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The Letter in PDF format

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The team of The Letter wishes you a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you for your loyalty. We look forward to further reading with you on 11 January 2021.

"This exceptional crisis should encourage us to reflect about how we want to shape tomorrow's culture"

Author: Gitte Zschoch



Culture has been very much affected by the pandemic, but it is also taking advantage of it to reinvent itself. Because the construction of Europe is also a cultural project, the EU must redefine how to support this development and promote cultural action in the world, says Gitte Zschoch, director of the network of national cultural institutes of the European Union.

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Front page! :

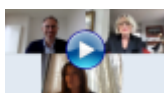
Brexit: What a waste!



In an op-ed published by Ouest France a few days before the end of Brexit's transition period, Jean-Dominique Giuliani stresses that it is a lie to make people believe that peoples and states can free themselves permanently from each other... [Read more](#)

Foundation :

Towards a true Europe of Health



The Foundation organised an online debate on 14 December on health policy in Europe and its future. The discussion with Nathalie Colin-Oesterlé, MEP and member of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, and Françoise Grossetête, former MEP and special advisor to the Foundation, is available on line in full... [Read more](#)

Impact of the health crisis on the functioning of Parliaments of Europe

When the first wave of the epidemic swept across Europe in March 2020, parliaments were forced to respond quickly. The Foundation, in partnership with a European university research network initiated by the University of Lille in 2016, has published a report bringing together contributions devoted to the changes in the functioning of parliaments during the health crisis in twelve European States and the European Parliament... [Read more](#)

Table of health measures and travel conditions in Europe



As Christmas approaches, the European States have taken new measures to try to strike a balance between the fight against the pandemic and the maintenance of family ties and business activity. At European level, coordination has been set up for tracing and vaccination. The Foundation offers you a summary of the health measures in place and travel conditions across Europe. An indispensable, regularly updated resource for you to understand the situation... [Read more](#)

Belarus: chronology of a revolution in progress



On 16 December, the democratic opposition in Belarus was awarded the 2020 Sakharov Prize in the European Parliament. Since 9 August, Belarusians have been protesting against the result of the rigged presidential election and demanding the departure of Alexander Lukashenko, whom the Union no longer recognises as president and is subject to sanctions. To follow this crisis, the Foundation offers you a chronology of events and links to European reactions and initiatives... [Read more](#)

Robert Schuman Prize 2021



The Robert Schuman European Centre in Scy-Chazelles will award the Robert Schuman Prize in 2021, for the 70th anniversary of the creation of the ECSC. Candidates can send a text by 2 February 2021 proposing new action for the Union or imagining the future over the next 70 years. The results will be announced on 9 May... [Read more](#)

Commission :

New rules for the digital platforms



On 15 December, the Commission presented two proposals for the reform of the digital space. The digital services legislation contains binding obligations for platforms, including the removal of illegal content, transparency on micro-targeting and algorithms, and better data cooperation with researchers. The digital markets legislation aims to combat anti-competitive practices and includes rules on the identification of gatekeepers, on certain unfair practices and on collaboration with the Commission. Penalties include fines of up to 6% of turnover and can go as far as banning services in Europe... [Read more](#)

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Recommendations for the Common Agricultural Policy



On 18 December the Commission published its recommendations to the Member States for the implementation of the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by 2023. It recommends developing their supply chains, identifying potential organic production areas, promoting organic food and encouraging the transition to organic production... [Read more](#)

Commission opens the way to merger between PSA and Fiat Chrysler



On 21 December, the European Commission cleared under the Merger Regulation the proposed concentration between the automotive companies Fiat Chrysler Automobiles N.V. and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles N.V. ("FCA") and Peugeot S.A. ("PSA"). The clearance is conditional upon full compliance with a series of commitments offered by both companies... [Read more](#)

Legislative priorities in 2021



On 17 December, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Parliament President David Sassoli, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, on behalf of the Council Presidency, signed the joint declaration by the three institutions on legislative priorities for 2021. Drawn up on

the basis of the Commission's work programme presented in October, the declaration lists the initiatives to be taken in 2021, in particular to implement the dual transition between climate and digital technologies, as well as economic recovery and the defence of the Union's values and interests... [Read more](#)

