



May 21, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

**Trump welcomes Hungary's far-right nationalist prime minister after past presidents shunned him**

U.S. Administration officials said that invitation to the White House for talks with President Viktor Orbán — the first for a Hungarian prime minister in years — is part of a concerted strategy to re-engage Central European nations as Russia and China seek to exert influence in the region. But the visit raised questions about which leaders Trump is looking to cultivate — including a long list of global strongmen — at the expense of more traditional US allies. [CNV, May 14, 2019]

**Swiss President in surprise White House visit, may mediate with Iran**

The White House announced that Swiss President Ueli Maurer arrived in Washington for an unscheduled meeting with President Donald Trump, to possibly discuss U.S. relations with Iran. Switzerland has in the past played the role of mediator between the United States and Iran. Analysts in Washington suggested that the unannounced meeting will focus on mounting tensions between Iran and the Americans. [Haaretz, May 16, 2019]

### EUROPE – RUSSIA

**Council of Europe restores Russia's voting rights**

Russia will remain in the Council of Europe after foreign ministers of the 47-nation organization voted to restore Russia's voting rights. Moscow's rights in the Council of Europe were suspended after the annexation in Crimea in 2014. Germany and France pushed to welcome back Russia in the organization as they claim it permits dissidents to Putin's regime to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights and make their voice heard. [POLITICO, May 17, 2019]

**Czech soldier gets suspended sentence for joining separatists in Eastern Ukraine**

A Czech soldier was condemned by a Czech court to a suspended three-year prison sentence after he was found guilty of joining Russian-backed separatists in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine. The soldier shared pictures of himself with firearms and wearing the uniforms of the separatists. [Radio Free Europe, May 19, 2019]

**Erdogan: Turkey to produce S-500s with Russia after S-400 deal**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has announced that the purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system by his country is a "done deal" and that Turkey and Russia would jointly produced S-500 defense systems. For the USA, these ties between Ankara and Moscow are perceived as a threat to Western defense. The US suspended the delivery of F-35 fighter jet in April to push Erdogan to halt the purchase of Russian defense system. Erdogan responded to the American threat of sanctions by claiming that the [US] not delivering the F-35s is not an option. [Al Jazeera, May 19, 2019]

### EUROPE – EAST ASIA

**Portuguese PM praises Macao's role in enhancing Portugal-China ties**

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa said that his country's relationship with China is an important element of its national policy. During his meeting with Chui Sai On, chief executive of China's Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR), Costa shared that the recent mutual visits by the presidents of the two countries have consolidated bilateral relations. The Portuguese PM also spoke highly of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development project, stressing that infrastructure improvements will strongly promote the area's further development. [Xinhua, May 15, 2019]

**Trump's Huawei ban also causing tech shocks in Europe**

The escalating U.S.-China trade war that's seen Chinese tech giant Huawei slapped on a U.S. trade blacklist is causing ripples of shock across Europe too, as restrictions imposed on U.S. companies hit regional suppliers concerned they could face U.S. restrictions if they don't ditch Huawei. The interconnectedness of high-tech supply chains coupled with U.S. dominance of the sector and Huawei's strong regional position as a supplier of cellular, IT and network kit in Europe suddenly makes political risk a fast-accelerating threat for EU technology companies, large and small. [Tech Crunch, May 20, 2019]

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

**IRouhani's Europe outreach fails, nuclear deal could collapse**

President Hassan Rouhani announced earlier this month that Iran would suspend implementation of some of its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), one year after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal. Rouhani's plan may be to pressure Europe to find a solution to save the JCPOA, but he is quickly losing control of the situation. He may no longer have the clout to stand against pressure at home. Indeed, he no longer has the leverage to talk to the establishment about preserving "strategic patience." [Al-Monitor, May 17, 2019]

**EU extends sanctions against Syria by 1 year**

The European Union has prolonged sanctions against the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad for a year. The EU said that the 28-nation bloc decided to maintain its restrictive measures against the Syrian government and its supporters "as the repression of civilian population continues." This includes a travel ban and freezing assets of 270 people and 70 entities (companies or organizations) until June 1, 2020, in addition to an already imposed oil embargo. [RT, May 17, 2019]

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

**German Parliament deems B.D.S. movement anti-Semitic**

The German Parliament became the first in the EU to pass a resolution that designates the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) against Israel as anti-Semitic. The vote said the campaign to boycott Israeli products, along with the movement's "Don't Buy" stickers, recalled "the most terrible chapter in German history" and revived memories of the Nazi motto "Don't buy from Jews." "The pattern of argument and methods of the B.D.S. movement are anti-Semitic," the resolution stated, vowing not to fund any organizations that question Israel's right to exist, call for a boycott of Israel or actively support B.D.S. [The New York Times, May 17, 2019]

**Poland cancels visit by Israeli officials to discuss property restitution**

In the latest diplomatic spat between Poland and Israel, the Polish Foreign Ministry canceled a scheduled visit of an Israeli delegation to Warsaw, which was expected to discuss restitution of Jewish property that was nationalized by the Polish Communist government after the Second World War. The ministry issued a short statement on its website saying the visit was canceled "after the Israeli side made last minute changes in the composition of the delegation, suggesting that the talks would primarily focus on the issues related to property restitution." [The Jerusalem Post, May 14, 2019]

