential to impact on the independence of Romania’s judiciary, which would undermine Romanians’ and partners’ trust in the justice system, and in Romania’s government as well”, they said. [*Reuters*, April 3, 2019]

### Turkish opposition frets over Erdogan’s election silence

Can Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accept defeat? That’s the question weighing on the mind of Turkey’s opposition a day after they snatched the country’s largest cities from Erdogan’s party in municipal elections. Preliminary results show the opposition’s mayoral candidates winning comfortably in the capital Ankara and narrowly taking Istanbul, wrenching Turkey’s political and economic centers from Erdogan’s grasp by tapping into widespread discontent fueled by an economic downturn. The president, however, has not conceded defeat in either city and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) is disputing the results, citing alleged irregularities. [*POLITICO*, April 4, 2019]

### Slovenian PM accuses Croatia of ‘outrageous’ interference

Slovenian Prime Minister Marjan Sarc accused Croatia of “outrageous” behavior, alleging Zagreb tried to suppress a media report that Croatian spies helped scupper efforts to end a border dispute. “It’s outrageous that Croatia tried to influence one of our media not to publish ... this interference of the Croatian secret service,” Sarc said. Sarc was referring to reports in Slovenian media this week that increased tension between the two neighboring EU members in the long-running dispute over their mutual border. [*POLITICO*, April 10, 2019]

### Poland’s Populists pick a new top enemy: Gay People

Poland’s governing party, Law and Justice, has seized on the declaration and the issue of gay rights in its campaigning for European Union elections in May and for national elections this fall. It is part of a growing trend across eastern and central Europe, where nationalist and populist parties are increasingly turning to cultural issues — and attacks on gay people — to rally their faithful supporters. [*The New York Times*, April 7, 2019]

### New poll predicts Socialist Party victory at Spanish elections

The Socialist Party (PSOE) will win the upcoming general election in Spain with between 123 and 138 of the 350 seats in Congress, while the far-right group Vox will gain 29-37 seats. That’s according to the latest opinion poll carried out by Spain’s CIS public research institute. [*El Pais*, April 9, 2019]

### Merkel calls on EU to give UK more time on Brexit

Angela Merkel has called on fellow European leaders to give the UK more time to avoid a disorderly exit from the EU, even as Theresa May repeated her desire for Brexit to be completed next month. In remarks that highlighted Berlin’s conciliatory stance ahead of the crucial European summit on Brexit, Ms Merkel warned: “We have only 59 hours to avoid a disorderly UK exit from the EU. That scenario of a disorderly Brexit is not in our interest.” Speaking to the German parliament, she said that the British prime minister had assured her during a visit “of her firm intention to find a way out of this situation together with the opposition in the House of Commons”. [*The Financial Times*, April 9, 2019]

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

#### Genocide Research Institute in Lithuania publishes statement trivialising the Holocaust

The Lithuanian Jewish Community expressed shock at an unsigned statement published by the Center for the Study of the Genocide and Resistance of Residents of Lithuania (LGGRTC), which reportedly seeks to remove the responsibility from the crimes committed by Lithuanian partisans in the Holocaust, and to justify the actions of Nazi collaborator Jonas Noreika. The statement by the LGGRTC also claims that “the number of Lithuanians who shot Jews was lower than in other nations” and that “the residents of occupied Lithuania in 1941 didn’t understand ghettos as part of the Holocaust.” [The European Jewish Congress, April 2, 2019]

### Report on 130 cases of Labour antisemitism shows the importance of Gordon Brown’s unequivocal stand

The writer examined more than 130 cases of antisemitism and antisemitism denial in the Labour Party recently, for a report published last week. The former prime minister has also produced a video in which he is emphatic about the approach Labour should be taking against antisemitism: “No ifs, no buts. no qualifications, no caveats.” However, the author’s findings were that some in the party have indulged in more than just qualifications and caveats. [*The Independent*, April 2, 2019]

### Dozens of headstones smashed at fire-ravaged Jewish cemetery in Romania

Days after Romanian media reported about neglect at the Jewish cemetery of Hosi in the country’s northeast, 73 of its headstones were smashed in a suspected hate crime. The Fedrom umbrella group of Romanian Jews condemned the vandalism in a statement published Wednesday, “Such events of a profoundly anti-Semitic nature cannot be accepted in the democratic world, and seriously affect democracy in Romania,” wrote Aurel Vainer, who heads Fedrom. The police are investigating the vandalism. [*Haaretz*, April 5, 2019]

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