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EU integration process in CEE countries

Parliament approves Ukraine visa waiver

Ukrainian citizens will be exempted from EU short-stay visa requirements, after Parliament endorsed an informal deal with the Council. Under the new law, Ukrainians who hold a biometric passport will be able to enter the EU without a visa for 90 days in any 180-day period, for tourism, to visit relatives or friends, or for business purposes, but not to work. The exemption applies to all EU countries, except Ireland and the UK, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. "Ukraine has achieved all the benchmarks, so the visa requirement should be lifted", noted rapporteur for the proposal Mariya Gabriel (EPP, BG), adding that the visa waiver will be "another very strong message that Ukraine is a key partner for the European Union in the Eastern Partnership".

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170329IPR69065/parliament-approves-ukraine-visa-waiver>

Commission statement on the management of flows of persons at the borders between Slovenia and Croatia

President Juncker met on 29 April in the margins of the European Council the Prime Ministers of Slovenia and Croatia, Miro Cerar and Andrej Plenković, on the management of flows of persons at the borders between Slovenia and Croatia and they stated the following: *"We had constructive talks in a solution-oriented spirit. We agree that EU law reinforcing the controls at the Schengen borders and the security of our Union must be applied and implemented. In this context, we welcome the fact that Croatia will have full access to the Schengen Information System by 27 June 2017."*

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-17-1182_en.htm

Pros, advantages and obligations resulting from EU membership

April infringements package: key decisions

The key decisions taken by the Commission (including 4 letters of formal notice, 45 reasoned opinions, 11 referrals to the Court of Justice of the European Union, and 2 closures) are presented in the article and grouped by policy area. The Commission is also closing 155 cases in which the issues with the Member States concerned have been solved without the Commission needing to pursue the procedure further.

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-17-1045_en.htm

EU's long-term budget: more flexibility to help tackle crises

MEPs are pushing for a flexible long-term budget for the EU to enable it to successfully meet unforeseen challenges. This is reflected in new agreement between the Parliament and EU countries, which is paving the way for the EU to respond better to crises related to for example security, migration or natural disasters. Having a budget that is set for seven year

	<p>makes it difficult for the EU to adequately respond to unexpected crisis. This is why the Parliament insisted on a revision clause in the agreement for the current long-term budget, also known as the multiannual financial framework. Having this clause means the European Commission is able to review the budget at mid-term and propose changes as needed.</p> <p>http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170324STO68404/eu's-long-term-budget-more-flexibility-to-help-tackle-crises</p>
<p>General development of the EU</p>	<p>Actions for the sustainable development of the blue economy Commission enhances cooperation for sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean. The sea's biodiversity is under severe pressure with a recent report indicating that 50% has been lost in the last 50 years. In addition to this are recent security and safety concerns from the increase in migration from the South to the North. These, among others, are the reasons why the European Commission launched a new initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean region. The initiative will increase maritime safety and security, promote sustainable blue growth and jobs, and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity.</p> <p>https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/actions-sustainable-development-blue-economy_en</p> <p>EU Justice Scoreboard 2017: justice systems becoming more effective, but challenges remain The European Commission published the 2017 EU Justice Scoreboard which gives a comparative overview of the efficiency, quality and independence of justice systems in the EU Member States. Its aim is to assist national authorities to improve the effectiveness of their justice systems. Compared to previous editions, the 2017 Scoreboard looks into new aspects of the functioning of justice systems, for example, how easily consumers can access justice and which channels they use to submit complaints against companies. For the first time, it also shows the length of criminal court proceedings relating to money laundering offences. <i>"The 5th edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard confirms that effective justice systems are essential to build trust in a business and investment-friendly environment in the single market"</i> said Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. <i>"I encourage Member States to ensure that any justice reform respects the rule of law and judicial independence. This is key for citizens and businesses to fully enjoy their rights. An independent and well-functioning justice system is a fundamental pillar of every democracy."</i></p> <p>http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-890_en.htm</p>
<p>Introduction to EU institutions and their functioning</p>	<p>Commission welcomes European Parliament's backing for European Year of Cultural Heritage The 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage will be an opportunity to highlight the role of Europe's cultural heritage in fostering a shared sense of history and identity. The European Parliament adopted the Decision establishing 2018 as the <u>European Year of Cultural Heritage</u> by a large</p>

majority. The vote follows a political agreement by the European Parliament and the Council in February this year. Tibor Navracsics, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: "*Cultural heritage is an essential part of our European identity and at the heart of the European project - the declaration adopted by Heads of State and Government in Rome last month recognises and celebrates its importance. Cultural heritage is not only a means to understand our past, but also an asset that can help us build the Europe of the future. The Year will help bring the richness of our European cultural heritage to the fore, highlighting its many social and economic benefits. I would like to thank the Rapporteur, Mircea Diaconu, and the shadow rapporteurs; Silvia Costa leading the Parliament's negotiating team, and the Maltese Presidency of the Council for their invaluable work on this initiative. I count on the continued commitment and enthusiasm of the Parliament, Member States and cultural heritage stakeholders to make this Year a success and to guarantee its long-term impact.*"

