EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Moving parts

This week, we take a look at developments with Israel and Palestine, Russia, the European far right, and upcoming British elections – perfect to go with your morning coffee.

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Warrants and recognitions

As Ireland, Spain and Norway announced their recognition of the State of Palestine this week, Israel itself has resurrected support for Palestinian self-determination through its actions in the Strip in one of its biggest diplomatic setbacks at a time when its reputation is increasingly in decline, writes Spanish newspaper *El País*. At the beginning of the last decade, a fruitful diplomatic campaign succeeded in stringing together state recognition and, above all, generating enthusiasm around the idea that it was the best response to the paralysis of the Middle East peace process. However, the recognition dossier was left gathering dust on the shelves of the chancelleries. In the nine years between Sweden's recognition in 2014 and the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, which triggered the invasion of Gaza, only three countries joined – until now. As the challenges pile up for Netanyahu, this week also provided the issuing of an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court for both him and the Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. A tough week in the office.

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Border bash

"What has he done now?" has become a rather normal weekly question when it comes to Russia's President Vladimir Putin. Well, the Russian Ministry of Defence wants unilateral border changes in the Baltic Sea, according to Norwegian news outlet *NRK*. The document was intercepted by both Russian and Finnish media, before it was removed from the Russian Ministry of Defence's pages on Wednesday afternoon. But by then they would have probably also achieved what they wanted from the Russian side: To create unrest and fear, so that the previously tense situation in the Baltic Sea area could develop into a full conflict between NATO and Russia. In the document sent out by the Russian Ministry of Defence, it is stated that the geographical measurements made by then-Soviet authorities in 1985 do not fully correspond to today's coordinates; this includes areas around some islands in the Gulf of Finland and in the sea area outside the Kaliningrad exclave and Lithuania. Despite strong reactions in Finland, President Alexander Stubb said on X: "Finland will respond as we always do: calmly, sensibly and based on facts". Regardless of collected Finns, the spotlight is certainly directed at a potentially dangerous situation that has long been brewing in the Baltic Sea.

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Leaving so soon?

Under the pouring rain without an umbrella, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced on Wednesday the likely end of his term by way of calling for elections to take place on 4 July, to the shock of just about everyone watching. Even his own Conservative party, long lagging behind Labour in the polls by as much as 20%, didn't expect elections so soon, writes Dutch outlet *NRC*; it seems unlikely that they can catch up in six weeks. It's possible, but not guaranteed, that the economy will improve in the coming months, but Sunak and his party are also plagued by the very risky and incredibly costly Rwanda deportation plan – meant to deter migrants from entering the country illegally, but again, it's a gamble whether this will work as he expects or will backfire even further. Sunak's grip on the party has been slipping for some time now, with several defections to Labour, and after 14 years of Conservative rule, Labour presents itself as an alternative to address the myriad societal issues about which British voters care most. While the Tories suggest Labour is too much of a risk, some British media suggests that Sunak is already checked out, itching to flee to his flat in California for a cozy new tech job.

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Who's the boss

The far right is already showing its influence even before the elections, according to an editorial in French newspaper *Le Monde*, as evident in the recent success of Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders, first in elections and now in securing a coalition agreement which will see his views imposed on the right and centre-right in an uneven compromise. Agreeing to rule of law and budgetary concerns, in return Wilders will see the more moderate parties endorsing immigration and asylum policies that, currently, would violate international treaties. The author suggests that this kind of compromise will always benefit the extremes – by agreeing to go hard on migration, the right paves the way for the far right to go even harder. It is hard to say, however, if Wilders' dream will come true; he even admits it could take years to formalise his vision. On the EU level, some in the Renew group have criticised the compromise, even as the Dutch centre-right are members of their political family in the European Parliament, and meanwhile EPP's Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has teased an alliance with far-right Italian Giorgia Meloni. The crux of the editorial is that these kinds of unreliable alliances and infighting can only lead to the further success of anti-democratic, anti-European forces.

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The European Movement International
Place du Luxembourg 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

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