

A modern Europe is one that includes more women

Author: Pascale Joannin



What changes have occurred in Europe from the point of view of men/women equality in 2014? Pascale Joannin looks into women's presence in the European Parliament, national governments (regression in three Member States) and parliaments, as well as in businesses. It is in the economic sector that progress has been the most significant. What are the politicians doing? As Women's Day on 8th March draws closer Europe must go even further if it wants to retain its lead.

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Front page! :

Energy, Europe in Networks



French President François Hollande was given a report called "Energy, Europe in Networks" by ERDF Secretary General Michel Derdevet on 23rd February. The adaptation and development of energy networks is indeed vital so that European countries succeed in terms of energy transition. The 12 proposals put forward in this report aim to support a European approach focusing on three axes: renovating supply security and cooperation between the various players; strengthening regulation coordination and financing levers to master infrastructure costs and promoting Europe as "leader" of energy innovation...

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Elections :

Victory for the Reform Party in the general elections in Estonia



The general elections in Estonia on March 1st benefited the two main parties. The Reform Party (ER) of Prime Minister Taavi Roivas appointed as head of government just under a year ago (26th March 2014) came out ahead in the election. It won 27.7% of the vote and 30 seats (-3) in the Riigikogu, the only chamber in Parliament. The Centre Party (K) the main opposition party, won 24.8% of the vote and 27 seats (+1). The Social

Democratic Party (SDE) took third place with 15.2% of the vote and 15 seats (-4). Pro-Patria Union-Res Publica (IRL) won 13.7% of the vote and 14 MPs (-9). Two parties are making their debut in Parliament: the Free Party of Estonia, created on 20th September last won 8.7% of the vote and 8 seats, the People's Conservative Party, won 8.1% of the vote and 7 seats. Turnout was almost the same as that recorded in the last general election on 6th March 2011 and totalled 63.7% of the vote (-0.2 points)... [Read more](#)

Parity :

IMF gender equality study



On 23rd February the General Director of the IMF Christine Lagarde reviewed the issue of gender equality speaking of a "conspiracy against women". "In too many countries," she explained, "there are too many legal restrictions dissuading women from taking part in economic life, from joining the world of work." A recent IMF study tries to understand the measures to take to ensure equal opportunities for women in the world of work. The fundamental observation is that fair rules have to be introduced... [Read more](#)

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Women in Power - building a different world



Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė travelled to Santiago - Chile on 27th February to attend an event co-organised by the UN on the theme of "Women in Power and in the Decision making process: building a different world." The President gave a speech to an audience of political personalities and decision makers like Ban Ki-moon, the UN's Secretary General and Leymah Gwobee, the Nobel Peace Prize winner. She stressed the importance of involving women in the process of political decision making and in the governance of major companies. She call on world leaders to set the example, notably women. In her opinion "women's participation in politics is not just a fashion, or a question of ambition or quotas. It is a necessity which is vital given the economic challenges and present security issues.".. [Read more](#)

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France: report on parity power sharing between men and women



On 26th February the French High Council for Gender Equality delivered a report on parity in politics in France and notably on the assessment of the implementation of the parity laws during the 2014 elections (local, European, Senatorial). It notes that 15 years after the constitutional reform parity has progressed but it is moving forward slowly due to a lack of legal constraints. It puts forward 12 recommendations to take matters further and to achieve real parity. Amongst these recommendations feature the harmonisation of MP candidate rules with those applied to Senators in a single list election obliging those standing to have an alternate of the opposite sex; the modernisation of the status of the elected member to enable an improved articulation of professional, political and personal life... [Read more](#)

Poland: support to women's entrepreneurship



On 23rd February Polish Prime Minister Eva Kopacz met participants at a seminar "Entrepreneurial Women 2014" Kilece - organised by the newspaper Echo Dienia. She presented the government's actions in support of women's professional activity and notably that of reconciling professional and private life. To this end a major project to build nurseries is now underway... [Read more](#)

