



January 19th, 2020

## Foreign Affairs

### EUROPE – US

#### [EU Trade Commissioner in Washington for trade talks](#)

The EU's Trade Commissioner, Phil Hogan, has met with US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, and Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, in an effort to ease trade tensions between the two blocks. France's digital services tax targeting US tech giants has been met with scorn in Washington, which has threatened to unilaterally impose 100 per cent duties on \$2.4 billion worth of French goods. The US is likewise weighing up whether to increase retaliatory duties on a further \$7.5 billion worth of European goods in a dispute over the EU's subsidies for Airbus. Although no agreement was reached, Hogan stated that talks were off to a "good start".  
[*Politico*, January 16, 2020]

### EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

#### [European powers trigger JCPOA dispute mechanism](#)

France, Germany and the UK have formally triggered a dispute mechanism over Iran's breaches of key parts of the 2015 nuclear deal. The move comes in response to Iran breaking key restrictions set out in the deal such as the lifting of limits on its production of enriched uranium. The move also comes amidst heightened tensions in the region following the US's killing of Iranian general Soleimani.  
[*BBC News*, January 14, 2020]

#### [Jordan's King Abdullah addressed EU Parliament](#)

In an address to the European Parliament, Jordan's King Abdullah II has lamented that hopes for the two-state solution between Israel and Palestinian backed by the international community were fading. He also warned of the "untold chaos" that would be unleashed on the world if a war broke out between the US and Iran and expressed concern over recent developments in Syria, Iraq and Libya.  
[*Times of Israel*, January 19, 2020]

### EUROPE – CHINA

#### [German diplomat investigated over China spying claims](#)

Buildings in Brussels and Germany have been raided by police amid inquiries into a former German diplomat and two lobbyists under investigation for spying for the Chinese government. It is claimed that two of the individuals shared confidential commercial information with the Chinese ministry for state security, whilst the third indicated a willingness to do so. The diplomat is said to have worked in both the EU commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) whilst leaking information to a senior officer in China.  
[*The Guardian*, January 16, 2020]

### EUROPE – ISRAEL

#### [Israel to host world leaders to mark 75 years of Auschwitz liberation](#)

The leaders of 46 countries will convene in Jerusalem on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January for the Fifth World Holocaust Forum, hosted by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin at Yad Vashem. The event will mark 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz and comes amidst rising antisemitism around the world. Polish President Andrej Duda will be a noticeable absentee, turning down an invitation after his request to speak at the event was turned down.  
[*Jerusalem Post*, January 17, 2020]

## Internal Affairs

### EU POLITICS

#### [Guy Verhofstadt named President of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#)

The former Belgium Prime Minister and leader of ALDE grouping in EU parliament, Guy Verhofstadt, will lead an exercise on how the EU should be reshaped as President of the Conference on the Future on Europe. The conference was originally proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron, who argued it should "propose all the necessary changes to our political system, without taboos". Likely topics to be considered include changing the Spitzenkandidat system, setting up transnational lists of MEPs and reforming the Council's decision-making process.  
[*Politico*, January 16, 2020]

#### [EU Parliament to consider Spanish request to waive immunity for Catalan leaders](#)

EU Parliament Vice President Ewa Kopacz has announced that the chamber has received Spain's request to remove the MEP's protective status and would hand the case over to the legal affairs committee. Catalan leaders Carles Puigdemont and Antoni Comín fled Spain after a failed secessionist push in Catalonia before being elected as MEPs, giving them immunity from prosecution. The leaders of Parliament's three biggest groups have already voiced support for lifting the MEPs immunity which requires only a simple majority in parliament.  
[*Politico*, January 16, 2020]

#### [Boris Johnson and Ursula von der Leyen in first "positive" meeting in London](#)

The President of the EU Commission has met UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson for the first time to kick start talks on the UK's future relationship with the EU. President von der Leyen called on both sides to focus on mutual interests, however warned that it would be impossible for the UK to negotiate a comprehensive deal covering all aspects of Brexit within the timeframe set by Johnson. She also warned against the fantasy in which the UK has a hard exit but retains all the benefits.  
[*The Guardian*, January 8, 2020]

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### [Russian government resigns amidst President Putin's constitutional reform plans](#)

President Vladimir Putin has proposed sweeping constitutional changes that could prolong his stay in power. If approved by the public, the proposals would transfer power from the presidency to parliament, potentially creating a dominant role for Putin outside of the presidency. Hours after the announcement, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev announced that the government was resigning to help facilitate the changes. A new prime minister, Mikhail Vladimirovich, formerly Director of the Federal Tax Service, has been named.  
[*BBC News*, January 15, 2020]

#### [Record-breaking France pension strikes enter 45<sup>th</sup> day.](#)

The police have arrested up to 59 people as the latest protests over the government's reform to the pension system turned violent. President Macron and his wife Brigitte had to be rushed from a Paris theatre after protesters tried to burst in and disrupt the performance. President Macron's reform aims to forge a single pension system from the country's 42 separate regimes. An attempt, however, to increase the minimum pension age from 62 to 64 has been dropped.  
[*France 24*, January 19, 2020]

#### [Malta: Robert Abela elected new PM after crisis over journalist's murder](#)

Malta's governing party has elected a new leader and prime minister to replace Joseph Muscat, who resigned over the murder of the journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia. Robert Abela won the Labour Party leadership contest with 57.9% of the vote. His predecessor, Joseph Muscat, who was accused of protecting allies and being implicate, resigned over his handling of the murder inquiry.  
[*BBC News*, January 12, 2020]

#### [Social Democrat Zoran Milanović beats incumbent to presidency in Croatia](#)

Croatia's Zoran Milanović has won the presidential race, receiving 53% of the popular vote to incumbent Kolinda Graber-Kitarovic's 47%. Previously a prime minister, Milanović is known for introducing liberal reforms including health education in schools and an expansion of rights for same-sex couples. The win also comes just days after Croatia took over the presidency of the European Union on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, with the UK's withdrawal of the European Union and accession talks of Balkan countries likely to be dominant topics.  
[*Euronews*, January 6, 2020]

### JEWISH COMMUNITIES

#### [Lithuania proposes Holocaust law absolving country from responsibility](#)

Lawmakers in Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis's party are drafting legislation declaring that neither Lithuania nor its leaders participated in the Holocaust. The move has sparked an outcry from historians and survivors who point out that complicity with the Nazi's was a major reason for why about 95% of the country's 250,000 Jews were wiped out. The move follows and mirrors similar legislation passed in Poland in 2018.  
[*Haaretz*, January 17, 2020]

#### [Italy appoints national coordinator for fight against antisemitism](#)

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has announced the appointment of Milena Santerini as National Coordinator for the fight against antisemitism in the country. Santerini is a member of parliament, member of the culture, education and sports commission in the Chamber of Deputies, and delegate to the Council of Europe in the equality and non-discrimination commission. The move comes following high profile threats made towards notable Jewish individuals in the country, including 89-year-old Auschwitz survivor Liliana Segre who has been put under police protection.  
[*La Repubblica*, January 16, 2020]

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