

Letter n°1066 of Tuesday 7th May 2024

Nationalist obstacles and geopolitical blind spots: the specific case of North Macedonia

Katerina Kolozova - 07 May 2024

Against a backdrop of rising nationalism in North Macedonia, the Macedonian parliament has still not voted to recognise the Bulgarian minority in the Constitution or to introduce the other reforms expected by the European Commission as part of the EU accession process. While negotiations are frozen, the European Commission, which now attributes a geopolitical dimension to enlargement, must take a firmer line with Macedonian decision-makers as the country votes on 8 May for the second round of the presidential election and the renewal of its parliament.



[Front page!](#) | [Foundation](#) | [Commission](#) | [Parliament](#) | [Elections](#) | [Council](#) |

[Diplomacy](#) | [France](#) | [Italy](#) | [Georgia](#) | [UK](#) | [Serbia](#) |

[Ukraine](#) | [Eurostat](#) | [Studies/Reports](#) | [Culture](#) |

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

■ **Front page! :**



Europe: immense success of the 50 years of enlargement

The successive enlargements of the European Union have been an immense geopolitical success. "With freedoms regained, sovereignty guaranteed and stability assured, growth and prosperity have liberated these countries from totalitarianism which wanted nothing more than to live their national and European identities in freedom". It is true that discontent runs through our democracies, and we still have to convince people that the rule of law is a universal value on our continent. As we approach the June elections, and with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia knocking on our door, let us not forget the benefits of European integration. [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



Meeting with Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas

On 3rd May, at an event organised with Sciences Po's School of Management and Impact and the Robert Schuman Foundation, the Estonian Prime Minister, Kaja Kallas, spoke of Estonia's 20 years of membership of the Union, highlighting its economic growth and the benefits of this membership. She called for decisive action to support Ukraine and guarantee European security in the face of Russian aggression. She also called for greater defence preparedness and cooperation in Europe, underlining the need for strategic action to meet security challenges. Finally, she warned against the growing threat of Russian disinformation and stressed the importance of meeting citizens' expectations while preparing for future challenges. [Read more - Other link](#)



A site to find out everything you need to know about the European elections

In under one month's time, from 6 to 9 June, Europeans will be invited to elect 720 Members of the European Parliament for the next five years. The Foundation has set up a website to help you better understand the role and powers of the Parliament, the voting rules and the issues at stake, and to follow the campaign with the lists of candidates and party programmes in each Member State. [Read more](#)



The Schuman Network

The Schuman Network is an initiative of the Robert Schuman Foundation, which works to promote the sharing of ideas on a European scale. With 20 members from 12 European countries, the Schuman Network is a space for pooling research on current European issues. Since its launch, around sixty studies have been published on the network's website. [Read more](#)



European recovery plans: figures and priorities

In response to the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union has set up a €672.5 billion recovery fund. On 3 May, the Commission approved a positive preliminary assessment of France's third request for payment of €7.5 billion. The Foundation offers you an interactive map of the plans country by country, to check out the amounts and timetables. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



State aid for farmers and fishermen

On 2 May, the Commission adopted an amendment to the Temporary Crisis and Transitional Framework for State aid (TCTF) to extend for six months some of its provisions designed to remedy persistent market disturbances, particularly in the agricultural and fisheries sectors. As a result, Member States will be able to continue to provide aid of up to €280,000 for the agricultural sector and up to €335,000 for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to businesses affected by the crisis or by Russian sanctions. [Read more](#)

■ Parliament :



Cooperation with Belarusian democratic forces

On 3 May, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and the head of the transitional government of Belarus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, signed a letter of intent in Malta aimed at strengthening cooperation between the Parliament and the democratic forces of Belarus. The two leaders called for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Belarus. [Read more](#)

■ Elections :



Debate between the front-runners

For the first time, the main heads of the European party lists faced off in a debate in Maastricht on 29 April. Eight candidates for the presidency of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (EPP), Nicolas Schmit (PES), Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (ALDE), Bas Eickhout (Green), Anders Vistisen (Identity and Democracy), Walter Baier (European Left), Maylis Roßberg (European Free Alliance) and Valeriu Ghilețchi (European Christian Political Movement) addressed a number of issues, including the Green Deal, the war in Ukraine and the Middle East, migration and artificial intelligence. The debates were particularly lively when it came to common foreign policy. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



