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The Letter

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And what if we started over, beginning with culture?

Author: Jean-Noël Tronc

Culture, which has linked Europeans together for centuries, has not been considered sufficiently for the time being in European integration. But today, given the American and Chinese strategies and the culture policies of influence undertaken by many other countries, taking back Europe via a European policy for culture and European cultural identity is an existential issue for the Union, advocates the Chairman of the SACEM, Jean-Noël Tronc.
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Elections :

Slovakia: results of the first round of presidential election

Zuzana Caputova, of the Progressive Slovakia (PS) came out ahead in the first round of the Slovakian presidential election on 16th March with 40.57% of the vote. In the second round on 30th March, she will be facing Maros Sefcovic, the Vice- President of the European Commission responsible for energy and candidate of Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), who won 18.66%. Lawyer and liberal, Zuzana Caputove campaign on the promise of fighting to counter corruption... Read more

Foundation :

European Elections: a site to understand everything

From 23rd to 26th May 2019, more than 300 million Europeans will be called to choose the 705 MEPs for the next five years. As in the previous elections, the Robert Schuman Foundation is offering its readers a dedicated site for a better understanding of the election and to follow the campaign in the 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 updated version of the "Permanent Atlas of the European Union" which offers readers a full overview of the European Union, the euro zone, of each of the Member States and its overseas territories. This book brings each reader the most recent, most objective political and statistical information in real time. It is available in paper and digital version from the Foundation's site or in bookshops... Read more

"The V4, France and Foreign Policy: it is time to act"

On 19th March the Polish Institute in Bratislava is hosting a debate on relations between France and the Visegrad group in the area of foreign policy in which Eric Maurice, the manager of the Foundation's Brussels office is taking part... Read more

Commission :

Rise in non-European property in key sectors

In a report on foreign direct investments published on 13th March, the Commission notes a continuous increase in the foreign ownership of businesses in sectors such as refineries, pharmaceuticals and electronics. It also notes an increase in investments from the emerging economies including China. It deems that this development confirms the need for the recently adpted investment screening mechanism... Read more

Progress report on the Capital Markets Union

On 15th March the Commission published a report on the progress achieved in the creation of a single capital market. The project aims to facilitate cross-border investments, notably those that are respectful of the environment, as well as strengthening the international role of the euro. The Commission adopted a series of non-legislative acts provided for in the 2015 action plan on the SCM, as well as in the 2017 midterm survey. As for the thirteen legislative proposals presented by the Commission, an agreement was found for ten of them and three were definitively adopted. Some agreements were also found on two of three Commission legislative proposals on sustainable finance... Read more

New Road Safety rules in the Union

On 13th March the European Commission adopted new road safety rules to step up the deployment of Cooperative Intelligent Transport Systems (C-ITS) enabling the exchange of information between users and road infrastructures. These new rules will enable the equipment of vehicles, traffic signs and motorways with technology that will dispatch messages to users so that they can adapt to road traffic situations. Digital connectivity between vehicles, and between vehicles and the transport infrastructure - is expected to significantly improve road safety, traffic efficiency and reduce the number of road deaths... Read more

Parliament :

Adoption of a regulation on cybersecurity

MEPs adopted a European regulation on cybersecurity on 12th March which creates the first European certification measure in terms of cybersecurity and aims to guarantee the conformity of products and services sold in the Union. They also adopted a resolution calling for European action against threats linked to the technological presence of China in Europe. MPs fear that 5G equipment have been given embedded backdoors allowing unauthorised access by Chinese manufacturers to personal data in the EU. They are asking the Commission and the Member States to provide guidelines on the fight to counter cyber threats... Read more

Adoption of European rules on non-performing rules

On 14th March the Parliament adopted a regulation to reduce the risks linked to non-performing bank loans. The text provides for the introduction of a minimal coverage of losses. Banks will have to reserve sums of money to cover losses caused by these loans, particularly in

the absence of any real-estate guarantee... Read more

Adoption of new rules against unfair trading practices

On 12th March MEPs adopted rules that aim to protect farmers from unfair trading practices. They drew up a blacklist of prohibited practices such as late payments, late, unilateral cancellations and even the refusal to sign a written contract. Suppliers will be able to lodge a complaint in the State where they are established even if the practices concerned occurred elsewhere in the Union. These new rules will protect small and medium sized suppliers whose annual turnover is below 350 million euro. They will be divided into five sub-categories and the greatest protection will be granted to the smallest of them... Read more

