

NEWS FROM THE EU

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JEAN JAQUES DELORS

On Wednesday the 27th of December 2023 Jacques Delors has passed away at the age of 98. The native Parisian had the nickname; 'The last great architect of Europe'. Born on the 20th of July in 1925 he was member of the French socialist party and minister of finance in France between 1981 and 1984.

Delors was of great importance to the formation of the European Union, partaking in the formation of the foundation of the European Union, such as the Maastricht treaty, the Schengen zone, the Erasmus project and the monetary union, which formed the basis of the Eurozone. Additionally, between 1985 and 1995 Delors was appointed as the eight president of the European Commission.



During his term Delors furthered the unification of the member states, with – among other things – the creation of the single market, which made possible the circulation of goods, people, services and capital, in accordance to the EEC or the European Economic community. On top of that, he created – and granted his name to – the Delors commission which proposed the monetary union and the introduction of the Euro as a single currency.

On Wednesday the 27th of December the daughter of Delors – Aubry Martine, also active in politics – announced the passing of her father, who died peacefully in his sleep at the age of 98.

BEER AS EIB VICE-PRESIDENT

A new vice president of the European Investment Bank is chosen, Nicola Beer. The German former Vice President of the European Parliament takes over from the Spanish Nadia Calvino. She states being honored by the appointment as the EIB holds an important function in the EU by overseeing the day-to-day financial functions.



Belgium has begun its presidency of the European Council. The presidency of the European Council is a responsibility that changes every 6 months, with cooperation between countries over a period of 18 months, and results from a trinomial of countries. Now it's the trio of Spain, Belgium and Hungary. Spain has already finished its presidency and is handing over to Belgium on New Year's Eve. Afterwards it's Hungary's turn. A system introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, which gives countries the opportunity to define long-term goals and set a common agenda.

Belgium has proposed a motto that defines their presidency: "*Protect. Fortify. Look to the future.*" With this idea they are to work on six different themes; (1) Defending the rule of law, democracy and unity, (2) strengthening competitiveness, (3) pursuing a green and just transition, (4) strengthening the social and health agenda, (5) protecting people and borders, and finally, (6) promoting Europe as a global player, as defined by Alexander de Croo, Prime Minister of Belgium.

The Flemish (Dutch-speaking region of northern Belgium) part of the presidency was inaugurated with a party, including several concerts by Belgian artists. However, the planned performances were interrupted when the poetess Hind Eljadid - who had been invited to present a haiku by the former President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy - decided to present a pro-Palestinian poem instead. On his words, people in the crowd unveiled Palestinian flags, while chanting "Free Palestine" and "Cease fire now".

PRESIDENCY: THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

Police intervened, removing the demonstrators from the dance floor, while Hind Eljadid was asked to leave the stage. The organizer and Flemish Minister of Culture, Jan Jambon (Flemish Nationalist Party), was disappointed - and visibly annoyed - by these actions. Shortly after the uproar, the show resumed, some of the following artists openly accepting the protest - by performing with a Palestinian flag received from the crowd -, others asking for serenity and believing that this event was neither the place nor the time for such a protest.

The effect of a public protest is always uncertain, but it did raise the question of the values of the Belgian state and how it will pursue them during half a year of increased influence in the European theater. In addition, it has opened up the debate - especially in political circles - as to whether or not this presidency allows influence to be exerted, as six months is not a long time to bring about significant change in such an important bureaucratic system. Especially considering the trials and tribulations of a major election year like 2024, which has already begun to reveal its challenges with the pre-emptive resignation of Charles Michel as President of the European Council.



EU YOUTH CHECK

EU Commission to introduce the 'youth check' a mechanism that takes into account the effect of EU policies on the European Youth, while facilitating dialogue and creating a platform for communication between the EU and youth organizations.

2024 THE WORLD VOTES

2024 will be the year of elections, with over 2 billion voters in 50 countries heading to the polls. Whilst these numbers mostly regard national elections, they also include the single direct elections for the European Unions, where EU citizens choose their parliamentary representatives. People across the 27 member states – more than 400 million voters – are called to decide on the elections of 720 members of the European Parliament. This makes these elections the world's biggest transnational elections. They will be held from the 6th to the 9th of June.