Meeting of agriculture and fisheries ministers

On 29 April, the agriculture and fisheries ministers discussed the EU's response to the concerns of the farming sector. Following Parliament's approval of changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), aimed at reducing the administrative burden on farmers, they examined potential measures to reduce workloads even further, such as a reform of the directive on unfair commercial practices, and the postponement of the implementation of the regulation on deforestation. The ministers adopted the so-called "breakfast directives", updating the rules on the composition, labelling and designation of honey, fruit juices, fruit jams and dried milk. [Read more](#)



Stability and Growth Pact

On 29 April, the Council adopted the new rules of the Stability and Growth Pact, with the aim of making them clearer, more favourable to investment, better adapted to each situation and more flexible. The aim is to strengthen the protection of governments' investment capacity and guarantee the credibility of these rules by introducing deficit and debt reduction mechanisms. The new rules should also give Member States greater room for manoeuvre. [Read more](#)

■ Diplomacy :



20 years of Enlargement

On 1 May, the European Union commemorated the 20th anniversary of its enlargement to include 10 new countries in 2004. Addressing MEPs on 24 April, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted the economic success of the new members since their accession, with agricultural output tripling and unemployment halved. At the same time, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, said that membership of the Union meant greater individual rights and opportunities for citizens. Charles Michel, President of the European Council, hailed a process that has been a "powerful engine for increased prosperity", and which has greatly strengthened the European Union's international position. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Trade agreement with New Zealand

On 1 May, the Commission announced the entry into force of the trade agreement with New Zealand, enabling EU businesses, producers and farmers to reduce their customs duties by €140 million a year. Trade between the European Union and New Zealand should increase by 30% over the next ten years, according to the Commission. European farmers will benefit from the elimination of customs duties on meat, pork, wine, chocolate, confectionery and biscuits. [Read more](#)



Economic dialogue with Japan

On 2 May, Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for an economy at the service of citizens and trade, met Ms Kamikawa Yoko, Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Mr Saito Ken, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, for the fifth high-level economic dialogue between Japan and the European Union. [Read more](#)



Hybrid attacks by Russia

On 2 May, the North Atlantic Council expressed concern about malicious activity on Alliance territory. These activities have led to investigations and charges being brought against several individuals in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom. NATO specifies that this includes acts of sabotage and other hybrid activities originating from Russia. On 3 May, the High Representative condemned Russia's continued malicious behaviour in cyberspace. [Read more - Other link](#)



Support to Lebanon

During her visit to Beirut on 2 May, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, discussed ways of helping Lebanon and its citizens. She announced that the European Union will provide financial aid of €1 billion for the period 2024-2027, aimed at strengthening essential services such as education, social protection and health, while supporting urgent economic, financial and banking reforms. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ France :



France's economic attractiveness

For the fifth year running, France has topped the league table of European countries in terms of business attractiveness, according to an annual barometer published by EY. Although the number of investment projects fell by 5% compared with the previous year, France remains in the lead with 1,194 projects to set up or extend sites announced last year, compared with 985 and 733 for the United Kingdom and Germany respectively. [Read more - Other link](#)



Strengthening military cooperation with Japan

French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on 2 May. The two men agreed to begin formal negotiations on a reciprocal troop access agreement to strengthen military cooperation between the two countries, against a backdrop of heightened maritime tensions in the Indo-Pacific and the war in Ukraine. [Read more](#)

■ Italy :



Italian Council of State ruling on beach concessions

The European Union and Italy have put an end to a dispute over beach concessions, following a ruling by the Italian Council of State on 30 April. Despite the European Commission launching infringement proceedings against Italy for non-compliance with the Bolkestein Directive, the Italian government automatically renewed the concessions, offering low rents to private operators. This new ruling orders Italy to issue invitations to tender for these concessions and recognises that beaches are a scarce resource. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Italian decree on the use of European funds

On 2 May, the Italian government approved a decree aimed at improving the strategic use of European funds received by Italy. The decree introduces measures such as a reward system for regions that meet spending targets, and aims to avoid overlap between the various European funds. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Georgia :



Protests against the "foreign influence" bill

Georgian MPs passed the draft bill on foreign influence on second reading by 83 votes to 23 on 1 May. The text must now be examined on third reading, despite the veto of President Salome Zurbishvili, who is opposed to the bill. The ruling Georgian Dream party has the majority needed to pass the bill, but the population has taken to the streets in large numbers to oppose this controversial text. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ UK :



Resignation of Scotland's First Minister

Humza Yousaf, Scotland's First Minister, announced his resignation on 29 April, thirteen months after taking office, as he faced two votes of no confidence in the Scottish Parliament. Yousaf was elected leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in March 2023, succeeding Nicola Sturgeon. His resignation paves the way for the election of a successor, with Kate Forbes or John Swinney among the potential candidates. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



