

Total uncertainty just one month before the UK elections

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On 7th May next the British will be renewing the 650 members of the House of Commons, the lower chamber of Parliament. No party is due to win an absolute majority and speculation is running high about possible coalitions. The formation of the future government majority is therefore the real issue at stake in this election. All of the polls, just one month before the election, show that the two main parties (Conservatives and Labour) are running neck and neck. The TV debate on 2nd April between the seven main candidates did not reveal a winner. Economic issues, healthcare and immigration are the priorities in this election, and indirectly, Europe, since outgoing Prime Minister David Cameron announced in May 2013 that a referendum would be organised, if he won the election, on the UK's exit of the EU - the Brexit.

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Contents

Foundation : Gastronomy **Financial Crisis** : Germany - France - Greece - UK - Sweden
Commission : Agriculture - Dairy Quotas - Montenegro - Citizens' Initiatives
Parliament : NATO **Council** : Ukraine **Diplomacy** : Iran - Syria **ECB** : Greece - Opinion
Sciences : CERN **Germany** : Franco-German **Bulgaria** : Anti-Corruption
France : Terrorism **Greece** : Reforms **Italy** : France **UK** : Campaign - Debate/Elections
Bosnia-Herzgovina : Government **Ukraine** : Germany - Finland/Poland
Eurostat : Unemployment - Inflation - Labour/Cost **Publications** : Europe
Culture : Exhibition/Frankfurt - Exhibition/Paris - Exhibition/Vienna -
Exhibition/Parma - Exhibition/Brussels - Film/Europe - Cinema/Italy

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

Foundation :

25th European final of the Georges Baptiste Cup



French gastronomy is recognised the world over for its finesse and this competition follows the French taste for a distinct "art of living". The Georges Baptiste Cup provides young candidates with a chance to show their know-how in terms of hosting, serving and preparing gourmet meals. The European final in which 12 European States participate will be taking place between 8th and 10th April 2015. The Robert Schuman Foundation is associated with this event... [Read more](#)

Financial Crisis :

Germany wants to continue reducing its debt



In its national reform programme adopted on 1st April Germany recalls that the country's debt is still over 60% of the GDP. An expansive budgetary policy would affect the German economy in a pro-cyclical manner. Berlin does not want this to happen because unemployment is at a historically low rate and the production gap close to zero... [Read](#)

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OECD Study of France



On 2nd April the OECD published an economic study devoted to France which assesses the country's performance since the crisis and the factors that are preventing it from achieving stronger economic recovery. This publication looks into a series of structural reforms that might help France revive and stimulate growth, raises living standards and improve citizens' well-being... [Read more](#)

Greece will pay back the IMF on 9th April



On 5th April the Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said to the General Manager of the IMF, Christine Lagarde that Athens would pay back its debt of 450 million euro to the IMF by 9th April. After their interview in Washington Ms Lagarde published a declaration confirming that Greece would respect its commitments... [Read more](#)

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UK growth revised upwards in 2014



The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published growth figures for the last quarter of 2014 on 31st March. Official data shows that the UK's economy grew by 2.8% in 2014, more than initially expected and one of the highest rates since 2006, notably due to buoyant exports. The GDP also increased by 0.6% between the third and fourth quarter of 2014 and these figures will be promoted by the government in office in view of the upcoming general elections... [Read more](#)

OECD Study of Sweden



On 30th March the OECD presented an economic study of Sweden. The Swedish economy, which has recovered a higher production rate than before the start of the economic and financial crisis in 2008, is one of Europe's most resistant economies. The OECD stresses however that some challenges remain in order to raise the GDP per capita, which has stagnated since 2008 and to stimulate productivity, which has slowed over the last few years... [Read more](#)

Commission :

New meat labelling rules enter into force



As of 1st April 2015 it will now be obligatory in the EU to use a new label on meat products so that their origin is clearly visible. Approved in December 2013 the law comes in the wake of the horsemeat scandal that struck Europe two years ago. Consumers will now clearly be informed of the place where the animal was reared and slaughtered, whether this entails pre-packed, fresh, chilled or frozen meat and whether it is pork, mutton, goat or chicken... [Read more](#)

