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The Letter in PDF format

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Germany turns the page post-Merkel

Authors: Frank Baasner, Stefan Seidendorf



Angela Merkel, who has headed the German government since 2005, will step down after the federal elections on 26 September. The election also heralds a profound change in the political landscape, with the Christian Democrats seeking to renew their candidates, the Social Democrats losing ground and the Greens representing an alternative force for the first time.

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Foundation :

Table of Health Measures and Travel Conditions in Europe



France announced the lifting of travel restrictions for 3 May, and nursery and primary schools reopened on 26 April. In Italy, restaurants, cinemas, theatres and schools reopen on 26 April under certain conditions. In the Netherlands, the curfew has been lifted and bars can partially reopen on 28 April. In Cyprus, a lockdown will be in place until 9 May. In Germany, the Parliament passed a law allowing measures to be taken at federal level. Germany and Italy have introduced restrictions for passengers coming from India, and the Netherlands has suspended flights to India. To keep track of the situation, the Foundation provides a comprehensive map of health measures in place and travel conditions across Europe. An essential resource, which is regularly updated, to help you understand the situation better... [Read more](#)

Belarus: chronology of a revolution in progress



The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called on 21 April for a "comprehensive" reform of the electoral system in Belarus to meet international standards for democratic elections, and called for the "urgent" opening of a political dialogue to end the crisis peacefully. To

follow the crisis since the August 2020 elections, the Foundation has provided a timeline of events and links to European responses and initiatives... [Read more](#)

Commission :

Proposal for new rules regarding artificial intelligence



On 21 April, the Commission proposed a first legal framework on artificial intelligence (AI) and a new plan coordinated with Member States to boost the uptake of AI, while ensuring safety and fundamental rights by setting new rules for machines and equipment that will be directly applicable in all Member States. Strict regulation will be introduced and all AI systems considered a threat to people's safety, livelihoods and rights will be banned... [Read more](#)

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New measures to direct capital to sustainable activities



The Commission presented on 21 April measures to better direct capital flows towards sustainable activities in the EU, in particular the taxation system to promote sustainable investments. It also presented a proposal for a directive on corporate sustainability reporting, as well as six texts on fiduciary duties and investment and insurance advice... [Read more](#)

Creation of a Knowledge Centre on Earth Observation



On 20 April, the Commission established a Knowledge Centre on Earth Observation to develop the use of knowledge from the collation and analysis of geo-referenced data on the state of the planet. The centre aims to support the implementation of the Commission's policy priorities, and to develop the European Earth observation programme Copernicus, which provides geospatial information about our planet... [Read more](#)

Technical guidelines for digital green certificate



Member States unanimously adopted on 22 April the guidelines describing the technical specifications for the implementation of the digital green certificate, with the aim of ensuring the deployment of the system in the Union by June... [Read more](#)

New guidelines on regional state aid



On 19 April, the Commission adopted new guidelines on regional state aid which will enter into force on 1 January 2022. They include adjustments to take account of the new strategic priorities linked to the Green Pact for Europe and the European industrial and digital strategies. Among these changes, the total coverage of regions eligible for aid has been readjusted to 48% of the Union's population, and the maximum aid intensities have been increased... [Read more](#)

New rules for drones and manned aircraft



On 22 April, the Commission adopted three regulations to allow drones and manned aircraft to operate safely in an airspace called U-space. The rules cover the roles and responsibilities of the organisations involved and include new services for drone operators who will be able to carry out more complex and longer-range operations. They come into force in April and will apply from January 2023... [Read more](#)

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Parliament :

Provisional agreement on the climate law



Negotiators from the Council and Parliament have reached a provisional political agreement on the EU climate law with the objective of reducing CO2 emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990, leading to carbon neutrality by 2050. They have also called on the Commission to propose an interim climate target for 2040.. [Read more](#)

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Council :

Meeting of European Affairs Ministers



On 20 April, the Ministers for European Affairs held a discussion on the development of the rule of law in France, Germany, Greece, Ireland and Spain, as part of the annual dialogue on the rule of law in the Union. They also examined EU-UK relations and in particular the application of the Protocol on Ireland. They discussed EU coordination on vaccines and digital green certificates, the epidemiological situation and travel restrictions. They also discussed the conference on the future of Europe. On this subject, the Executive Council, meeting on 22 April, agreed on the rules for the establishment of citizens' panels and on the event programme that will launch the conference on 9 May in Strasbourg... [Read more](#)

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Meeting of Defence Ministers



Defence ministers met on 23 April to discuss the Strategic Compass, which will be the main document for political guidance and common security and defence from 2022. The meeting defined Member States' contributions in four areas: crisis management, capabilities, resilience and partnerships... [Read more](#)