New phase of customs checks in the UK

The UK began carrying out customs checks on certain food products from the European Union on 30 April, three years after leaving the single market and eight years after the Brexit referendum. This second phase of controls introduces physical checks for certain "moderate risk" food products at ports. The first phase, which began on 31 January, initially imposed health certificates for European exporters of these products. The UK government maintains that these measures are necessary to protect biosecurity. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Serbia :



New Government

On 2 May, the Serbian Parliament approved the formation of the new government, headed by Prime Minister Miloš Vučević, and comprising two ministers under US sanctions for their pro-Russian stance, Aleksandar Vulin, who became Deputy Prime Minister, and Nenad Popovich, who was appointed Minister without Portfolio. It includes 10 women out of 31 ministers. [Read more](#)

■ Ukraine :



Another step towards a "special court" to try Russia

On 30 April, the Council of Europe instructed the Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović Burić, to launch preparations for an agreement between the Council of Europe and Ukraine on the creation of a special tribunal to judge Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. In May 2023, the Council of Europe summit had decided on the creation of an international register to assess the damage caused by the war in Ukraine and to prepare the bill that will one day be presented to Moscow. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



NATO Secretary General visits Kyiv

On 29 April, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg travelled to Kyiv to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. He reiterated that Ukraine's membership of NATO was 'irreversible', and welcomed the commitment of Alliance members to assist Ukraine militarily. Volodymyr Zelensky repeated the urgent need for arms deliveries, in particular anti-aircraft systems. The two men discussed the forthcoming NATO summit in Washington in July. [Read more - Other link](#)



British aid to Ukraine

On 2 May, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron travelled to Kyiv to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Zelensky thanked his guest for the announcement of further British military aid on 24 April. David Cameron said that British aid to Ukraine would amount to £3 billion a year "for as long as it takes". Negotiations were also launched on a 100-year bilateral trade, security, cultural, technological and scientific partnership. [Read more - Other link - Other link](#)

■ Eurostat :



Rebound in growth and stable inflation

On 30 April, Eurostat announced that GDP in the eurozone and the European Union rose by 0.3% in the first quarter compared with the previous quarter, when it was 0.1% in the eurozone and remained stable in the Union. Compared with the same period in 2023, seasonally adjusted GDP rose by 0.4% in the eurozone and by 0.5% in the Union. Inflation remained stable in the eurozone, estimated at 2.4% in April. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



Uncertainty surrounding agriculture

On 3 May, the Commission published the spring edition of its report on the outlook for the European agricultural market. The report shows that agriculture continues to be affected by a number of events beyond farmers' control, such as the climatic and geopolitical crises, which continue to put pressure on them. It notes that since the last report in the autumn, energy, fertiliser and feed prices are well above pre-Covid-19 levels. [Read more](#)



Annual report on press freedom

Reporters Without Borders published its annual report on press freedom around the world on 3 May. Norway, Denmark and Sweden occupy the top three places among the countries in which press freedom is best protected. The report warns of the risk of strong pressure on the press, with conditions for the exercise of journalism deteriorating in the face of widespread disinformation and censorship of the media on spurious charges of undermining national security or terrorism. The proportion of countries in which the situation is judged to be "good" or "fairly good" is falling in the world rankings. [Read more](#)



OECD revises its growth forecasts upwards

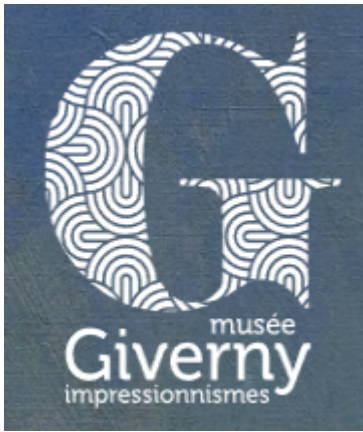
On May 2, the OECD raised its global growth forecast for 2024 to 3.1% from 2.9% in February. It attributes this increase to the dynamic economic recovery in the United States and strong growth in emerging countries, including India and Brazil. But the OECD insists that these forecasts are uncertain, due to geopolitical tensions. [Read more](#)

■ Culture :



Europe and the Thirty Years War in Brussels

The "Bellum & Artes" exhibition runs until 12 January 2025 at the House of European History in Brussels. It focuses on the role of the arts during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), exploring the complex interaction between conflict and artistic expression. The exhibition offers an in-depth look at this first pan-European war and reveals how the arts were used both as tools of military propaganda and as vehicles for peace. [Read more](#)