Abolition of dairy quotas in the EU



The dairy quota regime established in 1984 under the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) was finally abolished on 1st April 2015. The European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Philip Hogan believes that this is both a "challenge for dairy farmers who face a certain amount of price volatility" and also an "opportunity in terms of growth and employment." The issue at stake comprises encouraging exports outside of the EU, which still only represent 10% of the EU's exports. Brussels is estimating a 2.1% increase per year on average of world exports supported by a sharp rise in world demand, notably on the part of China... [Read more](#)

Two new negotiation chapters opened in the EU membership process with Montenegro



Two new chapters were opened on 30th March in the negotiation process with Montenegro for accession to the EU. Chapters 16 and 30 which focus on external relations have been added to the 16 chapters opened previously out of the 35 that are to be opened for negotiation. Regarding chapter 16 Montenegro will have to bring its legislation in line with that of the EU in areas like VAT and direct taxation. Chapter 30 invites the

country to present the Commission with an action plan for its remaining preparations in terms of legislative alignment. With this the country has to show that it has the administrative capability to introduce the community acquis. A membership conference bringing the EU's ministers together is planned for June 2015... [Read more](#)

Commission report on citizens' initiatives



The European Citizens' Initiatives 'ICEs' that were planned for in the Lisbon Treaty and that entered into force in 2012 have mobilised six million Europeans over the last three years. The ICEs aim to give European citizens voice regarding major issues, but very few of these initiatives have succeeded in overcoming the initial stages of the process. An ICE must collate 1 million signatures in the areas for which the European Commission is competent, only three of which have managed to do so far. Improvements and modifications might however follow the report that was published on 31st March, which for Frans Timmermans, the Commission's First Vice-President "is one of the keys to strengthening confidence in the European institutions and to promoting active participation on the part of the citizen in the drafting of Union policy.".. [Read more](#)

Parliament :

Jens Stoltenberg visits the European Parliament



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited the European Parliament on 30th March. He took part in a debate with MEPs of the Foreign Affairs Committee together with the sub-committee for security and defence and the Parliament's delegation for relations with the parliamentary assembly of NATO. Debate focused on the situation in Ukraine and relations with Russia, but also on security in the Mediterranean and on relations between the EU and NATO. Jens Stoltenberg recalled that "he was a fervent supporter of close cooperation between the EU and NATO," two organisations which although they did not share the same prerogatives nor the same responsibilities, were facing the "same challenges and the same threats.".. [Read more](#)

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Council :

The Council grants a further loan of 1.8 billion to Ukraine



On 31st March the Council decided to lend up to 1.8 billion € to Ukraine over a two and a half year period. These loans will be disbursed in three instalments and will have a maximum maturity of 15 years. These funds should enable Ukraine to continue the stabilisation of its national economy and will be mobilised after the signature of a memorandum of agreement between the European Commission and Ukraine. The latter will also define the economic policies and financial conditions under which the funds will be used... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Agreement with Iran



On 2nd April the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs along with representatives from France, Germany, the US, China, Russia and the Iranian Foreign Minister (P5+1 and Iran) announced that they had reached agreement in Lausanne on the parameters for a sustainable settlement to issues raised by the Iranian nuclear programme. American and European sanctions will be lifted depending on whether Iran respects its commitments. A final text might be concluded by 30th June... [Read more](#)

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The European Union doubles its pledge of funds to Syria



During the third international donors' conference to Syria that took place on 21st March in Kuwait the EU announced a significant increase in its financial support to Syria. The Commission and the Member States decided to double their pledge of donations thereby taking the total to 1.1 billion euro, 500 million of which will be devoted to humanitarian aid, to the rapid recovery of the country's situation and to long term stabilisation. A special fund for Syria was also set up: the "Madad Fund" will support humanitarian work in Syria and also in neighbouring countries which are hosting most of the refugees... [Read more](#)

ECB :

The ECB raises the ceiling on its emergency loans to banks



The European Central Bank (ECB) again raised its ceiling on emergency funding (ELA - Emergency Liquidity Assistance) to Greek banks by 700 million euros on 1st April. This brings the ceiling to 71.8 billion euros. The ECB has been helping the Greek banks in this way since the beginning of February. The ECB also confirmed its "cautious confidence" in the euro zone's gradual economic recovery. The second report on the most recent ECB governors' council meeting on 5th March was published on 1st April and suggests an in depth discussion over the pertinence of euro zone economic forecasts mid-term... [Read more](#)

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"Does austerity affect public opinion?"



