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The Letter in PDF format

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## Ending the political crisis in Belarus: with or without external intervention?

Author: Ekaterina Pierson-Lyzhina



Protests and repression have continued after the rigged presidential election on 9 August. Alexander Lukashenko, not recognised by Europeans, is being tempted by "Sultanistic" rule and is seeking his salvation partly from Russia and China. The European Union, which has decided to impose sanctions against the regime, must act so as not to leave the people alone with their autocrat.

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### Contents

**Foundation** : Publication/Schuman Report - Belarus - Health/Europe **European Council** : Conclusions **Commission** : Customs Union - Research - Education - Brexit/Negotiations **Parliament** : Audition - Budget **Council** : Programme/Horizon - Tourism - Trains - Eurogroup **Diplomacy** : Armenia/Azerbaijan **ECB** : Digital euro **European Agencies** : European Prosecutor's Office **Germany** : Reunification/30 years **Belgium** : Government **Bulgaria** : Bank **Spain** : Catalonia **France** : New Caledonia **UK** : Brexit **Council of Europe** : Corruption/France **NATO** : Tension/Mediterranean **Eurostat** : Savings - Unemployment - Inflation **Studies/Reports** : Rule/Law - Terrorism - OECD/PISA - Brexit/Finance **Culture** : Exhibition/Vienna - Exhibition/Paris - Exhibition/Madrid - Exhibition/Cork - Music/Naples - Cinema/Warsaw

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

### Foundation :

#### The "Schuman Report on Europe, 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 hard copy in French, published by Marie B, and in electronic format in French and English. With the contribution of the most prominent personalities and experts, including Laura Codruta Kövesi, the head of the new European Public Prosecutor's Office. With original maps and annotated statistics, this book offers a comprehensive view of the European Union and analyses the challenges facing Europe. You can order it on our website... [Read more](#)

#### Belarus - chronology of a revolution in progress



Since the "rigged" presidential election of 9 August, the Belarusian people have been protesting against the continued rule of Alexander Lukashenko. While opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, exiled in Lithuania, has just met French President Emmanuel Macron and arrests of opponents and police violence continue, the Union has decided to punish leaders of the regime and calls for political dialogue. To follow this crisis, the Foundation offers you a chronology of events and links to European reactions and initiatives... [Read more](#)

## Table of health measures and travel conditions in Europe



While the pandemic remains present in Europe, the 27 Member States of the European Union are trying to determine the conditions for maintaining social and economic activities. The Foundation offers you an overview of the health measures in place and the conditions for travel across Europe. An indispensable, regularly updated resource to understand the situation... [Read more](#)

## European Council :

### Conclusions of the European Council



On 1 and 2 October, the heads of State and government called on Turkey to stop drilling in Cypriot and Greek waters and said they were ready to use "all instruments and options". They decided to impose sanctions against 40 officials responsible for the repression in Belarus. They expressed their "concern" about the human rights situation in Hong Kong and the situation of minorities in China, and called for an immediate ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan. They also discussed the lessons of the pandemic and its impact on EU policies and stressed the need to strengthen the internal market and industrial policy... [Read more](#)

## Commission :

### Action Plan to improve Customs Union



On 28 September, the Commission launched a new action plan to make the Customs Union more effective. The plan focuses on risk management, e-commerce management, compliance promotion and better coordination between countries. Recommendations include the establishment of a new analysis network for the collection, analysis and sharing of customs data, rules to support the fight against customs and tax fraud in e-commerce, and better instruments for cooperation between different customs authorities... [Read more](#)

### European Research Area



On 30 September, the Commission presented its objectives for relaunching the European Research Area, created in 2000. It wants to establish the ecological and digital transition in Member States' research and innovation policies. The Commission wants to increase intra-European cooperation by setting a target of 5% national public funding for joint programmes and by calling for a 50% increase in public spending on research and development in countries lagging far behind the European average... [Read more](#)

### Creation of a European Education Area



On 30 September, the commission unveiled its plan to create a European education area by 2025. It aims to boost cross-border education, promote gender equality, inclusion and diversity, improve understanding of climate change and enrich the digital dimension of the education systems of the Member States. The Commission is also proposing an action plan for digital education for the period 2021-2027... [Read more](#)

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### Negotiations with the UK



