



The Foundation team is pleased to be back and wishes you a very happy New Year 2012!

## Mid-term assessment of the European Parliament's 7th legislature



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Mid-term the 7th Legislature of the European Parliament the latter shows real determination in responding to the crisis and is increasingly pro-European and pro-active. Current events are pushing MEPs to focus on their work. It seems to be less dispersed than during the previous legislature and it has become more effective in terms of the time they take to process proposals. To this end the work of the parliamentary committees has been vital in defining compromises, which also lead to a display of unity and cohesion in the face of other institutions in plenary and during inter-institutional negotiations.

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**Front page!** :

**The Future of the Council of Europe in the light of 60 years of experience**



The proceedings of the seminar "The future of the Council of Europe" organised on 8th November 2011 by the Robert Schuman Foundation and the French delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly at the Council of Europe are now available in electronic format. Soon they will be available on paper... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

**Elections** :

### Referendum in Croatia on EU membership on 22nd January



On 9th December last Croatia signed its membership treaty of the EU in Brussels. On 1st December the European Parliament approved 564 votes in support, 38 against and 32 abstentions Zagreb's entry into the 27. On 22nd January the Croats will be voting by referendum on Croatia joining the EU or not. This vote will be second only to be organised in Croatia. No minimum turnout is required to validate the popular vote. According to the last poll published on 6th January nearly 58% will vote in support of their country's membership of the EU and 23% will vote against. More than 60% of those interviewed say they will "certainly" go to vote and 11% have said they will "probably" vote in the referendum... [Read more](#)

### Financial Crisis :

#### EFSF raises 3 billion euros for Ireland and Portugal



The European Financial Stability Fund raised three billion euros on 5th January 2012 for aid to Ireland and Portugal. This is the first obligatory three year issuance. The EFSF, which has a total lending capability of 440 billion euros, aims to "raise money on the markets with a guarantee provided by the euro zone states;" and to disburse this to distressed countries in the euro zone at rates under those they would normally pay on the market..." [Read more](#)

#### Germany: unemployment at record low in 20 years



According to figures published on 3rd January by the German employment agency, the number of unemployed in Germany last year totalled 2,976 million on average, ie the lowest it has been since 1991, and 263,000 unemployed less than in 2010. The unemployment rate declined in Germany last year by 0.6 percentage points to lie at 7.1%... [Read more](#)

#### Belgium freezes spending of over one billion euros



Belgium decided to freeze over one billion euros in spending "for several months" in line with the requests made by the European Commission, explained Olivier Chastel, the Belgian budget minister on 7th January 2012. The European Commission warned the Belgian government with regard to the 2012 budget, believing that the deficit figure planned for by Elio di Rupo's government was overly optimistic and as a result demanded an additional effort of 1.2 -2 billion euros. "The commission left us with the choice of either implementing further measures immediately over one weekend totalling 1.2 billion euros - which we refused to do, or to freeze some spending over a period of a few months - and it is this option which we have chosen, " explained Mr Chastel... [Read more](#)

#### Unemployment in Spain rises again



The Spanish Secretary of State for Employment, Engracia Hidalgo, announced on 3rd January 2012 that unemployment had risen in December 2011. The total number of unemployed now lies at 4,422,359 people... [Read more](#)

#### Rise in the number of job seekers in France



According to data published on 26th December by the Labour, Employment and Healthcare Ministry the number of job seekers who registered with Pôle Emploi totalled 2,844,800 at the end of November. With figures rising by 1.1% in comparison with the end of October, France has now hit a new record, the highest since 1999; over one year the number of unemployed has risen by 5.2%... [Read more](#)

#### Italy: unemployment soars amongst young people

The Italian national statistics institute published data on unemployment



for the month of November 2011 on 5th January 2012; these are typified by a rise in youth unemployment. For the 15-24 year olds the unemployment rate rose to 30.1% ie an increase of 0.9 points in comparison with October and 1.8 points over one year; it is the highest rate since January 2004. Overall the national unemployment rate totals 8.6% ie a rise of 0.1 points in comparison with October... [Read more](#)

