

1. LE PACTE SUR L'ASILE ET LA MIGRATION A ETE ADOPTE « AU DETRIMENT DES DROITS HUMAINS », AVERTIT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Le Pacte sur l'asile et la migration adopté par le Parlement européen mercredi 10 avril va «affaiblir le droit d'asile» et inscrire dans la loi une approche défaillante de la question migratoire européenne, a alerté la cheffe du bureau de Bruxelles d'Amnesty International.

Le pacte, un ensemble de neuf textes de loi, est l'aboutissement de près de dix ans de débats et de négociations au sein de l'UE. Dans les faits, il réforme de fond en comble la politique migratoire de l'Union, dont la procédure d'asile, renforce la sécurité aux frontières de l'UE et établit un nouveau mécanisme dit de « solidarité » entre les États membres.

Le vote de mercredi a été marqué d'un vent de panique chez les négociateurs en chef, qui ont craint que le pacte puisse ne pas être adopté, et la bataille a continué jusqu'à la dernière minute pour s'assurer que toutes les voix soient réunies.

L'adoption en plénière a été marquée par un silence total: alors que les eurodéputés ont l'habitude, à la fin d'un parcours législatif, d'applaudir et de se féliciter, rien de tel n'a eu lieu mercredi, tant la version finale ne plaît à personne.

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3. PLUS DE MESURES POUR RENDRE L'AGRICULTURE BIOLOGIQUE COMPETITIVE

Alors que l'on craint que l'UE n'atteigne pas son objectif de 25 % d'agriculture biologique d'ici 2030, les parties prenantes appellent à un cadre politique plus favorable pour stimuler la demande de produits biologiques.

Pour les acteurs de l'industrie biologique, la Commission européenne devrait prendre davantage de mesures pour stimuler l'achat de produits biologiques, car une demande insuffisante pourrait empêcher l'UE d'atteindre son objectif de consacrer 25% des terres agricoles à l'agriculture biologique d'ici 2030.

Malgré l'augmentation de la superficie consacrée à l'agriculture biologique dans l'UE, le rapport annuel de l'Institut de recherche de l'agriculture biologique a prévenu que ce marché devrait croître à un rythme plus rapide afin d'atteindre ses objectifs.

Le rapport indique qu'après des années de croissance à deux chiffres, en effet, le marché biologique s'est contracté en 2022 en raison de l'inflation qui a fait grimper le prix des produits biologiques.

Selon un rapport de McKinsey, le secteur européen de la distribution alimentaire montre les premiers signes de reprise après des années de restriction des dépenses, et les ménages à revenu élevé ont annoncé leur intention d'acheter davantage de produits biologiques en 2024.

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5. COVID: LE RAPPORT SUR LES LEÇONS TIREES DE LA PANDEMIE

En mars 2023, le Parlement européen a créé la sous-commission spéciale chargée d'examiner la réponse de l'UE à la pandémie de Covid-19 afin de réfléchir aux leçons tirées par l'UE après la pandémie et de se préparer aux défis futurs qui pourraient compromettre la santé des citoyens européens.

Le rapport souligne la nécessité d'améliorer la résilience en cas de crise sanitaire, tant au niveau national qu'europpéen, en créant des incitants à l'investissement et au développement de lignes de production de médicaments, de vaccins et d'autres équipements médicaux dans l'Union.

Il appelle également à une réponse coordonnée pour soutenir différents groupes, tels que les indépendants, les travailleurs, les personnes particulièrement vulnérables et démunies.

En outre, il appelle à regarder vers l'avenir, en menant des recherches prospectives sur les menaces potentielles actuelles et futures, telles que les risques chimiques, biologiques, radiologiques et nucléaires.

La majorité des eurodéputés s'est accordée sur la nécessité de maintenir les écoles et les parlements nationaux ouverts en cas d'urgence sanitaire, et ce aussi longtemps que possible, ainsi que sur la nécessité de s'attaquer au Covid long et sur la nécessité pour l'Europe d'être indépendante des pays tiers en ce qui concerne l'achat de matériel et de médicaments.

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7. L'UE EXHORTE A NE PAS DEPENDRE UNIQUEMENT DE LA CHINE POUR ATTEINDRE LES OBJECTIFS D'ENERGIE RENOUVELABLE

L'Agence internationale pour les énergies renouvelables (IRENA) a réuni des nations du monde entier à Abou Dhabi le 17 avril pour un rassemblement annuel de deux jours consacré à la conclusion d'accords, aux échanges techniques et à la planification dans le domaine des énergies renouvelables.

Lors de l'événement, l'UE a communiqué deux messages essentiels par l'intermédiaire de la commissaire européenne à l'Énergie, Kadri Simson, aux délégués présents: l'engagement pris lors de la COP28 de tripler la capacité des énergies renouvelables pour atteindre 11 000 GW d'ici 2030 nécessite un cadre de gouvernance renforcé, mais aussi qu'il serait « *très dangereux* » de dépendre uniquement de la Chine comme fournisseur.

« Si nous déployons de nouvelles installations éoliennes, terrestres et maritimes, ainsi que des centaines de gigawatts d'énergie solaire, cela devrait également créer de nouveaux emplois dans le monde entier », a expliqué Mme Simson.

8. INTELLIGENCE ARTIFICIELLE: EMPECHONS LA DICTATURE DE LA MACHINE!

L'intelligence artificielle révolutionne l'économie mais menace aussi la civilisation. Pour nous préserver de ce péril, il faudra aller bien plus loin que « l'IA Act ».

