

Quarterly Review of International Relations

July-September 2018

CHIARA D'AURIA

July 1st-2nd:

In Mexico, after general elections, new president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador declares he will seek to remain in NAFTA along with the United States and Canada and that he confirms the existing Mexican team renegotiating the trade agreement.

July 3rd:

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's face-saving deal on migrants with her conservative allies in Bavaria shows how indispensable the chancellor is to her party - even if she is weakened. Merkel has not resolved the underlying tensions in her coalition. But a dearth of credible challengers to lead her Christian Democrats (CDU) and a general fear among many Germans of the far-right keep her hanging on, possibly even to the next election in 2021.

July 4th:

In an interview Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz declares that his government shares with Germany the goal to reject migrants to their first entry country where they are registered but the Austrian Minister of Transport maintains that the restoration of controls at the Brenner Pass «would certainly be a disaster» in economic terms.

July 5th:

At the end of a meeting with German Minister of Interior Horst Seehofer, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz declares that there will be a summit of the Ministries of Interior of Germany, Austria and Italy to establish measures to close the routes of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.

July 6th:

At midnight the US duties on Chinese goods for 34 billions dollars come into force while Beijing, with a note of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, declares that the USA have made a move of «commercial bullism» which has started the biggest commercial war of ever in economic history.

July 7th:

British government agrees on Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for Brexit: an agreed plan, a «soft» one as in the intentions of May, which provides that the United Kingdom «will maintain a common regulation for all goods», including the agricultural ones, after Brexit, engaging with a treaty on borders' harmonization.

July 8th:

In Addis Abeba the leaders of bitter foes Ethiopia and Eritrea meet as officials on both sides herald an end to a near 20-year military standoff.

July 9th:

British Minister for Brexit David Davis and British Foreign Affairs Minister Boris Johnson resign because of their disappointment to the 'soft' turn on London's divorce from the European Union of Theresa May.

July 10th:

Theresa May wins the support of senior ministers and of Angela Merkel, surviving the explosive resignations of two top cabinet members in protest at her Brexit plans.

July 11th:

In Brussels at the NATO headquarters at the Organization summit US president Donald Trump, during a bilateral meeting with Secretary general Jens Stoltenberg, declares that Germany is prisoner of Russia for energy supply and demands to double the military budget for the member States for a total amount of 4% of their GNP.

July 12th:

Donald Trump gives an angry ultimatum to European allies, warning the NATO summit they could lose US support and sparking crisis talks which the US president has said produced big new defense spending pledges.

July 13th:

During his official visit in Great Britain Donald Trump declares the United States and Britain can secure a «great» post-Brexit trade deal, lavishing praise on Prime Minister Theresa May and contradicting his own withering assessment of her strategy.

July 14th:

During his official visit in Scotland Donald Trump declares that he intends to run for re-election in 2020 because «everybody wants me to» and there are no Democratic candidates who could defeat him.

July 15th:

Theresa May reveals that, during their talks, Donald Trump has advised her to prosecute the European Union instead of negotiating Brexit with it.

July 16th:

In Helsinki standing side-by-side with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump refuses to blame the Russian leader for meddling in the 2016 elections, casting doubt on the findings of his own intelligence agencies and sparking a storm of criticism.

July 17th:

In Tokyo EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, EU Council President Donald Tusk and Japanese premier Shinzo Abe sign the free trade agreement between EU and Japan (JAFTA), the most important one ever negotiated between the two economic zones, with the subscription of various political agreements on many regional and multilateral themes.

July 18th:

Donald Trump declares his meeting with Vladimir Putin will lead to «big results», in a continuing bid to calm a storm over his failure to criticize the Russian leader for Moscow's actions to undermine the 2016 US elections.

July 19th:

In an official note the European Commission declares that the 27 member States of the European Union «are not ready enough» to face every possible scenario for Brexit, also in case of a missing agreement.

July 20th:

Jean-Claude Juncker in a letter of response to Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte declares that on migrants' emergency «European Commission is ready to completely perform its coordinator's function» of the cell's crisis suggested by the Italian premier «but only as a step in the perspective of a more stable framework».

July 21st:

After months of growing escalation on the Western border of Gaza, Hamas' spokesman Fawzi Barhoum announces a cease-fire with Israel: «thanks to the efforts of Egypt and of the UN an agreement is reached to come back to the previous situation of cease-fire between the occupation and the Palestinian factions».

