

Tuesday 26th May 2020

issue 893

The Letter in PDF format

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The Challenges and Constraints facing a "Geopolitical Commission" in the achievement of European sovereignty

Authors: Pierre Mirel, Xavier Mirel



The crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is accentuating the technological, economic and security challenges that the Union faces in its relations with China, Russia and the United States. Its neighbourhood policy, particularly in the Western Balkans, is an important instrument for the promotion of its strategic interests.

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Front page! :

Reconstruction



On 27 May, the Commission is due to present its plan for the recovery of the European economy. The Franco-German proposal for a €500 billion fund within the EU budget is a first step towards a new "de facto solidarity". It is up to the Commission to rise to the challenge, because the issue at stake is nothing more and nothing less than rebuilding an economy devastated by its brutal halt, writes Jean-Dominique Giuliani... [Read more](#)

Foundation :

Digital publication of the "Schuman Report on Europe, the State of the Union 2020"



The 2020 edition of the "Schuman Report on Europe, the State of the Union", a reference work for European decision-makers, is available in electronic version. With contributions from leading personalities and experts, original maps and annotated statistics, it offers a comprehensive view of the European Union and analyses the challenges facing Europe... [Read more](#)

End-of-Lockdown seen from Europe



After several weeks marked by exceptional measures of more or less strict lockdown, the Member States of the European Union are gradually resuming their activities. The Robert Schuman Foundation offers you a

summary of the measures taken and the timetable planned by each State. An indispensable resource for understanding the way out of the crisis and for regaining a European "spirit"... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Economic recommendations to the Member States



The Commission published its economic recommendations to the Member States on 20 May. Taking into account the coronavirus crisis and the suspension of budgetary rules, it recommends investing in employment, health and business to boost the economy. It intends to use the framework of the European Semester to coordinate the recovery once the crisis is over... [Read more](#)

European Strategy for Biodiversity and Food



On 20 May the Commission presented its two strategies for biodiversity and food, both of which are part of the Green Deal. The first aims to protect and regenerate biodiversity, and aims to protect 30% of Europe's land and seas, and at least 10% of the Union's agricultural land. The second, called "from farm to fork", aims to make the agri-food sector more sustainable and healthy, in particular through a 50% reduction in the use of pesticides and an increase in public and private funding to make the sector more sustainable... [Read more](#)

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Coronavirus :

National Measures



In France, religious ceremonies were able to resume on 22 May, and the government set 28 June as the date for the second round of municipal elections, which should have been held on 22 March. In Belgium, schools continue to reopen classes. In Spain, the state of alert has been extended until 7 June and the borders will reopen on 1 July. On 25 May, shops and restaurants reopen partially in the Madrid and Barcelona regions, and swimming pools and beaches are once again accessible in the least affected areas. In Germany, the government has published an outline for the reopening of cultural venues but without giving a date. In Austria, hotels are due to reopen on 29 May. In Poland, primary schools are taking in some of their pupils. In the United Kingdom, anyone showing symptoms of Covid-19 can be tested and a 14-day quarantine will be imposed on those arriving in the country from 8 June... [Read more](#)

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Further measures in Italy



Gymnasiums, swimming pools and sports centres reopen in Italy on 25 May. The government announced on 20 May that Italian airports will reopen on 3 June for Schengen passengers only... [Read more](#)

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Support measures to the economy



France has concluded agreements with Germany, Belgium and Switzerland on the taxation of cross-border workers stranded at home. The UK government has allocated £150 million (€167 million) for social enterprises and vulnerable people and £22 million (€24.5 million) for health charities. In Germany, the State will pay compensation to parents who had to look after their children during the health crisis with up to 20 weeks of lost wages. It will also support the travel industry by issuing vouchers to these agencies and issuing guarantees. In Spain, the Council of Ministers approved €20 billion in additional guarantees for SMEs, bringing the total amount to €100 billion... [Read more](#)

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Suggested plan for recovery by 4 Member States



Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden presented their proposals for a European Economic Recovery Fund on 22 May. Contrary to the Franco-German proposal of 18 May, they want the money borrowed by the European Commission from the markets to be paid out to the Member States that need it in the form of loans and not as grants from the EU budget. The Commission is due to present its recovery plan on 27 May... [Read more](#)