**Poland demands reaction over 'racist' assault of ambassador to Israel**

Poland's prime minister condemned what he described as a "xenophobic" and "racist" assault on its ambassador to Israel on a Tel Aviv street. The incident comes amid a bitter standoff between Poland and Israel over how to remember the Holocaust and over demands that Poland pay reparations for former Jewish properties that were seized by Nazi Germany and later nationalized by Poland's communist regime. Israeli Ambassador Anna Azari was summoned to the Polish Foreign Ministry in Warsaw over the assault. Michal Dworzecy, the head of Morawiecki's office, said the Polish government expects the perpetrator to be punished. [Ynet, May 15, 2019]

**Ireland vs. Hungary: Report Charts Rising Support for Netanyahu Among EU States**

Researchers have mapped the differences in EU members' relations with the Netanyahu government and analyzed the reasons for the union's loss of relevance in advancing a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Their study, published in advance of next week's elections for the European Parliament, found that Hungary is the country that works hardest to block EU decisions critical of Israeli policies, while Ireland is the EU's most active critic of these policies. France, meanwhile, is the country most supportive of resuming international peace efforts. [Haaretz, May 17, 2019]

**Tel Aviv pulled off a Eurovision to remember - Reporter's notebook**

After a year of anticipation, months of intense preparation, a whole week of festivities and an epic 4-hour Eurovision broadcast, Tel Aviv slowly began returning to normal on Sunday May 19th. Despite a series of bumps and hurdles along the way – and a few surprises during the grand final – the bottom line was undeniable: Israel put on an impressive, praiseworthy and memorable show for potentially up to 200 million viewers around the world. Chatter in the press room all week long wasn't about the threat of Hamas rockets, or the pro-Palestinian activism of Iceland's Hatari. Few people were discussing the budget squabbles between KAN and the Israeli government, or even the drama surrounding Madonna's contract with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Instead, international media personnel gathered in Tel Aviv for a week were there to discuss the competition itself: the staging of the show, the drama of the semi-finals and the excitement of the contest. Superfans, bloggers and media from across Europe were abuzz all week long with the show's developments, and a large hearing of praise for the Israeli production. [The Jerusalem Post, May 20, 2019]

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

**Salvini says he wants pre-Maastricht EU rules, ahead of far-right rally**

Italy's headline Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini said that European Union rules are creating "full-on unemployment" and he wants to go back to pre-Maastricht Treaty rules. "Those who want to save Europe are those that are sold as the anti-Europeans. I feel more pro-European than the pro-Europeans". The Maastricht Treaty -- officially known as The Treaty on European Union -- was signed by the 12 member countries of the European Community in the Netherlands in 1992. It created the structure for a single currency, later named the euro, that was born in 1999. [CNN, May 19, 2019]

**Dutch lead populist charge in European Parliament**

A flamboyant Dutch populist could open the floodgates for a tidal wave of eurosceptic and anti-immigration parties across the continent in this week's European Parliament elections. Classics-quoting climate skeptic Thierry Baudet founded the Forum for Democracy just two years ago, but his party is on course to beat Prime Minister Mark Rutte's Liberals when the Netherlands votes on May 23rd. As the first country in the EU to vote, along with exit-bound Britain, Dutch exit polls will be closely watched as a bellwether of a populist earthquake ahead of official results for the whole EU on Sunday May 26. [The Japan Times, May 19, 2019]

**Who will be the new president of the EU Commission?**

At a meeting in Sibiu, Romania, European leaders discussed potential names for the role of president of the EU commission. Kristalina Georgieva, the chief executive officer of the World Bank, emerges as a strong contender for the job: she is from Bulgaria and many governments are pushing for Eastern Europe to be represented. She is member of the center-right alliance forecast to win most seats in the European Parliament elections and she would also become the first woman to head the Commission. [Bloomberg, May 14, 2019]

**EU parliament elections: country-by-country poll tracker**

The latest polls indicate that the center-right European People's Party (EPP) and the center-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) are likely to remain the largest groups in the EU Parliament after the elections taking place between the 23 and the 26th of May. However, they are expected to lose their combined majority for the first time. The Eurosceptic and anti-immigration parties look set to make the greatest gains. They are currently split divided in three groups, despite Matteo Salvini's will to forge a far-right alliance. For instance, in France, the Rassemblement National, Marine Le Pen's party, leads the polls by a very narrow margin over La République En Marche, Emmanuel Macron's party. [The Financial Times, May 20, 2019]

**Emmanuel Macron's grand ambitions are at stake in European Elections**

Mr. Macron's vision of a united Europe now faces its most critical test in elections for the European Parliament over three days, starting on May 23rd. Polls in France show his party trailing Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National, or National Rally. Defeat for Mr. Macron would be a stinging humiliation for a president who has barely managed to turn the tide of a popular revolt against his pro-business policies after months of often-violent Gilets Jaunes protests. But it could also be the final nail in the coffin of the expansive vision of an inclusive, harmonious Europe, that has remained beyond Mr. Macron's reach. [The New York Times, May 21, 2019]