Meeting of Environment Ministers



On 23 April, the EU Environment Ministers discussed the challenges of water scarcity, drought and adaptation to climate change with their Swiss, Norwegian and Icelandic counterparts. They discussed Europe's role in the international context and recognised that water is a crucial aspect of adaptation to climate change and that it is important to increase knowledge about the effects of climate change... [Read more](#)

Meeting of Agriculture Ministers



On 26 April, the Agriculture Ministers discussed the progress of the inter-institutional negotiations on the CAP reforms and exchanged views on the question of the amounts reserved for the eco-schemes. They also discussed the trade agenda and the conditions for fair competition, as well as the Union's trade relations with third countries, in order to preserve the sustainability of the agri-food sector... [Read more](#)

Diplomacy :

New commander of operation Atalanta



On 20 April, the Council's Political and Security Committee appointed Spanish Vice-Admiral José M. Núñez as EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta Commander. The operation is contributing to stability in the Horn of Africa by helping to deter, prevent and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery off the coast of Somalia. It helps protect World Food Programme vessels and monitor fishing activities... [Read more](#)

Virtual summit on climate



At the virtual international climate summit on 22 April, US President Joe Biden pledged to reduce US greenhouse gas emissions by 50%-52% by 2030 compared to 2005. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will apply to transport and buildings. French President Emmanuel Macron called for an acceleration in the implementation of the 2030 commitments and insisted on the need to integrate the environmental dimension into investment costs and trade relations. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said her country wants to increase its renewable electricity production to 65% by 2030... [Read more](#)

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Court of Justice :

Decision on the rule of law



In a judgment handed down on 20 April concerning the appointment of judges in Malta, the Court of Justice of the European Union clarified that a Prime Minister may have the power to appoint judges if the procedure provides for the intervention of an "independent body responsible, in particular, for assessing the candidates". The Court also stated that Article 49 TEU, by which States joining the Union undertake to respect its fundamental values, does not allow Member States to adopt laws which lead to a regression in the protection of the rule of law... [Read more](#)

Court of Auditors :

Report on Galileo and Copernicus



In a report published on 21 April, the Court of Auditors finds that the EU has not done enough to exploit the full potential of its space programmes, particularly the Copernicus earth observation satellite programme and the Galileo satellite navigation and positioning system. The auditors point to a lack of an overall strategy with target values, a clear timetable and more focused actions... [Read more](#)

ECB :

Continuation of monetary policy



The European Central Bank decided on 22 April to keep interest rates unchanged and to continue its asset purchase programme in line with economic conditions, amounting to €1,850 billion by March 2022. ECB President Christine Lagarde expects growth to rebound in the second quarter but highlighted uncertainties related to the pandemic and vaccination. She stressed the importance of a rapid implementation of the European recovery plan... [Read more](#)

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European Agencies :

Lift-off of the Alpha mission



The SpaceX rocket carrying four astronauts, including Frenchman Thomas Pesquet, lifted off from Florida on 23 April towards the International Space Station (ISS). Thomas Pesquet is the first European to fly aboard a Crew Dragon capsule, and the first Frenchman to take command of the ISS. He will carry out the "Alpha" mission, the second organised on behalf of the European Space Agency (ESA), which will consist of research into the ageing of stem cells, and will help prepare for future missions to Mars and the Moon... [Read more](#)

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Opinions on Janssen and AstraZeneca vaccines



The European Medicines Agency (EMA) found on 20 April that the overall benefit-risk ratio of the Janssen vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson remains positive. On 23 April, the EMA found that the benefit-risk ratio also remained favourable for AstraZeneca's vaccine and stressed that its effectiveness increases with age. It recommended that the second dose be continued 4 to 12 weeks after the first... [Read more](#)

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Germany :

Constitutional Court clears ratification of EU recovery plan



The German Constitutional Court rejected on 21 April the appeal against Germany's ratification of the Own Resources Decision, the legislation allowing the loan to finance the European recovery plan to be launched. The court ruled that blocking ratification would have "irreversible" consequences, but did not reject the substance of the complaint challenging the constitutionality of the recovery plan, which will be examined later. The ratification instrument was initialled by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 23 April... [Read more](#)

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The Christian Union and the Greens appoint their candidate for the chancellorship



On 20 April, North Rhine-Westphalia's Minister-President Armin Laschet was appointed as the Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) candidate for the chancellorship in the parliamentary elections on 26 September. On the previous day, the Greens chose co-president Annalena Baerbock as their candidate for the post. Finance Minister Olaf Scholz is the candidate of the Social Democratic Party... [Read more](#)

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Meeting with Emmanuel Macron



