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The Letter in PDF format

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## Stakes and Outlook for the Ukrainian presidential election

Author: Iris Muraz



On 31st March the first round of presidential election in Ukraine, the first since the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the start of the war in the Donbass in 2014. The outgoing President Petro Poroshenko is competing against 38 candidates including opponent Yulia Tymoshenko and comedian Vladimir Zelenskiy. The election promises to be a complex play off between economic and political stakeholders in which civil society is trying to forge a place for itself. [Read more](#)

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### Elections :


#### General Elections in Finland on 14th April



On 14th April the Finns will be appointing the 200 members of the Eduskunta/Riksdag, the only house of Parliament. 2,468 candidates of whom 42% are women will be standing in this election. According to the most recent poll by Kantar TNS for the daily Helsingin Sanomat published mid-March the Social Democratic Party (SDP) is due to come out ahead with 21st of the vote followed by the Conservative Assembly (KOK) with 18.1% and the Centre Party (KESK) of outgoing Prime Minister Juha Sipilä with 14.3%... [Read more](#)

### Foundation :

#### "Think democracy ... yesterday, today and tomorrow"

 On 29th and 30th March a seminar entitled "Think democracy ... yesterday, today and tomorrow" will take place in Fehérvárcsurgó, Hungary. The conference in French, German and Hungarian is supported by the Foundation bringing together teachers, students and journalists to reflect on democracy in Europe in three periods : the past, the present and the future. It will be

introduced by the Ambassador for France in Hungary, Pascale Andréani... [Read more](#)

## European Council :

### Conclusions of the European Council of 22nd March



During the European Council on 22nd March the Union's leaders discussed the economy, climate change and the means to counter disinformation. They reasserted their determination to deepen the single market, notably from the digital point of view. They hoped to implement the Paris Agreement on the Climate at national level but also via a long-term European strategy. They also prepared the EU-China Summit of 9th April... [Read more](#)

### Brexit: the European Council has given the UK two options



During the European Council on 21st March the 27 Member States of the EU gave two options to British Prime Minister Theresa May who asked for the postponement of Brexit until 30th June. Either British MPs accept the withdrawal agreement before the end of March and Brexit will be postponed until 22nd May or the agreement is rejected by the UK and the country will have until 12th April to put forward a new project to the 27, in particular the organisation of European elections in May or departure from the EU without an agreement... [Read more](#)

## Commission :

### 1.49 billion € fine against Google for abuse of dominant position



On 20th March the European Commission set a further fine on the American internet giant Google, accusing it once again of abusing its dominant position, this time in a case involving its advertising branch, AdSense. This financial sanction is the third to be decided in under two years by the European executive, which ensures the respect of Europe's competition rules. This fine however is not as high as the previous two... [Read more](#)

### Fine of 12.5 million € for Nike



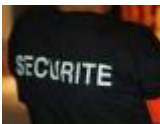
On 25th March the Commission set a 12.5 million € fine on the American company Nike for having limited cross-border sales in Europe of derived products such as football shirts and scarves. According to the European Commission, guardian of competition in Europe Nike prevented many shops to whom it had granted a permit to sell merchandise in a given country from trading these products in another Union country... [Read more](#)

### Common European fund for industrial defence and research projects



On 19th March the Commission adopted work programmes for the co-financing industrial defence and research projects with an envelope of 500 million euro for the period 2019-2020. An additional 25 million € has been allocated to the support collaborative research projects in the area of defence in 2019, with calls for proposals for Eurodrone and other industrial projects... [Read more](#)

### Union's progress in terms of security



On 20th March the Commission reported on the state of security in the Union. Since it entered office the Juncker Commission has put forward 22 legislative initiatives in this area, 15 of which have been approved. Some issues, notably regarding the European border and coastguard and terrorist content online, still require immediate work to be finalised before the European elections... [Read more](#)