Human Rights/Russia :

Demands for the liberation of Nadia Savchenko



In an open letter to the Russian president published on 26th February on the internet site "Open Russia", a pro-European movement led by Kremlin opponent Mikhail Khodorkovski, writer and former Soviet dissident Vladimir Voynovich called for the liberation of pilot Nadia Savchenko who has been on hunger strike for the last two months in protest against her detention in Russia. "Please do not dishonour Russia again by letting this brave woman die," it concludes. Ms Savchenko has been in prison in Russia since July 2014 where she has been accused of the "pre-meditated murder" of two Russian journalists in the east of Ukraine mid-June. She was fighting in the country as a volunteer before being taken prisoner by the pro-Russian rebels. Nadia Savchenko started a hunger strike on 13th December 2014 and former Pussy Riot lawyer Mark Feygin is now

taking care of her case. Many demonstrations in support of Ms Savchenko have taken place in Russia, Ukraine and in Europe and a campaign #SaveOurGirl and #FreeSavchenko has been launched on Twitter... [Read more](#)

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General condemnation of the murder of Boris Nemtsov



The murder of former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov on 27th February 2015 in Moscow caused a wave of indignation worldwide. Mr Nemtsov was a fierce opponent of Vladimir Putin's regime. All of the European leaders condemned his murder and the investigation into the crime continues. The EU's head of diplomacy Federica Mogherini declared her indignation on 28th February over the "brutal murder" of the Russian opponent calling on the Russian authorities to undertake a "full, rapid, transparent" inquiry... [Read more](#)

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Financial Crisis :

The EU approves the extension of financial assistance to Greece



On 24th February euro zone Finance Ministers approved the list of reforms submitted on 23rd February by the Greek government to the IMF, ECB and the European Commission. They have asked Greece to "develop and extend the reform measures" however. In a letter addressed a little earlier to the President of the Eurogroup Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the European Commission said that the list of reforms sent by the Greek government was a "valid starting point" for an agreement between the Troika and Greece on the extension of the financial assistance programme. For her part the IMF's General Director Christine Lagarde was more sceptical than her European partners deeming that nothing in the Greek government's letter guaranteed "significant reform". She did however say that the government's commitments are "enough" to be able to continue the international financial assistance programme. The Board of Directors of the European Stability Fund (ESF) approved the four month extension of the European aid programme to Greece on 27th February. On the same day German MPs in the Bundestag also approved the extension thereby lifting the last hurdle to the disbursement of European aid to Greece... [Read more](#)

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Improvement of economic confidence in the euro zone confirmed in February



An improvement in economic confidence was observed in February in the euro zone carried along by consumers and retail sales after remaining almost stable since the autumn. Indeed according to data published on 26th February by the European Commission the economic sentiment index lay at 102.1 points in February 2015 after dropping to 101.4 in January. Consumers (+1.8 points) are increasingly optimistic about the economic situation. They are the carriers of the wave of economic confidence in the euro zone with the retail sales sector (+1.5 points) in which business leaders are "more positive" about the economic climate according to the Commission's observations. Regarding the EU as a whole confidence rose especially in Italy (+2.4 points), France (+2 points) and Spain (+0.8 points)... [Read more](#)

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Unemployment remains stable in Germany



The Employment Agency in Germany has published its February data. Unemployment figures adjusted to seasonal variations remained the same in January at 6.5%. Specialists at the agency Factset, a supplier of financial analyses and service had forecast this. However they did not anticipate a major decline in the number of job seekers. Indeed analysts forecast a reduction of 8000 job seekers but 20,000 in fact came off the lists in Germany bringing the number of unemployed down to 3,017 million... [Read more](#)

