

The German 'Schuldenbremse' crisis: a symptom to be taken seriously in Europe

Clara Bösche - 30 Jan 2024

The German budgetary crisis and its repercussions on Berlin's political choices, particularly with regard to the ecological transition and agriculture, ought to prompt a debate on the debt brake enshrined in the Basic Law. This debate is all the more necessary at a time when the European Union is seeking to reform the rules governing its single currency.



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■ Elections :



Results of the first round of the Finnish presidential election

The former Prime Minister and candidate of the National Coalition Party, Alexander Stubb, with 27.21% of the vote, and the former Foreign Minister and member of the Greens, Pekka Haavisto, with 25.8%, came first in the first round of the Finnish presidential election on 28 January. They will face each other in the second round on 11 February. The turnout was 71.53%. [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



Schuman Network

The Schuman Network aims to promote debate and reflection on European issues. Numerous contributions from think tanks on the international situation, the forthcoming European elections and the issues and challenges to be faced are available, such as those from the Centre for European Reform, the Brexit Institute and the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) which have recently been put online. [Read more](#)



A site for everything you need to know about the European elections

From 6 to 9 June, Europeans are invited to elect 720 MEPs for the next five years. The Foundation has set up a website offering a better understanding of the elections and the issues at stake, as well as information about the campaign, the lists of candidates and the programmes of all the parties in each Member State. [Read more](#)

■ European Council :



Charles Michel withdraws from European Elections race

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, announced on 26 January that he was withdrawing his candidacy for the European elections, which he had announced on 6 January. This decision follows the negative reactions triggered by his announcement, in particular because his election to the European Parliament would have led him to leave his duties at the European Council prematurely. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Strategic Dialogue regarding the future of agriculture

On 25 January, the President of the European Commission launched the "strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the European Union". It brings together farmers, agricultural cooperatives, agri-food companies, NGOs and representatives of civil society. The topics addressed are: farmers' incomes and living conditions; the ecological transition; technological innovation; and the place of the European food system in a competitive global environment. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Development of Artificial Intelligence

On 24 January, the Commission presented measures aimed at providing a framework for the development of artificial intelligence (AI). It intends to revise the European regulation on supercomputers to include AI development infrastructures, and to create an AI office to coordinate European policies relating to this technology and implement the future AI Act. On the same day, the Commission adopted a strategy on the use of AI by its staff, to ensure safe and reliable use. [Read more - Other link](#)



Drinking water hygiene standards

On 24 January, the Commission adopted minimum hygiene standards for products and materials in contact with drinking water, with the aim of reducing the pollution of drinking water by micro-organisms or harmful substances. These rules will come into force on 31 December 2026, and will allow materials and products whose use is validated by the Commission to be used throughout the EU. [Read more](#)



The European Union's Economic Security

On 24 January, the Commission unveiled measures designed to strengthen the Union's economic security. It wants to introduce controls on foreign investment and European coordination of export controls. The proposed measures also call for a better assessment of the risks of foreign investment in certain technologies, and for greater security in research and innovation, particularly for dual-use civil and military technologies. The legislative proposals are now to be considered by the Council and Parliament. [Read more](#)



Alliance of European Ports

On 24 January, the Commission launched an international public-private partnership to combat organised crime and drug trafficking in European ports. Regular exchanges between public authorities and private operators will highlight the vulnerabilities of ports and share best practice in the fight against crime. [Read more](#)

■ Parliament :



Supervision of new genomic techniques

On 24 January, the European Parliament's Environment Committee adopted its position on the Commission's proposal to regulate the development of new genomic techniques (NGTs). MEPs voted in favour of creating two categories of NGT, one that could be treated as equivalent to traditional plants (NGT 1) and the other that should be considered as genetically modified organisms (NGT 2). They also want to ban the patenting of NGTs. If this report is adopted by the full Parliament, it will form the basis for negotiations with the Council. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Valérie Hayer elected Chair of the Renew Europe Group

French MEP Valérie Hayer was elected Chair of the Renew Group in the European Parliament on 25 January. She succeeds Stéphane Séjourné, who was appointed Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs in the French government on 11 January. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



Meeting of Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers

At their meeting on 23 January, the agriculture and fisheries ministers were informed that the Commission would be launching a strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture on 25 January. They discussed the programme of the Belgian Presidency of the Council, and the importance of competitiveness and food sovereignty in the context of the ecological and digital transitions. [Read more](#)