### Preparations for a no-deal Brexit



On 25th March the Commission completed its preparations in the event of a no-deal Brexit from the UK on 12th April. Since December 2017, the Commission has published 90 communications about the preparation for Brexit and put forward 19 legislative measures, 17 of which have been approved by the Parliament and the Council. The emergency

measures focus amongst other things on the EU budget, fishing rights, road, rail and air connectivity, climate policy, Erasmus and visa reciprocity. The Commission is also preparing for the withdrawal from the Galileo sites which have been established by the UK... [Read more](#)

## Council :

### Conclusions of the Tripartite Social Summit



The tripartite social summit of 20th March targeted "For a stronger, united, future-looking Europe". Discussions focused on the means to improve European worker mobility: the digitisation of social security coordination, the reform of the posted workers system and the establishment of the European Labour Authority. Participants spoke of the deepening of the single market, notably regarding investments and the need to provide new impetus to European Social Dialogue... [Read more](#)

### Preliminary Agreement on InvestEU



On 20th March the Commission, the Parliament and the Council came to a provisional agreement on InvestEU, a programme that is part of the 2021-2027 budget and designed to stimulate investments in the Union. It copies the "Juncker Plan" for investment and should raise 650 billion € in additional investments according to the Commission. The provisional agreement will now have to be approved formally by the Parliament and the Council... [Read more](#)

### Provisional Agreement on the funding of Fiscalis



On 21st March the Council and the Parliament came to a provisional agreement on the funding of the Union's tax cooperation programme (Fiscalis) for the period 2021-2027. This agreement will help Fiscalis guarantee closer tax cooperation between the Member States for the introduction of efficient tax systems and to reduce red tape that citizens and businesses in the single market have to face. The Parliament and the Council must now approve this agreement officially. Its budgetary aspects will depend on an overall compromise regarding the Union's multi-annual financing framework... [Read more](#)

### Agreement on social services of mobile workers



On 19th March the Council, Parliament and the Commission came to a provisional agreement over social services of mobile workers in the Union. The new rules provided in this agreement will guarantee mobile workers with social security whilst coordinating and distributing fairly obligations between the Member States. Parliament and the Council must now officially adopt the agreement... [Read more](#)

### Provisional agreement on the supervision of European financial establishments



On 21st March the Council and the Parliament came to a provisional agreement on several proposals that aim to reform the European system of financial supervision, which is made up of three European supervisory authorities and the European Systemic Risk Board. The agreement provides for the strengthening of the role played by the supervisory authorities, particularly the European Banking Agency (EBA) in the area of countering capital laundering and the financing of terrorism. The system for supervisory convergence will also be improved with, for example, new common priorities at Union level... [Read more](#)

### Conclusions of the General Affairs Council



European Affairs Ministers who met on 19th March for the General Affairs Council debated the multiannual financial framework (MFF), the European strategy for the climate, as well as migration. They took a first partial decision regarding the pre-accession assistance instrument: the EU will continue to provide assistance to the candidate countries over the period 2021-2027. The Council also adopted a series of emergency measures in view of a no-deal Brexit, as well as new rules to prevent the abusive use of personal data by European political parties... [Read more](#)

## ECB :

### Appointment of the ECB Board



On 22nd March the European Council appointed the governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, Philip R. Lane to the board of the European Central Bank for a non-renewable term of 8 years commencing 1st June. Philip R. Lane will replace German Peter Praet has occupied this position since 1st June 2011... [Read more](#)

## European Elections :

### Seven leaders in the ALDE's European campaign



On 21st March the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) presented its team of seven leaders for the European election campaign. Former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, group's leader in the European Parliament, Slovenian Violetta Bulc, European Commissioner for Transport, Italian Emma Bonino, former European Commissioner and Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, Spaniard Luis Garicano, member of the Ciudadanos Party, Nicolas Beer, lead candidate for the German FDP, Hungarian Katalin Cseh and Dane, Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner for Competition. The latter announced in the press that she would run to succeed Jean-Claude Juncker as the President of the European Commission... [Read more](#)

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### 19 media join forces to track fake news