#### Portugal: funding programme 2012



The Portuguese Institute for the Management of Public Lending (IGCP) published the State's funding programme 2012 on 29th December 2011. The Institute believes that "the State's net total requirements in 2012 (...) are due to rise to 17.4 billion euros." The State's financial requirements will be achieved thanks to an EU-IMF aid programme and the emission of a short term debt on private markets... [Read more](#)

#### Commission :

##### 2012: the European Year Solidarity between Generations



The European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations started on 1st January. On this occasion a variety of projects in many areas will be undertaken: employment, transport, healthcare, housing and support. Indeed Europeans are living longer and longer and are in better health; as a consequence we have to look into the prospects that this opens up to us... [Read more](#)

##### Is the Hungarian Constitution in line with European legislation?



The European Commission has said that it wants to look into the conformity of the new constitutional laws and reforms of the Central Hungarian Bank in terms of EU legislation. The main concern on the part of the Commission focuses on the independence of the national judges and also on the country's Central Bank, which these new constitutional laws are said to be impeding. It is claimed that the new texts do not respect the rule of law or the EU's main democratic values, as stipulated in article 7 of the EU treaty... [Read more](#)

#### Council :

##### The 27 Environment Ministers strengthen the Biodiversity Strategy



On 19th December the 27 Environment Ministers studied a draft directive with regard to the control of hazards associated with major accidents involving dangerous substances. They also adopted conclusions to strengthen the Biodiversity Strategy and to protect species and habitats. Ministers finally debated the Commission's proposal to establish a road-map for the effective management of resources in the EU, insisting on economic restrictions in times of crisis... [Read more](#)

#### ECB :

##### The Euro celebrates its 10th anniversary



On 1st January 2012 the euro celebrated 10 years of circulation and use. Although the euro was technically born in 1999, it was on 1st January 2002 that citizens in the euro zone discovered euro coins and notes. At first it was the currency of 12 EU Member States, five others have joined it since and 7 others are due to do so in the next few years. Further to this the currencies of many other States are linked to it. Increasingly it plays a role internationally and is the reserve currency for third States - the European currency has succeeded in achieving real international status on a par with the dollar as the years have gone by... [Read more](#)

##### Distribution of posts amongst the members of the ECB's Board

On 3rd January the European Central Bank published the new



distribution of responsibilities between the members of its board. The most remarkable appointment is that of Belgian Peter Praet as Strategic Economist in Chief; he will be responsible for taking key decisions. He will now occupy this post, which until now was the private domain of the Germans. Furthermore the Frenchman, Bernard Coeuré, will be responsible for all market operations starting in March... [Read more](#)

## Germany :

### Thomas Steffen, new Secretary of State for Finance with W. Schäuble



Wolfgang Schäuble, German Finance Minister, appointed a successor to Jörg Asmussen, Secretary of State for Finance on 2nd January - one of the key figures in negotiations to save the euro zone, who joined the ECB on 1st January. He is being replaced at the Finance Ministry by 50 year old Thomas Steffen who had led the policy department in the ministry since October 2010. Previously Mr Steffen was responsible for supervising the insurance sector for the German financial supervisory organisation, Bafin... [Read more](#)

### Results of the first Franco-German meeting at the beginning of the year



On 9th January 2012 the French President Nicolas Sarkozy met German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on the occasion of a working lunch devoted to the preparation of the next European Council planned for 30th January in Brussels. During a joint press conference, the French president announced that France will soon apply a financial tax before its European partners in order to set an example. Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy agreed that the European Treaty including the budgetary pact should be signed before 1st March. They also asked that any remaining European funds be used in support of job creation, SMEs and innovation... [Read more](#)

