

# The European Union in 2015: key events

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January

**1 January:** Latvia takes over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) from Italy. The priorities of the Latvian Presidency include the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and working relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia.

**2 January:** the President of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi, defends the need for a ‘renewed institutional order’. Project Syndicate (<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ecb-eurozone-economic-union-by-mario-draghi-2015-1-2015-01>).

**7/8/9 January:** terrorist attacks in France. A series of attacks target the office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, as well as police officers and customers of a kosher supermarket.

**7 January:** the European Commission publishes several documents setting out the EU proposals for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) being negotiated with the United States (<http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1230>).

**8 January:** EU-Ukraine relations. The Commission proposes a further €1.8 billion in macro-financial assistance, Press Release, IP/15/3020 ([http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-3020\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-3020_en.htm)).

**13 January:** Juncker Investment Plan. The European Commission adopts a legal proposal setting up the European Fund for Strategic Investments, to be established in close partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB).

**14 January:** Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claims responsibility for the attack on ‘Charlie Hebdo’ ([http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/01/14/aqpa-revendique-l-attaque-contre-charlie-hebdo\\_4555720\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/01/14/aqpa-revendique-l-attaque-contre-charlie-hebdo_4555720_3224.html)).

**14 January:** ECB monetary policy. The Advocate General of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issues his opinion on the Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT) programme. Contrary to the arguments put forward by the German Constitutional Court, the Advocate General is of the view that the OMT programme and the OMTs are ‘unconventional’ monetary policy measures, and compatible with the European treaties. The opinion of the Advocate General paved the way for the announcement of new ECB measures, described by the press as ‘quantitative easing’. A quantitative easing measure is a technique used by central banks when other monetary policy instruments, mainly changes to the key interest rates, can no longer be used since the rates are so low, as has been the case in the Eurozone since the reductions of June and September 2014. Opinion Case C-62/14, Gauweiler and Others

**22 January:** the ECB announces an ‘Expanded Asset Purchase Programme – EAPP). The programme, presented as a European-style ‘quantitative easing’ measure, will run from March 2015 until the end of September 2016, and will involve monthly purchases of € 60 billion’s worth of public and private sector securities, i.e. a total amount of € 1,140 billion (<http://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pressconf/2015/html/is150122.en.html>).

**25 January:** elections in Greece brought forward by 18 months. The anti-austerity party SYRIZA gains 36.34% of the votes and 149 out of 300 parliamentary seats, missing out on an absolute majority by 2 seats. A national government, formed by SYRIZA together with the Independent Greeks party (ANEL), opposes, for the first time, the austerity measures and the monitoring of these by the Troika. The Greek government wishes to propose new ‘reforms’ breaking free from the austerity policies of the second programme, which has remained fully unimplemented (see Theodoropoulou, this volume).

## February

**3 February:** pension funds. The European Commission publishes a report which recommends exempting pension funds for two further years from the requirement for central clearing of their over-the-counter derivative transactions ([http://ec.europa.eu/finance/financial-markets/derivatives/index\\_fr.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/finance/financial-markets/derivatives/index_fr.htm)).

**5 February:** ECB/Greece. The European Central Bank decides to suspend the use of Greek bonds as collateral. In order to receive funding, therefore, Greek banks have to resort to ‘emergency liquidity assistance’ (ELA), which requires agreement from the ECB’s Governing Council, but also means higher borrowing costs

**12 February:** analytical note on the next steps towards better economic governance in the euro area, prepared by Jean-Claude Juncker, together with Donald Tusk, Jeroen Dijsselbloem and Mario Draghi. For the first time, the note recognises explicitly that the crisis is a ‘competitiveness crisis’, and acknowledges that certain weaknesses pre-date the crisis. According to this analysis, several Eurozone countries did not use this boom time of expansion to tackle ‘existing rigidities in product and labour markets’. Preparing for Next Steps on Better Economic Governance in the Euro Area. Analytical Note, 12 February 2015 ([http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/economic-governance-note\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/economic-governance-note_en.pdf)).

**13 February:** informal meeting of the European Council. The EU leaders discuss the ‘three challenges facing Europe: restoring peace in Ukraine, fighting terrorism and improving the economic and monetary union’.

