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The Letter in PDF format

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The Rule of Law: the uncertain gamble on conditionality

Author: Eric Maurice



With the implementation of its multi-annual budget and post-Covid recovery plans, the European Union has equipped itself with instruments that make disbursements of European funds conditional on reforms in favour of the rule of law. While potentially powerful, these instruments have not yet demonstrated their full effectiveness. [Read more](#)

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Front page! :

Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine: the great rejection of Russia



For Georgians, Moldovans and Ukrainians, the European Union embodies freedom, the rule of law, human dignity, respect for borders and a prosperity that has long been confiscated. This is why they reject Putin's Russia, which "revives memories of a totalitarian past," writes Jean-Dominique Giuliani... [Read more](#)

Elections :

Will Finland shift to the right in the parliamentary elections on 2 April?



According to the latest opinion poll, Petteri Orpo's National Coalition Party (KOK) would come out ahead in the 2 April parliamentary elections, with 20.8% of the vote, ahead of the Social Democratic Party of outgoing Prime Minister Sanna Marin, which is expected to garner 19.9%, and the Finns Party (Perus S), led by Rikka Purra, 19%... [Read more](#)

Foundation :

Pension systems in the European Union

Pension systems are regularly the subject of debate in the Member States and discussions at European level because of their impact on budgets and the demographic



development of Europe. While each country has its own system, the Foundation offers a comparative table to better understand the situation in each country and the issues involved... [Read more](#)

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European recovery plans: figures and priorities



In response to the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union has set up a €672.5 billion recovery fund. On 8 March, Malta and Slovenia received their first instalments. On 9 March, Estonia asked the Commission to add a REPowerEU chapter to its plan. On 10 March, the Commission gave a positive preliminary assessment of Austria's payment request. The Foundation provides you with an interactive map of the plans country by country, including amounts and timetables... [Read more](#)

Ukraine/Russia :

Continued EU military support to Ukraine



On 7-8 March, EU defence ministers meeting in Stockholm discussed military support to Ukraine, in particular the joint procurement of artillery ammunition and training of Ukrainian soldiers through the EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine)... [Read more](#)

Visit by the Finnish Prime Minister



Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin visited Kyiv on 10 March where she reiterated that Ukraine's future lies in Europe. She discussed with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky European support and efforts to prosecute war crimes. Both leaders condemned Russia's "irresponsible nuclear rhetoric"... [Read more](#)

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Antonio Guterres in Kyiv



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Kyiv on 8 March. He recalled that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a violation of the UN Charter and international law and pledged to mitigate the impacts of the conflict, including from a humanitarian perspective... [Read more](#)

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Aid for the reconstruction of Ukraine



The ministers responsible for development aid and the Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister for Reconstruction, Oleksandr Kubrakov, discussed EU support for the reconstruction of Ukraine on 8-9 March in Stockholm. Oleksandr Kubrakov discussed EU support for Ukraine's reconstruction in Stockholm on 8-9 March... [Read more](#)

An application to learn French from Ukrainian



To learn French from Ukrainian, the NGO Bibliothèques Sans Frontières offers the free application "Bonjour France", accessible from the Kajou application. The application offers 50 themes to help you find your way around in everyday life, 100 podcasts and more than 1,000 exercises to practise your French, as well as a lexicon with 600 pre-recorded phrases in French... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

Agreement on the Energy Efficiency Directive



The Council and the Parliament reached an agreement on 10 March to reduce the Union's final energy consumption by 11.7% by 2030. This consumption limit will be binding on the Member States, which will have to contribute to this target through their national energy and climate plans (NECPs). The agreement also provides for a gradual increase in the annual energy savings target and an obligation for the public sector to achieve above-average energy savings... [Read more](#)

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Commission :

New state aid rules

On 9 March, the Commission approved an amendment to the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) and adopted a temporary framework to accelerate support for the



green and digital transition, in line with the Green Deal Industrial Plan. The text simplifies and extends the possibilities for public subsidies to projects that contribute to reducing CO2 emissions in the EU, in response to US and Chinese subsidies that have raised fears of a flight of green investments from Europe... [Read more](#)

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New strategy for maritime security



On 10 March, the Commission published its proposals for strengthening the EU's maritime security strategy, together with an updated action plan for its implementation. The new strategy provides for enhanced measures against new threats and a framework for the EU to protect its interests at sea. It promotes international peace and security but also the protection of the oceans and their biodiversity.. [Read more](#)

European Space Strategy



On 10 March, the Commission presented a communication on the European space strategy for security and defence. It proposes, among other things, enhanced cooperation in the face of space threats, actions to strengthen the protection of space systems and services in the Union, maximising the use of space for security and defence and promoting responsible uses of space at international level... [Read more](#)

