

Data: the fuel of the third industrial revolution

Author: Henri Thomé



Digital technology is one of the major components of the third industrial revolution. A first stage is linked to the harnessing of the personal data left on the web. The second stage will be fed by the billions of business-related data held by companies. But access to this information by third parties still needs to be organised. This development will require regulation promoting trust and participation by all players and enabling the construction of European digital

sovereignty.

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European Council :

No budget agreement



Despite 30 hours of negotiations to find a compromise, the 27 EU leaders were unable to agree on the new multiannual financial framework on 20 and 21 February, due to major disagreements between some contributor countries and several recipient countries. "It was not possible to reach an agreement. We need more time," said Charles Michel, President of the European Council. However, no date has been put forward for a new summit... [Read more](#)

Call for a ceasefire in Syria



The European Council called on 20 February for a halt to hostilities in Syria following an offensive in Idlib, in the north-west of the country, by the Syrian regime and its supporters. European leaders recalled the obligations of the various parties under international humanitarian law and human rights law and expressed their willingness to strengthen their humanitarian

action in the region. They called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Strategy on data and artificial intelligence



On 19 February, the Commission presented its Digital Agenda, in which it envisages the establishment of a single European area for the exchange of industrial and commercial data and announced a regulatory framework on the use of data. In a White Paper on Artificial Intelligence focusing on excellence and trust, it examines ways to encourage and regulate the use of this technology, including the development of public-private partnerships and new legislation to ensure respect for fundamental rights... [Read more](#)

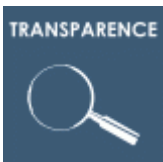
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232 million € to fight the coronavirus



On 24 February, the Commission announced the release of €232 million to tackle the COVID-19 virus, part of which will be allocated immediately. Half of the money will support the World Health Organisation's (WHO) global preparedness and response plan, with the aim of targeting the most vulnerable countries, while €100 million will be used to fund research for a vaccine. The Commission is coordinating and partly financing the repatriation of Europeans from China, the original source of the outbreak... [Read more](#)

Trade: new transparency measures



EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan announced on 19 February the introduction of new measures on transparency in trade negotiations. The measures will be reflected in the publication of the Commission's recommendations on negotiating directives for trade agreements and its decisions authorising Member States to conduct bilateral investment negotiations, as well as the publication of minutes of the Trade Defence Instruments Committee meetings... [Read more](#)

Council :

Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council



On 18 February, ministers for the economy and finance discussed strategies for sustainable growth and for tackling macroeconomic imbalances, as well as the economic surveillance framework to be put in place in 2011. They adopted two VAT reforms concerning online fraud and SMEs. Finally, they added four names to the list of non-cooperative countries and territories in the field of taxation, which now comprises twelve, including one British territory, the Cayman Islands... [Read more](#)

Conclusions of the Education Council



On 20 February, the Ministers of Education asked to be more involved in the European Semester procedure. They discussed how to attract talent while ensuring a balanced movement of people. They also discussed the theme of green and sustainable education... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Go-ahead to negotiations with Japan regarding PNR data



The Council gave the go-ahead on 18 February to the opening of negotiations with Japan on the transfer and use of passenger name record (PNR) data collected by airlines. The Union has already concluded agreements on the use of such data with the United States and Australia... [Read more](#)

ECB :

Financial statements 2019



The audited financial statements of the European Central Bank (ECB) for 2019, published on 20 February, show that the size of the bank's balance sheet increased by 2% to €457 billion from €447 billion in 2018. Profit for the year was €2.366 billion, up €790 million, mainly due to higher income from the dollar portfolio and the one comprising the asset purchase programme... [Read more](#)

Launch of a public consultation for the strategic review



On 24 February, the European Central Bank launched its consultation campaign to "listen to the expectations and concerns" of the public on how monetary policy in the euro area should be conducted. "We want to hear the views, expectations and concerns of the public with an open mind," said ECB President Christine Lagarde. The institution will publish an online vademecum of the strategy review and a web form that citizens can use until 24 April... [Read more](#)

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Germany :

Regional elections in Hamburg



Social Democratic Party (SPD) came out ahead in the regional elections in the Land of Hamburg on 23rd February with 39% of the vote, down by more than 8 points in comparison with the 2015 election. The Greens came second with 24.2%, compared to 12% in 2015. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Chancellor Angela Merkel's party, comes third with 11.2% of the vote, compared to 15.9% in 2015... [Read more](#)

CDU Congress 25 April



CDU Chair Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer will relinquish her post after an extraordinary congress on 25 April. The CDU representatives accelerated the replacement process on 24 February in view of the current difficulties. The party suffered a setback in Hamburg and is struggling to find a way out of the crisis in Thuringia... [Read more](#)

Belgium :

Emerging from political stalemate?



