

Letter n°1156 of Tuesday 19th May 2026

Medium-sized cities: the blind spot in European cohesion

Fabien Verdier - 19 May 2026

European cohesion policy, which has long focused on regions and metropolitan areas, has neglected medium-sized towns, which are stuck in "development traps". To address this blind spot, the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework should grant them greater recognition, provide dedicated funding for their revitalisation and ensure better access to technical expertise. The challenge is as much economic as it is democratic: reconnecting these areas with the European project to curb rising electoral disaffection.



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■ Foundation :



NextGenEU: Payment and approval for Latvia and Romania

On 14 May, the Commission approved Romania's fourth payment request, amounting to €2.62 billion, and disbursed €371.2 million for Latvia's fourth payment under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. To date, Latvia has received nearly 75% of its €1.97 billion grant allocation, and Romania has received 60.6% of the €21.41 billion allocated, comprising €13.57 billion in grants and €7.84 billion in loans. The Foundation provides a summary of the various national recovery plans on its website, setting out the amounts, timetables and priorities. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Simplifying rail travel

On 13 May, the European Commission proposed three measures to improve the flow of interregional travel across Europe. Passengers will now be able to book single tickets from multiple rail operators in a single transaction. The single ticket will provide better protection of passengers' rights, particularly in the event of a missed connection, through assistance, a refund or compensation. Finally, platforms must meet certain obligations to ensure fair and neutral access to the various travel options. These proposals aim to respond to a Eurobarometer survey, which called for a reliable European booking system. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



Meeting of Defence Ministers

On 12 May, the Defence Ministers exchanged views on defence industrial cooperation with Ukraine. They agreed to find ways to mobilise funds from the European Peace Facility (EPF). Discussions also focused on the situation in the Middle East, in particular the possibility of extending Operation ASPIDES, as well as the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose mandate expires at the end of 2026, and the possibility of a European mission. Finally, they approved €15 million in assistance under the EPF to strengthen the military capabilities of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. [Read more](#)



Meeting of Ministers for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

On 11 and 12 May, ministers agreed on a position regarding the Erasmus+ regulation for the period 2028–2034 with a view to negotiations with the European Parliament. They adopted conclusions on the status of teachers in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). They agreed on general guidelines for the new AgoraEU programme, aimed at supporting Europe's cultural diversity, and adopted conclusions on sports tourism as a driver of sustainable development. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Diplomacy :



Meeting of Foreign Ministers

On 11 May, the Foreign Ministers discussed the Western Balkans, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East. Ahead of the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 5 June, they held a debate on geopolitical developments and partnerships in the fields of security and defence. They adopted new restrictive measures against individuals and entities responsible for the deportation of Ukrainian children. Finally, regarding the situation in the Middle East, they explored options for strengthening Operation ASPIDES. [Read more](#)



First political dialogue with Syria

On 11 May, the first high-level political dialogue between the European Union and Syria took place in Brussels, co-chaired by High Representative Kaja Kallas and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Chaibani. Discussions focused, on the one hand, on strengthening cooperation and addressing regional geopolitical challenges and, on the other, on the EU's renewed support for the Syrian transitional authorities' efforts towards the country's socio-economic reconstruction. Signalling this support, the European ministers adopted, prior to the meeting, a decision restoring the full application of the cooperation agreement between the EU and Syria, which had been partially suspended in 2011. [Read more](#)

■ European Patents Office :



European Inventor Award

The European Inventor Award, presented by the European Patent Office, recognises inventors across a range of disciplines, celebrating their individual contributions as well as the European patent system, which protects inventions and encourages innovation. This year, the Award will be presented on 2 July in Berlin. In the run-up to the event, you can contribute to the Public Choice Award by voting for your favourite finalists. [Read more](#)

■ Cyprus :



Latest polls ahead of the election

On 13 and 15 May, the latest polls were published ahead of the general election on 24 May. The two main parties, DISY (centre-right) and AKEL (left), are running neck and neck with 22–23% of voting intentions, whilst ELAM (right) is expected to come third with 13%. Several parties – ALMA, DIKO and ADIK – are polling at around 10%. Against this backdrop, analysts anticipate the formation of a more fragmented Parliament, which is likely to complicate the constitution of a majority coalition. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Finland :



Finnish President visits Lithuania

On 14 May, Finnish President Alexander Stubb visited Lithuania to mark the 105th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the 35th anniversary of their restoration. The meeting with his counterpart Gitanas Nausėda focused on the security situation in the region, strengthening NATO's deterrence and collective defence, and the protection of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. They also discussed bilateral economic and defence cooperation between their countries, closer coordination within the European Union, and support for Ukraine. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ France :