Pas un jour ne passe sans que nous soyons témoins de la progression fulgurante de l'intelligence artificielle.

L'IA est déjà utilisée dans la vie quotidienne: communications, traductions, jeux vidéo, bientôt voitures autonomes, mais aussi systèmes de surveillances de masse... et conflits armés. La possibilité de voir arriver des « robots tueurs » sur le champ de bataille est en effet tout sauf théorique.

Moins apocalyptique, quoique fort inquiétant: la possibilité de propager de fausses informations à l'aide de photos et vidéos créées de toutes pièces par des IA, presque impossibles à distinguer des vraies.

Dans un contexte d'uniformisation des contenus sur les réseaux sociaux et les plateformes de streaming via les algorithmes, ce genre d'innovation nuira non seulement à la manifestation de la vérité, mais aussi à la culture et sa diversité, et donc à la civilisation.

Il est important de développer un projet éducatif autour de l'intelligence artificielle, ayant pour but d'informer les citoyens sur les risques associés à l'IA, mais aussi de les former à utiliser l'IA de manière responsable et éthique.

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10. MOBILITE VERTE POUR MODERNISER LE RESEAU DE TRANSPORT EUROPEEN

Le réseau de transport européen doit se préparer à un avenir à faible émission de carbone.

Le « paquet mobilité efficace et verte » propose de moderniser les principaux axes de transport de l'UE, de réviser la directive sur les systèmes de transport intelligents, de créer un nouveau cadre pour stimuler la mobilité propre dans les villes et de soutenir le transport ferroviaire de passagers à longue distance et transfrontaliers.

Il aidera l'UE à atteindre son objectif de réduction de 90% des émissions liées aux transports d'ici à 2050, tout en offrant des avantages « concrets » aux citoyens de l'ensemble de l'Union.

Ces propositions mettent la mobilité européenne sur la voie d'un avenir durable: (...)

11. L'ECONOMIE DE L'UE EST PLUS FORTE QU'IL Y A CINQ ANS

Malgré une série de « crises historiques », l'économie de l'UE est « plus forte qu'il y a cinq ans », a déclaré la présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula von der Leyen, aux eurodéputés, mardi 23 avril, vantant ses succès alors qu'elle brigue un nouveau mandat de cinq ans.

Dans son dernier discours devant l'actuel Parlement européen avant les élections de juin, Mme von der Leyen a également présenté son programme pour les cinq prochaines années.

« La crise sanitaire de la Covid-19 et la guerre en Ukraine, ainsi que la crise énergétique, auraient pu dégénérer en une crise économique et sociale dramatique. Mais cela n'a pas été le cas », a-t-elle annoncé aux eurodéputés.

Avec « plus de 75% », le taux d'emploi n'a jamais été aussi élevé, selon la présidente de la Commission, tandis que le chômage « est à son niveau le plus bas, à moins de 6% », et que l'inflation se rapproche « de notre objectif de 2% », a-t-elle ajouté.

Des politiques telles que l'instrument européen de soutien temporaire à l'atténuation des risques de chômage en situation d'urgence (SURE), le programme d'emprunt commun NextGenerationEU, ainsi que le programme REPowerEU

pour accélérer le développement des énergies renouvelables, ont aidé l'Union à renforcer sa résilience économique et sociale, a-t-elle soutenu.

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13. LE RETOUR POSSIBLE DES MANIFESTATIONS D'AGRICULTEURS

Les mouvements de contestation contre les politiques environnementales de l'UE devraient se poursuivre, avec de possibles relances des manifestations d'agriculteurs avant les élections européennes de juin, ce qui pourrait faire les choux gras des partis d'extrême droite dans les zones Rurales.

Alors que les États membres ont vu les agriculteurs déployer leurs tracteurs dans les grandes villes et bloquer les frontières pour protester contre les nouvelles règles européennes applicables au secteur, les partis conservateurs ont cherché à se positionner comme les principaux alliés des agriculteurs.

Le quartier européen de Bruxelles a été le théâtre de pas moins de trois manifestations depuis le début de l'année, et un groupe d'agriculteurs radicaux menace maintenant de ramener les tracteurs au cœur de l'Europe quelques jours avant les élections européennes, qui auront lieu du 6 au 9 juin.

14. MEDICAMENTS CRITIQUES ET RECOMMANDATIONS DE L'AGENCE EUROPEENNE DES MEDICAMENTS

Alors que les ministres de la Santé de l'UE se réunissaient à Bruxelles pour discuter de l'accès aux médicaments critiques et lancer officiellement l'Alliance des médicaments critiques, l'Agence européenne des médicaments (EMA) a publié ses propres recommandations pour remédier aux faiblesses dans la production et la distribution des médicaments considérés critiques par l'UE.

Pendant la pandémie de Covid-19, les institutions européennes ont renforcé le rôle de l'EMA dans la préparation aux crises et la gestion de celles-ci en ce qui concerne les médicaments et les dispositifs médicaux, afin de garantir la disponibilité des médicaments en cas d'urgence de santé publique.

Les recommandations seront adaptées aux spécificités de chaque médicament de la liste et l'EMA s'abstiendra de faire des recommandations sur les stratégies de politique industrielle, y compris les incitations financières.

