

INFO FLASH 23/01

EU Institutions have progressively restarted their activities. After Bulgaria took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU many institutional and civil society stakeholders have commented on the country's policy programme ahead.

A series of op-eds and editorials by ECRE addressed recent and upcoming trends on international cooperation and recent legal development in the field of migration, asylum and integration.

A series of analyses and research papers is available on sustainable development, migration and youth empowerment.

EU INSTITUTIONS

European Commission

(19/01) Report: EU trade schemes promote economic development and human rights.

The report published today jointly by the European Commission and the European External Action Service shows the positive impact of the European Union's duty-rebate schemes on developing economies. Trade acts as an engine for growth and helps promote human and labour rights, good governance and sustainable development principles. Since the reformed EU initiative known as Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) entered into force in 2014, exports from countries to the EU benefitting from these tariff cuts rose by nearly a quarter to a yearly amount of €63 billion. Least developed countries benefited the most: their exports to the EU increased by nearly 40% and reached €23.5 billion in 2016. In addition to the economic benefits of the scheme, today's report points out the progress made on issues such as women's empowerment, child and forced labour, torture, illegal drugs trafficking and climate change. The EU monitoring reveals many positive changes due to EU engagement related to the scheme. Among many other examples, this includes Pakistan's new legislation against honour killing and rape, or the inclusion of Paraguay on the list of countries with the strongest commitment to the protection of endangered species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. However, the report points also at areas that require further improvement in order to fulfil the conditions of the scheme, for instance as regards the implementation and enforcement of the relevant legislation by the beneficiary countries. Full press release [here](#). Q&A session [here](#).

(18/01) Future of Europe: President Juncker appoints members to Task Force on Subsidiarity and Proportionality.

Today, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker appointed six members to the "Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently" that he announced in September in his State of the Union Address. The Task Force will work under the Chairmanship of First Vice-President Frans Timmermans and will report to the President by 15 July 2018. Scenario 4 in the Commission's [White Paper on the Future of Europe](#) - "Doing less more efficiently" - foresees that the European Union focuses on delivering more and faster in selected policy areas such as securing our external borders through the European Border and Coast Guard or in pooling defence capabilities, while doing

less elsewhere, such as in regional development. The Subsidiarity and Proportionality Task Force will identify policy areas where work could be devolved or definitely returned to Member States, as well as ways to better involve regional and local authorities in EU policy making and delivery. Full press release [here](#).

European Parliament

(18/01) Better protection of children in international divorce disputes. MEPs put children at the forefront of their concerns on Thursday when adopting their proposals to change EU laws on resolving international divorce disputes. While acknowledging the quality of the Commission's proposals to improve the regulation in place, MEPs propose strengthening the rights of children throughout the dispute resolution procedure between the divorcing couple. This would notably mean ensuring that the child has the right to express an opinion, which would be obtained through a clear procedure, without exerting pressure on the child and by a specially trained expert interviewer. If a child is abducted to another EU country by one of their parents, MEPs propose that the matter must be dealt with by practising and experienced family judges, to ensure the best interests of the child are prioritised. Full press release [here](#).

(17/01) Cutting off terrorist financing: Parliament ready to negotiate. Parliament is ready to start talks with ministers on two laws targeting the financing of terrorism and organised crime. The two laws will clamp down on the funding of terrorism and other organised crime, by countering money laundering as well as easing cross-border freezing and confiscation of the proceeds of crime. The [directive to counter money laundering](#) would improve enforcement by laying down EU-wide definitions of crimes and minimum penalties. MEPs also propose barring those convicted from running for public office or holding a position of public servant. The [cross-border confiscation regulation](#) would set tight deadlines for member states to act on cross-border requests to freeze or confiscate assets, leaving criminals with less time to move them. Furthermore, the process would be simplified in order to make cross-border confiscations easier to carry out, as they are under-used under current rules. At the moment, only an estimated 1.1% of criminal proceeds are ever confiscated. Full press release [here](#).

(17/01) The priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council debated in plenary. MEPs discussed the priorities of the incoming Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union with Prime Minister Boyko Borissov on Wednesday. MEPs welcomed the Bulgarian Presidency's intention to concentrate on the EU perspective of the Western Balkans and the future of young people in Europe. Migration, fighting corruption, environmental protection, challenges to the rule of law, and social justice were highlighted as areas where further joint efforts are needed. The discussion covered the next multiannual budget of the European Union and it was agreed that the debate must start from EU priorities; only then can it move on to the specific figures needed to achieve them. Full press release [here](#).

European Council / Council of the EU

Others

(22/01) European Economic and Social Committee - The EU's human rights civil society organisations report more difficulties in their work. A report by the EU's decentralised agency specialising in fundamental rights testifies to the ever-shrinking space for civil society in the EU, EESC-hosted event reveals. On Friday, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), in partnership with its Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks, hosted the launch of a report prepared by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which warns of the shrinking space for civil society action and attempts to thwart the valuable work of civil society organisations (CSOs) that fight for the respect of human rights in the European Union. The report "[Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU](#)", which focuses on the period between 2011 and 2017, highlights some troubling difficulties increasingly encountered by EU civil society organisations in carrying out their work. Full press release [here](#).

