

EPFMA

Bulletin



87 · June 2024

European Parliament Former Members Association

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editorial Board would like to thank all those members who took the time to contribute to this issue of the FMA Bulletin. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the decision to include an article lies with the FMA Editorial Board and, in principle, contributions from members who are not up-to-date with the payment of the membership fee will not be included. Due to the long time lag between the call for contribution and the publication, some articles may be outdated.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

Ahead of the European elections, it is crucial for us, as former European parliamentarians, to persist in our efforts to uphold parliamentary democracy and our shared vision of a unified and capable Europe that can deliver.

We already know that the European Union will have to seek and find answers to questions that it has not been asked for 30 years. Europe will no longer focus on the common market and prosperity, nor on a new capital market and new financing concepts, nor on any kind of Green Deal, but security and defence.

A new Europe will have to show the world what it stands for:

- European interests and European values, European culture and European peace will continue to carry weight in the world and have significance for the world.
- A meaning for freedom and justice, democracy and humanity in the world and for the world.
- A meaning as orientation and as a motor for a humane future of our planet.

In our next edition of the Bulletin, we will devote our publication to the EU elections *"You get what you vote for"* and I am sure we will receive interesting reflections.

Our Association has remained active throughout this year and has engaged in many different activities and programmes. This was highlighted by our very successful visit to Belgium, which took place from 8 to 9 April. You can read five articles of our members about this interesting visit.

The June bulletin delves deep into the *"Situation of public finances on three levels - local, national, and European"*.

It includes insightful analyses of current affairs, including among others post-election reflections, the impact of the war in Ukraine on the EU, the Israel/Palestine conflict, and the pursuit of social rights in the face of market competitiveness.

Your continued enthusiasm and support for the EP to Campus programme are greatly appreciated. Many members delivered lectures and attended events focused on the EU elections, providing nuanced and pluralistic perspectives to young people both inside and outside Europe. Our association is engaged worldwide, with ongoing partnerships in Latin America. We have a programme scheduled in August at the University of Uruguay and another in Colombia that is still under discussion. Our collaborations and partnerships with the Jean Monnet House and the EUI are also a significant strength for our programme.

Additionally, we have continued to strengthen our successful relationship with the European Parliament Liaison Offices. With the support of EPLO Italy, we will organise our Liborum event on 3 July, dedicated to the publication of *"Il parlamento europeo - The European Parliament"* by Andrea Manzella. This event will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss the results and consequences of the EU elections.

You will soon receive information on the programme of our visit to Hungary, which will take place in Budapest from 23 to 25 October 2024. Save the date in your diary to ensure that you can apply to be part of the FMA delegation when registration opens.

For our Annual Events, we are honoured to announce that President Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council (2009-2014), Prime Minister of Belgium (2008-2009), and President of the Chamber of Representatives (2007-2008), will be our guest speaker at the Annual Cocktail Reception and Dinner on 3 December at the European Parliament in Brussels. The FMA's annual events will continue on 4 December with our Annual Seminar and Liborum. These special events will culminate a year of intense activities and programmes, offering newly elected and former MEPs an opportunity to meet and discuss the pressing issues of the next parliamentary term. You will soon receive more information on the upcoming FMA events for autumn 2024.

As we embark on this pivotal year, I extend an invitation to outgoing MEPs to join our esteemed community of former parliamentarians, where their expertise and dedication can continue to make a profound impact on the future of our Union. I am pleased to report that many outgoing MEPs have already shown interest and applied to join our Association. Together, let us reaffirm our commitment to advancing European unity and parliamentary democracy through the diverse range of programmes and activities offered by our Association.

Thank you to everyone for contributing to this edition of the Bulletin.

With my very best regards,

Dr. Klaus Hänsch
FMA President

Key facts

"Parliament 2024": a more modern and efficient Parliament after the elections

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0176)

The new internal rules will strengthen Parliament's working methods, its institutional role, and its capacity to act. The reforms will improve Parliament's functioning as a co-legislator, arm of the budgetary authority, and discharge authority, as well as increase its capacity to exercise democratic oversight and hold the other institutions, particularly the Commission, accountable. Improvements to plenary sessions are also included. MEPs decided to improve the way in which committees cooperate by simplifying working methods to significantly reduce conflicts of competence among them.

MEPs approve trade support measures for Ukraine with protection for EU farmers

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0304)

MEPs backed extending the suspension of import duties and quotas on Ukrainian agricultural products for another year, until 5 June 2025, to support the country amidst Russia's continuing brutal war of aggression. The Commission can take swift action and impose any measures it deems necessary should there be significant disruption to the EU market or the markets of one or more EU member states due to Ukrainian imports. As part of the agreement on these new rules, the Commission pledged to launch talks with Ukraine on permanent trade liberalisation soon, and keep the Parliament closely engaged in the process.

Right to repair: Making repair easier and more appealing to consumers

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0308)

The new rules ensure that manufacturers provide timely and cost-effective repair services and inform consumers about their rights to repair. Goods repaired under the warranty will benefit from an additional one-year extension of the legal guarantee, further incentivising consumers to choose repair instead of replacement. Manufacturers will have to provide spare parts and tools at a reasonable price.

Products made with forced labour to be banned from EU single market

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0309)

Parliament has given its final approval to a new regulation enabling the EU to prohibit the sale, import, and export of goods made using forced labour. Member state authorities and the European Commission will be able to investigate suspicious goods, supply chains, and manufacturers. If a product is deemed to have been made using forced labour, it will no longer be possible to sell it on the EU market (including online) and shipments will be intercepted at the EU's borders.

European Parliament updates trans-European transport network guidelines

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0317)

MEPs endorsed updated plans to complete major trans-European transport projects, such as cross-border roads, railways, bridges and tunnels, by the end of 2030. Under new rules, transport infrastructure projects with Russia and Belarus will be halted, reinforcing instead links with Ukraine and Moldova. MEPs convinced EU governments to take into account military needs when constructing or upgrading infrastructure that overlaps with military transport networks, to ensure the seamless transfer of troops and equipment.

Air pollution: Parliament adopts revised law to improve air quality

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0319)

Parliament adopted a provisional political agreement with EU countries on new measures to improve air quality in the EU so it is no longer harmful to human health, natural ecosystems and biodiversity. Air quality indices need to be comparable across all member states. Those affected by air pollution will be able to take legal action, and citizens may receive compensation if their health has been damaged.

Parliament adopts Platform Work Directive

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0330)

MEPs approved new rules aiming to improve the working conditions of platform workers. The new rules aim to ensure that platform workers have their employment status classified correctly and to correct bogus self-employment. They also regulate, for the first time ever in the EU, the use of algorithms in the workplace.

Parliament adopts EU-wide Disability and Parking Cards

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0339)

MEPs gave their final green light to the EU Disability Card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities. The EU-wide disability card will make sure that persons with disabilities have equal access to preferential conditions, such as reduced or zero entry fees, priority access and access to reserved parking. European Disability Card to be issued and renewed free of charge. Those temporarily moving to another EU country to study also covered by the new rules.

MEPs adopt plans to boost Europe's Net-Zero technology production

(April session - P9_TA(2024)0378)

Parliament approved the Net-Zero industry Act to bolster EU production in technologies needed for decarbonisation. Aim is to make EU internal market fit for industrial decarbonisation. The agreement provides for the creation of "Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys" initiatives, speeding up the permitting process by delegating parts of the evidence collection for environmental assessments to member states. National support schemes aiming to get households and consumers to move over to technologies such as solar panels and heat pumps more quickly will have to take into account sustainability and resilience criteria.

Other main dossiers discussed in the plenary sessions were:

23.04.24

MEPs approved a revamp of **EU fiscal rules** making them clearer, more investment friendly, better tailored to each country's situation, and more flexible.

MEPs significantly beefed up the **rules to protect a government's capability to invest**. Time to achieve objectives in national plans may be extended, and deviation from the plan would be allowed in exceptional circumstances. First national plans outlining expenditure, reforms and investments will be prepared by September 2024.

24.04.24

Parliament adopted **new measures to make packaging more sustainable** and **reduce packaging waste in the EU**.

The regulation, aims to tackle constantly growing waste, harmonise internal market rules and boost the circular economy. Certain single use plastic packaging types will be banned from 1 January 2030.

24.04.24

Parliament gave a final green light to **new rules obliging firms to mitigate their negative impact on human rights** and the environment.

The rules will apply to EU companies and parent companies with over 1000 employees and a worldwide turnover higher than 450 million euro. Firms will have to create **transition plan that complies with Paris**.

24.04.24

Parliament adopted the **first ever EU rules on combating violence against women and domestic violence**.

The directive calls for stronger laws against cyberviolence, better assistance for victims, and steps to prevent rape. The new rules prohibit female genital mutilation and forced marriage and outline particular guidelines for offenses committed online, such as the disclosure of private information and cyberflashing.

24.04.24

The European Parliament approved the creation of a **new EU body to strengthen integrity, transparency, and accountability in European decision-making**.

The agreement was reached between Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice, the European Central Bank, the European Court of Auditors, the EESC, and the European Committee of the Regions.

24.04.24

MEPs gave a green light to the **common agriculture policy (CAP)** review to ease the administrative burden for EU farmers. MEPs adopted the draft law with technical modifications proposed by the Council and endorsed by the Parliament's Committee on Agriculture on 15 April 2024. The CAP review changes the rules for three environmental conditionalities farmers must adhere to in order to receive funding.

24.04.24

MEPs reinforced EU member states cooperation in the **cross-border investigation of traffic offences** to help prevent reckless driving while abroad.

With approximately 40% of cross-border traffic offences currently going unpunished, MEPs updated the rules to get EU countries to cooperate more and help each other to find a foreign driver liable for a traffic offence. The new rules oblige national authorities to reply to requests from another EU country without delay, and no later than two months after it has gathered the necessary information.

24.04.24

MEPs consent to the **EU withdrawing from the Energy Charter Treaty**. The recommendation from the Industry, Research, Energy, and International Trade committees was adopted with 560 votes to 43, with 27 abstentions. Parliament's consent is required so that the Council can now adopt the decision by qualified majority.

The Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), established in 1994 to govern trade and investment in the energy sector, has become controversial.

25.04.24

Parliament calls on the political leadership in the EU and member states to **counter Russian interference attempts** urgently and vigorously.

Following several recent revelations of Kremlin-backed attempts to interfere with and undermine European democratic processes, MEPs adopted a resolution firmly denouncing such efforts. MEPs want EU and member state leaders to deal with Russian interference efforts, not just in the EU institutions but across the Union.

