



January 5th, 2020

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

#### [European leaders call for de-escalation of US-Iran crisis after Suleimani killing](#)

European politicians have publicly voiced concern over the US killing of Iranian general Qassem Suleimani, urging all sides to reduce tensions. It is feared the assassination, which follows a series of confrontations in Iraq between the US and Iranian backed Shia-militias, could spark a direct confrontation between the US and Iran and drag the US's European allies into it. Furthermore, Germany, France and the UK fear that this attack may deal a final devastating blow to their hopes of keeping the Iran nuclear deal alive. [*The Guardian*, January 3, 2020]

### EUROPE – RUSSIA

#### [Ukraine and pro-Russian rebels carry out prisoner swap](#)

200 prisoners have been returned to their respective parties following successful peace talks between the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany. The deal, which saw 124 prisoners returned to the pro-Russian separatists and 76 returned to the Ukrainian government, also recommitts the sides to an existing ceasefire and the withdrawal of forces from conflict zones by March. [*Politico*, December 28, 2019]

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

#### [NATO suspends Iraq training mission after Soleimani killing](#)

NATO has suspended its training of Iraqi forces to ensure the safety of several hundred mission members amid fears for regional stability after a US airstrike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian general. The NATO Mission in Iraq (NMI) is made up of several hundred trainers, advisers and support staff from countries of the 29-member alliance and non-NATO partner countries and includes military and civilian personnel. [*Reuters*, January 4, 2020]

#### [Turkish MPs approve bill to send troops to Libya](#)

In a further show of Turkish President Erdogan's regional ambitions, the Turkish parliament passed a bill that allows the government to deploy troops to Libya. These troops will support Libya's UN-backed government based in Tripoli which is currently under assault from General Khalifa Haftar's forces based in the east of the country. The move was met with dismay in Europe as the Greek, Cypriot as well as Israeli Prime Minister's warned the deployment market "a dangerous threat to regional stability". [*BBC News*, January 3, 2020]

### EUROPE – EAST ASIA

#### [China's EU ambassador warns EU not to block Chinese companies](#)

The EU could face a backlash from "suspicious" Chinese entrepreneurs if it pursues its plans to limit foreign corporate ownership and China's involvement in 5G communications, the country's ambassador to the EU said. The comments come ahead of recommendations expected in January for EU countries to tighten security checks on 5G companies such as China's Huawei. [*Politico*, December 26, 2019]

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

#### [Israel signs major gas pipeline deal with Greece and Cyprus](#)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hailed the signing of the EastMed gas deal as a "big day" for the country. The agreement will allow Israel and Cyprus to export between nine and twelve billion cubic meters of gas a year through a pipeline to be built through Greece and then on to Italy. The deal is likely to be an economic boon for Israel which will become a major gas exporter. [*Times of Israel*, January 2, 2020]

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

#### [EU-UK trade talks to begin in earnest](#)

British prime minister Boris Johnson is expected to open talks on his country's post-Brexit trade with the new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, when she visits Downing Street next week. Von der Leyen has suggested that an extension to the current 11-month timeframe available for negotiations before the end of the transition period on December 31, 2020, may be sensible, as previous trade deals between the EU and countries such as Canada, Japan and Singapore have taken between six and eight years to agree. Prime Minister Johnson has, however, so far refused to countenance any such extension. [*The Guardian*, January 4, 2020]

#### [EU Court of Justice rules jailed Catalan separatist MEP has right to immunity](#)

In a ruling that will likely aggravate tensions between Brussels and Madrid, the EU Court of Justice has ruled that jailed former Catalan Vice President Oriol Junqueras has the right to parliamentary immunity having been elected to the European Parliament in May. Oriol Junqueras was sentenced in October to 13 years in prison for his role in organising the Catalan independence referendum which was judged to be illegal by Spanish Courts. [*France 24*, December 20, 2019]

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### [Terror attack in Paris killed one, injures two others](#)

