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The Letter in PDF format

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The entire Foundation team is happy to be back and wishes you a very happy New Year 2019!

Countering disinformation and protecting journalists

Author: David Alandete



Russian propaganda media are already working full out to influence the European elections on May 2019. Across the EU journalists need protection against increasing interference in the work and against the attacks that aim to undermine institutions via the denigration of their work.

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Foundation :

Permanent Atlas of the European Union



In view of the upcoming European elections the Robert Schuman Foundation has published a new edition of the "Permanent Atlas of the European Union," which offers a full overview of the Union, the euro zone and each of the Member States. It provides the reader with all types of the most recent and most objective information, both political and statistical, at any time. Available in paper form from the Foundation's site and in bookshops, it is also available in digital form... [Read more](#)

OFI Conference 2019



Pascale Joannin will be taking part in the annual OFI conference on 16th January and more particularly a round table during which she will review the macro-economic and geopolitical situation in Europe... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

Towards a European Defence White Paper



The question of the White Paper on European Defence is the focus of discussion. Many, notably in the European Parliament, are pushing this initiative, whilst others deem that it is not useful. The European Parliament has just published a study by Frédéric Mauro that aims to outline the path towards a White Paper... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Inquiry into the tax rulings given to Nike by the Netherlands



The European Commission launched an indepth inquiry on 10th January to decide whether the tax rulings granted to Nike by the Netherlands gave the company an undue advantage in comparison with its competitors, in breach of the Union's rules in terms of State aid. The inquiry will seek to decide whether measures has unduly reduced Nike's tax base since 2006... [Read more](#)

Council :

Launch of Romanian Presidency of the Council



The inauguration ceremony of the Romanian presidency of the Council took place on 10th January in Bucharest, in the presence of the college of European Commissioners. The President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker recalled the natural vocation of Romania in Europe. The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk called on Romanians to defend European values. Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister, Teodor Meleşcanu, re-iterated that Romania was prepared for its first presidency, whilst Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă said that Romania was determined to contribute positively to Europe during its Presidency of the Council... [Read more](#)

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Conclusions of the General Affairs Council



On 8th January European Affairs Ministers assessed the priorities set out by the Romanian Presidency of the Council based on four axes: Europe of convergence, safer Europe, Europe of common values, Europe as a stronger global actor. They were informed of the progress in discussions for the next multi-annual financial framework (2021-2027). They exchanged views regarding disinformation, a vital issue in view of the upcoming European elections, and notably which factors might become a priority as part of a future action plan, requested by the European Council in December. Ministers also discussed the way that communication could be improved in Europe... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Trade talks with Japan and the USA



On 9th January the European Commissioner responsible for Trade, Cecilia Malmström, met the American and Japanese Trade Ministers, Hiroshige Seko and Robert E. Lighthizer in Washington. They discussed non-market oriented policies and practices and the identification of additional criteria indicating market-oriented conditions. They also confirmed that they wanted to work together towards the reform of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). C. Malmström also announced that the mandate to negotiate an agreement over the trade of industrial goods with the USA had "nearly been finalised", which opens the way to official discussions... [Read more](#)

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New Sanctions against Iran due to terrorism



The Council added two new Iranian personalities and the Department for Domestic Security from the Iranian Ministry for Information and Security to its list of terrorists on 9th January. This decision was taken in response to attempted attacks that have recently been foiled in Europe, notably in Denmark, France and the Netherlands. The list now covers 15 individuals and 21 groups and bodies, which are subject to the freezing of funds and other financial assets. It is also forbidden for operators in the EU to provide them with funds and economic resources... [Read more](#)

Kosovo called to lift customs duties against Serbia



During a meeting with the Kosovar parliamentary delegation for dialogue with Serbia, on 8th January in Brussels, the EU's High Representative Federica Mogherini called again on the Kosovar authorities to lift customs duties imposed on Serbia (introduced at the end of 2018). As a result she stressed the importance of good neighbourly relations in respect of the region's strategic goals for the achievement of normalised relations with Serbia... [Read more](#)