According to an ECB study undertaken in 26 EU countries there is no correlation between a government's fiscal choice and the degree of satisfaction or confidence in opinion regarding the institutions. However belonging to the euro zone increases the mistrust of public opinion regarding national institutions says the ECB... [Read more](#)

Sciences :

Restart of the biggest particle accelerator at the CERN



The biggest and most powerful particle accelerator in the world restarted on 5th April after a two year pause thereby opening the way to the exploration of new areas of physics such as black matter and antimatter. The restart of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), on the Franco-Swiss border, which comprises a ring-shaped tunnel 27 km long is the focus of extreme interest in the scientific community. Buried 100 metres underground this particle accelerator, in its initial stages, led to the confirmation of the existence of the Higgs boson for which two CERN scientists were awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 2012... [Read more](#)

Germany :

Franco-German Council of Ministers



The 17th Franco-German Council of Ministers took place on 31st March in Berlin together with Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande. A list of joint investment projects was presented which are mainly focused on areas like energy and the digital economy. These projects are due to support the investment plan put forward by the European Commission. "France and Germany want to contribute significantly towards taking the European Union towards greater economic integration by way of concrete initiatives and joint projects undertaken by Member States which share the same vision" maintained German Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron in a joint declaration. Regarding the international arena France and Germany are continuing their work to reach a sustainable, peaceful solution to the Ukrainian crisis... [Read more](#)

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Bulgaria :

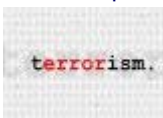
Anti-Corruption measures in Bulgaria



The estate of some 6,000 Bulgarian public figures will be examined in great detail under the new anti-corruption programme announced the Deputy Prime Minister Meglena Kuneva. A national anti-corruption policy council will be established to assess the tax return made by these personalities - ministers, MPs, heads of regional agencies and regional council heads - who sometimes have lifestyles that do not correspond to their official incomes. The investigations will be undertaken by a specialised unit of representatives from the prosecutor's office, the police and the national security agency... [Read more](#)

France :

National parliaments adopt the Paris Declaration on the fight to counter terrorism



Several national parliaments adopted the Paris Declaration on 30th March on the European policy on the fight to counter terrorism announced the French Senate. The declaration indicates that "terrorism is a direct violation of fundamental values" and that "European citizens have the right to have high expectations regarding their security."

Recalling that national security is still the responsibility of each Member State the declaration does however support priority action to be undertaken Europe wide such as the widening of the definition of terrorist acts, "foreign fighters", the strengthening of the coordination role played by FRONTEX, that is responsible for the Union's external borders and the improvement of identification measures like the Schengen Information System (SIS II)... [Read more](#)

Greece :

List of Greek Reforms



The discussions started in Brussels between Greece and its international creditors broke off on 31st March. The EU and the IMF deemed that the list of reforms presented by the Greek government did not "contain any precise measures." Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras declared that he was looking for an "honest compromise" with the country's creditors, without being prepared to make every single concession. The President of the European Council Donald Tusk deemed that Greece's economic situation was "under control" but that no agreement would come before Easter, but that this would be possible before the end of April. The Financial Times published a list of reforms put forward by Athens to its European partners. There will not be any meetings between the euro zone ministers before the one planned on 23rd April in Riga, but "discussions are moving forward" maintains the European Commission...

