



June 12, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – USA
North Macedonia, a new NATO member?
During a visit to North Macedonia, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg indicated that the Western military alliance is “ready to welcome” the Balkan country as its 30th member. North Macedonia signed the Accession Protocol in February after Skopje and Athens settled a decades-old name dispute through a compromise that changed Macedonia’s name to the Republic of North Macedonia. Russia has opposed the Western military alliance’s expansion in the Balkans, claiming that it is undermining security in the region.
[Radio Free Europe, June 03, 2019]

On the 75th anniversary of D-Day, President Donald Trump and President Emmanuel Macron emphasize the historical ties between USA and Europe
The President of the USA, Donald Trump, and his French counterpart met in Normandy on the 6th of June to mark the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The ties between Western Europe and the USA have come under strain these last few years as both sides are divided on a growing number of issues. However, Emmanuel Macron, after meeting with Donald Trump, emphasized the “shared objectives” of USA and France, notably concerning the need to avoid Iran from getting nuclear weapons. However, Macron stressed his will to negotiate with Tehran while Trump threatens and pressures Iran.
[Politico, June 06, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA
German governor calling to ease sanctions on Russia
Michael Kretschmer, the governor of the German state of Saxony, called to end sanctions imposed by the European Union on Russia after he met Vladimir Putin at the St-Petersburg Economic Forum on June 7. Kretschmer is a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Angela Merkel’s party. The CDU Party leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer rejected Kretschmer’s arguments by indicating that the sanctions would stay in place until Russia changes its behavior and put an end to its violations of international law in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.
[Radio Free Europe, June 09, 2019]

New gas import deal signed between Hungary and Russia
On the 6th of June, at the St-Petersburg International Economic Forum, Péter Szijjártó, the Hungarian foreign affairs and trade minister, met with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov to sign a gas import agreement. Russia will provide gas to Hungary by the end of September and in 2020. Western pro-European officials have expressed their worries concerning the growing ties between Hungary and Russia.
https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-gas-supplies-deal-russia/
[Hungary Today, June 07, 2019]

EUROPE – EAST ASIA
Aung San Suu Kyi pays a visit to Viktor Orban
On June 6th, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar, met with Viktor Orban, the Hungarian Prime Minister, in Budapest. Aung San Suu Kyi and Viktor Orban stressed that migrants and the “growing Muslim populations” represent the “greatest challenges” for their countries. Aung San Suu Kyi received the Nobel peace prize in 1991 but she is now accused of failing to condemn the Myanmar military’s violent crackdown on the Muslim Rohingya minority.
[The Guardian, June 06, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST
Germany’s Foreign Minister met with Iran president Hassan Rohani to save the Iran deal
As part of a tour in the Middle East German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, met on June 10th with Iranian president Hassan Rohani. Heiko Maas reiterated the commitments of European countries to the Iranian nuclear deal and expressed his worries concerning the growing tensions in the region. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif warned that countries imposing and supporting sanctionts against Iran cannot expect to “remain safe”.
[Deutsche Welle, June 10, 2019]

Hezbollah-linked terrorists stockpiled explosives in London
In 2015, British intelligence services found that terrorists with ties to Hezbollah were stockpiling more than three tons of ammonium nitrate, a common ingredient in homemade bombs, on the outskirts of London. The plot was part of a wider Hezbollah plan for future attacks targeting Israeli interests around the world. The plot was not divulged at the time because it came just months after the signature of the Iran Nuclear deal. British officials feared it would derail the agreement with Tehran, who are the main supporters of the Lebanese terrorist group.
[Times of Israel, June 10, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL
European Union condemns Israel’s settlement construction
On June 1st, the European Union has condemned Israeli plans to build 805 housing units in East Jerusalem beyond the 1967 border after the Israel’s Housing Ministry issued tenders to add housing units. This planned construction is the largest since 2014. The EU’s spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs condemned the “policy of settlement construction” which “undermines the possibility of a viable two-state solution”.
[Haaretz, June 01, 2019]

German and Jordan Foreign ministers reaffirmed their countries’ support for a two-state solution
Heiko Maas, German Foreign minister, and Ayman Safadi, his Jordanian counterpart, reiterated their countries’ support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two-state paradigm is eroding as the US ambassador stated that “Israel has the right to annex some of the West Bank”. The long-awaited US peace plan might also mark the end of US support for the two-state solution. Heiko Maas and Ayman Safadi also stressed the importance of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees just weeks after the US called for it to be dismantled.
[Times of Israel, June 09, 2019]

Israel lobbies German Government to enforce motion defining BDS as anti-Semitic
The German government is examining whether to adopt a non-binding motion recently passed in the German parliament defining the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as antisemitic and calling on governmental bodies not to support any organization that supports BDS. Israel and various public diplomacy groups are pressuring Germany to adopt the motion. The German government is divided on the issue as the German Foreign Minister argues that the BDS movement includes a broad spectrum of positions that must be examined individually.
[Haaretz, June 11, 2019]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS
France and Germany are divided on the choice on the new president of the EU Commission
The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, supports Manfred Weber, the German candidate for the European People Party (EPP), as candidate for the post of President of the European Union Commission. Meanwhile, the French President Emmanuel Macron’s preferred alternative to Weber is the French Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier or the liberal Dane Margrethe Vestager. Macron aims at putting his party at the forefront of the European project at a time when Angela Merkel’s dominance over Europe is coming to an end as she announced her impediment retirement from politics.
[Spiegel, Mars 31, 2019]