Towards a faster exchange of criminal records of citizens from third countries

On 12th March MEPs approved the creation of a new database (ECRIS-TCN) regarding past convictions of citizens from third countries, which will complement the European criminal record information system (ECRIS) that is already being used to exchange information on past convictions of EU citizens. This new tool will help prosecutors, judges and police in their fight to counter crime and terrorism... Read more

Debate over the future of the Union with the Slovakian Prime Minister

Slovakian Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, who was invited as a guest to speak on the future of the Union on 12th March indicated to MEPs that the EU cannot close itself in on a status quo. It needs wider debate regarding strategy and its hopes for 2050. "It should be united, prosperous and safe, relevant at world level, honest with its citizens and look to the future," he insisted. "It is clear that isolationism, protectionism and nationalism are not the answers. Our answer must not be fragmentation in small national States with limited resources but greater unity of the Union as a world player.".. Read more

Council :

Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Economic Affairs

The 28 Finance Ministers adopted new conclusions regarding the community list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions. They also discussed the excise duties regime, digital services taxation, InvestEU and the European Semester... Read more

"Employment, social policy, healthcare and consumers" Council

Labour and Social Affairs Ministers who met in Brussels on 15th March debated improvements to the labour market and the social security systems in the Union. They adopted the Joint Employment Report established by the Commission as well as conclusions on this report and on the Annual Growth Survey. They also came to a part agreement over the European Adjustment Fund to Globalisation... Read more

Agreement on financing in support of the environment and action for the climate

As part of the EU budget 2021-2027, the European Parliament and the Council came to a temporary agreement on 13th March on the LIFE programme for the environment and action for the climate. The temporary agreement now has to be approved formally by Parliament and the Council. The amount of the budget will be decided during final negotiations under the multiannual financial programme... Read more

Future Space Programme

On 13th March the Council confirmed the draft regulation on the EU's space programme for 2021-2027 that has come after negotiations with Parliament. The project provides amongst other things, for the simplification of the legal framework of the Union's space policy, the establishment of governance rules and an adequate budget to continue and improve the programme... Read more

Conclusions of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council

Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers debated the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy post 2020 on 18th March. They assessed three draft regulations as part of this reform and suggested making several modifications. They then exchanged views on the Union's strategy for the bioeconomy, small scale fisheries, the meat market and the possibility of patenting methods to improve plants... Read more

New rules regarding the protection of data and European political parties

On 19th March the Council adopted new rules to prevent the abusive use of personal data by European political parties during the European elections. Political foundations and parties which breach the personal data protection rules could be sanctioned to a total of 5% of their annual budget and will no longer be able to have financing from the European budget the following year... Read more

Diplomacy :

Conclusions of the third conference on the future of Syria

From 12th to 14th March the European Union, together with the UN organised the third conference in Brussels on the future of Syria and the region, which brings together 57 States and around 20 international organisations, including Syrian NGOs. Participants notably decided to release aid to a total of 6.2 billion euro for 2019 both for Syria and for the neighbouring countries which have hosted several million Syrian refugees. In a common declaration, the co-chairs re-asserted their wish to see Syrian political transition to take place within a framework approved by the international community... Read more

Federica Mogherini speaks to the UN Security Council

On the occasion of the annual speech on relations between the EU and the UN, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, launched an appeal in support of the multilateralism before the UN Security Council on 12th March. She defended the agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue. She indicated that she was concerned by behaviour on Russia's part, quoting amongst others, the situation in Ukraine and its withdrawal from the Treaty on Intermediary Nuclear Forces... Read more