## Denmark :

### Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union



On 1st January Denmark took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for a period of six months. The priorities put forward by the Danish government for this period are to continue work to consolidate the budget, to implement the commitments made during the 2011 European Councils, to continue negotiations on the European budget 2014-2020, to revive the European economy, via sustainable development, IT's and communication, as well as the enhancement of the EU's external border security... [Read more](#)

## Spain :

### One year extension on external operations



The Spanish Ministers who met on 30th December decided to extend the Spanish army's external operations by one year. The latter is taking part at present in five operations abroad: Afghanistan (IFAS/NATO), Lebanon (UNIFIL), Bosnia-Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea), Indian Ocean (EUNAVFOR) to counter piracy and Uganda (EUTM-Somalia) in a mission to train Somali soldiers. This measure will come to an end on 31st December 2012... [Read more](#)

## France :

### Meeting between N.Sarkozy and M.Monti



The President of the Italian Council, Mario Monti was guest to French President Nicolas Sarkozy on 6th January in Paris, to address the situation in the euro zone. A press conference was held after the meeting during which Mr Monti said that Rome "was moving towards budgetary balance in 2013 and a primary surplus of 5% also in 2013." Nicolas Sarkozy believes that "Italy and France share the same point of view with regard to the future of Europe and the means to settle the euro zone crisis (...)" ; he also said

that he would travel to Italy with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 20th January... [Read more](#)

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Greece :

#### General Elections in Greece in April 2012



Early general elections will be taking place in Greece at the end of April said Greek Finance Minister, Evangelos Vénizélos, on 27th December adding that the country's future would be decided next month with the plan to refund the debt."Elections will take place after Easter, at the end of April," declared the minister... [Read more](#)

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Hungary :

#### Entry into force of a new Constitution



The new Hungarian constitution entered into force on 1st January. Its preamble mentions the importance of Christianity in the building of national identity. The text sets restrictions on the legal scope of the Constitutional Court; the right to reject a text that involves financial and budgetary issues is strictly limited. The right granted to local authorities to turn to this Court if their rights are infringed has been abolished. The agreement on the "budgetary council", the members of which are not elected, is now necessary before the adoption of the budget by Parliament, which itself can be dissolved if this budget is not approved before 31st March of the year in question. Subjects that can be put to referendum are also limited. These measures are the source of concern on the part of the European Union... [Read more](#)

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Italy :

#### Senators finally adopt Monti's anti-crisis plan



On 22nd December the Italian Senators finally adopted the austerity plan put forward by Mario Monti's government. This plan was adopted by an overwhelming majority of 257 votes against 41. Before the vote Mario Monti declared to the Senators that the adoption of this "emergency" plan will enable Italy to "face the extremely serious European crisis with dignity"... [Read more](#)

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Latvia :

#### Referendum on 18th February



Latvia is to organise a referendum on 18th February on the recognition of Russian as the country's second official language said the Latvian Electoral Commission on 3rd January (CVK). More than 180,000 signatures have been collated in support of this referendum, well over the threshold required (154,397), ie 10% of the electorate in a country of 2.2 inhabitants. The language is a controversial issue in Latvia where Russian speakers represent around one third of the population. They mainly are mainly the result of 50 years of colonisation by Moscow... [Read more](#)

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Slovenia :

#### Arbitration over the border with Croatia



Slovenian and Croatian Foreign Ministers will meet on 10th January in Brussels to complete the creation of an arbitration tribunal that should help settle the old conflict over their joint borders said the Slovenian government on 4th January. "The European Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Füle, suggested a tripartite meeting with the Slovenian Foreign Minister, Samuel Zbogar, and his Croatian counterpart Vesna Pusic be held in Brussels," announced the Foreign Minister in a press release. The aim of the meeting is to complete the arbitration agreement between the two countries over the border dispute ongoing for 20 years... [Read more](#)

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Zoran Jankovic put forward as Prime Minister



