EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Survival of the fittest

As EU leaders gathered in the European Council this week and agreed to new sanctions against Iran, we take a look at the security situation across the continent.

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Slapping wrists

Following Iran's attack on Israel last weekend, EU leaders agreed to new sanctions against the country at the European Council summit on Wednesday, focusing on drone and missile production and possibly on Iran's supply of weapons to Russia and other allies, writes Slovenian outlet *Delo*. Condemning the attack and calling for de-escalation, conclusions from the Council emphasised solidarity with Lebanon in light of its domestic difficulties and the vulnerable population there, including refugees from Gaza, with a view to isolate Iran as much as possible to prevent further attacks and destabilisation in the region. The conclusions also reiterated the EUCO's previous call for a ceasefire, the return of hostages, and the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid and opening of corridors to Palestinians that are currently facing a "death sentence" from Israel's blockade – also highlighting that Israel is obliged under international law to do so. Meanwhile, China and Indonesia joined in these calls, also pledging to support Palestine as a member of the United Nations. For now, the details of the new sanctions against Iran will be worked out by EU foreign ministers on Monday.

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To consent or not to consent

In a European Union where leaders like Viktor Orbán no longer try to hide their pro-Putin sentiments, and consistently hinder other EU members in supporting Ukraine and putting pressure on Russia, it is crucial for Europe and the entire free world to continue supporting Ukraine in every way until the entire country is liberated, says Urmas Paet in a comment in the Estonian newspaper *Postimees*. Even though nothing has fundamentally changed in this regard, Orbán has been joined by a new ally in the European Union, Robert Fico, the new-old leader of the Slovak government. It could therefore be easier to try to undermine the EU's joint decision plans if Putin has friends on the inside. Originally intended to protect the interests of smaller Member States, the requirement of consensus has become an instrument of blackmail by Europe's own tiny authoritarians. As the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union approaches, the realisation of possible Russian perks is lingering. As totalitarian and authoritarian regimes are increasingly sticking together, so must the democratic parts of the world.

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Double standards

Recalling the destruction of Kyiv's Trypillia thermal power plant last week by a Russian assault, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called out Western double standards after Iran's attack on Israel, which was largely nullified due to the intervention of allied forces, according to Slovakian newspaper *Pravda*. Out of eleven rockets, four got through to the power plant simply because Ukrainian defences ran out of anti-air missiles, leaving them completely vulnerable. The power plant was the largest in the Kyiv region, one of the two largest in Ukraine. While Western countries defend their lack of intervention as necessary to avoid bringing NATO forces into the war, Zelensky pointed out the fallacy in this reasoning when the same forces are used to defend Israel. "I ask: Is Israel in NATO or not? Israel is not a NATO member country, but allies, including NATO countries, protect Israel," he said. Last week's attack also stands out as Russia used newer, more dangerous Ch-69 rockets, capable of extensive destruction and more difficult for anti-air defences to target – Russia only started using them two months ago.

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The unicorn in the room

Adam Bodnar, the current Polish justice minister, has revealed that almost 600 people in Poland were targeted for surveillance with Pegasus spyware between 2017 and 2022 under the former ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, according to the Polish newspaper *Notes from Poland*. When Prime Minister Donald Tusk's new government took office in December, it pledged to investigate alleged abuses of Pegasus, a powerful Israeli-made tool that allows monitoring of mobile phones, and to hold those responsible to account. Several senior PiS figures, including Jarosław Kaczyński, have always insisted that the spyware was used legally and against legitimate targets. However, last year, a European Parliament inquiry found that Poland had used Pegasus as part of "a system for the surveillance of the opposition and critics of the government – designed to keep the ruling majority and the government in power". A special parliamentary committee was established in February to investigate the use of the spyware. Separately, prosecutors have also been investigating the issue; 31 people have so far been granted witness status in the case investigating the abuse of power and breach of duty by public officials in the use of Pegasus. There is certainly a need to address the unicorn in the room.

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