

Germany FM Says U.S. Crossing ‘Red Lines’

Dutch PM: Europe Must Rally Against U.S. Threat



German Chancellor Angela Merkel speaks to U.S. President Donald Trump during the second day of the G7 meeting in Charlevoix city of La Malbaie, Quebec, Canada, on June 9, 2018.

BERLIN/STRASBOURG (Reuters/AFP) — Europe needs to find a “new balance” to its relationship with the United States in the light of the challenges posed by the administration of President Donald Trump, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Wednesday.

Among the challenges posed by the Trump administration, he named its tearing up of the Paris climate deal, its abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, threats of sanctions against European partners as well as protectionism.

“We Europeans have to act as a conscious counterweight when the U.S. crosses red lines,” he said. “Where the U.S. government aggressively throws into question our values and interests, we have to react more robustly.”

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte also urged the European Union to rally urgently behind a rules-based international order against threats from Russia and even the United States.

“Even the relationship with our most important ally is no longer self-evident,” Rutte said in a speech to the European

Parliament in Strasbourg, France which won a standing ovation.

Rutte echoed EU alarm over Trump’s decisions to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal as well as to impose tariffs on European steel and aluminum.

He said he stood before the parliament, the EU’s only directly elected body, with “a real sense of urgency” because the bloc’s way of conducting international relations can no longer be taken for granted.

“The multilateral order is being challenged in a way that we haven’t seen in decades, and the geopolitical balance of power is shifting,” Rutte warned.

Rutte also said the rise of economic powers China and India brought both challenges and opportunities for the “EU as the world’s biggest trading bloc and as a leading force for peace, stability and development.”

European Commission vice president Frans Timmermans, a fellow Dutchman, underscored Rutte’s points on the threat from the United States.

“For the first time since 1945, we now have a president in the United States who apparently believes that a disunited Europe is more in the interests of the United States than in a United Europe,” Timmermans.

“Again this calls for Europe to be united,” Timmermans, a former Dutch foreign minister, told the parliament.

China Winner of Trump-Kim Summit, But Wary



A Chinese woman pulls a trolley bag past a Chinese magazine cover showing U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at a newsstand in Beijing, June 13, 2018.

BEIJING (Dispatches) — The outcome of the Singapore summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was good news for China.

China won big at the summit after Trump made surprising pledges to suspend war games with South Korea and eventually pull U.S. troops from there. Beijing dislikes the U.S. military presence in South Korea and Japan and has urged Washington to suspend the drills that Pyongyang claims are rehearsals for invasion, in return for the North’s halting of nuclear activities.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters Wednesday that Trump’s drills suspension announcement was “another proof that China’s

proposal is legitimate, is reasonable (and) it addresses the concerns of the two sides.”

China wants to see a reduction in foreign military forces in Northeast Asia and for the gap between Washington and its allies and partners to widen, said Ryan Hass, who directed China policy for the U.S. National Security Council during the former President Barack Obama administration. “Beijing is now on track to achieve these objectives at little cost.”

But Beijing will be mindful after Trump showered Kim with praises, calling him a “very talented man,” and made security concessions in return for very little.

Analysts say they expected that Kim would meet with Chinese President Xi

Jinping fairly quickly after the summit and that Xi would remind his North Korean counterpart about China’s willingness to help the North develop its economy.

Despite recent tensions between the communist neighbors, Xi has met Kim twice since April, most recently hosting a banquet for him and strolling with the young leader along a beach and through lush gardens at a coastal Chinese city last month.

That meeting in Dalian was seen as an effort by China to ensure that Beijing’s voice was heard when Kim later met with Trump. In the on-again, off-again run-up to the summit, Trump at one point blamed Kim’s trip to China for creating an unwelcome “change in attitude” by the North Korean leader. China moved quickly to urge both sides not to cancel the meeting.

Such maneuvers highlight the delicate balance China has to strike between encouraging Pyongyang and Washington to engage on ending the North’s nuclear program and pushing Pyongyang too far into Trump’s embrace.

China would be wary if the suspension of military exercises led to some kind of larger rapprochement between the U.S. and North Korea. China, which fought the U.S. on behalf of the North in the 1950-53 Korean War, wants a stable, independent North Korea as a buffer with South Korea and the thousands of U.S. troops stationed there. Beijing is also hoping to convince Seoul to remove a sophisticated U.S. missile defense system that China sees as a threat to its security.

Cultural Body: Populist Talkshows Fuel Far Right Rise in Germany

BERLIN (Dispatches) — The head of Germany’s most powerful cultural body has called for the plug to be pulled on the nation’s multitude of political talkshows for a year, arguing that their populist agenda has helped fuel the rise of the far right.

Olaf Zimmermann, who heads the German cultural council, an umbrella group for organizations from art galleries to television companies, said public broadcasters needed to step back and rethink a format that has helped cement gloom-ridden public attitudes towards refugees and Islam, and propelled them into parliament at last September’s election.