Guidelines on Member States' budgetary policies



On 8 March, the Commission published its guidelines for Member States' budgetary policies, calling for caution. It recommends policies that ensure debt sustainability in the medium term and promote growth, notably through public investment. The general derogation clause of the Stability and Growth Pact will be deactivated at the end of 2023 and replaced... [Read more](#)

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Ursula von der Leyen visits North America



From 6 to 11 March, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Canada and the United States. In Canada, she made a joint statement with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and then addressed the Canadian Parliament to reiterate their common support for Ukraine, their commitment to democracy, environmental protection and energy security and transition. In Washington, she met US President Joe Biden with whom she discussed the economic challenges of EU-US cooperation, particularly in the area of energy transition. The two leaders also discussed their cooperation on the war in Ukraine... [Read more](#)

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Council :

Meeting of Interior and Justice Ministers



On 9 March, the Ministers of the Interior discussed asylum and migration issues, particularly in the Central Mediterranean and the Western Balkans, the state of the Schengen area and visa policy. On 10 March, the Justice Ministers adopted conclusions on the Charter of Fundamental Rights. They discussed obstacles in gaining access to justice, the draft directive on the recovery and confiscation of assets and the threat of organised crime to European societies... [Read more](#)

Meeting of Education Ministers



On 7 March, the Education Ministers approved conclusions on skills and competences for the green transition. They also discussed the teacher shortage in the EU and enhanced European cooperation to attract, develop and retain teachers and trainers... [Read more](#)

Informal Meeting of Trade Ministers



On 9-10 March, the Trade Ministers met in Stockholm to discuss trade relations, particularly with the USA, and the contribution of trade to the EU's competitiveness. They discussed the issue of resilient supply chains, as well as trade support for Ukraine and its accession to the EU's free-trade area... [Read more](#)

ECB :

Directing European savings towards growth



On 9 March, in a joint statement, the Presidents of the European Central Bank, the European Council, the Commission, the Eurogroup and the European Investment Bank asserted their determination to work to accelerate its ecological and digital transition, in particular through the completion of the capital markets union... [Read more](#)

Cyprus :

New government in Cyprus



Following the inauguration of the new Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides on 28 February, a new government has been formed. It comprises 11 ministers, including 3 women. It will have to address several major issues, namely rising inflation and cost of living, the fight against corruption, as well as relations with Türkiye and the government of the Turkish-occupied northern part of the island... [Read more](#)

Spain :

Gender equality reinforced



Pedro Sanchez, head of the Spanish government, delivered a speech to the lower house of the Spanish Parliament on the progress made on gender equality under his mandate. The statement came in support of a government bill, currently under debate, which aims to achieve more equal representation of women and men in politics, public life and business... [Read more](#)

France :

Franco-British Summit



On 10 March, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for a summit on migration and defence issues. The meeting was an opportunity to turn the page after several years of tension between the two countries. They announced a new agreement to curb illegal immigration into the UK, which includes an increase in the UK contribution of €543 million by 2026, the construction of a command centre and new human and material resources... [Read more](#)

Ireland :

Proposed referendum on gender equality



The Irish government announced on 8 March that it will hold a referendum on gender equality in November. This will involve amending the Constitution to include equality between men and women and to remove the reference to "housewives"... [Read more](#)

Luxembourg :

IMF report on Luxembourg



On 10 March, the IMF released its forecast for the Luxembourg economy. The organisation expects growth to slow to between 1.5% and 2%, while inflation is expected to remain between 3.5% and 4% of GDP. The report warns of the risk of a resurgence of inflation in 2023-2024 and recommends that Luxembourg pursue a broadly neutral fiscal policy and refrain from further stimulus measures... [Read more](#)

The Netherlands :

Mark Rutte in Italy



On 8 March, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte travelled to Rome to meet his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni. The two leaders discussed the migration issue, which they said requires an effective and coordinated European response and must be approached from the perspective of defending the external borders and combating traffickers... [Read more](#)

Czech Republic :**Investiture of Petr Pavel**

On 9 March, Petr Pavel (Coalition Together, centre-right) was sworn in as President of the Czech Republic, having been elected on 28 January for a 5-year term. He succeeds Milos Zeman (Civil Rights Party, left). On 13 March, he made his first official trip to Slovakia... [Read more](#)

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Georgia :**Withdrawal of the controversial Foreign Agents Bill**

The Georgian government withdrew on 9 March a draft law requiring organisations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents". The bill had sparked large-scale protests, and condemnation in the international community. The withdrawal of an anti-democratic bill was a crucial step in the citizens' determination to move closer to the European Union... [Read more](#)

Kosovo :**Visa exemption for Kosovars**

The Council adopted its position on 9 March on visa-free travel to the EU for Kosovar passport holders for stays of 90 days within a period of 180 days. These rules must now be adopted by the Parliament... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :**Meeting of the Venice Commission**

