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## Europe as a power, European sovereignty, strategic autonomy: a debate that is moving towards an assertive Europe

Author: Maxime Lefebvre



Despite its incompleteness, its economic and legal dimension rather than its diplomatic and military dimension, European power exists and is increasingly acknowledged and assumed as such. The terms "strategic autonomy" form the basis of a European consensus which is now taking shape.

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### Front page! :

#### Will Europe know how to guard its borders?



Framed by strict legal rules on the respect of human rights, Frontex can give credibility to the European will to end the naivety to which the Union is inclined by its natural generosity, as it begins to give a concrete existence to its external borders, which largely determine its identity and the sense of belonging that it still lacks, believes Jean-Dominique Giuliani... [Read more](#)

### Foundation :

#### Table of health measures and travel conditions in Europe



As cases of Covid-19 increase again and several more virulent strains of the virus develop, Member States are extending or strengthening health measures and trying to speed up the vaccination campaign. France has suspended non-essential travel to and from any country outside the EU, Germany has banned entry into its territory from several countries and Portugal has closed its borders. The Foundation provides you with a summary of the health measures in place and the conditions for travelling throughout Europe. An indispensable, regularly updated resource to help you understand the situation... [Read more](#)

## Commission :

### Greenlight for the panEuropean project for innovative batteries



On 26 January, the Commission approved joint grants from 12 Member States worth €2.9 billion for a pan-European research project on innovative batteries. Together with private investment, the total budget for this project involving 42 companies will thus exceed €12bn. The project was initiated by the European Battery Alliance in 2017 with the aim of competing with the Asian monopoly on the market... [Read more](#)

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### Extension on relaxation of rules governing State aid



On 28 January the Commission decided to extend until 31 December the relaxation of State aid rules introduced on 19 March 2020 to deal with the crisis caused by the pandemic. In particular, the measure doubles the aid ceiling and converts repayable instruments into direct subsidies... [Read more](#)

### System of export approval and delivery of vaccines



On 29 January, the Commission adopted a "targeted and time-limited system" making exports of any vaccine against Covid-19 subject to authorisation by Member States if it is produced by laboratories that have signed advance purchase agreements with the EU. The aim is to provide more transparency on the production and distribution of vaccines. On 1 February, the German laboratory BioNTech announced an acceleration of vaccine deliveries to the European Union, promising up to 75 million additional doses in the second quarter. On 31 January, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced that AstraZeneca would deliver 9 million more doses to the Union in the first quarter, making a total of 40 million doses... [Read more](#)

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### Greenlight for the AstraZeneca vaccine



The European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended on 29 January that AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine be placed on the market for people aged 18 and over. This is the third vaccine authorised after those of Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. Earlier in the day, the Commission published the contract signed in August for the delivery of 300 million doses, with an option for a further 100 million doses. The publication follows a dispute between the Commission and the laboratory over an anticipated supply delay... [Read more](#)

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### Rule of law: a further warning to Poland



On 27 January, the Commission sent a supplementary reasoned opinion to Poland, deeming its responses to the infringement procedure opened in April 2020 against one of the Justice reforms to be "insufficient". The Commission considers that Poland is infringing EU law by allowing the disciplinary chamber of the Supreme Court, whose impartiality is questioned, to take decisions on judges. Poland has one month to reply, failing which the Commission may refer the matter to the Court of Justice... [Read more](#)

## Council :

### Meeting of Home Affairs Ministers



On 28 January, the Home Affairs ministers discussed the proposal for a pact on migration and asylum, stressing the need to strengthen cooperation and dialogue with third countries of origin and transit, to increase Frontex's resources to maintain border control and to preserve the Schengen area... [Read more](#)

### Meeting of Justice Ministers



At a meeting on 29 January, the Justice Ministers reiterated the need to improve the protection of vulnerable adults and to fight against medical crime. They called for the ratification of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Adults of 2020 and the Council of Europe Medicrime Convention of 2010, which criminalises the sale of illegal and falsified medicines... [Read more](#)

## Update of list of third countries open to travel



On 28 January, the Council updated the list of third countries to which restrictions on travel to the Union do not apply. Japan was removed from the list. Six States remain on the list: Australia, New Zealand, Rwanda, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and China, subject to reciprocity... [Read more](#)

## Diplomacy :

### Increase in the humanitarian aid budget



On 26 January, the Commission adopted the EU budget for humanitarian aid for the year 2021. The budget totals €1.4 billion, an increase of 60% compared to the previous year. €505 million will be allocated to Africa, €385 million to the Middle East, €180 million to Asia and Latin America... [Read more](#)

## Court of Justice :

### Decision on the means of payment in euro



In a ruling delivered on 26 January on the cash settlement of the audiovisual contribution in Germany, the Court of Justice ruled that euro area Member States may oblige their administration to accept cash payments, but may also restrict this possibility of payment if it involves an unreasonable cost for the administration... [Read more](#)

