



June 2, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

**US warns against European joint military project**

The US has warned that greater military cooperation between EU countries, as part of the European Defence Fund and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), could lead to the implementation by the US of restrictions on EU defense companies. The US argues that the EU's military plans would prevent US companies from participating in military projects and would weaken NATO due to "unnecessary competition between NATO and the EU". [The Financial Times, May 14, 2019]

**EU told to 'brace' for multibillion Trump tariffs**

European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström warned the EU's trade ministers at a meeting that they need to steel themselves for U.S. President Donald Trump to hit billions of euros worth of European goods with tariffs, ramping up a decadeslong dispute over unwarranted subsidies for Airbus. Three officials in the meeting said Malmström warned them that the U.S. has rejected attempts to negotiate a deal on aviation subsidies and added that Washington is now willing to proceed with the tariffs, which would be legal under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. [POLITICO, May 28, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

**The links between European nationalist parties and Russia**

The release of a video showing the Austrian vice-chancellor promising lucrative public contract to a woman posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch cast a light on the links between far-right European parties and the Kremlin. In Hungary, Viktor Orban had advocated the lifting western sanctions against Russia and granted contracts to Russian firms. In Italy, the League, Matteo Salvini's party, was accused of receiving financing from Russia. In France, Marine Le Pen's party has taken loans from Russia and supported the annexation of Crimea. [The Financial Times, May 23, 2019]

**Russian UN employee detained by Kosovo in armed raid on north**

A Russian UN employee was detained after a raid conducted by the Kosovo police aimed at combating criminal groups. The Russian UN employee was using his diplomatic status to hamper the police operation in addition to wanting to destabilize the region. Russia has refused to recognize Kosovo's independence and has backed Serbia in their ongoing conflict. Serbia claims sovereignty over the Serb-dominated northern Kosovo. [The Guardian, May 28, 2019]

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

**China and European Union sign landmark aviation deals**

China and the European Union have signed two aviation agreements, reinforcing their cooperation in this sector. The agreements will facilitate the recognition of each others' evaluations and certifications for aeronautical products. It will also enable European airlines to fly to China from each of the 28 member states, the EU said in a statement. [Reuters, May 20, 2019]

**Vietnam hopes for investment from Swedish firms: PM**

Vietnam advocates institutional reform and economic restructuring, while also promoting the private sector and deep international integration, the PM told the Vietnam-Sweden business forum in Stockholm, held as part of his ongoing official visit to the European country. He briefed the participants on Vietnam's economic development in 2018 with GDP growth of 7.1 percent, trade turnover hitting US\$500 billion, including US\$250 billion in exports, and inflation kept under 4 percent. Vietnam has signed a series of new-generation free trade agreements and is preparing to sign the EU-Vietnam FTA (EVFTA) with the European Union. [Nhan Dan online, May 27, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

**France asks Iraq not to execute French Daesh terrorists as seventh sentenced to death**

An Iraqi court sentenced a French citizen to death for joining the Daesh terrorist group, the seventh such verdict passed over the course of several days. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said that while France was asking Iraqi authorities not to carry out the death sentence, the seven had had a fair trial. According to reports in French media, some or all of the seven convicts were among 13 prisoners handed over to Iraqi authorities in February by Western-backed People's Protection Units (YPG) terrorist group, which is the Syrian extension of PKK. [Daily Sabah, May 29, 2019]

**Pompeo to discuss Iran in Europe and make a side trip to a secretive conference in the Alps**

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo headed to Europe to meet with officials from two governments that maintain close ties with Iran, just days after President Trump suggested he would welcome negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear program. Pompeo's itinerary includes three days in Switzerland, an unusually long time for him to spend in any one country. Switzerland represents U.S. interests in Iran, which has imprisoned at least five Americans. The United States considers hostages and is believed to know the whereabouts of a sixth who disappeared there 12 years ago. [The Washington Post, May 30, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

**Poland canceled Israeli visit over Holocaust restitution dispute. Turns out, they still went**

The official Israeli delegation to Warsaw whose visit to Poland had been reportedly canceled earlier in May, did in fact arrive in the eastern European country but hid it from the media. The delegation was meant to discuss the restoration of Jewish property stolen from Polish Jews during the Holocaust, a contentious issue between the two countries. However, after Poland cancelled the visit, claiming it will not discuss that matter since it was a victim in World War II and thus should not be saddled with financial obligations, the delegation members made do with a meeting with the Jewish community heads in Poland. [Haaretz, May 30, 2019]

**Germany neo-Nazi parties aggressively push boycott of Israel**

Two neo-Nazi parties are stoking the flames of BDS, a sanctions campaign targeting Israel that was classified as antisemitic in May by the German federal parliament. A third neo-Nazi party attacked Israel on Twitter. The party Die Rechte (The Right) used an election poster for the weekend's EU parliament vote stating: "Boycott Israel. Stop ethnic cleansing." The neo-Nazi party's election poster also said: "Stop land robbery and expulsion: 8 million Palestinians want their land back." The poster also showed maps depicting alleged losses of Palestinian territory over decades. [The Jerusalem Post, May 30, 2019]

## Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

**In graphics: How Europe voted**

The European election resulted in a fragmented European Parliament where the traditional big two groups, the center-right European People's Party (EPP) and the center-left Socialists & Democrats (S&D), lost ground and Euroskeptics made gains. This article explores the results and estimates and allows readers to explore through its graphics. [POLITICO, May 27, 2019]

**The "Green wave" and 4 other takeaways from the European parliamentary elections**

European voters wanted a change. Both the center left and the center right appear to have lost their absolute majorities for the first time since 1979, when the first European parliamentary elections were held. Voters on the left and center instead threw support to the pro-environment, pro-EU Green parties (known as the "Greens") and liberals. But far-right populist and nationalist parties led by the likes of Italy's Matteo Salvini and France's Marine Le Pen also bolstered their position in the European Parliament. Some voters may be fed up with the establishment, but they're still largely backing pro-EU parties, even if they're looking elsewhere than the traditional centrist blocs. [For, May 28, 2019]

**Hungary's Fidesz wins 52% of vote; Orban vows to halt immigration**

Hungary's ruling right-wing Fidesz party won 52.14% of votes in the European parliamentary election on a headline anti-immigration platform, scoring a big victory over a divided opposition. Orban, who built a steel fence in 2015 sealing off Hungary's southern borders to keep out migrants, has framed the election as a choice between forces backing and opposing mass immigration. He was reelected for a third term in 2018 with a very strong mandate. His power at home is cemented until the next election in 2022. More open is whether Fidesz, which secured 13 of Hungary's 21 seats in the 751-seat European Parliament, leaves the mainstream European Peoples' Party (EPP) to side with far-right nationalists in the new European Parliament. [Reuters, May 26, 2019]

**Salvini wins big — but only in Italy**

Matteo Salvini declared the victory of his far-right League party on Sunday would change the rules of the EU — but his triumph may have more impact on domestic politics. The League was projected to win between 31 and 34 percent of the vote in the European Parliament election, putting it comfortably in front of the center-left Democratic Party and streets ahead of its partner in national government, the populist 5Star Movement. Yet although the League came first in Italy and Le Pen and Farage did the same in their countries, the new group Salvini has talked about forming in the European Parliament is projected to have only about 70 seats in the 751-member chamber. On the national level, however, the implications of the result could be more immediate and profound. The League's strong showing means the leadership will be tempted to trigger a general election, which could result in the party becoming the senior partner in government, possibly at the head of a right-wing coalition. [POLITICO, May 27, 2019]

**European vote reveals an ever more divided France**

President Emmanuel Macron of France lost his bet that he would defeat the far right, not only losing the election to the European Parliament but getting beaten by the populist firebrand he roundly defeated only two years ago, Marine Le Pen. Now, with the final results of the campaign for the European Parliament, the former National Front has anchored itself more than ever as the representative of that France, and as one of the country's two dominant parties, along with Mr. Macron's. With their feeble results, the traditional parties of the right and left in France have been effectively eliminated from the game. [The New York Times, May 27, 2019]

**Polish nationalists win EU vote, set stage for national ballot**

Poland's ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) surged to a clear victory in European Parliament's vote, a stamp of approval for the party's nationalist, eurosceptic platform before a national election later in the year. The strong showing by PiS will bolster a growing chorus of populists in Europe who share the broad goal of returning power to EU member states and strict limits on immigration. PiS had framed the European ballot as a battle against Western liberal ideals, which it says threaten the traditional way of life in Poland, a staunchly Catholic country. [Reuters, May 26, 2019]

**German EU election results ramp up pressure on Merkel's coalition**

Germany's two major parties took another significant blow in the European elections. Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and the allied Bavarian Christian Social Union managed to win a combined 28.7% of the vote, down 7 points from the European Parliament election in 2014, and their worst result in a nationwide election ever. Her junior coalition partner, the Social Democrats (SPD), only received 15.6% — an 11-point drop from its 2014 result — putting it in third place. The latest humiliation for the center-left SPD could prove to be the more significant one for Merkel. The SPD's decline in recent years, marked by steadily worsening election results, has seen growing unrest within the party, especially on its left flank, where dissatisfaction with the grand coalition with the CDU has been building for years. The result will only have strengthened that feeling, reinforced as it was by a historic defeat in the election in Bremen, Germany's smallest state, where the SPD looks set to come second to the CDU and lose power in the city for the first time in seven decades., as voters continued to flee the traditional political center. [Deutsche-Welle, May 26, 2019]

**Nigel Farage's Populist Brexit Party wins big in European Parliament elections**

Britain's new populist Brexit Party, led by Nigel Farage, strong performance humiliated the governing Conservatives, whose leader, Prime Minister Theresa May, announced her resignation after almost three troubled years in power. The results in Britain were a striking success for a party that has existed for only a few weeks, and for Mr. Farage, the campaigner for British withdrawal from the European Union. He is one of the country's most divisive politicians but also one of its most effective communicators. [The New York Times, May 26, 2019]

