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Europe

May 1, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

U.S. called on to boycott German cars until Hezbollah banned from Germany

A newly formed Committee to Ban Hezbollah in Germany called on US consumers to boycott German automobiles in an advertisement in The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles, after German Chancellor Angela Merkel rejected outlawing Hezbollah. The advertisement read: "Boycott the German car industry until Hezbollah is banned in Germany." Merkel's administration is vehemently opposed to banning Hezbollah's entire organization in Germany, where at least 950 Hezbollah members operate. [*The Jerusalem Post*, April 25, 2019]

Europe isn't feeling much pain from Trump tariffs, Central Bank says

President Trump's trade war was supposed to hurt European companies by so much pain they would pressure Trump to back down. But it's not working out that way, according to a new study by the European Central Bank. Almost a year after the White House imposed tariffs on European steel and aluminum, the actual damage to European exports has been surprisingly mild. Some industries, notably manufacturers of heavy equipment, may have even profited. That is because the White House imposed a broader tariff on Chinese goods, making competing European goods less expensive by comparison and allowing them to gain market share. [*The New York Times*, April 24, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

Putin offers Russian citizenship to Ukrainians in separatist-held areas

Russian President Vladimir Putin has sparked anger in Kiev by offering Russian citizenship to residents of areas in eastern Ukraine held by Russian-backed separatists. Outgoing Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called the move "unprecedented interference" and is demanding "the internal affairs of an independent state." Poroshenko also said it is a "brutal violation of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine and a complete trampling upon its obligations in the framework of the Minsk agreements." [CNN, April 25, 2019]

Ukraine to lose gas supplies if transit contract not extended – Putin

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine would remain without gas supplies if the country fails to extend the agreement on the transit of Russian gas. At a conference, Putin discussed whether a transit agreement would be signed for the transportation of Russian gas after the election of a new president of Ukraine. The Russian President then stressed that, if there is no gas transit, there will be no reverse supply. [*UNIAN*, April 28, 2019]

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

Europe wants to deal with China as a group: German minister

Major European Union countries want to deal with China as a group rather than sign bilateral agreements as individual states, German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said while attending a conference on China's Belt and Road plan. European countries have generally signaled their willingness to participate in China's program to co-create the old Silk Road joining China with Asia and Europe. But key states like France and Germany have said China must at-tern improve access and fair competition for foreign firms. [*Reuters*, April 26, 2019]

EU and Japan advance ties with focus on China, US

President of the European Council Donald Tusk and head of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The three leaders took stock of the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement (EPA), the largest trade deal in the world, which entered into force on February 1. What was noticeable from their summit was that the EU's relationship with the Japanese is first and foremost seen as a counterpoint to Sino-European engagement in fields ranging from trade and investment to closer cooperation on connectivity. However, both sides emphasized the importance of multilateralism and adherence to the World Trade Organization, which was seen by the world as a clear response to the protectionist policies of US President Donald Trump. [*The Asia Times*, April 26, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

Libya conflict stirs divisions in Gulf and Europe

Germany stops processing some Syrian asylum applications: report

Germany will put off ruling on asylum applications for some Syrians pending an assessment of the security situation in the war-torn country. The Interior Ministry, said for the past several weeks decisions on Syrian asylum procedures have been "postponed" as the ministry evaluates possible changes to internal guidelines. Refugee organizations have said they are concerned more asylum-seekers from Syria will see their applications denied because the ministry no longer views all of Syria as a war zone. [*Deutsche Welle*, April 29, 2019]

France said to tell Lebanon: Israel won't tolerate Iranian-backed missile plant

France has warned Lebanon that Israel will not tolerate the existence of an Iranian-backed manufacturing facility for precision-guided missiles located inside the country. Diplomatic sources from within the Arab world told Al-Hayat newspaper the details of the facility were conveyed to France from the US and originated with Israel. The newspaper reported that France expects Lebanon to take action against the Iranian-backed production facility. [*The Times of Israel*, April 20, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

Macron expresses hope Netanyahu's new government will push for Two-state solution

French President Emmanuel Macron congratulated Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu via a letter for winning the Israeli election, expressing hope his government will renew efforts towards a two-state solution with the Palestinians. The spokesoverson for the French Foreign Affairs Ministry said that Israel and France maintain an "extraordinary friendship," adding it "will work with the new Israeli government to expand cooperation in every area, and will continue the dialogue on regional and security issues." [*Haaretz*, April 19, 2019]

