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From a common vision to concrete achievements: towards United Balkans in a United Europe

Author: Nikola DIMITROV



After its ratification by the Macedonian Parliament on 11th January, the agreement on the change of name of the "Republic of Northern Macedonia" now has to be approved by the Greek Parliament for it to enter into force. This is a major step for Europe and the Western Balkans at a time when foreign influence in the region is increasing. From Chinese investments to Russian and Turkish intervention, the future of the agreement highlights the challenges faced by the European Union and the opportunities available to it, writes the

Macedonian Foreign Affairs Minister Nikola Dimitrov.

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Front page! :

The Brexit Saga



Jean-Dominique Giuliani reviews the Brexit saga and the political statement in which the British government now finds itself... [Read more](#)

Elections :

Find out everything you need to know about the European elections



From 23rd and 26th May 2019, more than 300 million Europeans will be called to choose their MEPs for the next five years. As in the previous elections in 2014 the Robert Schuman Foundation is launching a dedicated website providing a greater understanding of the election and to follow the campaign in the 27 Member States... [Read more](#)

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 complete view of the Union, the euro zone and each of its Member States, enabling the reader have at his/her fingertips the most recent and most objective political and statistical information regarding the Union. Available in paper and digital form in bookshops or on the Foundation's site... [Read more](#)

Conference on the future of Europe in Viroflay



Jean-Dominique Giuliani will be participating in a conference on the future of Europe on 24th January organised in Viroflay by Jean-Noël Barrot, MP in the Yvelines with Nathalie Griesbeck, MEP and Sylvain Waserman, Vice-President of the National Assembly... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Draft trade negotiation mandate with the USA



On 18th January the Commission adopted two draft mandates for trade negotiations with the USA, ie on the assessment of conformity, a tool to lift customs barriers and on the elimination of customs duties on industrial products, thereby implementing the joint declaration made by American President Donald Trump and the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker last July. The Member States now have to approve the mandate so that negotiations can start... [Read more](#)

Proposal for a qualified majority regarding tax questions



On 15th January the Commission put forward the reform of the decision making process in certain areas related to tax policy, which for the time being requires a unanimous vote on the part of the States. It advocates a transition towards the ordinary legislative procedure and the qualified majority vote by 2025 in four stages, starting by cooperation in the fight to counter tax fraud and evasion. This would lead to faster procedures and involve the European Parliament to a greater degree in the legislative process... [Read more](#)

Protective measures on steel imports



On 17th January the Commission announced that measures, that have been temporary to date, designed to protect the European steel industry were going to become permanent, after having won the support of the Member States the day before. A 25% tax will be implemented beyond a certain import threshold, whatever the country of origin. These measures match the punitive customs duties set by the American President Donald Trump in 2018. These measures will enter into force at the beginning of February and will remain so until July 2021... [Read more](#)

Record budget for Humanitarian Aid



The EU has adopted an annual budget for 2019 of 1.6 billion € for humanitarian aid. Most of this money will be used to rise to the Syrian and Yemeni crisis and to help refugees in this region of the world. In Africa the EU will provide its aid to the populations affected by the crises in South Sudan, Central African Republic, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and the Sahel. A share of this money will go to Colombia and Venezuela and also to Ukraine and to the Rohingya population in Myanmar. In a context of accelerated climate change, European aid will also go to vulnerable communities in the countries exposed to climate catastrophes... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

Link between the attribution of European funds and the respect of the rule of law

On 17th January MEPs approved a regulation allowing the suspension or reduction of European funds, 397 votes in support, 158 votes against



and 69 abstentions, that are granted to Member States which breach the rule of Law. The Commission would be responsible for the detection of the existence of "generalised deficiencies in terms of the rule of law," with the help of independent experts. The decision would only be made once approved by the Parliament and the Council and would remain temporary for the period the Member State took to remedy the situation. Negotiations with the Council are now to start... [Read more](#)

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Establishment of the InvestEU programme



MEPs adopted amendments to the InvestEU programme on 16th January put forward by the Commission. A part of the multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027, InvestEU brings together various European financial instruments designed for projects that were having difficulty in finding funding. The programme that has been adopted targets in particular climate, employment and growth projects... [Read more](#)

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Resolution on autonomous vehicles



In a non-binding resolution adopted on 15th January MEPs said they were pleased with the emphasis placed on autonomous mobility, notably in the communication by the European Commission on the issue. However MEPs called on the Commission to make greater effort to ensure road safety, support to European industry and technical harmonisation of autonomous vehicles. They also hope that the Commission will establish detailed rules regarding other modes of autonomous transport, notably autonomous ships and planes... [Read more](#)

