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Gender Equality in Europe: what progress in 2019?

Authors: Pascale Joannin, Ramona Bloj



Gender equality lies at the heart of the Union treaties. Despite the progress made at European level, some Member States are still lagging behind. The renewal of the institutions that will follow the European elections of May 2019 will be both an opportunity and a risk. On the eve of this renewal, political choices will be decisive to ensure that gender equality is not left by the wayside or that it is become a conveniently forgotten promise. The courage of Europe's leaders will be put to the text. To enable Europe to be an unrivalled

world champion in this area is also a vital goal. It services no purpose to advocate Human Rights if the first of these, women's rights, is not guaranteed.

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Elections :

General election results in Estonia



The Reform Party of Estonia came out ahead in the general elections on 3rd March with nearly 29% of the vote and it should take 34 seats of the 101 in the new Parliament. The Centre Party of outgoing Prime Minister, Jüri Ratas, came second with 23% (26 seats). The far-right People's Conservative Party (EKRE) made a breakthrough with 17.8% of the vote and can hope to occupy 19 seats, 12 more than in the outgoing house. Reform Party leader, Kaja Kallas, is due to become the country's first woman Prime Minister. She has ruled out any alliance with EKRE and does not want to govern with the Centre Party... [Read more](#)

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Foundation :

European Elections - a site to understand everything



From 23rd to 26th May 2019, more than 300 million Europeans will be called to elect their 705 MEPs for the next five years. As in the previous elections the Robert Schuman Foundation is offering its readers a dedicated website to provide greater understanding of the election and for them to be able to follow the campaign in 27 Member States... [Read more](#)

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 readers a full panorama of the Union, the euro zone, each of its Member States and its overseas territories. This work provides the most up to date, objective political and statistical information. It is available in paper and digital version from the Foundation's site and from bookshop... [Read more](#)

Commission :

First report on work undertaken by platforms against disinformation



On-line platforms, Google, Facebook and Twitter delivered an initial report on 28th February regarding the implementation of the Code of Good Practice against on-line disinformation that they signed in 2018. This report, which focuses on the month of January has not dissipated the Commission's concern, which regrets the lack of specific indicators to gauge progress achieved, the lack of detailed results and the lack of innovative and effective tools... [Read more](#)

Response to Hungary's anti-European campaign



On 28th February the Commission published a document rejecting 7 claims made in the campaign launched by the Hungarian government entitled "You also have the right to know what Brussels is Planning". Billboards, ads in newspapers and a letter from Prime Minister Viktor Orban addressed to all Hungarian citizens have disseminated this campaign across the whole country. The Commission states that the Hungarian government is "deforming reality" and is painting a "dark picture of a conspiracy that aims to promote mass immigration in Europe"... [Read more](#)

Investment plan in clean, innovative technologies



On 26th February the Commission announced an investment plan of over 10 billion € in clean, low carbon technologies between 2020 and 2030. The aim is to strengthen their competitiveness on the world market and to protect the EU's technological lead in the area of clean energy. The programme also aims to improve healthcare and European citizens' prosperity by creating new green jobs by building more energy sufficient housing or by diversifying European energy supplies... [Read more](#)

Assessment of the economic situation in the Member States



On 27th February the Commission published the annual assessment reports of the economic and social situation in the Member States. According to its conclusions 13 countries are in economic imbalance, including France. These imbalances are deemed to be excessive for Cyprus, Greece and Italy. The Commission also adopted the 2019 Work Programme in support of Structural Reform, as well as a proposal that aims to confirm the alignment of the employment guidelines with the 20 principles of the European social rights pillar. This assessment will provide a base for the Commission's recommendations that are to be made to the Member States... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

New seats forecasts for the European elections



On 28th February the European Parliament published a new forecast in terms of seats in the next hemicycle, based on national surveys. The European People's Party (EPP) retains its lead with an estimated 181 seats, followed by the Socialists and Democrats (S&D), with 135 seats. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), is due to win 75 seats and the Greens 49. The European left (GUE/NGL) and the European Conservatives and

Reformists (ECR) follow them with respective forecasts of 47 and 46 seats. The two Eurosceptic groups, Europe of Liberties and Direct Democracy (ELDD) and Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) might win 39 and 59 seats in the next Parliament... [Read more](#)



