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Western Balkans-European Union: Between internal cohesion and external stability

Author: Pierre Mirel



Whilst the Sofia Summit organised on 17th May illustrated the European Union's re-commitment to the perspective of membership for the Western Balkans, it did, nevertheless, re-iterate conditionality which goes together with a vital reform of the Union says Pierre Mirel who analyses in detail the state of progress of the process for each of the six countries in the region.

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Front page! :

NATO without the USA



After the UNESCO, the UN's Committee for Human Rights ... does D. Trump now want to leave NATO? Are his increasingly virulent criticism of the European Union and his rejection of multilateral organisations compatible for him with the USA's upkeep in the Atlantic Alliance? This is the question asked and developed by Jean-Dominique Giuliani... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Rule of law: infringement procedure against Poland

On 2nd July the European Commission launched an infringement



procedure addressing a letter to Poland warning it about the Polish law regarding the Supreme Court which is against the principle of the independence of the judges... [Read more](#)

Tax on cars: warning by the EU to the USA



Accused by Donald Trump of being as damaging to the USA as China, the EU warned Washington on 2nd July of the disastrous consequences of possible American tax on foreign car imports. The European Commission has warned the USA that if they execute their threats of imposing customs duties on foreign cars the American economy will be the first to be affected... [Read more](#)

College of Commissioners visits Vienna



The College of Commissioners travelled to Vienna on 6th July to debate the Union's priorities under the Austrian six-monthly presidency of the Council. President Juncker stressed that Austria has the presidency as a crucial time and encourage Austria's leaders to act as a "bridge builders and an impartial mediator.".. [Read more](#)

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Parliament :

Adoption of the European Defence Industry Fund



On 3rd July MEPs adopted the introduction of the first programme aiming to encourage innovation in the European defence industry, 478 votes against 179 and 23 abstentions on 3rd July. With a budget of 500 million € for 2019-2020 the new European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) will help to fund new products and improved technologies... [Read more](#)

Adoption of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System



On 5th July MEPs approved the implementation of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) as well as the enhancement of the EU-LISA mandate, the agency for large scale operational management of information systems in the area of freedom, security and justice. Citizens from third countries exempted from visa obligations will now have to have a prior authorisation before coming to the EU... [Read more](#)

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Modernisation of the Union's electoral law



MEPs adopted measures that aim to modernise the European electoral law 397 votes in support, 207 against and 62 abstentions on 4th July. Amongst the new measures an obligatory threshold lying between 2% and 5% of the votes cast in constituencies of more than 35 seats. The aim is to encourage participation by the Europeans in the elections and to enhance the European nature of the procedure... [Read more](#)

The Polish Prime Minister speaks to the European Parliament



Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki spoke to the European Parliament which met in plenary on 4th July to defend his controversial reform of the legal system, whilst his country is now under the infringement procedure launched by the European Commission on Monday 2nd July... [Read more](#)

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Priorities for the 2019 budget



On 5th July MEPs adopted 399 votes in support, 146 against and 87 abstentions a resolution that lays out the principles to follow during the budgetary negotiations for 2019 with the Council, i.e. youth, growth, security, climate and migration... [Read more](#)

Rejection of the copyright reform

On 5th July MEPs rejected the European copyright reform that had



ardently been supported by artists and editors of the press but which was opposed by the digital giants and supports of freedom on the internet. 318 voted against it, 278 for and 31 abstained. The aim of this reform put forward by the Commission was to modernise copyright bringing it into the digital age. The text will be re-examined in September... [Read more](#)

Council :

Extension of economic sanctions against Russia



On 5th July the Council decided to extend economic sanctions targeting specific sectors of the Russian economy until 31st January 2019. This decision follows information that President Macron and German Chancellor Merkel communicated to the European Council during its meeting on 28th and 29th June on the state of progress of the implementation of the Minsk Agreements to which the sanctions are linked... [Read more](#)

