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New challenges for the European Union's trade policy

Author: Olivier de Laroussilhe



The European Union's trade policy owes its efficacy to its federal structure and to it being a concept shared by 28 Member States. The EU is a major player in world trade and the leading world exporter of services. But the world trade arena has changed due to competition created by the emerging countries and mistrust on the part of public opinion in the developed economies. The collapse of multilateralism is affecting the EU especially, since it is committed to a rules-based idea of international relations. Given the international challenges and

to convince the citizens during the upcoming European elections the EU has to redesign its trade policy. A social policy will have to be added to it as well as an industrial policy to help retain its place on the markets.

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Front page! :

What did you say, competition?



Jean-Dominique Giuliani reviews the issues at stake for the future of the European Union's competition policy after the Commission's decision regarding Alstom-Siemens... [Read more](#)

Elections :

Elections in Estonia on 3rd March



958, 571 Estonians are being called to ballot on 3rd March next to elect the 101 MPs in the Riigikogu, the only house in Parliament. 1,099 people from 10 different political parties and 16 independents are officially running in this election. According to the most recent poll by

Kantar Emor between 24th and 29th January last, the Reform Party (ER) would come out ahead with 26.3% of the vote. It is due to pull ahead of the Centre Party (K) which is due to win 24.4% of the vote. The People's Conservative Party (EKRE) is due to come third with 18.2% of the vote, the Social Democratic Party is due to win 9.7% of the vote; Pro-Patria 7.5% and the new party, Estonia 200, 7.2%... [Read more](#)

Foundation :

Permanent Atlas of the European Union



In view of the upcoming European elections, the Robert Schuman Foundation has published a new version of the "Permanent Atlas of the European Union" which offers a comprehensive view of the Union, the euro zone and each of the Member States, as well as the overseas territories. This work helps readers find the most up-to-date and objective political and statistic information. It is available in paper version from the Foundation site or in bookshops, as well as in digital version... [Read more](#)

European Elections: a site to understand everything



From 23rd to 26th May 2019 more than 300 million Europeans will be called to choose their 705 MEPs for the next five years. As in the previous elections, the Foundation has designed a website devoted for greater understanding of the election and for them to be able to follow the campaign in the 27 Member States... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Rejection of the merger between Alstom and Siemens



On 6th February the European Commission vetoed the project for the creation of a European rail industry giant via the merger of the French group Alstom and German Siemens. According to Margrethe Vestager, the Competition Commissioner, this merger would lead to an increase in prices for signalling systems and for future generations of high speed trains. Following this decision, the German and French Economy Ministers accused the Commission of not defending an industrial policy worthy of the EU's technological power... [Read more](#)

Recommendations for an electronic health network



The Commission published its recommendations to the Member States for the creation of a safe system allowing the Union's citizens to access their electronic health files in all Member States... [Read more](#)

Assessment of the code of conduct regarding illicit content



On 4th February the European Commission published the fourth assessment of the code of conduct signed amongst others by Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube to remedy the proliferation of racist and xenophobic hate speech. The assessment shows that IT businesses assessed 89% of flagged online content in 24 hours and 72% of content deemed to be illegal hate speech against 20% ad 28% when the code was launched in 2015. These businesses must however be more transparent in terms of deleting and notifying, as well as reporting back to users... [Read more](#)

Winter economic forecasts



On 7th February the Commission published its winter economic forecasts. The EU is due to experience a 7th consecutive year of growth, but which is not as strong as forecast, particularly in Germany, the Netherlands and in Italy due to external factors such as trade tension, the fear of a new financial crisis and a disorderly Brexit and also the slowing of emerging countries. Growth is due to rise to 1.5% in 2019 and by 1.7% in 2020 (against 1.9% and 1.8%). The euro zone is due to grow by 1.3% in 2019 and 1.7% in 2020... [Read more](#)

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Council :

Agreement between Member States on copyright

On 8th February Romanian President of the Council received the



support of the Member States for the new compromise text put forward by France and Germany regarding the directive on copyright in the digital single market. The compromise focuses on article 13, which provides that platforms such as YouTube pay their creators better and obliges them to withdraw content that has not been the object of a licence agreement between the artist and the platform. Since the Council's position has now been cleared negotiations with Parliament can start again... [Read more](#)