Meeting of Trade Ministers

The trade ministers met on 22 and 23 January to prepare for the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting to be held in Abu Dhabi from 26 to 29 February. They also discussed the challenges of open strategic autonomy in terms of trade, and the crisis in the Red Sea affecting international trade. [Read more](#)



Meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers

The Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs met on 24 and 25 January to make progress on the final agreement of the Pact on Asylum and Migration, one of the priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the Council. They discussed the future of Ukrainian refugees, the fight against organised crime, and the dangers of artificial intelligence for democracy and information. [Read more](#)



Agreement on the fight to counter human trafficking

On 23 January, Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on the revision of the directive on trafficking in human beings. The agreement criminalises forced marriage, illegal adoption and the exploitation of surrogate motherhood. The revision of European legislation also aims to strengthen support for victims. It must now be formally adopted by the two co-legislators. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Diplomacy :



Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers

The foreign affairs ministers, meeting on 22 January, discussed the situation in the Middle East, and held separate exchanges with the foreign affairs ministers of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, as well as the Secretary-General of the Arab League. The ministers took stock of Russia's aggression against Ukraine with their Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba, and discussed the consequences of the EU's financial and military assistance to that country. Since the start of the war, European aid to Ukraine is estimated at €85 billion. Discussions are still under way to establish a €50 billion fund for the period 2024-2027. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Meeting of the Association with Egypt

The 10th EU-Egypt Association Council was held on 23 January, co-chaired by Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and Sameh Choukri, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The European and Egyptian representatives discussed the situation between Israel and Gaza, as well as their cooperation on human rights, the environment and the fight against terrorism. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ ECB :



Upkeep of interest rates

On 25 January, the ECB Governing Council decided to leave the three key interest rates unchanged. According to its estimates, rates are at a sufficient level to bring inflation down to 2% in the medium term. [Read more](#)

■ European Agencies :



Approval of two new missions

On 25 January, the European Space Agency (ESA) gave the green light to two new missions. The LISA mission, scheduled for 2035, will attempt to capture gravitational waves (distortions in space-time) for the first time, and the EnVision mission will send a spacecraft towards Venus in 2031. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Italy :



Adoption of the migration agreement between Albania and Italy

On 24 January, Italian MPs adopted the agreement with Albania on immigration management, signed in November 2023. As part of this agreement, two reception centres under Italian jurisdiction may be set up on Albanian soil to monitor the arrival of migrants on Italian soil. However, following an appeal lodged by the Albanian opposition, based on the violation of the Constitution and the renunciation of the territory's sovereignty, the Constitutional Court suspended ratification of the agreement and is due to issue a ruling by 6 March. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Poland :



Two former Polish MPs pardoned by the President

On 23 January, Polish President Andrzej Duda pardoned former Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski and his deputy Maciej Wasik. Their arrest on 9 January followed their sentencing in December 2023 by a Polish court to two years in prison for having ordered an investigation deemed illegal against a member of the previous ruling coalition led by the nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS). [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Slovakia :



Robert Fico in Berlin

On 24 January, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in Berlin. The two heads of government affirmed their support for Ukraine's accession to the European Union, as well as the importance of deepening energy issues with this country. Robert Fico said he was not opposed to European financial aid for Ukraine, but stressed the need for the country to undertake reforms, in particular to align itself with the Copenhagen criteria. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Moldova :



Resignation of the Moldovan Foreign Affairs Minister

On 24 January, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicu Popescu, resigned, bringing to an end a mandate during which he had been instrumental in opening negotiations for Moldova's accession to the European Union. Moldova was granted candidate status on 23 June 2022. Nicu Popescu has been replaced by Mihai Popsoi, a pro-European from the same political family, the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS). [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Ukraine :



Joint Declaration with Slovakia

On 24 January, the prime ministers of Ukraine and Slovakia, Denys Shmyhal and Robert Fico, signed a joint declaration to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. The declaration underlines, among other things, Slovakia's firm and constant support for Ukraine's European integration, the importance of Bratislava's participation in the restoration of the country and in humanitarian demining, and the development of technical military cooperation between the two countries. [Read more](#)



Visits to Kyiv by the Polish Prime Minister and the EPP President

On 22 January, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Kiev to discuss bilateral relations between Poland and Ukraine in the fields of defence, security and energy with the Ukrainian President. Volodymyr Zelensky also met the President of the European People's Party (EPP), Manfred Weber, on 23 January. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Council of Europe :