The ECB's and Banking Union



On 16th January MEPs adopted two resolutions concerning the work of the ECB and regarding the progress towards Banking Union. They approved the halt of the ECB's exceptional monetary measures and called on the bank to remain wary of increasing concern about the reappearance of real estate bubbles and debts in the private sector. They support the creation of a European guarantee banking deposit system and greater harmonisation for the completion of banking union... [Read more](#)

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Improving the pesticide authorisation procedure



MEPs adopted the report by the Special Pesticides Committee on 16th January, 526 votes in support, 66 against. The committee would like a further study regarding the carcinogenic nature of the product to be undertaken and with the establishment of the maximum limits of residues in the ground and water tables. This vote came the day after the publication of a study ordered by three MEPs, who are members of this parliamentary committee, revealing that half of the glyphosate assessment report by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, the base of the European decision for the re-authorisation of the pesticide in 2017 is a plagiarism of the certification file given the European authorities by Monsanto and its industrial allies... [Read more](#)

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Council :

Results of the Austrian Presidency



On 15th January the Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz addressed the results of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU to the Parliament in Strasbourg. He recalled that his presidency had led to the strengthening of the internal market and had brought the EU's attention to the Western Balkans. Despite criticism for Austria not signing the UN's pact on migration, the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker congratulated the Chancellor for one of the most "successful presidencies in the EU's recent history".. [Read more](#)

Debate over the Romanian Presidency

Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă debated with European Parliament on 15th January regarding the priorities of the Romanian Presidency of the Council which started on January 1st. The main goal is to achieve greater political and economic cohesion between Member States. She stressed her commitment to taking questions regarding

enlargement forward, notably the Western Balkans. She declared that economic competitiveness, digitisation, the protection and safety of citizens are the core of the Romanian presidency. During the debate the Prime Minister faced criticism, notably due to the controversial reform of the Romanian legal system undertaken by her government... [Read more](#)

Eurogroup Conclusions



Eurogroup met on 21st January in Brussels. The 19 ministers discussed the Council's recommendations regarding the euro zone's economic policy for 2019 as part of the European Semester. They exchanged views regarding the role of the European currency at international level on the basis of the Commission's December communication on this issue, notably regarding the implementation of a European deposit insurance system and a budgetary convergence and competitiveness system (budget and euro zone)... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council



Foreign Affairs Ministers added 1 entity and 11 Syrian businessmen to their black list on 21st January, which targets supporters of the Syrian regime. They also registered 9 Syrians and Russians and one entity on a sanctions list to counter the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. They sanctioned the head of Russian military intelligence (GRU), his deputy and two agents deemed responsible for the poisoning of Serguey Skripal via the freezing of any assets they have in the EU and a travel ban in the EU. They maintained their support to the action plan to counter disinformation, presented by the Commission in December. They insisted on the need to step up the EU's operational capabilities and to have a common, inclusive Alert System, which protects the freedom of the press and of expression... [Read more](#)

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22nd EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting



The EU's Foreign Affairs Ministers and their counterparts from 10 ASEAN countries met on 21st January in Brussels. They agreed to deepen their relations via a strategic partnership. They acknowledged their role in the drafting of a socio-economic and political agenda at regional and world level. They exchanged views on various themes such as climate change, multilateralism, digital economy, the rule of law, the proliferation of chemical weapons and free-trade... [Read more](#)

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ECB :

The euro is 20 year's old: Mario Draghi speaks to the European Parliament



On 15th January Parliament celebrated the euro's 20th anniversary, together with the President of the European Central Bank (ECB), Mario Draghi, which stressed the role of the euro in confirming the Union as a financial world power. With the chair of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee of the Parliament, Roberto Gualtieri, and the President of the Eurogroup Mario Centeno, all acknowledged that the euro was not perfect and that progress had to be accelerated to complete the Economic and Monetary Union... [Read more](#)

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Germany :

Markus Söder, the new President of the CSU



On 19th January the Minister President of Bavaria, Markus Söder, was elected as the head of the party of the CSU (Christian Social Union) during its congress in Munich. He takes over from Horst Seehofer, who announced his resignation on 11th November last to facilitate the "renewal" of the party, notably after the decline in its score in the Bavarian elections of October 2018... [Read more](#)

Spain :