The Commission withdraws its yellow card from Thailand



On 8th January the Commission withdrew the "yellow card" inflicted on Thailand since April 2015, which indicated that the country was not fighting enough to counter illegal, undeclared and unregulated fishing. The Commission acknowledged that Thailand had made progress and remedied the lacuna in its legal and administrative systems in the area of fishing. The withdrawal of the yellow card brings the procedure to an end which might have led to restrictions on Thai imports of fishing resources... [Read more](#)

Court of Justice :

Opinion of the Advocate General regarding the right to be forgotten



On 10th January the Advocate General of the EU Court of Justice suggested that the scope of the right to be forgotten, which the operators of search engines are obliged to respect, should be limited to the Union only. It recommends the deletion of internet links of a search engine only in the Union, including the use of the "geo-blocking" technique so as not to damage the freedom of people outside of the Union to access information. As part of another affair the Advocate General suggested that the Court deem that the operator of a search engine should systematically accept a request for the de-referencing of sensitive data, whilst protecting the right to access information and the freedom of expression... [Read more](#)

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Court of Auditors :

Call for full scrutiny of the ECB's banking supervision



In a letter addressed to the European Parliament on 14th January the Court of Auditors calls for EU legislators to intervene to ensure that the ECB provides it with full access to the necessary documents for the audit of banking supervision. The Court deems that banking supervision activities comprise major risks for public finances, but that it is unable to audit them correctly if the ECB does not give it greater access to the necessary documents... [Read more](#)

ECB :

The euro is twenty years old



The euro, the EU's common currency turned 20 on 1st January. In January 1999, 11 Member States took the euro as their official common currency and granted their monetary policy to the European Central Bank. In 2002, with the introduction of coins and notes, the euro became "a little bit of Europe in our hands" according to the then President of the Commission, Romano Prodi. The President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani recalled the strong popular support enjoyed by the common currency. Mr Tusk, President of the European Council stressed that it was an instrument for the Union's expression of political and economic strength worldwide. 19 Member States now use the euro... [Read more](#)

Germany :

Angela Merkel in Greece



On her first visit to Greece in five years, on 10th and 11th January, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Greek Alexis Tsipras discussed Greece's return to economic stability, migration and Macedonia. She ensured that Greece "could continue to count on its partnership and friendship with Germany." She stressed that the agreement over the name of Macedonia would be to the advantage of the Western Balkans and the EU... [Read more](#)

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Spain :

Coalition between the People's Party and Ciudadanos in Andalusia



In view of forming a government for the autonomous community of Andalusia and to bring 36 years of socialist power in the region to an end (PSOE), the People's Party (PP) - which came second in the elections on 2nd December behind the PSOE - signed a coalition agreement with the centre-right party Ciudadanos. VOX, which has entered the regional Parliament for the first time supports this agreement without participating in government... [Read more](#)

The government puts forward the 2019 budget



The Spanish government put forward its 2019 budget on 11th January, which it defines as the most social that the country has ever known: consolidation of public services, an increase in retirement spending, studies grants, spending devoted to countering violence against women and against financial dependency on tax increases. With a forecast of growth of 2% the Finance Minister, Maria Jesus Montero maintained that despite the rise in spending, the budget will be in line with European budgetary stability principles: the deficit forecast lies at 1.8% of the GDP... [Read more](#)

France :

Emmanuel Macron's letter to the French



On 13th January Emmanuel Macron published a letter to the French to define the outline of the grand national debate organised from 16th January to 15th March. The aim is to "define together the major questions regarding our future" to "transform anger into solutions." The four themes chosen by the government are taxation and public spending, organisation of the State and public services, ecological transition, democracy and citizenship... [Read more](#)

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A new Franco-German treaty on 22nd January



