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Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027 : democratic illusion, do we stop or carry on ?

Author: Jean Arthuis



After the failure of the February European Council devoted to the Union's budget for 2021-2027, the discrepancy between the political proclamations and the budgetary sham has become intolerable. Jean Arthuis, former chairman of the Budgets Committee, believes that the European Parliament, which may face an irreversible take it or leave it agreement, can legitimately ask for more time. As for the budget, it should be rethought around the idea of European public goods".

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Front page! :

Conquering the virus



In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, international cooperation is more effective than the unilateral closure of borders. In addition to the fight against the virus, European states must also respond together to the economic disaster that is looming and free up exceptional and significant budgetary resources, writes Jean-Dominique Giuliani... [Read more](#)

Coronavirus :

Strategy to attenuate the economic impact of the virus



The Commission presented its responses on 13 March in an attempt to limit the socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. It proposes allocating €37 billion under the cohesion policy to fight the virus and to make the best use of the flexibility provided for in the Treaties to enable Member States to take all budgetary measures to support their health systems and the economy. It proposes to use the EU budget, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the European Social Fund to mitigate the social impact of the epidemic. It calls on the Member States to ensure the circulation of health facilities within the single market... [Read more](#)

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European Council Conclusions



The European Council met by videoconference on 10 March to discuss the coronavirus epidemic. The Heads of State and government stressed the importance of joint action coordinated by the Commission. They also defined four priorities: limiting the spread of the virus, anticipating the need for medical equipment, financing research into a vaccine and acting on the socio-economic consequences of the epidemic... [Read more](#)

The ECB pledges 120 billion € to support the economy



On 12 March, the European Central Bank decided to spend €120 billion by the end of the year on asset purchases to support the economy in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also decided not to lower interest rates but to grant European banks more favourable conditions for refinancing. At a press conference, ECB President Christine Lagarde regretted the "complacency and slowness" of European countries in dealing with the consequences of the virus and called for an "ambitious and coordinated" budgetary response... [Read more](#)

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National measures against COVID-19



All EU countries have taken steps to try to slow the spread of the virus and to provide financial support to their economies. Spain has declared a 15-day state of high alert. Some countries such as France, Belgium and Ireland have decided to close schools and universities and limit gatherings. Belgium has also decreed the closure of bars, restaurants, cultural and festive places. Poland and Germany have introduced health checks at their borders... [Read more](#)

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Videoconference of Education Ministers



Education Ministers exchanged views by videoconference on 12 March on the measures taken in the various Member States concerning COVID-19. The issue of school closures was also discussed, in particular with regard to distance learning and childcare for young children... [Read more](#)

Emergency support measures to airlines



Faced with the drop in air passenger numbers due to the COVID-19 epidemic, Transport Commissioner Adina Valean presented a proposal on 10 March to suspend the obligation for airlines to use 80% of their landing and take-off slots, or face a reduction in the number of slots allocated the following year. This obligation pushes airlines to maintain empty flights, which has an economic and environmental impact... [Read more](#)

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Restriction of the export of protective equipment



On 15 March the Commission decided to make exports of personal protective equipment such as masks, visors and protective clothing from the Union subject to authorisation. The measure is valid for the next six weeks in order to avoid a shortage of equipment in Europe during the coronavirus pandemic. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also regretted the closure of internal borders, which also block the supply chains for materials... [Read more](#)

UN launches a solidarity fund



The World Health Organization, the United Nations Foundation and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation launched a solidarity fund on 13 March in response to Covid-19. This initiative enables individuals, companies and institutions to contribute to the global effort against the coronavirus. As of 16 March, the WHO counted more than 160,000 cases in 146 countries and nearly 6,500 deaths... [Read more](#)

The USA suspends air travel from the Schengen Area



On 11 March, US President Donald Trump decided to suspend for 30 days the entry into the United States of foreigners from Schengen countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Presidents of the Commission and the European Council, Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel, "disapproved" of a measure "taken unilaterally and without consultation"... [Read more](#)

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Eurogroup meeting



The Eurogroup met on 16 March to coordinate Member States' economic response to the coronavirus. It expressed its support for the emergency economic measures taken by the Commission and the European Central Bank, and considered that the current macroeconomic rules allow sufficient flexibility to enable States to deal with the crisis. Ministers expressed their readiness to "take all necessary coordinated and decisive action"... [Read more](#)

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Videoconference of G7 leaders



The leaders of the G7 countries discussed Covid-19 on March 16 by videoconference. They pledged to strengthen coordination to combat the pandemic, particularly with regard to information and research. They also pledged to cooperate in mitigating the economic consequences and in laying the "foundations for a strong recovery of economic activity", in particular through the action of international institutions, Central Banks and by facilitating international trade... [Read more](#)

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National leaders' speeches regarding Covid-19



