

Think Tank Report

1/2020 Insights into the agendas of international think tanks

KONRAD
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DEFENCE

Below the surface

How Russian submarines threaten global information flow

Over the last decade, Russian naval forces have invested a great deal in the submarine fleet in order to give it central strategic importance. It now boasts a number of unmanned vehicles to complement its manned underwater force. This increased activity indicates a weak point in the security policy of Western nations: unprotected underwater cables and their economic and military significance. It is underwater cables that allow global communication – more than 99 per cent of information exchanged worldwide flows through these channels. If they were cut, the global exchange of data and information would be interrupted. The fact

that high-ranking military men are speaking bluntly of the threat to these cables underscores the anxiety that is increasing at the highest levels. Where exactly the danger to Western nations lies and what must be done now shows a new study from the *French Institute for International Affairs* (IFRI) in Paris, France.



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EU FOREIGN POLICY

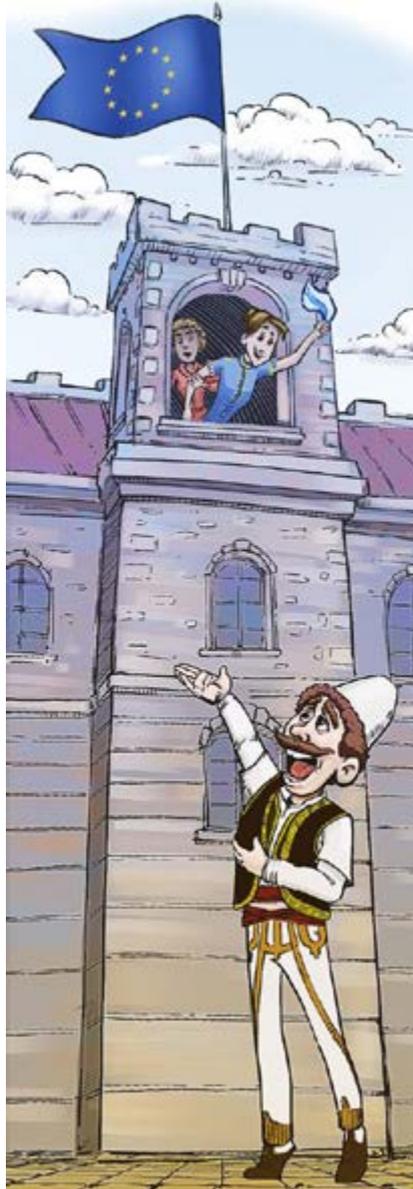
Balkan blues

Why the EU should make nice with Albania and North Macedonia

For some time, the EU has been in entry negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. But no breakthrough is in sight. Several voices have been raised within EU member states calling for negotiations to be broken off. This would be the worst course of action for both sides: For instance, the pro-European governments in the countries in question would be damaged, the progress of liberal reforms in the western Balkans endangered, the EU's credibility further undermined, and incentives created for western Balkan states to seek support elsewhere. How remaining problems might be solved and why the Balkans are of strategic interest to the EU shows a new paper from the [International Institute for Strategic Studies](#) (IISS) based in London, United Kingdom.

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HEALTH POLICY

Reaction is better than incubation

Can artificial intelligence stop the next epidemic?

Prompt, precise information on the outbreak of new epidemics are critical to containing and combatting them. Over the last decade, digital and technical innovations have allowed rapid progress in collecting, analysing, and presenting health data. Digital health approaches now aim at pooling the available data silos and incorporating them into the decision-making process when catastrophes occur. This is intended to create the technological framework that will allow countermeasures to be implemented at the right place, at the right time, and for the right people. To determine the extent to which the characteristics of such events can be calculated based on health data, which is continuously becoming more precise, the US has initiated a five-year pilot project for digital disease prevention with associated protective measures. A report on the project's goals and possible areas of application is provided by the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., USA.