Slight drop in unemployment in France in January



The Employment Ministry has released unemployment figures for the month of January 2015. Hence the number of registered jobseekers (without any work at all) declined by 0.5% i.e. 19,000 people to lie at 3.48 million in mainland France. This decline involves young people in particular (-7,600 young people i.e. -1.4%). However if those people with part time work are added to those registered with "Pôle Emploi", the figure rose by 0.3% over one month. However these figures are encouraging since the number of people without any work at all had not declined since August 2014. Prime Minister Manuel Valls calls for caution since it is still too early to say whether these figures reflect a real change in trend... [Read more](#)

Portugal will pay back 6 billion euro to the IMF in March



Portugal will pay the IMF 6 billion euro in March ie a quarter of the loans granted since 2011 as part of the bailout, indicated the government on 27th February. In all Lisbon wants to pay 14 billion euro of the 25.7 billion received over the last three years from the IMF within a two and a half year time span. This decision approved by the IMF and the EU will lead to a "significant reduction in the interest that the country has to pay," said Finance Minister Maria Luis Albuquerque... [Read more](#)

OECD Report on the UK



Two and a half months before the UK elections the OECD's Secretary General Angel Gurría presented a report on the UK's economy on 24th February which is deemed positive overall by Prime Minister David Cameron. Two points do spoil the whole however: productivity and real salaries. "The main goal must undeniably be to improve productivity," said Angel Gurría. "Unlike events in previous crises productivity has not recovered. However it is necessary if the country's competitiveness is to improve and that real salaries rise continuously. A rise in the latter would help reduce the deficit and inequality, which are weighing on growth.".. [Read more](#)

Commission :

The European Commission presents its strategy to create an Energy Union



On 25th February the European Commission approved a package of measures as part of its strategy for "a strong Energy Union together with a climate change policy directed towards the future." In this context the College of Commissioners adopted a document presenting the Union's energy goals and the measures that the Juncker Commission will take to achieve these based on five themes. Amongst these strategic themes there are notably legislative measures that aim to redesign and reorganise the electricity market, enhance the transparency of gas contracts, develop regional cooperation and even a new package of measures in support of renewable energies. The Commission also adopted two communications, one on interconnection defining the measures necessary to achieve 10% electricity interconnection by 2020, the other illustrating its position on a world agreement on the climate that might be concluded in Paris in December... [Read more](#)

The Commission delivers its decisions on the Member States' economic and fiscal situation



As part of the European Semester, the Commission delivered its decisions on the Member States' economic and fiscal situation on 25th February. Of the 16 countries identified in November as being in a situation of macro-economic situation of imbalance the Commission has stepped up the procedure regarding three countries: France (Stage 5), Germany (Stage 3) and Bulgaria (Stage 5). In two countries the Commission has launched the procedure on macro-economic imbalances i.e. Portugal and Romania; whilst the Commission decided to bring Slovenia out the said procedure. Regarding budgetary deficits, the Commission recommends that no excessive deficit procedure be launched regarding Belgium, Italy and Finland. Moreover the Commission decided to grant France a two year extension to bring its government deficit below the 3% of the GDP mark i.e. until 2017. This decision which goes together with a regular fiscal adjustment assessment as of May should enable the French government to introduce "ambitious structural reform". This extension should also be supported by a structural effort of 0.5% in 2015 said the Commission... [Read more](#)

Government deficit: the European Commission sets France new goals



In its new recommendations published on 27th February the European Commission has asked France for further efforts to reduce its budgetary deficit, demanding that it reduce this more than planned in 2016 before reaching 2.8% of the GDP in 2017 via "additional savings measures". The European Commission's new recommendations set government deficit goals of 4.0% of the GDP in 2015 (instead of the 4.1% promised by the French government), 3.4% in 2016, when Bercy was planning on 3.6%, then 2.8% in 2017, the year when the country is supposed to drop below the 3% mark of the GDP. In structural terms the Commission hopes that France will reduce its deficit by 0.8 GDP points in 2016 then by 0.9 points in 2017. In 2015, the European Commission has asked France to make a structural effort of 0.5 GDP points. But it believes that the plans submitted by Bercy are inadequate and will only enable a

reduction of 0.3 points this year. France is "able" to respect this "demanding", "realistic" recommendation said Finance Minister Michel Sapin... [Read more](#)