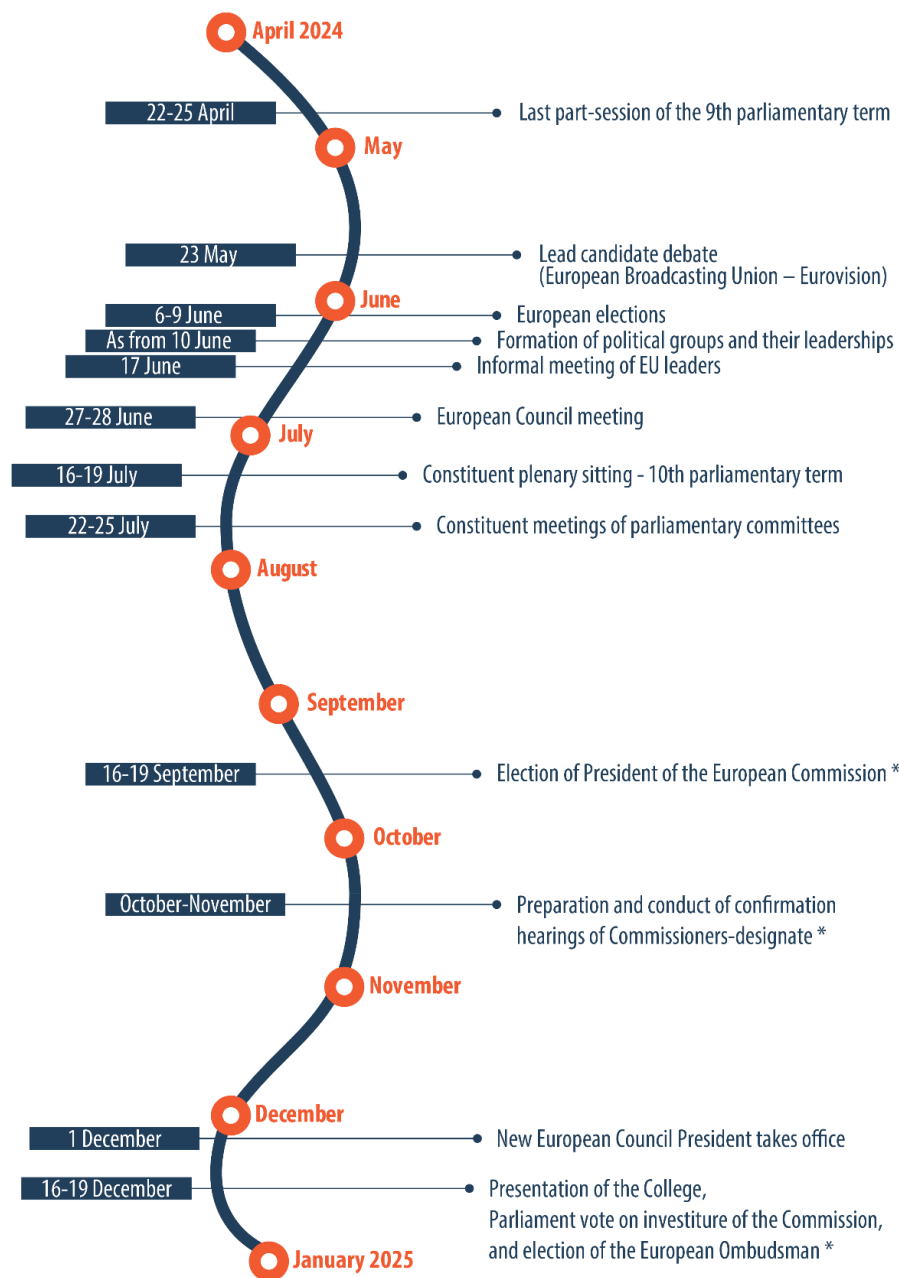
For more information, please visit:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/plenary>



Timeline to new EU institutional leadership

The June 2024 European elections are the focal point for a broader renewal of the leadership of all the European Union's main institutions. This timeline sets out the main steps up until the end of 2024, with likely timings.



* These dates concerning the installation of the new European Commission represent the scenario currently considered most likely, but a different timetable could unfold, depending on the political situation after the elections. In particular, the timings will depend on decisions of the Conference of Presidents in the new Parliament.



EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

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EN

AFTER THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

The tenth legislature of the 'directly elected' European Parliament is about to begin: while the aftermath of wars that touch the double heart of Europe is still lingering. A geographical and political heart from Kiev to Odessa; a historical heart 'from the Jordan to the sea'. At the beginning of the legislature, the European Parliament will immediately take the lead in the Union's governance mechanism: with the election (secretly and by absolute majority) of the President of the Commission, the 'executive' that will last until 2029.

Of course, the proposal for that appointment will be made by the Intergovernmental Council, 'taking into account' the results of the June elections. And in fact, the governments have already sought prior agreement on a possible candidate well in advance. But, at the end of the story, every preliminary pact - whether by agreement between governments or by convention between parties - must pass the test of that secret election, with that difficult majority. If in fact the governments' candidate does not pass parliamentary scrutiny, the Council has to "invent" another name that will suit the parliament if it is to overcome its veto.

That constitutive election also marks the moment of maximum autonomy of the European Parliament vis-à-vis the governments in the Council. Then, as in any normal form of parliamentary democracy, the Council-Commission government circuit begins. The one will be responsible for the 'impulses' and 'priorities' of European policy, the other for its implementation in the 'general interest' of the Union. Parliament does not have legislative initiative but functions of control and amendment: political powers that are in any case strategic in the



European dynamic of government. Not least because they go hand in hand with the natural parliamentary function of introducing into the integration process the opinions and sentiments prevailing in the European public space. That 'parliament beyond the states' thus becomes a subject of influence and political unification despite its limited possibilities for legal action.

It is this institutional capital that the 'extended political families' in every country of the Union have looked to, amidst a thousand tensions.

Not least because the European elections determine not only the composition of the Parliament and the decision on the Union's government, but also - reflexively - how much each national head of government 'counts' in the Council: by matching his 'numbers' in the European Parliament and his stability at home. From this point of view, there is an intimate link between European and national parliamentary democracy.

Moreover, the last legislature demonstrated - with its creative handling of multiple 'crises': financial, pandemic, war - the

inseparability between European policies and the everyday life of the 27 countries. In the final days of the 9th legislature, the Parliament also changed its Rules of Procedure in some strategic points. The legislative procedure now has opportunities for simplification: both because the procedure in joint committees has been facilitated and because special temporary committees can be used for projects that touch on several topics. Again: with the constitutional resolution of 22 November 2023, the 'old' Parliament has left the new one a wealth of ideas and projects that cannot be ignored if the pace of integration and enlargement is to be resumed and sustained.

Governments and parliamentary groups therefore have the field ready to play a decisive game and to tackle the 'hard stones' of European integration - with the strategic economic instruments, with enhanced cooperation - of which the Draghi and Letta reports speak: to go beyond the 'world of yesterday'.

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THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE



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The founding pact of the European Union – the Treaty of Lisbon – proclaims that ‘The Union’s aim is to promote peace’. This is not a statement of principle that can be bargained over; it is a fundamental requirement without which the Union stands no chance of surviving.

Nine months ago, the FMA Bulletin published an article of mine under the same heading as this one today. In it, I expressed concern over the ambiguity that was driving the Commission and the European Council to mingle humanitarian aid to Ukraine with involvement in the war against Russia. The first pursuit was legitimate; the second was in conflict with the Union’s mission. Nothing illustrated this better than the Commission’s shrewd financing of the war by drawing on its ‘European Peace Facility’ resources. I felt that Ursula von der Leyen and her colleagues were straying from their goal. They had received no constitutional mandate for their actions.

At the time, my objections may have seemed trivial. The success of the Ukrainian troops gave the impression that the end of the war was nigh.

The breach of the Treaty of Lisbon would be concealed under a resounding victory. Time has shown that this was an illusion: the war has not ended. The Commission and the European Council were forced to admit that their measures were insufficient to push Putin back. They deemed it necessary to take the Union’s involvement in the war a step further. Firstly, they increased its military support to Kyiv; secondly, they made a commitment to bring Ukraine into the EU. The ambiguity that I expressed concern over in spring last year has snowballed.

Never in the past have any of the 28 accessions to the EU caused such problems. Each time, the peoples concerned were at peace among themselves and with their neighbours. Each became a member without receiving any military aid. Each country contributed from the outset to the EU’s mission for peace. This time, the outcome of a war will be the deciding factor in the fate of Ukraine’s candidacy. While the fighting continues, there is no chance of the country joining the EU – and yet the Union, in the throes of the war, will nonetheless be forced to support the Ukrainian army ‘for as long as it takes’.

When the fighting ends, accession may become feasible. But no one can predict today over what area of its original territory Kyiv’s current government will maintain control. The Union is veering away from its mission to take a risky and expensive gamble. If it does not pay off, how will the Commission remain credible when it will have infringed – in vain – a treaty of which it is guardian?

I believe the Union’s involvement in a war is likely to undermine the European project to the extent of endangering it. It remains to be seen whether the 27 peoples brought together within the Union will follow their leaders down this new and hazardous path.

“I believe the Union’s involvement in a war is likely to undermine the European project to the extent of endangering it. It remains to be seen whether the 27 peoples brought together within the Union will follow their leaders down this new and hazardous path.”

The polling for the forthcoming European Parliament elections is already showing that Eurosceptic and nationalist parties are on the rise. This does not bode well.

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SOCIAL RIGHTS FOR MARKET COMPETITIVENESS

"The European project is about external competitiveness and the internal solidarity you need for that! The one is premised on the other. Solidarity is built on that external competitiveness. However, external competitiveness requires internal solidarity."

- Jacques Delors

On Tuesday 16 April 2024 at La Hulpe the European Commission, the European Parliament, social partners and member states signed a Joint Declaration on the future of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Two days later Enrico Letta presented his report on the Single market and European competitiveness.

The confluence of the two events was yet another confirmation that social rights and competitiveness go hand-in-hand. Given the redesign of the EU's economic governance, the start of a new legislature in Brussels in 2024, the upcoming EPSR action plan review of 2025 and in the context of war in Ukraine, the "cost-of-living" crisis, the green and digital transitions, and the splintering of the political landscape, the EPSR and its role as a compass and counter-crisis narrative has never been more important.

The European Pillar of Social Rights took the form of an Interinstitutional Declaration that was signed in Gothenburg in November 2017 by the heads of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council. It contained twenty analytical paragraphs and twenty specific principles/rights regarding equal access to the labor market, fair working conditions and social protection.

As an MEP at the time I had the privilege of taking part in the drafting and the negotiations for finalizing the text of the EPSR. It was an exercise that revealed the differing approaches and understanding regarding the content and standing of the Pillar. One view maintained that it should contain a greater degree of commitments at the Union level, commensurate with the enforceable rules of the macroeconomic framework and the single market provisions. The opposing view held that social policies were in principle the prerogative of national governments.

The final outcome therefore reflected these two approaches.

The Pillar was recognized as an important update of existing EU social norms and commitments and a roadmap for further enhancement of the social dimension of the Union. Over the years this role was developed by the adoption of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Pillar and the introduction of the Social Scoreboard to the European Semester process.

Yet the feeling persists that the social provisions remain subsumed by the imperatives on macroeconomic and fiscal governance. This sense was reinforced in the course of the preparation and adoption of the La Hulpe Declaration. Two member states, Sweden and Austria, refrained from joining, so did the European business associations.

"Yet the feeling persists that the social provisions remain subsumed by the imperatives on macroeconomic and fiscal governance."

Clearly these differences of policy will be playing out in the newly elected Parliament. Yet the Declaration should provide a new and vitally needed impetus for the development of a resilient and globally competitive Social Union by promoting a consistent social action plan for the next 2024-2029 cycle and a strong social reference for the European Council Strategic Agenda 2024-2029.