EU-Turkey Association Council Meeting

On 15th March the EU-Turkey Association Council held its 54th meeting in Brussels, the first since the lifting of the state of emergency in Turkey last year. The Union repeated the importance of its relations with Turkey which is a candidate country and a key partner in areas such as migration, counter-terrorism, energy, the economy and trade. The Union did however repeat its fears regarding regression in terms of fundamental rights and the rule of law, as well as the deterioration in the independence and functioning of the Turkish legal system. Finally it said it wanted Turkey to reform its legal system in line with the EU's standards and those of the Council of Europe... Read more

Conclusions of the "Foreign Affairs" Council

On 18th March on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, the EU's High Representative, Federica Mogherini and the Foreign Ministers of the EU recalled that the Union refused to acknowledge this violation of international law and that they supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Ministers discussed relations with China, calling for a deepening in cooperation in areas of multilateralism, the fight to counter climate change, non-proliferation and the upkeep of peace. They then hosted Chinese Minister Wang Yi. They also spoke of relations with Moldova and the situation in Yemen... Read more

Sanctions against Russians damaging the territorial integrity of the Ukraine

On 15th March in response to an escalation observed in the Kerch Strait

and in the Azov Sea, the Council added 8 Russian executives to the list of people targeted by restrictive measures due to action that threaten or damage the territorial integrity, sovereignty and the independence of Ukraine. In all 170 people and 44 entities are the focus of restrictive measures comprising a ban on entering the EU and a freezing of their assets. The Council also asked for the liberation of all of the Ukrainian sailors being held prisoner, the restitution of the ships that have been seized and the free passage for all ships sailing through the Kerch Strait... Read more

European Agencies :

Suspension of Boeing 737 flights in Europe

On 12th March the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) suspended all Boeing 737 flights in Europe, including when they are operated by non-European airlines. This decision follows the crash of the Boeing 737 in Ethiopia on 10th March, four months after a similar incident in Indonesia... Read more

Other link

Belgium :

Visit of the German Chancellor by the Prime Minister

On 12th March German Chancellor Angela Merkel hosted Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel in view of the European Council on 21st and 22nd March. Regarding Brexit they indicated that they wanted to "protect good relations and an orderly withdrawal.".. Read more

Spain :

Article by the Prime Minister on Europe

On 13th March in an article entitled "Prepared for Brexit" in the daily newspaper "El Pais", Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called for greater European integration after Brexit. He mentioned his government's will to maintain links with the UK after its departure from the EU, notably to retain British citizens' rights living in Spain and those of Spanish citizens living in the UK. He also recalled the issues at stake in the European elections in May... Read more

Other link

Launch of government site devoted to Brexit

On 11th March the Spanish Labour, Migration and Social Security Minister launched an information site on Brexit and the consequences the exit of the EU by the UK would have. The site is mainly addressed to Spanish residents living in Britain and to British citizens living in Spain... Read more

Other link

France :

Journey to Eastern Africa

The President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, made a trip to Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya from 11th to 14th March. Given China's increasing influence in Eastern Africa he insisted on issues of regional stabilisation, economy, education and military cooperation... Read more

Other link

Creation of a Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly

On 11th March the National Assembly approved the creation of a common assembly to strengthen cooperation between France and Germany. This initiative still has to be approved by the Bundestag. The Common Parliamentary Assembly will bring together around 50 French and German MPs. It will be led by the two speakers of the respective assemblies and its sessions will take place alternatively in both countries. The first meeting is planned for 25th March... Read more

Latvia :

Prime Minister's visit to Berlin

On 11th March German Chancellor Angela Merkel hosted her Latvian

counterpart, Krišjānis Kariņš. They declared that the EU should not allow East-West divisions to occur and that Brexit must not allowed to damage European solidarity... Read more

Luxembourg :

Visit by the Prime Minister to Finland

On 12th March Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, hosted his Luxembourg counterpart, Xavier Bettel, to discuss the priorities of the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU which will start on 1st July, Brexit, the multi-annual financial framework (MFF). They also agreement to deepen their bilateral cooperation in R&D... Read more

UK :

