

Tuesday 18th December 2018

issue 829

The Letter in PDF format

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The Letter team wishes you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you for your loyalty and we look forward to offering you our first Letter of 2019 on 14th January.

Time to build a future proof migration and asylum policy

Author: Dimitris Avramopoulos



In an era of human mobility, the EU must try to manage the migratory issue at world level by reducing illegal migration and allowing safe and orderly movement. It has to complete the strategy that was set out with the 2015 crisis. According to Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner, it is urgent for us to define a common immigration and asylum policy for the future and to erect a wall to counter populist and nationalist forces.

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Foundation :

"The Permanent Atlas of the European Union" available in paper and digital version



In view of the upcoming European elections, the Robert Schuman Foundation published a new version of the "Permanent Atlas of the European Union" which offers a comprehensive view of the Union, the euro zone and of each of its Member States and provides each reader with the most recent and most objective political and statistical information anytime anywhere. Available in paper and in digital form from the Foundation's site or from bookshops, it is an excellent idea for a Christmas present...
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European Council :

Declaration of the Euro Zone Summit

During the euro zone summit on 14th December in Brussels the 27 heads of State and government assessed the Eurogroup's report on the



deepening of Economic and Monetary Union. They approved the rules governing the common safety net of the Single Resolution Funds which will be operational by 2020 if risks are sufficiently reduced. They asked the Eurogroup to prepare the implementation of the reform of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) by June 2019 and to work on the design and means of the implementation of the euro zone budget. They also hoped for the completion of work on the Banking Union and Capital Union... [Read more](#)

Conclusions by the European Council



Meeting in Brussels on 13th and 14th December heads of State and government asked for work to continue on the next multi-annual financial framework in view of an agreement in the autumn of 2019. They said they were "concerned" about the escalation of violence in Ukraine and renewed sanctions against Russia. As 27 they confirmed that the withdrawal agreement concluded with the UK could not be renegotiated and recalled that the Irish solution would be a last resort if no other agreement was reached. They hoped for the rapid completion of the single market and the adoption of the Commission's proposals regarding the fight to counter disinformation. They also assessed the implementation of the migratory policy. They discussed the results of the citizens consultations, which they are to include in the preparation of the next strategic programme... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Review of Security Union



On 11th December the Commission gave news of the progress made in the construction of a real, effective Security Union since the European Council of last October. It recalled the positive progress made in terms of several proposals, notably the enhancement of Frontex or the deletion of on-line terrorist content, but it hopes that the Parliament and the Council will rapidly come to an agreement on urgent issues, such as the interoperability of information systems. The Commission asked the Member States to implement rapidly the measures adopted and insisted on the need to strengthen the Union's resilience... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

Vote on the programme for Digital Europe 2021-2027



MEPs approved amendments on first reading on 13th December regarding the draft regulation establishing the programme for a Digital Europe 2021-2027. This programme will be launched in 2021 to support the digital transformation of European business and economies. The programme for a Digital Europe will finance projects in areas linked to digital matters;.. [Read more](#)

Award of Sakharov Prize



During a ceremony organised in the European Parliament on 12th December the Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Thought was awarded to film maker and political prisoner Oleg Sentsov. The latter was not present since he is still in prison in Siberia. His cousin Natalya Kaplan and his lawyer Dmitri Dinze were there to represent him... [Read more](#)

Approval of the 2019 budget



On 12th December MEPs came to agreement on the EU's 2019 budget. On 11th December the Council approved it also. The agreement provides for 165.8 billion € in commitments (+3.17% in comparison with 2018) and 148.2 billion € in payments (+2.37%). Emphasis will be placed on employment and growth, youth, security and migration... [Read more](#)

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Ratification of the EU-Japan trade agreement

Parliament approved 474 votes (against 152 and 40 abstentions) the EU-Japan free-trade agreement - the Union's biggest bilateral trade agreement. This agreement does away with most customs duties on



European products exported to Japan. It protects certain geographical indications. It deregulates Japanese calls for tender in certain areas such as on-line trade, postal or railway services. It integrates measures to protect workers and the environment. Japan has already ratified the agreement. They also approved the strategic partnership agreement 535 votes in support, 84 against and 45 abstentions. The Council still has to formally approve it before the agreement enters into force on 1st February 2019... [Read more](#)

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Vote on the European Defence Fund



On 12th December MEPs approved the amendments on first reading regarding the draft regulation establishing a European Defence Fund. This is designed to encourage cooperation in defence via the financing of European projects, improve interoperability of military equipment and strengthen the Union's strategic autonomy... [Read more](#)

