

Letter n°1093 of Monday 23rd December 2024

The Foundation wishes you a Merry Christmas and invites you to meet again on January 13, 2025.

The role of local communities in European policies. Thirty years of cohesion funds.

[Fairouz Hondema-Mokrane - 24 Dec 2024](#)

'While the news usually focuses on the - sometimes tense - relations between 'Brussels' and the national capitals, the day-to-day life of local authorities is linked to the construction of Europe'. This study looks at the trilateral relations between local authorities, Member States and the European Union as regards the management of cohesion funds.



[Front page!](#) | [Foundation](#) | [European Council](#) | [Commission](#) | [Parliament](#) | [Council](#) | [Diplomacy](#) | [Court of Justice](#) | [European Agencies](#) | [Germany](#) | [Croatia](#) | [Estonia](#) | [Finland](#) | [France](#) | [Hungary](#) | [Ireland](#) | [Lithuania](#) | [Poland](#) | [Bosnia and Herzgovina](#) | [Georgia](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [Ukraine](#) | [Studies/Reports](#) | [Culture](#) |

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

■ **Front page! :**



2024: an erratic year

In an unstable and erratic world, Europe is being tossed about and battered, and the challenges are many. For Jean-Dominique Giuliani, Europe must adapt to ensure and guarantee its prosperity, to remain the cultural and political beacon to which its nations aspire, and to draw on the strength of enthusiasm needed to build a future as bright as its past. [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



Schuman Network, exchanging ideas for Europe

Initiated by the Robert Schuman Foundation in November 2023, the Schuman Network is a network of 21 think-tanks from 13 European countries. With 148 studies shared since its creation, this initiative enriches debate and stimulates ideas about Europe. The Schuman Network encourages exchanges between researchers specialising in European issues and facilitates the sharing of studies on a variety of themes. [Read more](#)



Offer the Schuman Report as a Christmas gift

The Schuman Report on the State of the Union is available on the Robert Schuman Foundation website. It contains detailed maps as well as analyses by eminent researchers and leading political figures such as Emmanuel Macron, Roberta Metsola and Ursula von der Leyen. As such, it is a great reference book to deepen your knowledge of the European Union and makes an excellent Christmas gift idea. [Read more](#)

■ European Council :



Conclusions on Ukraine, the Middle East, crisis prevention and migration

At their meeting on 19th December, the Heads of State and Government invited the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to take part in their work. The war in Ukraine was one of the issues discussed, and in particular the EU's financial support through the Ukraine Facility. Developments in the Middle East were also discussed, with leaders once again calling for de-escalation and reconstruction in Syria. There was also a strategic debate on strengthening the EU's role on the international stage. Resilience and preparedness were also discussed, particularly in the light of the Niinistö report. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Second part of the autumn package of the European Semester

On 18 December, the Commission unveiled the second part of the autumn package of the European Semester, which includes the following elements: the Commission's proposal for a recommendation on the economic policy of the euro zone for 2025, the 2025 report on the alert mechanism and the Commission's proposal for the Joint Employment Report 2025. [Read more](#)



Double legal action against the United Kingdom

On 16 December, the European Commission announced its intention to bring two separate actions against the United Kingdom before the Court of Justice of the European Union. The first concerns the failure to respect the right of free movement of EU citizens and their family members at the end of 2020, a situation that continues to affect EU citizens under the Withdrawal Agreement. The second concerns bilateral investment treaties between the United Kingdom and six EU Member States, which should no longer be in force. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Launch of an inquiry into TikTok by the Commission

On 17th December, the European Commission opened an investigation into TikTok, in the context of the cancellation of the Romanian presidential election. The Romanian Constitutional Court annulled the election of 24th November on suspicion of Russian interference. The Commission therefore launched this formal procedure to determine whether the social network had failed to fulfil its obligations to assess and mitigate systemic risks to the integrity of the electoral process, in accordance with the Digital Services Regulation (DSA). [Read more](#)

■ Parliament :



New Parliamentary Committees

MEPs decided to set up two new standing committees, one on security and defence and the other on public health. They also called for two special committees to be set up: one on the European democracy shield and the other on housing. These four committees will be officially set up at the plenary session from 20th to 23rd January 2025. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Award of Sakharov Prize

On 17th December, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, awarded the 2024 Sakharov Prize to human rights defenders. This year's winners are Venezuelans Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia and Maria Corina Machado, for their commitment to the democratic opposition in Venezuela. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



