

November 14th, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – AMERICAS

[NATO alliance experiencing brain death, says Macron.](#)

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, has described NATO as “brain dead”, stressing what he sees as waning commitment to the transatlantic alliance by its main guarantor, the US. He questioned whether NATO was still committed to collective defence and cited the US’s failure to consult its NATO allies before pulling forces out of northern Syria. Macron has urged Europe instead to start thinking of itself as a “geopolitical power” to ensure it remained “in control” of its destiny.

[*BBC News*, November 7, 2019]

[US begins process of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement.](#)

The US has notified the UN of its intention to leave the Paris Agreement, beginning a one-year process of exiting the accord. The Paris accord committed the US and 187 other countries to keep rising global temperatures below 2C, but the US government says the deal puts an “unfair economic burden” on Americans. The EU, which has invested significant effort in keeping the agreement on track, responding by saying the agreement was “here to stay”, and that “its door remains open and we hope the US will join it again one day”.

[*BBC News*, November 5, 2019]

[EU to extend funding for Colombia peace agreement for four more years.](#)

The EU has announced further funding to support the implementation of Colombia’s peace accord with former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels, including an initial contribution of 33.5 million euros. This is in addition to the nearly 128 million euros it has already contributed to help former fighters reintegrate into society since 2016.

[*Reuters*, October 25, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

[EU-mediated Russia-Ukraine gas talks in deadlock.](#)

The latest round of EU-Russia-Ukraine gas talks again ended without progress, as the EU’s energy chief called for a clear sense of urgency. The current gas contract ends on 31 December, and a new contract is needed to ensure the steady supply of gas to the EU from Russia, which remains its biggest supplier.

[*Euractiv*, October 29, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

[EU parliament rejects Turkey’s “safe zone” in Syria, steps up talks of sanctions.](#)

EU lawmakers have again condemned Turkey’s offensive in northern Syria, demanding its immediate withdrawal from the region. In a draft resolution, legislators urge “appropriate and targeted economic measures against Turkey” which could include the freezing of preferential treatment for Turkish agricultural exports to the EU or even, as a last resort, the suspension of the EU’s customs union with Ankara.

[*Reuters*, October 23, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

[EU’s top court says settlement product labelling mandatory.](#)

The EU Court of Justice has ruled to make it legally binding for all member states to label West Bank goods as such, rather than as products of Israel. Whilst the EU introduced the

need to label settlement goods back in 2015 in its “interpretive notice”, member states where not legally bound to do so, meaning that countries such as Germany and Hungary effectively ignored the ruling. Whilst the EU stressed that it still rejects any form of boycott or sanctions against Israel, this decision will likely adversely affect the already strained relations between the two parties.

[*Times of Israel*, November 12, 2019]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

[At French insistence, Macedonia and Albania left out in the cold.](#)

French President Emmanuel Macron has seemingly upended the decade-long EU policy of anchoring the Balkan states to the EU by vetoing the opening of accession negotiations for North Macedonia and Albania. Labelling the EU’s enlargement strategy as “bizarre”, President Macron insisted that the EU needed reform before further enlargement. This veto has sent shockwaves through the Balkans; North Macedonia’s prime minister, having spent significant political capital negotiation his country’s name change with the view of aiding accession to the European Union, immediately called snap elections following the decision.

[*The Economist*, October 26, 2019]

[EU seals Lagarde’s European Central Bank appointment.](#)

EU leaders have officially sealed the appointment of Christine Lagarde as the next European Central Bank president for an eight-year term to begin on the 1st of November. Formerly France’s Finance Minister and head of the International Monetary Fund, Lagarde will succeed Mario Draghi in the role, serving a non-renewable term as President. Government leaders officially completed the ECB selection process during a summit meeting in Brussels, after she had received positive opinions from the European Parliament and European Central Bank itself.

[*Politico*, October 18, 2019]

[UK parliament backs general election at the fourth time of asking.](#)

The House of Commons has voted in favour of an early general election on December 12, after Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party backed the motion following the EU’s granting of an extension to article 50. Opinion polls show the Brexit-backing Conservative party roughly 10 points ahead of the remain-leaning Labour Party, with the overtly remain-backing Liberal Democrats and the Brexit party also polling strongly.

[*The Guardian*, October 30, 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

[Spain digs up Franco remains.](#)

The remains of Spanish dictator General Franco have been exhumed from the Valley of the Fallen and moved to a cemetery in Madrid where they were re-buried next to his late wife. This fulfilled a key campaign pledge from Spain’s Socialist government, which labelled the move “an end to a moral affront”.