Slovenian President Danilo Turk appointed Zoran Jankovic, Mayor of Ljubljana as Prime Minister on 5th January. His centre-left party, Slovenia Positive, was the source of surprise, as it won the general elections on 4th December. Zoran Jankovic announced on 7th January that he had come to a political agreement in view of forming a coalition government with three other parties: the Social Democratic Party of previous Prime Minister Borut Pahor, the Citizens List led by Gregor Virant and the Pensioners Party DESUS. Parliament is due to vote on 11th January to finalise this appointment. Zoran Jankovic will then have 15 days to form his new government that is due to enter office at the end of January after Parliament has approved it... [Read more](#)

## Belarus :

### Freedom Declining



Restrictions with regard to using the internet, limiting access to opposition sites and making those who provide access such as cyber-café, pay fines if they have not recorded data about their users entered into force on 6th January 2012 in Belarus. According to the law the authorities can establish a black list of banned sites because of their pornographic content, or for their violent or extremist nature. The State's institutions and universities are now banned from using these sites. For their part access providers in cyber-café or in other places of collective internet use, have to record and keep, under the threat of being fined, information pertaining to their clients and services provided for a year - so that these can be given to the police if the latter ask for them. The law also extends to home access providers... [Read more](#)

## Bosnia-Herzgovina :

### Agreement on the formation of a new central government in Bosnia-Herzegovina



The political leaders of the three main communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Serb, Croat and Muslim) came to agreement on 28th December on the formation of a central government, thereby bringing a 14-month political crisis to an end. This will also enable the rapprochement with the EU to resume. They also agreed on the introduction of two major reforms as requested by the EU - on the laws governing the census and the distribution of State subsidies. The nine government ministries will be given to the six parties representing the three communities in Parliament. The Prime Minister will therefore be a Croat, the Foreign Minister, Bosniak and the Economy Minister, a Serb. The Bosnian Parliament will meet on 12th January to confirm the appointment of Vjekoslav Bevanda as Prime Minister... [Read more](#)

## Croatia :

### New Croatian Government



The new Croatian government led by Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic was sworn in on 23rd December by the Croatian Parliament, 89 votes in support, 28 against and 12 abstentions. The government, which includes 17 ministers, three of whom are women, has promised to reduce public spending and to adopt an austerity budget very quickly... [Read more](#)

## Russia :

### Lively protest against Vladimir Putin's regime



At the end of 2011 there was a great deal of unrest in Russia, where many demonstrations of unprecedented size took place in protest against the expected return of Vladimir Putin as head of the Russian state in the presidential election on 4th March next. Further protest is expected, notably on 4th February next. On 7th January the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill spoke out warning of a "manipulation" of the demonstrators but he also invited the government to change its policy in order to respond to the opinion of the people, saying that "if the public authorities did not respond", this was "a very bad sign"... [Read more](#)

## Switzerland :

### Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, President of the Helvetic Confederation in 2012



On 1st January Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf became the president of the Helvetic Confederation for 2012. She succeeds Micheline Calmy-Rey. In Switzerland each of the seven members of the executive, the Federal Council, takes it in turn to become President of the Confederation for a period of one year. E. Widmer-Schlumpf is also responsible for the Federal Department 'Ministry' of Finance... [Read more](#)

## Ukraine :

### Yulia Tymoshenko's husband gains political asylum in the Czech Republic



The husband of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, sentenced to seven years in prison for abuse of power, gained political asylum in the Czech Republic said the Czech Interior Minister Jan Kubice on 6th January. "Mr Tymoshenko asked the Interior Ministry for political asylum several months ago and this request was accepted," declared the minister to the press. "Yulia Tymoshenko's husband, Alexander, has been forced to leave Ukraine and has asked the Czech government for asylum," announced the opposition party, Batkivchtchina, on its internet site earlier on in the day... [Read more](#)