Agreement on investment funds and derivated product



The Council and Parliament came to agreement on 5th February on the measures needed to improve the existing regulatory framework governing over-the-counter derivated products and new rules enabling access to investment funds, including those established in other Member States. This proposal is part of the Plan of Action on Capital Markets Union... [Read more](#)

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Temporary agreement on the directive on working conditions



The Parliament and the Council came to agreement on 7th February regarding a new directive aiming to create more transparent and predictable working conditions, particularly for workers in atypical circumstance - i.e. all jobs that are not permanent or full time. From the beginning of their contract all workers will know their rights and obligations. It will no longer be possible for example to dismiss people working on-demand if they refuse to work within a very short period of notice... [Read more](#)

Agreement on border IT systems



The Parliament and the Council came to agreement on 5th February on measures aiming to improve the interoperability of information security, migration and border management systems in the Union. The agreement provides to pool data from the various systems in the European search portal, to create a common biometric information cross-checking system and to improve access to information by police officers from the Member States. The agreement does not change the existing rules on the protection of fundamental rights, notably regarding the storage and use of personal data... [Read more](#)

Agreement on the gas directive



On 8th February after a Franco-German compromise the representatives of the Member States gave a mandate to the Presidency of the Council to start negotiations regarding a modification of the directive on gas with the European Parliament. The text aims to submit the gas transmission lines between one Member State and a third country to the internal market rules, up to the Member State's border and the territorial waters. The proposal also provides for the possibility to grant derogations for existing gas pipelines such as Nord Stream 2... [Read more](#)

Agreement on the maritime sector in the event of a no-deal Brexit



On 8th February the Parliament and the Council came to a temporary agreement on a proposal that aims to guarantee new maritime links between Ireland and the other EU Member States in the event of a no-deal Brexit. The agreement will facilitate the continuity of investments and provide legal clarity. The agreement now has to be approved formally by the two institutions... [Read more](#)

Conclusions of the Eurogroup



During a Eurogroup meeting on 11th February the euro zone's Finance Ministers discussed post-programme surveillance missions in Ireland and Portugal. They unanimously supported the candidacy of the governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, Philip Lane for the vacant position on the board of the European Central Bank. They assessed the Commission's winter economic forecasts. In an inclusive format with their non-euro zone colleagues they continued to discuss the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union, notably the budgetary instrument for convergence and competitiveness (euro zone budget)... [Read more](#)

Informal meeting of Justice and Interior Ministers



The Interior and Justice Ministers met on 7th and 8th February in Bucharest. They discussed potential measures for the distribution of migratns to be set in place whilst waiting for the reform of the Dublin regulation regarding the asylum system. They exchanged views regarding the means to run the Schengen Area effectively, in the light of terrorist and migratory issues. They discussed police cooperation, notably regarding the sharing of digital data and the fight to counter terrorism. They debated the means to develop judicial cooperation in the civil, trade and criminal areas. They notably concentrated on the gathering of electronic evidence in criminal matters... [Read more](#)

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Diplomacy :

Africa-Europe: establishment of an African trade observatory



On 9th February the European Commission, the African Union and the International Trade Centre agreed on the introduction of an African Trade Observatory. The EU will be participating to a total of 4 million from the Pan-African programme. The observatory will enable the collation and analysis to cross-border trade flows... [Read more](#)

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Court of Justice :

Decision on social benefit policies



On 7th February in a decision the European Union's Court of Justice deemed that a person living in one Member State is not obliged to be in employment to be able to receive family allowance for his or her children living in another Member State... [Read more](#)

Court of Auditors :

Better controlled emissions



According to a report by the Court of Auditors published on 7th February European legislation in terms of vehicle emissions has improved since the "Dieselgate" scandal. The report stressed that the legislation's efficacy will depend on its implementation by the Member States. They also warn that manufacturers may find ways around the new testing systems which have been introduced and that scope for independent third-party testing may be limited because of the high costs involved... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Successful launch of Ariane 5



