

Letter n°1054 of Tuesday 13th February 2024

The BRICS, a geopolitical challenge overlooked by the European Union

[André Gattolin, Emmanuel Véron - 13 Feb 2024](#)

Overlooked by the European Union's foreign policy, the group of five states known as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) presents itself as the informal group that puts the "global South" on the international map. Strengthened by the arrival of Ethiopia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran in January 2024, this BRICS + grouping - which is set to expand - offers its members considerable freedom of political initiative. While it may present itself as embodying the new world order and resistance to the Western world, it conceals another reality: that it has been devised and designed by Beijing. Its expansion implies an increased risk of conflict: the European Union must urgently "offer its Member States a framework for reflection that is both open and anticipatory on this new political object, which still largely escapes traditional geopolitical analysis".



[Elections](#) | [Foundation](#) | [Tribute](#) | [Commission](#) | [Parliament](#) | [Council](#) |

[Trilogues](#) | [France](#) | [Hungary](#) | [Italy](#) | [Sweden](#) | [Armenia](#) |

[Ukraine](#) | [Publications](#) | [Culture](#) |

[Agenda](#) | [Other issues](#) | [Contact](#)

■ Elections :



Alexander Stubb elected President of the Republic of Finland

Alexander Stubb (National Coalition Party, KOK) has won the presidential election in Finland. He won the 2nd round of voting on 11 February with 51.6% of the vote, ahead of Pekka Haavisto (Green League, VIHR) who won 48.4%. Turnout was 70.7%. Alexander Stubb will officially succeed Sauli Niinistö on 1 March. [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



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 to help you better understand the elections and the issues at stake, and to follow the campaign with the lists of candidates and the programmes of all the parties in each Member State. [Read more](#)



The Schuman Network

The Schuman Network is an initiative launched by the Robert Schuman Foundation in November 2023. It aims to promote the sharing of ideas on a European scale and offers European think-tanks a space to share and pool research on European issues. Since its launch, the Schuman Network has 17 partner think-tanks across 11 European countries and around forty publications have been put online. [Read more](#)



Protecting the European elections

Make.org is launching the Democratic Shield, an initiative bringing together ten organisations including the Robert Schuman Foundation and Sciences Po, with the aim of preserving the security and integrity of the European elections in June 2024 in the face of the threats of interference and disinformation generated by artificial intelligence. [Read more](#)

■ Tribute :



Robert Badinter, working for European justice

Robert Badinter, former French Minister of Justice, who died on 9 February, left his mark on French political history with the law of 9 October 1981 abolishing the death penalty. His qualities as a jurist led him to exercise responsibilities at European level, participating in the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia, and he was also President of the European Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. A national tribute will be paid to him on 14 February at the Ministry of Justice. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Recommendation on reducing emissions by 2040

On 6 February, the European Commission recommended setting a target of a 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, in order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. It will be up to the next Commission to set a legally binding target for 2040, as required by European climate legislation. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Changes in the definition of "market" in competition rules

On 8 February, the Commission announced a change in the definition of "market", the area within which companies compete when anti-competitive practices are examined. The new definition is designed to take better account of the global nature of economic exchanges and digital developments. The aim of this revision is to be able to pursue a competition policy that protects consumers in the European Economic Area, without weakening European companies competing on the international market. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Parliament :



Framework for new genomic techniques

On 7 February, MEPs adopted the regulation on new genomic techniques. They voted in favour of creating two categories of NGTs, one that can be treated as equivalent to conventional plants (NGT 1), requiring no special labelling, and another whose products must be treated as genetically modified organisms (NGT 2). The Foundation recently published a study on this subject. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Instant euro money transfers

On 7 February, MEPs finally adopted a regulation guaranteeing instant and secure money transfers within the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). Service providers will have to guarantee access to payments within 10 seconds, 24 hours a day, with no higher charges than for non-instantaneous transfers. Banks will have to take additional measures to protect citizens against fraud. The text will come into force 20 days after its publication in the Official Journal. [Read more](#)



Exposure to hazardous substances at work

On 7 February, MEPs adopted a directive setting exposure limits for certain substances in the workplace. The rules concern diisocyanates and lead, and are designed to protect workers who may be exposed to these substances in the course of their work. They will come into force once the text has been definitively adopted by the Council. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



Approval of the Pact on Asylum and Migration

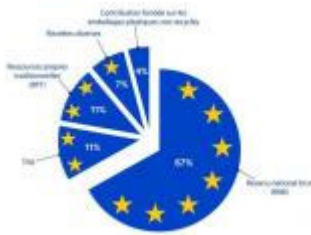
The representatives of the Member States have given their approval to the versions of the various texts making up the Pact on Asylum and Migration, following the agreement reached with the Parliament. These five legislative texts change the way in which migratory flows into the EU are managed, by reforming the asylum application process, shifting responsibility for the reception of refugees between Member States, and laying down specific provisions to deal with the instrumentalisation of human flows by third countries. The texts will now have to be formally adopted by the Council and Parliament before coming into force. [Read more](#)



