



June 2019

The political environment within the European Union is going through a transitional period, with the newly elected European Parliament to start its new term at the beginning of July and a new European Commission in the later part of the year. The upcoming legislative period will be of crucial importance for the future shape of the European Union. To complement the Civil Society Days 2019 at the European Economic and Social Committee on 12-13 June 2019, this digest presents a selection of pertinent publications from the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).



Resilience of democracy

Online disinformation and the EU's response

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, EPRS, February 2019

The visibility of disinformation as a tool to undermine democracies increased in the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine. It gained notoriety as a global challenge during the UK referendum on EU membership as well as the United States presidential election campaign in 2016. The European Union and the European Parliament have stepped up efforts to tackle online disinformation ahead of the May 2019 European elections.

From post-truth to post-trust?

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, EPRS, October 2018

Is the 'very concept of objective truth' fading out in the world, as George Orwell wrote in his *Homage to Catalonia* in the 1930s? Or is truth 'dead', as *Time* magazine asked in 2017? Can we draw clear lines between objective facts, spin and lies? What are the consequences of 'truth decay' for trust, democracy and multilateralism?

Foreign influence operations in the EU

Briefing by Naja Bentzen, EPRS, July 2018

Attempting to influence political decision-making beyond one's own political sphere is not a new phenomenon – it is an integral part of the history of geopolitics. Whereas hard power relies on military and economic force, the soft power of a state involves public diplomacy and dialogue on values, cultures and ideas, which should normally correspond with its behaviour abroad. Although the extent is hard to measure, democratic states whose values match the prevailing global norms – pluralism, fundamental rights and freedoms, and the rule of law as a principle within states and in international relations – and exert this influence by contributing to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, traditionally appear more attractive, thus having more soft power leverage. However, influence can also serve purposes of interference and destabilisation.

Active participation

Revising the European Citizens' Initiative

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Laura Tilindyte-Humburg, EPRS, March 2019

The ECI enables European citizens to invite the Commission to table a proposal for a legal act. The detailed rules for such initiatives are laid down in a 2011 regulation, whose main stated aim is encouraging citizens' participation in the political life of the European Union (EU). However, since the regulation became applicable in April 2012,

numerous actors have raised concerns regarding the instrument's functioning and have called for reform, aiming to simplify the existing procedures and increasing the tool's usability.

[Women in politics: A global perspective](#)

Briefing by Joanna Apap, Eulalia Claros and Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, March 2019

Fair representation of women in political life has a positive impact on gender mainstreaming in various policies. The United Nations has set a dedicated target within the sustainable development goals dealing specifically with women's access to leadership. The available data on the presence of women in parliaments and in governments show a positive trend, but much still remains to be done to ensure an equal presence of both genders in decision-making. The European Union supports gender equality in politics, and the European Parliament has reaffirmed the importance of such a policy on various occasions.

Role of culture and education in sustainable development

[A new European agenda for culture](#)

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, January 2019

Culture can have various meanings and roles in our lives and societies. Continuous research into this subject reveals its significant contribution not only to economic growth and job creation but also to wellbeing, social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Together with culture's importance in shaping and maintaining international relations, these aspects define Europe's cultural strategy for the future.

[Cultural heritage in EU policies](#)

Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, June 2018

2018 was devoted to the European Union's cultural heritage. This paper focuses on the evolution of the very notion of cultural heritage, its role and place in society, as well as the way it is perceived and interpreted in the context of related EU prerogatives. The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 was a result of this evolution, and sought to allow EU citizens to gain a broad understanding of their cultural heritage in all its aspects, democratically share responsibility for it, celebrate it and benefit from the creation it inspires.

[Understanding Sustainable Development Goals](#)

'At a glance' note by Marta Latek, EPRS, November 2017

In 2015, the international community embarked on an unprecedented common path mapped out in the comprehensive set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which it had committed. Taking into account the high level of ambition of this new agenda, it was crucial to implement it as quickly and coherently as possible at all levels.

Young generation

[EU policies – Delivering for citizens: Youth empowerment](#)

Briefing by Denise Chircop, EPRS, March 2019

The proportion of young people (aged between 15 and 29) in the general EU population is declining. Young people generally have a higher level of education than older adults, and youth unemployment rates have begun to fall. Nevertheless, the young are still more exposed to poverty and social exclusion than other sections of the population.

[Erasmus 2021-2027: The Union programme for education, training, youth and sport](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Denise Chircop, EPRS, November 2018

The Erasmus 2021-2027 proposal was published on 30 May 2018. Establishing a new programme would ensure the continuation of the Erasmus+ funding programme for education, training, youth and sport in the period after 2020. The Commission proposes doubling the funds available and tripling the number of participants.

[European Solidarity Corps](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Denise Chircop, EPRS, April 2019

The Commission launched the European Solidarity Corps in a December 2016 communication, and the present proposal for a regulation would set its legal basis, define the budgetary and implementation arrangements, specify objectives and define key terms. The Corps would have a volunteering strand on the one hand and a smaller occupational strand (traineeships and jobs) on the other.