## OSCE :

### Irish Presidency



On 1st January the rotating presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe is being handed over to Ireland. Eamon Gilmore, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister is promoting three priorities for his mandate: the settlement of conflicts, the enhancement of cooperation between the Member States and the promotion of digital freedom... [Read more](#)

## Eurostat :

### Inflation in the euro zone estimated at 2.8%



In an estimation published on 4th January Eurostat indicated that inflation in the euro zone declined slightly in December 2011 in comparison with the previous month dropping from 3% to 2.8%... [Read more](#)

### Unemployment at 10.3% in the euro zone



According to a Eurostat publication on 6th January, the unemployment rate in November rose to 10.3% in the euro zone and to 9.8% in the EU. Stable in comparison with the previous month it was slightly up over one year, at 0.3% and 0.2% respectively. Austria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are the least affected, whilst Spain, Greece and Lithuania have the highest unemployment rates. The most significant increases involve Spain, Greece and Cyprus (3 to 5% unemployed in all), whilst the biggest decreases were recorded in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (3 to 5% unemployed less)... [Read more](#)

## Eurobarometer :

### Citizens see the EU as part of the solution to the crisis



On 22nd December Eurobarometer published the results of its autumn opinion poll on the economic situation. According to the poll results the EU is the most credible player to rise to the crisis ahead of the national governments. The G20 and the International Monetary Fund follow. Furthermore households are relatively satisfied with their financial situation in spite of the disparities: only 24% say they are satisfied in Greece, but more than 85% in the countries in the north of the Europe (Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands). Finally most of those interviewed say that the crisis will not be settled rapidly and that its effects on employment will get worse... [Read more](#)

## Studies/Reports :

### Which role for the EU in the G20?



The Finnish Institute for International Relations (FIIA) has published a study entitled "Europe's declining role in the G-20: what role for the EU in the club of the most important powers?" The author analyses the opportunity given to the EU by the G20 summit in Cannes to strengthen its leadership in the group... [Read more](#)

### Towards more federalism?



The College of Europe at Bruges has just published its 20th document in the series "Cahiers politiques". Written by Laurie Buonananno and Neill Nugent, entitled "Explaining the EU's Policy Portfolio: applying a Federal Integration Approach to EU Cohesion Policy" - this study suggests the establishment of a new analysis framework of European public policy based on the idea of "federal integration"... [Read more](#)

## Culture :

### Mondrian: perfect harmony



The Vittoriano complex in Rome is hosting the exhibition "Mondrian, perfect harmony" until 29th January 2012. Thanks to 70 paintings, drawings and oil paintings, the exhibition reveals the fascinating development of the life of Piet Mondrian, a 20th century Dutch landscape and naturalist painter... [Read more](#)

### Ai WeiWei



The Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin is devoting an exhibition to Chinese photographer Ai WeiWei until 18th March. This exhibition entitled "Ai WeiWei in New York" has brought together 220 black and white photos by the Chinese artist illustrating his life and the artistic milieu of New York between 1983 to 1993... [Read more](#)

### European Cultural Capitals



The town of Guimarães in Portugal and Maribor in Slovenia are the European Cultural Capitals 2012. On this occasion the two towns have planned a busy agenda. In Maribor the official launch of the event will take place on the weekend of 13th to 15th January 2012 with a musical, theatre and dance programme. Guimarães will launch the celebrations on 21st January with an open air theatre and multimedia show. The future European cultural capitals will be Marseilles (France) and Kosice (Slovakia) in 2013... [Read more](#)

## Agenda :



11th January

Meeting between the European Commission and the Danish Government



16th-19th January

Strasbourg  
Plenary Session at the European Parliament



20th January



20  
Jan

Paris-Berlin-Rome Summit

22  
Jan

22nd January  
Presidential Election in Finland (1st round)

Referendum on Croatia's membership of the European Union

23  
Jan

23rd January  
Brussels  
"Agriculture and Fisheries" Council

Brussels  
Eurogroup Meeting

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