15. LA LOI SUR LE « DEVOIR DE VIGILANCE » A ETE ADOPTEE

Le Parlement européen a adopté mercredi 24 avril une loi imposant un « devoir de vigilance » aux entreprises qui devront veiller au respect de l'environnement et des droits humains dans leurs chaînes de production partout dans le monde.

Les eurodéputés ont approuvé à 374 voix pour, 235 voix contre, ce texte lors d'un vote qui intervient exactement onze ans après l'effondrement de l'usine textile Rana Plaza au Bangladesh. Ce drame avait mis en lumière l'absence de contrôle sur les conditions de travail dans les pays tiers.

Les entreprises concernées par cette loi seront tenues de prévenir, d'identifier et de remédier aux violations de droits humains et sociaux (travail des enfants, travail forcé, sécurité...) et dommages environnementaux (déforestation, pollution...) dans leurs chaînes de valeur partout dans le monde, y compris chez leurs fournisseurs, sous-traitants et filiales.

Finally, the final text targets only companies with at least 1 000 employees and a turnover of at least 450 million euros.

If they do not respect their duty of vigilance, companies will be held responsible and will have to fully compensate their victims.

Victims will be able to sue companies in court to obtain damages and interest, and dissuasive fines are provided, up to 5% of global turnover.

16. LA LOI SUR LE « DEVOIR DE VIGILANCE » A ETE ADOPTEE

The European Parliament adopted Wednesday 24 April a law imposing a « duty of vigilance » on companies that will have to ensure respect for the environment and human rights in their production chains everywhere in the world.

The eurodeputies approved it by 374 votes in favour, 235 against, during a vote that comes exactly eleven years after the collapse of the textile factory Rana Plaza in Bangladesh. This tragedy had shed light on the lack of control over working conditions in third countries.

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Si elles ne respectent pas leur devoir de vigilance, les entreprises seront tenues responsables et devront indemniser intégralement leurs victimes.

Les victimes pourront attaquer les entreprises en justice pour obtenir des dommages et intérêts, et des amendes dissuasives sont prévues, jusqu'à 5% du chiffre d'affaires mondial.

17. L'UE ADOPTE POUR DE BON UNE DIRECTIVE SUR LES TRAVAILLEURS UBERISES

Le Parlement européen a formellement adopté le 24 avril, à 554 votes pour et 56 contre, une nouvelle directive relative aux travailleurs des plateformes – concluant ainsi plus de deux années d'intenses négociations.

La directive aborde notamment la question du statut contractuel des travailleurs ubérisés et tente, par le biais d'un nouveau mécanisme au cœur de nombreuses controverses, d'harmoniser l'éventuelle requalification des travailleurs de l'auto-entrepreneuriat vers le salariat.

C'est la première fois que l'Union européenne se penche sur la question de l'économie des plateformes, alors que le nombre de travailleurs des plateformes doit passer de 28 millions en 2022 à 43 millions en 2025, selon les chiffres de la Commission.

La directive établit en outre des règles quant à l'usage d'algorithmes dans le quotidien des travailleurs ubérisés.

18. MALGRE LES DESACCORDS, L'ALLEMAGNE ET LE ROYAUME-UNI RENFORCENT LEUR COLLABORATION MILITAIRE

Face à la guerre en Ukraine et aux menaces croissantes que la Russie fait peser sur l'architecture européenne de sécurité, les Etats membres sont à la manœuvre pour relancer et consolider leur industrie de défense.

La Grande-Bretagne y a longtemps joué un rôle essentiel, en tant que puissance nucléaire et le pays d'Europe qui dépense le plus sur le plan militaire en chiffres absolus. Mais la coopération de l'UE avec le Royaume-Uni en matière de défense a été mise à mal par la sortie du pays de l'UE en 2020 et l'absence d'accord sur la question.

Le chancelier allemand Olaf Scholz et le Premier ministre britannique Rishi Sunak ont annoncé mercredi 24 avril un certain nombre de mesures visant à renforcer la collaboration en matière de sécurité. Ils ont en outre souligné la nécessité d'intégrer étroitement la Grande-Bretagne dans les efforts européens, et de passer outre les récents accrocs survenus dans les relations bilatérales.

19. LE PARLEMENT EUROPEEN VA AMELIORER L'ACCESSIBILITE POUR LES PERSONNES EN SITUATION DE HANDICAP

Le Parlement européen s'apprête à instaurer des règles pour améliorer l'accessibilité physique et numérique de ses locaux dans toute l'UE pour les personnes en situation de handicap.

Le Parlement était déjà dans un bon état de conformité, mais de nouvelles mesures doivent être mises en place et un plan de dépenses de 13,8 millions d'euros a été introduit pour mettre en œuvre la politique d'accessibilité physique pour la période 2023-2024.

La proposition de politique d'accessibilité physique a été approuvée par le bureau du Parlement européen, un organe interne responsable des questions administratives.

La politique vise à mettre en œuvre 261 mesures d'accessibilité qui concernent la chaîne de mobilité des bâtiments, l'acoustique, l'éclairage, la signalisation de tous les espaces ainsi que les mesures comportementales du personnel de première ligne dans des zones spécifiques, telles que les entrées et les services de restauration.

Les mesures comprennent également des activités de sensibilisation et de communication ainsi que des actions particulières sur les procédures d'appel d'offres.

Le bureau a également analysé l'état d'avancement de l'amélioration de l'accès au matériel numérique du Parlement européen pour les personnes souffrant d'un handicap visuel, auditif, cognitif ou physique.