On 1 October, the Commission sent a letter of formal notice to the UK government following the maintenance of its Internal Market Bill, which it considers to be in breach of the EU withdrawal agreement. The UK has one month to respond to the letter of formal notice. On 2 October, chief negotiator Michel Barnier noted further progress on coordination in the areas of social security, fundamental rights and air safety. However, he pointed out "serious divergences on subjects of major importance" such as fisheries, state aid, the governance of the agreement and the question of compliance with the withdrawal agreement. In a telephone conversation on 3 October, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson agreed to work "intensively" to reach an agreement "if possible"... [Read more](#)

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## Parliament :

### Audition of candidates for the post of commissioner



Mairead McGuinness, Commissioner-designate for Financial Services, was heard on 2 October by the Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee. On the same day, the Executive Vice-President of the Commission, Valdis Dombrovskis, who is due also be in charge of trade, was heard by the Parliament's International Trade Committee. The appointment of the Commissioners is due to be approved at the Parliament's plenary session (7 October)... [Read more](#)

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### Discussions regarding the modalities of the Union's budget



MEPs said on 5 October that the Council's proposal concerning the establishment of a conditionality relating to the respect of the rule of law for the European budget and the recovery plan did not go far enough. They believe that the proposal would not "create an instrument that can be triggered in practice". The same day saw the sixth round of negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework between the Council and Parliament, "without significant results" especially on the issue of top-ups for the EU's 15 flagship programmes, according to Parliament's negotiators... [Read more](#)

## Council :

### Competitiveness, Research and Innovation Council



On 29 September, the ministers responsible for Competitiveness adopted the "Horizon Europe" research and innovation programme for 2021-2027. This programme aims to help Europe achieve its sustainable development objectives while strengthening the European Union's competitiveness and growth... [Read more](#)

### Tourism Ministers Meeting



At a meeting by videoconference on 28 September, tourism ministers called for better coordination of travel restrictions within the Union and requested the withdrawal of the quarantine obligation after a first negative test. They announced their determination to support the tourism industry, which employs more than 12% of the European population, in its post-Covid transition... [Read more](#)

### Rail Passenger Rights



The Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on 1 October on the reform of rail passenger rights. This reform should help railway companies to improve access to their services for passengers with reduced mobility. In line with the green deal for Europe, the possibility of taking a bicycle on board a train will be improved. Single tickets are to be introduced to facilitate connecting journeys and ticket refunds are also to be simplified. This informal agreement is due to be adopted by the Council in the near future... [Read more](#)

### Eurogroup Meeting



The 19 ministers of the Eurogroup, meeting by videoconference on 5 October, discussed the priorities of the national recovery plans. They decided to support the candidacy of the Dutchman Frank Elderson for the Executive Board of the European Central Bank (ECB). They announced that they wanted to prevent the health crisis from widening the gap between the 19 economies, discussed the digital euro project and took stock of the evolution of exchange rates... [Read more](#)

## Diplomacy :

### Conflict in the High Karabakh



The clashes that began on 27 September between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway Armenian-majority region of Nagorno-Karabakh have reportedly resulted in more than a hundred deaths, according to a provisional assessment. On 29 September, the Armenian government accused Turkey of having shot down one of its planes, which Ankara, which supports Azerbaijan, denied. France, the United States and Russia, which co-chairs the OSCE Minsk Group, have called for an end to the clashes and offered mediation. The European Council called for an "immediate" end to hostilities. Armenia declared itself open to discussions for a truce. Azerbaijan, for its part, said

negotiations would be possible if Armenia presented a plan for the withdrawal of Armenian soldiers from Nagorno-Karabakh and a public apology... [Read more](#)

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## ECB :

### Towards a digital euro



The European Central Bank (ECB) announced on 2 October that it will launch a six-month test period for the issuance of a digital euro that would exist alongside cash, which the ECB will continue to issue "in all cases". The initiative comes against the backdrop of a sharp decline in the use of cash in the eurozone due to the health crisis... [Read more](#)

## European Agencies :

### Auguration of the European Prosecutor's Office



The inaugural session of the European Public Prosecutor's Office was held on 28 September at the Court of Justice. This independent body will be responsible for investigating, prosecuting and bringing to trial those responsible for offences affecting the financial interests of the Union. During the meeting, the Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office Laura Codruța Kövesi and the 22 European Public Prosecutors gave a solemn undertaking to respect the obligations arising from their office and to guarantee their independence... [Read more](#)