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Meeting of the Economy and Finance Ministers



On 19 May the Ministers for the Economy and Finance adopted the SURE programme to support Member States' short-time working schemes. They discussed the Commission's proposal to improve the means of combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. They exchanged conclusions on the 2020 report for the European Semester... [Read more](#)

Meeting of Tourism Ministers



On 20 May Tourism Ministers discussed the implementation of the Commission's guidelines on the reopening of borders. They agreed on 4 principles: European coordination, a gradual approach, decision-making based on epidemiological data, and non-discrimination of citizens. The ministers support the creation of a site by the Commission for tourists, as well as the introduction of aid for tourism and air transport... [Read more](#)

Meeting of Culture Ministers



On 19 May, Culture Ministers discussed the sector's potential for recovery with the gradual lifting of lockdown measures, and supported the inclusion of the sector in recovery initiatives. They also stressed the importance of digital technology for culture and the need for flexible implementation of the Creative Europe programme and its funding after 2020... [Read more](#)

Meeting of Youth Ministers



Youth ministers decided on 19 May that the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps should be made more flexible, that youth-related measures should be included in recovery initiatives, that assistance should be given to the most vulnerable groups, and that opportunities for activities should be organised during the summer holidays... [Read more](#)

New funds for research into coronavirus



On 19 May, the Commission allocated €122 million under the Horizon 2020 fund for coronavirus-related research to finance the production and distribution of vaccines, test kits and medicines. The call for tender is open until 11 June... [Read more](#)

Health Guidelines for Air Travel



The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) published joint guidelines for air travel on 20 May. They call on airports and airlines to make the wearing of masks compulsory, to implement as far as possible social distancing rules at all stages of the journey, and to promote frequent hand washing and raise awareness of these practices among passengers... [Read more](#)

Measures for aviation and railways



On 25 May the Council adopted a temporary amendment to the rules on air services with a view to supporting airlines and airports in the face of the sharp fall in air traffic caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The Council also adopted an extension of the deadline for the transposition of the railway safety and interoperability directives of the fourth railway package so as to give the railway sector and the authorities some flexibility and legal certainty in the current circumstances... [Read more](#)

Temporary framework for the transport sector



On 20 May the Council adopted a temporary framework aimed at simplifying administrative procedures in the transport sector and reducing the tax burden on maritime transport. The new framework extends the validity of certificates and licences required for freight carriers and allows operators in European ports to reduce, suspend, cancel or delay the payment of charges to their users... [Read more](#)

Recommendations for Long-Term Care Facilities



The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) published on 19 May its recommendations on the surveillance of Covid-19 in long-term care facilities, which house a particularly fragile population, especially the elderly. The ECDC points out that the lack of monitoring systems and differences in screening capacity between countries may have led to an underestimation of cases... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

MEPs concerned about the rule of law in Poland



On 25 May, Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee (LIBE) debated the interim report by its Chair Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar on the rule of law in Poland. MEPs voiced concerns about the independence of the judiciary, democracy, minority rights and freedom of expression and assembly in Poland. They called on the Council and the Commission to act to preserve the fundamental values of the Union, notably through budgetary measures... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Declaration by the 11 Member States on the "Open Skies" Treaty



In a joint statement on 22 May, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Finland expressed regret at the withdrawal of the United States from the Open Skies Treaty on conventional arms control and limitation and security. They reaffirmed the importance and usefulness of the Treaty and expressed their concerns about Russia's implementation of the Treaty... [Read more](#)

Call for the respect of Hong Kong's autonomy



On 22 May, the EU called on China to respect Hong Kong's "high degree of autonomy" under the territory's Basic Law and China's international commitments. The Chinese authorities plan to bring Hong Kong under Beijing's control by setting up new security organs to "stop and punish" the activities of democratic movements... [Read more](#)

Economic and financial dialogue with the Western Balkans and Turkey



Representatives of the Member States, the Commission, the ECB, the Western Balkans and Turkey held their annual economic policy dialogue on 19 May in preparation for their future participation in the European Semester. They stressed the importance of their collaboration in managing the health and economic crisis. The measures discussed focused on immediate responses to mitigate the impact of the pandemic but also on the transition from short-term to medium- and long-term structural measures... [Read more](#)

