



September 15th, 2019

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

#### Europe on the path to trade war with the US?

Ursula von der Leyen, the new president of the European Commission, has appointed two commissioners, Phil Hogan and Margrethe Vestager, that have been outspoken defenders of European interests against Washington's trade protectionism and the dominance of American digital firms. Phil Hogan that has opposed the U.S "reckless" trade policies has been nominated as the EU's new trade chief. Margrethe Vestager will lead Brussels' digital policy as an executive vice-president in the new commission. She has been called the "tax lady" by Mr Trump, has imposed record fines to Google and demanded to the Irish government to raise taxes on Apple.

[Financial Times, September 10, 2019]

### EUROPE – RUSSIA

#### European states divided concerning Macron's desire to renew dialogue with Russia

The French President Emmanuel Macron has indicated these last few weeks his will to renew dialogue with Russia. Not all European states are ready to follow the French initiative. The president of the foreign affairs commission of the Bundestag in Germany indicated that a dialogue with Russia requires Moscow to change its policies, notably towards Ukraine. In Eastern Europe, Macron's foreign policy has been equally received with suspicion. The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jacek Czaputowicz, declared that France was privileging ties with an authoritarian country over relations with European states. However, Finland, Greece and Italy welcomed Macron's decision as a way to reaffirm Europe's independence.

[Le Monde, September 7th, 2019]

#### European Court of Justice limits Gazprom's use of a pipeline

The European Court of Justice overturned an EU decision allowing the Russian gas giant Gazprom to boost deliveries to Europe via the Opal pipeline. Poland, Lithuania and Latvia challenged this decision by fear that Gazprom would gain monopoly over the pipeline. The ECJ's ruling will force Gazprom to send higher volumes of gas to Europe via alternative pipelines in Ukraine which will make it harder for Russia to put pressure on Kyiv. Poland welcomed the decision as Warsaw is fighting to prevent the construction of Nordstream II, a pipeline that would allow Russia to double the amount of gas it sends to Germany, bypassing Poland and Ukraine.

[Financial Times, September 10, 2019]

### EUROPE – EAST ASIA

#### China sold drones to a European country for the first time

Chinese combat drones are expected to be delivered to Europe for the first time. Serbia is expected to take delivery of nine drones within the next six months, and there may be a follow-up order of 15 more. China is increasing its presence in the international arms market. Serbia, which is formally seeking European Union membership, has already been boosting its armed forces with Russian warplanes, battle tanks and other equipment. Western states are concerned that Serbia's arms buildup could threaten fragile peace in the Balkans; notably by leading Serbia to wage a war against its former province of Kosovo that proclaimed independence in 2008. Serbia, Russia and China do not recognize Kosovo's statehood, while the United States and most of the Western countries do.

[Associated Press, September 10, 2019]

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

#### France's financial bailout for Iran

French President Emmanuel Macron plans to release a financial bailout package to compensate Iran for oil sales lost to American sanctions. Iranian press reports that the financial package would account for \$15 billion; about half the revenue Iran normally would expect to earn from oil exports in a year. In return for the financial aid, Iran would return to the restrictions over the use of nuclear energy negotiated with the Obama administration four years ago. Mr. Macron's government has declined to provide any details of its negotiations with the Iranians. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and John R. Bolton, the former national security adviser of the U.S president, have made it clear that they oppose such an agreement. Without Trump administration support for the deal, it is not clear whether European banks would risk American sanctions by extending credit to Tehran

[New York Times, September 2nd, 2019]

#### For Iran, EU is failing to save nuclear deal

The EU has "failed to act on their promises" within the 2015 nuclear deal, said Iran's atomic energy chief. In response, Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas warned against any escalation of the nuclear dispute. Heiko Maas added that Tehran should return to full compliance to the nuclear deal. Iran breached again the deal by starting up 20 IR-4 and 20 IR-6 advanced centrifuges on Saturday to boost its stockpile of enriched uranium. France's President Emmanuel Macron has discussed with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to unite their efforts in order to preserve the JCPOA.

[Deutsche Welle, 9th September 2019]

#### Hungary draws up plans to upgrade diplomatic ties with Syria

Hungary is drawing up plans to upgrade diplomatic relations with Syria. It is planning to send diplomats in Syria to pave the way to reopen an embassy in the country. Many EU members strongly oppose normalizing relations with Bashar al-Assad's regime by dispatching envoys to Syria. Hungary's move will anger influential EU members who have sought to keep their distance from the Damascus regime. Hungary's far-right prime minister Viktor Orban has sought to portray himself as a defender of Christianity and has created ties with Syrian Christian communities.

[Financial Times, September 11th, 2019]

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

#### Macron calls on Hariri to provide elements of truce on southern borders

The French President Emmanuel Macron spoke on the phone to the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Macron stressed "France's commitment to Lebanon's stability and security" and its will to bolster the Lebanese economy through the CEDRE investment projects. Hariri thanked Macron for France's efforts to contain the escalation with Israel which occurred on September 1st. Hariri also expressed his country's gratitude for France's leading role in the extension of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Hariri and Macron will meet on September 20th in Paris.