Emmanuel Macron visits Kenya

From 10 to 12 May, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Kenya to attend the Africa Forward summit, which brings together stakeholders in the partnership between France and African countries. €23 billion in investment in the continent was announced. In a joint statement, the leaders of the participating countries reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism, whilst calling for reform of the United Nations Security Council to make it more representative. They also renewed their support for African peace operations and the need for negotiated political solutions, whilst at the same time condemning external interference. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Latvia :



New interim Prime Minister

The Latvian President, Edgars Rinkevics, on 16 May tasked Andris Kulbergs, a member of the United List (AS) party, with forming a government until the general election on 3 October, following the resignation on 14 May of the centrist coalition led by Evika Silina (Unity, V), precipitated by the crisis caused by drones intruding into Latvian airspace. The coalition, in office since 2023, lost its majority in Parliament following the departure of Defence Minister Andris Spruds, who was blamed for the country's air defence shortcomings. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Poland :



Warsaw celebrates 22 years of EU membership

To mark Europe Month and the 22nd anniversary of Poland's accession to the European Union, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has published a report highlighting the economic, social and strategic benefits of its integration. In this report, Warsaw highlights that its GDP has grown by nearly 130% since 2004, whilst its level of wealth now stands at over 80% of the European average. In the current geopolitical context, Prime Minister Donald Tusk's government is establishing itself as an economic and security pillar of the EU, committed to defending Europe's eastern flank and consolidating the EU project. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Romania :



Bucharest Nine (B9) Summit

On 13 May, the leaders of the Bucharest Nine (B9) – Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia – gathered with their Nordic allies, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The meeting aimed, in particular, to strengthen security and defence cooperation on the eastern flank. They reiterated their support for Ukraine and condemned Russia's actions, whilst emphasising the importance of a strengthened transatlantic defence industrial base. The meeting addressed the situation in the Middle East and the importance of strategic partnerships. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Ukraine :



Meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children

On 11 May, representatives from the European Union, Ukraine and Canada organised a meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children Illegally Transferred to Russia. Together with representatives from some 60 countries, they reiterated their shared commitment to stepping up efforts to ensure the return of every Ukrainian child who has been illegally deported. At the Foreign Affairs Council on the same day, new restrictive measures were adopted against a further 16 individuals and seven entities responsible for the illegal and systematic deportation of Ukrainian minors. Since the start of the war, Russia has deported and forcibly transferred nearly 20,500 Ukrainian children. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



Defence partnership with Lithuania

On 13 May, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda, signed a cooperation agreement in the field of defence as part of the "Drone Deal" initiative. The agreement aims to strengthen the military capabilities of both countries through joint projects involving equipment production, technology transfer and industrial cooperation in the drone and air defence sectors. The two presidents also discussed regional security issues relating to Belarus and reiterated their support for the progress of Ukraine's accession process to the European Union. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine

On 15 May, the foreign ministers of the Council of Europe member states adopted an expanded partial agreement on the Special Tribunal tasked with adjudicating the crime of aggression against Ukraine. 34 of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe, Australia, Costa Rica and the European Union have announced their intention to adhere to this agreement and to define the operating and funding arrangements for the Special Tribunal. Based in The Hague, it will be responsible for investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating those responsible for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. [Read more](#)

■ Prize :



Mario Draghi receives the Charlemagne Prize

On 14 May, the Charlemagne Prize award ceremony took place in Aachen, honouring the former President of the European Central Bank and former Prime Minister of Italy, Mario Draghi. This award, which has been presented since 1950, recognises individuals committed to European unity. The organisers praised Mario Draghi's role in preserving the stability of the eurozone, as well as his commitment to the competitiveness of the European Union. Meanwhile, the European Charlemagne Youth Prize was awarded to the Estonian project ATHENA, which focuses on women's leadership; the French project POL, dedicated to combating disinformation and promoting citizen participation; and the Spanish project Guanxi, which analyses relations between the European Union and China. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Trilogues :



Agreement on critical medicines

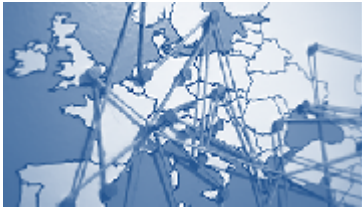
On 12 May, negotiators from the European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on a regulation aimed at strengthening the EU's resilience regarding the supply of critical medicines and the competitiveness of the European pharmaceutical sector. To reduce the EU's dependence on third countries, the measures include a preference for European manufacturing of critical medicines, as well as the option for Member States to use joint procurement. The medicines concerned are antibiotics, insulin and vaccines, as well as medicines for chronic and rare diseases. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Council of Europe :