Meeting of the Council of the European Economic Area



On 25 May, the members of the European Economic Area (EEA) Council discussed the functioning of the EEA and the consequences of Covid-19 for the internal market. They reiterated their commitment to continue the energy transition and the fight against pollution, as well as their desire to reduce social disparities and improve working conditions. They also exchanged views with Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier on the discussions between the Union and the United Kingdom... [Read more](#)

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Court of Justice :

The Union's court rejects Nord Stream 1 & 2



On 20 May, the European Court of Justice dismissed the operators of the Nord Stream 1 & 2 gas pipelines, which link Russia and Germany, from their application for the annulment of the European directive which makes gas pipelines linking Member States to third countries subject to European competition law. The two companies felt they had been harmed because they would be forced to reorganise or sell their gas pipelines. The Court considered that they were not directly concerned by the Directive, the application and binding nature of which will depend on its application by the Member States, in this case Germany, which will be able to grant derogations... [Read more](#)

Croatia :

Snap election 5 July



Following the dissolution of the Croatian Parliament on 18 May, parliamentary elections will be held on 5 July, a few months ahead of schedule... [Read more](#)

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Hungary :

Closure of transit camps after the decision of the European Court of Justice



On the night of 20-21 May, the Hungarian government transferred almost 300 asylum seekers from the Röszke and Tompale transit camps on the border with Serbia to refugee centres. It thus complied with two judgments of the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which described the camps as "illegal detention"... [Read more](#)

Poland :

New President of the Supreme Court



Polish President Andrzej Duda appointed Judge Malgorzata Manowska to head the Supreme Court on 25 May. The appointment has been strongly criticised by lawyers and the opposition because Ms Manowska, a former deputy justice minister, is close to the ruling Law and Justice Party. Poland has already been threatened with sanctions by the European Union for its attempts by the government to take control of the Supreme Court... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Inflation down



Annual inflation was 0.7% in the EU and 0.3% in the euro area in April, down from 1.2% and 0.7% respectively in March, according to Eurostat figures released on 20 May. The lowest annual rate was recorded in Slovenia with -1.3%, while the highest annual rate was observed in Hungary with 2.5%... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Winners of the EU Literature Prize 2020



The thirteen winners of the Union Prize for Literature were announced on 19 May. Organised annually, the prize rewards the best emerging writers from the 41 countries participating in the Creative Europe programme. National juries comprising publishers, booksellers, authors and critics select the winners from each of the 13 participating countries each year, allowing all countries to be represented every three years... [Read more](#)

Comic Strip Museum in Angoulême



Located in Angoulême, the Comic Strip Museum reopened its doors on 18 May. It is now possible to visit the permanent collection as well as the temporary exhibition "Calvo un maître de la fable" available until May 31st. There are also online comic book workshops and a guided tour... [Read more](#)

Deutsches Historisches Museum



The Deutsches Historisches Museum, which covers the history of the country from the Middle Ages to the fall of the Wall, has reopened in Berlin. The exhibition "Hannah Arendt and the 20th Century" on the relationship between the philosopher and the great issues of her time such as totalitarianism in Europe, racial segregation in the United States, Zionism and feminism can be visited... [Read more](#)

Drawing and Painting in Warsaw



The National Art Gallery Zachęta in Warsaw has reopened to the public with several exhibitions, including one by the press cartoonist Andrej Krauze and a piece of work by the painter Paulina Pankiewicz based on the work of Paul Cézanne. The programme of virtual activities, Zachęta online, is also continuing... [Read more](#)

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Contemporary painting in Malaga



The Contemporary Art Centre of Malaga is hosting the exhibition Opus nigrum, by the Spanish painter Girbent, which opened online on 22 May... [Read more](#)

Galway City Museum



The Galway City Museum has many online resources, including exhibitions on Gaelic culture, Ireland in 1913-1923, and the oceans... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



26 May 2020

EU-Japan Summit Meeting of the European Affairs Ministers



27 May 2020

Presentation of the Recovery Plan by the Commission



29 May 2020

Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting of Research Ministers Meeting of Ministers responsible for space

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