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1111_en.htm

Decentralized management of EU funds

Investment Plan for Europe: EUR 420 million for over 2,000 Greek businesses

The European Investment Fund (EIF) has signed four agreements with Alpha Bank and Piraeus Bank in Greece which will provide EUR 420 million to over 2,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across the country. These agreements were made possible by the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). The EFSI is the central pillar of the European Commission's Investment Plan for Europe, the so-called "Juncker Plan". The Juncker Plan is already expected to mobilise over EUR 3 billion in investments in Greece and EUR 183.5 billion across Europe.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/katainen/announcements/investment-plan-europe-eur-420-million-over-2000-greek-businesses_en

Investment Plan for Europe: EUR 150 million to finance green shipping

The European Investment Bank and Dutch bank ABN Amro signed an agreement in order to support investments for greening the European shipping fleet. This framework is the first with a financial institution in the Netherlands and is supported by the "Connecting Europe Facility" and was made possible by the "EFSI" (European Fund for Strategic Investments), central pillar of the Juncker Commission's Investment Plan for Europe. The framework guarantee agreement will ensure that promoters of sustainable projects in the maritime transport sector can benefit from favourable financial terms as a result of the EIB's AAA rating.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/katainen/announcements/investment-plan-europe-eur-150-million-finance-green-shipping_en

MEPs back budget flexibility: €6bn more for jobs, growth and tackling migration

	<p>Plans to make it easier to move money around within the EU's long-run budget, to help tackle urgent challenges such as the migration crisis, strengthening security, boosting growth and creating jobs, were backed by Parliament on Wednesday. MEPs have long fought for greater flexibility within the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), which would apply for the remainder of the 2014-2020 MFF. "Parliament rightly advocated a revision of the multiannual financial framework to meet the new challenges the European Union is facing. Although our ambition for the extent of the changes was not fully met, we can be pleased with the result. We won the first-ever revision of the MFF, which will guarantee a better budgetary system for the remainder of the current period. We created more space for manoeuvre to respond to new challenges. We also ensured extra budgetary means for some EU programmes and policies: €6 bn will provide additional support for SMEs, research, Erasmus +, to create jobs for young people and to enhance the security of our citizens", said co-rapporteur Jan Olbrycht (EPP, PL).</p> <p>http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170329IPR69064/meps-back-budget-flexibility-%E2%82%AC6bn-more-for-jobs-growth-and-tackling-migration</p>
<p>Multi-level governance</p>	<p>Action Plan to help regions reap the economic benefits of nature protection</p> <p>The European Commission has adopted a new Action Plan to improve the protection of nature and biodiversity in the EU, for the benefit of its citizens and the economy. The Action Plan is made of 15 actions which should be carried out by 2019 to rapidly improve the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, which are the EU's flagship nature policies. These Directives establish the largest coordinated network of biodiversity-rich protected areas in the world (Natura 2000 network), covering more than 18% of land and 6% of sea in the EU. The Action Plan is about improving the management of these areas, connecting nature protection and socio-economic activities more broadly, and engaging with national authorities, stakeholders and young people.</p> <p>https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/action-plan-help-regions-reap-economic-benefits-nature-protection_en</p> <p>Commission reports on how the EU Cohesion Policy can help low-income and low-growth regions</p> <p>In a report published on EU regions which are lagging behind in terms of growth or wealth, the Commission identifies clear paths to support regional growth strategies, with the help of EU funds. The report assesses what supports or hinders the competitiveness of these regions and why they have not yet reached the expected levels of growth and income for the EU. More importantly, the report identifies the investment needs of the regions, namely human capital, innovation, quality of institutions, better accessibility, as well as the tools available within the framework of EU Cohesion Policy that could support them in their future. Regional Policy Commissioner Corina Crețu said: <i>"For each obstacle to development, there is a Cohesion Policy answer. Tailor-made regional development strategies, combined with preconditions for successful investment, can</i></p>