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Italy :

The President of the Italian Republic visits Paris



French President François Hollande hosted his Italian counterpart Sergio Mattarella on 30th March. After their meeting the presidents delivered a joint declaration. Paris and Rome stressed their convergence on several themes: from a European growth policy to the fight to counter terrorism, not forgetting immigration policy. Mr Mattarella spoke of the "need to stimulate greater European integration.".. [Read more](#)

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UK :

Launch of the electoral campaign in the UK



The electoral campaign for the general elections on 7th May officially started on 30th March in the UK. According to tradition the present Prime Minister David Cameron went to Buckingham Palace to meet Queen Elizabeth to ask her permission to dissolve Parliament and thereby end the government coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats... [Read more](#)

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TV debate before the general elections in the UK



The only TV debate that will take place in the entire electoral campaign was broadcast on 2nd April. It included the seven leaders of the main political parties, including David Cameron and Ed Milliband. Taxation, government spending and the deficit - not forgetting immigration and the healthcare system gave rise to lively debate. Seven million viewers followed the event. Polls did not pinpoint any real winner after the debate... [Read more](#)

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Bosnia-Herzegovina :

Bosnia-Herzegovina has a new government



On 31st March, six months after the elections Bosnia-Herzegovina finally managed to form a government mainly with nationalist parties, which did however promise to take the process forward for the country to draw closer to the EU. The government will be led by Denis Zvizdic (SDA). In a parliament of 42 MPs, 26 voted for and 7 against the new government, which will comprise 9 ministers. "We need serious change (...) Weariness and pessimism have lasted for too long and the new government must provide new impetus," declared the Serb member of the collegial presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mladen Ivanic... [Read more](#)

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Ukraine :

Visit by Ukrainian Prime Minister in Berlin

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk was in Berlin on April 1st.



He met Chancellor Angela Merkel. The two heads of government spoke of the Minsk II Agreement. The Chancellor said that the situation had calmed down but that there was still no final truce. Economic reform was also the focus of discussion, and the Chancellor declared that Ukraine is "on the path to becoming a financially transparent, profitable country." She referred to the fight to counter corruption and the quest for fiscal transparency. During their joint press conference Angela Merkel confirmed that 300 million € would be disbursed to help economic development, infrastructures and the healthcare system... [Read more](#)

Finnish and Polish President meet to discuss the Ukrainian conflict



Finnish President Sauli Niinisto met his Polish counterpart Bronislaw Komorowski on 31st March during an official visit to Poland. This meeting aimed to review the Ukrainian conflict, the effects of this on security in the East of Europe and their respective relations with NATO. The two presidents agreed shared the same view of the conflict and the sanctions adopted regarding Russia since their geographical position, is "one of great political instability". They both condemned the annexation of Crimea and the infringement of the Minsk Agreements and called for greater cooperation between their two countries... [Read more](#)

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Eurostat :

Unemployment falls in February 2015



According to a Eurostat study published on 31st March the unemployment rate adjusted to seasonal variations lay at 11.3% in the euro zone and at 9.8% in the EU. In the euro zone the unemployment rate has decreased since it lay at 11.4% in January 2015 and at 11.8% in February 2014. There was also a decline in the EU (unemployment lay at 9.9% in January 2015 and 10.5% in February 2014). The unemployment rates in the EU and the euro zone are the lowest recorded since May 2012 and September 2011. The lowest rates were recorded in Germany (4.8%), and Austria (5.3%), whilst Greece (26.0% in December 2014) and Spain (23.2%) recorded the highest rates... [Read more](#)

Annual euro zone inflation rate at -0.1%



Inflation remained negative in March in the euro zone with an annual rate of -0.1% but price decreases have slowed in comparison with January and February said an estimate published by Eurostat on 31st March. After -0.6% in January and -0.3% in February the slowing in price decreases seen in March is pushing back fears of deflation... [Read more](#)

Extremely disparate labour costs in the EU



According to Eurostat report published on 30th March in 2014 hourly labour costs in the EU - agriculture and civil service apart - ranged between 3.80€ and 40.30€ per hour - ie a difference of one to 10 between Member States. The average lay at 24.60€ in the EU and 29.20€ in the euro zone. The lowest wages were recorded in Bulgaria (3.80€ per hour), Romania (4.60€), Lithuania (6.50€) and in Latvia (6.60€) and the highest were recorded in Denmark (40.30€), Belgium (39.10€), Sweden (37.40€) and Luxembourg (35.90€). Industrial sectors recorded the highest hourly labour costs followed by services and the building sector... [Read more](#)

