



The European Trade Policy: Towards Less Naivety



Author: Anne-Marie Idrac

This week the Robert Schuman Foundation has published a European Issue by Anne-Marie Idrac, former Secretary of State for External Trade from 2008 to 2010 and member of the Board of the Robert Schuman Foundation on the European Trade Policy. The European trade policy is formative on a world scale: the European Union is the world's leading power in trade; this is one of the domains which is best covered within the scope of the community. Although the EU is playing a major role in the liberalisation of the world's markets, especially since many European companies are multinationals

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Contents

Front page! : Editorial - Bulgaria - Europe/Diversity - Club Rhéna **Financial Crisis** : Banks - ECB - Austria - Greece - Ireland - Italy - Latvia - Poland - Slovakia **European Council** : Agreement - Croatia **Commission** : VAT - Development - SME **Council** : Enlargement - Competitiveness - Iceland **Parliament** : 753 MEPs **Court of Justice** : Immigration **Germany** : Afghanistan - Immigration - Charlemagne Prize **Belgium** : Government - Programme **Bulgaria** : Retirement **France** : 2012 Finances - EPP **Greece** : EIB **UK** : Division **Ukraine** : Repression **Council of Europe** : Internet **UN** : Climate **NATO** : Future **Eurostat** : Migrations - Growth **Studies/Reports** : Equality - Inequalities - European Defence - Freedom/Press **Culture** : Exhibition/Vienna - Exhibition/Italy - Exhibition/Sweden - Exhibition/Frankfurt - Exhibition/Germany - European Book Prize - Freedom of the Press - Nobel Prize

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

Front page! :

Editorial



The Chairman of the Robert Schuman Foundation, Jean-Dominique Giuliani, has published an editorial on his site on the results of the European Council on 9th December. According to him "the decisions taken by the European Heads of State and government include many positive novelties, which reveal true determination to overcome the crisis of doubt and defiance.".. [Read more](#)

Bulgaria

On 19th December the Chairman of the Foundation, Jean-Dominique Giuliani will take part in a debate at the Bulgarian National Assembly,



on the occasion of the second anniversary of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Jean-Dominique Giuliani's speech will start with an analysis of the financial crisis, he will then reveal his ideas, notably the solutions that he suggests are necessary. On the same day, the Assembly will launch an information and communication campaign devoted to the most urgent European issues... [Read more](#)

Europe and Diversity



The Robert Schuman Institute for Europe in partnership with the Robert Schuman Foundation is organising an international conference on 16th December on the theme "Europe-Diversity" at the Centre de la Conférence des Evêques de France. The Chairman of the Robert Schuman Foundation will speak at a round table on the theme of "Education-Politics-Communication"... [Read more](#)

Club Rhénan



Joachim Bitterlich and Jean-Dominique Giuliani are organising the 7th Franco-German meeting on 15th December on the future of Europe with the Club Rhénan. This meeting will focus on the means for the European Union to overcome the crisis and on the foundations of a common, Franco-German defence policy together with Defence Minister Gérard Longuet... [Read more](#)

Financial Crisis :

Recapitalisation of the Banks



On 8th December the European Bank Authority (EBA) published an official recommendation and final figures linked to recapitalisation requirements of banks, which total 114.7 billion euros. Requirements are divided as follows: 13.1 billion euros for the German banks; 15.4 billion euros for the Italian banks and 7.3 billion euros for the French banks. These measures are part of a vast European plan accepted by the European Council on 26th October and confirmed during the "Economy and Finances" Council on 30th November, to remedy the present situation in the EU and to re-introduce stability and confidence on the markets... [Read more](#)

The ECB reduces its rates and supports the banks



On 8th December the President of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi announced that the Council of Governors had decided to reduce the main rate by 0.25 points to 1%. Moreover he announced that the ECB was forecasting a net slowing in the economy for 2012, with GDP growth of between -0.4% and 1%, with a slight recovery in 2013, between 0.3% and 2.3%. In addition to this the ECB will continue to support the financial sector via "unconventional measures". One of its leading measures is the launch of a three year loan, whilst it was limited only to one at present, and national central banks will be able to provide their support to the banking establishments of their countries from time to time. Mario Draghi finally called on the Member States to undertake emergency and structural budgetary reform... [Read more](#)