[*El País*, October 25, 2019]

[Far-right surges to second place in east German State of Thuringia.](#)

The anti-immigrant populist party the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has leapfrogged Angela Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) into second place with 24% of the vote. The

result leaves the region in deadlock, as the previous left-wing coalition now lacks the seats to reform its majority coalition.

[*The Guardian*, October 27, 2019]

[80,000 march against Catalan independence in Barcelona.](#)

The anti-independence march in Barcelona came a day after a pro-independence demonstration brought 350,000 people onto the streets of Barcelona, accentuating the deep divisions in Catalan society following the imprisonment of Catalan leaders for their role in the 2017 independence referendum deemed illegal by the Spanish Supreme Court.

[*The Guardian*, October 27, 2019]

[Triumph of the far-right in Italy.](#)

An alliance of right-wing parties spearheaded by Matteo Salvini's far-right Lega Party has won the regional elections in Umbria with a decisive 57.5% of the vote. This is the first time the region, historically known as one of Italy's four "red regions" due to its left-wing political leanings, has not returned a left-wing candidate in over 50 years. The election result represents the first decisive victory for the Lega Party since its leader, Matteo Salvini, resigned from the government in the summer in a failed attempt to force elections with the hope of becoming Prime Minister.

[*La Repubblica*, October 27, 2019]

[Sophie Wilmes becomes Belgium's first Jewish Prime Minister.](#)

Sophie Wilmes will lead Belgium's caretaker government following the collapse of former Prime Minister Charles Michel's government last year. Wilmes, who lost several relatives during the Holocaust, becomes Belgium's first Jewish and female Prime Minister.

[*Times of Israel*, October 28, 2019]

[Germany marks 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.](#)

Germany celebrated the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, as Chancellor Angela Merkel vowed that "no wall will ever separate people again." Its fall was a decisive event in the fall of communism that foreshadowed the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier led the official ceremonies which took place at the iconic Brandenburg Gate and Bernauer Strasse, where he warned that "a new wall has arisen that cuts through our country – a wall of frustration, a wall of anger and hate," and called on Germans to "tear down these walls, at long last."

[*Deutsche Welle*, November 10, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

[German city of Dresden declares "Nazi Emergency".](#)

Dresden's local council has passed a resolution declaring a "Nazi Emergency" in the city. In a policy statement, the council notes the "increasing frequency" of right-wing-extremist actions in the city and calls for a focus on "fighting the causes of far-right attitudes and their consequence". Dresden is located in the state of Saxony and is a stronghold of the far-right Alternative for Germany party as well as the city in which the anti-Islam and xenophobic PEGIDA movement began in 2014.

[*Deutsche Welle*, November 1, 2019]

[Antisemitic Belgian parade float deemed not intentionally racist.](#)

The Coordinating Committee of Belgian Jewish Organisations (CCOJB) has slammed a report by the UNIA government anti-discrimination watchdog concerning an antisemitic float depicting Orthodox Jews during this year's Aalst carnival. The float depicting Orthodox Jews with crooked noses and carrying bags of money was deemed not to be criminally racist by the UNIA. Criticising the decision, CCOJB stated that the UNIA had now lost all credibility.

[7 sur 7, October 24, 2019]

[Jewish Agency chairman Herzog in Berlin to mark 81 years since Kristallnacht.](#)

Jewish communities around the world prepare to mark 81 years since Kristallnacht on the 9th of November, as Jewish Agency chairman Isaac Herzog joined the rabbi of the Orthodox Synagogue of Berlin to remember the victims. Against the backdrop of rising antisemitism in Germany and Europe, Herzog told community members at the synagogue that "it is unthinkable that Jews take off their kippah, prayer shawl and are afraid to walk in the streets of Europe".

[*The Jerusalem Post*, November 7, 2019]

[World Jewish Congress awards German Chancellor Merkel Theodore Herzl Award.](#)

The World Jewish Congress chairman, Ronald Lauder, awarded Merkel the Theodor Herzl Award in Munich for promoting "ideals for a safe, more tolerant world for the Jewish people", whilst also calling on the German government to do more to tackle rising antisemitism in the country. Referencing a recent survey in which 27% of people said they had strong antisemitic feelings, Ronald Lauder called on stronger teaching in schools to tackle antisemitism.

[*Deutsche Welle*, October 28, 2019]