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU



Whilst Austria has just taken over six-monthly presidency of the Council, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz presented the working programme for the second semester of 2018 to MEPs on 3rd July in Strasbourg. Amongst the priorities features protecting the Union's external borders, competitiveness, European high technology, and the continuation of an active neighbourhood policy based on the integration of the Western Balkan States in the long term... [Read more](#)

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Meeting with the Economy Ministers of the Western Balkans



On 4th July the Economy Ministers of the Western Balkans met in Vienna as part of the Berlin Process, under the joint Presidency of the UK and Austria. The meeting addressed several issues including the necessary investment in digital, support to SMEs and regional integration... [Read more](#)

20th EU-Ukraine Summit



On 9th July the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, closed the 20th EU-Ukraine Summit. The Union re-iterated its support to Ukraine's territorial integrity and said it was happy with the "positive results" produced by the partnership with Kyiv. Several other issues were addressed including the conflict in the east of the country, anti-corruption reforms, energy security, and the fate of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia. The EU also recalled Russia's responsibility in the fate of the flight MH-17 in 2014... [Read more](#)

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Migration :

Aid to North Africa



On 6th July the European Commission approved three new programmes regarding migration in North Africa to a total of over 90 million €. The new programmes under the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa will increase aid in support of refugees and vulnerable migrants and improve the partner countries' ability to manage their borders... [Read more](#)

Emergency Aid for Spain and Greece



On 2nd July the European Commission granted additional emergency assistance of 45.6 million € to both Spain and Greece to help them rise to migratory challenges. Due to the increase in the number of arrivals Spain will be given 25.6 million € to improve its reception capacity and to help towards increasing returns, whilst an additional sum of 20 million € was granted to the UN High Commission for refugees to help reception conditions in Greece... [Read more](#)

IOM makes recommendations to the Austrian Presidency of the Council



On 3rd July the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) made some recommendations to the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU, occupied at present by Austria for 6 months. The IOM focused on three points: the management of identity and borders with Africa, the Multi-annual Financial Framework and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, Regular Migration (the adoption of which is programmed for the end of 2018)... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Meeting on the nuclear agreement with Iran



The head of Iranian diplomacy, Mohammed Javad Zarif and his French, British, German, Russian and Chinese counterparts, as well as the Union's High Representative met on 6th July in Vienna in a bid to save the nuclear agreement with Iran in response to the American withdrawal. The signatories maintained their commitment to the agreement of 2015 or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and said they wanted to continue negotiations... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Report on the quality of water in Europe



According to a report on the state of water published on 4th July by the European Environment Agency, most European waters do not always meet the requirements set by the EU in terms of "good water". In spite of the progress achieved in terms of the environmental quality of lakes, rivers and coastal waters and underground waters in Europe, pollution and structures such as dams and over use are still a major threat to long term environmental health... [Read more](#)

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Germany :

Agreement on migratory issue



On 5th July German Chancellor Angela Merkel came to a political agreement with the CSU and the SPD regarding the migratory issue. There will be no unilateral action by Germany regarding deportation, no any kind of camp established on German soil. Instead of these "transit zone" and in application of the Dublin III rules asylum seekers will be processed faster in police centers... [Read more](#)

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Spain :

Visit by the Spanish head of government to Portugal



On 2nd July Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez met his Portuguese counterpart in Lisbon. Discussions notably focused on migration, the need for a "fiscal pillar" for the euro zone, the multiannual financial framework and the energy connections in the Iberian peninsula. He announced that a summit bringing together Spain, Portugal, France, as well as the European Commission, would be taking place in Lisbon on 27th July next... [Read more](#)

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France :

Emmanuel Macron in Mauritania, Nigeria and at the 31st Congress of the African Union