Austria approves the golden budgetary rule



The Austrian Parliament approved the "golden budgetary rule" on 7th December imposing a reduction in public deficits, but the grand coalition government (SPÖ/ÖVP) did not win the two-thirds majority required to include this measure in the Constitution. The law plans that as of 2017 public deficit in Austria must not exceed 1.25% of the GDP each year... [Read more](#)

The Greek Parliament approves the Austerity Budget 2012

On 7th December the Greek Parliament approved the 2012 austerity



budget, 258 votes out of 299. The three main government parties led by Lucas Papademos voted in support of the budget that is planning for tax increases and a significant reduction in spending. Greece is thereby falling in line with the requirements set by the EU and the IMF. The Greek Finance Minister Evangelos Venizelos also announced on 6th December that the government would continue to negotiate with private creditors on the reduction of the Greek debt... [Read more](#)

Ireland adopts further budgetary savings for 2012



On 6th December the Irish Minister responsible for public spending, Brendan Howlin presented details of further budgetary savings in 2012 to parliament. Of the 2.2 billion euros in cuts that were announced around 1 billion will be taken from the operational budgets of the healthcare and education ministries, as well as from social spending. Family allowances will be reduced as of the third child and allowances on heating paid to the poorest will be reduced. Moreover 800 million euros will be saved on State investment spending. Mr Howlin spoke of "difficult, painful decisions" but recalled that the country did not have the choice, after the international aid plan concluded last year to bring the country out of the crisis... [Read more](#)

2012 Forecasts in Italy



The Italian Treasury announced on 8th December that the government was forecasting that the country would enter recession in 2012 with a contraction of 0.4% of its GDP before a return to slight growth of 0.3% in 2013. Moreover, in a report delivered to parliament and signed by the President of the Council and the Economy and Finance Minister Mario Monti, the Treasury believes that growth is due to lie at around 0.6% this year... [Read more](#)

Moving towards the end of IMF aid?



According to a declaration by Latvian Finance Minister Andriks Vilks on 7th December Latvia is finalising an agreement with the IMF to end the financial institution's aid programme. Latvia had been benefiting from an aid programme to a total of 1.68 billion euros since December 2008. The Latvian economy grew by 4.5% in 2011. In 2012 the European Commission is forecasting 2.5% growth. It is also forecasting a decrease in the budgetary deficit of 4.2% in 2011 to 3.3% in 2012... [Read more](#)

2012 Budget Amended



The Polish government approved an amended draft finance law for 2012, which is planning for a GDP increase of 2.5%, instead of the previously planned 4%. "This budget should protect the Poles against the effects of the crisis, without taking any radical solutions. The crisis is not a good time for revolutionary change," declared Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Poland, which is not a member of the euro zone but hopes to respect the criteria by 2015, intends to bring its public finance deficit below the 3% GDP mark in 2012 as demanded by the Maastricht Treaty, against 6.5% this year, he said... [Read more](#)

Debt capped



The Slovakian parliament adopted a draft law on 8th December to cap the public debt at 60% of the GDP. Sanctions are planned for from the moment the debt rises to 50% of the GDP and the government will have to establish a balanced budget as soon as the debt reaches 57% of the GDP... [Read more](#)

European Council :

Agreement on euro zone governance

On 9th December the heads of State and government came to



agreement on bringing Europe out of the crisis. The agreement was concluded by the 17 members of the euro zone - 9 other Member States are ready to support it, except for the UK. The European Financial Stability Facility will be extended until mid-2013, whilst the implementation of the European Stability Mechanism will be take place one year ahead of time in July 2012. For greater coordination these two instruments will be managed by the European Central Bank, whose President qualified these measures "as a very good result for the euro zone". Moreover Member States will be able to increase their contribution to the IMF which is supporting the most affected countries to a total of 200 billion euros... [Read more](#)

Conclusions of the European Council



On 9th December the signature of Croatia's membership treaty of the European Union took place. The signed treaty now has to be ratified by the 27 EU's member States, as well as by Croatia. Membership is due to be effective on July 1st 2013 and will make Croatia the 28th Member State of the EU. The heads of State and government did however delay the opening of membership negotiations with Montenegro until June and likewise the acknowledgment of Serbia's candidate status until March. They also defined the guidelines for later stages in energy policy, with regard to the completion of the internal market and the enhancement of the safety and security of nuclear power stations... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Future of VAT