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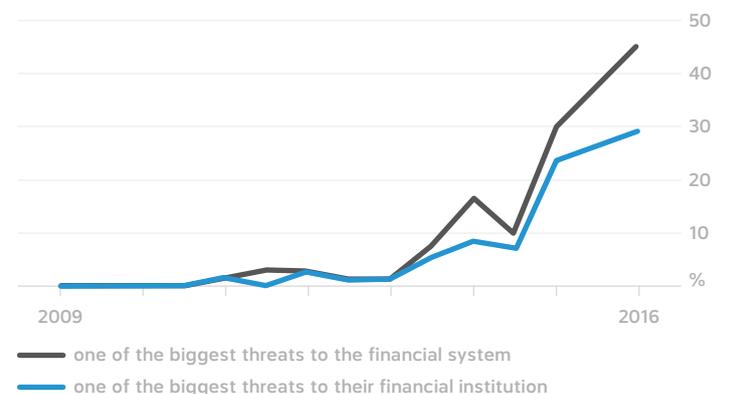
CYBER SECURITY

The danger of zeros and ones

Why cyber attacks are the biggest threat for the European banking system

Over the next few years, cyber risks will test large financial institutions. While banks and other institutions are by now much better prepared for hacker attacks, those attacks have recently become more frequent and more intense. Hybrid threats, which combine conventional and non-conventional means, are expanding, but there are still no comparable system-wide preparations and stress tests. The EU therefore has no overview of the actual danger to individual institutions. A Europe-wide cyber stress test for banks is needed. The necessary steps and what exactly needs to be tested shows a new paper from [Bruegel](#) in Brussels, Belgium.

British finance executives identify cyber attacks as ...



Source: Bank of England (2016)

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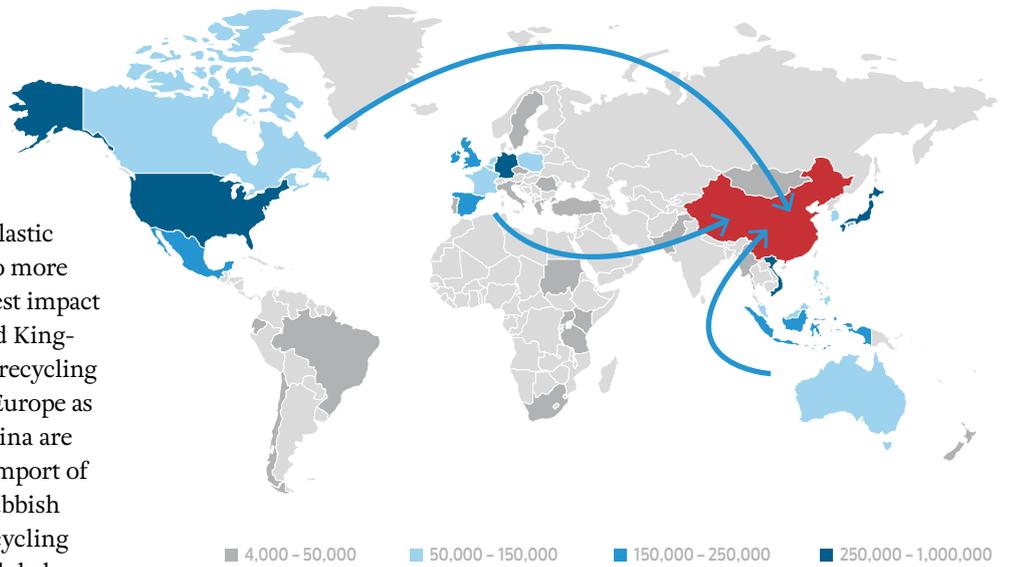
ENVIRONMENT

Where to with all the trash?

How China's plastic scrap import stop is stimulating the recycling economy

In March of 2018, China stopped importing plastic scrap and announced that it would accept “no more foreign rubbish”. This decision had the greatest impact on countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom, which had effectively outsourced their recycling problem to China. Shockwaves can be felt in Europe as well: Many other Asian countries besides China are preparing legislation that would outlaw the import of scrap from Western countries. This leaves rubbish exporters one option: enhance their own recycling economy. Californian cities are considered global leaders, showing how local laws that are far ahead of the nation as a whole can be shaped. What this means for Germany and Europe shows a dossier published by *Chatham House* from London, United Kingdom.

Waste exports to China 2017 (in tons)



Source: comtrade.un.org (2018)

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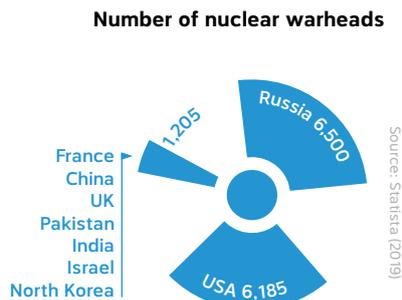
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NUCLEAR POLICY

Everything under control?

