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The Letter in PDF format

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Towards Energy Union Act II: a new European energy-climate leadership

Author: Emmanuel Tuchscherer



2018 is a year to reflect on the energy-climate priorities of the next European Commission. JC Juncker's Commission will publish a communication on the energy-climate priorities on the horizon of 2025. In this context this paper lays out the work that might be undertaken by the next Commission to turn the Union's ecological leadership into a lever for industrial development, growth and sustainable jobs.

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Elections :

Viktor Orban is due to win the Hungarian general elections on 8th April



On 8th April nearly 8 million Hungarians are called to ballot to renew the 199 members of the Országgyűlés, the only house in Parliament. This legislative election is almost without suspense such is the domination of the outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orban (Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union, FIDESZ-MPP) over the country and the opposition divided and therefore impotent. According to the most recent poll by Nezipont, published at the beginning of March, FIDESZ is due to win the elections with 52% of the vote easily, ahead of the Movement for a Better Hungary (JOBBIK), which is due to win 17% of the vote. On the left the Socialist Party (MSZP) is due to win 10% of the vote and the Democratic Coalition (DK) 6%. Doing Politics Differently (LMP), an ecologist party, is due to win 9%... [Read more](#)

European Council :

The Union's vision of future trade links with the UK

The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk laid out his vision of



post-Brexit relations in a declaration he made on 7th March. He declared that the Union did not want to build a "wall" separating it from the UK, but their divorce would necessarily lead to a loosening of ties, notably in terms of trade... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Action plan for sustainable finance



On 8th March the European Commission unveiled its strategy to lead the financial system to support the European Union's actions for climate and sustainable development. This is part of the work undertaken in virtue of the Capital Markets Union so that finance meets the specific requirements of the European economy, in the interest of the planet and our society... [Read more](#)

Annual analysis of social and economic progress in Europe



On 7th March the Commission published its annual analysis of the Member States' economic and social health. The European economy is in a promising phase of expansion with an optimal economic outlook underpinned by the quality of the reforms introduced in the Member States. However recovery is not occurring to the benefit of all and structural weaknesses are impeding growth and convergence in some Member States... [Read more](#)

Assistance to Industrial Regions



On 7th March the European Commission announced the names of seven regions in industrial transition which will benefit from tailored assistance as part of a pilot action financed by the Union. Cantabria (Spain), Centre-Val de Loire and Grand-Est (France), North East Finland, Greater Manchester (UK), as well as Lithuania and Slovenia are covered by this. They will be receiving increased assistance from the Commission to build resilient, competitive economies... [Read more](#)

Priorities of the structural reform support programme in 2018



On 7th March the Commission adopted the annual work programme that lays out measures to support reform, financed by the Structural Reform Support Programme 2018. In 2018 the SRSP will provide technical assistance to the 24 Member States to help them accomplish more than 140 projects that come in addition to the 150 projects selected in 2017... [Read more](#)

What answer should be given to the American measures on steel and aluminium



In response to the decision by the American President to tax steel and aluminium imports into the USA, the European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström confirmed on 7th March that the Union would be prepared to respond with "protective" measures if necessary. After a meeting on 10th March with the Japanese Economy Minister Hiroshige Seko and the US representative for trade, Robert Lighthizer, the commissioner informed that exemption for the Union from the duties still remained uncertain... [Read more](#)

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Council :

Implementation of the permanent structured cooperation



On 6th March Ministers adopted a roadmap for the implementation of the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), establishing a timetable that lays out details of the way the 25 participating Member States plan to fulfil their commitments. They also adopted the list of 17 joint projects which will be completed in this framework... [Read more](#)

Prolongation of assets freeze on former Ukrainian president Yanukovich

On 5th March the Union's Member States prolonged the assets freeze on former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich for a further year. 12 other people accused of misappropriating public funds as they fled



Ukraine after the Maidan uprising in 2014 were also included in this measure... [Read more](#)

Decisions by Justice and Interior Ministers



On 8th and 9th March ministers adopted a directive to counter non-cash means of payment fraud to improve existing rules and to widen the field of on-line offences to transactions made in virtual currencies. They also addressed the EU's cooperation with the Western Balkans in areas of security and the fight to counter terrorism... [Read more](#)

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Conclusions on the Industrial Policy Directives



On 12th March the Council published a report stating that it was re-introducing the principles of the competitiveness of the industrial policy whilst strengthening rules regarding the Single Market. It states that "unjustified, disproportionate" barriers will be deleted to facilitate long term European work. Ministers also discussed the digitisation of the EU's economy in the context of the European Semester. Finally on the occasion of the 25 year anniversary of the Single Market, new ideas to strengthen it have been given... [Read more](#)

M. Centeno's remarks after Eurogroup



After having congratulated the progress made by Greece, Mario Centeno, President of the Eurogroup, said that the ECB was prepared to disburse 5.7 billion € for the country. Moreover he stressed the success of the Greek growth adjustment mechanism which provides a positive vision for the long-term. Finally, Mario Centeno said that preparations for the presentation of the next European multi-annual framework had been completed: "Some points of view converge, but others will require more work," he concluded... [Read more](#)

ECB :

Governing Council of the ECB



During its conference on 8th March the European Central Bank informed that it would be maintaining its interest rate at a stable rate and that it would continue its monetary policies for the euro zone States until September 2018. It has given up however the possibility of increasing the monthly volume of its public and private debt purchases... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Launch of Soyuz rocket



On 9th March the space centre of Kourou in French Guiana launched the Soyuz rocket. Four Medium Earth Orbit satellites have been deployed by the European Space Agency... [Read more](#)