Meeting of ministers responsible for cohesion policy

The ministers responsible for cohesion policy met on 5 and 6 February to discuss the future of this policy as the Union's main investment policy. They expressed their desire to adapt this policy to the economic realities of the various regions, and discussed measures to simplify European investments. [Read more](#)

■ Trilogues :



Agreement on the mid-term review of the EU budget

Parliament and Council reached agreement on 7 February on the mid-term review of the EU's multiannual financial framework for the period 2021-2027, providing for an increase in the budget. The revision includes the creation of a €50 billion facility for Ukraine, a €9.6 billion increase in the budget dedicated to migration and external policy, and an additional €1.5 billion for the STEP technology investment platform, via the European Defence Fund. The Parliament and the Council will now have to definitively adopt this revised budget. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Reform of the Budgetary Rules

On 10 February, Parliament and the Council reached agreement on a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact, the European framework for budgetary governance. When a country's public debt exceeds 60% of its GDP, or its public deficit exceeds 3% of GDP, the Commission will propose a reform path that will enable it to return to the recommended thresholds. The new rules will also encourage structural reforms and major public investment. [Read more](#)



Agreement on combating violence against women

On 6 February, Parliament and the Council reached agreement on the first European legislation on gender-based, sexual and domestic violence. The aim is to improve victim protection and redress mechanisms. The new rules will include, in particular, more aggravating circumstances for cases of gender-based violence, the criminalisation of genital mutilation and forced marriage, and specific rules for online violence. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Agreement on a European disability card

On 8 February, the Council and Parliament reached agreement on the introduction of a European disability card and a European parking card for people with disabilities. The aim is to facilitate the recognition of disability throughout the Union and to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the special conditions reserved for them in the Member States. [Read more](#)



Agreement on the reform of the Schengen Borders Code

On 6 February, the Council and Parliament reached agreement on a reform of the Schengen Borders Regulation. The revision aims, on the one hand, to combat the exploitation of migratory flows by third countries or non-state actors at external borders, for example by limiting entry points. Secondly, the text aims to ensure that the reintroduction of internal border controls remains a measure of last resort, in the event of a serious threat to public order and internal security. It also provides for emergency measures in the event of a health crisis. [Read more](#)



Agreement on support for green industry

On 6 February, the European Parliament and the Council reached agreement on the Zero Emissions Industry Regulation (NZIA). The new legislation is designed to encourage the development of industry for the technologies needed to decarbonise the economy. By 2030, 40% of the green technologies the EU needs will have to be produced domestically. The granting of permits for the development of green infrastructures will be facilitated, and certain territories known as "Zero Net Acceleration Valleys" will be targeted, in particular to host these industries. [Read more - Other link](#)



Agreement on the deployment of gigabit infrastructures

On 6 February, Parliament and the Council reached agreement on the regulation on Gigabit infrastructures. The regulation aims to accelerate the roll-out of high-speed communications networks - 5G and fibre optics - across Europe. The legislation harmonises and simplifies the administrative procedures for deployment, while promoting access to rural and remote areas. [Read more](#)



Agreements on environmental, social and governance criteria

On 5 February, Parliament and the Council reached agreement on the regulation on environmental, social and governance (ESG) ratings. The aim is to regulate the activities of operators who award ratings to companies and financial products on the basis of their compliance with these criteria. On 7 February, they reached an agreement to postpone application of the European rules on disclosure of companies' eco-environmental data until 30 June 2026. [Read more - Other link](#)



Agreement on the revision of the legislation on market infrastructures

On 7 February, Council and Parliament negotiators reached a provisional political agreement on the revision of the Regulation and Directive on Market Infrastructures (EMIR). The agreement includes measures to improve European derivatives clearing services, notably by streamlining procedures and strengthening supervision of clearing houses. [Read more](#)



Agreement on the complete phase-out of mercury use

On 8 February, Parliament and the Council reached agreement on a regulation banning the import and manufacture of the last mercury-containing products in Europe from 30 June 2026. The products concerned are certain dental amalgams and mercury lamps. The ban will mark the end of mercury use in the EU. [Read more](#)

■ France :



Government Appointments

The full list of the government headed by Prime Minister Gabriel Attal was unveiled on 8 February. The government comprises 34 ministers, 18 of whom are women. Jean-Noël Barrot becomes Minister Delegate for Europe. [Read more](#)



Gabriel Attal makes official visit to Berlin

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal travelled to Berlin on 5 February, where he met his German counterpart Olaf Scholz. The two men discussed issues such as support for Ukraine, the EU-Mercosur agreement and the European Pact on Migration and Asylum. [Read more](#)

■ Hungary :



Résignation of President Katalin Novak

Katalin Novak, President of Hungary since 2022 and the first woman to hold the post, announced her resignation on 10 February. Novak, who is close to Viktor Orbán, had been under fire for several days after pardoning a convicted child sex offender in April 2023, sparking outrage across the country. Judit Varga has also announced her "withdrawal from public life" for having given her approval as Minister of Justice, and will not be leading the list for the European elections in June. [Read more](#)

