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# Europe

July 17, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

**US may impose tariffs on French goods to protect tech firms**
The U.S government will investigate a French plan to impose taxes on technologies companies, including Google, Facebook and Amazon, to fund media outlets. The U.S has lobbied aggressively to stop European countries from taxing the revenues of American tech companies like Facebook Inc. and Alphabet Inc.'s Google. France's proposed 3% levy would hit global tech companies with at least 750 million euros ($845 million) in worldwide revenue and digital sales totaling 25 million euros in France. The U.S investigation would threaten to further strain trans-Atlantic ties as the two sides prepare to negotiate a limited trade agreement on industrial goods.
[Al-Jazeera, July 17th, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

**UK bars RT & Sputnik from conference on disinformation**
The British government organized a meeting with 60 ministers and 1,000 journalists and members of civil society on media freedom. It decided to exclude Russia's RT and Sputnik news organization from participating because of their "active role in spreading disinformation". Russia's Foreign Ministry condemned the decision relating to RT as "direct politically motivated discrimination" journalists from across the world's media are attending the conference, including from Russia.
[France 24, 7th July 2019]

**A close aide to Italy's deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini held covert talks to pump Russian oil money to his far-right party**
Buzzfeed has obtained a previously unseen recording of a meeting in which a close aide of Europe's most powerful far-right leader — Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini — can be heard negotiating the terms of a deal with three Russians to covertly channel tens of millions of dollars of Russian oil money to Salvini's Lega party. The tape provides the first hard evidence of Russia's clandestine attempts to fund Europe's nationalist movements, and the apparent complicity of some senior figures from the far right in those attempts. It is unclear whether the agreement negotiated at the Metropol hotel was ever implemented, or if it led to any funding. Nevertheless, the existence of the recorded negotiation raises serious questions about whether Italian law was broken, the links between Moscow and Salvini's Lega party, and the integrity of May's European elections.
[Buzzfeed, July 10th, 2019]

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

**Chinese troops participate in first joint medical drill with major Nato power in Europe**
The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been participating in military drills in Germany as steps up effort to strengthen ties with European countries. About 100 Chinese medics are taking part in the two-weeks "Combined aid 2019" training at a base in southern Germany alongside 120 medics and 120 support personnel from the German military. The People Liberation Army (PLA) sent field equipment including armored ambulances to Germany for the drill. The joint exercise is focused on humanitarian rescue efforts and peacekeeping operations.
[*South China Morning Post*, 9th July 2019]

**Russia approves construction plans for a toll highway between Europe and China**
Russia pursues an ambitious infrastructure plan, a toll road connecting China's western neighbor Kazakhstan with Belarus called the Meridian highway, that will dramatically cut cargo shipping times between Europe and China. The Meridian would span 2,200 kilometres from the Russia-Kazakh border to a junction of an existing highway that connects Belarus with Moscow. It would shorten trucking times between cargo hubs in western China and central Europe and may offer a faster, if more expensive, alternative to three existing rail corridors.
[*Moscow Times*, July 6, 0219]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

**European countries tries to save the JCPOA after Iran stepped up production of enriched uranium**
President Macron spoke with President Hassan Rouhani and the two leaders agreed "to explore by 15 July the conditions for the resumption of dialogue between all parties". Mr. Rouhani had previously given the five countries still endorsing the deal - the UK, France, Germany, China and Russia - until July 7th to meet their commitment to shield Iran from the sanctions' effects.
[*BBC*, July 7th, 2019]

**Iran nuclear deal: Iran UN ambassador said Europe must compensate Iran.**
Iran's ambassador to the UN insists that the Europeans must do more to compensate Tehran for economic losses inflicted by US sanctions. Otherwise Iranians will continue to exceed limits on their nuclear fuel production. Majid Takht-Ravanchi said that Iran was not violating the accord, which he was involved in negotiating. He declared that Iran would move to the "third phase" of its stepped-up uranium enrichment programme, unless the Europeans keep their promises to uphold the economic benefits of the accord.
[*BBC*, July 10th, 2019]

**Tensions between Iran and UK**
Iranian boats tried to impede a British oil tanker near the Gulf before being driven off by a Royal Navy ship, the HMS Montrose. Guns on HMS Montrose were pointed to the Iranian boats as they were ordered to back off, but no shots were fired. Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the UK is trying to create tensions. Last week, British Royal Marines seized an Iranian tanker in Gibraltar seize an Iranian oil tanker because of evidence it was heading to Syria in breach of EU sanctions. The Iranian tanker will be released if there are assurances that it would not be going to Syria. Indicated UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt.
[*BBC*, July 14, 2019]