Report by the Secretary-General

On 15 May in Chisinau, the Secretary-General, Alain Berset, presented his 2026 report entitled 'The New Democratic Pact for Europe in Times of Upheaval'. In particular, he calls for a legal and democratic framework on which European security can be sustainably built, and for the restoration of trust in institutions. In his view, the manipulation of information and foreign interference, combined with the erosion of trust in democratic systems, are undermining both the rule of law and social stability, thereby endangering European democracies from within. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



New European Treaty Against Illicit Assets

On May 13, the foreign ministers of the Council of Europe announced the adoption of a new treaty aimed at strengthening the recovery of criminal assets. This treaty aims to improve member states' effectiveness in freezing, seizing, and confiscating assets derived from illicit activities, particularly in cases involving organized crime, corruption, and money laundering. In this context, the Council of Europe is promoting an instrument designed to address existing legal gaps and harmonize national practices, as illicit financial flows remain a major concern at the European level. [Read more](#)



Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Migration

On 15 May, the foreign ministers of the Council of Europe member states adopted a declaration in Chişinău reiterating their commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights, the principle of subsidiarity and the role of the European Court of Human Rights. The declaration places particular emphasis on migration issues and the exploitation of migration by hostile states or actors. Member states nevertheless reassert their right to control their borders and migration policy, in accordance with the obligations set out in the Convention. [Read more](#)

■ Culture :



Bulgaria wins Eurovision

On 16 May, the singer Dara, representing Bulgaria, won Eurovision with her song 'Bangaranga'. With a total of 516 points, she won both the public vote and the national juries' vote, allowing her country to win this annual European song contest – which has been held since 1956 – for the first time. Israel came second in the rankings; its participation prompted a boycott of the contest by Slovenia, the Netherlands, Iceland, Ireland and Spain. Romania came third. Bulgaria will host the 2027 edition of the contest. [Read more](#)



Victor Vasarely in Budapest and Pécs

Until 16 August, the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts is hosting an exhibition dedicated to the Hungarian artist Victor Vasarely. The first retrospective in Hungary since 1969, it traces, to mark the 120th anniversary of his birth, his main creative periods in chronological order, from his early figurative experiments through the pure systems of geometric abstraction to the meticulous visual structuring of optical phenomena. Commemorative events are being held in Pécs, his birthplace, throughout the year. [Read more - Other link](#)



The French Navy's 400th Anniversary

To mark the French Navy's 400th anniversary in 2026, several exhibitions are celebrating the changes in the maritime world and the exploration of the seas over the centuries. Until 2 August, the Musée National de la Marine in Paris is presenting "The Navy and the Painters. Four Centuries of Art and Power", which explores, through nearly 150 works, the links between painters and the maritime world. Until 4 October, the Fort de Mindin Naval Museum in Saint-Brévin-les-Pins is hosting the exhibition "From the Royal to the National: 400 Years in the Service of France", looking back at the history and development of the French Navy since its inception. [Read more - Other link](#)



75th Vienna Festival

Until 21 June, Vienna is hosting the 75th edition of the 'Wiener Festwochen', a festival of contemporary arts. A programme combining theatre, music, performance and visual arts is on offer at over thirty venues across the Austrian capital. Under the theme "Republic of Gods", this year's festival explores the founding myths and collective narratives that run through contemporary European societies. [Read more](#)



Ravenna Festival

Until 11 July, the Ravenna Festival is celebrating its 37th edition under the theme "A sun has risen in the world", inspired by a line from Dante. This year, the festival is dedicated to the figure of St Francis of Assisi, to mark the 800th anniversary of his death. The festival features classical music, jazz, dance and theatre, across several of the city's iconic venues. [Read more](#)



Hay Festival in Wales

Until 31 May, the village of Hay-on-Wye is hosting the 38th edition of its literature and arts festival. Over 600 events are taking place in the village, including talks, debates, readings, workshops, performances, comedy and music, all centred on literature and creativity, and featuring authors and artists from around the world. [Read more](#)



Bernhard Rüdiger in Piran

Until 23 August, the gallery in Piran is hosting the exhibition 'Failed Again (Seventh Trumpet)', a retrospective dedicated to the artist Bernhard Rüdiger. It traces more than forty years of creative work through a collection of pieces combining sculptures, installations, drawings, films and sound installations. [Read more](#)



Art in Warsaw

From 21 to 24 May, Art Warsaw is organising a new edition of its international art fair, Villa RÓŻ, in Warsaw. Whilst retaining an intimate atmosphere and placing the emphasis on artistic quality, the event will feature 56 contemporary art galleries from various European countries. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 18 May 2026

"Development" Council (Brussels)

 18-21 May 2026

Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Strasbourg)

 22/05/2026

"Trade" Council Eurogroup (Brussels")

 22/05/2026

EU-Mexico Summit

 24/05/2026

General elections (Cyprus)

 26/05/2026

"Agriculture and Fisheries" Council "General Affairs" Council (Brussels)



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