## Germany :

### 30th anniversary of the reunification



Germany celebrated the 30th anniversary of its reunification on 3 October. In a speech in Potsdam, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier praised Germany's new identity, united "in freedom and diversity", and stressed that Germany's unity "must always be defined in the European context!".. [Read more](#)

## Belgium :

### New government



After 662 days without a government resulting from the legislative elections of 26 May 2019, Belgium formed a 7-party government on 1 October, chaired by Alexander De Croo (Open VLD). The so-called "Vivaldi" coalition brings together Flemish and French-speaking liberals, socialists and environmentalists, as well as the Flemish Christian Democrats. The outgoing Prime Minister Sophie Wilmès becomes the first woman Foreign Minister. The government, which obtained the confidence of the Chamber of Deputies on 3 October, is parity, with 10 men and 10 women... [Read more](#)

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## Bulgaria :

### Membership of the Banking Union



The Bulgarian Central Bank (BNB) announced on 1 October the accession of Bulgaria to the European Banking Union. Participation in the Banking Union was required after the country joined the European Exchange Rate Mechanism ERM II last July, a compulsory step towards the adoption of the euro. Since 1999, the Bulgarian lev has had a fixed rate against the European single currency... [Read more](#)

## Spain :

### Destitution of the President of Catalonia Quim Torra



On 28 September, the separatist president of the Spanish region of Catalonia, Quim Torra, was dismissed by the Spanish Supreme Court. He had been sentenced in December 2019 to a year and a half of ineligibility for disobedience. Shortly before the parliamentary elections of April 2019, he had had a banner with content deemed separatist installed on the façade of the regional government headquarters and refused to remove it despite requests from the Spanish electoral commission. The vice-president of the Catalan government, Pere Aragoes, is in charge of the interim until the next regional elections scheduled for February 2021... [Read more](#)

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## France :

## Referendum in New Caledonia



In the referendum held in New Caledonia on 4 October, voters rejected independence by 53.26% of the vote. This was the second referendum organised on the subject in the archipelago, an overseas community with special status. The agreements signed in 1988 after a period of unrest provide for three referendums on independence in the event of a no vote in the first two. In 2018, remaining within the French State won 56.7% of the votes... [Read more](#)

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## UK :

### The bill on the internal market moves to third reading



On 29 September, the Internal Market Bill was approved on third reading in the House of Commons by 340 votes to 256. The controversial law, which breaches the UK's agreement to withdraw from the European Union signed in October 2019, is due to be debated in the House of Lords. On 1 October, the European Commission sent a letter of formal notice to the UK government to ensure that it meets its commitments... [Read more](#)

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## Council of Europe :

### Report on the prevention of corruption in France



In a report published on 1 October, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) assesses the measures taken by the French authorities to implement the recommendations made in 2018 concerning the prevention of corruption among parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors. While GRECO notes that some progress has been made, such as the control of senators' expenses, the system for managing conflicts of interest and the regulation of gifts in the two assemblies, some recommendations remain unaddressed or incompletely addressed more than six years after the adoption of the first report on the subject in 2013... [Read more](#)

## NATO :

### Deconfliction Mechanism in the Mediterranean



On 1 October, after a series of meetings between Greek and Turkish military representatives at NATO headquarters, a bilateral mechanism for military deconfliction at sea or in the air was established. The two countries expressed their wish to resume negotiations to settle their disputes over the delimitation of their maritime zones... [Read more](#)

## Eurostat :

### Household savings at historically record high



According to Eurostat estimates published on 2 October, household savings in the euro zone in the second quarter of 2020 reached a record rate of 24.6%, compared to 16.6% in the first quarter. This is explained in particular by the fall in consumer spending (-12.6%) and household gross disposable income (-3.3%) due to the health crisis. The household investment rate stood at 7.9%. Both rates represent levels that have not been seen since the introduction of the euro... [Read more](#)

### Increase in unemployment rate



The unemployment rate increased in August according to figures published by Eurostat on 1 October. It stood at 7.4% in the European Union and 8.1% in the euro zone... [Read more](#)

