

**Letter n°1155 of Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

## What do the Balkan countries expect from the European Union?

Besnik Mustafaj - 12 May 2026

The integration of the six Western Balkan countries into the European Union highlights a divide between leaders who favour a technical approach to mask their authoritarian tendencies and a public that is calling for strict oversight of the rule of law. Faced with endemic corruption, people expect the European institutions in Brussels to act as guardians of democratic values rather than merely providing financial support. Without transparent communication and a firm commitment to combating abuses of power, public disillusionment risks permanently undermining the European ideal in the region.



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■ **Front page! :**



## 9 May: let us not forget... for the Europe of tomorrow

The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 marked a major strategic turning point with its proposal to pool European resources, thereby ensuring peace and reconstruction. 76 years on, the European Union, although transformed, is all too often seen as unfinished. A fresh impetus is needed to recapture the initial momentum and confirm the credibility of its successes. [Read more](#)

## ■ Elections :



### Early general election in Malta, nine months ahead of schedule

The early general election in Malta on 30 May, nine months ahead of schedule, is taking place against a backdrop of international tensions and debates over political stability. Prime Minister Robert Abela's Labour Party is leading in the polls with 52% of voting intentions, ahead of the Nationalist Party led by Alex Borg (43%). The election is dominated by issues of purchasing power and inflation, whilst matters of corruption, the rule of law, the economy and the international situation appear to have been relegated to the background, or are even absent from the debates. [Read more](#)

## ■ Foundation :



### New payments under NextGenerationEU

On 5 May, the European Commission disbursed €5.85 billion to Germany and Slovakia, bringing the total funds released under the Recovery and Resilience Facility to over €400 billion. As NextGenerationEU enters its final phase, Member States must submit their final applications by September. On 7 May, the European Commission gave the green light to Austria's fourth application, worth €325 million. The Robert Schuman Foundation provides an overview of the various national recovery plans on its website, detailing the amounts, timetables and priorities. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Commission :



## Combating poverty and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities

On 6 May, the European Commission presented measures aimed at ending poverty in the European Union by 2050 by addressing housing, employment and the reduction of child poverty. Furthermore, the Commission aims to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and plans to strengthen the strategy for people with disabilities up to 2030 so that their rights in all aspects of life are fully respected. [Read more](#)

### ■ Council :



## Meeting of Ministers for the Economy and Finance

On 5 May, the Ministers for the Economy and Finance adopted new rules to step up the fight against VAT fraud. They discussed the legislative package on market integration as part of the 'One Europe, One Market' roadmap, due by the end of 2026. The economic situation linked to the war in Ukraine was also discussed, in particular the implementation of the €90 billion loan finalised on 23 April. [Read more](#)



## Eurogroup meeting

On 4 May, Eurogroup finance ministers discussed banks' operational resilience in relation to cybersecurity, the use of artificial intelligence, and the barriers to cross-border banking consolidation and activity. They discussed the crisis in the Middle East and its impact on the energy market with Oya Celasun, Deputy Director of the European Department at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). [Read more](#)

### ■ Trilogues :



## Artificial intelligence: simplifying and streamlining regulation

On 7 May, negotiators from the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on amending the EU regulation on artificial intelligence. The text sets out a new implementation timetable for high-risk AI systems. It introduces a ban on the generation of non-consensual intimate sexual content and the production of child sexual abuse material. The amendments include a simplification component, notably to avoid certain regulatory redundancies and extend certain benefits to medium-sized enterprises. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Diplomacy :



### Stepping up cooperation with Japan on AI and quantum technology

On 5 May, at the fourth meeting of the EU-Japan Digital Partnership Council in Brussels, European and Japanese leaders agreed to deepen cooperation on regulation, research and industry in the fields of data, artificial intelligence, quantum technology and semiconductors. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



### G7 Trade Ministers' Meeting

On 5 and 6 May, the G7 trade ministers (France, Italy, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada) discussed industrial overcapacity, the supply of critical materials, reform of the World Trade Organisation and international e-commerce. Furthermore, they expressed deep concern about economic coercion, which they said was evident in arbitrary export restrictions on rare earths, and agreed to strengthen their response to current global imbalances. [Read more](#)



### Trilateral summit between Greece, Cyprus and Jordan

On 6 May, Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis were hosted in Amman by King Abdullah II of Jordan. In a context of high regional tensions, the leaders reiterated their commitment to stability, respect for international law and the security of trade routes, whilst deepening their cooperation in the fields of energy, infrastructure and food security. This trilateral format confirms the consolidation of a cooperation axis centred on the stability of the Mediterranean neighbourhood and Euro-Arab dialogue. [Read more](#)