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Signing ceremony of the Declaration of La Hulpe 15-16 April 2024 © Belgian presidency

IS THERE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION FOR ISRAEL/PALESTINE?

In my time as MEP (1994-2004), I was a member of the EP delegation to Israel/Palestine. I was also a member of the Conservative Friends of Israel, the Parliamentary Association of Euro-Arab Co-operation and I helped form a group Friends of Muslims in Europe.

With those groups I travelled quite extensively through the Arab World and to Israel. I often reflected that our visits were somewhat easier being part of an EU Group than as a "Brit" where one inevitably is associated with a good deal of what might be termed colonial baggage. These were days prior to the Arab Spring and sadly we have all seen how that period of bright hope fizzled out.

I recall visits to Yasser Arafat in Palestine, where I was ready to shake his hand but not quite so ready to be kissed. We visited President Assad in Damascus where he came over as a reasonable man surrounded by some tough characters. I treasure a copy of the Quran presented to me on a visit to Saudi Arabia by the President of their Parliamentary Council. I was momentarily worried about EP rules on accepting gifts when the Saudi said he was giving us the most precious gift possible.

One year our EP delegation visited Jenin in the north of the West Bank where there had been a terrorist atrocity followed by a reprisal by the IDF. As we passed the Israeli army checkpoint to witness the destruction, a mini version of what has been inflicted on Gaza today, a young Israeli serviceman, knowing what we would see, said quietly "We are good people". Down in the town the local people were trying to put life back together. A young Palestinian stallholder selling fruit, same age as the Israeli soldier said, "Please remember us!"

I have forgotten neither. The first time I heard the saying "From the River to the Sea" was in Jerusalem when an Israeli Labour politician explained that was the ambition of many Israelis but also for a state that would be Jewish and democratic. He wisely said, "We cannot have all three."

Israel is a democracy in a region where that is not the norm. I am second to none in condemning the atrocity by Hamas on October 7th last year and can understand the horror felt by that evil act not just in Israel but around the democratic world.

It is impossible to witness what is happening in Israel/ Palestine today without feeling the utmost sympathy for the Jewish families affected by the awful atrocities of October 7 especially the innocent youngsters enjoying a weekend of music and fun. Likewise, it is impossible to see the TV pictures of the awful destruction being impacted on Gaza without having great sympathy for the families and especially the young children witnessing terror and destruction. Will those young children grow up to be the freedom fighters of tomorrow?

Is that what Hamas planned? Is the Israeli Government playing straight into the plot Hamas set for them.

What is the solution? It must be one acceptable to Israelis and Palestinians. Back in the early 2000's a two state solution seemed possible.

"What is the solution? It must be one acceptable to Israelis and Palestinians. Back in the early 2000's a two state solution seemed possible."

However difficult, I still consider it possible given there are good people on both sides. As that young Israeli whispered to our EP delegation, "We are good people" and that young Palestinian begged - "Please remember us".

Roy Perry

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THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A COMMITMENT TO PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS

The EEC set out to remove the barriers that divided Europe in order to strengthen 'the defence of peace and freedom'. Later on, as the European Union, it set itself the objective of promoting peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. As regards its foreign and security policy, it set itself objectives which included strengthening the security of the Union in all ways, preserving peace, and strengthening international security, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders (Article 11 TEU).

Therefore, in view of those mandates and in the light of the ongoing threats of war at our own borders, in the face of the proliferation of increasingly cruel and unpunished armed conflicts at international level, our primary obligation is to succeed wholly in fulfilling these objectives as fundamental pillars of our well-being. We must also be vigilant and ensure that the EU fulfils them properly, that our commitments to peace are not counteracted, cancelled, by the adoption of other conflicting or incompatible measures and regulations. And, if it comes to it, we must ensure that these commitments are not postponed or abandoned in favour of attractive and vague 'siren song' policies or promises for the future.

There is an urgent need to stop this escalation of war in all respects – above all, due to the breaches of human rights involved, but also because war runs counter to all of our environmental protection policy. In addition to being propagators of pain, wars constitute absolute environmental disasters and brutal attacks on nature.



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"There is an urgent need to stop this escalation of war in all respects – above all, due to the breaches of human rights involved, but also because war runs counter to all of our environmental protection policy."

This has been confirmed by scientists, who have reported that Syria has lost 20 % of its forests in 10 years as a result of the war: artillery explosions cause fires that are difficult to put out without resources, etc. (according to a study by Angham Daiyoub published in the scientific journal *Land*, 'War and Deforestation: Using Remote Sensing and Machine Learning to Identify the War-Induced Deforestation in Syria 2010-2019').

We should not, therefore, ignore the serious environmental scourges caused by armaments, now that policies to combat climate change are the biggest challenge facing the

European Union. Data from 2023 show that temperatures in the Arctic were the sixth warmest on record and that the disruption caused by climate change blighted the lives of millions in Europe, with widespread floods and severe heatwaves.

The parliamentary majority in Strasbourg and Brussels has understood this problem very well and reacted accordingly, adopting, at the end of this term, the Nature Restoration Law, which provides for the protection and restoration of biodiversity – a pillar of the European Green Deal – and the Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA), a European law boosting strategic clean industries.

We, for our part, should continue on this path, in the knowledge that there is a growing number of broadly diverse citizens, young and old, in favour of environmental protection and effective measures against climate change – which, at the same time, serve as practical expressions of our European commitment to peace and sustainable progress.

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FMA ACTIVITIES



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FMA COLLABORATIONS

LYCÉE FRANCO-ALLEMAND DE BUC EUROMUN PROJECT IN COLLABORATION WITH THE JEAN MONNET HOUSE

I was thrilled to be one of four former members invited to participate in a new civic education initiative organised in collaboration with the Jean Monnet House. The Lycée Franco-Allemand de Buc EuroMUN project was designed to introduce students to consensus building processes in the field of human rights and democracy using role play. Students imagined they were meeting as UN delegates in a variety of committees with invited experts, FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi, Coordinator of the EP to Campus programme Michael Hindley, Member of the Board also responsible for the EP to Campus Programme Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl, and myself providing background information and case studies.

I spoke on the topic of Human Rights and Business. As March is designated BCorp Month I began my intervention with the good news that approximately 8000 businesses globally are now fully accredited BCorp organisations, which means they pass stringent tests regarding their social and environmental impact. The students were pleased to hear that a French dairy company was one of the few large corporations to undertake the bench-marking journey, although there was disappointment that so few multi-nationals are listed on the BCorp website. We discussed the rights promoted by the ILO and the UN Guiding Principles which are laudable but sadly not followed universally.

I explained how the European Parliament's Human Rights Committee worked and how human rights urgencies are brought to the plenary sessions. I recalled how I could make a one minute speech on a Thursday morning in Strasbourg and know that a life could be saved, an execution stopped, a prisoner of conscience released, and so on.

I offered the specific case of forced labour of Uyghurs in the Xianjiang area of China where so-called 're-education camps' continue to subject the Muslim minority to state propaganda and abhorrent practices such as forced sterilisation whilst they are compelled to work in dehumanising conditions in factories making components for American tech companies and global fashion brands. The students then proposed a resolution condemning the situation, discussing amendments and making recommendations. They lamented the fact that some countries (including China) have the power of veto and we discussed the need for a radical overhaul of some UN processes, especially in the light of recent events.

We discussed the important role of whistleblowers and the students subsequently dedicated a whole section of their resolution to strengthening laws protecting whistleblowers, including the novel idea of an accessible platform (eg. TV channel) which could provide greater visibility for these unsung heroes who

help to expose corruption, often to the detriment of their wellbeing and career prospects.

The students clearly understood the power of the market urging the use of fines and import taxes as a disincentive. We discussed the 'follow the money' principle and the importance of binding human rights in trade agreements, also the use of sanctions and anti-corruption measures. It was heartening to see young people value the role of organisations such as Transparency International, and call for greater funding to support independent watch dogs.

I was hugely impressed by the organisation of the event, which saw dozens of high school students from many different countries come together over a weekend to engage in highly complex issues. Talking to teachers provided valuable feedback about this new FMA venture which demonstrated that when experienced law-makers, dedicated educators and motivated young people come together to explore how to improve society there is hope on the horizon.

Let me conclude this report by quoting Prof. Siobhan Rostaing who has coordinated this project in cooperation with the FMA and the Jean Monnet House: "A few days after the conference, a delegation of the MUN club students came to see me about setting the date for the conference next year! Their enthusiasm is largely due to the unique experience that they had thanks to the wealth of knowledge and insight that you all brought to the conference. Thank you again for contributing to making the LFAEuroMUN attendees more thoughtful, better informed and engaged European and global citizens."

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Monica Baldi, Michael Hindley and Julie Ward at the EuroMUN project © Lycée Franco-Allemand de Buc

COOPERATION WITH THE EUI/HAEU

STATE OF THE UNION 2024

The fourteenth 'The State of the Union' conference took place in Florence from 23 to 25 May 2024 at the Badia Fiesolana, headquarters of the European University Institute, and in the prestigious Salone dei Cinquecento in Palazzo Vecchio. The FMA consciously participated not only with myself but also with President Emeritus Enrique Barón Crespo and Evelin Lichtenberger.

The opening, entrusted to the new President of the EUI, Patrizia Nanz, was followed by a special conversation between Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Republic of Portugal, and Katerina Sakellaropoulou, President of the Republic of Greece. The Portuguese President emphasised that, regardless of the election results in June, it is necessary to maintain the unity of Europe and good transatlantic relations, to support the victory of Ukraine and a new security strategy to protect all citizens. He went on to mention that after the pandemic, many factors affected resilience and coping capacity, such as inflation that requires the recovery of our economy in a new financial framework, and the complex international environment that requires a proper enlargement process. Regarding enlargement, the Greek President argued that this is a unique opportunity to be able to review EU policies and decide on priorities by creating a better

balance of powers based on respect for the law. Therefore, the rule of law and independent justice are the prerequisites required of the accession countries, which should not suffer from the long and bureaucratic entry procedure. Many shared President de Sousa's assessment that 'EU institutions are outdated in the face of new economic, social, scientific and technological realities'.

This year, the conference addressed key topics such as democracy, the rule of law, future EU enlargements, digital and green transition.

All topics that will play an important role in the upcoming European elections. Sustainability took centre stage, with debates on green energy transitions, regional cohesion and climate change. Discussions on digital transformation covered competitiveness, digital infrastructure, AI and blockchain regulation. Particularly popular was the debate on countering foreign interference and conflict resolution in Ukraine and the Middle East. And, as pointed out by European Commission Vice-President responsible for policies on values and transparency, Vera Jourova, "The upcoming vote will be a 'stress test' of what the EU has put in place to counter foreign interference in the electoral process".

"This year, the conference addressed key topics such as democracy, the rule of law, future EU enlargements, digital and green transition. All topics that will play an important role in the upcoming European elections."