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21. LE PRIX SAKHAROV RECOMPENSE MAHSA AMINI ET LE MOUVEMENT DES FEMMES EN IRAN

Le prix Sakharov, plus haute distinction de l'UE pour les droits humains, a été décerné jeudi par le Parlement européen à Mahsa Amini, jeune kurde iranienne décédée l'an dernier, et au mouvement « Femme Vie Liberté » réprimé dans le sang par le pouvoir en Iran.

« Le meurtre brutal de Jina Mahsa Amini », le 16 septembre 2022, trois jours après son interpellation par la police pour un voile mal ajusté, « a marqué un tournant », a déclaré à Strasbourg la présidente du Parlement, Roberta Metsola.

« Cela a déclenché un mouvement mené par des femmes qui est entré dans l'histoire. Le slogan 'Femme Vie Liberté' est devenu un cri de ralliement pour tous ceux qui défendent l'égalité, la dignité et la liberté en Iran », a-t-elle ajouté.

22. LA RECOLTE DES FRUITS ET LEGUMES NECESSITE TOUJOURS PLUS DE TRAVAILLEURS EXTRA-EUROPEENS

La pénurie de main-d'œuvre pousse la France et les pays européens à employer de plus en plus de travailleurs saisonniers étrangers, notamment extra-européens, ce qui engendre des problèmes de logement et de concurrence entre pays membres.

En juin 2023, alors que la période de récoltes des fruits et légumes battait son plein, à cause du manque de main-d'œuvre en France, les maraîchers, en particulier les producteurs d'asperges, n'ont eu d'autres choix que d'abandonner une partie de leur production faute de bras.

Le problème ne date pas d'hier. Chaque année, les exploitations françaises signent environ 461 000 contrats saisonniers.

Le faible taux de chômage (3% dans le secteur), des travailleurs locaux qui refusent de s'adonner à des tâches aussi physiques, des contrats courte durée: la désertion des champs par les Français tend aujourd'hui à s'accroître.

23. DANS LES AVIONS, LE FLEAU DES PASSAGERS INDISCIPLINES

Agressifs, ivres voire violents, ils représentent un cauchemar pour les compagnies aériennes et leurs voisins en cabine. Malgré une répression accrue, la vague de passagers indisciplinés n'a pas reflué depuis la crise sanitaire.

Ce phénomène de passagers indisciplinés, les « paxi » dans le jargon des professionnels de l'aérien, a explosé pendant la pandémie. En 2021, l'autorité américaine de l'aviation civile (FAA) a enregistré près de 6 000 incidents, dix fois plus qu'en 2017.

Lors du premier semestre 2023, ces occurrences demeuraient presque deux fois plus nombreuses en moyenne qu'avant la crise sanitaire, selon la FAA qui professe une « tolérance zéro » et a infligé 8,4 millions de dollars cumulés d'amendes l'année dernière, les passagers rétifs risquant aussi des poursuites pénales.

24. L'UE S'ENGAGE A ELABORER DES PLANS POUR PROTEGER SES INFRASTRUCTURES CRITIQUES

Les soupçons de sabotage russe des gazoducs européens ont mis l'Union européenne dans l'embarras. Elle doit à présent élaborer un plan de protection de ses infrastructures critiques.

« Les actes de sabotage à l'encontre des gazoducs Nord Stream ont montré à quel point notre infrastructure énergétique est vulnérable. Pour la première fois dans l'histoire récente, elle est devenue une cible », a déclaré Ursula von der Leyen, présidente de la Commission européenne, devant le Parlement européen.

Quatre fuites ont été détectées la semaine dernière sur les deux pipelines Nord Stream qui relient la Russie à l'Allemagne en passant par la mer Baltique.

Une enquête est en cours, mais les Occidentaux estiment que ces fuites sont très probablement le résultat d'un acte délibéré. La Suède et le Danemark ont écrit une lettre au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies.

Les États européens ont déjà renforcé les mesures de sécurité afin de préserver les approvisionnements en énergie en mer du Nord et au large des côtes italiennes.

Les États membres de l'Union doivent renforcer la protection de leurs infrastructures critiques en effectuant des tests de résistance et en utilisant la surveillance par satellite afin de détecter les menaces potentielles, a déclaré Mme Von der Leyen.

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1. DON'T TOUCH MY MONEY: RICH REGIONS CONCERNED BY PERSPECTIVE OF EU ENLARGEMENT

Wealthier European Union regions are concerned that enlargement could result in a reduction in cohesion funds, but the European Commission said it is still too early to start talking about money.

EU cohesion policy, about one-third of the overall EU budget, is the EU's main instrument to help poorer regions catch up with richer ones, although richer regions are also eligible for funding, although in smaller sums.

In the current seven-year budget period from 2021 to 2027, €426 billion is dedicated to the EU's cohesion policy, topped up with an additional €776 billion from the recovery fund set up after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

But as discussions about future EU enlargement continue, which could see several financially weaker countries, such as Ukraine or Moldova, join the bloc, concerns rise that this could mean less money for richer regions.

"If more countries come in and the funds are not increased, then everyone gets less," Isolde Ries, head of the German delegation at the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), told Euractiv.

While regions in richer countries could see their funding cut, "that's not possible at all," Ries said, instead calling to increase the overall sum for cohesion policy.

"We do have richer states in Germany, but we also have a divide," Ries said, adding that her own region, Saarland, was a "very poor state that cannot be equated with a region like Munich or Hamburg or Frankfurt."