Germany to cover expenses of Jerusalem Holocaust Memorial Concert

The Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra's Holocaust memorial concert is to take place with support from the German Embassy in Israel. The idea for the German-Israeli cooperation comes from the Israeli musician Daniel Fradkin, who is to play the violin *Ciaccona* in the concert. [*Haaretz*, April 23, 2019]

Netanyahu party's Foreign Affairs director endorsed Spain's Far-right party Vox – then apologized

The foreign affairs director of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party tweeted his support for the far-right party Vox that is ran in Spain's election before turning back and deleting his tweet, after which he issued an apology. Likud PR chief Eli Hanan wrote, in Spanish, that on behalf of the Likud party he wishes Vox and its president luck in the election. In response to comments, he added that "Vox is Likud's sister party in the European Parliament. It helps us a lot… anyone who supports Israel and Jews, I support him back." After receiving harsh feedback on Twitter, Hanan deleted his tweet. Hours later, he tweeted an apology in Spanish, saying he shouldn't have included the Likud party in his personal opinion. [*Haaretz*, April 27, 2019]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

EU's Juncker says Poland unlikely to leave the European Union

Poland is unlikely to leave the European Union, even if the ruling eurosceptic Law and Justice (PiS) party wins re-election this year. EU executive head Jean-Claude Juncker said in response to a question in an interview published by the Polish daily: "Poland is with us (the European Union) because we have common values," Juncker said. His statement came as Poland's biggest opposition bloc has repeatedly warned that Law and Justice could eventually lead the country out of the EU. [*Reuters*, April 29, 2019]

EU elections: Brexit Party kicks off campaign in Wales

The Brexit Party's lead candidates in Wales has called for leave supporters to use their European election vote to send a "strong message" to Westminster. The party kicked off its campaigning in Wales on with visits from leader Nigel Farage and former Tory MP Anne Widdecombe. It is one of eight parties fighting the European elections in Wales, taking place on 23 May. The party is formed by Mr Farage after the European elections, campaigning for the UK to leave the EU straight away. [*BBC*, April 30, 2019]

France's far-right boy wonder

Jordan Bardella is leading the election campaign for Marine Le Pen, and is in line for a prominent role in Brussels. Only 23 years old, Bardella has never held national public office, but his position at the top of the National Rally's electoral list all but guarantees him a seat in the European Parliament. As the new face of the French far right, he will be well placed to play a prominent role at the heart of a new, enlarged Eurosceptic bloc — a group comprised of right-wing populists from big parties in France, Germany, Italy and Austria as well as a myriad of smaller forces. [*POLITICO*, April 24, 2019]

Brexit: UK to ask EU for citizens' rights assurance

The government will ask for assurances from the European Union on what happens to British citizens living in the bloc – and EU citizens in the UK – in the case of a no-deal Brexit. But the EU has already rejected this kind of plan back in February. European Commission spokesowma, Mina Andreeva said they would "not negotiate mini-deals", and the best way to protect citizens' rights was through the deal negotiated between the EU and UK. [*BBC*, April 29, 2019]

Timmermans and Verhofstadt spar in election debate

The socialist and liberal candidates for Commission president struggled to differentiate their views on the economy, climate change, social policy and other issues during a high-profile debate, but they joined forces in urging voters to ditch the conservatives who have long dominated EU politics. Despite their efforts to draw contrasts, Timmermans and Verhofstadt agreed far more than they disagreed. They are two of the most outspoken EU federalists and ardent defenders of the European project, and that shared vision was evident — especially in their responses on trade, migration, and regulation of big technology companies. [*POLITICO*, April 29, 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Spain's Socialists score big election victory

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's Socialists scored a big victory in Spain's national election, though they will still have to seek coalition agreements to stay in power. With over 99 percent of the ballots counted, the Socialists won about 29 percent of the vote and 123 of the 350 seats in parliament — a huge step up from the 85 seats they now have. This puts them well ahead of the second-placed conservative Popular Party on 66 seats. The liberal Ciudadanos won 57 seats, the far-left Podemos and its allies 42 seats, and the far-right Vox 24 seats. This was also a big win for Vox, the first far-right party to win seats in the national parliament since 1982. Combined with Ciudadanos' close third-place finish behind the PP, this paves the way for more competition on the right. The rise of Vox seems to have worked to Sánchez's advantage, mobilizing supporters of both the left and regional nationalists, while cannibalizing former conservative votes. [*POLITICO*, April 29, 2019]

