

Monday 23rd December 2019

issue 873

The Letter in PDF format

The Foundation on  and 

The foundation application available on [Appstore](#) and [Google Play](#)

— I support the Robert Schuman Foundation —

The Letter team wishes you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We thank you for your loyalty and look forward to seeing you again on 13th January 2020.

Speaking European

Author: Stefanie Buzmaniuk



The unique character of the European Union as neither a State nor an international organisation has from the outset required the creation of a language regime that meets particularly high standards. Multilingualism, which is less widely practised today, meets a democratic requirement. The Union must invest in translation and interpreting and affirm its willingness to maintain the debate in several languages.

[Read more](#)

Contents

Elections : Croatia **Commission** : Booking - Strategy/Growth **Parliament** : Sakharov Prize - Malta - Treaty/Annivesary - Ombudsman - EU/Budget - Catalonia **Council** : Agricutlure/Fisheries - Environment - Green investments - Mobility/Hauliers - Crowdfunding **Diplomacy** : Russia - Agreement/Gas **Court of Justice** : AirBnB - Data - Catalonia **ECB** : Results - Board **Agencies** : Space - Airbus **Germany** : Gas **France** : G7/Development **Italy** : Fiat/Peugeot **The Netherlands** : Climate **Poland** : Justice **UK** : Speech/Queen - Brexit/Vote - Scotland/Independence **Sweden** : Bank **Council of Europe** : Greece - Serbia **Eurostat** : Inflation - Trade **Eurobarometer** : Opinion **Culture** : Exhibition/Lisbon - Concert/Vienna

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

Elections :

Results of the first round of the presidential election in Croatia



Former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic (Social Democratic Party) came out ahead in the first round of Croatia's presidential election on 22 December with 29.55% of the vote. In the second round, on 5 January, he will face outgoing President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (Croatian Democratic Union), who gets 26.65%. The question is to whom will the voters of the populist candidate Miroslav Skoro, who came third with 24.45%, turn?..

[Read more](#)

Commission :

Commitments regarding consumer protection

The accommodation booking platform Booking is committed to improving information to its customers in order to better comply with EU rules, the Commission announced on 20 December following a

procedure initiated by the Commission and national consumer protection authorities. Booking will make clearer information on the criteria for the prices displayed and the nature of the accommodation

on offer... [Read more](#)

Annual strategy for sustainable growth



On 17 December the Commission opened the first phase of the European Semester of its mandate and presented its annual strategy for sustainable growth. The strategy includes 4 elements: environmental sustainability, productivity gains, equity and macroeconomic stability... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

Award of the 2019 Sakharov Prize to Ilham Tohti



Jewher Ilham, received the European Parliament's 2019 Sakharov Prize on 18 December on behalf of her father, Ilham Tohti, a former Uighur economist and intellectual who has been imprisoned in China on a life sentence since 2014 for his fight against the repression of the Uighur minority in his native Xinjiang region... [Read more](#)

Resolution on the risks of interference



In a resolution adopted by 581 votes to 26, the European Parliament expressed concern about the credibility of the investigations into the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. They stressed "a serious and persistent threat to the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights" and a continued risk of a compromised investigation, as long as Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, who announced that he would resign in January, remains in office... [Read more](#)

Lisbon Treaty Ten Year Anniversary



On 18 December Parliament celebrated the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Parliament's President David Sassoli stressed the role of both texts in maintaining peace and prosperity in Europe. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Council President Charles Michel welcomed the strengthening of democratic accountability introduced by the Treaty and recognised that citizens must be at the heart of the Union... [Read more](#)

Re-election of Emily O'Reilly as European Ombudsman



The outgoing European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, was re-elected on 18 December by Parliament for a five-year term. Her job is to investigate complaints from EU citizens, residents and organisations about maladministration by the EU institutions or other bodies in cases of unfair conduct, discrimination, unnecessary delays or incorrect procedures... [Read more](#)