Commission report on the visa exemption regime granted to the Western Balkan Countries



On 25th February the European Commission presented its fifth assessment report on the functioning of the visa exemption regime from which the Western Balkan countries benefit ie Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, FRYOM, Montenegro and Serbia. According to this report on the liberalisation of the visa regime with these countries "additional measures are necessary to protect the integrity of the regime and to fight to counter potential abuse in the EU's asylum regime." Indeed abuse of the asylum regime by Western Balkan citizens "is still extremely worrying" says the report. We should also note that the number of citizens from these five countries requesting asylum in the EU and the associate countries of the Schengen area has been rising constantly since liberalisation was introduced. Serbs (42% in 2013) are the biggest group of asylum seekers ahead of the Albanians and the FYROM (21% each). Finally Germany is the EU country which the greatest number of asylum requests from Western Balkan country citizens rising from 12% in 2009 to 75% in 2014... [Read more](#)

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A new European index points to differences in access possibilities to "digital society" amongst the Member States



On the occasion of the presentation of the Digital Economy and Society Index the European Commission unveiled the first conclusions revealed by this new instrument on 24th February. Data shows that the digital experience differs from one country to another and results are significantly different between major digital players like Denmark (with connectivity of 0.68 out of 1) and countries that are less performant like Romania whose connectivity level is 0.31. We might also note that a large majority of Europeans regularly use internet: 75% of Europeans did so in 2014 (in contrast with 72 % in 2013), from 93 % of the Luxemburgers to 48 % of the Romanians. Finally the European index reveals a gap between Member States regarding access to public online services. Although it is a daily reality in some countries like Denmark where 69% of internet users use online forms to send information to public authorities, it is almost non-existent in other countries like Romania where the share totals 6% only... [Read more](#)

The Commission release 3.8 billion euro to counter poverty in the EU



On 26th February the Commission adopted the last of the national operational programmes for the European Fund for the most vulnerable covering the period 2014-2020. Hence it has released a total of 3.8 billion euro in aid designed for 4 million Europeans who are deemed to be "the most at risk". This sum will mainly take the shape of material aid for those in the greatest state of poverty i.e. food shortage, homelessness and child poverty. The aid offered is very varied since it comprises food, clothing and other vital necessities, as well as action that aims to facilitate social integration or re-integration... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

MPs debate the changes to the draft PNR system



A new draft report on the European PNR system presented by Timothy Kirkhope (ECR, UK) was debated in the Committee for Civil Liberties on 26th February. This new text suggests that several changes be made in comparison with the draft put forward by the Commission in 2011. MEPs discussed the assessment of the proportionality of the proposal given the present threats to security, the field of application (list of infringements covered), period of time data is kept, the inclusion or exclusion of intra-European theft, the link with the data protection reform now ongoing and the impact of annulment, by the EU's Court of Justice's judgment, of the 2006 directive on the retention of data. MEPs have until 25th March to put forward amendments to the draft report before a vote can be taken on the final text... [Read more](#)

French MP Alain Lamassoure elected Chairman of the Commission on Tax Rulings

The new parliamentary committee on tax rulings established during the plenary session of 12th February, elected Alain Lamassoure (EPP, FR) as chairman during a constitutive meeting on 26th February. Bernd



Lucke (ECR, DE), Marisa Matias (GUE/NGL, PT) and Eva Joly (Greens/ALE EFA, FR) were elected Vice-Presidents. The rapporteurs of the Committee will be appointed on 9th March. This committee comprising 45 members and with an initial mandate of six months, will assess practices linked to fiscal rulings since January 1st 1991 and also the way the European Commission has addressed state aid... [Read more](#)

Council :