## ■ Bulgaria :



### New government led by Rumen Radev

On 8 May, the Bulgarian Parliament approved the appointment of Rumen Radev as Prime Minister, following the victory of his party, Progressive Bulgaria, in the general election on 19 April. His government comprises 16 ministers, including four women. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ France :



### Deployment of the French aircraft carrier strike group to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden

On 6 May, the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle and the carrier strike group passed through the Suez Canal en route to the Gulf. This deployment is part of the multinational initiative launched by France and the United Kingdom in February with the aim of restoring navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. [Read more](#)

## ■ Hungary :



### Peter Magyar officially sworn in as Prime Minister

On 9 May, the new Parliament, elected on 12 April, held its inaugural session, during which Agnes Forsthofer was elected Speaker. Her first act was to raise the European flag over the Parliament building once again, after an absence of nearly twelve years. Furthermore, Péter Magyar was officially sworn in as Prime Minister by 140 votes to 54, with one abstention. He thus becomes Hungary's 60th Prime Minister. His new government is expected to be announced in the coming days. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Poland :



### Poland formalises the signing of the SAFE agreement

On 8 May, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk officially signed the SAFE agreement with the European Union. This mechanism provides access to €44 billion earmarked for strengthening military capabilities. Against a backdrop of heightened security tensions in Eastern Europe, this programme aims to accelerate strategic investment in the fields of air defence, anti-drone systems, artillery, cybersecurity and military infrastructure. As the first Member State to formalise its accession to the scheme, Poland is thus confirming its determination to establish itself as a key player in the European defence pillar. [Read more](#)

## ■ Romania :



## Government collapses following a motion of no confidence

On 5 May, Romanian MPs voted in favour of a motion of no confidence tabled by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the far-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR), which was backed by 281 MPs, thus exceeding the required 233 votes. It was motivated by opposition to the austerity policy pursued by Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan. It comes 10 months after the formation of a pro-European coalition government comprising, in addition to the PSD, the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Save Romania Union (USR) and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). The President, Nicusor Dan, is due to begin consultations with the parties with a view to appointing a new Prime Minister. [Read more - Other link](#)

## ■ Armenia :



### Strategic partnership with France

On 4 and 5 May, French President Emmanuel Macron paid a state visit to Armenia, during which he met his counterpart, Vahagn Khachaturian. Together with the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, he signed a strategic partnership. This partnership provides for the intensification of political dialogue between France and Armenia, the development of a partnership in the fields of security and defence, the development of economic and trade relations, and the strengthening of their cooperation. [Read more](#)



### 8th Summit of the European Political Community in Yerevan

On 4 and 5 May, leaders from more than forty European countries gathered in Yerevan for the eighth European Political Community (EPC) summit to reassert European support for Kyiv and welcome the progress made in the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia with a view to stabilising the South Caucasus. Against the backdrop of the current strategic realignment, discussions also focused on strengthening the European defence architecture, strategic autonomy, reducing energy dependencies and democratic resilience in the face of hybrid threats. [Read more - Other link](#)



## First EU-Armenia Summit

On 4-5 May, the European Union and Armenia held their first summit in Yerevan, marking a new stage in their political and economic rapprochement against a backdrop of geopolitical tension. The focus of discussions was on strengthening investment, broadening sectoral cooperation and consolidating a strategic partnership in response to tensions with Russia. At the end of the meeting, they issued a joint statement. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ UK :



## New sanctions against Russia

On 5 May, the UK announced new sanctions aimed at curbing the production of Russian drones, notably by disrupting supply chains, and at dismantling networks that exploit vulnerable migrants from around the world to support Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. These measures target 35 individuals and entities, including those responsible for human trafficking networks. [Read more](#)

## ■ Switzerland :



## Dialogue with Italy and the Holy See

On 5 May, the President of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin, travelled to Rome to meet with Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani. Their discussions focused on bilateral relations, competitiveness and security in Europe, as well as several international issues, notably the war in Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East. The following day, he met Pope Leo XIV and attended the swearing-in ceremony for recruits to the Pontifical Swiss Guard, which is traditionally held on 6 May in memory of the 147 Swiss Guards who fell during the Sack of Rome in 1527. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Ukraine :



## Ceasefire and prisoner exchange between Kyiv and Moscow

A ceasefire has been agreed to bring the fighting to a halt, with the aim of facilitating the return of detainees on both sides as part of a fair exchange of 1,000 prisoners from each side. Negotiations are currently underway, and the agreement has yet to be implemented. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Eurobarometer :