Budget: MEPs deem the Council's proposal unacceptable



The Finnish Council Presidency's proposal for the 2021-2027 budget has been deemed unacceptable by MEPs. In a debate on 18 December they strongly criticised the project's lack of ambition, which will have to provide adequate funding not only to its traditional beneficiaries (citizens, regions, cities, farmers, researchers, students, etc) but also to new objectives. They called for a reform either of the Union's own resources mechanism or of the decision-making process to enable the Union to meet the main challenges on which no progress seems possible under the current rules... [Read more](#)

Catalans Puigdemont and Comin accredited as MEPs

The Catalan independentists Carles Puigdemont and Toni Comin were provisionally accredited as members of the European Parliament in



Brussels on 20 December. They will be able to start the permanent accreditation procedure on 6 January, which will enable them to take up their seats as MEPs. They had been refused access in July after the Spanish court ruled that their election in the May ballot was invalid. They are being prosecuted in Spain for their role in Catalonia's bid for independence in 2017. On 19 December, the European Court of Justice ruled that a person elected to Parliament becomes a member and enjoys immunity from prosecution once the results are officially announced... [Read more](#)

Council :

Conclusions of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council



On 16 and 17 December, the Ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries set the fishing quotas for 2020. They decided to stop fishing for western herring and cod in the Baltic Sea in order to promote the recovery of stocks, and proposed measures to help fishermen. They discussed the post-2020 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and adopted policy guidelines for the protection and restoration of the world's forests. They adopted a new strategy for animal welfare as well as for the fight against food fraud. They also discussed the use of pesticides, origin labelling, the bio-economy strategy and the impact of US tariffs on the European agri-food industry... [Read more](#)

Conclusions of the Environment Council



Environment ministers meeting on 19 December discussed the European Green Deal and adopted political guidelines for a post-2020 global framework for biodiversity. They were informed of the measures taken by the Commission on waste treatment and the reuse of water for agricultural irrigation, as well as of the discussions following the Minamata Convention on mercury, COP 25, the Conference of the Signatories to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean, and the Air Quality Forum. The Executive Director of the European Environment Agency (EEA), Hans Bruyninckx, presented the European Environment - state and outlook Report 2020... [Read more](#)

Agreement on Green Taxonomy for Investment



The European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on 17 December on green taxonomy to direct investment towards sustainable activities. These should contribute to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, the protection of water and marine resources, the transition to a circular economy, the use of secondary raw materials, the prevention and control of pollution, or the protection and restoration of biodiversity. It must also comply with specifications to be drawn up by the Commission. The agreement must be formally approved by Parliament and the Council... [Read more](#)

Agreement over lorry driver mobility



On 20 December the representatives of the Member States approved the provisional agreement reached last week between Parliament and the Council Presidency to reform the Union's road transport sector. The new rules aim to strike a balance between better working conditions for drivers, in particular regarding rest periods, and the freedom for hauliers to provide cross-border services. The package, known as the "mobility package", now has to be adopted by the Parliament and the Council... [Read more](#)

Preliminary agreement over crowdfunding rules



The Finnish Presidency of the Council and the Parliament reached an agreement on 19 December to facilitate the provision of services by crowdfunding platforms under the Capital Market Union. The new rules will harmonise legal requirements on the subject in all Member States and strengthen investor protection. The representatives of the Member States still have to approve the proposal, for subsequent formal adoption by the Parliament and the Council... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Extension of sanctions against Russia



more

On 19 December, the Union extended economic sanctions against Russia for six months. The measures, to be implemented in 2014, target the finance, energy and defence sectors and the area of dual-use goods. They are being renewed because the Minsk agreements on the peace process in Eastern Ukraine are not fully implemented... [Read more](#)

Agreement between Ukraine and Russia over gas transit



After months of negotiations under the aegis of the European Commission, Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement in principle on 19 December over the transit of Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine after the current contract expires on 31 December. The details of the agreement, which avoids a disruption of EU supplies, were not immediately communicated... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

Court of Justice :

AirBnB is not an estate agent



The European Court of Justice ruled on 19 December that France cannot require AirBnB to have a professional estate agent's card for its activities. The judges ruled that since France had not previously notified this requirement to the Commission, the platform for renting and reserving private homes remains an "information society service" company under the e-commerce directive... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