On 8th January the French and German governments announced that they will sign the new Franco-German cooperation and integration treaty on 22nd January in Aix-la-Chapelle/Aachen. Based on the Elysée Treaty of 1963 (Franco-German Friendship Treaty), it will strengthen links in areas such as economic policy, foreign and security policy, education and culture, research and technology, climate and the environment, as well as in terms of cooperation between border regions and between civil society... [Read more](#)

Greece :

Resignation of the Defence Minister



Before the vote on the ratification for the agreement over the name of Macedonia, the Greek Defence Minister, Panos Kammenos, leader of the nationalist Anel party, a government partner with far left Syriza handed in his resignation on 13th January since he is against the agreement. Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, has asked for a vote of confidence in Parliament that is planned for 16th January... [Read more](#)

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Latvia :

Krišjānis Kariņš asked to form a new government



On 7th January the Latvian President Raimonds Vējonis asked Krišjānis Kariņš of the New Unity Party (centre-right) to try and form a government based on the support that he won on the part of four other parties: the New Conservative Party, Development/FOR National Alliance, KPV LV. This would give the government a majority of 66 out of 100 seats in Parliament after the elections on 6th October last... [Read more](#)

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Poland :

The Mayor of Gdansk, Pawel Adamowicz assassinated



Pawel Adamowicz, Mayor of Gdansk since 1998 and member of the Centre-Right Party Civic Platform (PO), died on 14th January following a stabbing on the previous evening during a charity gala. Thousands of people, including the President of the Council of the EU, Donald Tusk

gathered in Gdansk on Monday evening to pay tribute to him, whilst the Polish political class condemned this act unanimously. The President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani paid tribute to Mr Adamowicz on 15th January during a minute's silence in memory of the victims of violent attacks in Europe... [Read more](#)

Romania :

Departure of the head of the Anti-Corruption Directorate



The interim head of the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA), Anca Jurma announced on 8th January that she was giving up the bid to stay in office longer, speaking of a "hostile environment" in the exercise of her work in Romania, a country that took over the six-monthly Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1st January. This magistrate took over from Laura Codruta Kovesa in July who was dismissed by the majority in power. The latter has just referred the case to the ECHR regarding her dismissal... [Read more](#)

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UK :

Defeat for Theresa May in Parliament



On 9th January MP adopted an amendment forcing the government to return quickly to them if they were to reject the withdrawal agreement concluded with Brussels. If the MPs reject the agreement on 15th January, Theresa May will have three days to submit plan B to them on the occasion of a new vote. An amendment delivered by Dominic Grieve was adopted by the House of Commons 308 votes to 297. This is a further defeat for the Prime Minister after the adopted by MPs of a first amendment on 8th January which would limit the budgetary room to manoeuvre on the part of the government in the event of a "no deal"... [Read more](#)

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Exchange of letters between European and British leaders before the vote



The Presidents of the European Council, Donald Tusk and the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker exchanged letters with British Prime Minister Theresa May on 14th January to clarify their respective commitments regarding Brexit, in particular over the issue of the "backstop" in Northern Ireland. The European leaders are prepared to find technical solutions to avoid the entry into force of the measure and promise to start trade negotiations rapidly. The exchange of letters comes just before the vote by the British MPs on the ratification of the agreement regarding the withdrawal of the UK from the EU... [Read more](#)

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Macedonia :

Ratification of the agreement between Greece over the country's new name



On 11th January the Macedonian Parliament adopted the four constitutional amendments required for the ratification of the country's name change into "Republic of Northern Macedonia, in line with the agreement with Greece, signed in June 2018. The agreement was ratified by 81 MPs, one vote more than the two-thirds majority necessary, whilst the opposition boycotted the vote and called for a snap election. The change of name which is due to take Macedonia's integration into NATO and the EU forward, will enter into force if it is also ratified by the Greek Parliament... [Read more](#)

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Council of Europe :

