

WEEKLY ASADO

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Latin American Program
The Argentina Project
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Nisman probe: Murder was the case that they gave me

In a recent federal court filing, Argentina's Gendarmeria officially declared that Alberto Nisman was murdered. That conclusion – based upon analysis by 28 forensic experts – was welcomed by Argentines who deeply mistrusted the original investigation following Mr. Nisman's mysterious death in 2015. Initially, investigators said the special prosecutor, who died of a gunshot wound to the head, had taken his own life. But many rejected that conclusion, including Mr. Nisman's former wife, a federal judge. After all, Mr. Nisman, who for years doggedly investigated the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, died only days before he was scheduled to present evidence to lawmakers that then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner conspired with Iran to sabotage the inquiry. The former president denied Mr. Nisman's allegations, and quickly accepted the suicide hypothesis. But she later added to the mystery, issuing a statement that suggested Mr. Nisman had been killed.

Heraldo Muñoz: An ocean divides us

Chilean Foreign Minister Heraldo Muñoz, in remarks at the Wilson Center on September 28, hinted at growing U.S. isolation in the hemisphere. Muñoz – an erudite diplomat with a Ph.D. from the University of Denver – avoided direct criticism of the Trump administration. However, his list of Chile's top global priorities was telling: salvaging free trade following the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and addressing ocean conservation and the “frightening impacts of climate change” following the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris agreement. Relations between Argentina and the United States face a comparable disorientation. President Mauricio Macri is an energetic supporter of the Paris agreement and in December, Argentina will host the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting, the first South American country to organize the biennial gathering.



BBQ Bus: Pulled pork in Colonia

Am I the only one who drives by [BBQ Bus](#), on Georgia Avenue, and mistakes it for a [Buquebus](#) terminal?

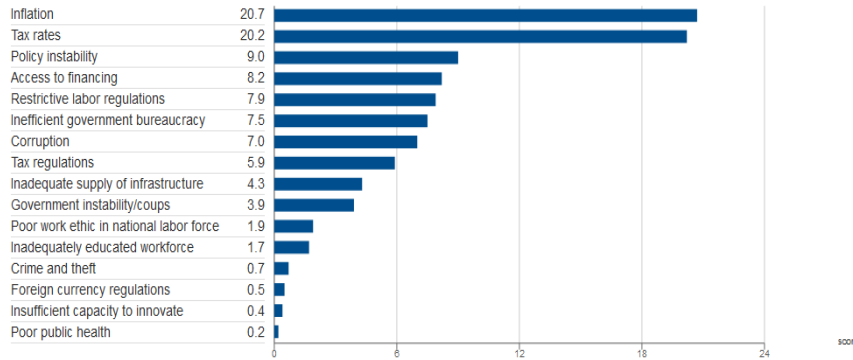
GSP talks: Tempone in town

A senior Argentine negotiator reportedly visited the Office of the United States Trade Representative on September 27 to press for renewed access to the Generalized System of Preferences program. GSP eliminates tariffs on imports from participating countries, and Argentina enjoyed its benefits until 2012, when it was [suspended](#) for failing to honor international arbitral awards. Ms. Fernández de Kirchner settled those claims in 2013 and for more than a year, Mr. Macri has been pleading to rejoin the program. Readmission, however, has been a moving target; it is linked to concerns about inadequate intellectual property rights protection in Argentina, and apparently also lumped in with U.S. demands for greater market access. In its most recent attempt to press its case, Argentina dispatched Eduardo Tempone, the director for multilateral economic negotiations at the foreign ministry, to Washington.



Argentina [leapt](#) ten positions in this year’s Global Competitiveness Index, buoyed by increased trust in government institutions under Mr. Macri. Its scores on technological adoption and innovation also improved. That said, *the country has a long way to go*. Overall, Argentina ranked just 92nd out of 137 countries, weighed down by high inflation and taxes, as well as “policy instability.” (The score reflects a country’s business climate according to the World Economic Forum’s 12 categories, including infrastructure, educational quality and market efficiency.) Chile – despite what Dr. Muñoz described as *crescending ennuï* – had the highest score in the region ([33rd](#) over all).

Most problematic factors for doing business



(Source: WEF Argentina Rankings)

G-20: The hot-seat

The Argentina Project [is hosting](#) Argentina’s G-20 Sherpa, Pedro Villagra Delgado, on Friday at 3 p.m. at the Wilson Center. Argentina holds the G-20 presidency beginning in December, and it will host the leaders’ summit in Buenos Aires. Ambassador Villagra – a career diplomat who has served as vice foreign minister – was Argentina’s ambassador to Australia for 11 years, including in 2014, when Australia hosted the G-20 summit in Brisbane.

Mercosur: Glory days

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s September visit to Argentina drew attention to the improved diplomatic relationship, and the still open wounds from the Israeli Embassy and AMIA bombings. But it was also a reminder of Mercosur’s glory days. In its initial phase, Mercosur was an unexpected success; not only did trade among members skyrocket – ballooning from \$4 billion in 1990 to \$40 billion in 2000 – but the bloc also looked outward, signing free trade agreements with four countries, including Israel. Infamously, it has [stagnated](#) ever since. Mercosur’s proposed free trade agreement with Europe, for example, *has been under discussion for 18 years*.

The big mo': Hopeful trends for Macri’s midterms

Sixteen days from the midterm elections, experts predict a strong performance by Cambiemos, Mr. Macri's coalition. In the September Poliarquía survey, support for Mr. Macri was 54 percent, up two points, and consumer confidence had increased seven points in the past month. (Consumer confidence is now 20 percentage points higher than a year ago.) Ms. Fernández de Kirchner still hopes to sap Cambiemos's momentum. In her campaign against Esteban Bullrich in the Buenos Aires Province Senate race, she is focused on Mr. Macri's austerity policies. The spending cuts are significant; the proposed budget for next year reduces subsidies – including for energy and transportation – to 12 percent of total spending, down from 22 percent during the last year of the Fernández de Kirchner administration, according to a Cefeidas Group analysis. Mr. Macri's opponents also benefit from the country's stubbornly high inflation rate. The latest central bank survey found that inflation expectations for this year are 22 percent, compared to an official target of 12-17 percent. For next year, experts forecast inflation at 16 percent, far above the 8-12 percent target. (Undaunted, Mr. Macri told Bloomberg Television on September 28 that he expects inflation in single digits by 2019.) But the Peronists remain a divided force, and Ms. Fernández de Kirchner is hardly a unifying figure. In recent polls, Mr. Bullrich was ahead by six points.



The Knife: All the meat that's fit to grill

At the Argentina Project Sept. 27 launch, we got a dining tip: The Knife, an Argentine steakhouse chain, offers an [all-you-eat](#) dinner that includes grilled meats, appetizers and a bottle of wine for only \$35. That's less than a single plate of short ribs at [Del Campo](#), by Sixth & I. (The Brazilian *churrascaria* on Pennsylvania Avenue, [Fogo de Chão](#), charges \$57 for its *tenedor libre* experience.) The catch? The nearest Knife is in Woodbridge, Va., and the hourlong Uber ride costs almost more than dinner. For background on the Argentina Project launch, see [La Nación](#) and [Clarín](#) coverage. (Spoiler alert, there was no *parrilla*, but plenty of Malbec.)

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