**Brussels tries new Balkan push**

For the second year in a row, the European Commission called on the EU to let Albania and North Macedonia begin membership talks. The Commission argued that bringing Tirana and Skopje closer to the EU would make both the volatile Balkan region and the European Union itself more stable. But the Commission's arguments didn't convince all of the EU's member countries last year, with France and the Netherlands effectively blocking the start of talks. And it's far from clear that the outcome will be any different this time around. [POLITICO, May 30, 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

**In contest to succeed Theresa May, stars are aligning for Boris Johnson**

Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, announced her resignation and the process to find her replacement began immediately. Boris Johnson, the favorite candidate to replace her, is a firm proponent of Brexit and would increase the prospects of Britain leaving the EU without an agreement at the end of October. The name of the Conservative candidate for Prime Minister will be decided by the end of July. [The New York Times, May 25, 2019]

**Luigi Di Maio calls M5S confidence vote after EU elections flop**

The leader of Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S), Luigi Di Maio, is seeking a confidence vote from party supporters after a bruising defeat in the European elections. Di Maio has been criticized after support for his anti-establishment party slumped by almost half a year as it was usurped by its national coalition partner, the far-right League, which took 34.3% of the vote compared with M5S's 17.1%. A revived centre-left Democratic party also unexpectedly eclipsed M5S to take second place. [The Guardian, May 29, 2019]

**Sebastian Kurz, Austrian leader, is ousted in No-Confidence vote**

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz of Austria and his caretaker government were ousted from power with a no-confidence vote in Parliament as the ramifications of a secretly filmed video added to the political disarray in a European country normally known for stability. After about three hours of debate, a simple majority of lawmakers stood up in a demonstration of their withdrawal of trust from Mr. Kurz, making him the first Austrian leader in more than seven decades to be removed from power by his peers. The removal of Mr. Kurz, just 17 months after he became chancellor, came despite a gain of 8 percentage points for his conservative People's Party in the European Parliament elections. New elections are planned for September. [The New York Times, May 27, 2019]

**Latvian parliament elects former judge Levits president**

Latvia's parliament elected former European Court of Justice judge Egils Levits as the Baltic country's next president, a largely ceremonial role that also brings with it limited political powers. Levits won the support of 61 lawmakers in the 100-seated parliament. He will serve four years starting on July 8, when incumbent president Raimonds Vējonis' term comes to an end. [Reuters, May 29, 2019]

**Protests grow against authoritarian slide in Czech Republic**

Fifty-thousands people filled Wenceslas Square to protest what they say is an attack on judicial independence that threatens to send the country down a similar route with its internationally pilloried neighbors. The event marked a fourth week of growing demonstrations since the sudden appointment of Marie Benesova as justice minister in April. Her nomination came one day after investigators recommended Prime Minister Andrej Babis should face criminal charges for European Union subsidies fraud. [Al Jazeera, May 21, 2019]

**Belgian king meets far-right leader hoping to form government**

The king of Belgium met Tom Van Grieken, the leader of a far-right political movement, in the first meeting of its kind since the 1930s. King Philippe, who is required to be politically neutral, has a significant constitutional role in the formation of Belgium's government. He has also held talks with other party leaders following Sunday's inconclusive national election, as the palace decides which political leader has the best chance of forming a government. Van Grieken's Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) party, which has traditionally been shunned by mainstream parties, stunned Belgium by grabbing 18 seats in the federal parliament, coming second to the more moderate Flemish separatist N-VA party. [Al Jazeera, May 29, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

**German Jews warned not to wear kippas after rise in anti-Semitism**

The German government's anti-Semitism commissioner warned Jews against wearing kippahs following a rise in anti-Semitism in Germany. Official figures in 2018 showed a 10% increase on the previous years in hate crimes against Jews. Israel's President Reuven Rivlin said the recommendation amounted to "an admission that, again, Jews are not safe on German soil". [BBC, May 26, 2019]

**The New German anti-Semitism**

In Germany, anti-Semitic crimes are on the rise. The source of anti-Semitism in Germany is difficult to identify. The far-right party AfD portrays itself as "pro-Israel" and "pro-Jewish" by linking the attacks against Jews to Muslim immigration. While surveys show that Muslims in Germany and other European countries are more likely to hold anti-Semitic views than the overall population, anti-Semitism is equally originating from the far-right as leaders of the AfD suggested that the Holocaust should be forgotten. [The New York Times, May 21, 2019]

**Budapest Jews to establish their own security service amid anti-Semitism fears**

The Hungarian Jewish organization, Foundation for Action and Defense, decided to create its own security service in Budapest to fight anti-Semitism. The attacks against Jews have increased in Hungary over the years and two thirds of Hungarian Jews believe anti-Semitism is a serious problem in their country. [The Times of Israel, May 29, 2019]

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