4 candidates for the post of Secretary General



On 11th January the Council of Europe announced the names of the four candidates to take over from Thorbjørn Jagland as Secretary General in October next. The candidates are Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius, former Greek Foreign Affairs Minister Dora Bakoyannis, Croatian Foreign Affairs Minister Marija Pejcinovic Buric, and Belgian Foreign Affairs Minister Didier Reynders. The four candidates will be heard by the Committee of Ministers, who will send a final list to the Parliamentary Assembly, which will vote in June... [Read more](#)

Lithuania must do more to counter discrimination against Roma

On 8th January the Consultative Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which comes under the authority of the Council of Europe, urged Lithuania to adopt a



comprehensive legal framework, to prevent discrimination against pupils in minority language schools and to counter negative stereotypes of Roma. In its opinion the Committee particularly regretted that major linguistic rights had not been implemented adequately. The Committee did however lauded the re-introduction of a Department for National Minorities... [Read more](#)

World Bank :

Resignation of the President



The President of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, announced on 7th January that he will be leaving office on 1st February. The interim will be ensured by the present Director General and former European Commissioner, Bulgarian Kristalina Georgieva. According to tradition the next president will certainly be American... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Unemployment down



Unemployment adjusted to seasonal variations was established in November 2018 at 6.7% for the EU and at 7.9% for the euro zone, according to the most recent Eurostat data published on 9th January. The best in the class are the Czech Republic (1.9%), Germany (3.3%), Netherlands (3.5%), whilst the highest rates were seen in Greece (18.6%) and in Spain (14.7%). Unemployment has dropped particularly in Croatia, Greece and Spain in comparison with last year... [Read more](#)

R&D spending up to 2.07% of the GDP



According to Eurostat estimates published on 10th January research and development spending in the EU totalled 320 billion € in 2017, ie 2.07% of the GDP, was achieved mainly through the business sector (66%). It is up in comparison with 2016 (2.04%) and in comparison with 2007 (1.77%). The European countries which spend the most on R&D are Sweden (3.33% of the GDP), Austria (3.16%) and Denmark (3.06%), whilst the least is spend in Romania (0.5%), in Latvia (0.51%) and Malta (0.55%)... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Plovdiv and Matera, European Capitals of Culture



Plovdiv, in Bulgaria and Matera in Italy are the European Capitals of Culture for 2019. Plovdiv launched a programme of events and exhibitions on 12th January under the banner "Together!" Festivities will start in Matera on 19th January under the banner "Open Future!"..

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Tintin's 90th birthday



To celebrate the Tintin's 90th birthday, who was published for the first time on 10th January 1929 in "Le Petit Vingtième" and the 50th anniversary of the first steps of Man on the Moon, a "Tintin and the Moon" exhibition is running until May in Barcelona... [Read more](#)

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Jazz Festival Brussels



The fifth Brussels Jazz Festival is taking place on 19th January in Brussels. Every evening, there will be jazz concerts with Belgian and also Ethiopian, Mexican and Bahrani artists... [Read more](#)

Celebration of Celtic music in Glasgow



The Celtic Connections Festival, one of the biggest Celtic music festivals in the world, which also celebrates Celtic cultural heritage will bring

together more than 2 thousand artists, with the organisation of 300 events in Glasgow from 17th January to 3rd January... [Read more](#)

Mircea Cantor and Romanian nature



The Museum of Hunting and Nature is has offered Romanian artist Mircea Cantor "carte blanche" for an exhibition from 15th January to 31st March as part of the France-Romania Season 2019 and at a time when Romania is chairing the Council of the EU. The artist takes up the traditional festivals and the production of objects inspired by the faune of Romania exhibiting images, popular artistic objects and works from the Museum of Romanian Peasantry of Bucharest... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



14th to 18th January
Strasbourg
Plenary Session at the European Parliament



15th January
London
Vote in the House of Commons over the Withdrawal Agreement



21st January
Brussels
Eurogroup Foreign Affairs Council Meeting

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