From 2nd to 4th July French President Emmanuel Macron travelled to Mauritania where he took part in the 31st Congress of the African Union and then he went on to Nigeria. He held talks about the fight to counter terrorism, the continent's development and the challenge of migration, today and in the years to come. In his opinion this issue is "demographic above all things" and linked "firstly to a failing security situation"... [Read more](#)

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Hungary :

Orban visits Berlin



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban met German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on 5th July. Exchanging views of the migratory issue, the Chancellor pointed to Hungary's failure to honour the Dublin Agreements, criticised its lack of humanity, whilst the Hungarian Prime Minister recalled that he wanted to keep his borders closed... [Read more](#)

Lithuania :**Lithuania becomes the 36th member of the OECD**

On 5th July the OECD published a report on the economic reforms in Lithuania, whereby those undertaken have boosted growth even though "work remains to be done to improve productivity." The report also points to several problems such as unequal wages, the ageing population and mass emigration (notably of young people). On the same day Lithuania officially became the 36th member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, after a process that has lasted nearly three years... [Read more](#)

Poland :**The judicial bill enters into force**

The extremely contested reform of the Polish judiciary entered into force on Wednesday 4th July. Amongst the measures retained, one sets the age of retirement at 65 instead of 70, thereby pushing one third of the Polish judges in office now into early retirement.

The President of the Supreme Court Malgorzata Gersdorf refused to resign, whilst several thousand people demonstrated against this reform on 5th July in Warsaw. Lech Walesa, former Polish President and Nobel Peace Prize winner provided his support to the demonstrators... [Read more](#)

Romania :**Dismissal of the head of the anti-corruption court**

On 9th July Romanian President Klaus Iohannis finally agreed to the dismissal of the head of the anti-corruption court, Laura Codruta Kövesi. On 30th May the Constitutional Court asked the President to lift his veto regarding this dismissal requested by the ruling Social Democratic Party. Just like the European institutions and several Union Member States, the head of the Court had criticised the controversial judicial reforms being made by the government. This decision does not help towards improving Romania's image... [Read more](#)

Parliament relaxes the criminal code for corruption offences

On 4th July the Romanian Parliament adopted a controversial relaxation of the criminal code. It partially decriminalises the abuse of power that will only be punished if a civil-servant makes an "undue gain for himself or for a member of the family" and not for a third party or an entity. Romanian President Klaus Iohannis criticised this vote and announced that he would be turning to the Constitutional Court. It is one of many reforms made to the Romanian legal system since 2016, whilst the leader of the SPD, Liviu Dragnea was given a two-year suspended sentence in 2016 and 3 and a half years on 21st June last for corruption offences... [Read more](#)

UK :**Theresa May bisits Berlin**

British Prime Minister Theresa May met Chancellor Angela Merkel on 5th July in Berlin - the latter insisted on the need to respect the timetable for the Brexit negotiations, which plan for a final agreement in October. Theresa May presented her options for maintaining the Irish border open... [Read more](#)

Government seminar to define post-Brexit relations with the EU

A free-trade zone with the EU and a new customs model: Theresa May presented her vision of the future relationship she wanted with the EU on 6th July, saying that her ministers, who are extremely divided over Brexit, had managed to reach a "common position"... [Read more](#)

Resignations of David Davis and Boris Johnson

On 9th July, the British Ministers for Brexit David Davis and Foreign Affairs Boris Johnson, resigned due to their deep disagreement with Theresa May regarding the political line to follow for Brexit. They were replaced by Dominic Raab and Jeremy Hunt... [Read more](#)

Macedonia :**Parliament ratifies the agreement with Greece a second time**

On 5th July the Macedonian Parliament again ratified the agreement concluded mid-June with Greece to rename the country the "Republic of North Macedonia". The second vote follows the refusal of the Macedonian President Gjorgje Ivanov to sign the text on 26th June last. A referendum is planned at the end of September... [Read more](#)

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Moldova :**Freezing of European financial assistance**