European leaders have addressed their countries, calling on people to limit their movements and gatherings and have announced measures to slow the progress of Covid-19. In Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez declared a state of emergency. In Poland, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki declared a state of epidemiological threat. In France, President Emmanuel Macron deemed that the country is at "war" and has limited all unnecessary movement. In Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel called on fellow countrymen not to travel anywhere and she has closed most venues hosting the public. In the UK, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has asked the British to limit their movements and to avoid bars and restaurants, but no measures of confinement have been taken... [Read more](#)

Recommendation for border management



On 16 March, the Commission presented its recommendations for border management in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. It recommends maintaining the free flow of goods and services. As regards persons, Member States can establish medical tests and close their borders. The Commission calls on Member States to treat patients instead of turning them away, and not to take measures that could create long queues at borders, where the virus could spread. It has also proposed to introduce restrictions on entry into the Schengen area for 30 days. The measure enters into force on 17 March... [Read more](#)

Commission :

New Industrial Strategy

On 10 March, the Commission presented its new industrial strategy, which aims to strengthen the Union's competitiveness while focusing on climate neutrality and digital challenges. The Commission stresses the need to support SMEs and to tackle the barriers of the single market.



The strategy includes various actions such as an action plan on intellectual property, measures to decarbonise energy-using industries, and a fund for IPOs of SMEs. The Commission will also analyse the risks and needs of different industrial ecosystems and reassess its competition policy.

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Plan of action for the circular economy



On 11 March the Commission presented its action plan for the circular economy under the Green Deal. The aim is to ensure that the resources consumed remain in the Union's economy for as long as possible. It thus aims to strengthen competitiveness and consumer rights while protecting the environment. Only 12% of secondary materials are reintroduced into the economy. The Commission is thus committed to making sustainable products the norm, ensuring less waste and focusing on the most resource-intensive industries (textiles, electronics, vehicles, packaging)... [Read more](#)

Financing 107 innovative projects



The Commission announced on 12 March that the European Innovation Council, currently in its pilot phase, will fund 107 projects with €344 million from the Horizon 2020 programme. These research projects aim to develop new technologies in areas such as the environment or health... [Read more](#)

Parliament :

For a ambitious multi-annual budget



MEPs debated the Union's multiannual budget with European Council President Charles Michel on 11 March. MEPs expressed their disappointment at the failure of the last European Council to approve a budget for 2021-2027, and their opposition to the current budget proposal. They believe it would make the Union less relevant in the world and that the current crises show the need for a strong budget...

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Debate over the migration situation



On 11 March MEPs discussed the migration situation on the Greek-Turkish border with the Croatian Council Presidency and Commissioner Ylva Johansson. A majority of them denounced Turkey's political use of refugees and expressed fears about the humanitarian situation. MEPs also stressed the need to reform European asylum law to avoid a further migration crisis... [Read more](#)

Council :

Conclusion of the Home Affairs Council



Home Affairs Ministers meeting on 13 March discussed the situation on the Greek-Turkish border, which appears to be stabilising, and took stock of the implementation of the aid measures for Greece announced on 4 March. They then exchanged views on the COVID-19 pandemic, to discuss ways to improve the exchange of information on the virus, as well as the activation of new European mutual assistance mechanisms... [Read more](#)

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Informal meeting of Transport Ministers



Transport Ministers meeting on 11 March adopted a declaration to lay the foundations for a maritime and inland waterway transport policy. The Opatija Declaration emphasises four areas: environmental protection, digitisation, human resources, safety and competitiveness. Ministers also discussed the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on the transport sector... [Read more](#)

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Ukraine: renewal of sanctions for 6 months

On 13 March, the Council renewed the economic sanctions against persons who have violated the territorial integrity and sovereignty of



Ukraine for six months. Adopted in 2014, these sanctions target 175 individuals and 44 entities. They consist of financial asset freezes and a ban on making funds available to them... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

New commander for operation Atalanta



On 13 March, the Spanish Admiral Ignacio Villanueva Serrano was appointed by the Council as head of the Atalanta naval operation from 17 March. Operation Eunavfor Atalanta contributes to the prevention and repression of acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia... [Read more](#)

Court of Justice :

Decision regarding air passenger rights



In a decision delivered on 12 March, the European Court of Justice ruled that a passenger's right to compensation is also valid on a re-routing flight, even when compensation has already been received for the change of flight. The case concerned passengers from Finnair whose alternative flight to a first cancelled flight arrived three hours late due to a faulty document... [Read more](#)

New Advocate General



On 12 March, the Council of the Union appointed Frenchman Jean Richard de la Tour as Advocate General at the Court of Justice, replacing Yves Bot, who passed away in June 2019. The term of office of J. Richard de la Tour will run from 23 March to 6 October 2024... [Read more](#)

European Agencies :