**European Union foreign-policy chief welcomes Iraq efforts to ease U.S-Iran tensions**
Iraq has been trying to ease tensions between Washington and Tehran. Last weekend with Iraqi Foreign Minister Muhammad al-Hakim, Federica Mogherini said the EU backed Iraq's proposal to hold a regional conference between Iran and U.S.-allied Sunni-led states in the Persian Gulf region such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Baghdad, which has good relations with both Iran and the United States, has offered to help mediate differences between the two amid rising tensions that some observers fear could lead to an armed conflict. Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel-Mahdi also called on the EU to increase investment in the country, citing the heavy price it paid in the fight to defeat the Islamic State (IS) extremist group.
[*Radio Free Europe*, July 13, 2019]

**Britain and France Agree to Send Additional Troops to Syria**
To compensate for U.S. troops withdrawal. The two countries will commit to a marginal 10 to 15 percent increase in troop numbers. In addition, Britain and France, both are divided on whether or not to send additional forces, and a number of Balkan and Baltic states are also uncertain. Some European countries are reluctant to deploy troops to operate in Syria, officially France has no troop on the ground in Syria. The U.S. administration is trying to convince the U.K., France, and other allies to contribute money for the Syria stabilization effort. Germany has rejected a U.S request to send ground troops to Syria.
[*Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2019]

**French jihadists denounce French government involvement in their transfer to Iraqi authorities**
French jihadists that have joined ISIS are being judged to death sentences by Iraqi courts. The French government has denied being involved in the transfer of these jihadists from Kurdish groups to Iraqi authorities. The French government, which has ruled out repatriating its Islamist fighters, faced criticism at home from lawmakers and human rights groups after 11 French nationals were sentenced to death in Iraq over the last two weeks. Jihadists have indicated that they have been in contact with French officials when they were being transferred from Kurdish camps to Iraq.
[*Le Monde*, July 6, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

**Israel backs Cyprus as Turkey vows to continue drilling in its waters**
Israel expressed support for Cyprus on Wednesday after Turkey vowed to continue drilling activities off the island nation's coast, which Nicosia has claimed as its exclusive economic zone. Israel's support for Cyprus underscores the growing tensions with the European Union, which has called on Ankara to cease its "illegal" activities. Ankara says its actions abide by international law and that it is drilling inside its continental shelf. Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesman indicated that Israel is committed to Cyprus's sovereign right in its maritime areas.
[*The Times of Israel*, July 11th, 2019]

## Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

**German defense minister needs help from leaders to be confirmed as Commission chief by Parliament**
To become Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen must win an absolute majority of Parliament in the vote scheduled for Tuesday 15th of July in Strasbourg. The conservative German defense minister needs the complete support of MEPs from her own European People's Party (EPP) — 182 votes — and another 192 votes, to clinch the job. If she fails to secure enough votes, the EU's institutional architecture, with its parties, would be a catastrophic result, denying von der Leyen the durable majority and basic legitimacy needed to preside successfully over the EU for the next five years. The leftist European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) bloc and the Greens declared formally their opposition to von der Leyen. If Parliament rejects von der Leyen's nomination, the Council, in accordance with the EU treaties, has 30 days to propose a new nominee.
[*Politico*, 12 July, 2019]

**German candidate for commission president offers EU parliament more influence over Brussels agenda.**
Ursula von der Leyen has promised the European Parliament a bigger say in Brussels' decision-making as she seeks MEPs' backing to become the next president of the European Commission. Ms von der Leyen pledged to give MEPs the right to propose EU laws, a key power the Commission has held since the bloc's birth. It will be up to the right to propose EU legislation, while parliament has had to make do with scrutinizing and amending the commission's ideas.
Ursula von der Leyen, who is the ally of German chancellor Angela Merkel, is trying to drum up support from the parliament before it votes on her candidacy next week. She needs backing from an absolute majority of the parliament's 751 members to be elected commission president.
[*Financial Times*, July 10, 2019]

**German foreign minister calls for alliance of EU countries to take in migrants**
German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on Saturday urged European countries to join forces and establish a functioning system to distribute asylum seekers among them. For years, some EU countries have opposed any form of legal mechanisms to distribute asylum seekers arriving at Europe's southern borders among all 28 member countries. Instead, countries have had to rely on ad-hoc distribution mechanisms that force European countries to always take in a fixed share of people rescued at sea. His proposal was immediately rejected by Austria's former and possibly future chancellor, Sebastian Kurz.
[*Deutsche Welle*, 13th July]

**EU draws up measures against Turkey over Cyprus drilling**
EU diplomats have agreed a list of possible measures, including sanctions, against Turkey for its drilling in waters off the coast of Cyprus. Ankara dispatched a ship for the gas exploration off the coast of Cyprus, which Brussels has condemned as "illegal." The EU is prepared to cut pre-accession funding and cancel high-level meetings with Ankara. The move to sanction Turkey comes as a second Turkish drilling arrived off the coast of Cyprus, which has been split between an ethnic Greek south and an ethnic Turkish north since Ankara's 1974 invasion. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey, and Ankara disputes Nicosia's rights to unilaterally explore for gas around the island. The European diplomats are trying to support Cyprus while being careful not to alienate Turkey, with whom the EU maintains a deal designed to limit migration across the Aegean sea.
[*Politico*, 12 July 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