### The benefits of EU membership

On 8 May, the latest Eurobarometer survey showed that a large majority of Europeans view the European Union as a stabilising force and believe that their country has benefited from EU membership. At the highest level ever recorded, 75% of respondents feel they are citizens of the European Union. At the same time, record support (81%) is seen for a common defence and security policy, as well as strong approval of the European Union's response to the war in Ukraine. The Spring 2026 Eurobarometer was conducted between 12 March and 5 April among 26,415 EU citizens, as well as in nine candidate countries and the United Kingdom. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Studies/Reports :



### Progress report on the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum

On 8 May, the European Commission issued a progress report on the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, in which it noted progress across the board, particularly regarding the adaptation of legislation and the strengthening of transfer capacities between Member States. However, it notes that further efforts are needed to address the remaining gaps in the procedures and infrastructure required for the pact to function. With a two-year transition period from its entry into force, the provisions of the pact will apply from 12 June 2026. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



COUR DES  
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### Use of recovery funds

On 6 May, the European Court of Auditors published a report on the traceability and transparency of spending under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), a programme established by the European Union in 2021 to help Member States' economies recover from the pandemic. According to the Court, public information regarding the beneficiaries of the funds, the actual cost of the measures and the results achieved is insufficient. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Joint European Declaration on Migration

On 4 May, around 30 European states adopted a joint declaration on combating irregular migration. The text reaffirms the need to strengthen international cooperation to prevent irregular migration flows, combat criminal networks and improve the management of the EU's external borders. It also emphasises upstream action and the strengthening of legal and safe channels for mobility. [Read more](#)



## Coalition Against Drugs

On 4 May, several European states adopted a joint declaration within the framework of the European Coalition Against Drugs to strengthen international cooperation in the face of a growing transnational threat, by stepping up the fight against trafficking networks and their financial flows. It also emphasises a comprehensive approach combining security, public health and prevention, notably through early warning systems and treatment and rehabilitation policies. [Read more](#)

## ■ Culture :



## Picasso in Aalborg

Until 6 September, the Kustner Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg is hosting the exhibition 'Late Picasso', devoted to the last years of the artist's life. More than 60 works from the 1960s and 1970s are on display in the most comprehensive Nordic exhibition ever put together. [Read more](#)



*Musées de Marseille*

## Art Nouveau – Art Deco in Marseille

Until 25 April 2027, Château Borély in Marseille is hosting the exhibition 'Art Nouveau – Art Deco. Marseille at the Heart of Styles', dedicated to a major period in the history of decorative arts spanning from the late 19th century to the interwar years. Bringing together nearly 200 works from national and international collections, the exhibition highlights the continuities and breaks between these two aesthetic movements, from the naturalism of Art Nouveau to the geometric lines of Art Deco. [Read more](#)



## Cannes Film Festival

From 12 to 23 May, the 79th Cannes International Film Festival will take place under the presidency of South Korean filmmaker Park Chan-wook. A total of 21 films have been selected for the Official Competition. Finally, director Peter Jackson and actress, director and singer Barbara Streisand will each receive a Palme d'honneur. [Read more](#)



## Chopin Piano Festival in Pristina

Until 10 June, the city of Pristina is hosting the 16th edition of the Chopin Piano Fest, a key event on the classical music scene in Eastern Europe. Dedicated to the works of Frédéric Chopin and the art of the piano, this annual event brings together renowned performers and young talents for a demanding programme combining recitals, chamber music and artistic encounters. [Read more](#)



## Photo in Madrid

Until 13 September, the city of Madrid is hosting the 29th edition of the Photo Espana festival. A leading event in the visual arts and photography, it offers visitors the chance to discover the latest trends through exhibitions in the Spanish capital's major museums, venues and art galleries. Under the theme 'reimagining', this year's festival focuses on photographic creativity, experimentation and the exploration of the limits of the image, whilst questioning reality and authority. [Read more](#)



## Dublin International Literature Festival

The Dublin International Literature Festival takes place from 15 to 24 May. Since 1998, it has brought together Irish and international authors of fiction and non-fiction, poets, songwriters, playwrights and screenwriters to lead readings, talks, debates, film screenings, guided walks, events, podcasts and radio programmes. [Read more](#)

# ■ Agenda :

 11/05/2026

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

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 11/05/2026

**Foreign Affairs Council: Meeting on the return of Ukrainian children; First high-level political dialogue with Syria** (Brussels)

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 18 May 2026

**"Development" Council** (Brussels)

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 18-21 May 2026

**Plenary Session of the European Parliament** (Strasbourg)



## The Letter n°1155

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