Moreover, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, Josep Borrell, urged Europe to 'be more assertive' and 'learn to use the language of power'. He called for unity and the use of new decision-making approaches that are only possible if there is political will and a shared understanding of the world. Therefore, the EU must change, especially after reacting quickly and in solidarity to the pandemic and the war, but it is imperative to shake up the system that works too slowly. Borrell went on to reiterate that we need a stronger and united Europe, where defence and security are paramount and NATO can play an effective role in European defence, without member states continuing to delegate security to the US. Furthermore, he stated that the conflict in the Middle East can only be resolved with a political and not a military solution.

In essence, the conference, which was interrupted several times by pro-Palestinian student protests, called for 'the EU to be more competitive'.

Monica Baldi
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From left to right: former EP and FMA President Enrique Barón Crespo, FMA Member Evelin Lichtenberger, FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi and HAEU Director Dieter Schlenker

LESSON TO STUDENTS OF THE AGRICULTURAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE OF FLORENCE

HAEU HOSTS THE AGRICULTURAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE FLORENCE, ITALY | 23 APRIL 2024 | ON CAMPUS



Anneli Jäätteenmäki during her lecture on 23 April 2024 to fifth year students from the Istituto Tecnico Agrario © Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU)

The Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU) offers tailored educational programmes designed for students. These programmes aim to introduce to students important topics related to the history of European integration by using didactical materials of the original holdings preserved in the archives.

In April, I had the pleasure to give a lecture to the fifth Year students on the campus in Florence. The main topic of the academic year is general overview of European citizenship. Searching and identifying European citizenship in the documents of the HAEU. From building post-war peace to the construction of today's Europe.

Leslie Hernández, the coordinator of the educational programme, had asked all the students to prepare and take some personal family objects with them. Thus, the students could express individual and personal family histories and their connections to European history. This was an excellent method and we got lively discussions. These objects were historical documents from their grandparents: stamps, a picture of the family trunk, different kinds of

clocks, coins, a poster of cartoons of the Euro. The stamps were dedicated to the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Schuman declaration, trunk was from Tripoli, Libya, which at that time was one of the Italian colonies, one alarm clock from relatives from America. I asked the students what was the first word/topic they link with the European Union. My answer was common money. They were astonished. I understood that for them common money has always been. However, for us older folk, this is a real achievement, and I could share its history with them. We discussed also the past enlargements and surely the Russian invasion to Ukraine. I think that the invasion was much bigger issue for me, being from Finland than for the students. For them it is a remote issue. For me Russia is the neighbouring country.

Musical interlude

I was invited to choose a musical interlude to listen to in the class. The aim of this activity was to give place of a different discussion and to give the possibility to the students to formulate a question to the guest.

I chose Abbas Waterloo. It won the European Song test at Brighton the 6th of April 1974. 50 years ago. I remember that day; I was young and watched TV with Swedish students. We were so enthusiastic. I chose this song because of the words. For me the words are a tribute to the European cooperation. "Knowing my fate is to be with you". In addition, the students listened and understood.

The students were very active. Each of them had prepared a written story of their family objects. They learned that their own objects are part of the European history. That is important. I am sure they got interested in our common history.

"The students were very active. Each of them had prepared a written story of their family objects. They learned that their own objects are part of the European history."

After the lecture, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit The HAEU. Director Dieter Schlenker and senior archivist Ruth Meyer took me into the archives, where I had the opportunity to examine some historical and archival documents related to Finland's accession to the EU and to the role of women in its integration. Ruth Meyer presented me Simone Veils excellent speeches in the European Parliament. Simone Veil was the first female President of the European Parliament, Holocaust survivor and women's rights figure. A great woman.

"A Life. A Memoir" by Simone Veil is worth reading.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki
ALDE, Finland (2004-2019)

VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

BELGIUM: FEDERAL PARLIAMENT IN FEDERAL BELGIUM – AN ABSTRACT

The Belgian institutional architecture is a complex labyrinth for some, a mystery for others, and legal cutting-edge technology for lawyers. What started in 1831 as a new country that was organized as a unitary, decentralized and monolingual state, Article 1 of the Belgian Constitution nowadays reads that “Belgium is a federal State composed of Communities and Regions.” Next to the Federal policy level, Belgium comprises (a) four linguistic regions: the Dutch-speaking region, the French-speaking region, the bilingual region of Brussels-Capital and the German-speaking region, (b) three Communities: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community, and (c) three Regions: the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Region. The Communities mentioned under (b) and Regions mentioned under (c) all have their own government and parliament; the situation is even more challenging in Brussels, but will not be discussed in this abstract.

This situation is the result of the extension of the right to vote and an ensuing constitutional evolution through so-called State Reforms that transformed Belgium from a unitary state into a federal or multilayered state. Language is a key element to understand these evolutions, as Belgium’s territory is cut by the historical and pan-European linguistic frontier between the Germanic and Latin languages.

The Federal, Community and Regional policy levels are exclusively responsible for specific policy items. Communities and Regions are moreover only responsible for those policy items that have been explicitly assigned to them, the Federal policy level being responsible for all residual matters. Whatever policy level is responsible intra Belgium, also holds the international treaty making



Presentation by Legal Director of the House of Representatives Pieter Dirck G. Caboor about the Belgian Institutional System during the FMA Visit to Belgium on 9 April 2024.

power for those topics. Summarized and simplified, it can be said that Communities are responsible for person-linked matters (e.g. education) and Regions for territory-linked matters (e.g. agriculture). The Federal policy level is responsible, among many other things, for social security, the court system, monetary policy, police and national defense forces. The Federal, Community and Regional policy levels all hold legislative and executive powers within the scope of their responsibilities.

“Whatever policy level is responsible intra Belgium, also holds the international treaty making power for those topics.”

Within this institutional framework, the original national bicameral parliament – nowadays the federal parliament – still exists. It comprises the 60 Member Senate and the 150 Member House of Representatives. Whereas both assemblies had identical powers in 1831, the House is now the policy making chamber on the Federal policy level. It is directly elected, has full constitutional review power and full legislative power on federal matters, controls the federal

government, votes the annual federal budget, holds the right of inquiry, etc. The responsibilities of the Senate, however, are gradually reduced over the last thirty years. It has limited legislative power, does not control the federal government nor votes the federal budget, has no right of inquiry, etc.

The Senate does have constitutional review authority, together with the House, and is considered as a meeting place of Community and Regional Members of Parliament. Therefore, it is composed of sixty Senators, among whom fifty Senators who have been appointed by their Community of Regional parliament of origin; they serve a double mandate. There are no longer direct elections for the Senate.

Books have been and will be written on the Belgian institutional architecture. This abstract is therefore both a summary and a simplification.

Pieter Dirck G. Caboor
*Legal Director,
House of Representatives*

[The author writes in his own name and his opinions do not commit the Belgian House of Representatives.]

REPORT ON THE FMA VISIT TO BELGIUM AND THE ANNUAL EVENTS

From 6 to 9 June 2024, Europeans will elect the 720 MEPs that will represent them at Parliament in Strasbourg for the next five years. These elections are set to be among the most important for two decades, given the numerous crises that Europe has had to face, and is still facing.

Rocked by the United Kingdom's decision to leave, the European Union had to deal with a pandemic that affected not only public health, but also the economy and society as a whole, turning everyone's lives upside down. Then Russia's invasion of Ukraine – a sovereign state – first shocked and then roused Europeans, who, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, had taken peace in Europe to be a done deal, regarding international trade as the founding principle of that peace.

The newly elected MEPs will have to build a new Europe, for the challenges that await them are immense: the war in Ukraine, a hybrid conflict involving all-out cyberattacks, and as a result of which the EU has had to step up its efforts in security and defence; the green transition to combat climate change and ensure energy sovereignty; the digital transition and the challenges posed by AI; the prospect of further enlargements in the next 20 or 30 years; the challenges associated with migration, with Africa facing great instability and a growing population; the need to plan for health and food sovereignty through an active reindustrialisation policy, and so on. It's a daunting list – all the more so given Europe's dwindling population numbers.

The EU has always been able to respond to crises, however. Who would have thought just a few years ago that the EU would borrow huge sums to support its economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic? Who would have thought that the 27 Member States would agree to launch a rearmament plan (including munitions production) to boost its capacity and support Ukraine against the Russian invaders?



Annual Memorial Service 2024 © European Union 2024 - Source : EP

The people of Europe must once again place their trust in the European institutions, and do so by electing MEPs who are willing to step things up a gear, and who will ensure that the EU adapts to face the challenges of a changing world, all while defending its values – in a nutshell, building a stronger, more sovereign Europe that is also closer to its citizens.

After the elections in June, some MEPs will discover the European Parliament for the first time and others will leave it... I would encourage the latter to join the Former Members' Association (FMA). The FMA is very important to former Members; it ensures that the European flame that unites us continues to burn brightly, and forges links with those who are further away and no longer go to Brussels. I extend my thanks to everyone working at the FMA – they create a true sense of family: 'the European family'.

The most recent General Assembly, which took place from 8 to 10 April, was particularly interesting, combining formal duties with an organised visit to Brussels during Belgium's time at the helm of the rotating presidency of the EU. On that occasion, we had the opportunity to discuss the priorities of the Belgian Presidency with two former MEPs from Belgium: Manu Desutter and Mathieu Grosch.

On 9 April, during a visit to the Federal Parliament, we had discussions with Ambassador Willem Van de Voorde, Belgium's Permanent Representative to the EU, Pieter Caboor, Director of the Legal Department, and Senator Gaëtan Van Goidsenhoven. Once again, our discussions focused on the risks the EU is facing in a dangerous world; a world weakened by the rise of nationalism and shaken by populist movements.

Lastly, I would add that the commemorative service that the FMA organises to pay tribute to MEPs who have passed away in the past year is particularly moving, bringing serving and former MEPs and family members together. It is a beautiful ceremony: for some it is imbued with sorrow; others feel sadness mixed with the joy of seeing one another again. It really encapsulates the spirit of the 'European family' to which I alluded previously. I should like to thank everyone, including President Klaus Hänsch and his bureau, who were re-elected during the General Assembly. Thanks also to Elisabetta Fonck and her team, who do so much to support the FMA and keep the European flame burning brightly in all of us.

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VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

A LANDMARK SINGLE MARKET REPORT FROM LETTA

Rectifying a long history of unfulfilled promise

I was privileged to be a participant in the former Members delegation that held discussions with the Belgian Presidency team in March 2024. A regular topic was the health of the Single Market, with great concern that its full potential was not being delivered. At the core of those frustrations was the weak enforcement - or even disregard - of the rules by Member States. There was much interest in the eagerly awaited report on its future evolution, commissioned by The Council from former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, and the hope that it would not hold back from addressing the problems.

The most sweeping critique yet

The Letta report was published shortly after our visit. Former Members will not be disappointed. It is a sweeping 146-page scrutiny, shedding light into every corner of Single Market policy. It makes a host of policy recommendations to boost the power of the Single Market as the engine of EU prosperity and global influence. It does not hold back from criticism, with the research to back up its findings.

Paradoxically, the scale and ambition of the report reduces its immediate impact. There is no "Executive Summary" or list of its key recommendations. Letta gets full marks for effort. But a stronger action plan must follow, a task that would be a great test for the incoming Parliament.