July 22nd-23rd:

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani cautions Donald Trump about pursuing hostile policies against Tehran, saying «war with Iran is the mother of all wars», but does not rule out peace between the two countries. US President replies to Rouhani not to «never, even threaten USA» or his country «will suffer consequences».

July 24th-25th:

Donald Trump keeps open the possibility of negotiating an agreement to denuclearize Iran but Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi declares that his country will never take part in one-sided negotiations with the United States under threat.

July 26th:

In the Spanish *enclave* of Ceuta at least 800 migrants, coming from Morocco, force the border's barrier, doing a battle against Moroccan police and the Spanish Guardia Civil which causes dozens of injured people.

July 27th:

Vladimir Putin declares he wants Donald Trump to be his guest in Moscow, an idea that the White House welcomes despite lingering criticism over the Helsinki summit.

July 28th:

Former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont returns from Germany to Belgium after Spain has failed in an attempt to extradite him from Germany on charges of rebellion over the illegal declaration of independence.

July 29th:

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan declares Turkey will stand its ground after Donald Trump has threatened to slap sanctions on Ankara if it does not free an American pastor detained for suspected terrorism support.

July 30th:

Giuseppe Conte is received at the White House by Donald Trump, obtaining free way on three critical issues: Libya, a permanent director cabin on Mediterranean Sea and the commercial exchanges and duties.

July 31st-August 1st:

Donald Trump opens to possible direct negotiations with Teheran without preconditions and Hassan Rouhani replies that talks between Iran and USA can be made: «if the United States will come back in the multilateral agreement on nuclear of 2015 and if they will reduce hostility» against Iran.

August 2nd:

Treasury and Finance Minister Turkish Berat Albayrak says that US sanctions imposed over the trial of the American evangelical pastor Andrew Brunson, accused of participation to the 2016 Turkish *golpe* are unacceptable and will have limited impact on the Turkish economy.

August 3rd-4th:

In an experts' report presented to UN Security Council there is the accuse that North Korea: «did not end its nuclear and missile program» and that it is still violating UN imposed sanctions. Furthermore it is sustained that Pyongyang: «has tried to sell light weapons and other military equipment through foreign intermediaries» to Libya, Yemen and Sudan.

August 5th:

In Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro's opposition tries to assassinate him with an explosives-laden and the government warns of a possible political crackdown.

August 6th:

North Korean State *media* urge the United States to drop sanctions, as South Korea has declared it is investigating nine cases of coal shipments that potentially violated UN resolutions.

August 7th-8th:

Donald Trump pledges that firms doing business with Tehran will be barred from the United States, as new US sanctions against Iran have taken effect in spite of pleas from Washington's allies.

August 9th:

Russia condemns a new round of US sanctions as illegal and states it has begun working on retaliatory measures after news of the curbs pushed the rouble to two-year lows over fears Moscow has been locked in a spiral of never-ending sanctions.

August 10th-11th:

In Turkey the strong speculative crisis on lira, also caused by growing tensions between Ankara and Washington (because of detention of American pastor Andrew Brunson, accused of participation to the 2016 Turkish *golpe*, accusations rejected by USA, and because of the hypothesis of sanctions against Ankara), causes the reactions of Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan, that declares that if the United States will not: «invert the tendency to unilateralism and to the loss of respect we will be forced to look for new friends and allies».

August 12th-13th:

Iranian State TV reports that Iran's Supreme Leader *ayatollah* Ali Khamenei rules out the possibility of any military confrontation with the United States.

August 14th:

In London British police arrests a man on suspicion of terrorism offences after he has driven a car into security barriers outside British Parliament and has injured at least two people.

August 15th:

Turkey doubles tariffs on some US imports including alcohol, cars and tobacco in retaliation for US moves, but the lira rallies further after the central bank's liquidity moves have had the effect of supporting the currency.

August 16th:

The United States impose sanctions on a Russian port service agency and Chinese firms for aiding North Korean ships and selling alcohol and tobacco to Pyongyang in breach of US sanctions.

August 17th:

US Treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin, during an executive cabinet meeting at the White House, declares that the United States are ready to push on sanctions against Turkey in case of failed freedom of Evangelic American pastor Andrew Brunson.

August 18th:

Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel meet outside Berlin for talks ranging from the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, to Iran and a gas pipeline project that has drawn US ire.