The Prime Minister debates the future of Europe at the European Parliament



On 16th January during the debate over the future of Europe, the President of the Spanish government Pedro Sanchez declared: "We must protect Europe so that Europe can protect its citizens." He insisted on social values, notably bringing approaches that privilege austerity to an end and the upkeep of the budget. Regarding migration he hopes to deepen cooperation with African countries and reform the European asylum system on sound and responsible bases... [Read more](#)

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France :

The government triggers its plan in the event of a no-deal Brexit



On 17th January French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe triggered the plan in the event of a no-deal Brexit. The plan covers "the habilitation bill" which allows the government to take the necessary measures for an investment plan of around 50 million € in French ports and airports and the triggering of 600 recruitments (customs officers, veterinarians etc ...). The Prime Minister declared that he was continuing information work directed at businesses and the design of a plan to support the fishing industry... [Read more](#)

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Greece :

Alexis Tsipras wins a vote of confidence in Parliament



Greek MPs voted in support of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's government on 16th January, 151 votes out of 300. Alexis Tsipras asked for the vote after the resignation of the Defence Minister Panos Kammenos, the leader of ANEL, SYRIZA's government partner; the idea was to consolidate his majority and to open the path for the ratification of the agreement over the name of Macedonia. He benefited from the vote of the MPs in his own camp as well as on the part of four independent MPs and two dissidents from ANEL. The vote by the Greek Parliament is due on 24th January... [Read more](#)

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Poland :

High emotion after the assassination of the Mayor of Gdansk



The Mayor of Gdansk, Paweł Adamowicz, who died on 14th January after been stabbed was buried on 19th January with the Polish President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk and personalities like Lech Walesa in attendance, whilst several thousands of people paid tribute to him in the town. Several speaks including the Archbishop of Gdansk denounced political divisions and the climate of hostility that they deem responsible for the assassination of Mr Adamowicz, Mayor since 1998 and member of the Civic Platform (PO) during a charity evening... [Read more](#)

UK :

Rejection by MEPs of the agreement regarding the withdrawal from the EU



On 15th January the House of Commons rejected the agreement regarding the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, 432 votes against 202, negotiated by the Prime Minister Theresa May. In a press release the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker asked the UK to "clarify her intentions as soon as possible" and the EU stepped up preparations for a no-deal Brexit. After the failure by 19 votes of a vote of confidence launched by the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, on 16th January, Ms May started consultations to find a majority. She presented a "plan B" to MPs on 21st January for a vote on 29th... [Read more](#)

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Slovakia :

Maroš Šefčovič, candidate for the presidency



Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for energy announced on 18th January that he will be a candidate in the Slovakian presidential that will take place on 16th March. He declared that he wanted to counter the rise of euroscepticism and to ensure an active place for Slovakia "at the heart of the EU". He will stand for SMER (social democrats) and will notably face the candidate of the eurosceptic party SaS (Freedom and Solidarity) Robert Mistrík. He will retire from his post at the Commission as of February... [Read more](#)

Sweden :

Stefan Löfven will lead government as Prime Minister again



Outgoing Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (SAP), was reappointed as Prime Minister on 18th January after a vote in parliament. He will lead a minority government comprising Social Democrats (SAP) and the Greens, supported by the Centre and Liberals. Together these four parties have 167 seats out of 349, ie eight short of an absolute majority of 175 votes. After the declaration of general policy the government's composition was announced on 21st January... [Read more](#)

Russia :

French and German observers in the Kerch Strait



Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Serguey Lavrov announced on 18th January that his country would accept the presence of French and German observers in the Kerch Strait, between the Ukraine and Russia. The Strait was the place of conflict between Russian and Ukrainian sailors last November last... [Read more](#)

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Serbia :

Visit by the Russian President



During a State visit to Serbia on 17th January, the Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke of the importance of compromises in settling conflicts between neighbouring countries, notably between Serbia and Kosovo, for the stability of the Balkans. He accused the West of destabilising the region "by wanting to impose its domination." Vladimir Putin and his Serb counterpart Aleksander Vučić addressed issues of economic and energy cooperation. A candidate to join the EU, Serbia did not join in the sanctions set by the West against Russia after the annexation of Crimea... [Read more](#)

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Council of Europe :

The Russian Parliament refuses to sit on the Council of Europe in 2019



Russian MPs decided on 17th January that they would extend their boycott of the Council of Europe that began with the Ukrainian crisis. Hence they will not send a delegation during the next session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the consultative body of the Council of Europe, which starts on 21st January and for all of those in 2019. They also renewed the freezing of more than 300 million € in terms of their contribution to the Council of Europe's budget... [Read more](#)

