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Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

Trump sees possible U.S.-EU trade deal that would avert car tariffs

At a news conference during the G7 summit Donald Trump indicated that he thinks that the US can reach an agreement with Europe without imposing threatened tariffs on car imports. Such tariffs would pose a threat to German carmaker amid reports that export-dependent Germany is facing a recession. Trade talks between the United States and Europe have moved slowly, given disagreements over whether to include agricultural products in a deal. Donald Trump indicated that he planned to visit Germany soon. *[Reuters, August 26, 2019]*

EUROPE – RUSSIA

Emmanuel Macron reaches out to Vladimir Putin

Emmanuel Macron met with Vladimir Putin on August 19th. The French president stressed on cultural links and the shared history of France and Russia to renew dialogue with Moscow. The only tangible outcome of the meeting was an agreement on the organization of a summit in September based on the Normandy Format (France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine) to aim at ending the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. However, tensions between the two leaders appeared in bright light after the question of a journalist concerning the crackdown on protesters in Moscow. Emmanuel Macron indicated that independent candidates should be free to run in elections in Moscow. Vladimir Putin replied by pointing to the yellow jacket movement to argue that he did not want "a situation like in France". *[Le Monde, 20th August 2019]*

European rights court rules against Russia on Magnitsky death

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on August 27th that Russia violated the rights of Sergei Magnitsky, an auditor who was charged with tax evasion while investigating state corruption. His death gained international attention and highlighted Russian human rights abuses, leading the United States and other countries to pass "Magnitsky Acts" targeting Russians accused of human-rights abuses. The Court estimated that Russia had no reasonable grounds to suspect Mr. Magnitsky of being involved in tax evasion. Magnitsky had been working for the hedge fund Hermitage Capital when he alleged he had uncovered a \$230 million tax fraud scheme by Russian officials. This finding is the likely cause of his imprisonment and death. *[Deutsche Welle, 27th August, 2019]*

Berlin murder raises suspicions of Russian involvement

A former Chechen separatist commander was killed in central Berlin, raising concerns that Russia may be responsible for the murder. The Chechen fighter Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, who took part in second Chechen war, was shot twice in the head by a man using a handgun with a silencer. Chechen dissidents and former rebels opposed to Chechnya's current leader, Ramzan A. Kadyrov, have been frequent targets of Russia around Europe. Mr. Khangoshvili survived two targeted killing in Georgia before fleeing to Germany. The German police arrested a Russian man known as Vadim S previously accused of treacherous killing. The suspect travelled to Berlin from Moscow via Paris a few days before the attack and had a return ticket to Moscow. *[New York Times, August 27, 2019]*

EUROPE – EAST ASIA

Hong-Kong on Europe's agenda

European MPs are expected to raise concerns about the use of police force against protesters in Hong Kong as parliament reconvene. In July, the European Parliament passed a resolution on Hong Kong, warning Beijing to cease the "constant and increasing interference by China in Hong-Kong's internal affairs". However, European governments have been rather silent on the issue as they fear diplomatic retaliation from Beijing. *[South China Morning Post, 29 August 2019]*

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

France's plan to ease tensions with Iran

Officials in Tehran have declared that they are reviewing France's plan to reduce tensions between Iran and the United States, President Hassan Rouhani's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi indicated that meanwhile France is consulting with the EU. He added that an Iranian economic delegation will be visiting France next week to discuss the details of the plan. European diplomats are supporting the French initiative to provide Iran economic relief from U.S. sanctions in return for its full compliance with a multinational nuclear accord. *[Wall Street Journal, August 30, 2019]*

EUROPE – ISRAEL

Rift between Israel and France on the Iran deal

French President Emmanuel Macron was optimistic at the end of the G7 summit that a meeting would take place between U.S President Donald Trump and his Iranian counterpart. He invited Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, on the margins of the Group of 7 summit to once more try to save the JCPOA. In the past France used to defend the Israeli positions on the deal. Over the past three years, PM Benjamin Netanyahu established alliances with Eurosceptic partners such as Hungary and Poland, sidelining the larger European Union members France and Germany. Israel is now paying the price of the rift created with France and other countries in Western Europe. The French move according to their own point of view, that the agreement must be saved. Macron is focusing his efforts on Trump and taking little account of the Israeli position. *[Al-Monitor, August 28, 2019]*

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

German and France opposed on the Mercosur trade deal

The French President Emmanuel Macron accused Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro of not respecting climate commitments he made to France. Macron denounced Bolsonaro's deforestation policy in the Amazon and blamed him for an increase of fires in the forest. Consequently, the French leader decided to block the Mercosur trade deal, between the EU and Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's office criticized Macron's decision and indicated that the non-conclusion of the Mercosur deal is "not the appropriate answer to what is happening in Brazil" as it would "not help reduce forest deforestation". *[Reuters, August 24, 2019]*

European Commission plans to simplify eurozone budget rules

Brussels is planning to simplify the eurozone's budgetary rules to provide governments with softer debt reduction targets that do not put pressure over struggling economies during downturns. Currently, economies with excessive deficits have to reduce their debt burdens by 1/20th a year over three years to move towards a 60 per cent debt-to-GDP target. These rules have been criticized for being impossible to enforce and overly flexible for governments that are in breach of the rules. Italy's anti-establishment government avoided punishment for failing to meet its deficit targets in 2018 and 2019. Officials are aiming to rewrite the rules within the first 12 months of the new commission coming into office in November. The debate comes as eurozone economies are experiencing slowing growth and Germany faces the threat of recession this year. *[Financial Times, August 25th 2019]*