For its first launch of 2019 on 5th February the Ariane 5 rocket placed two telecommunications satellites in orbit for Indian aerospace Isro, which is also to include work with Cyprus, Greece and Saudi Arabia. The rocket was launched from the space centre in Kourou, in Guiana. Four other Ariane 5 launches are planned in 2019... [Read more](#)

Germany :

Angela Merkel visits Japan



German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Japan on 4th and 5th February during which time she met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Emperor Akihito. She welcomed the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement which has just entered into force and the two leaders reasserted their common wish to deepen cooperation between their two countries, as well as their position in support of free-trade and international multilateralism... [Read more](#)

Angela Merkel meets the Visegrad group

In the historic context of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, German Chancellor Angela Merkel met the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Czech, Andrej Babiš, Slovakian Peter Pellegrini, and Hungarian Viktor Orbán on the occasion of the Visegrad Group Summit



(informal group rallying four countries) on 7th February in Bratislava. The themes addressed were the EU's financial framework for 2021-2027, the upcoming European elections, the future of the EU and the changes that have occurred to European society... [Read more](#)

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Limit on the processing of Facebook user data



On 7th February Germany's competition authority sharply curtailed how Facebook may profile people, saying that users could refuse to allow the company to combine their Facebook information with data about their activities on other sites... [Read more](#)

France :

Launch of the Franco-German air fighter system



On 6th February the French and German Defence Ministers, Florence Parly and Ursula von der Leyen launched the first stage in the future fighter system, the SCAF which is due to replace the Rafale and Eurofighter fighters by 2040. Ministers notified Dassault Aviation and Airbus of the preparatory work and the design of the SCAF for 65 million € over the next two years. They recalled that the project is open to all European countries, and Spain, already an observer member of the programme, is due to integrate the project soon... [Read more](#)

Greece :

Parliament's vote on North Macedonia's accession to NATO



After the signature of the accession protocol of North Macedonia to the North Atlantic Treaty on 6th February, Greece was the first country to ratify the protocol on 8th February in the Greek Parliament, 153 votes in support, 140 against and 1 abstention. This ratification is the last stage in the validation of the Prespes agreement which renamed the Republic of Macedonia, North Macedonia... [Read more](#)

Ireland :

Visit by Prime Minister to Brussels



During a visit to Brussels by Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on 6th February, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker maintained that the withdrawal agreement of the UK "is not open for renegotiation". Whilst waiting for further proposals by British Prime Minister Theresa May who was in Brussels on 7th February, they repeated that the "European Union will continue to seek an agreement on the orderly withdrawal of the UK", by also preparing for a no deal Brexit scenario... [Read more](#)

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UK :

Continuation of discussions over Brexit



After a meeting in Brussels with British Prime Minister Theresa May on 7th February the President of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker said again that the EU would not re-open the withdrawal agreement with the UK, but it might change the content of the political declaration on the future relationship. Both leaders announced that their teams of negotiators were going to meet in a bid to find viable, acceptable solutions for Brexit, whilst Theresa May will be able to ask for an extension to article 50... [Read more](#)

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Ukraine :

Ukraine includes the goal of joining the EU and NATO in its Constitution



On 7th February the Ukrainian Parliament adopted an amendment to the Ukrainian Constitution put forward by President Petro Poroshenko, which states "that Ukraine's strategic orientation is towards joining the EU and NATO." Some weeks before the presidential election planned for

31st March, the vote marks the "irreversibility of the choice (Ukrainian) towards Euro-Atlantic integration, deemed the leader of the parliament, Andrii Paroubii... [Read more](#)

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Council of Europe :

Visit by the Spanish Prime Minister



The President of the Spanish government Pedro Sanchez travelled to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 7th February to discuss the issues at stake in the Union - notably migration - as well as issues regarding the position of Russia within the institution... [Read more](#)

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Moneyval Report on Lithuania