Zimmermann argued that the public broadcasters ARD and ZDF were obsessed with refugee-related issues, often framing them negatively.

The cultural council, which is taxpayer funded, has pointed out that

since 2015, at the height of the refugee crisis when almost a million refugees and migrants entered Germany, more than 100 political talk shows have put a topic related to migration at the centre of their discussion.

Since September’s election, which saw the AfD enter the Bundestag for the first time, much debate has surrounded the extent to which framing an issue, or lending a topic a certain perspective, might have helped their cause.

Television analysts have argued that the issue of refugees has been dealt with in a mostly negative way.

Even last week, ARD’s main talkshow Hart Aber Fair - Hard But Fair - led with the question: “To what extent is it possible to integrate young men who have fled from war and archaic societies? How unsafe is Germany as a result of them?”

Zimmermann said in too many cases

refugees were unfairly presented as a threat to German society.

A recent talkshow moderated by the veteran host Sandra Maischberger was advertised in TV listings with the title: “Are we too tolerant towards Islam?” Critics were quick to pounce on the word “we” as being problematic because it suggested “them and us”. The program’s title was swiftly changed to: The Islam debate: where does our tolerance end?

Other recent talkshow topics included ones entitled Refugees and criminality, and Beethoven or Burka?

Kai Hafez, a media analyst, said that immigration was rarely presented in talkshows as anything other than negative. “The viewers get used to these negative expressions, and long-term that way the rightwing populists manage to press their points home,” he told Der Spiegel.

Demands Apology From Macron

Italy Summons French Envoy in Refugee Row



French police signal to a migrant, June 1, 2017.

ROME (Dispatches) — Italy’s Interior Minister Matteo Salvini said Wednesday that without an “official apology” from France, a planned meeting between Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday should be cancelled.

“If an official apology doesn’t arrive, Prime Minister Conte would be right not to go to France,” Salvini told reporters after demanding that France take in more migrants.

Macron had blasted Italy for its “cynicism and irresponsibility” in refusing to welcome 629 refugees left stranded on a French charity’s rescue ship in the Mediterranean before Spain agreed to take them in.

Gabriel Attal, the spokesman for Macron’s party, called Italy’s actions “nauseating.”

Italy’s Foreign Affairs Minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi summoned the French ambassador to Rome over the comments on Wednesday, saying in a statement that “the Italian government considers unacceptable the words publicly pronounced yesterday in Paris”.

Milanesi added that the comments made by France were “compromising relations between Italy and France”.

Salvini’s far-right League party campaigned on taking a hardline on refugees ahead of March’s election and

rose to power as part Italy’s euroskeptic, populist government that took office this month.

Also on Wednesday, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said that the hardline interior ministers of Austria, Germany and Italy have formed an “axis of the willing” to combat illegal immigration into the EU.

Salvini said France had taken in only a fraction of the 9,816 refugees it had pledged to welcome under a 2015 EU relocation plan to relieve frontline countries Italy and Greece of the burden of caring for newly arrived refugees.

“So I ask President Macron to pass from words to action and tomorrow morning welcome the 9,000 France promised to welcome as a sign of concrete generosity and not just words,” Salvini said to applause in the Senate chamber.

Salvini has accused European aid groups of essentially operating taxi services for Libya-based human traffickers, and has said Italy will now refuse their rescue ships entry. Italian maritime vessels, however, are still docking in its ports: on Wednesday, an Italian coast guard vessel docked in Catania, Sicily with 932 migrants aboard.

Macron had blasted what he called Italy’s cynicism and irresponsibility in turning away the Aquarius, which is operated by the humanitarian group SOS Mediterranee and the French-founded Doctors Without Borders.

Dems Urge Fight on U.S. Poverty After Shocking Report



United Nations monitor Philip Alston, center, is visiting skid row to examine Los Angeles’ response to homelessness.

WASHINGTON (Guardian) — Bernie Sanders and a group of top Democrats are calling on the Trump administration to present a plan to Congress to combat “massive levels of deprivation and the immense suffering this deprivation causes”, following an excoriating United Nations report into extreme poverty in America.

In a congressional letter delivered to Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, the group said the UN report was “a call to action that we must heed”. They stand ready, the signatories say, to work with the Trump administration “to address appalling rates of child poverty, destructive economic policies that benefit the wealthy over the working poor ... and lack of access to basic necessities in rural and underserved communities”.

The group specifically urges Trump to put the convention on the rights of the child before the Senate for ratification. The U.S. is the only country in the world that has failed to ratify the treaty and the letter writers said “it is shameful that more than 13 million children live in poverty in this country and that, on any given night, more than one in five homeless individuals are children”.

The congressional intervention comes in response to the official report of the UN

special rapporteur on extreme poverty, Philip Alston, who acts as global watchdog on the human rights implications of deprivation. Following a two-week tour of the U.S. in December that took him to several of the most poverty-stricken parts of the country, he issued a scathing critique of the fact that 40 million Americans live in poverty and more than five million experience levels of absolute deprivation associated with the developing world.