The King of the Belgians, Philippe, asked two new political figures on 19 February to try to break the political deadlock that has prevented the formation of a government since the elections of 26 May 2019. Patrick Dewael, leader of the Chamber of Deputies, and Sabine Laruelle, leader of the Senate, were officially charged with "making the necessary contacts with a view to forming a fully-fledged government". They will submit a report on 9 March... [Read more](#)

Croatia :

The swearing in of President Zoran Milanovic



Zoran Milanovic was sworn in as President of Croatia on 18 February after winning the second round of the presidential election on 5 January. At the inauguration ceremony in Zagreb, he said he wanted to "turn the page" on past wars and promote the values of democracy, justice and equality... [Read more](#)

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Finland :

Visit by the Finnish Prime Minister to Germany



On 19 February, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin was hosted by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The two leaders discussed European climate policy, the negotiations on the EU's next multiannual budget, digital policy and strengthening the EU's role on the international stage... [Read more](#)

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France :

Launch of studies for the future European fighter plane



On 20 February, French and German Defence Ministers Florence Parly and Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and Spanish Defence Secretary Angel Olivares signed the contract for the fighter aircraft demonstrator, an essential component of the SCAF (Future Air Combat System). The project has a budget of €150 million and is due to make its first test flight in 2026... [Read more](#)

Ireland :

Resignation of Leo Varadkar's government



On 20 February, following the results of the 8 February parliamentary elections in which no party won a majority in Parliament, Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar announced his resignation. He will remain in office until a governing coalition is formed... [Read more](#)

Italy :

Measures to halt the coronavirus



In response to numerous cases of Covid-19 (coronavirus) in Italy, the government decided on 22 February to limit access to all communities where there is at least one infected person of unknown origin, to close public places and schools and to suspend all events. Initially, 11 towns in Lombardy have been affected. The Venice carnival has also been shortened... [Read more](#)

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The Netherlands :

The lower house supports the EU-Canada agreement



The lower house of the Dutch Parliament voted on 18 February in favour of ratifying the European Union-Canada Trade Agreement (CETA) by 72 votes to 69. To be ratified by the Netherlands, the agreement must also be approved by the Senate, where the governing coalition does not have a majority. Opposition on the left and far right are challenging the CETA, which they say weakens Dutch farmers and food safety... [Read more](#)

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Poland :

Eight countries of central Europe for the upkeep of a CAP budget



The agriculture ministers of eight Central European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania) signed a declaration in Warsaw on 24 February calling for the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget to be maintained and for convergence of direct aid to farmers in the various EU Member States... [Read more](#)

UK :

The government presents its migration policy



On 19 February, the British Government presented the points-based immigration system it plans to introduce from 1 January 2021. It intends to give priority to skilled workers with specific conditions to obtain a work visa such as speaking English and already having a job offer with a minimum annual salary of £25,600 (€30,820). The new system will treat EU and non-EU citizens equally... [Read more](#)

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Romania :

Invalidation of the appointment of the Prime Minister



The Romanian Constitutional Court ruled on 24 February that the second appointment of Ludovic Orban as Prime Minister by President Klaus Iohannis on 7 February was unconstitutional. The Court ruled that the Constitution does not allow the President to reappoint the same Prime Minister after a vote of no confidence, but that he must nominate another person able to obtain sufficient support in parliament to take up his post... [Read more](#)

Sweden :**The Bank of Sweden tests the e-krona**

On 20 February, the Sveriges Riksbank announced the launch of a pilot project to test an electronic version of the krona, the national currency. In the simulation, users will be able to use the krona from a digital wallet in a mobile application. The project is in place until February 2021, with an option to extend it... [Read more](#)

