EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Desperate for diplomacy

This year's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) was supposed to address the broader issue of institutional change and how to make the UN more effective in the future. However, the 79th session of the UNGA was overshadowed by the disastrous escalation of the conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

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Hell breaking loose

The international community fears a major war in the Middle East and calls for a ceasefire in Lebanon, Norwegian news outlet *NRK* reports. So far, their wishes have not been heard. On Monday, Israel sharply stepped up its attacks against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Several countries have requested that a 21-day ceasefire should be introduced in the border areas between Lebanon and Israel. However, senior lecturer in Middle Eastern studies Dag Henrik Tuastad doubts that Israel is interested in a ceasefire as the situation is now. Additionally, many fear that a ground invasion could trigger a larger war in the region. “Hell is breaking loose in Lebanon”, said the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, at the UN on Wednesday. Hezbollah began firing rockets towards Israel on 8 October 2023, the day after the Hamas attack in Israel. Israel has responded with a series of major attacks in Lebanon. These were stepped up sharply after last week's attack in which pagers and electronic equipment belonging to Hezbollah members exploded.

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Hope dies at last

The US is leading a new diplomatic effort to end hostilities in Gaza and Lebanon, the Croatian news agency *Novilist* reports. Details of the initiative are currently being discussed at the UN General Assembly. Israel has set big, but hopefully achievable, goals for its initiative. The plan is to combine the two ongoing bloody conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon into a single initiative. This initiative is particularly significant because it is the first attempt by American diplomacy to link the two fronts – Gaza, where Hamas operates, and southern Lebanon, where Hezbollah targets northern Israel – in a joint ceasefire plan. According to Lebanese sources, as reported by *Novilist*, the deal would include the possible release of Israeli hostages taken by Hamas during the 7 October attack on settlements and a music festival in southern Israel. Neither the White House National Security Council nor Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office have commented on the initiative. While this initiative offers hope for an early end to the bloodshed, it remains to be seen whether diplomatic efforts will be successful; recent history has taught us to be cautious in this regard.

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Peace...?

The Israeli defence chief, Herzi Halevi, tells Israeli soldiers that they must get ready to “possibly enter” Lebanon, writes Danish newspaper *Politiken*. Earlier on Wednesday, the Israeli military, the IDF, called up two additional reserve brigades to the northern part of the country. The two parties have carried out attacks against each other across the border almost daily since 8 October 2023, without it escalating into actual war. However, since last week, there has been a significant escalation in the situation, with explosions in communication equipment in Lebanon and greatly intensified airstrikes. According to Lebanese authorities, hundreds have lost their lives in recent days. And despite attempts from the international community, with big brother USA taking a clear stance to open the floor for peace negotiations, Israel seems to have no plan to listen. Herzi Halevi said on Wednesday afternoon that Israel will not “stop”. "We will continue to attack them and harm them everywhere," Halevi told Israeli soldiers, according to *AFP*.

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More seats at the table

While most of the media focus on the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon and its impact on this year's UN General Assembly, Belgian news outlet *La Libre* sheds some light on the discussion about the need to reform the UN Security Council. In his address to the General Assembly, French President Emmanuel Macron calls for the right of veto to be limited in the case of "mass crimes" as part of a reform to make the key UN body more effective. France joins a large number of Member States calling for reform of the paralysed Security Council, which they see as unrepresentative of today's world, and are thus asking in particular for an increase in the number of permanent members. Macron reiterated his support for the request from Japan, India, Germany and Brazil, as well as two African countries, to become permanent members. The body is largely paralysed by vetoes, notably from Russia and the United States; a blockade that provokes wider criticism of the UN's ineffectiveness in influencing conflict resolution. This initiative is very welcome and will hopefully encourage EU leaders to reconsider limiting veto rights in certain EU institutions as well.

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