[Middle East Monitor, September 7th, 2019]

#### EU reacts to Netanyahu's intention of annexing the Jordan Valley

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on September 10th to begin annexing settlements in the Jordan Valley if he is reelected. The European Union said that this plan undermines any prospects for peace. A spokesperson said the bloc "will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders" of Israel. The EU spokesperson said the policy of settlement construction and expansion, including in East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law. This would undermine the viability of the two-state solution and the prospects for a lasting peace, spokesperson added.

[Deutsche Welle, 10th September 2019]

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

#### Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen introduced her proposed team of commissioner

The new President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, has appointed her team of European Commissioners. The appointments permit to gain knowledge about the incoming commission's priorities: preserving competitive markets in a digital age, engineering Europe's transformation into a carbon-neutral economy while maintaining its industrial and innovation capacity. Ms von der Leyen vowed to lead a "geopolitical commission". The new president of the European commission and her team will have to overcome great obstacles to build coalitions in a fragmented European Parliament and to overcome deep divisions between member states represented in the council.

[Financial Times, September 10, 2019]

#### Migration to Greece is rising

August has been the busiest month in more than three years in terms of migrants arriving to Greece by boats. The rate of arrivals is still just a fraction of the 2015 peak. Last month, nearly 10,000 migrants arrived in all of Greece; in October 2015, at the height of the crisis, more than 210,000 landed in Greece. However, the recent surges come as the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey threatens once again to allow high numbers of migrants to make their way through Turkey to Greece, should European politicians fail to provide Turkey with further financial support, or dismiss his plans to extend Turkish influence in northern Syria. Up to 3.6 million Syrian refugees live in Turkey. If Erdogan pushes them out of Turkey, the effects could be dramatic for Europe.

[New York Times, September 11, 2019]

#### The U.K. will almost certainly get another Brexit extension

UK parliamentarians have compelled Boris Johnson to request an extension beyond Brexit's current date. French Foreign Minister indicated that "under the current circumstances" he would not consider an extension request. France is taking a tough line against granting an extension. The EU wants the U.K to provide some justifications and reasons for a delay the Brexit talks create a great amount of frustration among EU officials. Indeed, senior European officials fear that by denying an extension they would make the EU responsible, at least in the eyes of the population, for the economic harm expected in case of a no-deal. Furthermore, rejecting an extension request would force the new European Commission to take office on November 1 effectively in a state of emergency.

[Politico, 9th September 2019]

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### 600,000 Protesters in Barcelona call for independence from Spain

Hundreds of thousands of Catalans demonstrated in Barcelona on September 11th in favor of independence from the rest of Spain. Their numbers were smaller than in previous years, underlining deep divisions within the independence movement. Politicians from various pro-independence parties are divided over whether to call new regional elections, or to push for secession again. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez could exploit these division to end the territorial conflict, but he faces his own political problems. Sanchez has been unable to form a governmental coalition since July and consequently Spain is likely heading towards new general elections in November.

[New York Times, September 11, 2019]

#### Germany: New Defense Minister urges for more money

The new German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer has warned that a €2 billion increase of the defense budget is not enough. She is calling Germany to take a more forthright and decisive role in its foreign policy and as part of defense organizations. She indicated that threats around the world were growing, singling out Syria, Afghanistan, Russia, China, Iran as creating a volatile defense picture in the world from which Germany needed to protect itself and other nations. The draft budget of the defense Ministry amounts to €44.9 billion. It represents 1.37% of GDP. However, NATO has put out repeated calls for defense spending to rise to 2% GDP from NATO member-states.

[Deutsche Welle, 11th September 2019]

#### Rise of Far-Right party AfD in Germany

The far-right party AfD has demonstrated its popularity in two regional elections that were held in East Germany. In Brandenburg the AfD received 22.5% of the votes (it scored 12.2% in 2014) and in Saxony the party received 27.5% (9.7% in 2014). While the AfD has not won these elections, they demonstrate the rising popularity of the party in the former DDR. All the major parties have ruled out forming a coalition with AfD, even though the CDU has come under pressure from its right wing to do so.

[New York Times, 1st September 2019]

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

#### Bust of Hitler and Nazi flag found in the French Senate

The French newspaper Le Monde revealed that a bust of Hitler and a Nazi flag were hidden in the French Senate for 75 years. The objects were hidden since the end of WW2. The building of the French Senate was used as HQ for the Luftwaffe, the German air force, when Paris was occupied by German troops. The exact story of how the bust and flag came to be hidden in the cellars of such an important public building remains a mystery. Senate President Gérard Larcher has ordered an investigation.

[Le Monde, 3rd September 2019]

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