Go ahead given to provide help to Member States affected by natural disasters

Following Parliament's decision on 17th December, on 18th December the Council adopted two regulations aimed at supporting Member States affected by natural disasters. The RESTORE regulation, on emergency regional support for reconstruction, allows cohesion policy funds to be deployed. The regulation governing the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development has also been amended to provide targeted emergency aid to farmers. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Meeting of Environment Ministers

The environment ministers met on 17th December to discuss the prevention of plastic granulate loss into the environment from production lines. They also discussed the proposed regulation on end-of-life vehicles. The aim is to strengthen the sustainability and circularity of the automotive sector. They also discussed how to achieve the 2040 climate objectives, through the prism of economic competitiveness and just transition. [Read more](#)



Meeting of Energy Ministers

The energy ministers, meeting on 16 December, examined the report on the future of geothermal energy. They unanimously approved the conclusions on the promotion of this energy and called for its development to be accelerated. They debated the future of energy policy, particularly with a view to an energy union. They reiterated the need for a transition to a clean energy system and the achievement of the European Union's climate objectives. [Read more](#)

■ Diplomacy :



Western Balkans Summit

The leaders of the European Union and the Western Balkans, meeting in Brussels on 18th December, discussed the further integration of the Western Balkans and their common future in the European Union. A number of issues were discussed, including the establishment of an economic base, cooperation on migration management, and the fight against corruption and organised crime. [Read more](#)



Future of Syria and visit to Turkey

On 14 and 15 December, High Representative Kaja Kallas visited Jordan to discuss Syria's future and establish criteria for further engagement. On 16 December, she appointed a diplomat to establish direct relations with the provisional government. She considered that the new government should expel the Russian presence from the country by closing Moscow's bases on its territory. Furthermore, Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission travelled to Türkiye on 17 December to meet President Erdoğan. She announced a €1 billion package for Türkiye to manage migration and border management, and to support the voluntary return of Syrians from this country, which has taken in millions of refugees since the start of the civil war in 2011. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Extension of operations in the Horn of Africa and Somalia

On 16 December, the Council decided to extend the mandate of the European Union naval force as part of Operation Atalanta and the military training mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia) until 28 February 2027. This decision follows that of 5 December to extend the mandate of the civilian capacity-building mission (EUCAP Somalia) until the same date. On 21 December, the President of the French Republic travelled to Djibouti to discuss the partnership in defence, security and infrastructure with his counterpart Ismail Omar Guelleh, before visiting the French military personnel deployed in Djibouti, who are making a direct contribution to peace and stability in the region. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Court of Justice :



Measures adopted regarding the attempted destabilisation of Moldova confirmed

The European Union adopted restrictive measures in response to destabilising actions in Moldova, which have intensified since the start of the war in Ukraine. Mr Shor and Ms Tauber applied to the General Court of the European Union for the measures to be annulled. The Court dismissed their actions on 18 December. According to the judges, the applicants' actions were fully in line with the Moldovan government's efforts to destabilise the country, to which the restrictive measures in question were intended to respond. The Court thus confirms the legitimacy of these measures in the context of the EU's common foreign and security policy. [Read more](#)

■ European Agencies :



Launch of Iris2 Project

On 16th December, the European Commission and the European Space Agency (ESA) signed a 'twelve-year concession agreement' with the SpaceRise consortium. Led by three European satellite operators (SES, Hispasat and Eutelsat), SpaceRise will be responsible for building and putting into orbit a constellation of 292 communications satellites (Iris2). They will be distributed over three orbit levels: low, medium and geostationary. This configuration will provide effective coverage of connectivity needs, even in isolated or hard-to-reach areas. In addition, the data will be stored exclusively in Europe, thereby strengthening the security of the information. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Launch of the "Flight Emissions Label"

On 18 December, the European Commission adopted a regulation introducing an in-flight emissions label (FEL). The label will be operational from July 2025 and will be awarded to airlines operating flights within or departing from the European Union. It will allow passengers to view and compare the estimated greenhouse gas emissions of their flights. Airlines will be able to choose to participate in this label until 1 February 2025. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Teresa Anjinho elected European Ombudsman

On 17th December, the Members of the European Parliament voted 344 in favour of Portuguese MEP Teresa Anjinho for the post of European Ombudsman. She will take office on 27th February 2025, after being sworn in by the European Court of Justice. Her term of office is 5 years. The role of the European Ombudsman is to investigate cases of maladministration within the Union's institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. [Read more](#)



Bruna Szego, Chairwoman of the Money Laundering Authority

On 18 December, MEPs appointed Bruna Szego of Italy as the new Chair of the European Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Authority (AMLA). Based in Frankfurt, the agency is responsible for coordinating the actions of national financial intelligence units and directly supervising certain high-risk financial entities present in several Member States. [Read more](#)