On 26 April, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The two leaders praised Franco-German solidarity during the health crisis, as well as the Covax initiative on vaccines. They announced that their two countries will jointly present their recovery plans on 27 April. They discussed the major geopolitical issues, particularly in the East. Finally, they discussed the challenges of the Conference on the Future of Europe... [Read more](#)

France :

Council of State decision on data retention rules

The French Council of State clarified on 21 April the application of the rules on the storage of connection data, following the judgment on the tracking of digital communications issued by the Court of Justice of the European Union in October 2020. It considers that the widespread storage of data is justified by the threat to national security but orders the French government to regularly reassess the threat to the territory to justify data storage and to make the use of this information by the intelligence services subject to the authorisation of an independent authority... [Read more](#)

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Italy :

Recovery plan of 222.1 billion €

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi presented his draft national recovery and resilience plan to Parliament on 26 April. He stressed that "the country's future" will be at stake in the implementation of the plan, worth a total of €248 billion. The plan foresees investments of €191.5 billion financed by the European NextGenerationEU plan, €30 billion by a complementary fund and €26 billion budgeted for specific projects. The priorities are infrastructure renovation, renewable energies, digitalisation of businesses and administrations, and closing the gap between the north and south of the country... [Read more](#)

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Czech Republic :

Prime Minister in conflict of interest, says Commission

In an audit report made public on 23 April, the Commission found that Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis continues to exercise decisive influence over the Agrofert holding company and is therefore in a situation of conflict of interest. The Commission concluded that Babis remains the de facto owner of the holding company and found irregularities in the payment of EU subsidies and grants to Agrofert. The holding company may have to pay back €11 million to the EU. A. Babis rejected the audit's conclusions... [Read more](#)

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Expulsions of Russian diplomats

On 22 April, the Czech government gave Russia until the end of May to reduce the number of diplomats in its embassy in Prague to seven. On 17 April, it had expelled 18 Russian embassy employees involved in the 2014 explosion of an ammunition depot and in retaliation, Russia expelled 20 Czech diplomats. In solidarity, Slovakia, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, as well as Romania, decided to expel eight Russian diplomats. The Czech Republic also received support from EU High Representative Josep Borrell, European Council President Charles Michel and NATO... [Read more](#)

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Switzerland :

Meeting with Ursula von der Leyen

The President of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin, met with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, on 23 April to relaunch negotiations on a framework agreement between Switzerland and the European Union. An agreement is possible if Switzerland accepts the three problematic points, namely State aid, the free movement of people and posted workers' salary levels... [Read more](#)

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Albania :

General Election Results

According to the latest provisional estimates, the Socialist Party of the outgoing Prime Minister, Edi Rama, could win the 25 April parliamentary elections in Albania despite a series of controversies surrounding its management of power. According to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), the official results should be announced on 28 April... [Read more](#)

Armenia :

Resignation of the Prime Minister

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian announced his resignation on 25 April but will continue to govern until early parliamentary elections scheduled for 20 June in an attempt to end the political crisis caused by the military defeat of Azerbaijan in autumn 2020. On 25 April, Armenia commemorated the genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire in 1915. On 24 April, for the first time ever, US President Joe Biden acknowledged the genocide on behalf of the United States. The President of the French Senate, Gérard Larcher, went to Yerevan for the commemorations... [Read more](#)



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Council of Europe :

Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly



Speaking at the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose country currently holds the chairmanship of the institution's Committee of Ministers, recalled that "the rule of law is an indispensable precondition for people's trust in the State and its institutions". European Parliament President David Sassoli called for the Union to be "more efficient, more flexible, more resilient and more democratic". PACE called on the Committee of Ministers to use "all the tools at its disposal" to secure the release of Russian opponent Alexei Navalny. It also called on Turkey to "renounce laws and practices contrary to democratic standards"... [Read more](#)

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Eurostat :

Increase in deficit and debt in the Union in 2020



On 22 April, Eurostat published figures for the public deficit and debt in the euro area and the EU in 2020. The deficit increased in the euro area from 0.6% of GDP in 2019 to 7.2% in 2020, and in the EU from 0.5% to 6.9%. Public debt in the euro area increased from 83.9% in 2019 to 98% in 2020, and in the Union from 77.5% to 90.7%. All Member States had a public deficit above 3% except Denmark, and fourteen of them had a debt above 60% of GDP... [Read more](#)

Eurobarometer :

Trust in the EU at its highest level in 10 years



49% of Europeans say they have confidence in the EU, up 6 points since the summer of 2020 and the highest level in more than 10 years, according to the Eurobarometer survey published on 23 April. The highest level of trust is in Portugal, where 78% of respondents are satisfied with the EU's policies. 43% of citizens are satisfied with the measures taken by national governments and the EU to fight the pandemic. Four out of ten European citizens consider health to be the main "problem" facing the EU, and 69% consider the current economic situation to be "bad"... [Read more](#)