Getting the basics right

In this short article, it will be impossible to summarise the full report. The report sets out proposals that will take years to achieve and be politically challenging. But my priority would be to get the basics right. The core rules for the free movement of people, goods services and capital need to be constantly monitored and reinforced. There is clear evidence that, over the last five years, this has not been a priority.

The most disturbing example lies in services, which account for over 70% of EU GDP. As Letta says, the Services Directive is a "pivotal" initiative. The report notes that an astonishing 60% of the barriers identified in 2002 still exist today and that progress in dismantling these has slowed "to a worrying degree." Targeting problem sectors should be enacted quickly.

The rules for goods should be consistently applied and enforced. There should be no resiling from maximum harmonisation, and consumers must have undeterred access to purchase goods from any EU country.

Effective Public Procurement is critical to achieving the EU's strategic goals. Measures to enhance competition, encourage more cross border contracting and boost innovation can be quickly introduced. Measures encouraging SMEs to take advantage of the Single Market are vital for a dynamic and innovative economy. Getting the basics right will underpin the ambitions for the Single Market "to go fast and go far". They will also feed into the report's detailed proposals to boost performance in finance, energy, transport, health, and electronic communications.

Better Law Making

The report has the courage to tackle issues with the rule making process and ensuring that Single Market rules are more coherent and effective, backed by a simpler and more transparent Impact Assessments. It also notes that dominance of First Reading agreements has led to "the creation of rules that reflect the balance of power rather than sound policy-making grounded in evidence". Working on many Second Reading agreements in my first term has convinced me that, by returning to this process, Parliament can achieve better rules in a shorter time.



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THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY



The FMA Delegation with H.E. Ambassador Willem Van de Voorde on 9 April 2024.

Our FMA group's visit to Belgium, because of the EU Presidency, was a special experience for me because it was a visit to my own country.

What is Belgium doing with this presidency? We were given a detailed explanation on this, which can also be read on website the www.belgium24.eu. The visit started with a kick-off dinner on Monday 8 April, in the presence of Mr Manu Desutter from Knokke, president of the association of former members of the Belgian parliament Pro Lege. Also present was Mathieu Grosch from Eupen, former MEP and long-time representative of the German-speaking community in Belgium. This small community is now called Ost-Belgien, and is the best represented population group in the EP. This immediately shows that Belgium is a complicated country. This piece of Belgium was added to the country after World War I.

Then, on 9 April, there was the official visit to the Belgian federal parliament. We were welcomed with coffee in the meeting room across from the parliament building, the Palace of the Nation. Interpreters were present for English, French, German and Dutch. We were first given a comprehensive and very knowledgeable explanation of the political situation of the Belgian European Presidency, during the first six months of 2024.

Ambassador Willem Van de Voorde is a very skilled diplomat and brought us the state of affairs of many dossiers and measures discussed at the highest

level in order to get member states to cooperate and reach agreements in a certain direction. He chaired Coreper II during the Belgian Presidency.

"Ambassador Willem Van de Voorde is a very skilled diplomat and brought us the state of affairs of many dossiers and measures discussed at the highest level in order to get member states to cooperate and reach agreements in a certain direction."

Then Pieter Caboor tried to explain the country of Belgium to the former MEPs present. He is director of the Legislation Department of the Chamber of Representatives. Belgium is perhaps the most difficult country to govern in the world and it is becoming increasingly difficult to form a federal government. The question is even whether Belgium as a country will still exist as we know it today in 2030. That would mark the country's 200th anniversary. A country created in 1830 by a revolution in Brussels, when the Southern provinces broke away from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Some still lament that split of the potentially powerful country. The Southern Netherlands chose the name Belgium, which

was actually the Latin name of the Netherlands. The country chose French as its official language in 1830 to distance itself from The Hague and because the elite spoke French then. It was not until 1932 that Dutch was officially admitted as an administrative language. It was discovered through universal suffrage that the majority in the country spoke Dutch.

After six state reforms, the country changed from a national state to a federal state with three cultural communities (Dutch, French, German) and three regions: Flanders in the north, Wallonia in the south and Brussels in the centre of the country. Each with a government and parliament. Above that is the federal parliament and government. But in many powers there is no hierarchy of decisions, so Belgium as a state cannot take a stand and has to abstain at European councils of ministers. A real political border thus emerged right across Belgium when the language border was established in 1962. There is a different political landscape in North and South, with different parties.

There are currently seven parties in the federal government to get a majority in parliament. It looks like it will be even more difficult because polls indicate that Flanders is moving more to the (extreme) right and Wallonia more to the (extreme) left. There is no national press, there are separate worlds in the media.

There followed another panel discussion and a question and answer round. We could then stretch our legs for a tour across the street in the Senate and Chamber, in two groups, with an English-speaking and French-speaking guide. Finally, a light lunch in the restaurant.

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VISIT UNDER THE EU PRESIDENCY

RULE OF LAW AND EU ENLARGEMENT



Chamber of Representatives



Belgian Federal Parliament



Belgian Senate

In our exchange with H.E. Ambassador Willem van de Voorde, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the European Union and in his capacity as EU Presidency we discussed the role of the rule of law for the European enlargement process. The respect of the rule of law is one of the core Copenhagen criteria for membership in the European Union. There was a general concern, that this fundamental value is threatened and as well violated by existing Member States.

The European Union would lose its identity and 'soul' if such violations are tolerated and not immediately stopped.

The European Union has developed in recent times a set of instruments to get a Member State back to the right path, from a soft dialogue on a respective rule of law issue to financial sanctions in case of continued bad practice.

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union made clear that there cannot be a discount for candidate countries on the rule of law principle. Various European Union programmes have been put in place to analyse deficits, monitor progress and help with the support of law experts. The independence of the judiciary from political and party interests must be guaranteed.

The judicial system should be sufficiently equipped and financed to avoid misbehaviour and corruption.

Members of the European Parliament and Belgium Presidency underlined the necessity to have a solid and stable judicial situation in a candidate country before the final decision about Membership.

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All pictures of the FMA Visit to Belgium can be found on the FMA Flickr Account:
bit.ly/FMAVisitBelgium



The FMA Delegation and Staff Members at the FMA Visit to Belgium Kick-Off Dinner on Monday 8 April 2024 with speakers Manu Desutter, Pro Lege President and Mathieu Grosch, Belgian former MEP and FMA Member

FORMER MEMBERS' NETWORK

FP-AP GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN PARIS

On 23 February 2024, the preparatory Council meeting and the General Assembly of the European Association of former Parliamentarians of the member states of the Council of Europe (FP-AP), an organisation of which our association is a member, was held, as is mandatory. It is an annual meeting that takes place in Paris at the Residence of the National Assembly.

On the occasion of these meetings, our French colleagues organised a very interesting conference-debate the day before, at the National Assembly itself, with the title: "The Artificialisation of Intelligence" to discuss the most relevant consequences that Artificial Intelligence (AI) may have for our society. We were able to listen to two top-level speakers: Guillaume Gérard, head of GenAI for Southern and Central Europe at Capgemini, a world-renowned French technology consulting services company, and Cédric Villani, a mathematician who in 2010 won the Fields Medal (*considered the Nobel Prize in Mathematics*) and a former Member of Parliament.

Gérard gave an excellent presentation of the different technologies within Artificial Intelligence, and gave an overview of the situation of the sector worldwide. His answers to the questions posed to him in the debate demonstrated his in-depth

knowledge of the subject and its potential implications for society, and were a very enlightening complement to Cédric Villani's spectacular lecture, which impressed the entire audience. Villani, commissioned by President Macron, had led the elaboration of the French national strategy on AI in 2018. The so-called Villani report: "For a Meaningful Artificial Intelligence" documents an AI strategy for France and Europe. In his speech, he spoke about ethical issues, regulation, and the consequences for society and the new challenges posed by artificial intelligence. At the General Assembly held the following day, the new president of the FP-AP was elected. There were two excellent candidates: Filippo Lombardi from the Swiss delegation and Dario Rivolta, member of the Italian delegation and current Vice-President, both with a wealth of experience in international politics. Filippo Lombardi was elected for the period 2024-2026 by a single vote.

The next Council meeting was held in Graz (Austria) from 2 to 4 May this year, at which the current President Walter Schwimmer was replaced by the newly elected President.

The General Assembly endorsed the Paris Declaration, which the Council presented to the Assembly, in relation to the multiple crises and conflicts that are shaking the world today.



Cédric Villani, mathematician, Fields medal winner (2010), former MP and director of the French AI Strategy, and Guillaume Gérard, head of GenAI for Southern and Central Europe at Capgemini.

FP-AP Paris Declaration 23 February 2024



Multitude of crises

Europe and the whole world are confronted with a multitude of crises and conflicts. On behalf of its approximately 11,000 members, the European Association of Former Parliamentarians from the Council of Europe member states is calling on parliaments, governments and international organizations to urgently develop strategies and actions to find a way out of this situation. For two years, Putin's Russia has been waging a merciless war against Ukraine, attacking more and more civilian targets, infrastructure, homes and civilians, including many children. In addition, thousands of Ukrainian children were removed from their parents and taken to Russia in blatant violation of international law. We were shocked by the news of the death of Russian dissident Aleksey Navalny in a notorious Russian prison camp. A representative of the opposition was silenced. We condemn this crime without reservation. Children are also the defenseless victims of Israel's fight against the terrorist organization Hamas in Gaza. Israel undoubtedly has the right to self-defense, which after the barbarity of October 7th includes eliminating terrorists. However, Israel also has an obligation to adhere to the principle of proportionality and to ensure basic services for the population. Following the war started by Azerbaijan in Upper Karabakh we ask that the displacement of the Armenian population stops and that the Armenian population which had to flee is able to come back to their country without being troubled or threatened. The news from Sudan is also alarming, where the military conflict by the army and armed militias is forcing millions of people to flee and claiming hundreds of lives every day. Unfortunately, these are not all cases of systematic violations of international law, human rights and human dignity. We call on the international community, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the United Nations to use all their possibilities to bring a more just and peaceful world.

FORMER MEMBERS' NETWORK

It calls on parliaments, governments and international organisations to urgently develop strategies and actions to find a way out of the present situation. It stresses that for more than two years Putin's Russia has been waging a ruthless war against Ukraine, attacking civilian targets, infrastructure, homes and society as a whole. Many Ukrainian children have been killed or separated from their parents and taken to Russia in flagrant violation of international law.

The statement also condemns the death of Russian dissident Aleksey Navalny in a Russian prison in the Arctic, aimed at silencing the most

prominent representative of the opposition to Putin.

The statement also refers to the Gaza war. While recognising Israel's right to self-defence, it also calls on Israel to comply with the principle of proportionality and to guarantee basic services to the population, as required by law.

The Assembly also voted to include in the declaration a call for action to stop the exodus of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh fleeing threats, fear and armed conflict with Azerbaijan, and of the millions of people in Sudan who are also forced

to flee their land as a result of conflict with the army and armed militias.

The declaration clearly denounces that all these conflicts are about violations of international law, human rights and human dignity, and calls on the international community, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the United Nations to do everything in their power to bring about a more just and peaceful world.