While Hamburg has a GDP per capita of 191% of the EU average, Saarland still has a per-capita GDP of 102% of the EU average, falling into the second-richest category in the Eurostat classification.

As regional leaders met in Brussels this week to discuss the future of the bloc's cohesion policy, regional representatives from other richer countries voiced their concerns, too.

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3. ENRICO LETTA'S REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF THE SINGLE MARKET

Launched 30 years ago, the Single Market is the jewel in the crown of European integration, a source of common wealth. Faced with a more conflictual, volatile and complex world, a special effort in terms of strategic rethinking is required.

The European Council of 30 June 2023 called “for an independent High-Level Report on the future of the Single Market to be presented at its meeting of March 2024 and invites the incoming presidencies of the Council and the Commission to take this work forward, in consultation with the Member States”.

Both countries and the Commission would like to find in it concrete and ambitious recommendations and asked the former Italian head of government, Enrico Letta, to write this report. The report is now available.

In order to draft this report, which may come to define the future of the Single Market for years to come, Mr. Letta has travelled across Europe and beyond seeking to gather information and input. One of the stops on this route was 2023's SME Assembly, where he was able to engage with participants from all around Europe and understand the main issues at stake.

4. EU ADOPTS FIRST DIRECTIVE COMBATting VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

On Wednesday (24 April), members of the European Parliament overwhelmingly adopted the EU directive on combatting violence against women, after two years of intense negotiations with member states.

“Today Parliament has taken the first steps to make Europe the first continent in the world to end violence against women”, said the co-rapporteur from the Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Committee, Irish MEP Frances Fitzgerald (EPP), in a press release.

A large majority of 522 votes, 27 against, and 72 abstentions adopted the directive. It aims to deal with sexist cyber harassment, genital mutilation, and forced marriages, to provide better assistance to victims.

Fitzgerald welcomed a text that will protect “victims and prosecute perpetrators”, and thereby ensure a “holistic approach” to dealing with these “heinous crimes”.

Initially proposed by the European Commission on 8 March 2022, the directive was the subject of intense debate during negotiations between the Parliament, the Council, and the Commission – or trilogues.

The member states wrangled over whether or not to include rape in the directive. In the end, the no-vote won out, thanks in particular to the support of France, Germany, Poland, and Hungary.

Even though feminist NGOs regret that the rape is not included in the final compromise, they have welcomed the adoption of the directive.

“The adoption of this directive marks a crucial step towards ensuring the safety and protection of women and girls in all spheres of life, including online,” said Iliana Balabanova, President of the European Women’s Lobby, in a press release.

“We are immensely proud of this historic achievement in our ongoing fight for equality between women and men and the eradication of violence against women and girls,” she added.

Member States now have three years to implement the directive.

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“We are immensely proud of this historic achievement in our ongoing fight for equality between women and men and the eradication of violence against women and girls,” she added.

6. EU ENLARGEMENT: EXPORTING STABILITY OR IMPORTING INSTABILITY?

Despite the security risks involved, there can be no going back on the EU’s commitment to a renewed enlargement process. But policymakers need to take steps to fulfil the EU’s aspiration of securing stability, writes Sir Michael Leigh (*the former EU official in charge of EU enlargement*).

EU membership negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova are due to start this spring. Bosnia and Herzegovina have edged forward in the queue, and Georgia’s not far behind. There’s talk of Montenegro joining the EU by 2030.

The EU has re-launched the enlargement process in record time because of the precarious geopolitical situation in Europe. This is meant primarily to express solidarity with Ukraine after Russia’s invasion and signal to Vladimir Putin that Brussels rejects any notion that Ukraine, its neighbours or the Balkans form part of a Russian sphere of influence.

7. IMPACT ON EU SECURITY

The EU's offer of eventual membership to Kyiv is intended to bolster the security of both Ukraine and the EU. Yet the true implications of Ukraine's potential membership for European security have been largely ignored.

Security would not be enhanced by admitting a country partly occupied by a hostile foreign power. On the contrary, Ukraine's vulnerability would become the EU's vulnerability if it joined without concluding a peace treaty with Russia and without obtaining NATO guarantees.

The EU could stipulate that a peace treaty is a precondition for membership, but this would be handing a veto to Vladimir Putin. A peace treaty is unlikely when fighting finally stops, given the two sides' diametrically opposed war aims.

A ceasefire or armistice are probably the most that can be expected. Skirmishing could continue after the war has ground to a halt.

Russian-occupied territories comprise 20% of Georgia's national territory and Transdniestria in Moldova is a Russian-sponsored pseudo-state.

8. EU LAWMAKERS NAIL DOWN RULES FOR PLATFORM WORKERS

The representatives of the main EU institutions reached a provisional agreement over the Platform Workers Directive in the early hours of Wednesday (13 December) after almost two years of strenuous negotiations.

The Platform Workers Directive is a bill to regulate the gig economy and ensure that workers of digital platforms like Deliveroo and Uber have the correct contractual status based on their treatment and working conditions.

According to the European Commission, almost one in five platform workers ought to be reclassified from self-employed to full-time employees. The Directive intends to establish a harmonised mechanism to assess and operate contractual changes across the bloc.

The file also creates new algorithmic management provisions to protect gig workers' data and regulate the use of algorithms in critical work-related decisions, including remuneration and dismissal.