August 19th:

In Mesenberg in the joint declarations with Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel declares that: «there are many conflicts, this underlines the possibility to find solutions. We have responsibilities and also Germany has, but especially Russia has, which is part of UN Security Council», adding that, despite the Minsk agreement, there has not been reached a stable truce in Ukraine, proposing with Putin a UN mission to play a role in peace process.

August 20th:

Comes successfully to an end the third and final program of EU financial assistance to Greece, which has received a series of aids for 288,7 millions euros since 2010, of which 256,6 coming from the European Union and 32,1 from the International Monetary Fund.

August 21st:

Great Britain presses the European Union to increase sanctions against Russia, saying it should stand «shoulder to shoulder» with the United States, which hit Moscow with new economic restrictions.

August 22nd:

During a speech in West Virginia Donald Trump declares that: «we will put a duty of 25% on every car coming from the European Union to the United States», despite Trump and Jean-Claude Juncker, in a meeting at the White House July 26th 2018, have found an understanding to freeze new duties on European cars during the negotiations for a stable agreement between the USA and the EU.

August 23rd:

In Trappes, in the Paris region, a man stabs and kills two persons, before entrenching in a house shouting: «Allah is great». The attacker has been killed after the intervention of police's special forces. The two victims are the man's mother and daughter, a 36 years old radical Islamist. ISIS claims the attack.

August 24th-25th:

After the meeting of member States Foreign Ministers' *sherpa* in Brussels, urgently convened by the European Commission on the issue of the distribution of migrants on the Italian Coast Guard ship Diciotti, berthed since August 22nd in the port of Catania, there is not any agreement between Italy and the European Union, which rejects the people on board. Giuseppe Conte declares that: «Europe has lost the opportunity to fight for the principles of solidarity and hospitality, founding values in the European set of rules» and that: «at the moment, Italy does not consider as possible to join the European provisional budget for such an incoherent policy on the social side».

August 26th-27th:

Despite the question of migrants on Diciotti ship is resolved thanks to the hospitality of some Italian dioceses and some European States, the issues between Italy and the European Union on the participation to the EU budget cause a broader debate between the European member States.

August 28th:

Iran's parliament votes to reject Hassan Rouhani's explanations for economic hardship after a dramatic grilling on live TV, a sign his pragmatic faction is losing sway to hard-line rivals as new US sanctions begin to bite.

August 29th:

European Union Budget Commissioner Guenther Oettinger apologizes after comments suggesting Italian voters will be punished by markets for voting on March 4th 2018 for Eurosceptic populists but reaffirms that all the member States are required to pay contributions on time.

August 30th:

During a meeting of EU Defence Council, rotating president, Austrian Minister Mario Kunasek, presents a document proposing that military forces of the member States would be used in support of Frontex for logistics, transports and recognitions and, in particular cases, also in operations of controls of the external borders, to contain migratory flows.

August 31st:

Iran has given ballistic missiles to Shi'ite proxies in Iraq and is developing the capacity to build more there to deter attacks on its interests in the Middle East and to give it the means to hit regional foes.

September 1st:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declares that US sanctions against Russia are counter-productive but Moscow is ready for dialogue once the US side is ready for talks with mutual respect.

September 2nd:

In an interview EU chief negotiator for Brexit Michel Barnier declares that, taking in account necessary time for the ratification by British and European parliaments, it is essential to close negotiations for London divorce from the European Union within half November 2018.

September 3rd-4th:

Donald Trump warns Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his allies Iran and Russia not to «recklessly attack» Syria's rebel-held Idlib province, warning that hundreds of thousands of people can be killed.

September 5th:

In Tripoli calmness comes back after the cease-fire agreement mediated by the UN with militias which have crashed in the Libyan capital causing more than 60 dead people.

September 6th:

North Korea's Kim Jong Un gives his first time line for denuclearization, aiming for the end of Donald Trump's first term, prompting thanks from Trump who says they will «get it done together».

September 7th:

In Teheran the presidents of Turkey, Iran and Russia fail to agree on a ceasefire that will forestall a Syrian government offensive in rebel-held Idlib province which the United Nations fear can cause a humanitarian catastrophe involving tens of thousands of civilians.

September 8th:

Jean-Claude Juncker announces he will hold on September 12th in Strasbourg a speech on the state of the European Union during which should be announced a legislative project to create for the first time an authentic European border police and to transform the controversial control on irregular immigration in a communitarian competence. The project plans the establishment of a real European Guard on coasts and borders, which should have the ability to monitor the European area, but also the possibility to intervene in third countries and with participation powers during repatriation's operations.