Albania :**1.5 billion € for reconstruction**

At an international donors' conference in Brussels on 17 February, the EU and international donors pledged €1.15 billion in aid for reconstruction after the November 2019 earthquake in Albania. Member States, the Commission and the European Investment Bank are expected to contribute €400 million... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :**GRECO report on justice in Slovenia**

In a report published on 18 February, the Council of Europe's Group of Anti-Corruption States (GRECO) found that parliamentary inquiries, if they directly concern the judiciary in individual pending cases, may interfere with the separation of powers and respect for the independence of the judiciary... [Read more](#)

OECD :**Slowing of growth**

According to an OECD study published on 20 February, gross domestic product growth in its member states slowed to 0.2% in the fourth quarter of 2019, compared to 0.4% in the previous quarter... [Read more](#)

IMF :**Report on the economic state of Belgium**

In a report on the Belgian economy published on 20 February, the IMF stresses that despite a low unemployment rate, Belgium needs to resume reforms to consolidate public finances and cope with an ageing population. It also calls for Belgium to meet its commitments on climate change... [Read more](#)

Report on the economy of Croatia

In a report published on 19 February, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called on Croatia to accelerate economic convergence with the European Union, consolidate its fiscal progress and improve the business climate to increase growth. It also recommends that particular attention be paid to the risks posed by the high level of bank lending...

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Meeting of G20 Finance Ministers

The finance ministers and central bank governors of the G20 countries met on 22 and 23 February in Riyadh. They discussed the global economic situation, in particular climate change and the consequences of the coronavirus epidemic. They also took part in a symposium on taking account of the digital economy in international corporate taxation... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Rise in inflation



Euro-zone annual inflation was 1.4% in January, down from 1.3% in December, according to Eurostat on 21 February. Inflation is also on the rise in the Union, at 1.7% in January compared to 1.6% in December. However, there are wide disparities between Member States, with the lowest rate in Italy (0.4%) and the highest in Hungary (4.7%)... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Report on transport and connectivity in Africa



The Working Group on Transport and Connectivity in Africa, which brings together experts from both continents in the framework of the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Employment, delivered its final report on 19 February. The report includes recommendations on aviation, road safety and connectivity, such as the creation of a Single African Air Transport Market or a Road Safety Observatory... [Read more](#)

Report on research and innovation



The Expert Commission for Research and Innovation (EFI) submitted its 13th annual report to German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 19 February. The report focuses on three main areas: East Germany as a location for innovation 30 years after reunification, cybersecurity and the exchange of knowledge and technology between Germany and China... [Read more](#)

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Report on British business establishments



According to a report by the Dutch Foreign Investment Agency published on 19 February, 140 British companies have chosen to relocate to the Netherlands since the referendum on withdrawal from the Union in 2016, 78 of which took this decision in 2019. The agency estimates that these companies could create more than 4,200 direct jobs and generate €375 million in investment in the first 3 years... [Read more](#)

Stockholm Declaration on road safety



On 19 February, at the Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Stockholm, participants expressed concern that 1.35 million people die in road crashes every year and that more than 90% of crashes occur in low- and middle-income countries. In a joint declaration, they committed to work towards a 50% reduction in road traffic deaths between 2020 and 2030, to improve vehicle safety and to improve access to emergency care... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Berlinale 2020



The 70th Berlinale, the Berlin Film Festival, is taking place until March 1. The British actor Jeremy Irons is chairing the jury. 18 films are in competition, 343 films are presented in all sections... [Read more](#)

Fantastic women



Until 24 May, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt is presenting for the first time an exhibition devoted to women's contribution to surrealism. Around 260 paintings, works on paper, sculptures, photographs and films by 34 international women artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Leonora Carrington, Meret Oppenheim and Frida Kahlo are on show... [Read more](#)

Madrid thinks Rodin



Until May 3, the Canal Foundation, in collaboration with the Rodin Museum, invites you to discover another facet of the creator of the famous Thinker, Auguste Rodin. Comprising more than 91 works, including numerous drawings, the exhibition provides a better understanding of the artist's creative process... [Read more](#)

Jeremy Shaw at the Pompidou Centre



From 26 February to 20 April at the Centre Pompidou, Canadian artist Jeremy Shaw will be presenting an atypical artistic experience combining music, video, dance, photography and new technologies...

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General Affairs Council



27-28 February 2020
Brussels
Competitiveness Council



29 February 2020
Slovakia
General Elections

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