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Rise of far-right violence in Germany

The German newspaper Tagespiegel indicated on the 13th of August that up to 8605 far-right linked crimes and offense occurred on the first half of 2019. This is a rise of more than 900 cases compared to the first half of 2018. The data released by Tagespiegel is still incomplete. While far-right violence in Germany is not a new phenomenon, this year has been marked by the rise of collective violence targeting migrants and by the targeting of local elected officials. Several elected officials have blamed the far-right party AfD for the rise of violence. In September 2018 members of the AfD party took part in protests with far-right militias. *[Le Monde, 15th August, 2019]*

Is Germany still divided along East and West lines ?

November 9th marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the decade following the reunification, the economy in eastern Germany slowly recovered and more people were identifying as "Germans". However, today divides between the two sides of the country are growing. The far-right party AfD has exploited the migration crisis to gain votes in eastern part of Germany; creating divides within Germany. The AfD argued that migrants were allowed in by Chancellor Angela Merkel at the expense of eastern Germans that were not consulted on the decision. The party has called eastern voters to "complete the revolution," evoking the feeling that whatever injustices East Germans had to suffer since 1989 could be redeemed in a populist uprising. While 71 percent of West Germans replied this summer that they felt simply like Germans, only 44 percent of Easterners replied the same way. *[New York Times, August 29, 2019]*

Poland's new approach to the EU: soft in European policy and tough at home

The Polish populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) has criticized the EU since it came in power in 2015. In these last few months, the PiS has adopted a conciliatory approach to the EU: it has supported the candidacy of Ursula Von Der Leyen for the post of European Commissioner, it has not denounced the rejection of PiS representatives as leaders of influential committees in the European Parliament. Poland relies heavily on EU funds and fears that funds could be tied to the government's respect of the rule of law as EU budget are being renegotiated. Domestically, the PiS is pursuing its attacks against the rule of law. The PiS shift is a calculated move to secure the government more room to maneuver domestically and continue its illiberal project. *[Politico, 20th August, 2019]*

UK Parliament suspension sparks furious backlash

The British PM Boris Johnson suspended, after approval by the Queen, the British Parliament in September and October. The British Parliament will be unable to pass laws between September 9th and the 15th October. Prime Minister Johnson took this decision to prevent MPs from blocking a no-deal Brexit before the scheduled departure date of 31 October. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn described Johnson's move as "a smash-and-grab on our democracy" in order to force through no-deal by leaving MPs without enough time to pass laws in Parliament. Protesters gathered in the streets of London to oppose the Brexit and denounce Johnson's decision. *[BBC, August 28, 2019]*

Emmanuel Macron, the star of the G7?

French President Emmanuel Macron has tried during the G7 summit held in the southern part of France to position himself as the leader of the Western world. U.S President Donald Trump's isolationist policy and the decision of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel to leave political life at the end of her mandate allows the French president to appear as the leading champion of European values and multilateralism. According to many, Mr. Macron has succeeded in endorsing this role. However, Mr. Macron appeared relatively alone on a wide range of subjects: The U. S administration criticized the agenda that Mr. Macron set in the summit, Germany and Britain opposed France's call to veto the Mercosur trade deal. It is unlikely that Mr. Macron will make great progress on global issues such as trade and climate without the support strong allies. *[New York Times, August 27, 2019]*

New Government Takes Shape in Italy. Sidelining Salvini and the Hard Right

The leader of the hard-right, anti-migrant League party, Mr. Salvini had sought to consolidate his surging public support by putting an end to his coalition with the anti-establishment Five Star Movement. He called for early elections and asked Italians to give him full power. However, Five Star joined forces with the center left Democratic Party (PD) of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte to stop Matteo Salvini. The two party were strongly opposed one to another until Matteo Salvini's move. In many ways the new coalition has less in common than did Five Star and the League, which shared a scorn for expertise, the elites and globalization. Matteo Salvini denounced a conspiracy by his enemies to stop him and pointed to the popular support he beneficiaries to argue that Italians are being denied the right to choose their leaders. *[New York Times, August 28, 2019]*

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has asked Poland's forgiveness for Nazi "tyranny", 80 years on from the start of World War Two. Mr Steinmeier and other world leaders, including Chancellor Angela Merkel and US Vice-President Mike Pence, went to Poland to commemorate the outbreak of the conflict. Poland is still demanding compensation from Germany for the death and destruction inflicted. A Polish parliamentary committee is still assessing the amount of compensation, but Germany argues the matter is settled. Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz estimate that there is "a lack of fairness" and "discrimination" of his country by Germany, claiming that other countries had received better treatment with regard to their war losses. *[BBC, September 1st, 2019]*

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

French freemasons withdraw text attacking French Jewish organization

A member of the French freemasons asked leaders of the masonic organization to cease participation at events organized by the CRIF, the major French jewish organization. He argued that CRIF's support for Israel's "extreme right religious policies" lead to "an increase in antisemitism". The motion was approved by the 53,000-member lodge. However, the head of the freemason opposed the statement and contacted the president of the CRIF to formally close the affair. *[Le Figaro, 27 August, 2019]*

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