### New decline in inflation in September



Euro-zone annual inflation is estimated at -0.3% in September, down from 0.2% in August, according to a flash estimate issued by Eurostat on 2 October. However, inflation varies from one country to another, ranging from -2.3% in Greece to +1.5% in Slovakia... [Read more](#)

## Studies/Reports :

### First report on the rule of law

On 30 September, the Commission published its first report on the state of the rule of law in the Union, focusing on 4 points: the judicial system, the fight against



corruption, the balance of power, and the freedom and plurality of the press. While standards in the area of the rule of law are high, the situations in some countries, including Poland and Hungary, which are the subject of infringement proceedings, but also Bulgaria, are a cause for concern. The Commission warns against excessive use of fast-track legislation, political pressure on the media and lack of effective investigation of high-level corruption in several States... [Read more](#)

#### Assessment report of anti-terrorist measures



On 30 September, the Commission published a report reviewing the transposition by Member States of the European directive on the fight against terrorism. The report finds that the national transpositions of these measures are satisfactory overall. However, it notes that there are differences between the States, in particular on the criminalisation of terrorist offences or the sanctioning of terrorist financing... [Read more](#)

#### PISA report on access to technology at school



On 29 September, the OECD released its PISA report on education with a special focus on access to digital resources. The report states that in 2018 there was "on average" nearly one computer available at school for educational purposes for every 15-year-old student, but that inequalities within countries between advantaged and disadvantaged schools remain significant. The report recalls the importance of maintaining high investment in education, and of giving priority to reducing inequalities in access to computers, which in the context of the pandemic has enabled the continuation of distance learning... [Read more](#)

#### The negative effects of Brexit on the City of London



On 1 October, Ernst & Young published a study on the negative effects of Brexit on the UK financial sector. According to the study, more than 7,500 finance jobs have been relocated from the UK to the EU since 2016 and 24 finance companies said they would transfer assets from the UK, around £1,200 billion, to the EU. These transfers of jobs and capital have mainly benefited Dublin, Luxembourg, Frankfurt and Paris... [Read more](#)

### Culture :

#### Beethoven Moves in Vienna



On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is organising an exhibition until 24 January 2021 which combines painting, sculpture, video and music to retrace the life of the musician who lived in the Austrian capital for 35 years, as well as to experience his work by appealing to all the senses... [Read more](#)

#### Olmecs at the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum in Paris



From 9 October to 15 July 2021, the exhibition "The Olmecs and the cultures of the Gulf of Mexico" will be held at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris. It will showcase the culture of the Olmec civilization, as well as the pre-Columbian cultures of the Gulf of Mexico, with nearly 300 pieces from archaeological missions over more than a century, some of which are being shown for the first time outside Mexico... [Read more](#)

#### Lockdown Art in Madrid



From 6 October to 13 December, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum is hosting "Advancing with a Light Step", a collection of artists' projects created during the lockdown and carried out with a minimum of means.

Each week pieces ranging from photography to video, drawing and sculpture will be on show... [Read more](#)

#### Art and Light in Cork

From 7 October to 29 November, the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork brings science and art together in "Invisible Light", an exhibition on electromagnetic spectra. While only one light spectrum out of the seven that exist is naturally visible to man, the exhibition



traces with an artist's eye the history of techniques that have made the invisible visible... [Read more](#)

### Baroque Music in Naples



The fifth edition of the Sicut Sagittae Baroque Music Festival is being held in Naples until the 7th of November. On the programme are concerts of 17th century music, including 'Motets for Two Different Voices' conducted by Angelo Trancone and 'Domenico Scarlatti' with Cantatas and Sonatas... [Read more](#)

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### Film Festival Warsaw



From 9 to 18 October the 36th Warsaw Film Festival will be held in Warsaw. On the programme, more than 180 films will be screened to introduce the public to recent trends in world cinema... [Read more](#)

## Agenda :



5 October 2020

Eurogroup Videoconference



5-8 October 2020

Brussels  
European Parliament Plenary Session



6 October 2020

Economy and Finance Ministers' Videoconference  
Brussels  
EU-Ukraine Summit



8 October 2020

Interior Ministers' Videoconference



9 October 2020

Justice Ministers' Videoconference



11 October 2020

Lithuania  
General Elections (1st round)



12 October 2020

Brussels  
Foreign Affairs Council

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