	<p><i>make these regions attractive places for residents, workers and businesses. This is what we do: we help regions identify their needs and their competitive assets and we provide them with the tools for better-policy making.</i></p> <p>http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-893_en.htm</p>
<p>Introduction to different negotiation chapters</p>	<p>MEPs close multinationals' tax loopholes</p> <p>Loopholes used by some of the world's multinationals to avoid paying tax were closed by Parliament in a vote on Thursday. MEPs amended the EU's anti-tax avoidance directive to prevent multinationals taking advantage of mismatches between EU and third countries' tax rules to reduce their tax bills. The resolution was approved by 591 votes to 36, with 12 abstentions. "These arrangements are frequently used by the largest companies with the sole purpose of reducing corporate taxation. We have seen it in both the Apple case and in the McDonald's case. It is about time these corporations paid their fair share of taxes," said rapporteur Olle Ludvigsson (S&D, SE).</p> <p>http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170424IPR72042/meps-close-multinationals%E2%80%99-tax-loopholes</p>
<p>Specific issues relating to the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European arrest warrant • Stockholm programme • Third pillar <p>Recognition of professional qualifications</p>	<p>EU approves €59 million to support peace, stability and job creation in the Horn of Africa</p> <p>The EU announced 4 new actions worth €59 million to improve stability and address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement in the Horn of Africa region. EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, said: "<i>This new package illustrates how the EU Trust Fund provides sustainable solutions to address instability and lack of economic opportunities, as they are two main root causes of forced displacement in the Horn of Africa. By promoting peace, stability and job creation, these new actions will help create alternatives for people to improve their lives to ensure that migration can become a choice for people, and not a necessity.</i>"</p> <p>http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1151_en.htm</p> <p>Protecting all children in migration: Commission outlines priority actions</p> <p>Over the past two years, a growing number of children in migration have arrived in the EU, many of them without their families. While EU and Member States' legislation provide a solid framework for protection, the recent surge in arrivals has put national systems under pressure and exposed gaps and shortcomings. This is why the Commission is today setting out actions to reinforce the protection of all migrant children at all stages of the process. It is necessary to ensure that migrant children are swiftly identified when they arrive in the EU and that they receive child-adequate treatment. Trained personnel need to be available to assist children during their status determination and children should be provided with sustainable long-term perspectives through better access to education and health care. Child protection is a central priority in the European Agenda on Migration and the Commission will continue to support Member</p>

	<p>States' efforts through training, guidance, operational support and funding. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-906_en.htm</p> <p>Ease access to labour market for asylum-seekers to boost integration, MEPs say</p> <p>Asylum seekers should be able to work in the EU no later than two months after applying for asylum, instead of the current nine months, said Civil Liberties Committee MEPs on Tuesday. But for reasons of labour market policies, and especially regarding youth unemployment levels, member states may verify whether a vacancy could be filled through preferential access by their nationals, other EU citizens or by third-country nationals lawfully residing in the country, they added.</p> <p>http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170425IPR72302/ease-access-to-labour-market-for-asylum-seekers-to-boost-integration-meps-say</p>
<p>Introduction to different sector policies (regional policy, trade policy, agricultural policy, social policy)</p>	<p>Commission presents the European Pillar of Social Rights</p> <p>The Pillar sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The Pillar is designed as a compass for a renewed process of upward convergence towards better working and living conditions in Europe. It is primarily conceived for the euro area but applicable to all EU Member States wishing to be part of it. President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, said: "<i>As Commission President, I have been seeking to put social priorities at the heart of Europe's work, where they belong. With the European Pillar of Social Rights and the first set of initiatives that accompany it, we are delivering on our promises and we are opening a new chapter. We want to write this chapter together: Member States, EU institutions, the social partners and civil society all have to take on their responsibility. I would like to see the Pillar endorsed at the highest political level before the end of this year.</i>"</p> <p>http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1007_en.htm</p> <p>Making cohesion more effective, relevant and visible to citizens: President Markkula congratulates Maltese Presidency and welcomes EU Council conclusions</p> <p>As the EU's assembly of regional and local political representatives we are pleased to see that EU ministers made clear commitments in favour of cohesion policy as an investment lifeline for many regions and cities. If implemented effectively and in synergy with other public and private funding, this investment will contribute to achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion. It will continue to spark innovation, create jobs and prosperity, support social integration and tackle regional disparities. More importantly, it directly benefits citizens' lives showing that the EU does matter. The future of Europe now needs a stronger, simpler and more effective cohesion policy. Local and regional authorities know how cohesion funds can best serve their communities so their role must be strengthened to make this cornerstone of EU policy fit for the future.</p> <p>http://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Making-cohesion-more-effective-relevant-and-visible-to-citizens.aspx</p>

Promotion of EU upcoming events and news

New technologies and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges for Social Economy and Social Enterprise

12/05/2017/ Brussels, Belgium

Today, digital technologies play an increasingly important role in our society. As the ability to connect and interact quickly and efficiently becomes essential, digital skills are ever more relevant for companies and citizens alike. The European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee will hold a joint workshop on "the impact of digitalisation and new technologies on social economy".

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-new-tech-and-digit>

Citizens' Dialogue in Stockholm with First Vice-President Frans Timmermans

11/05/2017/ Stockholm, Sweden

The Citizens' Dialogue with First Vice-President Frans Timmermans will focus on the future of Europe.

https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/citizens-dialogue-stockholm-first-vice-president-frans-timmermans_en

Erasmus Time! Living European Identity

18/05/2017/ Brussels, Belgium

The European Economic and Social Committee, in collaboration with Université Libre de Bruxelles, organize the event "Erasmus Time! Living European identity", to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Program Erasmus. The conference will focus on the story of the Program Erasmus and, in form of round tables, on the themes "Erasmus as a cultural vector" and "What future for Erasmus +?". The ULB Erasmus students will show some videos on their daily life as transnational students.

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-erasmus-time>

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