

EU in flux as U.S. alliance creaks, populists rise in Italy

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Certainties Europe has relied on for decades seem to be crumbling: that the U.S. is a reliable trade partner, and that the founding members of the EU all remain committed to the bloc.



Macron

On Friday, U.S. President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on European steel and aluminum, dismissing Europe's pleas, and an

anti-EU populist government took office in Italy. Added to Britain's expected departure next year from the European Union, the milestones show a region entering a new state of flux, with potential

implications for the prosperity of its people and global relations.

"Germany and France should very quickly show

joint political leadership now," said Daniela Schwarz, director of the German Council on Foreign Relations.

That role would belong in large part to Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Emmanuel Macron when it comes to strengthening Europe's currency union. Collectively, the EU could seek to ease worries about trade by strengthening commercial ties with other partners like Japan, China and countries in South America.

But the trade relationship with the U.S. is the biggest in the world, and will be hard to make up for, if the U.S. and EU escalate their spat by imposing counter-tariffs on each other. U.S. trade helped Europe recover from the devastation of World War II and enriched U.S. companies that sold consumer goods to the continent. A souring in relations could also have implications for cooperation in other spheres, like security.

"The situation is worrying, it could escalate," said

the EU's trade chief, Cecilia Malmstrom, adding that the tariffs could hurt economic growth. "The United States is playing a dangerous game."

The EU officials were far more cautious in their reaction to the political situation in Italy, for fear of further provoking supporters of the new government led by the anti-establishment 5 Star Movement and the anti-immigration the League. But they were likely not less worried, having seen European financial markets plunge

this week on Italy's political chaos.

Law professor and political neophyte Giuseppe Conte was sworn in Friday as the head of Italy's populist government. The two parties plan tax cuts and more spending, including a basic income for the poor.

Italy, one of the original signers of the 1957 Treaty of Rome that created a common market and paved the way for today's European Union, has the second heaviest debt load in Europe after Greece.

U.S. blocks UN health panel from backing taxes on sugar drinks

Associated Press

GENEVA — The Trump administration has torpedoed a plan to recommend higher taxes on sugary drinks, forcing a World Health Organization panel to back off the U.N. agency's previous call for such taxes as a way to fight obesity, diabetes and other life-threatening conditions.

The move disappointed many public health experts but was enthusiastically welcomed by the International Food and Beverage Alliance — a group that represents companies including Coca-Cola, PepsiCo. and Unilever.

The revelations came Friday as a WHO panel on non-communicable diseases issued a report that aimed to cut down on diseases like diabetes, cancer and obesity, which kill about 40 million people each year.

The fight against such diseases is a priority for WHO's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Dr. Sania Nishtar, co-chair of panel, said most of its 26 members supported a tax on sugar sweetened beverages but one commissioner — whom she did not identify — hampered drafting stronger language.

Eric Hargan, the U.S.

deputy secretary for Health and Human Services, reported he was that member, arguing it was not clear that imposing taxes on sugary drinks like sodas and fruit juices would improve public health — even though WHO has argued exactly that over the last two years.

"Deputy Secretary Hargan opposed endorsing increasing taxes on sugary drinks in the commission report," HHS spokeswoman Caitlin Oakley said, noting that the panel's mandate was to make "bold" recommendations. "Taxes on sugary drinks is not new, bold, or innovative."

She also claimed that "evidence is lacking that such a tax produces positive health outcomes."

The U.S. provides a significant percentage of WHO's yearly budget.

The sweetened-drink industry has come out strongly against any such tax but Nishtar said she was not aware of any industry lobbying of the commissioners.

Commission member Ilona Kickbusch, a former WHO staffer who directs the Global Health Center at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, said the United States "made it clear" that it did not want more regulation.



AP Photo/Noah Berger, File

In this December 2017 file photo, a motorist on Highway 101 watches flames from the Thomas fire leap above the roadway north of Ventura, Calif. The largest wildfire recorded in California is officially out nearly six months after it began. Los Padres National Forest officials declared the Thomas fire extinguished Friday after no hotspots were detected within the perimeter for more than two months.

California's largest-ever wildfire declared out

GOLETA, Calif. (AP) — Officials declared the largest wildfire in recorded California history officially extinguished Friday, nearly six months after it ignited and later burned hillsides that washed away in deadly mudslides northwest of Los Angeles.

Los Padres National Forest officials made the designation after detecting no hotspots within the perimeter of the Thomas fire for more than two months.

The flames broke out on

Dec. 4, 2017, near Thomas Aquinas College and burned more than 440 square miles (1,140 square kilometers) in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

Two people were killed, including a state firefighter. The flames destroyed more than 1,000 buildings before they were fully contained on Jan. 12.

A massive downpour on fire-denuded mountains Jan. 9 unleashed massive debris flows that ravaged hundreds of homes in the community

of Montecito, killing 21 people and leaving two missing.

The blaze erupted as powerful Santa Ana winds swept the region, causing power outages. The gusts swept the fire out of a semirural area and into neighborhoods.

A spate of lawsuits by victims claim losses from the blaze and the resulting flooding were due to negligence by Southern California Edison.

In response, the utility

has said the cause of the fire remains under investigation and the claims don't stem from official findings.

More than half the burned territory was in Los Padres National Forest, where officials said crews were repairing roads, trails and fences damaged by the blaze and fire suppression actions.

Officials are developing a strategic approach for repairing trails damaged by the fire and rainstorms.



AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File

Soft drinks are on display at a supermarket in London. An independent World Health Organization panel is backing away from the U.N. health agency's own call two years ago for taxing sugary drinks, in a new report on diseases like cancer, obesity and diabetes that some experts slammed as being "conspicuously limp."

Summer Concert Series

FREE Concerts alternating between the Boardman and Irrigon Marina Parks. Bring the whole family for an evening of music on the banks of the scenic Columbia River!

Boardman Performances		Irrigon Performances	
June 11	'Bahuru Marimba Band 15-Member Zimbabwean Band	Brady Goss	18 June Piano Artist & Singer
June 25	Bobby & Faith Acoustic Duo, Light Rock Classics	98% Angels	02 July Big Band, Swing, Big Band Join Us to Honor Our Veterans
July 09	Los Potrillos de Nayarit 4 Piece Latin Band	Cruise Control	16 July Classic Rock and Roll
July 23	MissyG Band County Singer/Songwriter	The Buttercreek Boys	30 July Old Time Favorites
August 06	Blue Mt. Spanish Sound Acoustic Guitar Duo	Brass Fire	13 August Blues, Jazz, Rock, Swing & Funk

7-8PM Mondays @ The Marina Parks!
In the event of inclement weather, Boardman performances will be held at the SAGE Center and Irrigon Performances will be held at the Irrigon Senior Center.

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