Impressionism and the Sea in Giverny

The Musée des Impressionismes in Giverny is celebrating one hundred and fifty years of Impressionism with an exhibition entitled "Impressionism and the Sea", on show until 30 June. Although the theme of the sea seems intrinsic to Impressionism, the subject has only been touched on in part. The exhibition presents a different vision of the Impressionists' attraction to the sea. [Read more](#)



"Contemporary Collecting" in London

Contemporary Collecting" is on show at the British Museum in London until 29 September. It features some 100 prints and drawings of contemporary British art dating from 1960 to the present day. Artists such as David Hockney, Michael Craig-Martin and Cornelia Parker are on show, illustrating the diversity of this artistic period and drawing inspiration from historical themes or linked to contemporary politics. [Read more](#)



Exhibition on women in Porquerolles

The Fondation Carmignac is honouring women with the exhibition "The Infinite Woman" at the Villa Carmignac on the island of Porquerolles, until 3 November. Some sixty artists from a wide range of artistic backgrounds are taking part in this exhibition, which offers a rereading of classical mythologies through contemporary narratives centred on women. "The Infinite Woman" shows the potential for liberation from Western standards of beauty and the prospect of new ideals for the body. [Read more](#)



Muzeum
Narodowe
we Wrocławiu

Aśka Borof in Wrocław

Until 18 August, the exhibition 'Banal Mystery' by artist Aśka Borof is being held at the National Museum in Wrocław. In a world where religion is steeped in magic, the Polish artist questions the dreams, superstitions and beliefs that characterise human existence from birth to death. Her works are produced using traditional techniques such as embroidery, painting on glass and cutting. [Read more](#)

PEGGY
GUGGENHEIM
COLLECTION

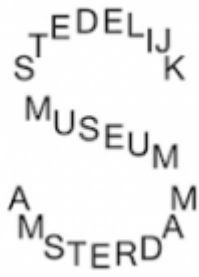
Jean Cocteau in Venice

The exhibition "Jean Cocteau: La Revanche du Jongleur" is on at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice until 16 September. It is a retrospective devoted to Jean Cocteau, a leading figure on the 20th-century French art scene. It highlights the diversity of Cocteau's talents as a poet, artist, novelist, playwright and film-maker. A variety of objects, photographs, documentaries and films made by Cocteau himself are on display, illustrating his avant-garde spirit. [Read more](#)



200 years of Beethoven's 9th Symphony

On 7 May, Arte celebrates the bicentenary of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its famous Ode to Joy. To mark the occasion, the channel will be broadcasting the symphony's four movements live from Leipzig, Paris, Milan and Vienna, the four cities associated with Beethoven, with performances by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, conducted by Andris Nelsons, by the Orchestre de Paris, conducted by Klaus Mäkelä, by the Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, conducted by Riccardo Chailly, and finally by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Joana Mallwitz. Arte president Bruno Patino hailed "the dream of a new Europe set to music by Beethoven". [Read more](#)



Ana Lupas in Amsterdam

The "Ana Lupas" exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam will run from 9 May to 15 September. It presents the career of this Romanian artist, who emerged as one of the major figures in Eastern European art in the 1960s, offering a form of resistance to the Communist dictatorship. Using modest materials such as wool and cotton, this artist explores themes of resistance, individuality and the preservation of local cultural heritage. [Read more](#)



Silvia Bächli in Santander

Swiss artist Silvia Bächli is on show at the Botín centre in Santander from 11 May to 20 October. She uses her body, her movements and the objects around her as the starting point for her wall compositions, which are organised like musical scores, made up of fragments, intervals, rhythm and silence. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 7 May 2024

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (Bruxelles)

 7 May 2024

"Foreign Affairs" Council (Development) (Bruxelles)

 9 May

Europe Day

 12 May

Presidential Election (1st round) (Lithuania)

 13 May 2024

Eurogroup (Bruxelles)

 13 and 14 May

"Education, Youth, Culture and Sport" Council (Brussels)



The Letter n°1066

PDF

in English -- Edition of Tuesday 7th May 2024

 I download

The Letter is also available in:



 I love the Robert Schuman Foundation's Letter

The Letter's Editorial Team :

Stefanie Buzmaniuk, Helen Levy ;

Juliette Bachschmidt, Charles Devoud, Aiti

Syiemlieh, Thomas Richomme, Elena

Kuntel

N° ISSN: **2729-6482**

A question, a suggestion ?

Contact us!

info@robert-schuman.eu

Editors-in-chief :

Peggy Corlin

Publishing Director :

Pascale Joannin

[Click here if this email is not displayed correctly.](#)

**FONDATION ROBERT
SCHUMAN**

You no longer wish to receive our letters. {LINK}