19 members of the international media, Fact-Checking network (IFCN) have just launched FactCheckEU, a collaborative project to counter disinformation and fake news, as the European elections approach in May. The work undertaken by the 19 partners will be published in 10 languages, and systematically translated into English to give them wider coverage... [Read more](#)

### New rules on data protection 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. The political foundations and parties breaching the personal data protection rules will be sanctioned financially to a total of 5% of their annual budget and they will no longer be able to benefit from financing from the European budget the following year... [Read more](#)

## Germany :

### Growth forecasts down



The German government's Council of Economic Experts revised its growth estimates for the year 2019 downwards. Indeed it plans for annual growth of 0.8% of the real GDP against 1.7% in the previous forecasts. "The German economic boom is over but a recession is not on the cards right now thanks to the strength of the domestic economy," said Christoph M. Schmidt, the Council's president... [Read more](#)

## Belgium :

### Belgian-German initiative on the rule of law in the Union



On 20th March the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs Didier Reynders and his German counterpart Heiko Maas suggested the establishment of a annual assessment of the rule of law in the Union's Member States. This project of a non-binding nature will allow the Union to suspend certain rights of a State that does not respect the Union's fundamental values. It is a project that completes the procedure of article 7. The 27 Member States support the idea of a conference in Brussels... [Read more](#)

## Estonia :

### Tribute to the victims of Soviet deportations



On 25th March the Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid paid tribute to the victims of Soviet mass deportations towards Siberia. 95,000 Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians deemed to be "enemies of the people" were deported on the orders of Stalin in 1949. The European Court of Human Rights recognised the act as a crime against

Humanity... [Read more](#)

## France :

### Meeting of the Franco-German Assembly



The first meeting of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly that comprises 50 MPs from each country took place on 25th March at the National Assembly. Wolfgang Schäuble, leader of the Bundestag and Richard Ferrand, the leader of the National Assembly signed an agreement creating the new assembly. Sabine Thillaye, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, who is of German origin, and Andreas Jung, Chair of the Germany-France Friendship group at the Bundestag were elected to chair the new assembly's bureau... [Read more](#)

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## Hungary :

### Suspension of FIDESZ from the EPP



The European People's Party (EPP) decided on 20th March to suspend the Hungarian Party FIDESZ from its ranks, for an indefinite period of time following the excesses of its leader, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, as he has attacked Brussels, or in his attitude to immigration, just two months before the renewal of the European Parliament. The People's Party (EPP) which brings together right-wing and centre-right parties from across the Union took this decision by an overwhelming majority (190 to 3) during a political meeting of the party in Brussels... [Read more](#)

## Italy :

### Letter to Europe from the Prime Minister



In a letter published on 19th March Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte shared his vision of Europe. He hopes to "offer Europe a new humanism" by strengthening the role of the European Parliament and to attribute "a general power of accountability" to the other institutions of the Union. Restoring "the confidence" of European citizens, markets and of Europe is the main aim of the Italian President of the Council in response to the "demand for change"... [Read more](#)

### Visit by the Chinese President



On 23rd March, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping holding talks that aimed to strengthen the international strategic partnership and cooperation regarding the Chinese "Silk Road". 29 sectoral agreements were concluded between the two leaders and Chinese investments will total between 7 and 20 billion €. The ports of Genoa and Trieste will receive funds for their modernisation... [Read more](#)

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## UK :

### Britons mobilise to remain in the EU



An on-line petition on the British parliament's site asking the government to "revoke article 50 TEU and to remain in the European Union" rose above the 5.5 million signature mark on 24th March. Moreover a million people, according to the organisers protested in the centre of London on 23rd March in support of EU membership and to demand a second referendum... [Read more](#)

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### MPs vote to take back control of Brexit



On 25th March British Prime Minister Theresa May announced that for the time being she was giving up the organisation of a third vote on the Brexit agreement. Moreover 329 MPs against 302 approved an amendment enabling Parliament to decide on its own agenda, normally controlled by the executive. This will allow MPs to organise a series of indicative votes on 27th March regarding possibilities of alternative Brexit solutions to the withdrawal agreement... [Read more](#)