■ Germany :



Vote of no-confidence against the government by the Bundestag

Following the implosion of the government coalition on 6th November, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz asked for a vote of confidence in the Bundestag on 16th December, which was not granted. This means that early elections will have to be held on 23 February. Polls show the opposition (CDU/CSU) in the lead. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Arms programme and reform of the Constitutional Court

On 18th December, the Bundestag's Budget Committee approved 38 military equipment procurement projects worth a total of €21 billion. One of the largest projects involves the purchase of four additional submarines, bringing the number in service to six. On 19 December, Germany's lower house voted in favour of a reform to protect the Federal Constitutional Court, which would lay down in the Basic Law the structure of the Federal Constitutional Court and the method of appointing judges. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Croatia :



Polls a week before the first round of the presidential election

A week before the first round of Croatia's presidential election on 29 December, incumbent President Zoran Milanović (SDP) is expected to win 35.49% of the vote, followed by Dragan Primorac (HDZ) with 26.91%, according to polls that show the gap between the two candidates narrowing. Independent candidate Marija Selak Raspudić is expected to come third with 12.27%. [Read more](#)

■ Estonia :



Nordic-Baltic Summit in Tallinn

The Summit of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a UK-led group comprising the leaders of 10 European states, was held on 16th and 17th December in Tallinn, Estonia. At this meeting, the members approved Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's victory plan, while confirming their commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and its membership of NATO. They concluded agreements to step up military aid and practical support to Ukraine, with assistance estimated at more than €12 billion between now and 2025. Finally, the leaders urged third countries, including North Korea, Iran and China, to cease all direct support for Russia, which is prolonging the conflict. [Read more](#)

■ Finland :



"North-South" Security Summit

At a meeting organised by the Finnish Prime Minister, Petteri Orpoo, in Lapland on 21 and 22 December, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, the Greek Prime Minister Kyriákos Mitsotákis, the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and the Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson discussed Europe's security challenges, calling on all Member States to invest more in defence. They believe that Russia represents a direct threat to European security. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ France :



European Support to Mayotte

After cyclone Chido devastated the Mayotte archipelago on 14 December, France activated the European civil protection mechanism on 18 December. The other Member States and the European Commission will provide emergency humanitarian aid. French President Emmanuel Macron visited the region on 19 and 20 December. The state of exceptional natural disaster has been activated. A national day of mourning will be held on 23 December. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Commissioning of the Flamanville EPR

The EPR reactor at Flamanville (Manche) was connected to the electricity grid on 21 December. The new-generation reactor, which was initially due to enter service in 2012, 'will be marked by various power levels until the summer of 2025, when the test phase will be completed', explains EDF. Initially, France's most powerful reactor (1600 MWe) will only operate at a quarter of its power. This new-generation pressurised water reactor is the 4th of its type to be installed worldwide and the 57th reactor in the French nuclear fleet. [Read more](#)

■ Hungary :



The Commission maintains the budget conditionality mechanism with regard to Hungary

On 16 December, the European Commission took the view that Hungary had not sufficiently remedied violations of the principles of the rule of law. Hungary had notified the Commission on 2 December of legislative changes in this area, but the Commission considered that this was not sufficient. As a result, it has decided to maintain the EU budget conditionality mechanism against the country, which has been in place since 2022. This decision involves suspending part of the cohesion funds allocated to Hungary. [Read more](#)

■ Ireland :



Meta fined €251 million

The Irish Data Protection Commission, acting on behalf of the European Commission, fined the US company Meta €251 million on 17 December. The fine follows a security breach that compromised millions of Facebook accounts in 2018 and the hacking of personal data. The fine is justified by the company's failure to comply with data protection requirements. [Read more](#)

■ Lithuania :



Defence Agreement with Germany

On 16 December, during a visit to Berlin, where she met her German counterpart Boris Pistorius, the new Lithuanian Defence Minister, Dovilė Šakalienė, signed an agreement for the delivery of 44 Leopard 2A tanks. This arms contract is the 'largest in Lithuania's history'. The two ministers also reiterated their support for Ukraine. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Poland :



New rules on asylum and tighter border controls

On 18th December, the government adopted several bills on immigration and asylum. It stated that it had no intention of denying anyone the right to asylum, but that this right was now being used by Belarus and Russia as a tool of hybrid warfare against Poland and the European Union. [Read more](#)

■ Bosnia and Herzegovina :