Ukraine election: Comedian Zelensky wins presidency by landslide

With nearly all ballots counted in the run-off vote, Comedian Volodymyr Zelensky had taken more than 73% with incumbent Petro Poroshenko trailing far behind on 24%. "I will revert let you down," Mr Zelensky told celebrating supporters. Mr Zelensky, a political novice, is best known for starring in a satirical television series Servant of the People, in which his character accidentally becomes Ukrainian president. He told reporters he would "reboot" peace talks with the separatists fighting Ukrainian forces and volunteers in the east. [*BBC*, April 22, 2019]

Hungary denying food to asylum seekers, say human rights groups

Hungarian authorities are systematically denying food to failed asylum seekers detained in the country's border transit zones, say rights activists. The policy, whereby adults whose asylum claims have been rejected are denied food, was described as "an unprecedented human rights violation in 21st-century Europe" by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a human rights organisation working to offer legal support to those in the transit zones. [*The Guardian*, April 26, 2019]

Macron, chastened by Yellow Vest protests, says 'I Can Do Better'

President Emmanuel Macron presented himself to journalists at the Élysée Palace on April 25th for the first news conference of his presidency, chastened by five months of often violent anti-government protests. Mr. Macron was the protesters' principal target as the perceived president of the rich. So he promised to undertake not only government reforms to appease the Yellow Vest movement's call for greater economic equality, but also to reform himself. Mr. Macron embarked on a three-month listening and speaking tour of the French provinces as part of what his government called the Great Debate — its response to the Yellow Vests — which educated him about his own country, the president said. [*The New York Times*, April 25, 2019]

Push for deal between Kosovo and Serbia puts national divisions on display

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and President Emmanuel Macron of France met the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia in Berlin, reaching toward a large prize: a path to a peace settlement between the two Balkan nations, almost 20 years after a war between them came to an end. But if they are to have any hope of easing tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, and breaking a deadlock in talks on the normalization of relations, then analysts say they may first have to broker another peace, between Kosovo's two leaders. The issue of an exchange of territory has been widely discussed between Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. However, Kosovo's prime minister, Ramush Haradinaj, is adamantly opposed to any territorial concessions, and this kind of plan is profoundly unpopular with Serbs — most of whom continue to consider Kosovo a part of Serbia. [*The New York Times*, April 29, 2019]

Erdogan says Istanbul vote involved "Organized Irregularities"

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said there were "organized irregularities" during the Istanbul elections that his ruling party narrowly lost on March 31. "Hundreds of employees from banks like Ishank, Sekerbank, Garanti were on duty" in election officials, Erdogan said during a speech in Ankara. "This is unprecedented and unacceptable." Ekrem Imamoglu of the opposition CHP party defeated the AK Party's Binali Yildirim, a former prime minister, with a slim margin of about 14,000 votes, according to election board results. The ruling party claimed widespread irregularities tainted the vote and caused it to lose control over the country's biggest city, which has been held by the AK Party and its predecessors since 1994. [*Bloomberg*, April 27, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Lithuania bans British Holocaust denier Duvid Irving from country for next five years

Lithuania has barred the prolific British Holocaust denier David Irving from entering the country for the next five years. The move to block Irving comes off the heels of reports of a planned tour in autumn of Poland and the Baltic states by the 81-year-old to important World War II sites linked to the Nazis and the persecution of Jews. [*Haaretz*, April 24, 2019]

U.K. Labour Party makes a Non-kosher mistake in Passover greeting

Britain's Labour Party tweeted and then deleted a Passover greeting to Jews because it made a salient mistake: It featured a picture of a loaf of bread, a foodstuff banned during the weeklong holiday. The tweet, which was ridiculed online, was posted and removed within two hours. The updated greeting, which originally featured a Star of David and wine glass along with the bread, featured only the star. [*Haaretz*, April 19, 2019]

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