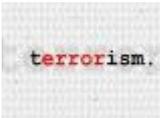
Cypriot President debates the future of Europe



Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades was in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 12th December to give a speech as part of the "Debate over the Future of Europe". He insisted on the need to face destabilising phenomenon "collectively" - like for example Brexit, terrorism, migration, nationalism and populism. He declared that Cyprus was still a fervent supporter of permanent structured cooperation (CSP) and said he supported the "military independence of Europe and the creation of a European army". He recalled the importance of the EU's support in terms of "the exercise of sovereign rights in the exploration for and use of natural resources," in the exclusively Cypriot economic zone... [Read more](#)

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New measures to counter the terrorist threat



On 12th December MEPs adopted recommendations for a new Union strategy aiming to prevent radicalisation, improve information exchange and support the victims of terrorism. They recommended the strengthening of the role of European agencies like Europol and the European Agency for the operational management of large scale IT systems... [Read more](#)

Council :

Agreement to improve cybersecurity



On 10th December the Parliament and the Council came to agreement regarding several measures that aim to improve cybersecurity. They introduce the first European cybersecurity certification system to guarantee cybersecurity standards on products and services marketed in the EU. The EU's Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) will have greater powers, notably to prepare the Union's response in the event of major cyberattacks... [Read more](#)

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EU-Ukraine Association Council



The EU and Ukraine held its fifth Association Council session on 17th December in Brussels, just one year after the entry into force of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The EU is concerned about the escalation of tension in the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea, caused by Russia's breach of international law as well as the continued militarisation of the region... [Read more](#)

Conclusions of the General Affairs Council



On 11th December ministers held a policy debate on the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027. They also finalised the last preparatory work for the European Council on 13th and 14th December. The Council also held an audience in virtue of article 7 regarding the rule of law in Poland and discussed - as part of the same context - the situation in Hungary. Ministers also approved the programme of the Council for the period ranging from 1st January 2019 to 30th June 2020... [Read more](#)

Agricultural and Fisheries Council



The Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers discussed the reform of the CAP on 17th December in view of the next period 2021-2027. They also exchanged views on the role of agriculture and forestry in the European Bioeconomy Strategy. They adopted a regulation establishing the TACs (Total Admissible Captures) in 2019 regarding fishing stocks in the Black Sea... [Read more](#)

Conclusions of the EU-Kosovo Association Council



The third EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Council took place in Brussels on 17th December. It reviewed the progress made by Kosovo in the economic, political and financial. Discussions also focused on the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement... [Read more](#)

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Diplomacy :

Positive report on EU-Egypt cooperation



The report on the partnership between the EU and Egypt between June 2017 and May 2018 published on 10th December by the European Union's External Action Service, points to the completion of the priority goals set for the period 2017-2020, adopted during an association council in July 2017, via regular political dialogue and bilateral visits. The report highlights the regional role played by Egypt, notably in view of its presidency of the African Union next year. It does show however that some challenges continue such as the rule of law and fundamental freedoms... [Read more](#)

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EU-Kyrgyzstan Cooperation Council



During the Cooperation Council on 10th December the EU and Kyrgyzstan discussed the development of their bilateral relations, notably under the framework of the negotiations over the partnership and enhanced cooperation agreement. They also exchanged views on the strengthening of the rule of law, judicial reform and electoral and fundamental rights. They debated the regional role played by Kyrgyzstan, particularly with the restoration of uranium sites, a legacy of the Soviet era... [Read more](#)

Court of Justice :

The ECB's debt purchase is within its remit



On 11th December the Court of Justice deemed that the ECB's government debt acquisition by the national central banks on the secondary market was not breaking EU law. It was introduced in 2015 to stimulate inflation. The Court deemed that the ECB had not gone beyond its remit and that it was not infringing the ban on monetary financing: the programme is part of monetary policy, an exclusive EU competence and that it does not prevent the EU's States from undertaking a healthy budgetary policy. The Court stressed that another, more limited programme in volume or duration would have been less effective and slower in bringing the inflation rate close to 2%... [Read more](#)

ECB :

End of the debt purchase programme



On 13th December the European Central Bank confirmed that its purchase of securities on the markets, i.e. quantitative easing (QE), implemented to support the economy and inflation since 2015, will come to an end on 31st December. It will continue to re-invest the interests on securities that have come to maturity "over a long period extended beyond the first rates increase." It maintained its key rates at the same level, which have not been increased since 2011... [Read more](#)

France :