Advocate General's Conclusions on Facebook and personal data



The Advocate General of the Court of Justice concluded on 19 December that the Commission's decision on the transfer of certain personal data abroad is valid, and that the platform responsible for the processing can proceed if it has the appropriate safeguards in place. However, in the absence of guarantees, the platform or the supervisory authorities are obliged to block the transfer. The Advocate General, whose conclusions are not binding vis-à-vis the Court, delivered his Opinion in the case of Facebook, challenged by the Austrian activist Max Schrems... [Read more](#)

Catalan separatist Junqueras must be granted European parliamentary immunity



On 19 December, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that a person elected to the European Parliament enjoys the immunity attached to his status as a Member of the European Parliament. The case was referred to the Court by the Catalan independence leader Oriol Junqueras, who was elected as a Member of the European Parliament in May 2019 while in prison and whose election was invalidated by the Spanish courts. It ruled that if the competent national court wished to maintain legal proceedings, it must ask Parliament to waive the immunity of the elected Member. O. Junqueras, imprisoned in 2017 for his participation in the organisation of the self-determination referendum in Catalonia, was sentenced in October 2019 to 13 years' imprisonment... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

ECB :

Monetary Policy Results



On 19 December, the European Central Bank published a study on monetary policy conducted since its creation 20 years ago. It examines how its definition of price stability has worked in the face of shocks and what instruments have been used since the crisis... [Read more](#)

New Members of the Board



On 19 December the Council formally appointed Isabel Schnabel of Germany and Fabio Panetta of Italy to the Executive Board of the European Central Bank. Their 8-year terms of office will take effect on 1 January. Isabel Schnabel replaces Sabine Lautenschläger of Germany, who resigned on 31 October, while Fabio Panetta succeeds Benoît Coeuré of France, whose term of office ends on 31 December... [Read more](#)

more

Agencies :

Launch of telescope Cheops dedicated to exoplanets



A Soyuz rocket took off on 18 December from the Guyana Space Centre in Kourou carrying the Cheops space telescope (acronym for "Characterising exoplanet satellite") to the exoplanets. It will be responsible for observing some 400 planetary systems neighbouring our solar system... [Read more](#)

Record orders for Airbus in 2019



On 18 December, the European aircraft manufacturer Airbus exceeded the 1,000 order mark for 2019, thanks to a request for 60 A220s from the Air France-KLM group. Airbus, whose current results are partly linked to the shutdown of the Boeing737 MAX for safety reasons, has also passed the symbolic mark of 20,000 aircraft sold since its creation in 1970... [Read more](#)

Germany :

American sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline



On 20 December, US President Donald Trump signed the law "Protecting Europe's Energy Security", passed by Congress on 17 December, which introduces economic sanctions against European companies associated with the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project linking Russia and Germany. According to Washington, the pipeline increases European dependence on Russia. The European Commission has indicated that it opposes the law, which Germany regards as interference in its internal affairs. However, the sanctions will delay the project for several months and increase its cost... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

France :

G7 report on development



On 17 December, the French Presidency of the G7 published the Biarritz Development Report, which takes stock of the commitments made to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This fourth report underlines that more than three-quarters of the 48 G7 commitments are on track to be attained, even though the results fall short of expectations in the environmental, trade and food sectors.G7/.. [Read more](#)

Italy :

Merger of car groups Fiat Chrysler FCA and Peugeot PSA



European carmakers PSA (Peugeot Citroën) and FCA (Fiat Chrysler) signed an agreement on 18 December to merge and within 12 to 15 months they will form the world's fourth largest automotive group with annual sales of 8.7 million vehicles and a consolidated turnover of almost €170 billion... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

The Netherlands :

Supreme Court obliges the State to reduce greenhouse gas emissions



In a judgment of 20 December, the Supreme Court of the Netherlands upheld a judgment of the Court of Appeal in The Hague, stating that the Dutch State has a positive obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to protect the right to life. It calls on the government to take the necessary measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% in 2020 compared to 1990 levels... [Read more](#)

[Other link](#)

Poland :

