



February 2nd, 2020

Foreign Affairs

EUROPE – US

[EU sets up WTO court without US](#)

Seventeen members of the World Trade Organisation, including the European Union, are setting up a parallel WTO court without the US. Proponents of the plan argue that the US has left them with little choice as the administration has been blocking the appointment of judges to the WTO's Appellate Body, leaving countries without a forum to solve their trade disputes. EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan described this as a "contingency measure needed because of the paralysis of the WTO Appellate Body"

[*Politico*, January 24, 2020]

EUROPE – RUSSIA

[EU task force on combating Russian disinformation holds first summit](#)

International experts gathered in Brussels to discuss hostile foreign influence and the evolving nature of the disinformation challenge. The EU has been working to expose Kremlin-backed propaganda for years as information warfare has moved online. Efforts to tackle the threat include the EU's Rapid Alert System network which attempts to notify EU governments about Russian interference efforts before they multiply and spread.

[*CNN*, January 30, 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]

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST

[Europe reacts to President Trump's Middle East peace plan](#)

European leaders have responded to the release of President Trump's peace plan with cautious optimism. The plan would see the establishment of a Palestinian state, although much of the West Bank would go to Israel. EU high representative Josep Borrell said the block would "study and assess" the plan, whilst France and Britain both welcomed its release.

[*Deutsche Welle*, January 29, 2020]

[Warring Libyan parties meet at Berlin peace conference](#)

A Berlin peace summit ended with a joint promise to respect a UN arms embargo and end outside support for the conflict, but crucially no formal ceasefire or threat of sanctions for states that ignore the embargo. General Haftar of the Libyan National Army, has been assaulting the Libyan capital Tripoli since April and has recently cut off oil shipments from Libya's main ports, halting almost all of Libya's oil production.

[*The Economist*, January 23, 2020]

EUROPE – CHINA

[EU spells out rules for "high risk" 5G suppliers](#)

European cybersecurity officials have agreed on a series of measures to downsize Huawei's presence in Europe due to concerns that it poses serious risks to the security of future 5G telecom networks. The move comes following the UK's announcement that it would ban Huawei from core networks rather than 5G as a whole as the US had been lobbying for. The EU's so-called 5G security toolbox marks the end of a year-long debate on how best to handle high risk suppliers from China

[*Politico*, January 29, 2020]

[Europe confirms first cases of coronavirus from China](#)

Germany, France, Italy, the UK, Spain and Sweden have all confirmed their first cases of coronavirus as they scramble to limit its spread. Over 300 people have been confirmed to have died whilst another 14,000 have been infected, the vast majority of which in China. European countries have been steadily repatriating citizens from the epicentre of the outbreak in China, as the World Health Organisation declared coronavirus to be a global health emergency.

[*BBC News*, February 2, 2020]

EUROPE – ISRAEL

[Israel and Cyprus begin new era of cooperation](#)

President Nicos Anastasiades has hailed a new era of cooperation between his country and Israel whilst attending his inauguration as an honorary doctorate at IDC Herzliya. President Anastasiades referred to the common struggle of Cypriots and Jews for self-determination, and the 53,000 holocaust survivors who passed through Cyprus after the Second World War. The statements come amidst heightened cooperation between the two states, particularly in the area of energy.

[*Cyprus Mail*, January 21, 2020]

[World leaders in Jerusalem for World Holocaust Forum](#)

Israeli President Rivlin has called on world leaders to battle rising antisemitism at the World Holocaust Forum event in Jerusalem to mark 75th anniversary of Auschwitz liberation. He was joined by US Vice President Mike Pence, Russian President Vladimir Putin, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Britain's Prince Charles amongst others. One notable absentee with Polish President Duda, who declined an invitation following a spat with Russian President Putin and Yad Vashem's refusal of his request to speak at the event.

[*Haaretz*, January 24, 2020]

Internal Affairs

EU POLITICS

[UK begins new chapter outside of European Union](#)

The UK has officially left the European Union after 47 years of membership, and three and a half years after voting to leave in a referendum. The UK now enters an 11-month transition period during which it remains a part of the EU single market and customs union, using this time to negotiate a new permanent trade agreement with the EU. The UK's final night in the EU was marked with a mixture of celebration and sorrow which has characterised the polarising nature of Brexit within the UK.