The Council allows Member States to ban GMOs



New rules allowing Member States to ban or restrict the cultivation of GMOs within their territories were adopted by the Council on 2nd March. They will enter into force 20 days after their publication in the EU's Official Journal. According to Jānis Dūklavs, the Latvian Agriculture Minister and President of the Council: "Member States can now decide whether GMOs will be cultivated on their territory or not which is in line with the subsidiarity principle and respects the choice of citizens and farmers." These new rules also take on board the issues of cross-border contamination, since the Member States in which GMOs are grown will have to take care to prevent contamination of neighbouring States in which GMOs are banned... [Read more](#)

New directive on tracking road safety infringements in Europe



On 2nd March the Council adopted a directive on the rules that will apply to all EU countries as of 2017 on information sharing regarding road safety infringements committed by drivers of foreign vehicles. These rules will now apply in the UK, Ireland and Denmark. A directive on information sharing was adopted in 2011 but the three latter States did not take part due to their specific position regarding police cooperation. The aim of this directive is to improve road safety in Europe and to guarantee equal treatment of European drivers. Eight infringements are included in the directive: speeding, not wearing the seat belt, driving through a red light, drunk driving, driving under the influence of drugs, not wearing a safety helmet, use of a closed road and the illegal use of a mobile phone and any other means of communication whilst driving... [Read more](#)

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Conclusions of the Competitiveness Council



Ministers responsible for competitiveness adopted measures on 2nd March that aim to do away with hurdles to the single market and enable a rapid transition over to the digital age. Dana Reizniece-Ozola, Latvian Economy Minister recalled that "there is no time to lose if Europe wants to lead the digital revolution and improve its competitiveness". The investment plan that is due to release an additional amount of 315 billion euro over the next three years was discussed... [Read more](#)

ECB :

New 20€ note



After the 5 and 10€ notes Mario Draghi, the Chairman of the European Central Bank announced the release of the new 20 € note on 24th February. In shape the note retains its dominant blue colour and its Gothic architectural structures. An additional innovative security feature has been added in the shape of the portrait window in the hologram. When the banknote is held against the light, the window becomes transparent and reveals a portrait of Europa (the mythological Greek princess after whom our continent is named) which is visible on both sides of the note... [Read more](#)

The ECB President wants to strengthen Monetary Union



During the debate in the European Parliament on 25th February on the ECB's activities the institution's President Mario Draghi highlighted his commitment to "true economic Union." "Economic convergence has not been as sustainable as we first hoped. And this still threatens the long term success of Monetary Union in the event of a major shock," he maintained as he addressed MEPs. According to Mario Draghi two additional answers have to be provided to the shortfalls of Economic Union. Firstly, the economies of the euro zone must be strengthened via sounder public finances and ambitious economic structural

reforms. "Secondly we must move over from a system of rules governing the drafting of national economic policies to a system of shared sovereignty within the common institutions, with the aim of strengthening our governance of economic policy. A common rule can only be strong if the common institution that can implement it is also strong," explained Mr Draghi... [Read more](#)

Germany :

The Bundestag approves aid to Greece



German MPs approved the extension of the four month programme of aid to Greece by a wide majority on 27th February 2015. The vote by the German Parliament was the final hurdle to overcome in terms of European aid to Greece. A wide majority of 542 MPs out of 631 approved the aid programme. Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble called to vote in support of the text... [Read more](#)

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Austria :

Austria modernises its law on Islam



The Austrian Parliament approved the new law on Islam on 25th February. The bill had been under preparation for several years since the previous law governing Islam dated back to imperial times (1912), but events in Paris in January pushed the Austrian government to act on foreign funding and "to counter excesses" said Immigration Minister Sebastian Kurz. The new bill notably plans for the ban on financing imams and Islamic organisations with foreign funds. Most Austrian Muslims are of Turkish origin and some imams have been financed by the Turkish Religious Affairs department. Sebastian Kurz believes that this bill grants more rights to Austrian Muslims and helps to promote "Islam of a European nature..." [Read more](#)

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Belgium :