While the parliamentary elections (held every five years) are always important, this year will be exceptionally critical in affirming or negating the overall rise of populist parties and right-winged politicians across the continent. The clearest example of that being the victory of Geert Wilders and his anti-EU, right-winged party in the Netherlands, and the rise of Giorgia Meloni in Italy. But also the Finnish government houses a far-right nationalist party, Sweden's does so as well, while in Spain the conservatives are gaining power. Furthermore, we can't forget the European countries in which the conservative and far-right parties have been in power for a considerable time, like Poland and Hungary.

DISABILITY CARD

EU Parliament unanimously supports a proposal for an EU disability Card, in hopes to facilitate travel across the member states for people with a disability, whilst ensuring equal rights and conditions for travelers in Europe with a disability.

Besides the European Parliamentary elections of 2024 there are also plenty of European countries that organize their national elections in the same year. Finland kicks off the year with presidential elections in January, followed by Belarus in February, March is for Portugal, then Slovakia and Lithuania. In June, on the same day of the EU parliamentary elections Belgium goes to the polls, followed by Croatia in July. In September it's the turn of Austria to choose a new parliament and Lithuania closes the ranks in October.

Other, non-EU elections, that are of great importance are the elections in Ukraine and Russia, although the Ukrainian will likely be canceled under martial law, and the outcomes of the Russian elections are highly predictable. As well as the elections in the US, where populism also seems to prevail. Modi seems to secure another term with his nationalist party, despite the critique on his treatment of the Muslim minority in India and the decline in civil liberties.

That being said, one can elaborate on every single election that will take place in 2024 – as they are all of great importance. However, the main takeaway is the current volatility of the political theater in most countries as well as on a geopolitical scale. In its risk report the World Economic Forum states that they expect *"upheavals at a global scale"*.



CHARLES MICHEL QUILTS

Charles Michel (Be) will step down as President of the EU Council before the end of his term. He has stated that he will resign in July of this year (2024), four months before the end of his official term, which ends in November. While this may come as a surprise to most people, the date of his resignation reveals his motivation. He clearly wishes to stand again in the European elections, which will be held between July 6 and 9 throughout the European Union. If he doesn't step down as President, he'll have no chance of winning a seat in the European Parliament (the only European body elected by direct universal suffrage).



In addition, Mr. Michel's presidency has not been without its problems. For example, the famous "Sofa Gate" in which he disgraced the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, during a meeting with the Turkish President. As well as, perhaps less memorable in the eyes of the public, several failed summits and his inability to get the various member states to agree on different topics and issues, his main task as president. Steven van Hecke, professor of European politics, sums it up as follows: *"From the outset, Michel saw himself too much as the president of the EU". "Whereas his job is to get the member states on the same wavelength. Hence the tensions with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen."*

Although this seems to be mainly a disadvantage, since the next president must be elected by an absolute majority of the 27 EU heads of state, it is not without danger, due to the rules of succession, if no new president is found within the allotted time, Hungary's head of state will become president, since he holds the rotating presidency until November. Nationalist leader Viktor Orban would then take over as head of the Council.

2 BILLION EURO FOR THE EUROPEAN SHIFT TO GREEN ENERGY

The EU has allocated more money to their 'green shift' in accordance to their climate goals. These encapsulate plans such as REPowerEU and the Fit For 55, under which you can find the Modernization Fund. This is a source of money for member states that require aid in upgrading their power grid whilst reducing levels of pollution. All funded by the EU emissions trading systems, by which polluting companies need to compensate for their emissions, whilst green companies can benefit by selling their emission-rights on a competitive market. This new 2 billion euro package is a big deal in the move to a greener Europe. And will mainly help Bulgaria, Croatia and Poland in enhancing their energy production, more specifically, transitioning from coal and gas to greener source of energy.

Whilst this is not the first time that the EU utilizes these techniques to support member states in the energy transition, there is something notable. To demonstrate their commitment to the work there is a collaboration between the European Commission and the European Investment Bank regarding the strategic and efficient allocation of the funds. Thereby acting upon the promises that were made. And whilst 2 billion euro is not sufficient to support a complete independent, renewable and green energy grid for the European Union – let alone make global changes – it is a great place to start.



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