

## World News Roundup

## Britain

## Trump still on: May

## UK seeks to keep EU 'security pact'

LONDON, Sept 18, (Agencies): Britain proposed a new post-Brexit security treaty with the European Union on Monday, seeking to maintain and intensify cooperation to thwart "ever-growing and increasingly cross-border threats".

In its sixth policy paper setting out Britain's vision for ties with the EU after it quits the bloc in March 2019, the government said it wanted to keep the benefits of EU security cooperation, arguing it was in both parties' interests to do so.

The proposal comes days after a blast on a packed commuter underground train injured 30 people in west London, Britain's fifth major attack this year.

"We already have a deep level of collaboration with the EU on security matters and it is in both our interests to find ways to maintain it," Brexit minister David Davis said in a statement.

"A new security treaty with the EU would be underpinned by our shared principles, and should make sure our partnership has the agility to respond to the ever-changing threats we face."

The paper said an entirely new form of agreement on security was necessary because there was no satisfactory precedent for security cooperation between the EU and non-EU states, and that relying on existing models would diminish British and EU defences.



Rudd

## Future

Britain has published a series of "future partnership" policy papers to try to nudge talks with the EU forward, after they have stalled over the divorce settlement, especially over the so-called Brexit bill.

Security cooperation is seen by government officials as one of their strongest arguments to gain leverage in the complicated talks to unravel more than 40 years of union.

Seeking to ram that point home, Monday's paper simultaneously stressed Britain's importance to EU security, and the need for continued cooperation to respond to future threats as they evolve.

Interior minister Amber Rudd said Britain was one of the leading EU contributors to a range of measures, such as data and evidence sharing, extradition measures and to the EU's police agency Europol.

Meanwhile, Oliver Robbins, the top official at Britain's Brexit ministry, has quit his job and will take up a new co-ordinating role at Prime Minister Theresa May's Downing Street office, the Evening Standard newspaper reported on Monday.

The Brexit ministry had no immediate comment on the report.

The Evening Standard reported that the move by Robbins followed disagreements between the influential official and Brexit minister David Davis, Britain's chief negotiator in talks with the European Union.

**UK statistics body chides Johnson:** Britain's statistics regulator has accused Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson of misleadingly claiming that leaving the European Union will give Britain an extra 350 million pounds (\$475 million) a week to spend on health care.

The figure was emblazoned on buses used by the "Leave" campaign before last year's Brexit referendum.

Johnson resurrected it in an article laying out his vision for Britain's post-Brexit future. He said the UK will "take back control of roughly 350 million a week" when it leaves the EU, and it would be "a fine thing" if much of it went to the National Health Service.

UK Statistics Authority chief David Norgrove chided Johnson in a letter, saying it was a gross rather than net figure. It doesn't take into account a substantial rebate Britain receives before the money is sent, or money the EU sends to Britain, which reduce the next figure to about half the cited 350 million pounds.

Norgrove called the figure "a gross misuse of official statistics."

Johnson accused Norgrove of distorting his article, but the statistics authority said Monday that Norgrove stood by his opinion.

**'Trump visit still on despite tweets':** British Prime Minister Theresa May has insisted a long-awaited state visit by Donald Trump will go ahead as planned despite a diplomatic spat triggered by the US president's comments after a terror attack in London.

Speaking to ABC News from Downing Street in an interview that aired Sunday, she added that London was in talks with internet giants Google and Facebook about "doing more" to assist authorities in tracking extremists using the web to plan attacks, an issue she said she would take up at the UN General Assembly next week.

After an explosion in the London subway early Friday injured more than 20 people, Trump on Twitter blamed "sick and demented people who were in the sights of Scotland Yard."

Britons expressed outrage at the president's suggestion that British authorities had advance knowledge about the attackers. May herself told journalists Friday that "I never think it's helpful for anybody to speculate on what is an ongoing investigation."

Trump's keenness to underline a series of attacks in Britain has led to repeated outcry across the Atlantic that has helped indefinitely delay his much-vaunted state visit. But in her ABC interview, May made clear the planned visit is still on.

"Her Majesty the Queen issued the invitation," she said. "The president has accepted it. It's just a question of getting dates to — and sorting out the logistics."

May said the point of the historic "special relationship" between the two countries was that "when we do disagree we're able to say so — and pretty bluntly."

As an example, she cited the sharp differences over the Paris climate change agreement. "I've made very clear I was dismayed when America decided to pull out of that," she said, adding that she hoped the US administration would be "able to find a way for America to come back into the agreement."

After reports that some European officials believed the US might return to the agreement, the White House said Saturday that it would do so only if it could negotiate more favorable terms.