Brexit: rejection of the agreement, no-deal Brexit and request for extension

On 12th March 391 MPs against 242 rejected the UK's exit of the EU. On 13th March 312 MPs against 308 rejected the hypothesis of a no-deal Brexit. On 14th March 412 MPs against 202 approved a government amendment for a postponement of Brexit until 30th June if MPs approve the withdrawal agreement negotiated by the Prime Minister with the EU by 20th March. If the agreement is rejected the postponement will have to go beyond 30th June and will imply the organisation of European elections in May. An additional delay will require the unanimous agreement of the 27 States of the EU at the European Council of 21st and 22nd March... Read more

Other link

Low-key budget, growth reduced to 1.2% in 2019

On 13th March British Finance Minister Philip Hammond presented a budget that has been restricted by the threat of a no-deal Brexit which is shaking the business world. Given the extended uncertainty linked to Brexit and a less profitable world economy the OBR (Office for Budgetary Responsibility) has reduced its growth forecast for 2019 to 1.2% against 1.6% - whilst maintaining that of 2020 at 1.4%. Amongst the new measures that have been announced £100 additional million will be granted to the police force to help counter knife attacks that are rife in the country and a guarantee fund of £3 billion to support the construction of affordable housing... Read more

Other link

Eurostat :

Decrease in asylum requests in 2018

In 2018 580,800 first time asylum seekers asked for international protection in the Member States of the Union, a figure that is down by 11% in comparison with 2017. The number of first time asylum seekers in 2018 is comparable to the level recorded in 2014 prior to the peaks of 2015 and 2016. Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis still form 30% of the total number of first time asylum seekers... Read more

Rise in euro zone inflation rate

According to a study published by Eurostat on 15th March the annual inflation rate of the euro zone lay at 1.5% in February 2019. This figure is up in comparison with January 2019, when the rate lay at 1.4%. In the EU inflation totalled 1.6% in February 2019, up in comparison with January (1.5%). The lowest annual rates were recorded in Ireland (0.7%), Greece, Croatia and Cyrpis (0.8%). The highest however were noted in Romania (4%), Hungary (3.2%) and in Latvia (2.8%)... Read more

More than 5 million births in the EU in 2017

According to a study published by Eurostat on 12th March 5.075 million babies were born in the EU in 2017, a figure that is slightly down in comparison with 2016. The fertility index lay at 1.59 births per woman in 2017, below the population renewal rate which lies at 2.1 births per woman. A woman's average age for their first child in the EU in 2017 was 29.1 years. The highest fertility index was in France with 1.90 births per woman, whilst the lowest was in Malta and Spain (1.26 and 1.31 births per woman respectively).. Read more

International Jazz Festival in Aberdeen

From 21st to 31st March the international jazz festival is taking place in Aberdeen, Scotland. Around 100 artists have been invited to perform on stage and will be hosting workshops... Read more

Vilhelm Hammershøi at the Jacquemart-André Museum

Until 22nd July the Jacquemart-André Museum is paying tribute Danish Vilhelm Hammershøi. Around forty pieces of work, qualified of mysterious and poetic, are on show for the first time in Paris in twenty years... Read more

Giacometti, a modern adventure

The LaM, the museum of modern art in Villeneuve d'Ascq near Lille is running an exhibition until 11th June "Giacometti, a modern adventure", an exhibition that has brought together 150 works by the Swiss artist... Read more

Ingres Exhibition in Milan

Until 23rd June the Royal Palace of Milan is running an exhibition "Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Artistic Life in the time of Napoleon". This exceptional retrospective is a unique occasion to discover this artistic master who lived in Italy 24 years. The portrait of Emperor Napoleon I has been lent for the occasion by the Musée de l'Armée of Paris. 150 works are on show... Read more

Other link

Agenda :

18 Mar
18th March
Brussels
"Foreign Affairs" Council "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council
Brussels
"Foreign Affairs" Council

19 Mar
19th March
Brussels
"General Affairs" Council
Brussels
EU-North Macedonia Association Council

20 Mar
20th March
Brussels
Tripartite Social Summit

21 Mar
21st-22nd March
Brussels
European Council

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