



August 4, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

Tensions between the US and France over French tech tax

The French parliament passed a law to tax digital companies for income even if their headquarters are not based on French soil. This tax is directly aimed at the American GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple). The American administration responded that “it will not sit idly by and tolerate discrimination against US-based firms”. Indeed, US President Donald Trump threatened to implement tariffs against French wine.

[FRANCE 24, 28th July, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

Russia wishes to join EU payment channel to trade with Iran

Russia indicated its willingness to join the EU payment channel, Instex, designed to circumvent U.S sanctions banning trade with Iran. Moscow has called Brussels to expand the channel to include oil exports. Russia believes the more countries and continents involved, the more effective the mechanism will be as a whole. Instex was launched in January but was criticized by Tehran for having major limitations. Russia’s involvement in Instex would mark a significant step forward to defend the JCPOA and would increase the cooperation between Russia and the EU.

[Financial Times, July 17th, 2019]

France and Germany are the two European countries doing most business with Moscow

Germany and France, despite leading the condemnation of Russia in the west, are the two European countries doing most business with Russia. In France, bilateral trade with Russia rose 11% last year and 8% in Germany. French and German groups investment in Russia is rising, Total has notably invested in a Russian arctic gas project. Groups from the two countries are investing in the pipeline project Nord Stream 2. France and Germany impose sanctions on Russia while encouraging friendly corporate relations. This strategy has been denounced by countries where trade with Russia has plummeted because of sanctions.

[Financial Times, July 25, 2019]

Improvement of ties between Germany and Russia

The annual German-Russian conference of the “Petersburg Dialogue” took place on July the 18th in the German town of Königswinter, near Bonn. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, met on the sidelines of the Dialogue. The two men discussed the issue of the preservation of the nuclear agreement with Iran, the future of arms control and the situation in eastern Ukraine. It is the first time since 2012 that high-ranking officials from Germany and Russia have taken part in the event.

Heiko Maas stressed his will to “focus on where progress can be made” in the relations with Russia despite political disagreements.

[Коммерсантъ, 19th July 2019]

Ofcom fines Russian news service over impartiality

Ofcom, the U.K broadcasting regulator, imposed a £200,000 fine on the Russian news service, RT. It condemned RT for “a serious breach” of impartiality rules in several news and current affairs programs, such as on the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury and the Syria conflict. RT has denied the breaches and has launched legal proceeding against Ofcom’s ruling. The Russian news service is tightly linked to the Russian government. Earlier this month the British government banned RT from participating in a meeting on media freedom.

[BBC, 26 July 2019]

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

Tensions between Prague mayor and China risk spreading

Zdeněk Hřib, the mayor of Prague, has flown the Tibetan flag at Prague’s city hall. He also met with the Taiwanese representative to the Czech Republic and said he would end the ‘sister city’ accord agreed by the previous Prague administration and Beijing. In reaction, the Chinese culture minister cancelled a number of concerts and other performances in China by Prague-based organizations. These events could affect the efforts of the Czech President, Miloš Zeman, to open China’s market to Czech businesses and attract Chinese investment. The Czech Republic is one of the only EU countries that signed a memorandum of understanding with China to promote the vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

[Politico, 18th July, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

U.K warns Iran after seizure of oil tanker

Britain threatened Iran with “serious consequences” after the seizure of a British-owned tanker in the Straits of Ormuz on the 19th of July. The capture of the British tanker by Iran occurred two weeks after British forces impounded an Iranian tanker near Gibraltar.

European countries, such as France and Germany, condemned Iran’s actions as unjustifiable. Britain collaborated with European powers to preserve the JCPOA. If Britain joins the U.S in re-imposing sanctions in Iran it would very likely mark the end of the JCPOA.

[New York Times, July 20, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

UN and France condemn Israel’s demolition of homes in east Jerusalem

The United Nations and France condemned on July 22nd the demolition by Israel of 70 homes in East Jerusalem neighborhoods under the control of the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli defense minister deemed the construction illegal and too close to the West Bank separation barrier.

[Haaretz, July 22, 2019]

6 EU states condemn Israel for violations of women’s rights

Norway and six EU countries voted at the United Nations in favor of two resolutions that condemned Israel as a violator of women’s rights. Israel was the only country named Tuesday as a violator or trouble spot by the 54-nation UN Economic and Social Council. The resolution says that “the Israeli occupation remains a major obstacle for Palestinian women and girls with regard to the fulfillment of their rights”. France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta joined Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, Russia, and Venezuela and 29 other nations to support the resolution. Only Canada and the United States voted against the resolution.

[The Times of Israel, 26 July 2019]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

Failures in the European GPS system

The European union introduced its own satellite navigation program, known as Galileo, to end the bloc’s reliance on GPS, a system controlled by the United States military. The European Commission and the European Space Agency launched the first satellite to work as part of Galileo in 2005. However most of the European navigation system has been out of use since July 11th. Problems have affected Galileo since soon after the launch of its pilot phase nearly three years ago. The episodes have raised questions over whether new satellite launches in the Galileo program, which the European Commission said would be fully operational by 2020, should be paused until experts find the cause of the failures.