The Council of Ministers approves a draft bill on the promotion of work



The Belgian Council of Ministers approved a draft bill on 27th February that aims to "reduce the wage handicap in comparison with three reference countries (France, Germany, Netherlands) notably by freezing the smooth health index as of March "so that the index leap of 2% can be made". The draft bill that is to be approved by Belgian MPs notably provides for criminal and administrative sanctions against employers who do not respect the wage moderation measures and the freezing of the index. This bill also implements the entire social agreement 2015-2016 concluded with inter-professional social partners as well as the last points in the first phase of the harmonisation of workers' and employees' statuses... [Read more](#)

Spain :

Debate on the State of the Nation in Spain



On 24th February during a debate on the state of the nation the head of the Spanish government, Mariano Rajoy indicated that "Spain had been on the edge of bankruptcy but it has now become an example of recovery for the other countries of the EU." It has set the goal of creating 3 million jobs over the next few years and announced an increase in growth forecasts for 2015: 2.4% in comparison with a previously forecast 2%. The socialist opposition is challenging this optimism and points to the pervasive corruption that plagues the country and the high unemployment rate. We should recall that Spain is preparing for general elections that will take place at the end of the year... [Read more](#)

Spain will contribute to the investment plan for Europe to a total 1.5 billion euro



On 27th February Spain announced that it will be contributing 1.5 billion € to projects funded by the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) which is the key element in the "Investment Plan for Europe". Spain's contribution will be made via the Instituto de Crédito Oficial (ICO), the country's national development bank... [Read more](#)

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Estonia :

The party in office in Estonia wins the general elections

On March 1st during the legislative elections in Estonia the party in



office, the Reform Party (centre), won 27.7% of the vote and 30 seats ahead of the Centre (pro-Russian) 24.8% and 27 seats. The Social Democrats came third with 15.2% and 15 seats, Pro-Patria Union-Res Publica (IRL) followed with 13.7% and 14 seats, the Liberals 8.7% and 8 seats and the Conservative Party 8.1% and 7 seats. No other party achieved the 5% eligibility threshold. Turnout totalled 63.7%. Outgoing head of government Taavi Roivas now has to form a new government. The two present government allies - the Reform Party and the Social Democrats do not however have an absolute majority in the Parliament and therefore a new ally will have to be found. This election took place to a backdrop of concern for the country's security in the face of Moscow. Taavi Roivas is also demanding greater NATO presence in response to that of the Russian army on the border... [Read more](#)

France :

Franco-Italian Summit in Paris



On 24th February the President of the Italian Council Matteo Renzi met French President François Hollande in Paris. The rider to the 2001 agreement enabling the launch of the TGV Lyon-Turin trainline was signed. Work will start in 2016. This TGV requires the construction of a 57km tunnel under the Alps the cost of which will total 8.5 billion euro. François Hollande hopes that the EU will take on 40% of the cost of building this portion of the line. The entire line - which is not due for completion before 2030 - is due to cost 26 billion €. France said it supported Italy's efforts notably in the UN to put an end to the chaos in Libya whilst seeking an agreement with neighbouring countries to counter human trafficking. The two men said that they first want to find a political agreement between the different factions. Matteo Renzi qualified the Libyan case as a priority for all of Europe. Regarding the Lyon-Turn line the Foundation published a paper on this in 2012... [Read more](#)

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Appeal in Manila by President Hollande for the climate



On his visit to the Philippines on 26th February French President François Hollande launched an appeal to help poor countries in the face of climatic disturbances in view of the Paris Summit this coming December which France hopes will lead to a binding agreement to limit global warming. This agreement drafted country by country would aim to contain global warming below 2°C by the end of the century. François Hollande has asked the rich countries to help the poorest to face the changes associated with future constraints, notably via the "Green Fund" - a financial mechanism which France and Germany have promised to finance to a total of one billion dollars each... [Read more](#)

Italy :