**European Elections: Spain seeks to become the Third leading power in the EU**

Spain may have found its window of opportunity to become a leading country when setting the agenda and addressing the challenges of the future of the EU. The political instability in the United Kingdom and Italy, the influence that the Spanish parties will have in the European Parliament after the elections, and the fact that most of the Spanish population is strongly pro-European, can be key to boost the role of Spain in the EU in the coming years. The departure of the United Kingdom from the EU will leave a significant power vacuum, that is certain. In contrast, Spain has just celebrated early elections, after which the socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has come out reinforced to form a more stable government. Although Spain has usually kept a low profile regarding the EU sphere, it seems that there has been an 'awakening' to occupy the rightful place. [Forbes, May 13, 2019]

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

**Austria to move fast to hold elections after coalition collapses**

Austria is heading for snap elections after the far-right vice-chancellor resigned over a video that appeared to show him promising public contracts to a woman posing as a Russian backer, in return for help in his election campaign. Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz said that "enough was enough" and his conservative Austrian People's party (ÖVP) was ending its 18-month-old coalition with the nationalist Freedom party (FPÖ). Elections would be held "as soon as possible", Kurz said. [The Guardian, May 18, 2019]

**New Ukraine President Zelensky dissolves parliament**

Television comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy took the oath of office as Ukraine's new president on May 20th, promising that as hard as he had worked in the past to make Ukrainians laugh, he would now work to keep them from crying. As his first act, he dismissed the parliament still dominated by loyalists of his defeated predecessor, setting up an election in two months in which his new party has a chance to win its first seats. [Reuters, May 21, 2019]

**Turkey insists on right to drill for energy reserves off Cyprus**

Tensions over energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean have risen sharply after Turkey said it would "exercise its sovereign rights" to drill off Cyprus in flagrant defiance of warnings from western allies. As the dispute over potential gas reserves intensified, Ankara insisted its state-of-the-art drilling ship, the Fatih, and its support vessels would begin operations in waters viewed by the EU as being within the island's exclusive economic zone. "Turkey does not recognise the unilateral and illegitimate exclusive economic zone claims of the Greek Cypriots," said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. [The Guardian, May 20, 2019]

**Brexit weekly briefing: May gears up for yet another vote on yet another deal**

Theresa May pledged to give MPs another chance to vote on her Brexit dealin the week beginning 3 June after an hour-long meeting with Jeremy Corbyn at which the Labour leader raised concerns about her ability to deliver on a cross-party deal. The prime minister had said her promise held good with or without Labour's backing, but it will have to be the latter, plainly, because – as long expected – talks between the two parties on a compromise Brexit plan promptly collapsed. [The Guardian, May 21, 2019]

**Greek economy shows promising signs of growth**

In January 2015, Alexis Tsipras, leader of the Syriza party, came to power, promising to end the austerity that had plunged Greece into one of the deepest depressions in economic history. Today, under his leadership, a recovering Greece stresses its fealty to the eurozone's policy orthodoxy. Greek macroeconomic policy has been remarkable for its orthodoxy. The primary fiscal surplus (that is, before interest) was 3.8 per cent of gross domestic product in 2016 (up from 0.8 per cent in 2015), 4.1 per cent in 2017 and, according to the IMF, again 3.8 per cent in 2018. These surpluses are far larger than those of other crisis-hit eurozone countries. The economy also returned to growth, at 1.5 per cent in 2017, an estimated 2.1 per cent in 2018 and an IMF forecast of 2.4 per cent in 2019. [The Financial Times, May 20, 2019]

**German Social Democrats fear double defeat**

On May 26, the once-formidable Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) faces the prospect of losing its 73-year-old hold on power in the city-state of Bremen as well as coming third nationwide in the European Parliament election. Trailing behind Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats and the Greens in the European ballot would be a national and EU-wide humiliation. But defeat in this northern port city would be a more poignant sign of the decline of the party, which serves as the junior coalition partner in Merkel's government. [POLITICO, May 20, 2019]

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

**Suspected stabber of Jewish woman in Sweden arrested in Denmark**

Police in Denmark arrested a man suspected of stabbing a Jewish communal leader in Sweden. The arrest followed the issuing of a warrant for the suspect's arrest for attempted murder in Helsingborg in southern Sweden, the Helsingborgs Dagblad reported. [Haaretz, May 15, 2019]

**Poland's Prime Minister says returning property to Jews is akin to Nazi victory, sparks backlash**

Poland will not pay restitution to Jews who had their property taken during World War II because to do so would be akin to handing Adolf Hitler a victory, Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said over the weekend. "If this would be injustice will ever happen—when the executioner and victim roles were reversed—"it would be Hitler's posthumous victory" said the Prime Minister. It is unclear exactly why Morawiecki thinks restitution would be a victory for Hitler. The Prime Minister's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment. However, Poland's government, led by the right-leaning Law and Justice Party, has argued vehemently against Poland being held responsible for the atrocities committed in Poland during World War II. [Newsweek, May 20, 2019]

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