[New York Times, July 16th 2019]

Ursula von der Leyen’s big promises for Europe

On July 16th, Ursula von der Leyen, who has been nominated to lead the European Commission, set out her plans for the European Union in remarks to the European Parliament. She promised a “Green Deal for Europe,” more equal representation of women, and an extension of the Brexit timetable if needed. The Commission president-elect won ratification in Parliament by 383 votes to 327 with 22 abstentions — just surpassing the required 374-vote majority. Her narrow margin of victory made her face questions about the legitimacy and durability of her mandate. Von der Leyen also faces an ongoing investigation by the German parliament into allegations of mismanagement and overspending at the defense ministry during her tenure there.

[Politico, 16th July 2019]

France to back Romanian for EU prosecutor

Laura Codruța Kovesi, former head of the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA), became popular for her attempts to fight against corruption in Romania, one of the EU’s most corrupt member states. Under her leadership, the DNA secured the conviction for abuse of office of the most powerful politician in Romania, Liviu Dragnea. However, she faces opposition from her own country. Romania’s justice minister denounced abuses committed by Laura Codruța Kovesi” when she led the DNA. The EU public prosecutor will be dedicated to tackling cross-border VAT crime and fraud against the EU budget. Laura Codruța Kovesi must be approved by a majority of EU member states and the European parliament, meaning no single country can block any candidate. Up until now, France has supported its own candidate for the post, Jean-François Bohnert. However, the French government has now decided to support Laura Codruța Kovesi.

[Politico, 16th July 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Spain: Pedro Sanchez fails to form government

The acting Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sanchez failed to assemble a majority and be reelected. His party, the Socialist Party (PSOE), came first in a general election in April but fell short of ruling majority. He has hence tried in vain to form a coalition with the far-left Podemos. On July 25th, Pedro Sanchez received 124 affirmative votes, 155 against and 67 abstentions. He was required to gather 176 votes for an absolute majority. Pedro Sanchez will now face a new investiture vote in September and if he fails again to gather a majority Spain will head for new elections in November.

[El Pais, 25 July 2019]

The new British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pushes for hardline on Brexit

Boris Johnson, the newly elected British Prime Minister, is set to adopt a hardline on Brexit. Mr Johnson installed staunch supporters of Brexit in key cabinet positions; such as Michel Gove or Mr. Rees-Mogg who led the most hardline group of Conservative lawmakers pushing for the European Union withdrawal. Mr Johnson indicated that he wishes to abolish one element of Theresa May’s Brexit agreement, the “backstop” plan to keep goods flowing freely across the Irish border. If Boris Johnson is blocked by lawmakers from leaving the European Union without any agreement, he is likely to organize a general election.

[New York Times, July 25, 2019]

Ukrainian president’s party wins first-ever ruling majority in parliament

Volodymyr Zelensky, a newcomer to politics, won the Ukrainian election in April. The president dissolved the parliament after taking power, arguing that it was not possible to pursue his agenda otherwise. In the snap election his party, Servant of the People, won over half the 424 seats in the Verkhovna Rada, the country’s parliament. It now forms Ukraine’s first-ever ruling majority. Zelensky will now be able to implement important reforms thanks to the parliament’s support. Servants of the People has promised to undermine many of the benefits Ukrainian politicians enjoy. Some of the reforms may require a two-thirds majority to pass legislative amendments. Hence, Servants of the people might form a coalition with Golos, another anti-establishment party, led by a popular rock star, Svyatoslav Vakarchuk.

[Foreign Affairs, July 24, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Germany to compensate 8,000 Romanian Holocaust survivors living in Israel

The German government announced it will compensate 8,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors living in Israel. They will receive a monthly stipend of up to 225\$ and retroactive payments to cover the last 20 years. To be eligible for the stipend, the survivors must have lived in 20 cities around Romania and have been impacted by Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu’s collaboration with the Nazi regime or by the Nazis themselves.

[Times of Israel, July 21, 2019]

The end of the Dreyfus Affair ?

The Dreyfus affair was a political scandal at the end of the 19th century that divided the French Third Republic. A French Jewish officer was sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly communicating French military secrets to the Germans. The affair was marked by Anti-Semitism as opponents of Alfred Dreyfus questioned his “loyalty to the state”. In 1906, after spending five years in a French penal colony, Dreyfus was exonerated and reinstated as a major in the French Army. On the 21st of July, at the ceremony to commemorate the Vel’ d’Hiv Roundup, the French minister of the Army, Florence Parly, hinted at the possibility that Alfred Dreyfus could be granted the title of general posthumously to “fully rehabilitate” him.

[L’Opinion, 21 Juillet, 2019]

Download PDF

Subscribe



המכון למחקרי ביטחון לאומי | חיים לבנון 40 | תל אביב | 03-6400400

[unsubscribe](#) | [spam](#)

נשלח באמצעות תוכנת [ActiveTrail](#)