Bill on the civil responsibility of magistrates in Italy



On 24th February the Chamber of Deputies in Italy approved the draft bill regarding the civil responsibility of magistrates. The main features of the bill are an extension of the possibilities for appeal by the citizen and the obligation to act in the event of negligence. "It is a historic moment" stressed Justice Minister Andrea Orlando. The bill addresses an issue over which an infringement procedure was launched by the European Commission for the non-implementation of EU law that would have led to payment by Italy of a fine estimated at 37 million euro... [Read more](#)

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Lithuania :

Lithuania decides to re-introduce compulsory military service



After having relinquished military service in 2008 after joining NATO in 2004 Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė announced on 24th February that compulsory military service was to be re-introduced after an emergency meeting of the National Defence Council. The president justified this decision due to the conflict in Ukraine and the threatening stance adopted by Russia. She declared that "the present geopolitical climate requires a strengthening of a speeding up in recruitment for the army (...) the National Defence Council has therefore decided to temporarily re-introduce compulsory military service for the next five years. Conscripts will serve for nine months and around 3,500 Lithuanians will be called up yearly." This decision still has to be approved by Parliament... [Read more](#)

Romania :

Official Visit by Romanian President to Germany



Romanian President Klaus Iohannis made an official visit to Berlin on 26th February. He spoke with Chancellor Angela Merkel. From an economic point of view Germany is one of the biggest European investors in Romania and trade between the two countries totals more than 20 billion €. The Chancellor spoke of the cultural links, with the President's membership of Romania's German minority strengthening this observation. The visit aimed to consolidate links and cooperation in vital areas notably trade and the fight to counter corruption. Foreign policy also took a central position in the visit and Ms Merkel said she wanted the two countries to cooperate more closely together. Indeed Romania's proximity to the Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine make it a strategic player for the Europeans in light of the crisis with Russia... [Read more](#)

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UK :

The UK is to provide support to the Ukrainian army



On 24th February British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK is to send advisors and training teams to Ukraine. During a meeting in Paris Pavlo Klimkin, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister announced that the Ukrainian army did not need lethal weapons but communication tools and the means to strengthen its capabilities. This is the idea behind the aid that the UK is to provide as it dispatches specialists to train in the medical, logistics, military and intelligence areas. It is an opportunity to train Ukrainian specialists so that they can then stand alone. David Cameron's government took this decision following further threats by the pro-Russian separatists and Russia's attitude in the region. David Cameron recalled that Britain's approach to Ukraine ruled out the delivery of lethal weapons for the time being but that might change depending on how the conflict developed... [Read more](#)

Bosnia-Herzegovina :

Historic Commitment by Bosnia-Herzegovina on the path to Europe



On 23rd February the EU head of diplomacy Federica Mogherini welcomed the historic commitment by Bosnia-Herzegovina after the adoption by parliament of a declaration that plans for economic and social reform that aims to bring the country closer to the EU. "This parliament has taken an important decision, I would say that it is historic," declared Ms Mogherini to MPs in the two chambers of the Bosnian parliament as they adopted a "political declaration" put forward by the country's collegial presidency. "It is a decision taken on behalf of many in Bosnia-Herzegovina who want the country to move towards the European Union," added Ms Mogherini... [Read more](#)

Ukraine :

Ministerial meeting on the implementation of the Minsk Agreements



The French, German, Russian and Ukrainian Foreign Ministers met in Paris on 24th February. They exchanged views on the implementation of the ceasefire. The situation in Debaltseve was the particular focus of discussion and attention was drawn to the situation in Mariupol. The four ministers have called for the full implementation of all of the measures included in the Minsk Agreements starting with a total ceasefire and the full withdrawal of heavy arms... [Read more](#)

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Eurostat :