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## North Macedonia :

Council of Stabilisation and Association with the European Union



The 15th Council of Stabilisation and Association between the EU-North Macedonia took place on 19th March. It reviewed the agreement that was signed on 2001. The Council noted the reforms and progress made by North Macedonia in the political, economic and financial areas. Finally the Council welcomed the country's accession to the status of candidate country after the settlement of the dispute with Greece... [Read more](#)

## OECD :

### Rise in counterfeit trade in the European Union



In a joint report published on 18th March the OECD and the EU's Office for Intellectual Property (EUIPO) noted a 3.3% rise in the trade of counterfeit goods in the OECD's member states. In the EU counterfeit goods represent 6.8% of imports, a rise of 1.8 points in five years. Although counterfeit trade mainly affects shoes and clothes (38%), the report is concerned regarding the trade in counterfeit medical equipment and medicines (7%) which pose a significant threat to consumers... [Read more](#)

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## Eurostat :

### International Goods Trade



According to an estimation published by Eurostat on 18th March the euro zone registered a surplus of 1.5 billion euro in January in its international goods trade with the rest of the world. This surplus lay at 3.1 billion euro in January 2018. EU28 recorded a deficit of 24.9 billion euro in January against a deficit of 21.4 billion in January 2018. According to a study published on 20th March the US and China were still the EU's leading trade partners in 2018, representing respectively 17.1% and 15.4% of the total extra-EU trade in goods. They are followed by Switzerland (6.7%), Russia (6.4%), Turkey (3.9%) and Japan (3.4%)... [Read more](#)

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## Culture :

### Photographic Festival of Vienna



Until 20th April the FOTO WIEN festival is taking place in Vienna. For a month the Austrian capital will be running events highlighting both international and local photography. Universities, museums, art galleries and public places are all partners contributing to the festival... [Read more](#)

### The Emil Bührle Collection at the Maillol Museum



Until 21st July, the Maillol Museum in Paris is presenting the collection of German artist Emil Georg Bührle. This collection brings together a variety of works by famous French artists like Manet, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Braque. It is on show for the first time in France... [Read more](#)

### Exhibition "From the Academy to Nature, landscape painting of Central Europe"



Until 30th June the National Gallery of Bratislava, together with the Gallery of West Bohemia, is hosting the exhibition "From the Academy to Nature, landscape painting of Central Europe 1860-1890". The exhibition reflects a series of landscapes from daily and rural life by a group of artists, of which the Barbizon School and the French Realist trend were the main inspiration... [Read more](#)

### Vincent van Gogh at the Tate Britain



The Tate Britain in London is running an exhibition from 27th March to 11th August "Van Gogh and Great Britain". The 45 works by the master on show illustrate the influence Great Britain has on the artist's work and how the latter inspired British artists... [Read more](#)

### Luc Tuymans at the Palazzo Grassi

For the first time in Italy, the Palazzo Grassi of Venice is hosting work by Belgian artist Luc Tuymans from 24th March until 6th January 2020. The exhibition entitled "La Pelle" set up in close collaboration with the painter



himself, includes more than 80 works from Pinault collection and other international museums... [Read more](#)

### Neo-Hellenic art in Athens



Until 12th May around one hundred pieces of work from the collection of the Neo-Hellenic Museum of Art on the Island of Rhodes will be on show at the Theocharakis Foundation as part of the exhibition "Precious Paintings from the Neo-Hellenic Museum of Art of Rhodes". The exhibition includes works by 20th century Greek artists like Theophilos and Konstantinos Parthenis... [Read more](#)

### Agenda :



25th-28th March  
Strasbourg  
Plenary session of the European Parliament



26th-27th March  
Bucharest  
Informal meeting of Transport Ministers



30th March  
Slovakia  
Presidential election (2nd Round)



31st March  
Ukraine  
Presidential election

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