"It's a very historic deal, I am not exaggerating," the EU Parliament rapporteur, centre-left MEP Elisabetta Gualmini, told journalists on Wednesday.

"For the first time, we built a social rights framework for millions of workers in Europe who are among the most precarious," she added.

The final political meeting between the EU Commission, Council and Parliament, the so-called trilogue format, kicked off on Tuesday evening and lasted 11 hours. The provisional agreement will now have to be fine-tuned at the technical level and be formally adopted by co-legislators to become law.

An initial debriefing for EU ambassadors will take place on 20 December.

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10. EU PARLIAMENT STRENGTHENS QUALITY SAFEGUARDS ON TRADITIONAL EUROPEAN FOODS

The final version of the revised regulation on Geographical Indications (GIs), approved on Wednesday (28 February), boosts protections for food products and producers, though the Greens criticised the lack of mandatory environmental commitments.

For the past three decades, the EU has protected foods and beverages whose quality, reputation or other characteristics are linked to their geographical origin through the labels of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI), and traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG).

There are now 3,500 geographical indications, generating €80 billion in the EU each year.

In 2022, the Commission proposed a revision of the EU Geographical Indications Regulation to address certain shortcomings identified in an evaluation carried out in 2021.

The assessment pointed to the lack of consumer awareness of the GI logo in some EU countries, the low level of enforcement of legislation, shortcomings in environmental matters and the complexity of registration and amendment procedures.

11. DIGITAL PROTECTION AND PROTECTION FROM INDUSTRY

The reform provided reinforced protection of geographical indications on the web. "For online purchases, a geo-blocking system will guarantee protection against fake sites that copy marks," explained De Castro.

An alert system set up by the European Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) will identify illegal domain names so that they can be deactivated.

The adopted text also defines rules when these products are used as ingredients by food processors. When the GI ingredient is used in sufficient quantities to confer an essential characteristic, manufacturers will be obliged to use the protected names on the label, indicating its percentage.

The GI producer groups (consortia) will have to be consulted and will be able to make recommendations to the manufacturer.

According to the rapporteur, the new text gives greater rights to consortia. They will be able to prevent or counter any measure or commercial practice detrimental to the image and value of their products, including price.

12. FINLAND'S STUBB SAYS BEST WAY TO AVOID WAR IS TO 'TALK LESS AND PREPARE MORE'

Sweden and Finland, NATO's two newest members, have an important role to play in contributing to peace and toning down the rhetoric of war while nevertheless preparing for it, Finnish President Alexander Stubb said in Stockholm on Tuesday.

Stubb, who was on an official visit to Stockholm, used the opportunity to discuss defence issues, including the current Western war rhetoric, which he says has become rather aggressive of late.

"The best way to avoid war is to talk less and prepare more," said Stubb.

"I think you feel the same way. It is understandable. Our screens are filled with wars in Europe and the Middle East. But he added that this rhetoric can easily disturb the younger generations' sense of security and faith in the future".

According to him, "Finland and Sweden have an important role to play in promoting peace", saying that while "it sounds paradoxical", it is "why we want a strong military and why we joined NATO".

*Both countries applied to join NATO after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 but became full members at different times – April 2023 for Finland and March this year for **Sweden**. Stubb added that they are both members and share a common cause and destiny.*

"It is impossible to overstate the importance that we were able to take this step together. Nor the value of keeping each other informed, day and night, at all levels. The situation was critical, and we acted accordingly," he said, referring to Helsinki and Stockholm having applied to NATO after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

Stubb also pointed out that the two countries will now play a key role in NATO's defence in the Baltic Sea, the Arctic and on the border with Russia.

"Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO provides an uninterrupted shield from the Baltic to the Black Sea and will further enhance defence planning and cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region".

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14. ITALY SEEKS DIALOGUE WITH IRELAND IN WINE LABEL ROW

Italians have not given up on opposing Ireland’s plan to introduce cancer warnings on wine bottles, hoping to switch the Irish government representatives to milder positions by approaching them in Brussels.

Over the past weeks, Italian politicians reacted with dismay to Ireland’s draft regulation for labelling alcohol products – specifically section 12 of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 – which requires alcohol products to have health warning writings on their labels similar to the ones used for cigarettes.

“Drinking alcohol causes liver disease” is one of them, or “There is a direct link between alcohol and fatal cancers”, or a symbol informing consumers of the danger of alcohol consumption when pregnant.

Concerns in Italy grew when the European Commission did not issue any formal reaction to the proposed law after the formal notification, which, procedurally speaking, counts as giving tacit consent to the plan.

Speaking before MPs in the Italian upper house on Thursday (26 January), Italy’s Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida said that Rome will tighten the ranks and increase activity in Brussels to turn Dublin around.

“Next Monday (30 January), in the context of the Agrifish Council [the monthly gathering of EU agriculture ministers] in Brussels, I will meet the Irish minister of agriculture to whom I will explain our reasons, confident that we will find points of agreement and overcome our different views,” he said.

The minister added he will give his Irish counterpart Charlie McConalogue a bottle of wine “so that he can see that we have no intention of harming his health.”

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16. LONG SUBCONTRACTING CHAINS FOSTER INJUSTICE, SAYS ETUC LEADER

Long subcontracting chains lock workers out of rights, and lock injustices in, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) General Secretary Esther Lynch said during a debate on abusive subcontracting practices in Europe.