**Greek elections: Prime Minister loses re-election to center-right**
The Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, leader of the left-wing and radical left-wing coalition Syriza, was defeated in a landslide. Greeks elected Kyriakos Mitsotakis from the center-right New Democracy party. The New Democracy party secured 39.85% of the vote and a comfortable majority of 158 seats in the 300-seat Parliament. New Democracy has promised to lower taxes and privatize services in the country, which is still feeling the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. The neo-Nazi organization Golden Dawn suffered a major setback in the elections. However, another far-right party, the pro-Russian party Greek Solution won 10 seats.
[*New York Times*, July 7, 2019]

**French President announces creation of French space force**
French President Emmanuel Macron announced he had approved the creation of a space command within the French air force to improve the country's defense capabilities. France's declared interest in boosting its military readiness in space follows increased spending and interest in the area by the United States, China and Russia. Observers see military activities – including spy satellites, location tracing and jamming, communications and weapons systems – increasingly being set up in orbit around Earth. France has a 2019-2025 military spending plan that allocates 3.6 billion euros ($4 billion) to defense in space.
[*France 24*, 14th July 2019]

**German intelligence agency increases its efforts to tackle far-right extremism**
The German domestic intelligence agency (BfV) decided to step up its observation of the Identitarian movement, a pan-European network that is part of the "extreme right movement". The classification of the Identitarians as an extreme right-wing group now enables the BfV to monitor them using secret surveillance methods, and also infiltrate their ranks with undercover investigators. The far-right political group Alternative for Germany (AfD) has close ties with members of the Identitarian movement; Daniel Fiss, the leader of Germany's Identitarian Movement worked in the office of AfD parliamentarian Siegfiert Droese.
[*Deutsche Welle*, 13 July, 2018]

**In Spain, political gridlock increases likelihood of fresh elections**
On May 26 of this year, Spanish citizens went to the polls in local, regional and European elections. With two weeks to go before parliament holds a vote to officially appoint the new PM, the Socialists of the PSOE party – who won the election but fell well short of an overall majority – are still refusing to consider a coalition government with the leftist Podemos party. Without Podemos, the Socialists would need to secure an absolute majority in Congress to be officially appointed on July 23rd. Failing that, a second vote will be held two days later, with only a simple majority of more yes than no votes required.
[*El Pais*, 10 July 2019]

**Boris Johnson has support of two thirds of Tory voters for leadership, says poll**
"Boris is the overwhelming Johnson-over" Jeremy Hunt to be the next Conservative party leader and prime minister by a margin of almost two to one. The survey confirms Johnson as the favorite to succeed Theresa May when the result of the ballot now taking place among 160,000 Tory party members is announced on 22 July. Johnson's biggest lead is on the issue of Brexit, with 69% believing he would be most likely to take the UK out of the EU by 31 October.
[*The Guardian*, 13 July, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

**Labour bosses accused of undermining fight against Antisemitism**
Eight whistleblowers from the UK Labour party have said that senior bosses from the party tried to interfere in their attempts to tackle Antisemitism. The whistleblowers have spoken to BBC Panorama to discuss antisemitism in the Labour. Their testimonies reveal a disciplinary system that had to deal with a huge increase in antisemitism complaints and cases, and was overwhelmed by it. The BBC has also interviewed Baroness Chakrabarti, former Labour general secretary Iain McNicol, who left his post last year, have broken non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) to come forward. The Labour released a letter of complaint to the BBC about the Panorama programme, saying it "relies heavily and one-sidedly on the claims and allegations of politically partisan anonymous/unnamed sources and Conservative-supporting newspapers and organizations.
[*The Guardian*, July 2019]

**Descendants of Jews who fled Nazis unite to fight for German citizenship**
A group of more than 100 descendants of Jewish refugees who fled the Nazi regime are challenging the German government's rejection of their applications to restore their citizenship. Anyone who was deprived of their German citizenship during the 12 years of Nazi dictatorship on political, racial or religious grounds – as well as their descendants – is potentially eligible for its restoration, according to a clause enshrined in the country's constitution. But many descendants have been rejected because their parents' or their applications are only valid if citizenship has been passed through the father. The Brexit vote was the galvanizing factor behind the creation of the Exclusions Group, a UK-based campaign group, after thousands of British descendants of German Jews decided to use their right – which many had not realized until then that they had –to continue being citizens of the EU.
[*The Guardian*, 10 July 2019]

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