Measures for purchasing power may increase the deficit



French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe lay out measures announced by President Emmanuel Macron in a context of "economic and social emergency", so that each can live from his or her work in a better way. To an estimated cost of 10 billion €, the Commission states that it is

following the impact of these measures on the public accounts closely and that it will give its assessment in the spring of 2019... [Read more](#)

Ireland :

Adoption of the law on abortion



On 13th December the Irish Parliament adopted the bill legalising abortion. The text which provides for permission to abort under certain conditions and up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, or if there is danger to the mother's "life" or if her health, was initially assessed by Parliament in October after a referendum in May during which 66% of the electorate supported the right to abortion. The bill must now be signed by the President... [Read more](#)

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Italy :

The government accepts the review of its deficit goal



Following an interview on 12th December with the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the Italian Council, Giuseppe Conte accepted the reduction in the government deficit planned for 2019 to 2.04% of the GDP against 2.4% in the previous budget to prevent the launch of an excessive deficit procedure. The citizen's wage and the reform of retirement pensions, on condition that some modifications are made will be maintained. Italy deems its proposal strong in view of the French deficit 2019 announced at 3.5% of the GDP and has asked the Commission to ensure fair treatment between countries. The latter will study the Italian proposal within the next few days... [Read more](#)

Poland :

Reintegration of Judges at the Supreme Court



On 17th December Polish President Andrzej Duda signed a bill to re-integrate the judges at the Supreme Court who had been forced to resign after a reform lowering the age of retirement. The signature came just hours after a ECJ decision asking for an "immediate suspension" of the reform for a second time. The Court gave a first decision on 19th October after an emergency complaint made by the Commission for breach of the rule of Union law... [Read more](#)

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UK :

Vote on the withdrawal agreement postponed until January



British Prime Minister Theresa May won the vote of no-confidence brought against her on 12th December by the Conservative party in the House of Commons, 200 votes in support 117 against. To convince her MPs she said she was prepared to leave office before the general elections on 2022. But without a majority to ratify the withdrawal agreement of the country from the EU she had to delay the vote, planned for the 11th December in the Commons and will now have to convene this by 21st January at the latest. During the European Council in Brussels she achieved no concessions over the issue of the Irish border... [Read more](#)

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Sweden :

Stefan Löfven again rejected by Parliament



On 14th December the Swedish Parliament rejected the proposal made by the parliamentary leader 200 votes against 116 to appoint Stefan Löfven (SAP), the outgoing Prime Minister, for a new mandate. It is the second time since the elections on 9th September that he has been rejected by MPs. The leader of Parliament will take up discussions again with the heads of the parties, and notably the leader of the Moderate Party (M), Ulf Kristersson. In the event of two further rejections, further elections will have to be organised... [Read more](#)

Switzerland :

Commission proposes to extend equivalence for Swiss share trading venues for six months

On 17th December the Commission suggested to extend equivalence for Swiss share trading venues for six months. This decision should help Switzerland complete its internal consultation until spring 2019



regarding the institutional framework agreement between the EU and Switzerland. The equivalence had only been agreed for a year, in expectation of the conclusion of a framework agreement under negotiation since 2014... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :

Report on Corruption in Italy



In a report published on 13th December the Group of State against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO), concluded that Italy had made progress in preventing corruption in the judicial system, by satisfactorily implementing 3 of the 12 recommendations. GRECO insisted on the path that still had to be accomplished, notably the implementation of its recommendations regarding the prevention of the corruption of members of parliament... [Read more](#)

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UN :

Final declaration of COP24



On 15th December after two weeks of consultation a final declaration was established between the 196 participating countries at the 24th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24). This is to be the base of the implementation of the Paris agreement signed in 2015. It is the focus of a great amount of dissension notably regarding the transparency of work undertaken by the States... [Read more](#)

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Eurostat :

The annual inflation rate is down in the euro zone



In the euro zone, the annual inflation rate lay at 1.9% in November 2018 - against 2.2% in October - according to the most recent data published by Eurostat on 17th December. It lies at 2% in the Union, against 2.2% in October. The lowest annual rates were noted in Denmark (0.7%), Ireland (0.8%) and Portugal (0.9%) whilst the highest were seen in Estonia, Hungary and Romania (3.2%)... [Read more](#)

Goods trade balance



According to the most recent Eurostat estimates published on 17th December the euro zone recorded a surplus of 14 billion € in its goods trade in October 2018, against +17.8 billion € in October 2017. The EU recorded a deficit of 7.7 billion € against -1.8 billion € in October 2017... [Read more](#)