(11/01) EU Court of Auditors - JASPERS regional support by the Commission and the EIB needs better targeting, say EU Auditors. An EU initiative managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) to help Member States apply for Cohesion and Regional Funds suffers from significant weaknesses, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. The 'Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions' initiative (JASPERS) contributed to quicker project approval, but could not have an impact on absorption of EU funds, say the auditors. They find that support under JASPERS should be better targeted. Full press release [here](#).

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

(18/01) The right of older persons to dignity and autonomy in care. "Older persons have exactly the same rights as everyone else, but when it comes to the implementation of these rights, they face a number of specific challenges", says Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, in his latest Human Rights Comment published today. "For example, they often face age discrimination, particular forms of social exclusion, economic marginalisation due to inadequate pensions, or are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including from family members." Full article [here](#).

(17/01) European Roma Rights Centre receives Raoul Wallenberg Prize for combating racism, rights abuse. The Budapest-based organisation European Roma Rights Centre ([ERRC](#)) has received today the [Raoul Wallenberg Prize](#) of the Council of Europe for successfully challenging discrimination, anti-Romani racism and rights abuses of Roma through innovative litigation, evidence based research and policy development. On this day in 1945, Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who used his status to save tens of thousands of Jews from the Holocaust, was arrested in Budapest. The Prize instituted in 2012 by the Council of Europe at the initiative of the Swedish Government and the Hungarian Parliament, is meant to keep his memory and outstanding achievements alive. Full press release [here](#).

(15/01) Study finds that intercultural cities have higher well-being and citizen satisfaction. Since 2008, the Council of Europe, through its flagship programme Intercultural Cities, has supported more than 120 local authorities in Europe and around the world, in designing and implementing inclusive policies and strategies for migrant and refugee integration according to the Intercultural approach. Based on the notion of "diversity advantage", these strategies are founded on the assumption that diversity can be an asset for communities if managed in a positive and competent way; they mobilise leaders, policy

officials, professionals, businesses and civil society towards re-shaping city policies and services to make them more effective and engage citizens in building an understanding of the societies' diversity(ies) as a competitive advantage for all. Today, a new study by the Migration Policy Group enquires whether the [Intercultural integration approach](#) advocated by the Council of Europe, leads to a better quality of life in diverse cities. Full press release [here](#).

CIVIL SOCIETY

(19/01) ECRE - Weekly Editorial: Political fragmentation bolsters extremism – to fight it we must get our hands dirty. The recent Belgian government crisis, the German coalition negotiations, the Italian election campaign, and Denmark's government support agreement are all political situations in which the rights of asylum seekers and refugees are sacrificed in the interests of political stability, government formation or holding power. But these cases also demonstrate the complexity of the interplay between refugee rights and European party politics. The simple narrative that extremist-nationalist parties are on the rise because the public doesn't want migrants or refugees simply won't do: not least because it is not generally true. The voting share of these parties is stable or declining in most European countries; yet the influence of their ideas increases. While it is sometimes hard to see beyond the recent crisis, long term trends are just as significant. Full article [here](#).

(19/01) ECRE - Switzerland: Landmark ruling on the right of appeal against Dublin transfers brings court in line with CJEU. The Federal Administrative Court of Switzerland (FAC) has approved the right of asylum seekers to challenge the incorrect application of responsibility criteria under the Dublin Regulation. This marks a departure from its previous case law and an alignment with recent jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). Full press release [here](#).

(19/01) ECRE - Scotland leads the way on refugee integration. The Scottish Government is considering a change to its electoral system that could give refugees living in Scotland the right to vote. In a [public consultation](#) launched at the end of 2017, the government proposed extending the voting franchise for elections of the Scottish Parliament and local government to include all legal residents of Scotland. The consultation, open until 12 March, comes as a result of the Scotland Act 2016, which granted the Scottish government new powers to manage elections. Currently only British, Commonwealth and EU citizens resident in Scotland and aged 16 or older can vote in Scottish Parliament and local council elections. While the consultation does not explicitly mention refugees, the external affairs spokesman for Scotland's Green Party called for the proposed extension to include both refugees and asylum seekers. He argued that this would send a strong message that Scotland is a "[welcoming country](#)". The Scottish Government responded by saying it would "carefully consider" the call to extend voting rights to both groups. Full press release [here](#).

(19/01) ECRE - Germany: proposals to uphold suspension of family reunifications despite drop in potential applicants. German foreign offices are [resuming](#) procedures for family reunifications for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection as the temporary suspension comes to an end on March 16, 2018. Parliamentary groups move to extend the status-quo in spite of the fact that, according to recent [calculations](#), the number of expected beneficiaries of entry visa for family reunification remain low. Full press release [here](#).

(19/01) ECRE - Asylum statistics 2017: Shifting patterns, persisting disparities. Despite [reports](#) of asylum applications "dropping off drastically" in the European Union

throughout 2017, statistics published by national authorities seem to reveal a more complex picture across the continent. Germany witnessed a dramatic decrease in applications registered last year (222,683) compared to the year before (745,545). It should be recalled that the [majority of people](#) lodging applications in 2016 had in fact arrived in 2015. Nevertheless, Germany still spearheads Europe's reception of people seeking protection, far ahead of countries such as Italy and France. Full press release [here](#).