On 6th December the Commission adopted a communication on the future of VAT. The aim is to create a simpler, more effective, stronger VAT system in the EU. This new system is hinged on three objectives. Firstly, the system must be simplified for companies so that administrative burdens are lighter and to facilitate trade. The sums collated must be then used for growth; to do this the Commission is notably suggesting maximising revenues rather than increasing rates. Finally the Commission recalls the importance of the fight against fraud and non-payment, since 12% of the sums due are not collated. The Commission has also given up the principle of taxing in the place of origin, preferring to maintain the present of destination country... [Read more](#)

Strengthening Europe's Place in the World



On 7th December the European Commission adopted budgetary proposals for its external mechanisms which will be applicable during the period 2014-2020. This budget will enable the Union to assume its responsibilities in the international arena: the fight to counter poverty, the promotion of democracy, peace, stability and prosperity. Several mechanisms will help developing countries as well as the countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and also those who are preparing to join the European Union. Moreover development aid to the 19 emerging countries will be abolished, but thematic programmes will be maintained. This measure notably affects Brazil, China and India. This package that totals just over 96 billion euros, is due to be adopted by Parliament and the Council next year... [Read more](#)

Facilitating SME access to funding



On 7th December the European Commission presented an action plan, as well as a draft regulation that aims to facilitate access to funding by SMEs. Antonio Tajani, Vice-President of the European Commission for Entrepreneurship, said that "the first priority to emerge from the crisis is to facilitate SME access to funding." The main measures aim to facilitate investment in venture-capital to support young businesses, by enabling the raising of funds in all member countries... [Read more](#)

Council :

General Affairs



On 5th December the 27 European Affairs Ministers worked on the enlargement of and the stabilisation and association process in the Western Balkans, stressing that there were still major challenges to overcome in terms of political and economic governance in many potential or declared candidate countries. They also adopted a decision to approve Croatia's entry into the EU, after the signature and ratification of the membership treaty... [Read more](#)

Competitiveness



On 5th and 6th December the 27 Ministers responsible for Competitiveness called on the Commission to assess customs cooperation with the countries of the Eastern Partnership and to focus on various priorities, including the modernisation of customs, risk management and the fight to counter fraud and the establishment of safe, fluid trade routes. They also adopted conclusions relative to industrial policy, notably requesting financial and fiscal support for SME's, as well as a better management of energy and raw materials resources. The Ministers worked on the European patent and notably on the single mechanism to settle conflicts and on the protection guaranteed by patents... [Read more](#)

Iceland



On 12th December Iceland finalised four new chapters in its negotiations to join the EU, but the sensitive issue of fishing is still pending. In all, after three meetings, Iceland has opened 11 chapters and has already finalised 8. Discussions are moving rapidly forward because as a member of the European Economic Area the island has already integrated many of the European directives into its legislation. The new chapters finalised between Iceland and the EU pertain to company law, business policy and industrial policy, trans-European networks and the legal framework as well as fundamental rights... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

The European Parliament now has 753 MEPs



In virtue of the Lisbon Treaty, the number of MEPs has been increased. After many problems, all of the countries which have increased their number of representatives in the European Parliament have finally appointed them. They will take their seats for the first time during the plenary session in Strasbourg this week. Spain has four more MEPs, Austria, France and Sweden, 2 each, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and the UK, one each. Until the next election in June 2014 the Parliament will comprise 753 members... [Read more](#)

Court of Justice :

Immigration and Return Directive



In a decision delivered on 6th December the European Union's Court of Justice, believed that the imprisonment of illegal immigrants just because they do not have the correct identity papers was not in line with the law. According to the court European legislation "is against national legislation which sets a prison sentence on an inhabitant of a third country who is residing illegally in an EU country during the return procedure." However the Court believes that the authorities can hold immigrants for the time the authenticity of their papers is checked, and that they can be placed in detention centres once the decision to expulse them has been taken, but only as a last resort, and for as brief a time as possible... [Read more](#)

Germany :

Afghanistan

The international community that met in Bonn on 5th December promised to renew its commitment to Afghanistan until 2024 in



exchange for work towards democracy and the fight to counter corruption. According to the final conclusions of the Bonn Conference, "Afghanistan and the international community are highly committed to renewing their partnership for the next decade," after the withdrawal of NATO's troops at the end of 2014. In exchange Afghanistan will commit to counter corruption decisively, to implement reform to improve the regime and to develop democracy with the participation of civil society... [Read more](#)

