EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Councils of war never fight

With crucial decisions on the European Union enlargement and budget on the table, the European Council meeting is set to be a protracted battle of wits and concessions.

European Headlines is a weekly newsletter from the European Movement International highlighting media perspectives from across Europe. Click here to subscribe.



Damned if you do, damned if you don't

The EU leaders are gearing up to burn the midnight oil during the European Council meeting scheduled for Thursday and Friday with an agenda contentious enough to keep the summit running well into the weekend, narrates *Tageblatt*. The key issues on the table are the enlargement decisions and revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027, which implies increasing the EU budget to cover additional spending on migration, neighbourhood, emergency aid, and crucially, a hefty lump sum of financial support for Ukraine. As if the matter of spending more is not a sticky wicket by itself, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán remains resolute in his threat to block funding and the opening of the EU accession negotiations with Ukraine, adding insult to injury by posing for a joint photo with Russian President Putin. On the eve of the meeting, the European Commission announced the release of €10.2 billion from the EU Cohesion Fund, previously blocked due to the rule of law violations by the Hungarian government, despite the objections from Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voiced during the plenary debate. Although approximately €21 billion from the Cohesion and Recovery and Resilience Fund remain out of Budapest's reach, MEPs warn against the precedent this "giving into Orbán's blackmail" sets for the future.

Read the full article



Build a better mouse trap

In a last-ditch effort to sway the stalemate of the Hungarian (op)position on opening the EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and providing additional financial support to the country before the European Council meeting, the European Commission announced that Budapest had fulfilled the conditions related to judicial independence and, thus, can claim up to €10 billion of the EU funds previously blocked under the rule of law conditionality mechanism. Questioning whether the concessions will be sufficient to change Orbán's rhetoric on the "absurdity" and "ridiculousness" of accession talks with Ukraine, *Die Presse* takes stock of the forfeits already granted to Hungary. Particularly on the Ukrainian side, the government reversed the recently adopted language law, which, according to Hungary, discriminated against almost 100,000 Hungarians living in the Western regions of Ukraine. Nevertheless, Orbán arrives in Brussels armed with his national parliament's resolution calling on the prime minister to veto the decision on Ukrainian integration and arguments citing the unfair preferential treatment in contrast to Western Balkans and supposed opposition of the majority of Hungarian population.

Read the full article



Working out the kinks

Final details and negotiations on accession to the European Union are still being ironed out, right up until this week's European Council summit, as outlined in two articles from *Balkan Insight*. One snag for Serbia has been Chapter 35 of the country's accession negotiations – Serbia has committed to not recognising Kosovo since the latter declared independence in 2008, and border disputes are a no-go for joining the EU. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic agreed to amendments to Chapter 35 back in March, which are contingent on a path toward mutual recognition between Serbia and Kosovo, and now the General Affairs Council is urging the European Council to change the accession deal to reflect these changes. Moldova, meanwhile, is due to open accession negotiations along with Ukraine, though "the draft is changing two to three times daily", according to another article in *Balkan Insight*. Even a rejection of only Ukraine would put Moldova on the outs as well. Though the Commission delivered a favourable report on Moldova and Ukraine last month, and draft conclusions of the EUCO summit are encouraging, the next steps mainly hinge on votes from Hungary and the Netherlands.

Read the full article



Fickle alliance

Following in the footsteps of his Hungarian counterpart, newly elected Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico is next on the European Commission's watch list for potential rule of law offenders as the Slovak government announced plans to abolish a branch of the prosecutor's office and reduce penalties for corruption, skipping the deliberation stage in favour of the accelerated procedure. The topic became the centre of a heated debate during the European Parliament plenary session on Wednesday with Slovak, Dutch, Polish, and Czech MEPs stepping forward to sound the alarm over the increasing number of attacks on Slovak journalists, shrinking access to information on government affairs, and the proposed changes to the criminal code that would allegedly paralyse the investigation of cases featuring people in Fico's closest circle, recounts *IDNES.cz*. The few far-right Slovak representatives dismissed the whole debate as an EU attempt to intervene into the sovereign affairs of Slovakia. Meanwhile, European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders delivered a clear forewarning, noting that the Commission would "not hesitate" to take actions including freezing the EU funds, in case the amendments breaching the EU law and undermining the rule of law are passed on Friday, December 15.

Read the full article

Copyright © The European Movement International, all rights reserved.
The European Movement International
Place du Luxembourg 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

This is a weekly newsletter from the European Movement International.
Click here to subscribe.