A knife-wielding man was shot dead by police in Paris after fatally stabbing members of the public. France's national anti-terrorist investigation body is treating the attack as a terrorist incident. The man, identified only as Nathan C, is thought to have converted to Islam in mid-2017 and had suffered serious psychiatric issues from a young age. [*France 24*, January 4, 2020]

#### [France in deadlock as pension reform strike enters 4th week.](#)

A general strike against a proposed pension reform has now become the longest in France since 1968 with no end in sight. The reform, which would replace France's 42 separate pension regimes with a universal point-based system and raise the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64, has been met by decisive opposition from unions. Nevertheless, President Macron has vowed to push ahead with the reform, stating that backing down would be a "betrayal of our children, their children after them, who would then have to pay the price". [*Euronews*, January 2, 2020]

#### [Pedro Sánchez gains backing to form Spanish Government](#)

A coalition government between Pedro Sánchez's Socialist Party and Unidas Podemos seems certain to be approved by the Spanish Congress of Deputies after the Catalan Republican Left gave its tacit approval by agreeing to abstain on the crucial vote. In exchange, Prime Minister Sánchez has committed to negotiations over the political situation in Catalonia and the future of the region. An indecisive election result in November means that even with the support of the far-left Unidas Podemos, Prime Minister Sánchez has to seek the support of smaller separatist parties in order to govern. Failure to do so would have meant Spain would have faced its third general election in a year, and fifth in five years. [*El Pais*, January 3, 2020]

#### [Austrian People's Party and Greens reach deal to form coalition government](#)

The Leader of the Austrian People's Party Sebastian Kurz will continue in his role as Austrian Chancellor after reaching an agreement with the Green Party. The agreement follows an election brought about by a corruption scandal which forced Kurz's former coalition partner, the far-right Freedom Party, to leave the government. Praising the deal, Chancellor Kurz stated that "it is possible to protect the climate and borders". It will be the first time that the Green Party in Austria is in power. [*Deutsche Welle*, January 1, 2020]

#### [5,000 far-right members join British Conservative Party](#)

Two-thirds of the openly anti-Islam Britain First group members have joined the Conservative Party since the general election in December. The organisation, whose leaders were jailed last year for hate crimes against Muslims, said Prime Minister Boris Johnson's approach towards "radical Islam" encouraged them to join. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has dropped a promised enquiry into levels of Islamophobia within the party and has been accused of "rewarding racism" after Zac Goldsmith, who exploited anti-Muslim prejudices during the 2016 London mayoral campaign, was given a life peerage and kept on as an environment minister despite losing his Commons seat. [*The Guardian*, December 28, 2019]

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

#### [New York antisemitic stabbing attack leaves five wounded](#)

A machete-wielding man left five Jews critically injured in an attack described by New York governor Andrew Cuomo as an "act of domestic terrorism". The man entered a rabbi's home during Hanukkah and launched a vicious attack before fleeing the scene. He was eventually tracked down and apprehended by police who are also stepping up patrols in Jewish neighbourhoods in response. The attack comes amidst rising antisemitism in the US as well as Europe. [*BBC News*, December 30, 2019]

#### [Antisemitic graffiti daubed on synagogue and shops on Hanukkah in London](#)

London police are investigating a hate crime in north London after antisemitic graffiti was sprayed across a synagogue and shops in a Jewish area of North London. The crude images show a Star of David alongside the number "9, 11", invoking the antisemitic conspiracy that there was Jewish involvement in the September 11 attacks in the World Trade Centre in 2001. The graffiti come amidst a climate of rising antisemitism in the UK and an election marked by an intervention from Britain's Chief Rabbi warning against its normalisation in British politics. [*Evening Standard*, December 29, 2019]

#### [Polish President threatens to boycott Holocaust Forum in Israel amid tensions with Russia](#)

The Polish President, Andrzej Duda, has threatened to cancel his participation in the World Holocaust Forum taking place in Israel to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. President Duda claims the boycott is in response to Russian President Putin being the main speaker at the event, following Putin's claims of Polish collaboration with Nazi Germany. President Duda has instead asked fellow participants to condemn President Putin's statements. [*Haaretz*, January 5, 2020]

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