Immigration and the Employment Market



In order to attract engineers, doctors, IT engineers, and specialists from the world over and to support growth, the German government adopted the introduction of the European blue card on 7th December, which is based on the American "green card" system. This card will facilitate the immigration of highly qualified, specialised foreigners. The German government wants to facilitate the immigration of qualified workers given the penury of labour and at the same time extend restrictions affecting the Romanians and Bulgarians... [Read more](#)

The Charlemagne Prize given to Wolfgang Schäuble



German Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, is the winner of the Charlemagne Prize 2012, one of the highest European distinctions for his work in support of European integration. The Charlemagne Prize that will be given on 17th May comes as a "reward for his major contribution toward the stabilisation of the Monetary Union and the development of the unification process," said the Mayor of Aachen Marcel Philipp and the leading of the prize's board, Jürgen Linden, in a press release on 10th December. The jury also pays tribute to "his excellent merits in overcoming divisions between Germany and Europe and his strong ability in terms of making proposals and the role he has played in nearly all of the steps forward in terms of integration over the last few decades.".. [Read more](#)

Belgium :

Government



On 5th December the King of Belgium appointed Elio Di Rupo, who became Prime Minister after the agreement concluded on 3rd and 4th December. The new government comprises six Deputy Prime Ministers, six Ministers and six Secretaries of State, from the six parties in the coalition and representing the Flemish and the Walloons equally. This new government replaces that of Yves Leterme, who resigned after 540 days in office. On 6th December the new government was sworn in before the King. On 7th December the new Prime Minister delivered his government declaration to the Chamber of Representatives. In his speech he insisted on the need to revive the country's economy. On 10th December he won the Chamber of Representative's vote of confidence - 89 votes in support - 54 against... [Read more](#)

The new government's economic priorities



On 7th December the new Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo presented his general policy declaration to the Chamber of Representatives. The main theme addressed was the country's economic recovery. The fight to counter unemployment, social and fiscal fraud, the reform of the pensions system with an extension to a person's working life, the reform and moralisation of the financial system, and finally a rigorous budgetary policy are the main priorities presented by the government to help the country recover. With regard to the Belgian political situation the Prime Minister said he wanted to give his fellow countrymen "self confidence and hope". "We might have lost everything during this long crisis (...) but Belgium can overcome these divisions," he added before being applauded by the Representatives... [Read more](#)

Bulgaria :

Veto on the retirement law



Bulgarian President Gueorgui Parvanov used his veto on 11th December against a law that intends to increase the age of retirement by four months per year as of 2012, to reach 63 for women and 65 for men said the presidency. The presidential veto on the social security law adopted on 8th December obliges parliament to re-examine the bill. If however parliament approves the texts unchanged, the President will be forced to provide the green light... [Read more](#)

France :

France: the Senate adopts the draft finance law 2012



After the National Assembly, the Senate adopted the draft finance law for 2012, 175 votes against 168. Since the two chambers did not adopt the draft budget in the same conditions, this project will now be submitted to a mixed parity committee that brings together MPs and Senators before it is re-examined by MPs... [Read more](#)

European People's Party Congress



During the 20th European People's Party Congress, which took place on 7th and 8th December, a declaration on "taking Europe forward: a strong Europe to defend our values and interests" was adopted in the presence of many heads of State and government... [Read more](#)

Greece :

135 million euros from the EIB



The European Investment Bank will invest 135 million euros in Greece's real economy said the EU's financial institution on 9th December. 85 million euros will be invested in urban development funds; the "Pancretan Cooperative Bank", the main cooperative organisation in Greece, will receive 50 million euros for investments in the development of SME's... [Read more](#)

UK :

The government coalition divided



The British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg declared on 11th December 2011 that the Prime Minister David Cameron's decision taken during the latest European summit, to use his veto against the budgetary pact, was "bad for Great Britain" and that this might leave the country "isolated and marginalised" within the EU. He also blamed pressure on the part of the eurosceptic Conservative Party, which had pushed David Cameron to reject the agreement thereby placing him in a difficult position. The Prime Minister who declared that he was trying to achieve certain "financial guarantees for the UK" will explain his choice on 12th December as he speaks to the House of Commons... [Read more](#)

