EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Authoritarians of the world, unite!

This week, we take a look at the happenings of various non-EU leaders, with Donald Trump on trial, Xi Jinping visiting Europe, and Vladimir Putin sworn in for another presidential term.

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Stormy weather

Political gossip junkies are having quite a week as porn actress Stormy Daniels testifies against the past and potential future president of the United States, Donald Trump, detailing their 2006 tryst under oath – the first criminal trial of a former US president, writes *El País*. It's no crime to have an affair, but the criminal case centers around the $130,000 payment that Trump quietly arranged for Daniels and two other women to ensure their silence during the 2016 presidential campaign, paying and negotiating through third-party intermediaries and logging the payments as legal expenses, which prosecutors claim amounts to electoral finance fraud as business records were falsified and it was all done to protect a campaign. As the trial finishes its third week, Trump has been fined a total of $10,000 for various violations of the judge's gag order while he publicly tilts, online and on camera, against any and all windmills. According to the former US president, this is all political persecution, of course; he has done nothing wrong, and if he had, he should be immune from the consequences – a bulletproof defense if there's ever been one, reams of evidence and years of prosecutorial preparation be damned. The trial continues – one of four ongoing criminal investigations surrounding Trump – and in six months, US voters may choose him to lead the country once again, as the world watches with white knuckles. Stay tuned!

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Besties

As Chinese President Xi Jinping embarked on his Europe tour this week, the leader took the opportunity to share his thoughts on China-Hungary relations in an opinion piece, writes Hungarian newspaper *Index*. The Chinese head of state was a guest in Budapest to hold talks on bilateral politics and economic and international issues with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and President Tamás Sulyok. In the piece published in *Magyar Nemzet*, Jinping expressed that Hungary is an important trading partner and the number one target country for Chinese investments in the Central and Eastern European region, with the cooperation between the two countries being described as fruitful and full of vitality. And the praise does not stop there – the president continued to characterise the Hungarian people as hardworking, intelligent, open and accepting. The president said China and Hungary are now focusing on a closer coordination of the strategies of the two countries, as well as on deepening pragmatic cooperation in the areas of investments, infrastructure construction, finance, alternative energy and communication technology, among others. While one authoritarian leader finishes his praise of another, one can only ask the question: takes one to know one?

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Reigning champ

Vladimir Putin has (drumroll) been officially sworn in as Russian president once again, marking the start of his fifth term. Western nations say the March election was neither fair nor democratic, and many countries chose to boycott the Kremlin ceremony, Romanian newspaper *Digi24* writes. Putin's new term – the third consecutive time he has been elected – ensures his presidency until 2030. First thing on the presidential agenda? Thanking the nation for its support and the military fighting his war in Ukraine. Going as far as claiming Russia is ready to be an "honest partner", the president even opened the door for dialogue with Western countries. The number of Western leaders present to explore the potential door was low, however, with the US and most European Union nations boycotting the investiture ceremony. Ukraine called for a boycott of the ceremony, saying "there is no legal basis to recognise him as the democratically elected and legitimate president of the Russian Federation." A European diplomat said 20 EU Member States would boycott, but seven others would send a representative.

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Frenemies

On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping during his tour of Europe as the two solicited promises from one another, as written in *Le Monde*. Aiming to secure France as a "balancing power" between the United States and China, Macron called for a global truce during the upcoming summer Olympic games, seeking assurances that China will play fair on trade with the West and refrain from selling arms to Russia, including multi-purpose equipment that can be used for both civil and military purposes. For China's part, Xi claimed that Western criticism of China – especially regarding Russia's war against Ukraine – risks ushering in a "new Cold War", asking that China not be smeared and characterising Beijing's role as positive and committed to a peaceful resolution. Amidst flowery words about continued partnerships and the tacit expectations required to maintain the relationship, with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen joining as well, it is clear that the European leaders heavily depend on China as a trade partner and, based on their statements after the meeting, have high hopes for China's role in tempering Russia's aggressions.

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