Measures against non-performing loans



On 16 December, the Commission put forward measures to prevent an increase in bad debts called "non-performing loans" (NPLs) in the wake of the pandemic-related economic crisis. NPLs are debts for which there is a delayed repayment or which are unlikely to be repaid. The Commission wants to increase transparency, support the creation of national asset management companies (AMCs) and develop secondary markets to allow banks to eliminate them from their balance sheets... [Read more](#)

Report on European Aid to Health and SME's in the pandemic



In a review published on 18 December, the Commission welcomes the results of the two €18bn Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives (CRIIs) launched in March 2020 to help member states overcome the economic and health crisis... [Read more](#)

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Clearance for the marketing of the first vaccine against Covid-19



On 21 December, the Commission cleared the first vaccine against Covid-19 for marketing in Europe. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) concluded that the vaccine, developed by Pfizer and BioNTech, was "safe and effective". The Commission has concluded a contract for 300 million doses of the vaccine with the two laboratories. Most EU countries will start their vaccination campaigns on 27 December. The labs also announced that the vaccine would also be effective against possible mutations in the virus... [Read more](#)

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Parliament :

Agreement on the 2021 budget



On 18 December, MEPs adopted the 2021 budget. In accordance with an agreement reached with the Council, the budget will have €164.3 billion in commitment appropriations and €166.1 billion in payment appropriations. The share for digital Europe and the transport infrastructure interconnection mechanism has been increased in order to promote job creation in these sectors. The budget will provide more funding for programmes dedicated to the preservation of biodiversity, EU values, health and youth... [Read more](#)

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Interinstitutional agreement over budgetary discipline and new own resources



On 16 December, MEPs adopted an agreement with the Commission and the Council on budgetary discipline, cooperation in budgetary matters and sound financial management. The document also details the roadmap for the introduction of new own resources for the EU budget... [Read more](#)

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Adoption of revised directive on drinking water



On 15 December, MEPs finally adopted the revision of the drinking water directive. The directive aims to make tap water safer, including stricter rules on the amount of lead, nitrates and chlorine allowed. The text stems directly from the European citizens' initiative "Right2Water"... [Read more](#)

Adoption of the React-EU programme for the regions



On 15 December, MEPs approved additional aid for EU regions to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and its social and health consequences by 654 votes to 23, with 17 abstentions. The REACT-EU aid will be made available through the Structural Funds with €37.5 billion allocated for 2021 and €10 billion for 2022... [Read more](#)

Resolutions on the Dublin III regulation and the return directive

In a resolution adopted on 17 December on the implementation of the Dublin III regulation of 2013 and the directive on the return of third-country nationals, MEPs call for the establishment of a solidarity mechanism to promote a fair distribution of asylum seekers between Member States. They call for the rules on the return of asylum seekers to take greater account of respect for fundamental rights and procedural guarantees... [Read more](#)

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Council :

Final adoption of the 2021-2027 budget



On 17 December, the Council formally adopted the regulation establishing the multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027, which Parliament had approved the day before. The MFF ceiling is set at €1 085.3 billion, plus €672.5 billion from the recovery facility and €47.5 billion from the React-EU instrument. The budget contains two new programmes, EU4Health with €5.1 billion to support European cooperation on health, and Digital Europe with €7.6 billion to accelerate Europe's digital transition. Horizon Europe, a research and innovation programme, sees its budget increase by 30% to €95.5 billion... [Read more](#)

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Agreement on the Recovery and Resilience Facility



Parliament and Council negotiators agreed on 18 December on the details of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which totals €672.5 billion, i. e. the bulk of the NextGenerationEU plan. Each of the 27 national plans will have to contribute 30% to climate objectives, 20% to digital transition and 7% to biodiversity preservation. The maximum pre-financing rate will be 13% and the funds will be available from 1 February... [Read more](#)

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Agreement on fishing opportunities in 2021



The Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries agreed on 15 and 16 December on provisional fishing opportunities for the first quarter of 2021, pending a possible agreement with the United Kingdom... [Read more](#)

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Meeting of Environment Ministers



On 17 December the environment ministers adopted a general approach on European climate law, which supports the objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. They also adopted conclusions on access to justice in environmental matters (Aarhus Regulation), the circular economy and digital transition... [Read more](#)

Eurogroup Meeting



On 16 December, the Eurozone Finance Ministers took stock of the economic situation and discussed the outlook. They exchanged views on the reform of the European Stability Mechanism, on the eurozone summit on 11 December and on the Commission's position on the Member States' draft budget plans (PPB). They warned against debt, which is expected to rise from 86% in 2019 to 102% of GDP in 2021. They welcomed the Commission's green light for €200 billion from the EIB for businesses affected by the economic crisis... [Read more](#)