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On 3 May 2024, as part of the **FP-AP meeting in Graz** (Austria) from 2 to 4 May 2024, there was a Round table entitled *"If the Council of Europe didn't exist..."* which was followed by a solemn session "75th anniversary of the Council of Europe". Teresa Riera Madurell will report on these meetings in the September edition of the FMA Bulletin.

The Council of Europe and the European Union share the same fundamental values – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – but are separate entities which perform different, yet complementary, roles.



The Council of Europe and the European Union

Council of Europe		European Union
1949	Established	1957
46	Member states	27
700 million	Population	448 million
	Flag	
Ode to Joy	Anthem	Ode to Joy



Legal cooperation

The EU participates in 12 CoE conventions and several of its specialised bodies.



Technical cooperation

47 joint programmes worth a total of €207.5 million across Europe and beyond*

*As of 03/05/2022



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EP TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

EUROPE, INCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

UNIVERSITY OF OVIEDO, SPAIN | 28 MARCH 2024 | ON CAMPUS

I have attempted to provide an overview of the situation in the EU regarding attempts to foster social inclusion in Europe. To that end, I have used data from several published reports to demonstrate the strong correlation between greater inclusion and more social justice. In 2020, the employment rate was 5.5 % short of the EU's 78 % goal for 2030. The employment rate was higher in more developed regions (76 %) than in developing regions (72 %); and was lower in less developed regions (67 %), although the employment rate in the latter regions rose by 7 % between 2013 and 2020. Between 2013 and 2020, unemployment fell in all EU Member States, from a high of 11.4 % down to 7.1 % (an increase from the 6.7 % in 2019).

In 2019, around 91 million people in the EU (20 % of the population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The percentage was slightly higher in rural areas (22 %) than in cities (21 %) and in towns and suburban areas (19 %), but there was a decrease in all three areas between 2012 and 2019. The EU is aiming to reduce this figure by at least 15 million people by 2030.



Liliana Rodrigues and D. Antonio González-Busto, Dean of the Oviedo Law Society © University of Oviedo



Liliana Rodrigues with students of group 2B Business Law at the poster exhibition on SDGs and EU at Oviedo University, Spain © University of Oviedo

In the EU, the proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2019 was slightly higher in rural areas (22.4 %) than in cities (21.3 %) and towns and suburban areas (19.2 %). Poverty and social exclusion rates have fallen in the EU but still remain high in the south of the EU and in rural areas of the east of the EU. In several regions of Spain, Italy, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, the risk of poverty sits at over 30 %.

In the east of the EU:

- 28.5 % of people were in poverty or socially excluded in 2019;
- Over 1 in 4 people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- In towns and suburban areas, the proportion was 19.5 %;
- In cities it was 15.2 %;
- In rural areas of Bulgaria and Romania, the proportion was much higher, over 40 %;
- Between 2012 and 2019, this proportion fell by almost 10 % in cities and rural areas, and by more than 8 % in towns and suburban areas.

In the south of the EU:

- Statistics on poverty and social exclusion were similar in different areas and remained high;
- In 2019, around 1 in 4 people were at risk in the three different environments.

By contrast, in the north east of the EU:

- 21.3 % of people in cities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- This is higher than in towns and suburban areas, where the proportion was 15.7%;
- In rural areas, the proportion was 15 %;

In most areas, the employment rate among migrants from non-EU countries increased, but remains lower than for natives (62 % vs 74 % in 2020), especially for those with university qualifications. The risk of poverty and social exclusion for those not born in the EU is double that of natives, with the rate of material deprivation is particularly high. Migrants from third countries (those born outside of the EU) encounter more difficulties on the job market and are at greater risk of poverty. This brief overview, which is part of a bigger work of over 350 pages, goes some way towards clarifying future steps which need to be taken for greater and stronger cohesion in Europe.

Liliana Rodrigues

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EP TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

KOREA, EU POWER AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

LUISS INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN ANALYSIS AND POLICY, ITALY | 18 APRIL 2024 | ON CAMPUS

In April, I travelled to Rome and LUISS University to participate in one of the Jean Monnet Seminar Series entitled “The Korean Peninsula and the European Union – Bilateral Relations in the Era of Geopolitics and Geoeconomics”. The seminar was opened by Choi Jongho, the current Minister and Consul-General of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Italy. My keynote address looked, first, at the current state of play in North East Asia following Kim Jong Un’s 2024 New Year’s Address when it rejected any further interest in Korean re-unification and opened strong links with Moscow. This seemed to end the North’s long-term interest in normalising relations with the United States, as after the failure of the 2019 Hanoi Summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un Pyongyang concluded that the US was neither willing nor able to deliver.

Second I looked at the prescient role of the European Parliament in establishing relations with North Korea, with three ad hoc delegations on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee prior to the Troika’s initial visit to establish diplomatic relations in 2001 and the Commission’s Country Paper recommending ‘critical engagement’. There followed a rash of recognitions by Member States around the same time with the EP establishing in 2004 a Standing Delegation for the Korean Peninsula



From left to right: Matteo Dian (University of Bologna), John Delury (Yonsei University and American Academy in Rome), Thomas Christiansen (Professor of Political Science and European Integration, Luiss University), Tereza Novotna (Free University Berlin and Luiss University), Marcell Burdelski (Vistula University Warsaw and Asia Pacific Society Poland), Glyn Ford (FMA Member) and Jongho Choi (Minister and Consul-General, Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Italy) © LUISS

that has continued its work over the last twenty years with a series of distinguished MEP chairs. There was then a panel discussion with John Delury, from Yonsei University and author of the acclaimed *Agents of Subversion* (2022), Marcell Burdelski, former Polish Ambassador to North Korea and now Vistula University, Matteo Dan from the University of Bologna and Tereza Novotná and Thomas Christiansen from LUISS, followed by an extensive Q&A with the panelists and myself both in-person and online.

The following day I gave a hybrid presentation on “The EU as a Global Power: Insights from the EP’s Perspective”, organised by the EU governance research cluster on ‘European Integration and Public

Policies’, open to faculty, post-doctoral fellows and graduate students and chaired by Dr Youngah Guahk, the University’s lecturer of Asian Affairs. This looked at the EU as an economic and regulatory power through trade, development and the ability to set global standards, a ‘soft’ power through its work on electoral observation and as an emerging ‘hard’ power in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. My work concluded with a reprise of my previous day’s presentation with a final lecture on “The EU’s Engagement with the Korean Peninsula” to third-year undergraduates taking the University’s course ‘Asian Culture and Politics – special focus on the Korean Peninsula’. During the Q&A that followed the students were interested in both the evolution within the Union of the EP’s power, and the growing weight of the EP within the EU’s wider institutional architecture. In addition, they wanted to see whether the Parliament would use its power to set the next Commission programme, engage with the distribution of portfolios and, if necessary, reject von der Leyen as Spitzenkandidat.

Glyn Ford

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Glyn Ford during his lecture at the Jean Monnet Seminar Series ‘The Korean Peninsula and the EU - Bilateral Relations in the Era of Geopolitics and Geoeconomics’ at LUISS Institute for European Analysis and Policy. © LUISS

EURODIACONIA: SOCIAL EUROPE TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY IN THE EU

EURODIACONIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ROMANIA | 16 MAY 2024 | ON CAMPUS

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice. Their membership represents the needs and unique experiences of many national and regional organisations across Europe. At a time when the majority of Europeans voice their concerns about the rising cost of living, increasing poverty and precarious jobs, Eurodiaconia commits to strengthening Social Europe. As an influential player in the European context, Eurodiaconia has published its manifesto for the 2024 European Parliament Elections, urging candidates to “build a truly social Europe”. The manifesto encourages candidates to prioritize social issues, such as healthcare, education, and poverty reduction, in their campaigns. It reflects a commitment to building a more inclusive and compassionate Europe.

Eurodiaconia held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2024 at the Patriarchal Palace in Bucharest, Romania, 14-17 last May. During this event, members discussed strategies, shared best practices, and strengthened their collaborative efforts. The theme of this year's AGM was “Diaconia and Democracy”. Eurodiaconia members engaged in discussions and workshops related to the critical role that organizations and individuals play in promoting a more inclusive and resilient democratic society. Jean Lambert and I, as FMA members, were invited to address this Eurodiaconia AGM in a debate with all participants, focusing on our own experiences as Members of the European Parliament, what were our initial objectives, whether they were achieved and what priorities we would set for the new parliament coming out of the June 2024 European elections. Jean summarized her initial presentation as follows: **“Three main objectives when I entered the EP in 2004 and my assessment on the degree of achievement:**

- To provide a voice for citizens into the EP and from the EP to citizens. Partially achieved through close links with civil society organisations, particularly those linked to my Parliamentary Committees and some of my Delegation work (I chaired the Delegation for South Asia for 10 years, which included

Bangladesh at the time of the Rana Plaza disaster)

- To make the links between climate change and the policy areas I worked on so that climate wasn't just seen as the business of the Environment and Energy Committees! Partially achieved.

- To have a positive asylum and migration policy that recognises people as having rights and ‘agency’. Marginal progress - an uphill struggle. **3 topics of key relevance for the upcoming European Parliament Elections:**

- Promoting democracy and human rights, within the EU and internationally - the EU and the values it represents are under attack from a range of forces that want to divide our societies, foster so-called ‘culture wars’, restrict our freedoms and (in my view) threaten our future. The EU really matters, and so do these elections.

- Ensuring social justice and climate policy go hand-in-hand - ensuring the poorest don't bear the costs of change and that the Green Deal improves the quality of people's lives. Showing that protecting our environment and spending on climate policy does not undermine food security or our social services.

- Security - future defence spending and co-operation, given the global situation but also people's everyday security. Their ability to feed their family, find a decent job, decent home etc.”. As for my own initial presentation, here are the points I made:

“Three main objectives when I entered the EP in 2004 and my assessment on the degree of achievement:

- Make a difference for a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, perceived as the cancer of International Relations, undermining International Law and poisoning the UN and the EU. Unachieved - as Israel goes on massacring the people of Gaza, in revenge for the October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas.

- Make a difference for advancing Human Rights in general, Women's rights specifically and make them permeate through EU Foreign & Security Policy, EU Common Security & Defense Policy, EU Development Policy and Asylum and Migration policies. Partially achieved.

- Helping Human Rights Defenders. Mostly achieved.



Sandra Cartaxo of Associação Baptista Shalom and Eunoia, Ana Gomes, João Verdelho of Eurodiaconia, Pedro Cartaxo of Associação Baptista Shalom and Eunoia on 16 May 2024 © Eurodiaconia

Main topics of social and political relevance for the coming EP elections:

- Defending the EU, Democracy, Human Rights and European values against far-right parties and their external backers, purporting to destroy them all. Helping Ukraine fight the Russian aggression and correcting EU Asylum and Migration policies are key tests.
- Delivering on social Europe - fighting poverty and inequalities, integrating migrants, ensuring decent work and housing for all, reverting demographic decline in the EU.
- Regulating the twin digital and energy transitions to effectively fight climate change, while ensuring food security, re-industrialization of Europe and that the inherent social transformations required are fair and inclusive.” Our presentations were followed by a lively and “euro soul-searching” discussion. I hope our views and the exchange on the main challenges ahead will be of use to EuroDiaconia members in their work with the vulnerable people they assist and their advocacy for a stronger Social Europe. Diaconia, a Greek word for service, means service for and with people in need. It also refers to bridge building in society generating increased knowledge and added value. That is what is very much necessary to strengthen Social Europe and save Democracy in the EU.