Winter session of the Parliamentary Assembly

The winter plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was held from 22 to 26 January. Michael O'Flaherty was elected Commissioner for Human Rights on 25 January. His term of office will begin on 1 April. The parliamentarians decided to exclude the Azerbaijan delegation because of its failure to honour its commitments to defend human rights and the rule of law. They appointed former Bulgarian justice minister Diana Kovatcheva as a judge at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). They discussed the democratic future of Belarus. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ NATO :



Turkish Parliament ratifies Sweden's NATO membership

On 23 January, Turkish legislators ratified Sweden's protocol of accession to NATO, thereby removing a major obstacle to the country's entry into the alliance. [Read more](#)



Defence exercise Steadfast Defender 2024

The "Steadfast Defender 2024" manoeuvre, NATO's largest exercise since the end of the Cold War, will be held on European soil from 31 January to 31 May. This series of exercises will train the allies for a scenario of aggression on the Eastern flank, including the arrival of American troops as reinforcements on the European continent. 90,000 soldiers will take part. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



Report on foreign interference in the media

On 23 January, the European External Action Service (EEAS) published a report on the manipulation of information by foreign powers and the dangers of such interference within the EU. It notes that disinformation is not only targeted at political actors, but also at civil society and public figures. China and Russia are named as being responsible for some of these campaigns, with the report emphasising that Ukraine has been particularly targeted over the period studied. It points out that the elections must be protected from foreign interference in the run-up to next June's elections, and must continue afterwards. [Read more](#)



Electricity market report

According to the "Electricity 2024" report published by the International Energy Agency (IEA) on 24 January, global electricity demand will increase by an average of 3.4% between 2024 and 2026. The agency notes that this increase will be met by renewable energy sources and nuclear power. These low-carbon energy sources are expected to produce more than half of the world's electricity by 2026. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Culture :



Opening of the Museum of Jewish Culture and Identity in Vilnius

Inaugurated on 18 January, the Museum of Jewish Culture and Identity in Vilnius presents 17 exhibitions on the daily, artistic and political life of the Lithuanian Jewish community. It is the first Lithuanian museum devoted to Jewish history and culture. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Exhibition of illustrations of Auschwitz in Warsaw

Until 25 March, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw is hosting the Hand of a Deceased exhibition. It features illustrations by visual artist Olga Siemaszko to accompany the illustrated edition of the memoirs of Maria Zarębińska-Broniewska, a former inmate of the Auschwitz concentration camp. [Read more](#)



Ukrainian Photography in Brussels

Until 23 March, the "Generations of Resilience" exhibition highlights 22 Ukrainian photographers from the 1970s to the present day, at the "Hangar" Centre for Photographic Art in Brussels. The collection presents the difficulties faced by Ukraine in its quest for independence and the development of democracy. [Read more](#)



Joséphine Baker in Berlin

The New National Gallery in Berlin is devoting an exhibition to Joséphine Baker until 28 April. The exhibition is entitled "Josephine Baker - Icon in Motion", and traces the artist's influence in the fields of dance, film and music, as well as her role as a civil rights activist. [Read more](#)



Max Beckmann in the Hague

The Hague Art Museum is presenting the "Universum Max Beckmann" exhibition until 20 May. The exhibition focuses on the work of painter Max Beckmann and its roots in the New Objectivity movement. Classified as a "degenerate painter" by Hitler's National Socialist regime, Max Beckmann is known for his depiction of reality and space, reflecting his experience of the European wars. [Read more](#)



De Chirico, Ernst, Léger, Picabia ... at the Picasso Museum

The Musée Picasso in Paris is presenting the exhibition "Dans l'appartement de Léonce Rosenberg. De Chirico, Ernst, Léger, Picabia...", until 19 May. The exhibition takes visitors on a tour of the reconstructed flat of the patron and art dealer Léonce Rosenberg, who collected a large number of paintings from the inter-war period between Cubism and Surrealism. [Read more](#)



Chagall in Madrid

From 2 February to 5 May, the Mapfre Foundation in Madrid is presenting an exhibition on the work of the painter Marc Chagall. The exhibition, entitled "Chagall. Un grito de libertad" reveals the artist's work in the light of the historical events he witnessed, from his birth in Belarus to his exile and settlement in France. [Read more](#)



Sculptures in London

From 7 February to 6 May, London's Hayward Gallery presents "When forms come alive". The exhibition brings together works by 21 artists from around the world spanning more than 60 years of contemporary sculpture. In an increasingly digital age, the exhibition highlights how artists draw on the familiar experience of movement, experiencing the poetry of gravity and the senses. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 30-31 January 2024

Meeting of Defence Ministers (Brussels)

 1 February 2024

Extraordinary European Council (Brussels)



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