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Conclusions in the fight to counter hybrid threats



The Council adopted measures on 15 December aimed at strengthening the fight against hybrid threats and misinformation in the context of the pandemic. It calls on the Commission and the EU High Representative to take greater account of the economic and social damage caused by disinformation and the misuse of technology; to establish additional transparency measures on online platforms and to strengthen the resilience of supply chains in the context of economic security. The Council also wishes to strengthen the StratCom working groups and reinforce the Early Warning System... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

EU-Latin America Meeting



On 14 December, the Union's Foreign Affairs Ministers and those of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) exchanged views on the combat against the pandemic and climate change, economic recovery and sustainable development. The ministers also wish to cooperate more in the development of digital technology and for a reform of the WTO... [Read more](#)

Sanctions against Russia extended by 6 months



The Council decided on 17 December to extend until 31 July 2021 the economic sanctions taken against Russia in 2014 after the annexation of the Crimea. The decision is justified by Russia's incomplete implementation of the Minsk agreements of 11 February 2015... [Read more](#)

EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council



On 17 December, the Stabilisation and Association Council with Serbia took stock of the country's progress in its accession negotiations. Since the last Council in 2018, two negotiating chapters have been opened, bringing the total number of open chapters to 18. Two of them have been provisionally closed... [Read more](#)

Payment of last instalment of aid to refugees in Turkey



On 17 December, the Commission disbursed the eighth and final instalment of the aid granted to Turkey under the agreement of 18 March 2016, amounting to €780 million for a total of €6 billion. Through this agreement, the EU has worked with Turkey to ensure decent housing conditions, as well as access to health care and education for 1.7 million refugees in Turkey, mostly from Syria. 620 000 children have been enrolled in school through the programme since 2016... [Read more](#)

Meeting of the EU-Armenia Partnership



The 3rd meeting of the Partnership Council with Armenia took place on 17 December. It discussed the reforms carried out in the framework of the Global and Enhanced Partnership Agreement signed in 2017, which provides for the strengthening of economic and political ties. The situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region after the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan from September to November was discussed and the EU expressed its readiness to provide support for the pacification and reconstruction of the region, notably with €10 million in humanitarian aid... [Read more](#)

EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council



At the 17th Cooperation Council with Azerbaijan, held in Brussels on 18 December, EU representatives discussed the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, the effects of the pandemic and the country's reform programme. They discussed the possible extension of the South European gas corridor project, which currently concerns only Italy and Greece, and agreed on an additional €10m in humanitarian aid... [Read more](#)

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Court of Justice :

The device to redirect exhaust gases is illegal



The European Court of Justice ruled on 17 December that the device to redirect exhaust gases (NOx) from combustion engines into the intake manifold in order to reduce final emissions is contrary to the 2007 European regulation setting limits on the level of NOx emissions. In its judgment, which concerns the "Dieselgate" revealed in 2015, the Court adds that the prevention of engine ageing through this mechanism does not constitute a valid justification... [Read more](#)

Advocate General against the reform of the Polish judicial system



The Advocate General of the Court of Justice ruled on 17 December that the Polish law excluding any appeal against the appointment of Supreme Court judges by the National Judicial Council is contrary to Union law. He considers that the impossibility of lodging appeals against

the appointment of Supreme Court judges deprives Polish judges of the possibility of referring questions to the Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling, thus leading to unequal application of Union law in the Member States. The possibility of submitting such appeals is also essential to preserve the independence and impartiality of Polish judges... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

New Director General of the European Space Agency



Austrian Josef Aschbacher, current director of the Copernicus Earth observation programme, was appointed on 17 December as the future Director-General of the Copernicus Earth observation programme... [Read more](#)

France :

Adoption of the 2021 finance law



On 17 December, the National Assembly finalized the adoption of the 2021 finance bill. The text includes numerous measures from the economic recovery plan presented on 3 September last for an amount of €100 billion, notably those aimed at helping companies hard hit by the consequences of the health crisis... [Read more](#)

Romania :