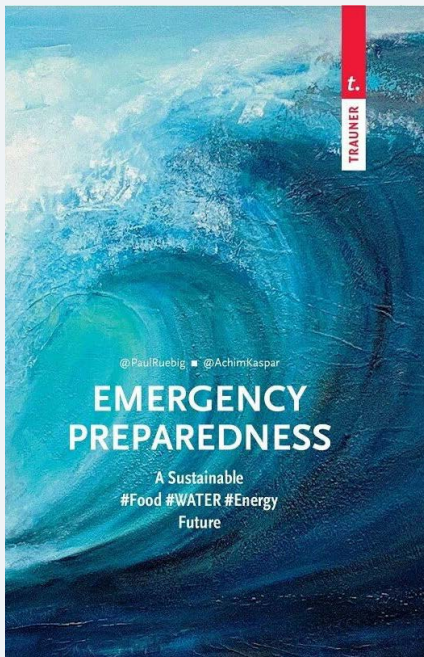
Ana Gomes

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

by **Paul Rübig** and **Achim Kaspar**, published by Trauner Verlag



Embark on a transformative journey into the future of sustainable living with “Emergency Preparedness.” This new release confronts water scarcity, food, and energy sustainability, serving as a comprehensive guide to navigating the intricate web of global resource management.

Unmasking the Crisis: As water, food and energy demand exceed population growth, the world grapples with escalating challenges. From intensified agricultural needs to climate change’s impacts, this book dissects global crises, emphasizing the interconnected nature of our resource ecosystem. It unfolds in three parts, each shedding light on pressing issues.

1. European Perspectives:

Featuring four opinions from the European Economic and Social Committee, this section offers regional insights and policy considerations.

2. Global Imperatives - SDG6:

Delve into international perspectives, focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 6. This section outlines a roadmap for global goals, emphasizing water management’s role in broader sustainability.

3. Innovations and Implementations:

Explore cutting-edge technologies and scientific innovations. Highlighting research’s pivotal role, this section addresses Living Labs, Digital Twins, Oxidation and cold plasma, sensors, data warehouse skills, fermenters, flood and flotation scrapers, non metallic DAF units, API separators, wastedisposal technology and predictive service etc.

Innovate to Survive:

Discover best-practice examples that illuminate the path toward a water, food, and energy-resilient future. From community-driven initiatives to groundbreaking technologies, “Emergency Preparedness” serves as a reservoir of knowledge that empowers individuals, industries, and policymakers to forge a more secure and sustainable tomorrow.

Join the Dialogue:

The conversation about water, food, and energy sustainability, coupled with wastewater management and mining, is just beginning. Immerse yourself in the insights, ideas, and innovations presented in “Emergency Preparedness.” Only through collective action and a commitment to research and innovation can we pave the way to a resilient and sustainable future.

Don’t Miss Your Chance:

Secure your copy today and be part of a global movement. Let’s reshape a future where resources symbolize resilience and preparedness. “Emergency Preparedness” isn’t just a book; it’s a call to action for a planet in need. Are you ready?

Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl

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UPCOMING EVENTS



ACTIVITIES

3

JULY 2024

Librorum (online)

On Wednesday 3 July 2024 from 17.00 to 18.15, FMA Member Andrea Manzella will present his newest publication 'Il Parlamento europeo' during the Librorum event in cooperation with EPLO Italy. Interpretation will be available in English, French and Italian.

More information and registration: <https://bit.ly/LibrorumManzella>

23-25

OCTOBER 2024

FMA Visit to Hungary

From 23 to 25 October 2024, the FMA will visit Hungary on the occasion of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Delegation will be led by FMA President Klaus Hänsch. More information about the programme and registrations will be communicated via mail and the FMA communication channels.

3-4

DECEMBER 2024

FMA Annual Events

On Tuesday 3 December the FMA Cocktail Reception and Annual Dinner will take place in the Members' Restaurant of the European Parliament. The following day, the Annual Seminar will be preceded by Librorum. The Get-Together Lunch will close the FMA Annual Events on Wednesday 4 December.

FMA MEMBERS' PUBLICATIONS



THE MONETIZATION OF DATA BY MICHAEL DETJEN AND RUDOLF TILLIG

Digitalisation and digitality - this pair of terms inevitably comes up when dealing with the global phenomenon of our time: the digital transformation. We playfully use a wide variety of digital devices and find our way around a multitude of apps. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of digital transformation sometimes seems opaque and mysterious to us. It is an expression of an accelerating technological development that is gaining momentum, particularly due to the spread of artificial intelligence (AI). In this volume, experts from the fields of engineering, natural sciences, law, social sciences and economics as well as computer science, medicine, philosophy and psychology get to the bottom of the technical possibilities of the digital. They scrutinise social phenomena that accompany this profound change and provide exciting insights into various sciences that make the digital transformation visible in its scope and complexity.

Michael Detjen and his co-author Rudolf Tillig have opened a new chapter in the digital world by calling for compensation for the commercial processing of collected personal data.

MEMBERS' NEWS

Ms Edit Herczog is the new Chair of the ACER Administrative Board

Ms Herczog and Mr Chiritoiu were elected by the Administrative Board members on 13 December 2023. Their two-year mandate started on 28 January 2024.



Ms Herczog, previously the Vice-Chair under Mr Thiollière's chairmanship, is a former member of the European Parliament (2004-2014) and the Hungarian national parliament. Currently she is active in the fields of public research, education, and digital infrastructure. Taking up the mantle, Ms Herczog underlined her commitment to advancing ACER's contribution to fostering an integrated European energy market and reaching the Green Deal's decarbonization targets while securing access to sustainable energy for European citizens and business. © ACER, 2024

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome
to the FMA



Den DOVER
EPP-ED, UK
(1999 - 2009)



Maria MARTENS
EPP-ED, NL
(1999 - 2009)

FMA AT WORK

MEMBERS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Klaus
HÄNSCH



Monica BALDI



Jean-Pierre
AUDY



Teresa RIERA
MADURELL



Michael
HINDLEY



Miguel Angel
MARTÍNEZ
MARTÍNEZ



Edward
McMILLAN-
SCOTT



Manuel PORTO



Godelieve
QUISTHOUDT-
ROWOHL



Paul RÜBIG

FMA BUREAU

President: **Klaus HÄNSCH**

Vice-President: **Monica BALDI**

Treasurer: **Jean-Pierre AUDY**

Secretary: **Teresa RIERA MADURELL**

LIST OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

FMA Bulletin Editorial Board:

Ms Baldi (Chair), Mr Audy, Mr McMillan-Scott, Ms Riera Madurell and Mr Rübig.

EP to Campus: Mr Hindley (Chair), Mr Porto and Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl.

Relations with Budgets Committee, DG Finance: Mr Audy.

Dinner Debate: Ms Baldi.

Delegates to the Bureau of the European Association of Former Members (FP-AP): Mr Martínez Martínez and Ms Riera Madurell. If necessary they will be substituted by Mr Audy.

FMA Communication: Ms Baldi (Chair) and Mr Hindley.

Delegates to the Annual General Assembly, seminars and colloquies of the FP-AP: Mr Audy, Mr Martínez Martínez and Ms Riera Madurell. Besides the FMA delegates or their substitutes and in agreement with the European Association, other FMA Management Committee Members may participate in the annual seminars or colloquies at their own expense.

Relations with Former Members Associations outside Europe: Mr Martínez Martínez (Chair), Mr Audy, Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl and Ms Isabella De Martini (FMA Member with advisory role).

Annual seminar and relations with think tanks, policy institutes and foundations: Ms Riera Madurell (Chair), Ms Baldi, Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl and Mr Rübig.

Archives: Ms Baldi.

Working Group on Democracy Support and Election Observation: Mr McMillan-Scott (Chair), Mr Hindley, Mr Martínez Martínez and Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl.

Relations with the House of European History: Mr Martínez Martínez.

Relations with the European University Institute (EUI): Ms Baldi.

IN MEMORIAM



Jacques DONNAY

✝ 13 March 2024

EDA, UFE, France (1994-1995, 1995-1999)

He served as a French Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Donnay represented *Rassemblement pour la République*.



Josep-Maria TERRICABRAS

✝ 16 April 2024

Greens/EFA, Spain (2014-2019)

He served as a Spanish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Terricabras represented *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*.



Fernando SUÁREZ GONZÁLEZ

✝ 29 April 2024

EDA, EPP, Spain (1986-1989, 1989-1994)

He served as a Spanish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Suárez González represented *Partido Popular*.



Petya STAVREVA

✝ 6 May 2024

EPP-ED, Bulgaria (2007-2009)

She served as a Bulgarian Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Ms Stavreva represented *BANU-PU*.



Mary Elizabeth BANOTTI

✝ 10 May 2024

EPP-ED, Ireland (1984-2004)

She served as an Irish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Ms Banotti represented *Fine Gael Party*.

SITUATION OF PUBLIC FINANCES ON THREE LEVELS: LOCAL, NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN



GLOBAL CHALLENGES REQUIRING ACTION ON ALL LEVELS

When attention turns to the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), discussions on public funds will return to the fore, and there will be efforts to decide how best to allocate funding in different locations to prepare for the challenges ahead.

Like other issues, competitiveness is now a significant challenge for the European Union, which has to compete not only with traditional powers such as the US and Japan, but also with countries that have emerged as global powers, such as China, India and Brazil; all while challenges related to the environment continue to be important in Europe and the world as a whole. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, as embedded in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, the budget has come to represent a small proportion of the Union's GDP, around 1%; which means that decisions on public spending regarding topics closest to citizens are still primarily the responsibility of national governments.

As expected, the European Union is being called upon to take on new responsibilities, notably in the fields of defence and security, which will necessitate an increase in the budget. However, if the budget is increased to pursue environmental objectives and maintain the EU's competitiveness, it should also aim to encourage structural policies so as to encourage better regional planning. National, regional and local public finances will play a key role, but given the imbalances in Europe, the EU budget must also contribute to regional policy.

It is particularly important to take action in big cities in order to alleviate costs associated with

transport and the environment. However, it is important to encourage greater equality between regions; smaller cities and even towns should have the same or perhaps even better opportunities to implement ideas and schemes to boost their competitiveness and improve the quality of life of their residents, v.g. without wasting time and money on transport systems and thus reducing their environmental impact (modern technology has levelled the playing field with regards to accessing information and contacting others, meaning that location does not limit access to culture or economic activity). The 'cliché' that there is a lack of opportunity in regions located outside of economic centres – and that historically have been less-developed – has to be left in the past.

"The 'cliché' that there is a lack of opportunity in regions located outside of economic centres – and that historically have been less-developed – has to be left in the past."

The Commission, in its recent publication: "Forging a sustainable future together: Cohesion for a Competitive and Inclusive Europe, Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy, 2024", underlines that 'regions once considered underdeveloped have the potential to become economic leaders'; also adding objective data to show that '78 % of EU GDP originates outside large core cities', and that this figure is close to the total number of the OCDE, where '73 % of economic growth during most of this century has been produced outside the largest agglomerations'.