On 5th July the EU announced that it was freezing its financial assistance to Moldova following the Moldovan Supreme Court's decision to annul the election of the anti-corruption candidate Andrei Nastase as head of the town council of Chisinau on 25th June. Mr Nastase won 52.08% of the vote against Ion Ceban, who acknowledged his defeat. According to the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, the Court's decision was not transparent and deprives the citizens of Chisinau of a democratically elected Mayor. MEPs adopted a resolution on this issue on the same day... [Read more](#)

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WTO :**Report on restrictive trade measures**

On 4th July the WTO published its 19th report on the follow up to trade measures implemented by the G20, for the period ranging from mid-October 2017 to mid-May 2018. The document indicates that 39 new trade barriers have been introduced by the countries, i.e. nearly double that recorded in the previous period. According to WTO Director Roberto Azevedo, the conclusions of the report are "really worrying"... [Read more](#)

OECD :**Publication of the 2018 edition of the Employment Outlook**

On 4th July the OECD publishes its Employment Outlook 2018. This report notably indicates that in most of countries the rate of unemployment is below or almost below the rate recorded prior to the crisis. Job offers have notably reached a peak in the euro zone. However it stresses that there is a "stagnation" in wages which is undermining public confidence in economic recovery... [Read more](#)

Agricultural Outlook 2018-2027

On 3rd July the OECD and the FAO published their joint Agricultural Outlook for the period 2018-2027. The report forecasts a continued increase in world production, together with a slowing in demand growth. The report anticipates a "decline" in Western Europe's share in world production but an upkeep of "productivity and high yields"... [Read more](#)

OECD, WHO and World Bank joint report on healthcare services

On 5th July the OECD, the WHO and the World Bank published a joint report on healthcare services. According to the document low quality healthcare services are increasing the weight of illnesses and the cost of care across the world and this is occurring whatever the level of income. One patient in ten is a victim of complications during his/her treatment in high level income countries, and around 15% of hospital spending in these countries are linked to mistakes made during treatment or nosocomial infections... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :**Reduction in Unemployment Figures**

According to figures published by Eurostat on 2nd July the unemployment rate adjusted to seasonal variations lay at 7% in May 2018 in the EU and at 8.4% in the euro zone. These are the lowest rates recorded since December and August 2008... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Win Wenders Exhibition in Berlin



Until 29th September the C/O 240 polaroid snaps taken by Wim Wenders between the 1960's and 80's are on show. A kind of diary put together by the artist, the exhibition shows shots taken during his travels, as he made his films and during evenings with friends. For those who like his films, the Delphi LUX cinema is devoting a retrospective to him at the same time... [Read more](#)

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Jazz and Blues Festival Edinburgh



The Edinburgh Jazz Festival will be taking place from 13th to 22nd July. Created in 1978 by guitarist Mike Hart, the festival presents an international line-up of high quality musicians... [Read more](#)

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Mad Cool Festival Madrid



From 12th to 14th July the Mad Cool Festival is taking place bringing European pop and rock together on its programme. This festival is taking place in Madrid's historic centre... [Read more](#)

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BBK Festival Live



The BBK Live Festival 2018 took place from 12th to 14th July in Bilbao. Amongst the artists on the line up this year were Florence and the Machine, the XX and Gorillaz... [Read more](#)

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Exhibition on the borders of the Roman Empire



Until 18th November the Museum of the Imperial Fort of Rome is hosting the exhibition "The Borders of the Roman Empire, the "Limes3 of the Danube, from Trajan to Marcus-Aurelius" which presents many archeological finds... [Read more](#)

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72nd Festival of Avignon



The 72nd Festival of Avignon will be taking place until 24th July. This festival devoted to theatre offers nearly 300 shows of 50 plays... [Read more](#)

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Agenda :



9th July
Brussels
EU-Ukraine Summit



11th July
Brussels
EU-Japan Summit



12th July
Brussels
NATO Summit
Brussels
Eurogroup Meeting



13th July

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