How India hopes to become a responsible nuclear power

Moving into the group of nuclear powers was an important technological, diplomatic, and political step for India in the 20th century. But because of the Kashmir conflict with Pakistan, there was repeated concern at the international level about a permanent nuclear threat. To consolidate its status as a responsible nuclear power, India has already concluded various nuclear treaties with other nuclear powers and is now negotiating with important suppliers and interest groups to take full advantage of its nuclear potential. The challenges the country faces in implementing these treaties and whether such agreements could serve as a blueprint for other countries, analyses the *Observer Research Foundation* (ORF) from New Delhi, India.



Source: Statista (2019)

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WORLD ORDER

Can the leopard change his spots?

How Russia wants to get closer to the EU again

Russia doesn't need to worry about a new security architecture in Europe. Ultimately, the ongoing confrontation with the United States and Moscow's overtures to Beijing will result in new alliances. According to the *Carnegie Moscow Center* Russia and Europe – in contrast to the United States – are not in confrontation with each other. Instead, the annexation of the Crimea, the war in the Ukraine, hacker attacks and Russian interference in elections have led to alienation from each other. But concerns in Russia and Europe today are primarily about economic and technological questions. That is why “reducing or eliminating political irritations” should contribute to revving the business relationship motor. Whether it will really be so easy to re-establish European-Russian relations and what the causes for hope on the Russian side are, assesses an article from the *Carnegie Moscow Center* (CMC) from Moscow, Russia.

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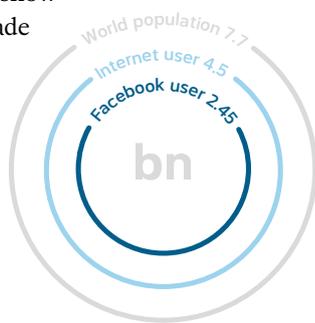
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SOCIAL MEDIA

Thumbs down

Does Facebook really have a negative effect on democracy?

Using so-called instant articles, Facebook became one of the world's largest platforms for disseminating news, but now stands accused of failing to face up to the associated responsibility. The claim is that, because Facebook subjects all kinds of news to the same algorithms, relevant news is scarcely distinguishable from fake news, and because rage and hate spread faster than facts, the social network has accelerated radicalization on the internet. Using the Philippines as an example to show what this radicalization is made up of and how it can be detected early on is the subject of an interview with the *Centre for International Governance Innovation* (CIGI) in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.



Source: Statista (2019)

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FIGHTING POVERTY

Breaking the vicious cycle

The precarious conditions of many people are becoming increasingly multidimensional

By 2030, about half of all people who today suffer poverty will also live in an environment characterised by fragility, conflict, and violence. This will further exacerbate the difficulties of poor and marginalized population groups. It is just these people who often live in countries with weak institutions or no monopoly on the use of force. Instead, the necessary services are provided by non-state actors, further limiting sovereign influence and leading to new poverty and instability. To prevent those caught in this vicious cycle from abandoning politics altogether, the first step must be making state actors more accountable. Lack of trust leads to parallel structures and thus to a reduction of state services. What additional steps are necessary shows a study by the *Institute of Development Studies* (IDS) in Brighton, United Kingdom.

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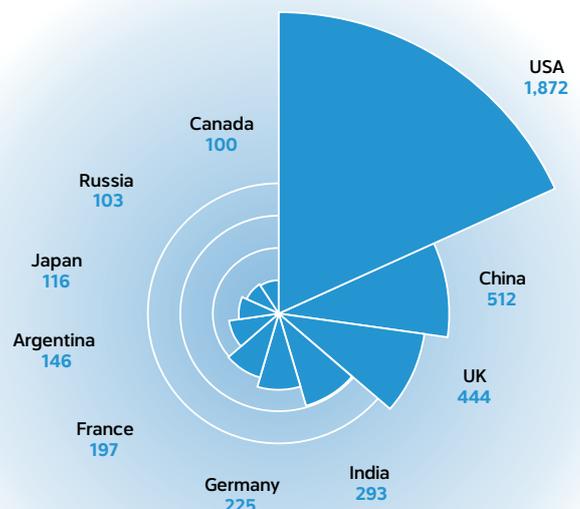
THINK TANKS