September 9th-10th:

In the Syrian province of Idlib new Russian aerial raids intervene while Syrian governmental forces, supported by Russia and Iran, continue the attack on the last rebels' stronghold in the country, while Turkey and other countries launch a new warning on the risk of a humanitarian disaster.

September 11th:

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban during a debate on the situation in Hungary tells the European Parliament he will not bow to EU «blackmail» as lawmakers have prepared to vote on whether to punish Budapest for eroding democracy.

September 12th:

The European Parliament approves Judith Sargentini's resolution on the rule of law in Hungary, applying, for the first time in EU's history, the art. 7 of the Treaties, that in its most relevant step, can bring to sanctions for a serious threat to the rule of law, to democracy and to the fundamental rights in a member State, in this case Hungary.

In his speech on the state of the Union, Jean-Claude Juncker proposes «an enforcement of the European Coast and Border Guard until 10.000 unities within 2020 and the creation of a European agency for asylum».

September 13th:

German Ministry of Interiors Horst Seehofer declares to the Bundestag that the agreement with Italy on the refoulement of migrants registered in Italy and stopped at the German border is concluded and that: «are only missing two signatures of two Italian colleagues and mine».

September 14th:

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accuses Russia of actively working to undermine international sanctions on North Korea, considering that United Nations sanctions were essential to achieving the denuclearization of the country.

September 15th:

In Bogotá secretary general of the Organization of the American States (OAS) Luis Almagro sustains that it is not excluded a military intervention in Venezuela as a solution to the political and social crisis in the country.

September 16th:

In Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopian premier Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean president Isaias Afwerki sign an historical peace agreement between the two countries.

September 17th:

In Sochi, after a meeting with his Turkish counterpart, Vladimir Putin declares that Russian and Turkish troops are to enforce a new demilitarized zone in Syria's Idlib region from which «radical» rebels will be required to withdraw by the middle of October 2018.

September 18th:

Vladimir Putin declares that the shooting down of a Russian military plane near Syria's seacoast is the result of a series of tragic and chance circumstances.

September 19th:

Kim Jong-un and South Korean president Moon Jae-in sign a first agreement to «reduce tensions», with measures and initiatives to «prevent accidental military clashes».

September 20th:

In Salzburg at the end of the summit of the EU member States deep distances remain on the themes of Brexit and migrants.

September 21st:

Theresa May declares that Brexit talks with the European Union have hit an *impasse*, defiantly challenging the bloc to come up with its own plans after EU leaders have savaged her proposals.

September 22nd:

In Ahvaz, in the Iranian province of Khuzestan, ISIS launches an attack during a military parade, causing the killing of 29 people.

September 23rd:

British opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn declares he will back a second Brexit referendum if his Labour Party votes to pursue the move, heaping pressure on Theresa May, whose plans for a divorce deal with the EU have hit an *impasse*.

September 24th:

Ali Khamenei states the attackers who have killed 25 people at the military parade have been paid by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and that Iran will «severely punish» those behind the bloodshed.

September 25th:

Donald Trump uses his annual address to the United Nations to attack Iran's «corrupt dictatorship» and to lay down a defiant message that he will reject globalism and protect American interests.

September 26th:

Jeremy Corbin declares that his party will reject any «no deal Brexit» if this result would be reached by Theresa May's Conservative Party because it will be a «disaster for the country», whereas «it is necessary a Brexit which will protect labour and economy in Great Britain». In the meantime Michael Barnier exposes his concerns about meeting his announced target of an outline deal and final package in mid-November 2018 to avoid Brexit's downfall.

September 27th:

At the United Nations General Assembly Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accuses Iran of hiding nuclear-related material at a warehouse in Tehran, which he says proved it has not abandoned its nuclear weapons program.

September 28th:

During a State visit that aims to repair relations with Germany after bitter disputes, Tayyip Erdogan declares that Turkey aims to win easier access to the European Union for its citizens.

September 29th:

North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho tells to the UN General Assembly that continued sanctions are deepening its mistrust in the United States and there is no way the country will give up its nuclear weapons unilaterally under such circumstances.

September 30th:

Theresa May calls on her party to unite behind her plan to leave the European Union, making a direct appeal to critics by saying their desire for a free trade deal is at the heart of her Brexit proposals.