Report by the Special Committee on Taxation



The Special Committee on Taxation adopted a detailed road-map on 27th February for fairer and more effective taxation, to counter financial crimes. It has asked the Commission to work on the creation of a European financial police and an observatory to counter capital laundering. It recommends the creation of a special tax body within the UN. It also targets 7 Member States which show traits of tax havens, and "golden" passports. This report concluded a year of the special committee's mandate, in the wake of revelations regarding tax evasion and capital laundering scandals. It now has to be approved in plenary session... [Read more](#)



Council :

Letter from 17 European leaders to Donald Tusk



On the initiative of the Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, 17 European leaders sent a letter to the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk on 27th February, in which they asked for greater development of the single market to improve the Union's competitiveness and growth. They also point to the importance of the digital market, artificial intelligence and international trade agreements, so that Europe plays a stronger role at world level. This common initiative in line with the preparation for the European Union Council meeting in March, which will be chaired by Finland... [Read more](#)



Informal Telecommunications Ministers Meeting



Telecommunications Ministers, who met informally in Bucarest on March 1st, discussed the future of the digital single market, cybersecurity issues, as well as artificial intelligence... [Read more](#)



Agreement on a harmonised framework for covered bonds and prudential rules



The Council and the European Parliament came to agreement on 27th February on a harmonised framework for covered bonds, financial instruments guaranteeing a certain level of investor security. The suggested framework (comprising a directive and regulation) notably provides a common definition of covered bonds and established rules to obtain the label of "European covered bond".. [Read more](#)



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Position on the consumer protection directive



On 1st March the Council adopted its position on the draft directive aiming to provide better protection to consumers. The project involves amending four existing directives to harmonise the penalties already provided for in the event of consumers being harmed. The goal is to modernise legislation and to adapt it to the digital era and on-line consumption. The Council now has to consult the Parliament with the aim of having the draft adopted on first reading... [Read more](#)



Temporary agreement on sustainable finance



The Council and European Parliament came to agreement on the project to create a new category of financial indicators focused on investment carbon prints. The proposal provides two different types of category: the Union's reference indicators in terms of climate change, as well as indicators aligned with the Paris agreement and the more ambitious aim to contain global warming below 2°C. The aim is to raise investor awareness of the environmental impact of their decisions... [Read more](#)



Regulation to align payment charges in the EU

On 4th March the Council adopted a regulation to reduce payments



charges in the EU as a whole and beyond the euro zone. The reform provides for an alignment of charges applicable to cross-border payments in euro with those billed for national payments of the same amount and undertaken in the national currency of the State where the payment is made. Paying, making a transfer or withdrawing cash will therefore soon be possible anywhere in the EU at the same price as in one's own country, including outside of the euro zone. New obligations of transparency are also provided for... [Read more](#)

Adoption of screening of direct foreign investments



The Council finally adopted a regulation on 5th March to establish a new framework for the screening and monitoring of direct investments made by third countries. These rules will create a cooperation measure designed to facilitate the exchange of information between Member States and the Commission. The latter will now be able to issue an opinion if a foreign direct investment involves several Member States or a European project... [Read more](#)

Energy Council Conclusions



On 4th March Energy Ministers debated the renewal of the tyre labelling system and the energy strategy to adopt to achieve a neutral economy for the climate. The Council was also informed of the progress made in negotiations over the gas directive, as well as the progress made regarding the draft Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)... [Read more](#)

Temporary agreement on road transport in the event of a no-deal Brexit



The Council and Parliament came to agreement on 26th February on temporary measures designed to attenuate most of the disruption that might occur in the event of the UK's exit from the EU without a deal? These measures will notably allow British road hauliers and bus operators to continue transporting merchandise and travellers between the UK and the EU. The UK will have to grant the same rights to European operators. These measures will only continue to apply until 31st December 2019... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Appointment of the special envoy for Human Rights



On 28th February the Council appointed Eamon Gilmore as the Union's special envoy for Human Rights. Former Irish Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Eamon Gilmore was the Irish government's official in the implementation of the peace agreement with Northern Ireland in 1998. Also, since 2015 he has been the High Representative's special envoy for the peace process in Colombia. Appointed for a two year mandate, he will replace Stavros Lambrinidis, the first to exercise this post... [Read more](#)

Extension of sanctions against Belarus



On 25th February the Council decided to extend its restrictive measures against Belarus by another year. This mainly means an embargo on arms as well as sanctions, assets freezing and travel bans, targeting four people who are involved in unexplained disappearances of opponents in 1999 and 2000. The first European sanctions against Belarus were introduced in 2004, the embargo on arms dates back to 2011... [Read more](#)