Dare more discourse

How fake news is redefining the role of think tanks

For decades, think tanks filled a pivotal position between society and politics. But while our societies are becoming increasingly politicized, resistance to "expert knowledge" has simultaneously developed. At the same time, trust in conventional power structures has deteriorated. This questioning of the prevailing political order and of the prominent role of science has undermined the relevance of think tanks. These institutions must therefore re-invent themselves and work on the core of their identity, mission, and justification for existing says the *Barcelona Centre for International Affairs* (CIDOB) from Spain.

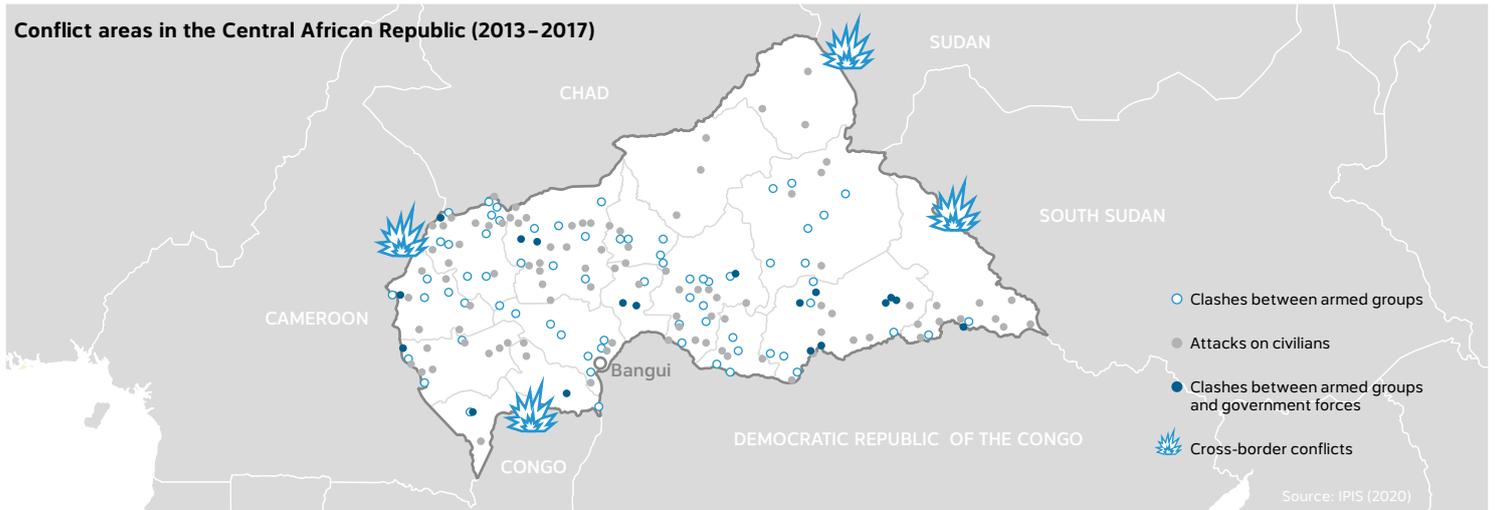
Origin of think tanks



Source: Statista (2017)

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PEACE BUILDING

Of central importance

What peace in the Central African Republic means for the continent

In the last 50 years, few countries have experienced more suffering, poverty, and violence than the Central African Republic. Various peace-promoting measures and processes, including the most recent peace treaty, were intended to end the instability and persistent violence in the country – but have so far been unsuccessful. The *African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes*

argues in favour of a process-based leadership approach. For instance, sustainable peace in the Central African Republic can be created only by an exchange of influence between elites and rank-and-file citizens. This requires the development of a new network of relationships and the identification of the structural causes of the conflict by all relevant interest groups. Why this is the only way shows a study by the *African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes* (ACCORD) from Mount Edgecombe, South Africa.

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HYBRID WAR

Faceless influence

The shift in political warfare

The 2016 US presidential election not only showed that political influence is not restricted to lobbyists and spies, but that the range of players has greatly expanded – and the most important newcomer is social media. The shift in information dissemination has long been irreversible and will hence-forth be another instrument for the politically powerful. The methods used in such attacks (bots, trolls, fake accounts, etc.), the aggressors, and their goals analyses a study by the *Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs* at Princeton University, USA.