[*BBC News*, February 1, 2020]

[Eurozone grows just 0.1% as France and Italy shrink](#)

Eurozone growth has almost slowed to a halt after the French and Italian economies shrank unexpectedly, denting hopes of a rebound and giving the European Central Bank a dilemma over whether to inject more stimulus this year. The data means that yearly Eurozone growth has fallen to a six-year low of 1.2%, bringing back the spectre of recession. The contraction of the French economy, in particular, is a blow for President Macron in his push to make the country more dynamic and business-friendly

[*Financial Times*, January 31, 2020]

[EU confronts Poland over its trampling of the rule of law](#)

The European Commission and the European Court of Justice have declared several Polish judicial reforms to be incompatible with EU law. The reforms included forcing the mass retirement of judged, giving the government and parliament control over appointing new judges, setting up a disciplinary chamber that can punish judges for their decisions, and putting the justice minister in charge of appointing senior judges who decide which of their colleagues hear which cases. In response, the Polish government has attempted to bar its judges from using European law against its reforms, whilst the Commission has asked the ECJ to order Poland to suspend the disciplinary chamber.

[*The Economist*, January 25, 2020]

[Hungarian ruling party to remain suspended from EPP grouping in EU Parliament](#)

The centre-right European People's Party has confirmed that Hungary's ruling party, Fidesz, will remain suspended from the grouping for the foreseeable future. The EPP's new President, former President of the European Council Donald Tusk, announced the measure at a meeting of the alliance's MEPs. The suspension remains in place over concerns about the state of the rule of law in Hungary and anti-Brussels rhetoric.

[*Politico*, January 29, 2020]

[Merkel calls for opening EU membership talks with Albania and North Macedonia](#)

German Chancellor Angel Merkel has cited "geopolitical necessity" as a reason for opening EU membership talks with Albania and North Macedonia. Chancellor Merkel's comments are a pointed message to French President Emmanuel Macron, who blocked the opening of membership talks for the two countries in October citing a deeply flawed enlargement process and the need to reform the EU internally first.

[*Politico*, January 27, 2020]

DOMESTIC POLITICS

[Centre-left wins Italian regional election in setback for Salvini](#)

Matteo Salvini's far-right Lega Party has failed to gain control of left-wing stronghold Emilia-Romagna, in a vote that Mr Salvini had touted as a referendum on whether he should lead the country. The turnout in the election was 68%, a full 30 point higher than the previous regional election in 2014, as the centre-left Democratic Party candidate, Stefano Bonaccini, finished 8% ahead of his rival. The election accentuated the effect of the grassroots "Sardines movement" of young, left-leaning activists who have emerged in opposition to Salvini.

[*The Economist*, January 30, 2020]

[Catalan president to all early election as divisions grow](#)

Catalonia's separatist president, Quim Torra, has announced he will call an early regional election amid growing divisions and deteriorating relations between the two pro-independence parties in his coalition government. The two parties have very different views over the best way to achieve independence from Spain; Together for Catalonia favours keeping tensions high to maintain pressure on the central government, whilst the ERC advocates a more pragmatic and measured approach.

[*The Guardian*, January 29, 2020]

[Italy's Five Star Movement leader Di Maio resigns](#)

The anti-establishment Five Star Movement leader, Luigi Di Maio, has resigned followed a collapse in support for the party less than two years after it surged to electoral victory. His resignation follows a wave of defections by Five Star lawmakers and heavy defeats in regional elections across Italy, as polling suggests support for the party has almost halved to 16% across the country. The resignation raises further questions over the stability of Italy's governing coalition between the Five Star Movement and the traditional centre-left Democratic Party.

[*Financial Times*, January 22, 2020]

JEWISH COMMUNITIES

[Israel's President joins German Parliament in remembering the Holocaust](#)

Israel's President Rivlin has addressed lawmakers in German Bundestag in remembrance of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp 75 years ago. President Rivlin is only the second Israeli leader to address the German Parliament for the annual event that remembers the atrocities of the Holocaust after former Israeli President Shimon Peres in 2010. The commemorations come amidst the backdrop of rising antisemitism in Germany and in Europe

[*Deutsche Welle*, January 29, 2020]

[UK councillor suspended over antisemitic post](#)

The deputy leader of Blackburn with Darwen Council has been suspended by the Labour Party over an antisemitic social media post. Councillor Andy Kay said, "Jewish leaders are worse than the Nazis" in a post linking to a Guardian article on the destruction of a power plant in Gaza. Councillor Andy Kay will now sit as an independent and give up his official position while being investigated.

[*BBC News*, January 22, 2020]

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