Frontex: arrival of 100 border guards in Greece



On 12 March, the 100 border guards promised by Ursula von der Leyen on 3 March were deployed to Greece by Frontex for two months as part of the measures to support the country, which is facing strong migratory pressure on its border with Turkey. The guards, who are part of the Rapid Border Intervention Teams, come from 22 Member States and join the more than 500 border guards already on the spot... [Read more](#)

Belgium :

Special powers for the government



Belgian Prime Minister Sophie Wilmès was sworn in before King Philippe on March 17 and will lead a government with special powers to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. She has been heading a caretaker government since the collapse of Charles Michel's government in December 2018, and in the absence of a political agreement for a coalition in the May 2019 legislative elections. The main Belgian political parties, with the exception of the Flemish nationalists of the N-VA, have committed to invest her for a renewable period of 3 months, allowing her to take the necessary measures to address the budgetary and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic... [Read more](#)

Greece :

Entry into office of the President



Ekaterini Sakellariopoulou took office as President of the Republic in Greece on 13 March. Elected on 22 January by Parliament for a five-year term, she is the first woman to hold this post in the country... [Read more](#)

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Prime Minister's visit to Vienna and Berlin

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited Germany and Austria on 9 and 10 March. At the German-Greek Economic Forum in Berlin, he discussed with Chancellor Angela Merkel the response to the border



crisis between Greece and Turkey and the future of the EU-Turkey migration agreement. In Vienna, he held talks with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on issues concerning the economic situation in both countries... [Read more](#)

Italy :

25 billion € to counter the COVID-19 pandemic



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Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced on 11 March a €25 billion package to combat the Covid-19 epidemic in Italy. The virus has caused more than 1,800 deaths in the country, and containment measures have been in place throughout the country until 3 April...

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Portugal :

Antonio Costa meets Angela Merkel



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On 11 March, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa travelled to Berlin for a working dinner with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In addition to the coronavirus pandemic, the two leaders discussed their bilateral relations and preparations for their EU Council presidencies in the second half of 2020 for Germany and the first half of 2021 for Portugal...

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Romania :

Ludovic Orban again appointed Prime Minister



Ludovic Orban, President of the National Liberal Party (PNL) won the confidence of the deputies on 14 March by 286 votes out of 309. He lost a vote of no confidence on 5 February and was re-elected as head of government after Florin Citu, who had been appointed his successor, resigned on 12 March. The Prime Minister has made the fight against the coronavirus the priority of his government... [Read more](#)

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UK :

First British post-Brexit budget



British Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak presented on 11 March the first post-Brexit draft budget which includes a 2% tax on digital services, new programmes to replace European environment, agriculture and fisheries policies. It also provides for a £30 billion recovery plan to deal with the pandemic... [Read more](#)

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Slovenia :

New government led by Janez Jansa



On 13 March, the Slovenian Parliament invested the new coalition government led by Janez Jansa, which comprises the Modern Centre Party, New Slovenia and the Democratic Party of Pensioners, with 52 votes out of 90. The government includes 4 women out of 17 members... [Read more](#)

Council of Europe :

Declaration on children's rights



The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe presented a declaration on children's rights on 11 March. It called on States to ensure children's access to justice, and to address the causes of poverty, social exclusion, violence and discrimination they may suffer. States must also protect children in the context of migration, including children without parental care... [Read more](#)

IMF :

Report on the economy of Spain

The International Monetary Fund published its report on the economic situation in Spain on 12 March. Despite a growth rate above the EU



average, the IMF notes economic disparities and advises the country to tackle structural unemployment in the country. The IMF also highlights the challenge posed by the coronavirus and recommends that Spain strengthen its hospitals and other health mechanisms to protect vulnerable populations... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Report on the EU's activities in 2019



On 11 March the Commission published the 2019 edition of the Annual Report on the Activities of the Union, which summarises the main policies pursued by the Commission during the year. The report refers in particular to the Green Pact, the investment plan for Europe, the strengthening of Frontex, the entry into force of the free trade agreements with Japan and Singapore, the signing of the agreement with Vietnam, and the negotiations on the agreement with MERCOSUR... [Read more](#)

Culture :

Titian and the Myths



The National Gallery in London is running "Love, Desire and Death", an exhibition devoted to Titian until 14 June, featuring paintings by the famous Italian artist depicting classical myths about love, temptation and punishment inspired by Ovid's Metamorphoses... [Read more](#)

Olympic flame lit in Olympia



The flame lighting ceremony for the Tokyo Olympics took place on March 12 in Olympia. For the first time in history, it was a woman, Greek athlete Anna Korakaki, who started the relay, followed by two European Commissioners, Maryia Gabriel and Margaritis Schinas, among others. The Tokyo Games are due to start on 24 July... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



16th March
Visioconference of G7 leaders



17th March 2020
Brussels
Economic and Financial Affairs Council
Visioconference of members of the European Council



23rd March 2020
Brussels
Foreign Affairs Council

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