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MIDDLE EAST

In the emir's sights

How Cyprus is gaining strategic importance for the Gulf States

2019 saw a stream of political emissaries from the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia to Cyprus. This underscores the new strategic significance of the partitioned island in the eastern Mediterranean for the countries on the Arabian Peninsula. The growing interest in Cyprus is driven by a combination of geopolitical interests: new gas fields off the Cyprus coast, easy access to the European financial system, tourism, and maritime security issues. But Gulf States see Cyprus primarily as the south-eastern gateway to the European Union and a practical communication channel to European institutions. What Cyprus becoming an interface with the Arab world would mean for Europe and what is to be expected in the future shows a new study by the *Italian Institute for International Political Studies* (ISPI) in Milan, Italy.

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OBSERVED



PROLIFERATION

Open fire!

A new database illustrates the fragmented state of US guns laws

There is scarcely a western country with a more influential gun lobby and weaker and less comprehensible gun laws than the United States of America. Most gun laws in the US are enacted at the state level. But to forecast the effects of new gun laws, one must understand existing ones. To this end, the *Rand Corporation* has now created a well-organized database that allows comparison of all US gun laws. It includes 17 classes of gun laws and even more sub-categories. It can show how the laws in each state have changed since 1979 and the effects of those changes. This allows conclusions about what laws effectively limit misuse of guns in the US. [Rand Corporation](#), Washington, D.C., USA

SCIENCE

History you can touch

Museum visits are becoming interactive

Although 3D printing capabilities are still in their infancy, the technology is already an impressive component of industry and research. For instance, 3D printing allows not only the design and construction of carbon fibre wings and integrative cooling systems, but it also promotes the conservation and development of cultural education. Museums will soon be able to offer exact copies of rare, valuable exhibits and allow visitors to touch contemporary sculptures. The potential of this technology for museum exhibits and cultural heritage more generally shows a new study by [Bournemouth University](#) from Dorset, United Kingdom.

MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Speaking with one voice

Uniform European policy for more influence in the Mideast conflict

There is a strong consensus in the European Union on the significance of the political relationships with Israel. But in handling Israeli settlements, there is no uniform official message. The *European Council on Foreign Relations* considers this lack of unity to be a reason why the EU is frequently ineffective as a mediator between Israelis and Palestinians. A synoptic overview shows how EU regulations and international law could be completely and effectively implemented in European-Israeli relationships so that the EU speaks with one voice in the future and gains relevance as a mediator. [European Council on Foreign Relations](#) (ECFR), Brussels, Belgium


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VIRTUAL REALITY

The dual self

Timmu Tõke, Kaspar Tiri, Rainer Selvet, and Haver Järveoja from Estonia together founded *Wolf3D*, which operates a scanning app for smartphones that allows the user to create a digital avatar of himself. More than 10,000 people used the app in its first year.

The young company intends to use its 1.5 million euros of American venture capital to go much further and is working on a new product version that includes a 3D scan of the entire body. The scan will be used to create an entire individual avatar that can be used in computer games and a variety of other areas of life in future.

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SUSTAINABILITY

Excellent digestion

Loes Bijleveld has Dutch roots, but grew up in various African countries. There, she experienced for herself the huge organic waste potential that the continent leaves unused. She therefore founded her own cleantech start-up from her base in Côte d'Ivoire to combat rural poverty. Its first product line is *KubeKo*, a compact box that uses anaerobic digestion to generate biogas and fertiliser from organic waste. *KubeKo* can be set up at home, on plantations, or in gardens and run as an autonomous system. It allows users to generate biogas for such uses as cooking from their own organic waste in a very short time.

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EDUCATION

Child's play

Making learning fun is a challenge that Johan Brand, Jamie Brooker, and Morten Versvik, founders of *Kahoot!*, a Norwegian start-up, have taken to heart. Their app allows students to compete against each other while providing the teacher a good overview of the answers the students give. The programme has already met with great success in the US: Half of all students and teachers in the country use *Kahoot!* or have tried it in the last twelve months. But its success is not limited to schools – *Kahoot!* can be used to learn at work, in meetings, or at home.

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