Lynch was speaking at a 20 March debate in the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels. The discussion, organised by the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), heard that subcontracting in construction is a major factor of exploitation, fraud, and other labour abuses when done for cost-cutting reasons.

A recent study from Aalborg University on the reality migrant workers face in the workplace was presented in the EP, where attendees heard from an Italian migrant worker speaking of his personal experience dealing with workplace exploitation. The event took place just before the organisation launched the second phase of its subcontracting campaign.

Lynch hailed the work of the report's authors, highlighting a quote from a migrant worker who spoke of their boss only being interested in them working "faster, faster, faster" to the detriment of their safety and wellbeing. She spoke about how some employers use divide-and-conquer tactics to keep migrant workers and the local workforce apart so that they won't be able to support each other to ensure better standards.

*EFBWW General Secretary Tom Deleu had previously told **Euractiv** they often hear about systems being used to keep these workers apart from each other. "We need to find systems where workers can talk with each other on-site. Then we need to empower representatives of subcontractors," he said.*

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18. MACRON'S BILLION TREES TARGET LEAVES SCIENTISTS AND NGOS SCEPTICAL

French President Emmanuel Macron has pledged to plant one billion trees in France over 10 years, but environmentalists and researchers question whether this programme will achieve its stated biodiversity and climate objectives.

Macron announced the plan at the Conference on Climate Change in Egypt in November 2022 (COP27). The target is equivalent to planting around 100 million trees over an area three to four times the size of Marseille each year until 2032.

Forests have long been recognised for their potential to counter the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity. Policy-makers particularly appreciate the ability of trees to absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

In support of the president's target, an inter-ministerial commission 'Conseil Supérieur de la Forêt et du Bois' published in July 2023 a report which estimated that there are between 1.5 and 1.7 million hectares of potential forest areas to be renewed in France.

19. COMMERCIAL FORESTRY AND SUSTAINABILITY

While trees absorb carbon and provide habitats for nature, the impact of commercially farmed trees on climate and biodiversity objectives is more complex and dependent upon how the trees are grown and harvested.

Commercial practices such as planting only one tree species and 'clear cutting' – harvesting all the trees in an area at the same time – can have a detrimental impact on local biodiversity. Trees ill-suited to local conditions are less likely to survive to maturity, the stage with the greatest biodiversity and climate benefits.

How the harvested wood is used will determine a tree's climate impact. The wood used in construction, for example, could store carbon for many years. However, if wood is burnt to produce energy, the carbon in the wood is quickly re-released back into the atmosphere.

20. PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BARELY BENEFIT FROM EU'S ACTION, COURT OF AUDITORS FINDS

The EU's action to improve the lives of people with disabilities has made little difference in recent years, as getting a job and fighting poverty remain a struggle, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) has found.

ECA's report, published on Thursday (12 October), found that the EU strategy for people with disabilities, in place for some 20 years now, does not bring improvement on the ground in terms of employment participation or the rate of poverty.

"EU actions had limited practical impact," Stef Blok, the ECA member in charge of the audit, told a press briefing on Thursday.

For the past decade, the auditors saw nearly a stagnation or very little uptake when it comes to improving the opportunities for people with disabilities to play an equal part in everyday life in important areas.

This affects around a quarter of EU citizens over 16, or around 87 million people, who have a self-declared disability such as a physical or mental impairment. Given the ageing EU population, this number is likely to increase.

The disability employment gap in 2021 remained almost the same as in 2014 when records began, with only half of the population of people with disabilities having jobs, compared to 75 % of those without disabilities, according to Eurostat.

In 2021, persons with disabilities were at a greater risk of poverty or social exclusion, at 30%, than those without disabilities – at 19% – and the risk has not changed significantly since 2015.

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22. PORTUGAL SAYS EU NEEDS PLAN TO PROMOTE WATER AVAILABILITY TO FIGHT SCARCITY

Responding to the threat of water scarcity must include creating a plan to promote water availability in the European Union, namely through management technologies that reduce waste, said Portuguese Agriculture Minister Maria do Céu Antunes on Monday.

On Tuesday, Portugal's agriculture minister is set to present the 'ReWaterEU' plan at the Council of EU agriculture ministers to respond to the problem of drought and water scarcity in the EU, according to a document to which *Lusa* has had access.

ReWaterEU' is intended to help reduce the EU bloc's vulnerability to the effects of climate change on water resources by guaranteeing access to water for public supply in terms of quantity and quality at fair prices, as well as the availability of water for agriculture, tourism and industrial uses, and the protection of different ecosystems.

With regard to the management of water resources, the government proposes to implement measures such as reducing water losses in distribution systems, optimising storage and transport infrastructures, reusing water for non-potable purposes in the urban, tourist, industrial and agricultural sectors, and investing in desalination plants.

The plan is to be financed by EU funds and private investment.

In March, the European Commission will launch a Water Resilience Initiative, which will include a series of immediate actions and launch a public debate on achieving water resilience.

According to the European Drought Observatory, referred to in the Portuguese proposal, about 42% of continental Europe is in a state of warning and about 8% in a state of alert, with a particularly worrying scenario in the EU's south, plagued by severe and prolonged droughts.

23. PORTUGAL SAYS EU NEEDS PLAN TO PROMOTE WATER AVAILABILITY TO FIGHT SCARCITY

Responding to the threat of water scarcity must include creating a plan to promote water availability in the European Union, namely through management technologies that reduce waste, said Portuguese Agriculture Minister Maria do Céu Antunes on Monday.