An online campaign against European Commission presidential candidates
An online campaign using advertisements to target European Commission presidential candidates, Manfred Weber and Franz Timmermans, has featured on Facebook and on websites using Google’s ads platform. Google declined to answer questions about who was behind the ads, how much was paid to run them, how many people they reached and which users they targeted. This raise questions about the effectiveness and willingness of Facebook and Google to tackle disinformation on their platform despite their pledges to boost transparency around political campaigning.
[Politico, June 04, 2019]

Boris Johnson threatens to withhold Brexit “divorce payment”
The UK owes about €44 billion to the European Union when it will leave the bloc. Boris Johnson, the current front-runner to succeed Theresa May as British Prime Minister, as indicated he wants to withhold the payments to the European Union unless offered a better Brexit deal. He also implied he would scrap the accepted border arrangement with Ireland. The deadline for Brexit is set to October 31st.
[The Guardian, June 09, 2019]

Italy risks disciplinary sanctions for violating EU debt rules
Italy failed to respect European Union’s spending rules and could face disciplinary sanctions. Italy’s public debt stood at more than 130% of GDP in 2018 while the EU sets the limit at 60%. The EU commissioner for the euro and social dialogue, Valdis Dombrovskis, threatened to open a disciplinary procedure against Italy which could result in an unprecedented fine of more than €3bn. Matteo Salvini, the Italian Deputy Prime Minister, rejected Brussels’ warning by indicating his will to cut taxes.
[BBC, June 06, 2019]

France opposing Albania and North Macedonia’s EU membership talks
Albania and North Macedonia are aiming at the start of talks for EU membership. The European Commission has recommended the start of talks for both countries, but it is ultimately EU member governments which will make the decision. A unanimous decision is required to issue an invitation for membership talks. French officials indicated that North Macedonia and Albania fail to meet EU standards of democracy and rule of law. The enlargement of EU has proved unpopular in much of Western Europe as populist parties have portrayed poorer countries as burdens. EU ministers are due to review the two membership applications at a meeting in Luxembourg on June 18th.
[Politico, June 07, 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS
Germany’s governmental coalition on the brink of collapse
Angela Merkel may not be able to hold together her governmental “grand coalition” formed by the Chancellor’s party Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD). The leader of the SPD, Andrea Nahles, announced her resignation on June 2nd in reaction to the collapse of the Social Democrat in the European election. Ms Nahles’s resignation could lead to the SPD leaving the “grand coalition”. It would trigger new elections in Germany and the early retirement of Angela Merkel from political life.
[Politico, June 02, 2019]

Italy’s governmental coalition may be brought down
The Italian Prime Minister, Guiseppe Conte, issued a warning on Monday June 3rd that if the two Italian parties of the League and the Five Star Movement did not stop paralyzing reforms, he would resign and bring down the government with him. The League of Matteo Salvini and the Five Star Movement of Luigi Di Maio have been unable to reach agreements, notably over the sensitive issue of financial negotiations with the European Union. Mr. Salvini would be well positioned to win new elections while Mr. Di Maio had to acknowledge the defeat of his party in the European Parliament vote. Matteo Salvini emerged during the European elections as the potential leader of Europe’s nationalist forces.
[New York Times, June 03, 2019]

Austria set for early elections on September 29
The date for early elections in Austria has been fixed for September 29 following a parliamentary commission on June 12. Austria’s government has been brought down after the former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz was ousted from power in a no-confidence vote. The government collapsed over the emergence of a video that showed the country’s far-right vice Chancellor promising public contracts to a woman who claimed to be a Russian investor.
[France 24, June 11, 2019]

Czech PM Andrej Babis faces Student-led demonstrations sparked by concerns over billionaire’s business interests.
The weekly demonstrations — sparked by concerns over the billionaire’s business interests — began in April and have built steadily. The latest protest in central Prague last week drew 120,000 people, according to the organizers, making it one of the biggest since the Velvet Revolution of 1989 that ended communist rule in what was then Czechoslovakia.
[Financial Times, June 10, 2019]

Albania’s president has canceled coming municipal elections, citing the need to reduce political tensions in the country.
President Ilir Meta said on Saturday that he had acted because the circumstances did not provide “the necessary conditions for true, democratic, representative and all-inclusive elections,” which had been scheduled for the end of this month. Mr. Meta added that he had canceled the polls since the crisis “undermined every chance to start accession talks with the European Union.”
[New York Times, June 09, 2019]

Political crisis in Moldova
The Constitutional Court of Moldovia stripped the country’s pro-Russian President Igor Dodon of his duties because of his refusal to dissolve parliament. The Court appointed the outgoing Prime Minister Pavel Filip as interim president. This move came after Igor Dodon’s party succeeded in forming a coalition with a pro-European Union block, a deal welcomed by the EU. Igor Dodon refuses to step-down from power. This political crisis could lead to violent clashes in the street between supporters of Dodon and of Pavel Filip.
[BBC, June 10, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES
American Jewish Committee 2019 survey of American, French and Israeli Jewish opinion
The American Jewish Committee (AJC) released three surveys of Jewish opinion in the United States, Israel and France - the world’s three largest Jewish communities. The three surveys shed light on the perspectives of American, French, and Israeli Jews on a range of important topics, including their perceptions of anti-Semitism, their support for various policies linked to Israel, and their attachment to Israel.
[American Jewish Committee, June 02, 2019]

The French government pledged to return cultural artifacts stolen from Jews in World War II
Around 2000 artifacts stolen from Jews were sent from Germany to France after the war. They are still held in French museums as their original owners have not been identified. The French government pledged to return the stolen works to their rightful owners. In Austria, thousands of artworks stolen by the Nazis have been returned — including major works worth millions of euros — since a law was passed in 1998.
[France 24, June 05, 2019]