Studies/Reports :

Annual report on the state of the European climate



On 22 April, the Copernicus programme published its report on the state of the European climate. The year 2020 was the warmest ever recorded in Europe and one of the three warmest years on record globally. Several temperature records were broken. Although the Covid-19 containment measures led to a slight reduction in annual emissions, CO2 concentrations continued to rise... [Read more](#)

Report on Drug Trafficking



Dans un rapport publié le 19 avril, Eurojust estime à 30 milliards € par an le montant du trafic de drogues dans l'Union. L'agence de coopération judiciaire souligne les défis engendrés par la forte augmentation de la production de drogues synthétiques. Le rapport fournit plusieurs recommandations pour accroître les enquêtes financières et la coopération judiciaire, notamment une augmentation de l'implication du Réseau judiciaire européen anti-cybercriminalité (RJE)... [Read more](#)

Culture :

"The European Collection" on television

Five public channels from France, Germany and Switzerland have joined forces to launch on 21 April the "European Collection", a joint selection of documentaries, reports and magazines broadcast online about the challenges facing Europe. The editorial package, translated into five languages (French, German, English, Spanish and Italian), is available free of charge on the digital platforms arte.tv, france.tv, ardmmediathek.de, zdf.de, and will soon be available on Play Suisse. This project is part of the Franco-German Aachen Treaty, as well as the digital media ENTR launched at the end of March... [Read more](#)



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Landscapes of Gerhard Richter in Zurich



Until 25 July, the Kunsthaus Zurich is presenting an exhibition devoted to the landscapes of the painter Gerhard Richter. 140 paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and sculptures are on show to trace the artist's creative process from 1957 to 2018... [Read more](#)

Readings of Baudelaire at the Orsay Museum



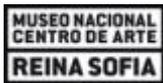
For the 200th anniversary of Charles Baudelaire and as part of the digital programme "A work, a look", the Musée d'Orsay in Paris is offering "Baudelairean voices", a new programme on its digital platforms. The museum invites figures of contemporary creation and thought to read, each week, a text of their choice... [Read more](#)

Frida Kahlo, the chaos within



The exhibition "Frida Kahlo - The Chaos Within" reopened on 26 April at the Fabbrica del Vapore in Milan. The life of the Mexican artist is traced through videos and enhanced reality, furniture, objects and clothes that belonged to her, as well as writings and reproductions of works... [Read more](#)

Digital design in Madrid



Until 16 August, the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid is showcasing the digital graphics of Charlotte Johannesson in the exhibition "Take me to another world". The artist combines textiles and digital art to represent images of hyperspace, self-portraits, mythological figures and technological references... [Read more](#)

Astor Piazzolla tribute concert



On 30 April, the Polish orchestra Sinfonia Iuventus celebrates the 100th anniversary of the birth of Argentine composer and bandoneonist Astor Piazzolla with a concert broadcast online from the Warsaw Music Schools Complex under the direction of Marek Wroniszewski... [Read more](#)

Napoleon's Bicentenary :

The Emperor, Metternich and Fate



The TV film "Napoleon - Metternich: the beginning of the end", available on the Arte website from 1 May and broadcast on the channel on 8 May, recalls the meeting in 1813 between Napoleon I and the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Clément de Metternich. Arte also offers "Napoleon, destiny and death", a documentary on 7 key moments in the life of the emperor. The YouTube channel "Prince Corsica" reviews the major stages in the life of Napoleon Bonaparte in a series of 4 episodes. In Poland, TVP offers a TV film on Napoleon and the Polish cause... [Read more](#)

Napoleon Bonaparte - the complete set



On the occasion of the bicentenary of Napoleon's death, Casterman is publishing the complete Napoleon Bonaparte, the reference comic book series by cartoonist Jean Torton, based on a script by Jacques Martin and Pascal Davoz... [Read more](#)

Napoleon Bonaparte - light thrown on the imperial destiny

Jacques Godechot, former Professor of Modern and Contemporary History and Dean, Faculty of Letters, University of Toulouse II, invites readers to explore this page in the



Encyclopaedia Britannica, tracing the epic journey taken by Napoleon towards power and glory, and finally defeat in Europe... [Read more](#)

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Podcasts and Memoires



The BBC is offering a wide range of podcasts on Napoleon, linked to other personalities such as Wellington, Stendhal and Tolstoy... [Read more](#)

Agenda :



26 April 2021
Videoconference
Meeting of Agriculture Ministers



26-29 April 2021
Brussels
Plenary Session of the European Parliament



29 April 2021
Videoconference
Meeting of Development Ministers

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