Unemployment drops in Europe



According to a Eurostat study on 2nd March the unemployment rate, adjusted to seasonal variations, lay at 11.2% in January 2015 in the euro zone and 9.8% in the EU, down in comparison with the December 2014 figures (11.3% and 9.9% respectively) but also in comparison with January 2014 (11.8% and 10.6% respectively). Unemployment in the euro zone in January 2015 (11.2%) is the lowest rate recorded since April 2012. The lowest unemployment rates recorded were in Germany (4.7%), Austria (4.8%), whilst the highest were seen in Greece (25.8% in November 2014) and in Spain (23.4%). Youth unemployment in January 2015 had also declined in comparison with January 2014 to lie at 21.2% in the EU and 22.9% in the euro zone in contrast to 23.3% and 24.3% respectively... [Read more](#)

Decrease in inflation in the euro zone



According to figure published by Eurostat on 2nd March the annual inflation rate in the euro zone lay at -0.3% in February 2015, up against the January rate of -0.6%. Regarding the main components of inflation in the euro zone services were due to witness the highest annual rate in February (1.1% against 1% in January) followed by food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (0.5% against -0.1% in January), industrial goods apart from energy (-0.2%, against -0.1% in January) and energy (-7.9%, against -9.3% in January)... [Read more](#)

National Minimum Salaries in the European Union



As of 1st January 2015, 22 of the 28 Member States of the European Union had national minimum wages. They ranged from €184 per month in Bulgaria to €1,923 in Luxembourg. However, when adjusted for differences in purchasing power, the disparities between Member States are reduced from a ratio of 1 to 10 in euro to a ratio of 1 to 4 in purchasing power standards (PPS). These figures were published by Eurostat on 26th February... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Amnesty International Report on Human Rights



Amnesty International published its annual report on human rights on 25th February. In 2014 the situation was more than alarming: war crimes were committed in 18 countries, four million people fled Syria, 3400 people drowned in the Mediterranean in their bid to reach Europe; 62 governments imprisoned people who were simply exercising their right to the freedom of thought; unfair trials took place in 58% of the countries observed (ie 93 countries). Amnesty International deplors that "for the defence of particular interests or political opportunism the UN Security Council has illustrated that it is incapable of settling the crises and conflicts that have torn Gaza, Iraq, Israel, Syria and Ukraine apart - even in situations in which States and armed groups have been guilty of atrocious crimes against civilians." The NGO also advocates that world leaders impose further restrictions to fight against the use of explosive arms as well as the irresponsible transfer of arms to authors of human rights infringements... [Read more](#)

Culture :

"Matisse. Arabesque" Exhibition in Rome



From March 5th to 21st June 2015 the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome is running an exhibition called "Matisse. Arabesque". The exhibition will present around one hundred paintings by the French artist several of which are the most remarkable on show in Italy for the very first time. Thanks to a partnership with the Italian Ministry of Culture this exceptional exhibition will be hosting pictures on loan from the most famous museums in the world like the Tate in London, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, the Pompidou Centre in Paris, as well as the main museums of Philadelphia and Washington... [Read more](#)

The National Gallery of London launches the exhibition "Inventing Impressionism."



From 4th March to 31st May 2015 the National Gallery of London is running an exhibition "Inventing Impressionism" devoted to the difficult beginnings of Impressionist art. The exhibition looks in particular at Paul Durand-Ruel, a Parisian art dealer who, at an early stage, discovered and acquired works by future key elements of the movement like Monet, Degas, Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley. "Inventing Impressionism" shows more than 85 works of Impressionist art which all belonged to Durand-Ruel some of which are part of Renoir and Monet's most famous series... [Read more](#)

Mary Heilmann & David Reed. Two By Two



The Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin is hosting the first joint exhibition of artists Mary Heilmann and David Reed from 6th March to 11th October 2015. These artists were key figures in American post-abstract Expressionist painting. The exhibition "Two by Two" presents 40 pieces made since the 1970's and explores the entente and tension between their respective artistic positions... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



2nd and 3rd March
Brussels
Competitiveness Council



5th and 6th March
Brussels
Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council



6th March
Brussels
Environment Council



9th March
Brussels
Eurogroup Meeting
Brussels
Employment, Social Policy, Healthcare and Consumer Council



9th and 12th March
Strasbourg
Plenary Session of the European Parliament

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