Supreme Court warns against the draft justice bill



The Polish Supreme Court warned on 17 December against a bill tabled by deputies of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) to punish judges who challenge the ongoing judicial reforms. The text, which was adopted by the Lower House on 20 December, provides for sanctions including the exclusion of judges who challenge the appointment of another judge or for political activities. The Court ruled that the draft could, in the long term, lead to Poland's withdrawal from the Union... [Read more](#)

UK :

Queen's Speech

Queen Elizabeth II presented the programme of the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, on 19 December during her speech opening the new Parliament in Parliament. The new government agenda mainly includes legislation to proceed with Brexit on 31 January, and budget increases for the NHS, the public health service, and public investment... [Read more](#)

House of Commons approves the withdrawal agreement

On 20 December, British MEPs approved the agreement to withdraw the country from the European Union by 358 votes to 234. They also approved the motion's adoption programme, which details the timetable for a definitive exit on 31 January 2020. The text now has to be adopted by the House of Lords... [Read more](#)

Scottish Prime Minister seeks power to hold referendum on independence

In a memorandum issued on 19 December, the Scottish Government asked the British Government for the necessary powers to allow a referendum on Scottish independence to be held. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, whose Scottish National Party won 47 of the 59 Scottish seats in the 12 December general election, believes she has a "democratic mandate" to hold a referendum... [Read more](#)

Sweden :

Swedish Bank raises its rate to 0% and ends five years of negative rates

On 19 December, the Sveriges Riksbank raised its key interest rate, which leaves negative territory for the first time in almost five years, from -0.25% to 0%. It is forecasting inflation at 1.7% (or close to 2%) for 2020... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :

Greek criminal justice system ineffective in the fight to counter corruption

The Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) believes in a report published on 18 December that despite some recent measures, the criminal justice system in Greece is ineffective in the fight to counter corruption. In particular, the report notes that corruption offences committed by public officials before 18 November 2019 will still be considered minor offences... [Read more](#)

Serbia: the situation of the Roma remains alarming

The Council of Europe considered on 18 December that the situation of Roma in Serbia remains alarming and that, despite a solid legal framework for the protection of national minorities, important steps still need to be taken to improve relations between communities... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Inflation down

EU annual inflation was 1.3% in November 2019, against 1.1% in October. A year earlier it was 2%. Euro area annual inflation was 1% in November 2019, up from 0.7% in October. A year earlier it was 1.9%. These figures were released on 18 December by Eurostat, the EU's statistics office... [Read more](#)

Trade surplus in international goods

According to first estimates released on 17 December by Eurostat, in October 2019 the European Union recorded a surplus of €2.2 billion in its international trade in goods with the rest of the world; the euro area recorded a surplus of €28 billion... [Read more](#)



Eurobarometer :

Autumn Eurobarometer



According to the Eurobarometer survey published on 20 December, the main concerns of Europeans are immigration (34%) followed by global warming (24%). 43% of respondents say they have confidence in the Union, a relatively stable figure compared to the previous survey in the spring. 70% feel they are EU citizens and 52% are satisfied with the way democracy works in the Union... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Renaissance Master in Lisbon



The National Museum of Ancient Arts in Lisbon is exhibiting Alvaro Pirez d'Evora, the Portuguese Renaissance painter, until 15 March. The exhibition has been facilitated by the loan of works from many European museums... [Read more](#)

New Year's Concert in Vienna



The traditional New Year's concert on January 1 at the Musikverein will be conducted by Latvian Andris Nelsons, Music Director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



1st January

Croatia
Start of the Presidency of the Council of the EU



5th January 2020

Croatia
Presidential election (second round)

The Letter is also available in:



I love the Robert Schuman Foundation's Letter

The Letter's Editorial Team :

Stefanie Buzmaniuk, Helen Levy ;
Zélie Barbet, Camille Boulat, Myriam Benallaoua
Editor-in-chief: Eric Maurice
Publishing Director: Pascale Joannin

Contact/Suggestions
info@robert-schuman.eu

The Robert Schuman Foundation, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.

You no longer wish to receive our letters. [{LINK}](#)