Report on the level of social protection in the EU



In 2016 social protection spending in the EU lay at 28.2% of the GDP, down by 0.2 points in comparison with 2015, according to the most recent data published by Eurostat on 12th December. The two main sources of financing were social contributions and taxes with respectively 55% to 40% to all revenues. France (34%), Finland and Denmark (32%) lead in the ranking, whilst the weakest rates are to be observed in Romania, Latvia and Lithuania (15%). Old age and survivor pensions represent 46% of social protection payments in 2016, sickness and disability benefits total 37% and family allowances linked to housing and unemployment totals 18%... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

The end of roaming fees has positive effect



According to an interim report published by the Commission on 14th December calls and the use of mobile data by Europeans travelling in the EU have increased significantly since the end of roaming fees in June 2017. Calls have doubled and the use of data has multiplied by 5. The report stresses that the end of roaming fees has helped extend 4G coverage in Europe. The Commission will published a full report on the impact of this regulation in December 2019... [Read more](#)

Report on women's participation in the digital economy



The first annual scoreboard "Women in Digital" published by the Commission on 10th December to assess women's participation in the digital economy on the basis of 13 indicators shows that 17% of IT and communication linked jobs are occupied by women whilst they represent 52% of the European population. On average they earn 20% less than men. The best of the European "class", which also lead in terms of digital competitiveness, are Finland, Sweden and Luxembourg, whilst Bulgaria, Romania and Greece trail behind at the end of the ranking... [Read more](#)

Report on the arms industry



According to the most recent report on the world arms industry published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on 10th December, the overall sale of arms and military services totalled 398.2 billion \$ in 2017, 2.5% more than in 2016, which represents an increase of 44% since 2002. American companies dominate the TOP100 arms manufacturers, with 57% of all arms sales, followed by Russian businesses with 9.5%. In Europe the UK is still the main arms manufacturer with 7 companies in the TOP100, ahead of France... [Read more](#)

Anti-semitism persists in the EU



According to a report by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights regarding discrimination and hate crime against people of Jewish confession in the EU published on 10th December, anti-semitism continues in the EU. Around 90% of respondents deem that anti-semitism is growing in their countries and a share of them even believes that is a problem, particularly on-line. Nearly 30% of those interviewed have been harassed over the past year and 80% do not report serious incidents to the competent authorities because they think it will serve no purpose. The Agency has asked Member States to take immediate, emergency steps, in cooperation with those affected... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Fernand Khnopff at the Petit Palais



The Petit Palais in Paris is devoting a retrospective to the Belgian artist Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921). His canvasses, engravings and sculptures which are often dreamlike and symbolic, are rarely on show in France. They can be viewed by the public until 17th March 2019... [Read more](#)

Prague's Golden Age



The city museum of Prague is devoting an exhibition until 31st March 2019 to the Golden Age of Prague, its urban, architectural and exceptionally technical rise that took it from the state of provincial town in the Austro-Hungarian empire at the end of the 19th century to that of a modern metropolis... [Read more](#)

Collection of the Liège Beaux-Arts



The Beaux-Arts Museum of Liège is showing its unique collection of more than 150 paintings and sculptures by international and Belgian masters of the Renaissance to the avant-garde movements - from 21st December 2018 to 18th August 2019. The exhibition "Liège.Works of Art" aims to establish dialogue between the eras and formal trends... [Read more](#)

Royal Ladies in Turin



From 20th December 2018 to 6th May 2019 the Palazzo Madama in Turin is hosting an exhibition on the life of two women who greatly influenced the development of artistic society and culture in Savoy from 1600 to 1700, Christine de France (1606-1663) and Marie-Jeanne-Baptiste of Savoie-Nemours (1664-1724)... [Read more](#)

The universe of the Moomins in ice



The hotel "Sport & Spa Hotel Vesileppis" of the Finnish town, Leppävirta, is hosting the first exhibition of ice sculptures in the world in a cave that is 30 meters in depth, as of 26th December. Renowned ice sculptors have created a Moomin city, set out to a backdrop of light and sound...
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Agenda :

-  17th December
Brussels
EU-Ukraine Association Council
EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Council
-  17th and 18th December
Brussels
"Agriculture and Fisheries" Council
-  18th December
Brussels
EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council
-  19th December
Brussels
"Energy" Council
-  20th December
Brussels
"Environment" Council
EU-Egypt Association Council

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Thomas de Robiano, Helen Levy ;
Victoire Bortoli, Chloé Hellot, Natasha Hroneska, Sophie van der Heijden
Editor-in-chief: Eric Maurice
Publishing Director: Pascale Joannin

Contact/Suggestions
info@robert-schuman.eu

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