(16/01) ECRE - Launch event AMIF research: Tuesday 23 January from 14.30 to 16.30.

In 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) have commissioned a joint report on the use of Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funding at national level. This report presents a critical analysis of the implementation of the AMIF via the EU Member States' National AMIF Programmes. The report's specific objectives are to support the assessment of AMIF national programming due to be undertaken in the 2018 mid-term review. It makes specific recommendations for better management and use of AMIF funds during the remainder of the AMIF multiannual funding period and provides input to assist the European Commission, EU Member States and partners to develop European asylum, migration and integration funding instruments post-2020. Full press release [here](#).

(12/01) ECRE - Weekly Editorial: To the Bulgarian Presidency: EU global punch needs inner solidarity.

With its assumption of the EU Presidency, Bulgaria becomes the latest member state to grapple with the reform of the European asylum system. Although post-Lisbon, the Presidency is not what it used to be, it does afford a certain influence on decision making through the development and presentation of compromise proposals and through the conduct of bi-lateral discussions to move decision-making forward. In the complex world of asylum law details are hashed out in working-level groupings, mainly chaired by the Presidency. Full article [here](#).

(12/01) ECRE - OPed: Cooperation with Morocco in the EU's African Border - a laboratory of externalization.

The fences encircling the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are the only land borders Europe shares with Africa, and work as a laboratory for the European Union to experiment with different externalization policies which are now being implemented throughout the Union. For example, the creation of isolated spaces from which people are not transferred to the continent has been standard here for over a decade, long before the EU-Turkey Statement implemented the same on the Greek islands. The Spanish-Moroccan Agreement on Readmission was signed in 1992, one of the first bilateral agreements between an EU Member State and a third country to return migrants. Since then, with fences built in the late nineties in what had previously been open borders, Moroccan authorities have controlled entry into the last European territories in Africa. Full article [here](#).

(12/01) ECRE - ECRE policy note: Making Asylum Numbers Count - Gaps and Reform Needs in the Area of Asylum Statistics.

ECRE has published a [Policy Note](#) analysing gaps in the collection and provision of asylum statistics in the EU at a time when the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is debated in an aura of "high politics". Problems identified include an overly narrow set of obligations to collect data under the [Migration Statistics Regulation](#) and an absence of compliance with it, as well as parallel and often competing data collection by EU bodies, international organisations and national authorities with civil society and others seeking to compensate through gap-filling. Full press release [here](#).

(12/01) ECRE - Mediterranean Sea 2017: Arrivals in Europe decrease, old routes are increasingly active and journeys remain deadly. Following a systematic EU policy of [externalization](#), the overall number of refugees and migrants [arriving in Europe](#) decreased in 2017, with Italy and Greece recording the lowest number of arrivals in four years. At the same time Spain and Cyprus reported an increase of arrivals. The overall death rate in the Mediterranean is increasing. Though the total number of people dying decreased, an increase in death per attempted to cross documents the deadlines of the route. Full press release [here](#).

(11/01) Social Platform - European Anti-Poverty Network: Getting results on poverty and the Social Pillar? EAPN response to the Annual Growth Survey package 2018. The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) presents its full analysis of the 2018 Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and draft Joint Employment Report. This follows a [letter to President Juncker](#) presenting EAPN's proposals for the AGS 2018, which were based on its [members' review](#) of the European Semester and the National Reform Programmes 2017. Following the launch of the AGS 2018 in November, EAPN published an immediate press release: [Participation is key to making social rights a 'compass' for the EU](#). This response now presents a fuller analysis of the AGS and the draft Joint Employment Report, prepared in consultation with EAPN members. Full article [here](#).

(10/01) Social Platform - 3 Things I learned from working with Human Rights (by Annica Ryngbeck). In 2010 I left my comfortable life in Sweden for a job opportunity in Belgium that I could not resist. I wanted to move out of my comfort zone and live abroad, and Brussels attracted me as it is the capital for European politics and lobbying. I started working for Social Platform – the largest European network of civil society organizations, advocating for human rights and social justice. Before moving on to a new job adventure I would like to share with you three valuable things I have learned thanks to the amazing people I have had a chance to work with. Full article [here](#).

[PUBLICATIONS](#)

European Commission - [Countering illegal hate speech online](#) (Factsheet)

Open Society Foundation - [Infringement proceeding as a tool for the enforcement of fundamental rights in the European Union](#)

MPI - [Moving Beyond "Root Causes:" The Complicated Relationship between Development and Migration](#)

EPRS - [Migration](#) [Ten Issues To Watch In 2018]

EPRS - [Youth Empowerment](#) [Ten Issues To Watch In 2018]

EPRS - [European Elections](#) [Ten Issues To Watch In 2018]

EPRS - [EU Efforts On Counter-Terrorism – Capacity-Building In Third Countries](#) [Policy Podcast]

Libération - [Interview Enrico Letta - The EU and Migration](#) (in French)