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24. 'SKILLS-FIRST' HIRING COULD WIDEN EUROPE'S LABOUR POOL

To close the skills gap, businesses and policymakers have recently backed a 'skills-first' hiring approach, which evaluates job applicants based on their abilities instead of traditional education or certification.

Europe is still enduring labour shortages three years after the onset of the pandemic, data released last month from the European Trade Union Institute shows, though even prior to 2020, economies undergoing digital and green transitions showed a deficit of skilled hires available.

"There are large pools of talent that remain underutilised or even wasted," European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit said at a European Year of Skills event in May.

Data from a 2013 study on EU skills shortages by the Centre for the Development of Vocational Training shows that four in ten employees feel their skills are underutilised in their position. The same percentage of European employers claim to struggle to find qualified hires.

25. STUDENT LIVING COSTS REACH 'HISTORIC' HIGHS IN FRANCE

Student living costs are reaching new highs in France, with over 10% increases year-on-year in rent, utility bills, and food, according to student unions' new data.

Rapidly increasing living costs are creating "major student precarity" across the country and deterring prospective students from applying to university, student union UNEF's Secretary General Hania Hamidi told French radio broadcaster *Sud Radio* on Tuesday (15 August).

Four out of every ten students are having to skip at least one meal a day to make ends meet, she added.

The greatest cost increases are in day-to-day expenditures, with rent going up 9% to reach an average of €534, according to a report by student union FAGE published on Wednesday (16 August). Similar trends apply for telephone & internet (+19%), food (+15%) and transport (+7%).

FAGE found that long-standing inflationary pressures are set to increase day-to-day expenditures by an average of 8.9% for the next year, meaning that in effect, the first month of the new university year will cost each newly-enrolled student €3,024. This number includes start-of-year specific expenses, such as health insurance, enrolling fees, and back-to-school supplies.

The numbers do not account for scholarship-holders, and assume that a student lives outside their parental home throughout their studies.

*This is a “historic” rise, €500 more than in 2022, FAGE spokesperson Félix Sosso told radio broadcaster **RTL** on Wednesday. UNEF **data** paints a similar picture, highlighting a €595 increase.*

Such numbers are pushing more students into “forced employment” – working at the cost of their studies, Sosso said. “Beyond a 16-hour work week, students are twice as likely to fail their bachelor’s degree,” he added.

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27. SURVEY FINDS HEALTH IS TOP CONCERN FOR VOTERS

Eurobarometer’s latest survey ahead of European elections in June shows that health is one of the top issues for voters.

Eurobarometer carried out more than 26,000 in person face-to-face or video conference interviews for the survey. The results were weighted according to the population of each member state. It shows that 60% of Europeans are interested in the forthcoming elections, an 11% increase on the same survey ahead of the last elections in 2019, they are also much more likely to vote.

The top issues were fighting poverty (33%), supporting public health (32%), strengthening the economy (31%) and bolstering EU defence and security (31%). Public health did not appear at all in the survey of spring 2019, but the COVID-19 pandemic put it in the spotlight during the current mandate. Other Eurobarometer surveys have shown that the EU reached historical levels of support during the pandemic.

28. DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDE

While the survey shows strong interest in public health, the importance given to it varies markedly between different segments of the population.

Women are much more likely than men to prioritise health (35% vs 28%); older respondents, those aged 55+, consider it to be more important than younger population segments (34% for 55+, 28% for 15 – 24).

Income and level of education are also influential. Those respondents who left full-time education at the age of 15 gave health much more importance than those who had spent more time in the education system (43% vs 27%). Likewise, those who had trouble paying bills were also more likely to place greater importance on health (41% vs 29%). However, the issue did not feature so highly for those who describe themselves as likely to vote in the upcoming elections.

29. TRANSFORMING OUR BUILDINGS: EUROPE'S PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY

As resistance mounts against the European Union's ambitious climate agenda, the recent communication from the European Commission regarding the EU's 2040 climate target brings hope. It commits to nearly eliminating greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, propelling the EU closer to its goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050.

With the building sector accounting for 36% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and 42% of the energy consumed, it is crucial for the Commission to prioritise this sector in its 2040 climate action plan and accelerate efforts by 2030.

Central to this approach is the continued focus on implementing the revised Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. This directive mandates that all new buildings in the EU must be zero-emission by 2030, with all new public buildings achieving this status by 2027. The directive also establishes minimum EU-level efficiency standards, which will drive an increase in the renovation rate of underperforming buildings.

These measures are essential for achieving meaningful progress towards decarbonisation in the building sector and advancing the EU's broader climate objectives. They also help us respond to the prolonged high temperatures that are increasingly common, with extreme heat becoming the norm across the globe.

Scorching summers and chilly winters have posed challenges, particularly in places like schools, where inadequate shading and ventilation lead to uncomfortably hot classrooms. The fear of exorbitant energy bills leads some to forego heating altogether. Instead of sustainable solutions, temporary fixes like energy electricity providers offering electric blankets are common responses, which fail to address the root issues.

Uncomfortable living conditions and high energy costs become a witness to the poor building design and material choices we have made. They highlight how inefficient structures that shelter us impact our health and overall well-being, while contributing significantly to climate change. We need to reimagine our built environment, then, in a holistic way. It's not just about how it looks. We should design them to last, to create comfort and to be future-proof.

Thankfully, forward-thinking cities are leading the way in adopting innovative approaches to construction and the urban landscape.

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