Catherine de Bolle appointed Executive Director of Europol



On 8th March the Council appointed Belgian Catherine de Bolle as Executive Director of Europol for a four year mandate that is renewable once. She will take office on May 1st... [Read more](#)

Spain :

New economy minister



Romano Escolano was appointed Spanish Economy Minister on 7th March. He has replaced Luis de Guindos, who will be joining the European Central Bank. He was previously the Vice-President of the European Investment Bank... [Read more](#)

Greece :**Growth returns to the country in 2017**

Greece returned to the path of growth in 2017, since its GDP has risen by 1.4% over the past year, according to a first estimate published on 5th March by the Greek Statistics Authority (Elstat)... [Read more](#)

Ireland :**The Prime Minister hosts Donald Tusk**

On 9th March Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar hosted the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in Dublin. Discussions mainly focused on economic issues (employment, growth, competitiveness) and on the UK's exit of the Union... [Read more](#)

The Netherlands :**Eight countries in Northern Europe call for caution in the reform of the euro zone**

In a press release on 6th March, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia called to focus reform of the euro zone in areas in which the Member States are close to compromise and to postpone any more ambitious plans... [Read more](#)

Poland :**The Party in office takes control of the National Council of the Judiciary**

The Law and Justice Party (PiS) took control of the Polish judicial system on 6th March as it elected its own candidates to the National Council of the Judiciary (KRS), a constitutional body that ensures the independence of the legal system. The opposition (except KUKIZ 15)

boycotted the vote in parliament regarding the choice of the new members of the KRS, held in virtue of a bill that has been criticised many times as being anti-constitutional both in Poland and by many international institutions... [Read more](#)

Portugal :**Launch of the "International South Rail Corridor"**

On 5th March the Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and his Portuguese counterpart Antonio Costa as well as European Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc attended the ceremony to launch the construction of the Evora-Caia railway line. This section is the first stage in the "International South Rail Corridor" that is due to link the

two countries together... [Read more](#)

Corruption: the country must "step up reform" says the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe called on Lisbon to "step up reform" in terms of countering corruption amongst its MPs and magistrates, deeming the present legal framework as "unsatisfactory" in a report published on 6th March. The European Parliament's panel of anti-corruption experts, (GRECO) invited the Portuguese authorities to establish "principles and standards of conduct" for MPs... [Read more](#)

Armenia :**Armen Sarkissian elected President**

Armenian MPs elected Armen Sarkissian President of the Republic on 2nd March, 90 votes in support out of 105. Aged 64 and Ambassador in the UK to date, he was the only candidate running for office... [Read more](#)

Iceland :**Europe's leading country in terms of equality**

Iceland distinguishes itself by its excellent results in terms of parity. The island has been ranked first in the report by the World Economic Forum



on equality for the past nine years. The country has adopted strong legislation which makes it illegal to pay women lower wages and measures that aim to promote equality in terms of education, healthcare and employment opportunities... [Read more](#)

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Norway :

Funds for the Western Balkans



On 7th March the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Minister, Ine Eriksen Søreide announced that her country was releasing 391 million Norwegian crowns to help the development of the Western Balkans. This fund has almost been doubled in comparison with 2017 (175 million NOK). It is designed to promote stability, democracy and the economic and social development of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia... [Read more](#)

Switzerland :

The Federal Council presents its negotiation guidelines with the EU



On 2nd to 5th March the Swiss Federal Council reviewed four years of negotiation with the EU over institutional issues pertaining to access to the European market. One of the priorities is an agreement for Swiss participation in the electricity market... [Read more](#)

Ukraine :

Sanctions extended over infringements of Ukraine's territorial integrity



On 12th March the Council extended restrictive measures linked to actions that are compromising or threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and its independence for a further six months. These measures comprise assets freezes and travel restrictions. They continue to apply to 150 people and 38 entities... [Read more](#)

WTO :

Preventing the escalation of trade barriers



On 5th March the WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo asked the Member States of the organisation to avoid triggering the escalation of trade barriers across the world. His intervention responds to the announcements made by the WTO's members indicating that unilateral barriers to trade might soon enter into force... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

GDP up by 0.6%



During the fourth quarter of 2017, the GDP adjusted to seasonal variations rose by 0.6% both in the EU and the euro zone in comparison with the previous quarter according to an estimate published by Eurostat. During the third quarter of 2017 the GDP increased by 0.7%... [Read more](#)

The wage gap between men and women is 16% in the Union



In 2016 the uncorrected wage gap between men and women was higher than 16% in the EU announced the Commission on 7th March. The gap ranged from 5% in Romania to 25% in Estonia, followed closely by the Czech Republic and Germany (22%)... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Report on gender equality in Europe in 2018

On International Women's Day on 8th March the Commission published its 2018 report on equality between men and women, as well as a document on women in tech... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Picasso at the Tate Modern London



Until 9th September the Tate Modern London is running a unique exhibition together with the National Picasso-Paris Museum "Picasso 1932 - Love, Fame, Tragedy". Visitors are offered a collection over of 100 paintings, sculptures, drawings, as well as photos of the artist's family... [Read more](#)

Klarafestival in Brussels



Until 30th March the Klarafestival in Brussels is paying tribute to visionary composers like Beethoven and Stockhausen. This year aims to be "an ode to the imagination and to wonder, to the power of the imagination and the creative capacity of humankind".. [Read more](#)

Tintoret Exhibition at the Luxembourg Museum in Paris



Until 1st July the Luxembourg Museum in Paris is offering visitors a unique exhibition of works by the Italian artist Tintoret. On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of his birth, the exhibition focuses on the first fifteen years of his career... [Read more](#)

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