



December 22nd, 2019

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

[US sanctions Nord Stream 2 pipeline](#)

The US Congress has passed a defence spending bill that includes sanctions on companies involved in Nord Stream 2, a new \$9.5bn gas pipeline in construction that will transport Russian gas directly to Germany through the North Sea, thereby bypassing Ukraine. German Chancellor Angela Merkel criticised the sanctions but indicated that Germany had no intention of imposing countersanctions on the US.
[*Financial Times*, December 18, 2019]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

[Russia and Ukraine agree to comprehensive ceasefire](#)

The leaders of Russia and Ukraine have reached a tentative agreement on ending the conflict in Ukraine at a summit in Paris brokered by France and Germany. In a written statement, the countries agreed to the release and exchange of all "conflict-related detainees" by the end of the year and to disengage military forces in three additional regions of Ukraine by the end of March 2020.
[*BBC News*, December 10, 2019]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

[Turkey-Libya Maritime border deal draws scorn from EU](#)

Turkey has signed a Memorandum of Understand with the internationally recognised Libyan Government of National Accord, delineating their security and maritime boundaries which ignore the presence of Greek islands. In a joint statement with Cyprus and Egypt, Greece states that the agreement "infringes upon the sovereign rights of third states, does not comply with the Law of the Sea and cannot produce any legal consequences for third states" whilst the EU "unequivocally reaffirms its solidarity with Greece and Cyprus regarding these actions by Turkey."
[*New York Times*, December 12, 2019]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

[German parliament passes resolution to outlaw Hezbollah activity](#)

The German Bundestag has passed a motion calling on the government to "decree an activity ban against Hezbollah" and end the distinction it currently makes between the political and military wing of Hezbollah. The bill, which was supported by the two major parties and passed with a large majority, was hailed by Israel's Foreign Ministry which called for the world to "unite against Hezbollah, declare it a terror organisation and impose heavy sanctions on it"
[*Times of Israel*, December 19, 2019]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

[New EU Commission announces ambitious Green Deal](#)

The European Commission's new president, Ursula von der Leyen, has announced the EU Commission's eagerly awaited Green Deal after barely 11 days in office. The 24-page document pledges to make Europe carbon-neutral by 2050, making the EU the largest bloc and biggest greenhouse-gas emitter to make the pledge. Amongst the various policy measures that will be used to enact this, the European Investment Bank is set to be transformed into a climate bank, phasing out the financing of fossil fuels by 2021 and directing 50% of its lending by 2025 towards green projects. The Commission will equally refuse to strike new trade deals with countries that fail to comply with the Paris agreement's requirements.
[*The Economist*, December 14, 2019]

[Poland parliament defies EU by passing controversial law to fire judges](#)

In defiance of Brussels, Poland's lower parliament has passed a law allowing the government to fire judges opposed to judicial reforms. The ruling PiS party argues that the law is necessary because many of the country's judges have become too outspoken politically and seek to block the party's effort to fulfil its democratic mandate. However, the EU has called on authorities to suspend the legislation citing concerns about judicial independence.
[*Euronews*, December 20, 2019]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

[Boris Johnson wins UK elections](#)

The Conservative party have secured a resounding victory in the UK general election with its biggest majority in parliament since the days of Margaret Thatcher. The result means Britain is almost certain to leave the EU on the 31st of January 2020. Led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the government will have just eleven months to negotiate an ambitious trade deal by the time the transition period ends at the end of 2020.
[*BBC News*, December 13, 2019]

[Italian police arrest over 300 with Mafia links](#)

In the biggest operation since the maxi-trail of Palermo between 1986 and 1992, police in Italy have arrested over 300 people including prominent lawyers, politicians, mayors and a police commander over links to the 'Ndrangheta Mafia group based in Calabria. The suspects are being held on suspicion of extortion, murder, money laundering and belonging to a mafia organisation.
[*La Repubblica*, December 19, 2019]

[France strike continue into third week](#)

Unions in France have vowed to continue their strike action against pension reforms in France which would increase the official retirement age of 62—one of the lowest in Europe—to a new "pivot age" of 64 for a full pension. The strikes are estimated to be costing the economy about €400m a day as entire sectors of the economy shut down and hundreds of thousands of people join rallies across the country in opposition to the reforms. President Macron also suffered a setback when his pensions minister spearheading the reform, Laurent Pietraszewskiwas, was forced to resign after it emerged he had failed to declare income alongside his government salary
[*The Guardian*, December 18, 2019]

[Spain coalition talks](#)

PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez has reached out to separatist's parties in an attempt to form a governing coalition after his party came first in the general election but fell far short of a majority. The election in November was the second this year following another inconclusive result in April and the fourth in four years. The PSOE will also have to seek support from the far-left Podemos Party which had refused to go into government with PSOE following the previous election.
[*El Pais*, December 17, 2019]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

[Suspect in 2017 Paris killing of Jewish woman won't stand trial](#)

A French court has ruled that a man accused of murdering his Jewish neighbour cannot be held criminally responsible for Sarah Halimi's killing because he was in a psychotic state from marijuana use. Kobili Traore is alleged to have beaten his neighbour, Sarah Halimi, to death whilst calling her a demon and evoking Allah, before throwing her body from the window of her third-story apartment. In response, the French-Jewish student association, EUJF, stated that the court's decision "marks the advent of a policy that gives impunity to antisemitic murders in France"
[*Times of Israel*, December 19, 2019]

[German Jewish leader says judges indulge anti-Semitism](#)

The head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Josef Shuster, has accused the judiciary of making allowances for antisemitic crimes. Accusing them of "very significant shortcomings", Shuster said the judges seemed "to look for reasons to give lighter sentences" when it came to antisemitic acts". Nevertheless, Schuster welcomed plans to recognise antisemitic motives in Germany's criminal code and stated that Germany still felt safe for Jews even after the Halle attack.
[*Deutsche Welle*, December 13, 2019]

[UNESCO kicks Belgian festival off culture list for antisemitism](#)

In an unprecedented move, the global cultural agency has struck the Aalst carnival from the Intangible Cultural Heritage list after complaints of antisemitism. The carnival, which included a float depicting ultra-orthodox Jewish men with hooked noses sitting on top of piles of money, is the first to be ever taken off the UNESCO cultural heritage for racism.
[*The Telegraph*, December 14, 2019]

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