Cooperation with Frontex

On 18 December, the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina signed an agreement allowing the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to deploy officers with executive powers to support the Bosnian authorities in their border management operations. This agreement, which covers Frontex's operational activities, was concluded at the request of Bosnia and Herzegovina in response to persistent migratory pressure in the Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina has already been cooperating with Europol and Eurojust for several months, and is thus strengthening its partnership with the European Union. [Read more](#)

■ Georgia :



Salomé Zourabichvili speaks to the European Parliament

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili gave a speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 18th December, which was greeted with a standing ovation. 'You must use your influence and act', she told MEPs, urging the European Union to exert pressure on the Georgian authorities and support calls for new elections. Georgia remains 'Europe's fulcrum in the region, a fulcrum that Russia is trying to conquer'. [Read more](#)



Protests continue

Protests continue in Georgia - in Tbilisi and in all the country's cities. In its final report on the observation of the parliamentary elections of 26 October, published on 20 December, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) reiterated its previous findings and conclusions on the pressure exerted on voters and the lack of independence of State institutions. On the same day, the European Commission proposed suspending part of the visa facilitation agreement for civil servants. From 18 to 20 December, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Alain Berset, visited the country to show his support for the Georgian people. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Switzerland :



Agreements with the European Union

On 20 December, the Swiss Federal Council and the European Union formally concluded negotiations on their future relationship. Negotiations were officially opened on 18 March in Brussels with a view to stabilising and developing bilateral relations. Both parties stressed the importance of cooperation in Europe in the face of geopolitical challenges. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Ukraine :



Visit by Donald Tusk to Lviv

On 17th December, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk held talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during a visit to Lviv. Donald Tusk declared that Poland would act in favour of Ukraine's aspirations to join the European Union during the Polish Presidency of the Council in the first half of 2025. He said Poland would continue to support its embattled neighbour with a new military aid programme, the forthcoming opening of a new border crossing and its agreement to Kyiv's integration into the Atlantic Alliance. [Read more](#)



European Defence Commissioner in Ukraine

On 14th December, the European Commissioner for Defence and Space, Andrius Kubilius, visited Ukraine to discuss strengthening the Ukrainian arms industry, fruitful cooperation between European countries to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression, and effective ways of countering Russian propaganda. [Read more](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



Investment Scoreboard

On 18th December, the European Union published its R&D investment scoreboard. For the 1st time since 2013, European industry has increased its investment more than its American and Chinese competitors: 9.8% in 2023 compared with 5.9% in the United States and 9.6% in China. In 2023, the European Union was ranked 2nd in the world for private investment in R&D (18.7%), behind the United States (42.3%) but ahead of China (17.1%). It stands out in particular for its investment in the automotive sector, where it represented 45.4% of global R&D investment in the sector in 2023. [Read more - Other link](#)



Progress in accession negotiations for Albania and Montenegro

On 16 December, the European Union announced that it had provisionally closed three new negotiation chapters with Montenegro: 'Intellectual Property Rights', 'Information Society and Media' and 'Enterprise and Industrial Policy'. This is the first time since 2017 that the country has closed chapters, a sign of the acceleration of its accession process. At the same time, Albania opened Cluster 6 'External Relations' on 17th December. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Culture :



Pompeii at La Sucrière in Lyon

La Sucrière contemporary art centre in Lyon is presenting the exhibition 'Pompeii. Immortal City' until 27th July 2025. The museum is unveiling a three-dimensional immersion, recreating the moment when the city was destroyed in 79 AD by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The Lyon-based museum, in partnership with the Museo Galileo in Florence and the Museo archeologico nazionale in Naples, is offering a clever mix of fun and interactive activities to help visitors better understand this event. [Read more](#)



New Year's Concert in Vienna

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's New Year's concert will be held, as it is every year, on 1 January in the Golden Hall of Vienna's Musikverein. This event, considered to be one of the world's greatest classical music concerts, will be broadcast live on television in over 90 countries. [Read more](#)



Mozart and Strauss in Versailles

From 27 December to 1 January, the Royal Opera House at the Château de Versailles will be staging performances of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, written entirely in French and directed with an extraordinary dreamlike quality by Cécile Roussat and Julien Lubek. *The Magic Flute* is a tale of love, the quest for wisdom and the triumph of light over darkness. On 30 December, the Schönbrunn Palace Orchestra joins the Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal du Château de Versailles for an exceptional New Year's concert dedicated to Johann Strauss. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Agenda :

 29th December 2024

Presidential Election (first round) (Croatia)

 January 1st

Start of Polish Presidency of the Council



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