Ukraine :

New Attacks against Yulia Tymoshenko



On 11th December the Ukrainian authorities inflicted a further sentence on Yulia Tymoshenko. The former Prime Minister was interviewed in her cell before being convicted for tax evasion and embezzlement of public funds between 1996-2000. At present she is serving a seven year sentence after a first conviction in October 2011. The appeal trial against the first sentence will start on 13th December. The European Union may cancel the EU-Ukraine Summit planned for 19th December if the Ukrainian government does not stop repressing the opposition... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :

Internet



On 8th December in a "Declaration on the protection of the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly and association with regard to internet platforms managed by private service providers and on-line operators" the Committee of Ministers warned its Member States against the dangers of putting political pressure on internet platforms and what this might imply for freedom of expression rights. Moreover it said that the principles governing human rights should be applied "in situations when there is an intrusion into internet content and access to web sites which host them, as well as into on-line social exchange".. [Read more](#)

UN :

Conference on Climate Change in Durban



From 28th November to 11th December the 17th UN Conference on Climate Change took place in Durban. Starting two days late, the 195 delegations agreed on a road map put forward by the EU. A working group has been set in place. It is responsible to come to a legally binding agreement that will associate the major CO2 producing countries as of 2020. In the mean time the Kyoto Protocol will still be valid after its expiry date, initially planned for the end of 2012. The countries want to limit global warming to 2°C... [Read more](#)

NATO :

Strategic Future



On 7th December the Foreign Ministers of the 28 NATO countries reviewed the results of ongoing missions - Afghanistan, Kosovo, Libya - and stressed NATO's unique capabilities. The most urgent subjects are notably Afghanistan's transition and the partnership with Russia. In spite of differences in opinion over Georgia, NATO-Russia cooperation is still important. This was emphasised during the NATO-Russia council on 8th December... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Migrations



According to figures published by Eurostat on 8th December, in the EU in 2008, the unemployment rate of foreign born people aged 25-54 was higher than that of native inhabitants of the same age (10% in comparison with 6%). When foreign born people were in work they found it more difficult to find an activity that matched their level of education. In the EU in 2008 the rate of over qualification of foreign born people aged 25-54 was higher than that of native born inhabitants (34% in comparison with 19%). One person in three aged 25-54 born abroad is threatened by poverty and social exclusion... [Read more](#)

Growth



According to figures published on 6th December during the 3rd quarter, the euro zone's GDP increased by 0.2% and that of the EU by 0.3% in comparison with the previous quarter. In the second quarter of 2011 the growth rate in both zones lay at 0.2%. In comparison with the third quarter of 2010 the GDP increased by 1.4% both in the euro zone and the EU after 1.7% in both zones in the previous quarter. As a comparison in the third quarter of 2011, the USA's GDP increased by 0.5% (1.5% over one year) and that of Japan by 1.5% (-0.1% over one year)... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Equality of the Sexes

On 6th December the World Bank published a report entitled "Opportunities for Men and Women: Emerging Europe and Central Asia" which maintains that "achieving gender equality could help support economic development and prosperity of emerging countries in



Europe and Central Asia." The conclusion of the report targets governments, which repair disparity between the sexes by facilitating the entry of women onto the labour market, by adopting reforms in education and by fighting against differences in healthcare... [Read more](#)

A Rise in Inequalities



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In its report "Increasing Inequality: why are the differences in income increasing?", the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development deplores that salaries are increasingly unequal. The authors look into the period 1985 to 2008. Their analyses are mainly based on the Gini coefficient. The difference in salaries notably increased in Germany, Sweden, South Korea, Japan, UK and the USA...

European Defence



The "European Council on Foreign Relations" published a study by Nick Witney on the state of European defence. The study entitled "How to stop the demilitarisation of Europe?" lays out what is at stake for European defence, whilst Europe is in a serious financial crisis that is limiting its means at present. According to the author, Europe must see that only a joint defence policy will give it the necessary power to defend its values; moreover he is concerned about the emergence and the consolidation of a "culture of demilitarisation in Europe" to the benefit of a weak strategic position towards security... [Read more](#)

