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POLITICO 28 — An introduction

By **MATTHEW KAMINSKI AND TUNKU VARADARAJAN** | 12/2/15, 6:00 AM CET

You have in your hands a new publication. POLITICO 28 will be an annual affair — our version of the “chapeau” or “hats-off” magazine in which we acknowledge women and men of consequence, those who caught our attention this year and bear watching closely into the next.

In the United States, we put together an annual POLITICO 50, recognizing 50 ideas and the people behind them that are changing American politics. Here we’ve gone for a more local number: 28.

On a continent so large and varied, it takes a bit of chutzpah to distinguish — much less put an order to — a small set of people who are stirring and shaping European public life. And to draw them not only from among practitioners of the political craft but from the worlds of business, media, arts and beyond.

We started off by asking: Who are the most eye-catching people in each of the 28 states of the European Union, from Austria to the United Kingdom? Our aim — our conceit, if you like — was to identify persons who don’t command attention merely by virtue of the office they hold. So there’s no Angela Merkel for Germany, for example, and no Alexis Tsipras for Greece.

Senior editors solicited nominations widely and winnowed them down this autumn. The result comprises people who aren’t in obviously powerful positions or those with overwhelming popular appeal, but who are, nonetheless, on the cusp of power, where the greatest influence is so often exerted. Those on our list all have the ability to shape their sphere of impact, whether it be a country, a transnational activity, a legal system, a referendum, a religion, a crisis or even the very notion of European identity.

That last idea would explain, in part, why we have chosen Viktor Orbán from Hungary, and why we placed him as the person most worth watching in the months ahead. Though he comes from a relatively small state, the prime minister of Hungary has emerged in the migration crisis to challenge the Europe of open borders and its notions of representative democracy — in effect, the post-Cold War political order on the Continent — in ways that some find brave and others malign. The November 13 terrorist atrocities in Paris are sure to swing more people into line behind him, as European politics pulls in a rightward direction and attitudes harden toward migrants who want to come in and the “outsiders” who are already here.

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In a haunting essay at the opening of this magazine, Tim Parks, who wrote the 1998 novel “Europa,” dwells on the possibilities of just such a European unraveling, brought on by different expectations of the EU, clashing political cultures and an unrelenting avalanche of crises.

On this list, Orbán is joined by Denmark’s Margrethe Vestager, who is rewriting the rules of global business from her post as the EU’s competition commissioner. Britain’s Nicola Sturgeon and Spain’s Albert Rivera are both, in their own ways, reshaping their nations: One is fighting to leave hers, the other to keep his intact. And there are 24 others.

Ranking 28 European high-fliers is devilishly complicated. How to evaluate a Croatian entrepreneur alongside a Maltese humanitarian, an Italian constitutional lawyer alongside a Belgian musician, an Irish gay-rights activist alongside a Polish bishop? Our rankings are bound to please and displease readers in equal measure, but our aim has been to spark discussion and debate.

In confining ourselves to a selection of 28, we have had to exclude others; people of equally vigorous effect, beguiling people who make a difference.

We think you’ll find, in looking at POLITICO 28, that we’ve covered deserving candidates, and have also ventured, where necessary, into more contentious territory.

The beauty of the exercise is that it will never get easier. We anticipate a struggle next year — over names and placements — that matches the excitement and fierceness of this year’s selection.

Find out who made the cut here.

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