Alston will present his findings to the UN human rights council in Geneva on 21 June.

So far the White House and federal government departments have remained studiously silent over his findings, though Sanders and his fellow signatories express the hope that Haley will relay the key conclusions to Trump.

The UN report exposed the extent to which millions of Americans remain locked in penury exacerbated by the growing gulf between rich and poor. Sanders and his colleagues say the existence of such suffering in a rich country like the U.S. is “an affront to any notion of the unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Given the breadth of poverty outlined in the report, these rights are simply illusory for millions in this country.”



BEIJING (Reuters) — A warming of ties between the United States and North Korea does not mean China will reach out to Taiwan for a similar summit, the Chinese government said on Wednesday. Singapore, the site of this week’s historic summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, is also where Chinese President Xi Jinping held a landmark meeting with Taiwan’s then president Ma Ying-jeou in 2015. But Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for China’s Taiwan Affairs Office, dismissed the suggestion that the Trump-Kim summit could lead to a similar thawing between China and Taiwan. “The Taiwan issue is purely an internal Chinese affair. Its nature is entirely different to North Korea-U.S. relations,” Ma told a regular news briefing in response to a question. “Taiwan and the mainland both belong to one China, and relations across the Taiwan Strait are not state-to-state ties.”

SINGAPORE (Reuters) — The U.S. State Department mistakenly made Singapore part of neighboring Malaysia in a note issued in connection with Tuesday’s North Korea-U.S. summit and published on its website, sparking snide comments on social media. The mistake came in a transcript of a briefing U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave Monday. It gave the venue as “JW Marriott, Singapore, Malaysia.” The error was rectified later to remove the reference to Malaysia. “Well, U.S. State Department still thinks Singapore is in Malaysia,” said Twitter user @BrioS BRxV. “Just 53 years and a bad break-up off.” The island of Singapore was once part of Malaysia but they were separated acrimoniously in 1965, clouding diplomatic and economic dealings for years. Malaysia’s The Star newspaper reported the error in a post on its Facebook page with the title “How to offend Singaporeans and Malaysians at the same time.”

PALMA, Spain (AFP) — A Spanish court has given the king’s brother-in-law, Inaki Urdangarin, five days to report to jail after he lost his appeal against a graft conviction and prison sentence, a judicial source said Wednesday. The former Olympic handball player and husband of Princess Christina has been sentenced to five years and 10 months in jail in a case which caused uproar in Spain and tainted the royal family’s image. The 50-year-old had been found guilty last year of embezzling millions of euros (dollars) between 2004 and 2006 from a non-profit foundation he headed on the island of Majorca. On Wednesday, Urdangarin flew from Switzerland where he lives in exile with his family to Majorca to appear in court. At the Palma courthouse he was met by a horde of journalists and some people who shouted “thief” at him, an AFP photographer reported.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sexual harassment is rampant in U.S. academic science, and colleges and universities that train new scientists need a system-wide culture change so women won’t be bullied out of the field, a national advisory group said Tuesday. In fact, it’s time to treat sexual harassment as seriously as research misconduct, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine concluded in recommendations aimed at U.S. institutions of higher education and the groups that fund them. Assault or unwanted sexual advances are making #MeToo headlines but don’t tell the whole story, the report found. Most common in science is what the National Academies termed gender harassment, a hostile environment rife with sexist commentary and crude behavior that can negatively impact a woman’s education and career, as well as her mental and physical health.

PARIS (AFP) — An 18th-century Chinese vase forgotten for decades in a shoe box in a French attic sold for 16.2 million euros (\$19 million) at Sotheby’s in Paris Tuesday — more than 30 times the estimate. Experts at the auction house said the exquisite porcelain vessel was made for the Qing dynasty Emperor Qianlong and had set a guide price of a much more modest 500,000 euros. “This is a major work of art, it is as if we had just discovered a Caravaggio,” Olivier Valmier, the Asian arts expert at the auction house, told reporters before the sale. The vase, which was in perfect condition, “is the only known example in the world bearing such detail,” he added. Rare porcelain from the Qian period has been going for astronomical prices recently. A bowl made for Qianlong’s grandfather sold last April by Sotheby’s in Hong Kong went for \$30.4 million.

ATHENS (Reuters) — Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras was accused on Wednesday of surrendering part of his nation’s identity, as a deal he struck to settle a name dispute with Macedonia prompted a barrage of criticism from opposition politicians and media. Under the agreement announced by Athens and Skopje on Tuesday, the Balkan state known as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would henceforth be called the “Republic of Northern Macedonia”. The accord would open the way for the small nation’s eventual membership of the European Union and NATO, currently blocked by Greece’s objections to its current name. But conservative opposition leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis called it “deeply problematic”, because the majority of Greeks were against it and Tsipras lacked the political legitimacy to sign it.