May also emphasized the need to block terrorists from using the internet for planning attacks and "for the spread of extremism, of hatred, of propaganda."

She said British authorities were working with internet giants like Facebook and Google "about doing more." Those companies and others, including YouTube and Twitter, have formed a Global Internet Forum to Combat Terrorism, working with governments and other groups.



Commuters on the platform at Parsons Green tube station in London on Sept 18. A bucket wrapped in an insulated bag caught fire on a packed London subway train at Parsons Green station on Sept 15, police are treating it as a terrorist incident. (AP)

## Germany

## Free Democrats may stall EU reform hopes

## Schulz tells of 'checkered' past

BERLIN, Sept 18, (Agencies): Martin Schulz's route to becoming Angela Merkel's challenger for German chancellor has been strewn with highs and lows: failed dreams of a soccer career, a bout of alcohol addiction, running a bookshop, a spell as a small-town mayor and high-profile years as the president of the European Parliament.

Schulz has made much both of his modest past and of his passion for European unity as he seeks to lead his center-left Social Democratic Party to victory after 12 years of Merkel. It is the 61-year-old's first run for national office.

Schulz hails from Wuerselen, a town of 40,000 near Germany's western border with Belgium and the Netherlands. In a message to voters two weeks before the election, Schulz addressed them as "Europeans" and said: "For me, Europe is a matter of the heart and a question of destiny. I have dedicated my political life to this idea."

Schulz told a party congress in March that he was "really lazy at school and, as a young man, had nothing but soccer in my head."

He left without a high school diploma, failed to become a professional footballer and struggled with alcohol addiction.

He says he is "the only top German politician who openly stands by his biographical disasters." Schulz got his "second chance" training as a bookseller, opening his own bookshop and getting involved in local politics with the Social Democrats. At 31, he became mayor of Wuerselen — a job he held for 11 years.

In 1994, Schulz won a seat in the European Parliament, where he gradually worked his way to prominence.

A critical question posed by Schulz in 2003 prompted Italy's then-Premier Silvio Berlusconi to compare him to a Nazi, suggesting he would be "perfect" to play the role of a concentration camp guard in a movie.

From 2012 until the beginning of

this year, Schulz was the EU parliament's president. He was credited with helping raise the profile and importance of the assembly, long a largely symbolic institution but now one with strong influence over EU policy in many areas.

Schulz was long considered a potential candidate for chancellor but it was still a surprise when the Social Democrats' then-leader, Sigmar Gabriel, stepped aside in January to let him run.

The party's support initially surged to equal that of Merkel's conservatives — and Schulz was elected party leader with an unprecedented 100 percent of the vote at a euphoric congress — but then it sagged as the party lost three state elections in the spring.

## Focus

Schulz has stuck doggedly to a focus on greater "social justice" for Germany's have-nots and underprivileged.

"We are a rich country, but that doesn't mean everyone in this country is rich," he told a recent rally. "In 60 seconds, a nurse earns less than 40 cents, but a top manager at a big company earns more than 30 euros. This injustice divides the country."

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel lauded her veteran finance minister Wolfgang Schaeuble at a birthday party in his honor on Monday, as a potential coalition partner laid claim to his ministry as their price for keeping her in power.

Speaking at Schaeuble's 75th birthday celebration, Merkel paid tribute to his 45 years as a member of the German parliament, but gave few clues as to whether she wanted him to remain in his job after next Sunday's election which she is on track to win.

"We're fighting together at the moment to ensure there are at least four more years," Merkel told attendees at the event hosted by her Christian Democrats (CDU) in Offenburg, in his constituency in the southwestern

state of Baden-Wuerttemberg.

A week before German elections, the storied Free Democratic Party looks set to recover from a historic 2013 defeat and return to parliament — where it could make Berlin a much more awkward partner for its European neighbours.

Were the FDP to reprise its historic role as junior coalition partner to Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right CDU/CSU, it would bring its staunch opposition to more financial transfers between European Union member countries.

That may ensure that mounting momentum behind reform of the bloc breaks on resistance from Berlin.

Stakes are high in an election race where the winner seems certain and all eyes are on four smaller parties, each polling around 10 percent.

With Merkel's party far ahead in the polls, but unlikely to gain an absolute majority, the chancellor will need to partner with one or more of the smaller parties — unless she wants to continue a loveless "grand coalition" with the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD).

She has ruled out working with the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD), or with the far-left Die Linke, which leaves the FDP and Greens battling for a potential junior role.

FDP secretary-general Nicola Beer says the goal is clear: "The decisive question for this election will be which party is the third largest."