■ Italy :



Launch of the Southern Alps Cross-Border Alliance

On February 8, Christian Estrosi, Mayor of Nice and President of the Southern Region, and Claudio Scajola, Mayor of Imperia and President of the Province of Imperia, launched the Southern Alps Cross-Border Alliance in Imperia. This alliance is the result of several years of cooperation and should, in time, become a tool of influence to defend the interests of the Southern Alps region, following the example of the Euroregion established between France, Germany and Switzerland. [Read more](#)

■ Sweden :



Swedish public prosecutor closes investigation into sabotage of Nord Stream gas pipeline

On 7 February, the Swedish Public Prosecutor's Office announced that it was closing its investigation into the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, explaining that the matter did not fall within Swedish jurisdiction and that there was no evidence of Swedish involvement. The elements of the investigation have been passed on to the German judicial authorities, who are investigating for their part, as is Denmark. [Read more](#)

■ Armenia :



Membership of the International Criminal Court

On 8 February, the International Criminal Court (ICC) held a welcoming ceremony in honour of Armenia, which has just signed the Rome Statute, the Court's founding treaty. Armenia thus becomes the 124th State to sign the Rome Statute. [Read more](#)

■ Ukraine :



Josep Borrell in Ukraine

The European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, visited Ukraine on 6 and 7 February. He met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, and addressed Ukrainian MPs. During his trip, Josep Borrell reiterated European support for Ukraine and promised the delivery of more than one million artillery shells by the end of 2024. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Visit from the Secretary-General of the OECD

On 6 February, Ukrainian President Zelensky received Mathias Cormann, Secretary-General of the OECD. The two men discussed the progress made in Ukraine's bid to become a full member of the OECD. [Read more](#)



Draft Security Agreement with Denmark

On 8 February, Ukraine launched negotiations with Denmark on a bilateral security agreement. The negotiations are being conducted by the Deputy Head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Ihor Zhovka, and the Danish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lisbet Zilmer-Johns. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Publications :



"Our war. Le crime et l'oubli: pour une pensée stratégique" by Nicolas Tenzer

Essayist and expert on strategic issues Nicolas Tenzer has published a book in which he offers a detailed analysis of contemporary geopolitics in the light of history and current developments. In it, he diagnoses the ills of our times and proposes a roadmap for a new diplomacy of war. "Our War is not simply a book on geopolitics: it is a call to lucidity, a mapping of our gross illusions and our vulnerability", he writes. [Read more](#)

■ Culture :

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Giovanni Anselmo in Bilbao

Giovanni Anselmo's work is on show at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao until 19 May. Inspired by the volcano Stromboli, his work focuses on the order and cyclical nature of natural phenomena. The exhibition features emblematic works by the artist, as well as some specially created by the latter, who recently passed away. [Read more](#)



Laura Buckley in Galway

Until 30 March, the Galway Art Centre in Ireland is exhibiting the sculptural installations of Laura Buckley, whose works play with light, sound and surface. [Read more](#)



Stanisław Brach in Warsaw

Until 5 May, the works of Stanisław Brach are on show at the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. Through his use of natural elements extracted from the earth, Brach expresses his love of nature and his need to escape the city. [Read more](#)



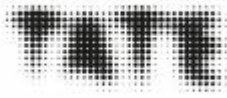
Frans Hals in Amsterdam

From 16 February to 9 June, the Frans Hals exhibition is on at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Visitors will be able to admire the work of one of the most influential artists of the 17th century, through some fifty masterpieces by this artist with his eccentric, free and innovative brushstrokes. [Read more](#)



The Dutch Masters in Bordeaux

Until 5 January 2025, the Bassin des Lumières in Bordeaux is celebrating the Dutch painters. An invitation to daydream, this digital creation offers complete immersion in the works of Vermeer, Rembrandt and Van Gogh. The three worlds succeed one another, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. [Read more](#)



Yoko Ono in London

From 15 February to 1 September, the exhibition Yoko ono: music of the mind at the Tate modern in London, honours the pioneer of conceptual and participatory art. This multifaceted performer has worked in the United States, Japan and the United Kingdom since the 1950s. The exhibition looks back at her artistic practice and explores her most powerful performances and works. [Read more](#)



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

The modernists who survived in Berlin

Until 21 April, the Staatliche Museen in Berlin is exhibiting a number of modernist works of art that were saved from the Nazi suppression of "degenerate art". The exhibition contains 95 works, including those by Picasso and Kirchner. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :



13 February 2024

EU-Armenia Partnership Council (Brussel)



14-15 February 2024

Meeting of Competitiveness Ministers (research and innovation) (La Hulpe)



16-18 February

Security Conference (Munich)



19 February 2024

Foreign Affairs Council (Brussels)



19-20 February 2024

Meeting of Ministers responsible for Tourism (La Hulpe)



The Letter n°1054

PDF

in English -- Edition of Tuesday 13th February 2024

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N° ISSN: **2729-6482**

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