Publications :

"A messenger for Europe, advocating against nationalism"



The book by Robert Menasse "Un messenger pour l'Europe, plaidoyer contre les nationalismes" has been published in French by Buchet Castel. How can we bring confidence back to the EU whilst it is experiencing an unprecedented crisis and that politicians and citizens alike in the Member States are constantly challenging it? Robert Menasse, a true European, has decided to explore the Union's institutions as an ethnologist with an investigation in Brussels amongst those who work towards building the European project. He makes a plea for the Europe that was created after the 2nd World War with the aim of rising above nationalism, but especially so that its citizens do not lose sight of the long lasting peace and prosperity that these supranational institutions have given us... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Monet Exhibition and the birth of Impressionism



The Städel Museum of Frankfurt is organising an exhibition on Monet until 21st June. This exhibition focuses on the birth of the Impressionist movement in the 1860's to the 1880's, as it explains the emergence of a radically new style that made a profound change to the relationship between shape and colour. The exhibition explores this movement that revolutionised pictorial art via the works of Claude Monet and also Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley and Camille Pissarro... [Read more](#)

Nicolas Poussin at the Louvre



The Louvre is running an exhibition until 29th June this year devoted to Nicolas Poussin on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of his death in 1665. The exhibition highlights the painter's approach to God and his personal thoughts on religion. The greatest painter of the 17th century Nicolas Poussin is considered to be the artist of the Gospel. This exhibition which binds art and religion offers visitors a different reading of Poussin who was able to mix the profane and the sacred to provide a personal meditation of God... [Read more](#)

Exhibition on Friedrich Loos at the Belvedere Vienna



The museum of the Belvedere Vienna is running an exhibition until 12th July 2015 on the Austrian painter Friedrich Loos (1797-1890) who was famous for his panoramic views including the famous "Sattler Panorama" of Salzburg, which he contributed to in the 1820's. After this period in Salzburg where he painted some of his most famous works, Loos settled in Vienna and finally in Rome in 1846... [Read more](#)

Exhibition Roma 900 in Parma



The Magnani Rocca Foundation is hosting the Roma 900 exhibition until 5th July. With around 100 works the exhibition presents the 20th century novel then public and artistic culture in Rome in the first half of 20th century with artists like De Chirico, Guttuso, Capogrossi, Balla, Casorati, Sironi, Carra, Mafai, Scipione... [Read more](#)

"The Sultan's World" exhibition at the Bozar Brussels



The Bozar Brussels is running an exhibition until 31st May entitled "The Sultan's World". Visitors discover the attraction exercised by the Ottoman Empire over Western artists and the influence of the Orient on Renaissance thinking. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 fascination for the Ottoman civilisation encouraged intellectuals, diplomats, humanists and artists to travel to this new crossroads of creativity. "The Sultan's World. The Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Art" brings this key moment in history to life in which two worlds met and influenced each other... [Read more](#)

Film Festival of Grand Europe



The 10th "Europe by Europe" film festival is taking place in Paris until 15th April focusing on the theme "Corps et Âmes". Organised by Europa Film Akt, the festival is co-financed amongst others by the region Île de France and the Europe Creative-MEDIA programme. The Sauvage Prize and the Luna Prize will be given to the most unique European films... [Read more](#)

"Rendez-vous" New French Cinema Festival in Italy



From 8th to 19th April the 5th new French cinema festival will be taking place in several stages across Italy (Rome 8th-12th April; Bologna 5th-17th April; Naples 10th April; Palermo 10th-12th April, Turin 13th-19th April, Lecce 17th April). Launched by the Embassy of France the Rendez-Vous Festival 2015 is being organised by the Institut français, together with UniFrance Films and the Villa Medici (Academy of France in Rome). The festival is devoted entirely to the most recent

works in French cinema with a programme of different genres, from the most popular to the most sophisticated, from blockbusters to independent films... [Read more](#)

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Agenda :



14th-16th April

Riga

Informal meeting of Ministers of Environment and Energy

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