This does not only make economies more competitive and improve citizens' quality of life, but it also has significant environmental benefits. Regional policy, when run effectively, is a privileged field in which efforts can be made both to preserve and improve the environment, by taking measures against unnecessary physical sites and congestion, and by promoting a more effective use of national resources, with a particular emphasis on the human element "the Community must therefore, when preparing its policy on the environment, take account of the economic and social development of the Union as a whole and the balanced development of its regions" (Article 119(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

Manuel Porto
ELDR, EPP-ED, Portugal
(1989-1996, 1996-1999)
mporto@fd.uc.pt



THE SINCERITY OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY ON THE PART OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Europe is a geographical continent made up of numerous political structures: national, in particular the States, and local, such as the regions, with a specific entity, the European Union (EU).

In the wake of numerous crises (financial, COVID, migration, war, etc.), the EU has reacted and strengthened its resilience by putting in place, with the Member States, all sorts of instruments to prepare for serious crises of different kinds, which could be multidimensional, hybrid, have cascading effects or occur simultaneously.

Since the accession of many Member States in 2005 and 2007 following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, public finances have been under strain, with an unprecedented level of public debt that many citizens and some political parties believe has spiralled out of control, without the

rating agencies really having sent out any signals of serious concern, unlike during the Greek debt crisis. The runaway Greek public debt crisis is very enlightening.

off-balance sheet and through financial instruments developed by the investment bank Goldman Sachs, which helped to exacerbate the crisis.

"Since the accession of many Member States in 2005 and 2007 following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, public finances have been under strain, with an unprecedented level of public debt (...)."

It began during the 2008 global economic crisis and developed in a Greece handicapped by high debt and a large budget deficit (over 13% of GDP). Greece first joined the European Union (formerly the EEC) in 1981, then the Eurozone in 2001 (after a few ups and downs).

The Greek government concealed this fact when presenting its public debt, in particular by raising funds

The scale of the country's structural problems, its difficulty in levying taxes, its oversized military budget and its dependence on European structural funds are strong components of the Greek crisis in the eurozone.

This culture of corruption in the management of public affairs is at the root of persistent lies about the state of Greek public accounts. In 2000, in order to join the eurozone, Greece provided false statistics, halving the figure for its public deficit. The government admitted this lie in 2004, but was not particularly concerned. Only Eurostat has always refused to validate the Greek accounts.

In 2004, the confession did not trigger any reaction on the markets - the crisis had not yet hit. At the end of 2010, however, the announcement by the newly elected Socialist government of a deficit that was twice as high as forecast triggered a wave of panic that caused the spread, i.e. the difference between the cost of Greek debt and the benchmark rate for the eurozone, that of German debt, to soar.



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On 15 December, the rating agency Fitch lowered Greece's rating to below A, a first for a European country. Greece's rating by the three major American agencies continued to fall.

Greece was allegedly assisted in falsifying its data by the American investment bank Goldman Sachs, which in return received nearly 300 million dollars in commissions, according to the New York Times article that revealed the affair.

Another example is the Poitou-Charentes region in France. At the time of the reform aimed at setting up the large regions (territorial reform of 2014 with effect from 1 January 2016), financial excesses were discovered in the former Poitou-Charentes region.

In a report published in December 2016, the Regional Audit Chamber finally estimated the amount of sums incorrectly taken into account and carried forward from one financial year to the next at 111 million euros; 17% of the authority's annual expenditure. Another public accounting curiosity that amazed me was that of the European Union (EU), which draws up consolidated accounts because it has had legal personality since the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, and which publishes accounts with significantly negative equity, to the general indifference of the markets and rating agencies in particular.

Let's move on to the approval timetable, where the European Parliament's discharge vote takes place within the abnormally long period of 15 months after the accounts have been closed.

But when it comes to the content of the EU's consolidated annual



accounts, how long will such a public entity be able to maintain its AA+ rating when it has had negative equity for many years? For example, at 31/12/22, equity was negative by €131.3 billion (30% of the balance sheet total), an increase of €49 billion compared with 31/12/21.

in other words, the EU has unfunded future commitments and is incurring operating expenditure with borrowings without the own resources initially planned being fully put in place. These few examples show how urgent it is to reflect on the sincerity of public accounts, without which the lucidity of elected representatives will be sorely tested.

"The EU has unfunded future commitments and is incurring operating expenditure with borrowings without the own resources initially planned being fully put in place."

This situation is mainly due to the staff pensions provisioned in the EU accounts and not covered by the Member States, and to the loans linked to the non-refundable support subscribed in 2022 under NextGenerationEU (European post-COVID recovery plan - €750bn: 360 bn in the form of loans to Member States and 390 bn in the form of grants):

As we often say in France, and probably elsewhere, 'good accounts make good friends'.

Jean-Pierre Audy
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EUROPE'S FISCAL SITUATION AND THE GREEN TRANSITION

EU public finances are not in a great place. In 2007 the average public debt to GDP ratio across the EU was close to the Maastricht target of 60%. After two massive fiscal shocks from the financial crisis of 2008 and Covid, today the EU debt has risen to 84% of GDP. This is despite years of austerity in the intervening period in an attempt to control public indebtedness.

France today has a public debt to GDP ratio of over 110%, and Italy has one of more than 140% – with an increase of 40% of GDP to this figure for both countries since the 2008 financial crisis. The S&P credit rating for Italy is BBB, while that for France has just been downgraded from AA to AA-, citing concerns that government debt would increase through to 2027. A range of other countries including Belgium, Greece, Spain and Portugal have a debt to GDP ratio of over 100%.

What is the consequence of this general austerity and fiscal weakness? To pick a few high-level observations:

1. Economic austerity has undermined the quality of European infrastructure. There is an investment gap in transport infrastructure, schools and hospitals.
2. Public sector cuts and reduced investment has increased unemployment and increased inequality.
3. The ageing European population is also putting pressure on government budgets. Inflation in health services in the EU has been typically running at 1% per annum above consumer price inflation, resulting in an ever-increasing

health budget. Austerity has countered this trend in the opposite direction and has been particularly impactful on diminishing the access to healthcare services.

"After two massive fiscal shocks from the financial crisis of 2008 and Covid, today the EU debt has risen to 84% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product)."

What lessons can we draw from this experience as we look to the future?

A first lesson is certainly that we need prudence in designing government budgets. Economic growth would help reduce the fiscal burden of past years, but unfortunately the EU economy is growing slowly. Hence, prioritisation is needed to ensure that the most valuable activities are kept even if other activities are temporarily reduced.

Within this broader consideration, some questions are of such an existential nature that dealing with them cannot be delayed. A prime example, for obvious reasons, is the need to reinforce the EU's defence capacity. Over the last decade Poland has increased defence spending by 2% of GDP to nearly 4%. Over the same period Hungary, Slovakia and Finland have increased military spending by 1% of GDP or more, and the German defence budget has gone from 1.2% of GDP in 2014 to 2% this year. Now 18 EU countries will meet the NATO target of 2% of GDP spending on defence compared to only three in 2014. Funds are found when there is sufficient political will. There is one further area which poses fundamental challenges to maintaining our

quality of life but is perhaps not getting the same attention: tackling climate change. Average world temperatures have already essentially reached the threshold of the 1.5 oC increase specified in the Paris Agreement.

Even if the latest data were a blip due to exceptional circumstances, the long-term trend is upwards and the 1.5 oC target will be surpassed in a systematic way during this decade. Based on current policies, the temperature increase by the end of the century is more likely to be between 2.5 oC and 3 oC than under 2 oC.

The consequences of global warming will be much more common extreme weather events, from floods to droughts, from sea surges to wildfires. For example, what is now a one-in-a-100-year storm will happen every few years across much of the European continent. Of particular concern are extreme heatwaves and the consequences for the frail and elderly. The last few years have already given us a taste of things to come.

If national budgets are severely constrained, can the EU budget help? While the resources for the EU do come from the Member States, the formula for defining the EU budget has established a rather stable budget of 1% of EU GDP for several decades. Some 30% of this is intended for climate action. The Next Generation EU has added more resources, but this will soon come to an end. Other sources of EU funds, notably from the receipts

of the European Carbon Trading System, add to the pot. Examples are the Innovation, Modernisation and the Social Climate Funds. These contribute another 0.1% of GDP.

How do these figures compare with the scale of the problem?

First, some orders of magnitude. The investment needed for the green transition is estimated by the European Commission at about €1 trillion per year, an average of some 5% of GDP per year over the next few decades. This is triple the investments that have actually been realised in recent years.

However, it is not clear how much of the €1 trillion is truly additional, and not substituting for investment that would otherwise have taken place – it is a shift to what is done rather than doing more per se. For example, if a bus would have been bought anyway, the additional investment is the increase in price of an electric bus over a diesel bus, not the entire price of the bus. If the additional investment is taken to be 2.5% of GDP, then we get the EU budget contributing something like one-sixth of the total. Note that this is only the cost of green equipment, excluding the investment needed to build a green manufacturing capacity in Europe if that is a strategic goal. The point of these back of the envelope calculations is to give a feel for the orders of magnitude involved. We can conclude that the EU budget for the green transition is significant, but only a small fraction of what is required to tackle the problem. It is normal that the private sector should be the major investor, but it is essential that EU money is used in those areas where most support is needed – where there are the

largest market failures – and where it can generate the greatest leverage with the private sector. A good example is the greening of the residential sector where public money can help overcome a lack of information and support bank lending to households.

The above figures also do not include the investment needed to adapt to climate change. Much of this will involve climate-proofing cities to deal with flooding and extreme heat. This is to a large part public investment from municipal budgets. Aggregate numbers are hard to come by, but it is certain this will involve tens of billions of euros across Europe. For example, Copenhagen has invested approximately €145 million in its flood management and stormwater management projects, and Barcelona has a budget of €230 million for green infrastructure projects and urban parks to help mitigate heat island effects and improve resilience against extreme weather events. Scaling this across thousands of municipalities gives an idea of the magnitude of the problem.

While the Nordic cities have greater local taxing powers, most cities' budgets in the EU depend heavily on intergovernmental grants. They usually account for at least one-half, and maybe up to 60-70% of spending.

The overall poor fiscal condition of the Member States cascades down to cities. Therefore, a key policy topic here is to find ways for cities to capture some revenues from the improvements they make to the local environment to help finance adaptation measures.

We have taken a brief look at public finances at the national, European, and local level. We start from a position of weak national



budgets, and the prospect of more public borrowing to cover investment is severely constrained. Cities also depend heavily on inter-governmental grants to finance their budgets and so also face constraints. The EU budget is insulated from this pressure, but it is small.

At the same time, we face serious problems due to climate change. We need to invest to mitigate climate change, but also to adapt to the major changes to our climate that are inevitable. This requires design of policy to maximise the impact of the budget that we have, to explore ways to use public money to lever private investment, and to increase the revenue base of cities. The cost of inaction is high, and the need to catch-up an accumulated lack of investment will only make tomorrow's fiscal worse.

We need to think of the fight against climate change as putting our economy on a war footing and give it the same priority in our planning.

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