On 8th February MONEYVAL, the Council of Europe's anti-money laundering body published a report on Lithuania in which it decided to apply the enhanced follow-up procedure (following the regular follow-up procedure as soon as a significant number of priority actions are not undertaken in time) and invited it to establish a report by mid-2020. It calls on the Lithuanian authorities to step up their understanding of the risks of capital laundering and the financing of terrorism... [Read more](#)

NATO :

Signature of the accession protocol of North Macedonia



Following the ratification of the agreement with Greece over the name for Macedonia the representatives of the 29 NATO member states signed the accession protocol on 6th February for Northern Macedonia to the North Atlantic Treaty. The country is due become a full NATO member after ratification of the Protocol in each member country according to national procedures... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

The European Union, winner in the USA-China tariff war



According to a study by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) published on 4th February, the establishment of customs duties on certain products by Washington and Beijing will certainly cause a decrease in trade between the two powers, but this will be to the benefit of foreign businesses operating on their market and to the detriment of national companies. The major beneficiary countries from the Sino-American trade tension lie mainly in Europe. UNCTAD estimates the export surplus for the latter at around 70 billion € (50 billion in the US and 20 billion on the Chinese market) caused by the dispute over tariffs between Washington and Beijing... [Read more](#)

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Arrivals in Europe via the Mediterranean



According to figures published by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on 5th February, 6,413 migrants and refugees entered Europe via the sea during the 34 first days of 2019, ie a 17% decrease in comparison with the 7,499 who came during the same period last year... [Read more](#)

Pollution: the poorest and most vulnerable are the most exposed



The poorest and the most vulnerable - children, senior citizens - are also the most exposed in Europe to atmospheric and sound pollution, notes the European Environment Agency in a report published on 4th February. The agency, based in Copenhagen, published for the first time in 25 years an "exploratory analysis" of the link between socio-economic and environmental inequalities... [Read more](#)

Culture :

350 years since the death of Rembrandt in the Netherlands



2019 is devoted to the 350 years since the death of Rembrandt in the Netherlands. The Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam is devoting a large retrospective to paintings and drawings by the artist from 15th February to 10th June. In The Hague an exhibition is devoted to him until 15th September at the Mauritshuis Museum... [Read more](#)

Pierre Bonnard at the Tate Museum



The Tate London is devoting an exhibition to Pierre Bonnard (an artist of the Nabis movement) until 6th May, insisting in particular on his work on colours... [Read more](#)

"Giorgio de Chirico: back to the origins of Belgian Surrealism" Mons



From 16th February to 2nd June, the Museum of Fine Arts of Mons is running an exhibition "Giorgio de Chirico: back to the origins of Belgian Surrealism - Magritte, Delvaux Graverol" as a dialogue between three major figures of Belgian Surrealism and their model, Italian artist De Chirico, one of the pioneers of modern art and of metaphysical painting in Europe... [Read more](#)

"Markus Lüperz. Impressions" in Leipzig



Until 28th April the Graphic Arts Museum of Leipzig, together with the Beckner Gallery of Düsseldorf is showing more than 30 years of prints by the German artist. The themes are man and nature linked to Antiquity and the Renaissance, literature and music... [Read more](#)

"The Talisman" by Sérusier



Until 2nd June the Orsay Museum is dedicating an exhibition to the picture "Le Talisman" (1888) by Paul Sérusier, deemed to be a Nabis manifesto, privileging abstract art and colours to mimetic painting to represent nature... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



11th February
Brussels
Eurogroup Meeting



11th to 14th February
Strasbourg
Plenary Session of the European Parliament



12th February
Brussels
"Economic and Financial Affairs" Council



14th-15th February
Brussels
NATO Defence Ministers Meeting



18th February
Brussels
Foreign Affairs Council



18th and 19th February
Brussels
Competitiveness Council

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The Letter's Editorial Team :

Stefanie Buzmaniuk, Helen Levy ;
Cléa Agosta, Victoire Bortoli, Chloé Hellot, Natasha Hroneska, Sophie van der Heijden

Editor-in-chief: Eric Maurice
Publishing Director: Pascale Joannin

Contact/Suggestions
info@robert-schuman.eu

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