Freedom of the Press



On 8th December Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights presented a book entitled "Human Rights and a Changing Media Landscape." Six themes seen from the point of view of Human Rights, are addressed in this work: social media, the protection of journalists against violence; ethical journalism, access to documents by public authorities, government media and the pluralism of the media. T Hammarberg declared that "the defence of all Human Rights depended on the freedom and plurality of the media. Hence the urgency of countering restrictions set by governments and the trend to create monopolies." In his opinion the freedom of the media is threatened in Europe... [Read more](#)

Culture :

René Magritte



The Albertina Art Museum of Vienna is putting on an exhibition until 26th January 2012, which includes around one hundred paintings by Surrealist René Magritte; it covers all of the various periods in the artist's life. The Albertina has joined forces with the Tate Liverpool for this exhibition and has brought together Magritte's best known creations and also advertising work from the start of his career, together with films and photos that have only ever rarely been on show... [Read more](#)

The Borgias and Antiquity



Until 9th April 2012 the Borgia Gallery in Rome has the privilege of bringing together most of the works that comprised the most beautiful collection of the Cardinal Scipione Borgia. 60 of the most important works of antique art which belonged to the Borgia Collection and which are now the basis of the collection of antiquities of the Louvre Museum in Paris have been returned to their place of origin: the Borgia Vase with its Dionysian scenes; the Sleeping Hermaphrodite restored by Bernini; the Three Graces and the Centaur mounted by Love. The exhibition celebrates Italian artistic heritage and history on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the

unification of Italy... [Read more](#)

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera



For the very first time in Sweden the Göteborg Museum of Art is devoting an exhibition to the famous couple of artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Around thirty of their paintings from the collection owned by Jacques and Natasha Gelman are being presented together with drawings, lithographs, collages and photographs, as well as a film made by Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura... [Read more](#)

Tomi Ungerer



The "Caricatura" museum in Frankfurt is presenting "Satiricon" until 18th March 2012 - this is a review of the satirical works of Alsatian artist Tomi Ungerer; it includes around 50 unique pieces. The exhibition is showing around 170 drawings, collages, sketches and posters lent by the Tomi Ungerer Museum of Strasbourg, covering several decades of the artist's work... [Read more](#)

Retrospective Devoted to Otto Dix



Until 18th March 2012, Gera, the native town of German painter Otto Dix (1891-1969) is devoting a retrospective to him on the occasion of his 120th anniversary. Some 240 pieces of work including around 100 pictures, water colours, drawings and prints review the career of this master of expressionism and new objectivity. The exhibition focuses on Otto Dix's work that "disappeared", since it was classed as "degenerate art" in the 1930's... [Read more](#)

European Book Prize



On 7th December German, Maxim Leo and Pole, Anna Bikont were awarded the European Book Prize 2011, delivered at the European Parliament by a jury chaired by British novelist Julian Barnes. The prize is designed to promote European values and to help bring the Union closer to its citizens. Maxim Leo, 41, is a journalist for the Berliner Zeitung and received the prize for his novel "The Story of an East German". Anna Bikont received a prize in the "essay" category for her work "Crime and Silence: Jedwabne 1941, the memory of a program in modern Poland"... [Read more](#)

Freedom of the Press Prize



Two Hungarian journalists, Maria Vasarhelyi and Pal Daniel Renyi received the Freedom of the Press Prize 2011, awarded on 9th December in Vienna by the NGO Reporters sans frontières (RSF). "Their courage and their commitment to democracy are exemplary, also for us," explained the jury during the prize giving ceremony. The two journalists received a prize for their articles on the "disappearance of the freedom of the press" in Hungary... [Read more](#)

Nobel Prize Award Ceremony



The winners of the Nobel Peace, Medicine, Literature, Economy, Physics and Chemistry Prizes 2011 received their awards on 10th December from King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden during a gala ceremony in Oslo. The award ceremony that took place according to custom on the anniversary of the death of Alfred Nobel, the prize's founder, in 1896, was followed by a traditional banquet in the presence of the royal family and 1,400 guests... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



12th December
Brussels
Transport and Telecommunications Council



12th-15th December
Strasbourg
Plenary Session - European Parliament



14th December
Brussels
Justice-Internal Affairs Council



14th December
Brussels
Trade Council



15th December
EU-Russia Summit



15th-16th December
Brussels
Agriculture and Fisheries Council



15th-17th December
Geneva
Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation



16th December
Brussels
General Affairs Council



19th December
Brussels
Environment Council

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