## Court of Auditors :

### Report on the exchange of tax information in the Union



In a report published on 26 January, the European Court of Auditors found that the system of exchange of tax information is satisfactory but could be improved. It recommends that the Commission further increase the coverage provided by the legislative framework, strengthen supervision and provide more guidance to Member States... [Read more](#)

## European Agencies :

### Signature of the reform of the European Stability Mechanism



On 27 January, 18 euro area Member States signed the reform of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) Treaty and the agreement on the Single Resolution Fund. The Fund, which complements the second pillar of the banking union, will allow the ESM to act as a safety net by creating a credit line. The 19th member of the euro area, Estonia, which has just changed government, has announced signature "as soon as possible". National parliaments have yet to ratify the reform... [Read more](#)

### Operation against the malware EMOTET



On 27 January, Europol announced that it had coordinated an operation with the Netherlands, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Lithuania, Canada and Ukraine against the EMOTET software, which allows cybercriminals to break into computers via email to steal data. The operation took control of hundreds of servers used by the cybercriminals and dismantled their systems from the inside... [Read more](#)

### Increase in the Union's military spending in 2019



In 2019, total defence spending by Member States (excluding non-EDA member Denmark) stood at €186 billion, an increase of 5% over 2018, according to a report published on 28 January by the European Defence Agency. The report notes a significant increase in the acquisition of new equipment but a drop in total cooperative equipment purchases from other States, down by 20% against a target of 35%... [Read more](#)

## Germany :

### Annual economic report 2021

On 27th January, the German government published its economic forecasts for 2021. Despite the uncertainty caused by the variants of the Covid-19, it forecasts a 3% increase in GDP and stable unemployment at 6%. It is expected to continue to massively support the economy, with a €50 billion investment plan in innovative



technologies such as artificial intelligence and hydrogen. Finally, the government wants to accelerate the green transition and move to 65% of renewable energies in 2030... [Read more](#)

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## Bulgaria :

### Report on the Bulgarian economy



In a study published on 29 January, the OECD forecasts that after a contraction of 4.1% in 2020, Bulgaria's GDP is expected to grow by 3.1% in 2021 and 3.7% in 2022. The OECD considers that since the Bulgarian economy is manufacturing and export-oriented, its recovery will depend on the recovery at European and global level. It urges the country to use the European Recovery Fund to promote low-carbon energy, public infrastructure and adult education. The country needs to modernise its competition policy and strengthen the fight against corruption... [Read more](#)

## Spain :

### The Parliament approves breaking the deadlock over the recovery plan



On 28 January the Spanish Parliament approved the recovery plan presented last October by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. The plan, worth €140 billion financed by the European NextGenerationEU plan, is intended to boost the economy affected by the Covid-19 crisis... [Read more](#)

## Estonia :

### Kaja Kallas invested as Prime Minister



Kaja Kallas of the Reform Party was sworn in on 26 January, becoming Estonia's first woman prime minister. Her coalition government with the Centre Party includes 6 women of the 14 ministers. Kaja Kallas said her priorities were effective management of the Covid-19 crisis and improving the situation in the country... [Read more](#)

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## Finland :

### Meeting of the Digital9+ group regarding European digital strategy



On 27 January, the member countries of the informal Digital9+ group discussed the European digital strategy for 2030. This group brings together Portugal, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Poland, i.e. the Member States with the highest ranking in the annual Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) established by the Commission. At the end of the meeting chaired by Finland, the D9+ issued a communiqué calling for increased data exchange between countries and more training in digital tools in the Union... [Read more](#)

## France :

### Meeting of Baltic States



On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between France and the Baltic States, the Foreign Ministers of Latvia and Lithuania and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia were hosted by their French counterpart on 26 January. They agreed to coordinate national vaccination strategies and border controls and to speed up vaccine production. They discussed the future French presidency of the Council in 2022, the illegal arrest of Alexei Navalny by the Russian authorities, the situation in Belarus, the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean with Turkey... [Read more](#)

## Italy :

### Resignation of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte



The head of the Italian government, Giuseppe Conte, handed in his resignation on 26 January to the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, who asked him to take care of current affairs. The resignation follows the announcement of the withdrawal of the governing coalition of Matteo Renzi's Italia Viva party; the Italian government no longer has an absolute majority. On 29 January, Sergio Mattarella gave

the ruling parties four days to find a parliamentary majority to form a new government... [Read more](#)

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## Poland :

### Publication a Constitutional Court ruling regarding abortion



On 27 January, the ruling of the Polish Constitutional Court restricting the right to abortion only in cases of "rape, incest or when the mother's life is in danger" was published in the Official Journal. The ruling, issued in October 2020, sparked a wave of protests in the country, prompting the government to suspend its publication in the Official Journal. A new protest movement has developed throughout the country since the publication of the ruling... [Read more](#)

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## Portugal :