The experts of the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional law, met on 11 and 12 March. They adopted interim opinions on draft laws on the influence of oligarchs in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. They adopted a joint opinion on a draft law on the external evaluation of judges and prosecutors in Moldova and a draft joint opinion on political parties in Azerbaijan. They also followed up on two of their opinions on draft laws on the judicial system in Montenegro and Georgia... [Read more](#)

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Report on Cyprus of the Committee against Racism and Intolerance

The Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued a report on 7 March welcoming the positive steps taken in Cyprus since 2016, while noting some concerns. It notes that hate speech remains widespread in public discourse and unchallenged... [Read more](#)

European Commission's report on Hungary against racism and intolerance

In a report on Hungary published on 9 March, the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) notes improvements in the fight against hate crimes and the inclusion of Roma. It commends the country's efforts to protect Ukrainian war refugees... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :**Increase in arms imports into Europe**

According to data published on 13 March by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri), imports of major weapons by European states increased by 47% between the periods 2013-2017 and 2017-2022. According to the same data, Ukraine became the world's third largest arms importer in 2022, behind Qatar and India... [Read more](#)

Culture :**Francophonie Week**

During the French language and Francophonie week, from 18 to 26 March, almost 1 500 events are being organised in 80 countries, including a gala of comedians in



memory of Raymond Devos, a conference on the enrichment of the language and Francophone meetings at the National Library of France in Paris... [Read more](#)

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Saint Patrick's Day Ireland



From 16 to 19 March, the St. Patrick's Day festivities are being held in Ireland. This festival is celebrated in honour of Saint Patrick, a missionary who converted Ireland to Christianity. Dublin is the capital of the festivities with many concerts, shows and other activities. The city's largest ever parade is scheduled for 17 March... [Read more](#)

Paul Smith reinterprets Pablo Picasso



The Picasso Museum in Paris is holding an exhibition until 27 August to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Pablo Picasso's death. Designer Paul Smith, who is the artistic director of the exhibition, brings a contemporary perspective to the artist's most iconic masterpieces... [Read more](#)

Herman Han in Warsaw



Until 23 April, the Royal Palace in Warsaw is devoting an exhibition to Herman Han, who is mainly known for his religious works. The exhibition seeks to shed light on a lesser-known part of the artist's career, who also explored secular themes and the portrait... [Read more](#)

Lucie Rie: The Adventure of Pottery in Cambridge



Until 25 June, an exhibition at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge offers an opportunity to discover the work of Lucie Rie, one of the most influential ceramicists of the 20th century. Julie Rie was the leading figure in the new ceramic art movement that developed in the aftermath of the Second World War, breaking away from the tradition that dominated the discipline... [Read more](#)

Photographs by Duane Michals in Helsinki



Until 21 May, the Finnish Museum of Photography in Helsinki is organising an exhibition entitled "The Portraitist", dedicated to Duane Michals, a famous photographer who broke with the tradition of documentary photography... [Read more](#)

Figurative painting in Montpellier



Until 7 May, the MO.CO in Montpellier is hosting an exhibition devoted to young French figurative painting. The exhibition features artists born between the 1970s and 1990s who revisit the figurative style... [Read more](#)

New exhibitions at the KW Institute in Berlin



The KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin is hosting three exhibitions until 14 May. The first is devoted to the Chinese-American painter Martin Wong. The second exhibition brings together paintings, drawings, collages and videos by the Colombian-American artist Karen Lamassonne. Finally, the American artist Win McCarthy is presenting a series of photograms devoted to everyday life and representing scenes that are both personal and universal... [Read more](#)

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[From Maurizio Cattelan to Lynette Yiadom-Boakye at the Strozzi Palace](#)

Until 18 June, the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation is hosting an exhibition featuring some of the most important Italian and international contemporary artists, including Maurizio Cattelan and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. The exhibition proposes, through more than 70 works, to reflect on the present and the future of art... [Read more](#)

Oskar Kokoschka at the Guggenheim Bilbao



Until September 3, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is organising an exhibition devoted to Oskar Kokoschka, entitled "A Rebel from Vienna". An artist known for his versatility and unclassifiable nature, during his lifetime he only acknowledged the term "Expressionist" to describe his art, considering that he did nothing but "express life"... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



13-14 March 2023

Brussels

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Council



13-16 March 2023

Strasbourg

Plenary Session of the European Parliament



14 March 2023

Brussels

Economic and Financial Affairs Council



16 March 2023

Frankfurt Council of Governors of the European Central Bank
Brussels Environment Council
Tirana EU-Albania Association Council



17 March 2023

Skopje

EU-North Macedonia Association Council



19 March 2023

Brussels

Foreign Affairs Council

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