Protection of child refugees and migrants



The Special Representative of the Council of Europe for migration and refugees presented an interim review on 17th January of the Action Plan for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe launched in 2017. The plan aims to guarantee access to rights and procedures adapted to children, especially those separated from their families, to guarantee them effective protection against violence and to improve their integration... [Read more](#)

OECD :

Report on taxing company profit



In a report published on 15th January the OECD notes that in spite of a trend towards decreasing corporate tax rates, those paid by businesses are still a major source of public revenues, especially in developing countries. Corporate taxes represent 15.3% on average of total tax revenues in Africa and 15.4% in Latin America and the Caribbean against 9% in the OECD... [Read more](#)

IMF :

Report on Finland's economic situation

In a report on Finland's economic situation, published on 15th January the IMF noted healthy growth and unemployment at its lowest point since 2011, but stresses the existence of some weak points: employment growth



and weak productivity, which is preventing the country's potential growth. Public finances are also being weakened by the increase of the government debt and that of interest rates on loans to households... [Read more](#)

Report on Malta's economic situation



In a report on Malta's economic situation, published on 16th January the IMF congratulated the country on its economic growth, which is still one of the strongest in Europe and has led to a rapid convergence of incomes towards the EU's average. It advises the country to improve its infrastructures and the offer of labour and to reduce budgetary risks to foster high, inclusive growth... [Read more](#)

Eurostat :

Inflation down



According to the most recent data published on 17th January by Eurostat, the annual inflation rate of the EU lay at 1.7% in December 2018, against 2% in November. That of the euro zone lay at 1.6% in December 2018, against 1.9% in November... [Read more](#)

Trade Balance



According to Eurostat's first estimates published on 15th January, exports of goods from the euro zone towards the rest of the world lay at around 203 billion euro in November 2018 (+1,9% in comparison with November 2017), whilst imports from the rest of the world lay at 184.0 billion euro (+4,7%). Hence the euro zone is in surplus of 19 billion € (-4.4 billion €). The EU has a deficit of 3.2 billion € with 172.7 billion € in terms of exports (+2.6% in comparison with November 2017 and 175.9 billion € in terms of imports... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Mapping Migrant Student Integration



In a report published on 17th January the Eurydice Network makes a comparative mapping of migrant students in schools across Europe. These students tend to have poorer school results and do not have such a good feeling of well-being as their co-students who were born in the host country. The Eurydice network, established by the Commission and the Member States covers 42 national units based in 38 countries... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Mozart week in Salzburg



Since 1956 the Mozart Foundation of Salzburg has been organising the "Mozart Week" on the occasion of the artist's birth on 27th January 1756. From 24th January to 3rd February, the concerts played by the bests artists from around the world will reflect Mozart's personality, who was reputed to love dancing, playing, eating and drinking... [Read more](#)

International Film Festival in Rotterdam



The International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR) is screening full feature films, documentaries, short films and artistic works from 23rd January to 3rd February. For 12 days of festivities, more than 500 films from 50 countries will be available to the public... [Read more](#)

Bauhaus Centenary in Germany



In 2019 Germany will be celebrating the centenary of Bauhaus, the revolutionary school of art founded by Walter Gropius in 1919. The inaugural festival is taking place at the Academy of Arts in Berlin until 24th January, with a programme of concerts, theatre plays, and virtual reality installations. Celebrations will continue in 100 emblematic

venues across Germany, including three new Bauhaus museums in Weimar, Dessau and Berlin which are organising major exhibitions from now to the end of the year... [Read more](#)

Foujita, the work of a lifetime



Until 16th March the House of Culture of Japan in Paris is organising a retrospective of the works of Tsugouharu Foujita, the first Japanese artist of international renown to establish in Paris. 37 paintings are on show in a five part exhibition covering the entire career of the artist, his arrival in Paris in 1913 until his death in 1968... [Read more](#)

Pierre Bonnard Exhibition at the Tate Modern



From 23rd January to 6th May the Tate Modern in London is running an exhibition on Pierre Bonnard called "The Colour of Memory". It highlights the artist's unconventional use of colour as he painted based using his memories as a base. It is the biggest exhibition of his work in the UK for over 20 years... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



21st Janvier

Brussels
"Foreign Affairs" Council
Brussels
Eurogroup Meeting
Brussels
EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting



22nd January

Brussels
"Economic and Financial Affairs" Council
Brussels
EU-Africa Ministerial Meeting
Aachen
Franco-German Summit



24th January

Frankfurt
European Central Bank Council of Governors



28th January

Brussels
"Agriculture and Fisheries" Council

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