Agreement to form a new government



On 21 December, the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Union Save Romania-PLUS (USR-PLUS) and the Magyar Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR) sealed an agreement to form a new government following the 6 December elections. They propose Florin Citu, the current Finance Minister, as Prime Minister. Former Prime Minister Ludovic Orban (PNL) was elected President of the Chamber of Deputies on 22 December, and the presidency of the Senate goes to the USR-PLUS Alliance. Nine ministries are assigned to the PNL, six to USR-PLUS and three to the UDMR... [Read more](#)

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Council of Europe :

Report on the Management of the Pandemic



The Council of Europe's European Committee on Democracy and Governance published a report on 17 December assessing the measures taken by member states to manage the Covid19 crisis. The report stresses that strong and effective multi-level governance is essential to prevent, identify and manage emergencies, including pandemics. It recalls that measures must be taken in accordance with the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, human rights and the rule of law... [Read more](#)

Report on the application of the Warsaw Convention rules



The Conference of the Parties to the Warsaw Convention, a treaty signed in 2005 on money laundering and the financing of terrorism, issued a report on 16 December assessing the application of the treaty's rules on banking supervision. The report finds that the majority of the 37 Council of Europe member states that have ratified the convention apply the articles allowing the authorities to supervise banking operations carried out through identified accounts. The report makes recommendations for each country to improve the implementation of the treaty... [Read more](#)

Commissioner for Human Rights calls on France to amend its draft security law



The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, urged the French Senate on 18 December to amend the French bill on global security to make it more respectful of human rights... [Read more](#)

Call for better management of conflicts of interest in Germany

In a report published on 15 December, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) calls on Germany to establish a better structure to prevent conflicts of interest, in particular by extending the waiting period between withdrawing



from political life and exercising a profession in the private sector... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

EU Citizenship Report



In its Report on EU citizenship 2020, published on 15 December, the Commission proposes 18 actions to improve the lives of the 13.3 million citizens who live in an EU country of which they are not nationals. These include funding for independent election observation projects, an initiative on taxpayers' rights aimed at simplifying EU citizens' tax obligations and measures on equality and anti-discrimination... [Read more](#)

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Report on the EU's external action instruments



The Commission published a report on 14 December on EU financial support in 2019 as part of international cooperation and development, humanitarian aid, foreign policy and enlargement. The report highlights that the EU has invested €75.2bn in official development assistance, or 55.2% of global aid in 2019. Investment in sustainable development has increased, with 240 local authorities in 14 countries receiving aid to combat climate change, among other things... [Read more](#)

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Annual Report Erasmus+



The annual report on the Erasmus+ programme, published by the Commission on 16 December, demonstrates that the funds allocated to it are used correctly and efficiently. 3.37 billion has been allocated to the programme, an increase of 20% compared to 2018, enabling 940,000 overseas educational opportunities to be undertaken and funding to be provided to around 25,000 projects and 111,000 organisations. 505 000 students and higher education staff benefited from the programme. The Commission also published a report on the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps, which supported 3 750 projects and helped 27 000 young people to take part in voluntary activities... [Read more](#)

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Culture :

Online concert by the Kalisz philharmonic



The musicians and soloists of the Kalisz Philharmonic Orchestra in Poland are offering an online concert on 27 December on the orchestra's Youtube channel... [Read more](#)

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Online concerts at the Orsay Museum with #Orsaylive



Every Tuesday, until 5 January 2021, the Musée d'Orsay is offering concerts that you can discover free of charge online with its programme of audiovisual creations, #Orsaylive... [Read more](#)

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Raphael's Renaissance Tapestries in Madrid



Until 18 April 2021, the gallery of the Royal Palace in Madrid will house nine tapestries by the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael depicting the Acts of the Apostles. The collection was commissioned by the Spanish King Philip II... [Read more](#)

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Modern masters in Chichester



The Pallant House Gallery in Chichester is hosting the exhibition "Degas to Picasso: International Modern Masters" until April 21, 2021, dedicated to the great artists of the 19th and 20th centuries. The exhibition features works by 50 artists. Visitors can also see the recently restored painting "Model sitting in an armchair, combing her hair" by Édouard Vuillard... [Read more](#)

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Russian Impressionists in Potsdam



The Barberini Museum in Potsdam is hosting an online exhibition on the Impressionists in Russia until 14 February 2021. Through a hundred paintings, the exhibition seeks to show the influence of the French Impressionists on Russian artists. The museum's website offers explanatory videos, readings and lectures on the subject... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



January 1

Start of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council

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