Economy and democracy

[Understanding trade balances](#)

'At a glance' note by Jana Titievskaia with Marian Pietsch, EPRS, February 2019

Trade policy discourse on both sides of the Atlantic has recently focused on trade deficits and surpluses. In the United States (US), President Donald Trump has routinely referred to the US trade deficit as a central indicator of the country's economic woes, and made its reduction a key objective of US trade policy. In Europe, the world's largest trade surplus, run by Germany, has come under scrutiny. However, focusing on trade balances of exports and imports can be misleading in the trade policy context. Trade balances need to be considered as an integral part of a larger whole, the balance of payments of an economy. The imposition of specific trade policy measures, such as unilateral tariffs, cannot be expected to improve a trade balance significantly.

[EU policies – Delivering for citizens: EU support for democracy and peace in the world](#)

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir with Alina Dobрева, EPRS, October 2018

From the outset, the European Union has been an integration project directed at preserving peace among its Member States – a fundamental objective that it has succeeded in achieving for over 60 years. As a community of like-minded states, the EU is also based on certain fundamental values, such as democracy and the rule of law, which the Union aspires to promote, both internally and externally, and which guide all its policies.

Environmental and social sustainability

[Social protection in the EU: State of play, challenges and options](#)

Briefing by Nora Milotay, EPRS, November 2018

Globalisation, technological change, an aging population and changes to the world of work have made securing social protection for all – i.e. economic and social security – a major challenge. When social protection systems work well, they can have a stabilising effect on the economy and promote socio-economic equality and stability. By contrast, inadequate or ineffective systems can exacerbate inequality. Indeed, improving the existing social protection systems is the priority of half of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights – the European Commission's overarching social-field initiative designed to serve as a compass for policies updating current labour market and welfare systems.

[EU policies – Delivering for citizens: Health and social security](#)

Briefing by Nicole Scholz, Monika Kiss and Alina Dobрева, EPRS, November 2018

While the main responsibility for health and social security lies primarily with the governments of the individual European Union Member States, the EU complements national policies, especially those with a cross-border dimension. In a recent poll conducted for the European Parliament, more than two thirds of EU citizens expressed support for increased EU action on health and social security.

[Environment action programme – Living well within the limits of our planet](#)

Briefing by Didier Bourguignon, EPRS, December 2018

The European Union has been protecting the environment since the early 1970s, under the premise that economic prosperity and environmental protection are inter-dependent. Successive environment action programmes have set the framework for EU environmental policy. The seventh environment action programme, a binding decision adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2013, covers the period from 2014 to 2020. Bearing the title 'Living well, within the limits of our planet', it seeks to achieve a 2050 vision for sustainability

Further reading:

[Democracy support in EU external policy](#)

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, March 2018

[China's foreign influence operations in Western liberal democracies: An emerging debate](#)

'At a glance' note by Gisela Grieger, EPRS, May 2018

[Arts, culture and culture awareness in education](#)

Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, November 2017

More in the Graphics Warehouse

Figure 1 – In your opinion, which of the following topics should be a priority for the EU? (%)

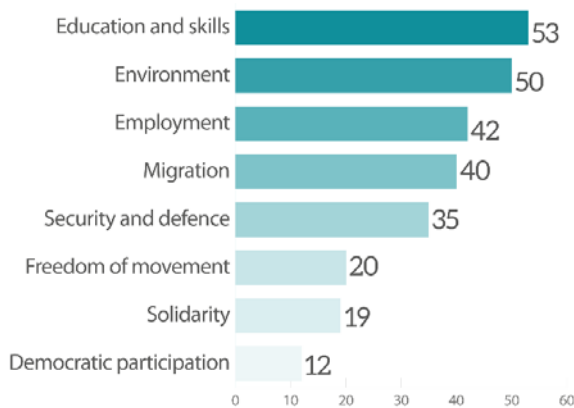
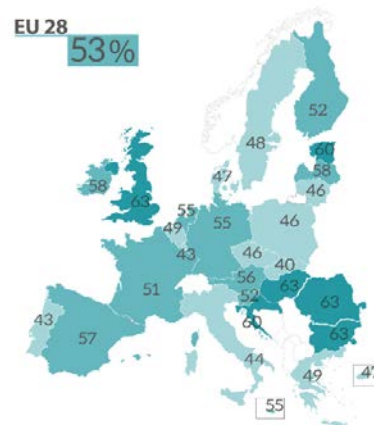


Figure 2 – Percentage of young people, who chose education and skills as a top priority for the EU.



Data source: [Flash Eurobarometer 455](#), 2018.

More information

**WHAT
EUROPE
DOES
FOR
ME**

**IN
MY
REGION**



**IN
MY
LIFE**



**IN
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