### Legalisation of euthanasia



Portuguese MEPs approved on 29 January by 136 votes to 78, with 4 abstentions, a text that makes euthanasia or assisted suicide possible in cases of "extreme suffering" or "incurable disease"... [Read more](#)

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## Switzerland :

### Davos Forum online



The 51st edition of the World Economic Forum in Davos was held online from 25 to 29 January on the theme "A Crucial Year for Rebuilding Confidence". Among the European leaders, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, as well as Commission President Ursula von der Leyen took the floor... [Read more](#)

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## Council of Europe :

### Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly



At its plenary session from 25-28 January, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) debated the arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the role of digital platforms in public life and the issue of vaccines against Covid-19. It adopted a resolution expressing concern about the rule of law in Poland. Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis of Greece was elected Secretary General of PACE for a 5-year term and is the first woman to hold this post... [Read more](#)

### Guidelines regarding facial recognition



In its guidelines adopted on 28 January, the Council of Europe calls for the regulation of facial recognition technologies to ensure privacy, data protection and the prohibition of discrimination... [Read more](#)

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## IMF :

### Economic Outlook



On 25 January, the IMF revised upwards its growth forecasts for 2021 in a context of the release of the Covid-19 vaccine, and forecasts world GDP growth of 5.5% in 2021 and 4.2% in 2022. For the euro zone, the return of lockdown measures has led to lower forecasts: 4.2% for 2021, i.e. 1 percentage point less than last October... [Read more](#)

## Studies/Reports :

### Greenpaper on the ageing of the European population



Presented by the Commission on 27 January, the Green Paper on ageing aims to launch a political debate on this development, which is expected to disrupt health and social security systems if the birth rate continues to fall. In 50 years' time, Europeans over 65 and over 80 are expected to account for 30% and 13% of the population, compared with 20% and 6% currently. A public consultation has been launched for a period of 12 weeks... [Read more](#)

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### Immigration drops sharply due to the pandemic



Asylum applications fell by 33% in the first 10 months of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, according to a report published on 29 January by the Commission. 390 000 applications were filed. The number of arrivals by sea decreased by 10%, with 114,300 new arrivals. This decrease is mainly due to lower arrivals in Greece (down 74%), with arrivals in Italy and Malta (+154%) and Spain (+46%), however, showing a sharp increase... [Read more](#)

### Positive effect of trade agreements on agro-food sectors



According to a study published by the Commission on 26 January, the 12 trade agreements in place between the EU and other countries will have a positive impact on the EU's agri-food trade balance by 2030. Exports are expected to increase by 25-29% and imports by 10-13%. The consequences for the climate have not been taken into account in the study... [Read more](#)

## Culture :

### Virtual visit of the National Gallery of Dublin



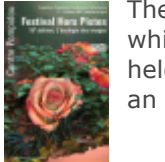
The National Gallery in Dublin offers tours of its collections through a virtual walk through four of its exhibition rooms: the Grand Gallery, the Shaw Room, the European Art Room and the Irish Art Room... [Read more](#)

### The Golden Age of the Jagiellonian Dynasty



The National Ossolinski Institute in Cracow is offering a virtual exhibition on "The Golden Age of the Jagiellonian Dynasty". Prepared on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the birth of King Sigismund Augustus, the last king of the dynasty, the exhibition traces the 200 years of the dynasty's reign... [Read more](#)

### "Hors Pistes" Festival Beaubourg



The Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris is organising its 'Hors Pistes' festival, which focuses on contemporary art and current issues. This year it is being held online until 14 February on the theme "Can we imagine and engage in an ecology of images?.. [Read more](#)

### Mozart live



The Opéra de La Monnaie in Brussels resumes its concerts and operas, without an audience but broadcast on its website. The month of February is entirely devoted to Mozart... [Read more](#)

### Solstice in Barcelona



From the 6th to 9th of February, Barcelona's Grand Teatre del Liceu will offer the dance show 'Solstice', created by choreographer Blanca Li. This show is about the upheavals in our ecosystem and the degradation of nature, expressed through dance... [Read more](#)

### Das Filmfest online



Das Filmfest, a festival of German-language films organised by the Goethe Institute Prague and the Austrian Cultural Forum in Prague to introduce the Czechs to German culture, is taking place from 8 to 14 February. This year's edition is online and accessible to all due to the pandemic and offers a selection of 7 films from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Every evening at 7pm, one film is put online and is accessible for 48 hours... [Read more](#)

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### Re-opening of museums in Italy

Many museums in Italy reopened their doors on 1 February, including the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the site of Pompeii and



its renovated Antiquarium, the Royal Museums of Turin and the Colosseum in Rome. The Academy Gallery in Venice will reopen on 8 February... [Read more](#)

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### Agenda :



3 February 2020

Videoconference

Meeting of ministers responsible for competitiveness



5 February 2021

Visit by the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell in Moscow

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