Cautious Merkel has left her options open, signalling to both the pro-business FDP and the left-leaning Greens that there could be a place for them at the cabinet table after the Sept 24 vote.

If the FDP joined a CDU government, eurozone reform would be "dead in the water," economist Christian Odendahl of the Centre for European Reform said, labelling it "the most dangerous coalition for the euro."



German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble (center right) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (center left) watch a parade to celebrate Schaeuble's 75th birthday on Sept 18 in Offenburg, southern Germany. (AFP)



Macron



Putin

## Europe

**'Action to rattle Macron':** French President Emmanuel Macron may have won the first round of his battle to overhaul France's economy, but the coming 10 days promise to bring far more protests and unrest to the streets as labour unions and the political left step up their opposition.

Last week's demonstration by the Communist Party-linked CGT union against changes to the labour code drew many fewer protesters than expected, with police saying 220,000 people turned out nationwide, against union estimates of 400,000.

Despite opposition, the government will adopt the labour reform, which simplifies employment rules and makes hiring and firing easier, on Sept 22.

But even if that battle may be lost for the unions, many workers, retirees, civil servants and youth are not giving up as they look warily towards Macron's longer-term plans to overhaul the unemployment benefit and pensions systems as well.

Jean-Luc Melenchon, head of the left-wing La France Insoumise (France Unbowed) party, who sees himself as the main voice of opposition, has described Macron's proposals as a "social coup d'etat". He is calling for a mass march on Paris by the party's 530,000 mostly young members on Sept 23. (RTRS)

**Putin watches parachute drop:** Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived at a remote army training ground on Monday to watch a military parachute drop, part of Russia's biggest war games since 2013 that have the West looking on nervously.

NATO officials say they are watching the "Zapad-2017" ("West-2017") war games with "calm and confidence", but many are unnerved about what they see as Moscow testing its ability to wage war against the West. Russia says the exercise is rehearsing a purely defensive scenario.

The Russian Defence Ministry said Monday's parachute drop, at a military facility in the Leningrad region, would see 450 paratroopers and nine armoured vehicles dropped from military transport planes, a show of military might that is likely to be heavily covered on state TV.

Putin, commander-in-chief of Russia's armed forces, has often appeared at such events in the past, using them to bolster his image among Russians as a robust defender of the country's national interests on the world stage.

**'US, Ukraine reject proposal':** Moscow's ambassador to the United Nations said the United States and Ukraine have told Russia they will not work on a Russian proposal to deploy United Nations peacekeepers in eastern Ukraine, the TASS news agency reported.

Russian President Vladimir Putin this month suggested armed UN peacekeepers be deployed to eastern Ukraine to help protect ceasefire monitors from the Or-

ganization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and to help end a conflict between Ukrainian troops and Russia-backed separatists, which has killed more than 10,000 people since 2014.

Putin originally said the peacekeepers should be deployed along the line of contact between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists, but later said they could also be deployed in other areas where OSCE inspectors work.

However, Washington and Kiev also want peacekeepers to be deployed along those parts of Ukraine's border with Russia which Kiev does not control. (RTRS)

## Romanian PM visits storm-hit city:

Amid criticism that authorities failed to warn residents, Romanian Premier Mihai Tudose traveled Monday to a western city that bore the brunt of a violent storm

that left eight dead and injured about 140 people.

The trip to Timisoara comes after President Klaus Iohannis criticized authorities for failing to raise the alarm about the devastating storm that ripped off roofs and uprooted trees, with winds gusting up to 100 kph (60 mph). Most of those who died were hit by falling trees or flying objects.

Timisoara mayor Nicolae Robu said he learned about the storm shortly before it ripped through his city. "I didn't have warning that there would be a violent storm. Rain was forecast," he said. Five of the dead and 49 of the injured were from the Timisoara area.

Tudose arrived in the city Monday afternoon and went to the Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, declining to speak to reporters.

More than 200 towns and villages were affected by Sunday's sudden storm, which overturned vehicles and downed power lines.

Some 40 schools were closed Monday after the storm ravaged their buildings. Iohannis' office issued a statement Monday saying the "growing frequency and intensity of weather phenomena leaves no room for dysfunctional communication between state institutes."

Premier Tudose, who drew criticism with his response on Sunday — "What can we do? Have a law that stops the wind blowing?" — on Monday announced that a rapid warning system would be put in place by the emergency services.

The storm began in western Romania and then went north. Rail and road traffic was interrupted across western Romania. (AP)



The 'Red Arrows' aerobatic team from Britain performs during Athens Flying Week at Tanagra air base, north of Athens on Sept 17. The performance is part of an annual air show, known as Athens Flying Week, which hosts aerobatic teams from several countries. (AFP)