EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Frenemies

Forging new partnerships risks compromising old alliances as leaders go rogue – while NATO allies meet in Washington, they face controversy and ruffle feathers on the home front this week.

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Problem (man)child

It's not exactly news that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is aggravating the EU and its Member States with disruptive and unpredictable behaviour, but with Hungary at the helm of the Council of the EU, he has all kinds of new opportunities. As written in *Helsingin Sanomat*, it only took a few days in the position for Orbán to embark on a surprise "peace mission" to Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin – even though the presidency of the Council has no authority to represent the EU diplomatically, that's exactly what it looked like Orbán was doing to EU and national leaders, and Putin even introduced him as a representative of the EU. For his part, Orbán claimed not to represent any EU body on the trip, that he is proposing a quick ceasefire, and that Europe should be the party to arrange it, but the man is light on credibility in Brussels, and has been no friend to Ukraine since Russia's invasion. EU ambassadors met Wednesday to discuss the trip with "exceptionally harsh" language from 25 countries (save Slovakia and Hungary), but for now, there are no countermeasures or official actions in place to rebuke Orbán. The idea is still being discussed all around town. This week, he's continuing his mission – whatever that is – at the NATO summit in Washington.

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Leaders unite

As heads of state gathered in Washington D.C. this week for the NATO summit, member countries pledged to support Ukraine on an "irreversible path" to integration and call on China to end all support for Russia's war against Kiev, Romanian news outlet *Digi24* reports. The summit in Washington is taking place in a climate of political uncertainty in the United States, where President Joe Biden's health and age are under strengthened scrutiny after the initial presidential debate with Donald Trump a few weeks ago. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's recent "diplomatic missions" to both Russia and China ahead of the NATO summit did not exactly contribute to a smooth preparation either. Despite this, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg managed to navigate the alliance to agreement on several aspects. According to the final declaration, NATO countries intend to provide Ukraine with a minimum of €40 billion in funding over the next year and establish a mechanism to coordinate the provision of military equipment and training to Ukraine. Additionally, the allies will commit to support Ukraine on its path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including by joining NATO. An invitation to join the alliance will be addressed to Kiev when the allies agree and the conditions are met. And as several of the leaders present will, and might, step down in the next months – "allies' agreement" might be another challenge.

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God willing

Two weeks are only the blink of an eye when you're 81 years old, but in politics, they can be an eternity – at least that's how it feels to the growing number of Democratic voters, donors and politicians calling for US President Joe Biden to step aside since the end of June. *Il Post* lays out the situation: the Biden campaign and the president himself insist that he's the only person for the job. He's gotten plenty of public support from mainstream Democrats, but rumours of discontent have been turning into reality as arguments defending the elderly president increasingly fall flat and more and more public figures ask him to move aside. On Wednesday, former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi was lukewarm, Peter Welch was the first US Senator to call for a new candidate, and one of the biggest Democratic donors and global celebrities, George Clooney, penned an op-ed in the *New York Times* calling for his withdrawal. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer continues to publicly support the president, but privately, it's rumoured that he wants a change as well – the same goes for labour unions. Biden recently said that only God can remove him from the campaign. Considering his condition, we may just get that gift from above before the Democratic convention in late August; otherwise, it's likely time to prepare for his alternative.

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Too far

With world leaders jetting off to Washington this week, one could assume that things would be quiet in the European capitals. Apparently not. This week also opened the door for yet another far-right political group in the European Parliament, led by Alternative for Germany (AfD): "Europe of Sovereign Nations". That has caused political problems in Poland, as half of the MEPs elected last month to represent Poland's far-right Confederation party in the European Parliament have joined the new group, writes *Notes from Poland*. Polish MEP Stanisław Tyszka stated on Wednesday that "we decided that, in order to fight for Poland's interests in the European Parliament more effectively, it is better to create a group than to remain unaffiliated". The battles in question? Opposing the EU's crazy climate policy, the immigration policy that threatens the stability of Europe, and attempts to build a European superstate, to quote Tyszka himself (or any other textbook neo-fascist). However, not everyone is greeted with open arms. The last of Confederation's MEPs, Grzegorz Braun, reportedly did not get an invitation to join the group due to several deeply problematic statements. In January this year, Braun was stripped of immunity by Poland's parliament to face charges over an attack on a Jewish Hannukah ceremony that took place in the parliamentary building. Braun also has a long history of antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust revisionism. Apparently, even for the far-right there is such a thing as too far.

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