Court of Justice :

Rejection of the "organic" label for ritual slaughter



In a decision published on 26th February the Union's Court of Justice deemed that the European organic production logo could not be placed on meat that comes from ritual slaughter without prior stunning. The case involved the French association Œuvre d'assistance aux bêtes d'abattoirs ('OABA') and the Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation (French Minister for Agriculture and Food), Ecocert. The OABA asked in 2012 the withdrawal of the comment "organic agriculture" from meat packaging that was certified "halal" from animals that had been killed without stunning. The Court stressed that it had to ensure that the organic logo only applied to products that had

come from farms that respected the highest standards of animal well-being... [Read more](#)

Court annuls the suspension of the governor of the Bank of Latvia



In a decision published on 26th February the Union's Court of Justice annulled the decision prohibiting Ilmārs Rimšēvičs, the Governor of the Central Bank of Latvia, from holding office. The Latvian office for the prevention of corruption, supervised by the Prime Minister was behind this suspension. The Court deemed that Latvia had not provided enough evidence of the governor's involvement in acts of corruption and influence peddling of which he stands accused... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Launch of 6 OneWeb project satellites



On 27th February, Arianespace launched six satellites on a Soyuz rocket (VS21) from the Guyanese space centre, as part of the OneWeb project which aims to develop internet access around the globe. The future European launcher Ariane 6, whose inaugural flight is planned for 2020 will have 30 OneWeb satellites on board. Airbus is part of this project building the satellites, providing greater connectivity in 3G, 4G, 5G and also broadband Wifi that is operational on land, at sea and in the air. OneWeb is to include 650 small satellites in its initial stage, but in the future this number might increase to total 950... [Read more](#)

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Two candidates for the post of head of European Prosecutor's Office



On 27th February the European Union's Committee for Civil Liberties chose Laura Codruța Kővesi as its candidate for Chief European Prosecutor's Office. On the previous day the Budgetary Control Committee also recommended the former head prosecutor of the Romanian Anti-Corruption Office. Negotiations are now about to start with the Council which appointed Frenchman Jean-François Bohert as their candidate for this post... [Read more](#)

Germany :

German Chancellor visits France



French President Emmanuel Macron hosted German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 27th February at the Elysée. They reviewed an intermediary step in the Aachen Treaty signed in January. They also discussed the main issues on the agenda of the next European Council, transatlantic relations and the international situation, as well as defence relations between France and Germany. During a press conference, they accepted the principle of a possible delay of the UK's withdrawal from the Union, but this, under conditions... [Read more](#)

Cyprus :

Discussions between Communities regarding "confidence building measures"



During a meeting under the aegis of the UN in Nicosia on 26th February Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot Community Mustafa Akinci committed to introducing "confidence building measures" regarding the telecommunications and electricity networks, the exchange of cultural works and the demining of certain zones, to improve the atmosphere for the return to a "creative and effective dialogue" if possible by June. Differences remain however particularly regarding issues of power sharing, decentralisation and guarantees of security on the island... [Read more](#)

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France :

Emmanuel Macron's column on the "European Renewal"



French President Emmanuel Macron published a column in the 28 Member States on 5th March entitled "For a European Renewal". In view of the upcoming European elections in May he called to revive the Union around three themes: freedom, protection and progress. He suggested the creation of a European agency to protect democracy, a European Internal Security Council, a European Climate Bank. He also suggested submitted membership of the Schengen area to rights and obligations, and to sanction or ban businesses that damaged the EU's strategic interests. Finally he suggested a

Defence and Security Treaty and a Conference for Europe to revise the treaties... [Read more](#)

UK :

Report on the impact of a no-deal Brexit



The House of Commons approved the new strategy put forward by Prime Minister Theresa May on 27th February, 502 votes against 20, on a possible limited delay of the date of Brexit if the UK's exit agreement is not approved on 13th March. On 26th February the government published a report on the economic impact of a no-deal withdrawal on 29th March and on the preparations to cope with this possibility. According to this report the no-deal Brexit would be "significant" in terms of its impact... [Read more](#)

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World Bank :

Women's rights in the workplace are improving



A study, "Women, Business and the Law" published on 27th February by the World Bank notes that "on a world scale women are only given three quarters of the rights that are granted to men" but notes "significant" progress, in particular for the economic inclusion of women and the fight to counter harassment. Whilst the overall mark has risen from 70 to 75, six countries, including France, achieve the maximum mark of 100, meaning that they grant the same rights to women as they do to men in the areas analysed... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :

Recommendations on keeping law and order in France



In a memorandum on keeping law and order and the "gilets jaunes" published on 26th February the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatovic deplored the violence, the racist, anti-semitic and homophobic declarations and attacks on the part of some demonstrators, as well as the number and seriousness of the injuries inflicted on demonstrators. She drafted some recommendations such as respecting human rights and the suspension of the use of flash balls by the police. These recommendations follow a draft bill aiming to strengthen and guarantee maintaining law and order during demonstrations... [Read more](#)

Handicapped and women's rights in Romania



In a report published on 28th February the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović, criticises Romania for its persistent shortfalls in the protection of handicapped people and she asks the Romanian authorities to show more determination in protecting women against violence. She also insists on the importance of guaranteeing the independence of the judicial power... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

European unemployment levels at their lowest



In January 2019 unemployment in the EU lay at 6.5%, down in comparison with the 7.2% rate in January 2018. This is the lowest rate recorded since 2000, the date when the monthly measurements of employment rates were launched. The unemployment rate in the euro zone in January lay at 7.8%, its lowest level since October 2008... [Read more](#)

Increase in inflation rate of the euro zone



According to an estimate published by Eurostat on 1st March the annual inflation rate of the euro zone is due to lie at 1.5% in February 2019, up in comparison with January when it lay at 1.4%. The energy sector is due to lie at its highest point in February (3.5%), followed by food, alcohol and tobacco (2.4%), services (1.3%) and industrial goods, energy apart (0.3%)... [Read more](#)

Employment up in 9 regions out of 10

According to the most recent Eurostat data, the employment rate increased in 2017 in 253 of the Union's regions, ie 90% of them. It



decreased in 26 regions, and remained stable in 2. The employment rate increased the most in Mayotte (+7.7%), Malta, in the Algarve in Portugal and in Central Bohemia in the Czech Republic (+5.3% each). However the employment rate declined most in some Italian, British and Lithuanian regions. The Union's overall employment rate increased by 1.6% in 2017... [Read more](#)

GDP per inhabitant



According to Eurostat, three quarters of the Union's population live in areas where the GDP per inhabitant is over 75% of the Union's average. The regional GDP per inhabitant is at its lowest point in the North-West of Bulgaria (31% of the European average) and at its highest in the region of Inner London- West in the UK (626% of the European average). Two other Bulgarian regions lie amongst 4 of the Union's' regions with the lowest the GDP/inhabitant... [Read more](#)

Culture :

International Meetings in Paris/Berlin



From 5th to 10th March the International Meetings of Paris/Berlin will be taking place in various Parisian locations - Centre Pompidou, Louvre, Forum des Images etc ... Taking place alternatively in the two capitals this festival tries to bring cinema and contemporary art together, uniting film makers and artists from the world over... [Read more](#)

Mantegna and Bellini in Berlin



For the very first time and until 30th June, the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin is showing the work and artistic dialogue of two Italian Renaissance masters, Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini alongside one another... [Read more](#)

Painting of the Revolution in London



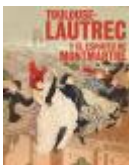
Until 19th May, the National Gallery of London is showing work by French painter, Louis-Léopold Boilly for the very first time in the UK. The artist bears witness to revolutionary Paris and shows audacious response to a changing political environment... [Read more](#)

Antonello of Messina in Milan



Until 2nd June the Palazzo Reale of Milan is running an exhibition of Antonello of Messina's paintings - the latter was one fo the main portrait artists of the Cinquecento. The exhibition provides an analytical view of his work... [Read more](#)

Toulouse Lautrec Exhibition and the Spirit of Montmartre in Madrid



The Caixa Forum of Madrid is running an exhibition of paintings, drawings and illustrations by the French artist, Toulouse-Lautrec, until 19th May, "Toulouse-Lautrec and the Spirit of Montmartre", retracing the social and cultural influence of the Parisian quarter at the end of the 19th century... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



4th March
Brussels
"Energy Council"



5th March

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Brussels
"Environment" Council
Brussels
Association Council EU-Georgia

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Mar

7th March
Frankfurt
Council of Governors of the European Central Bank

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7th and 8th March
Brussels
"Justice-Interior" Council

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