**14-15 February:** terrorist attacks in Denmark during a discussion organised in a cultural centre on ‘art, blasphemy and freedom of expression’ as a tribute to Charlie Hebdo, and in a synagogue. Following these attacks, Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt announced that a referendum would be held by April 2016 on the Danish derogation in the area of police and judicial cooperation.

**18 February:** capital markets union. The European Commission launches a brief three-month consultation on its ‘flagship project’: to create a true single market for capital in order to ‘facilitate the financing

of European companies and boost growth in the 28 EU Member States', IP/15/4433 and COM (2015) 63.

**18 February:** financial assistance programme to Greece. The Greek government requests a six-month extension to the second programme, which expires on 28 February, *Le Monde* ([http://www.lemonde.fr/crise-de-l-euro/article/2015/02/18/entre-bruxelles-et-athenes-le-bras-de-fer-devient-epistolaire\\_4579091\\_1656955.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/crise-de-l-euro/article/2015/02/18/entre-bruxelles-et-athenes-le-bras-de-fer-devient-epistolaire_4579091_1656955.html)).

**20 February:** Eurogroup/Greece. The Eurozone finance ministers agree 'to consider extending financial assistance to Greece' (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/eurogroup/2015/02/20/>).

**24 February:** deflation in the EU and the Eurozone. In January 2015, the annual inflation rate in the Eurozone is -0.6%, as compared to -0.2% in December. This is the lowest rate recorded since July 2009.

**24 February:** ECB/Greece. The ECB informs the President of the Eurogroup that, in its view, the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and of the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) still apply. On this point, it disagrees with the newly-elected Greek government, which wishes to propose new reforms breaking free from the previous programme's austerity policies ([http://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/other/20150224\\_letter-to-dijsselbloemen.pdf](http://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/other/20150224_letter-to-dijsselbloemen.pdf)).

**24 February:** Eurogroup/second Greek programme. The Eurogroup is briefed by 'the institutions' (a new way of referring to the Troika: the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) on the state of play of their discussions with the Greek authorities: 'The aim of the talks is to reach agreement on a comprehensive list of reforms, which Greece is expected to complete according to the current agreement' (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/eurogroup/2015/04/24/>).

## March

**5 March:** a new start for social dialogue. At the opening of a high-level conference, 'A new start for social dialogue', the European Commission confirms that 'social dialogue at all levels is a pre-requisite for the

functioning of Europe's social market economy and crucial to promote both competitiveness and fairness'. A new start for Social Europe, 5 March 2015 (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=fr&furtherEvents=yes&eventsId=1028>).

**9 March:** employment and social aspects of the 2015 European Semester. The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) adopts key messages on the financing of social protection systems, as well as conclusions on inclusive labour markets.

**10 March:** Trade in Services Agreement (TISA). The Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) Council makes public the negotiating mandate for the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA). This decision 'reflects a growing public interest for this multilateral agreement, which is currently being negotiated by 24 members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) accounting for 70% of world trade in services'. (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2015/03/150310-trade-services-agreement-negotiating-mandate-made-public/>).

**10 March:** the ECOFIN Council sets out a negotiating position for a proposal for a regulation on the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI).

**13 March:** rail liberalisation. The 'Transport, Telecommunications and Energy' Council holds a public debate on two proposals relating to rail services in the EU (fourth railway package). The ministers also discussed ways in which transport policies can stimulate competitiveness, growth and employment.

**18 March:** corporate tax avoidance. The European Commission presents a package of measures on fiscal transparency, as part of its programme to tackle corporate tax avoidance and harmful tax competition in the EU, COM (2015) 136.

**19/20 March:** European Semester. The European Council reaches agreement on the three pillars proposed by the European Commission in the Annual Growth Survey (investment, structural reforms and growth-friendly fiscal consolidation). The section containing the European Council Conclusions, entitled 'European Semester/Growth and Jobs', reports on a discussion on the state of play of negotiations with the

United States on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The negotiators are asked to make efforts to conclude negotiations on an 'ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement by the end of the year' ([http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/european-council/2015/03/european-council-conclusions-march-2015-en\\_pdf/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/european-council/2015/03/european-council-conclusions-march-2015-en_pdf/)).

**31 March:** the end of milk quotas. The EU milk quota regime is definitively scrapped. The quota regime, first introduced in 1984 when EU production far outstripped demand, was one of the systems set up to resolve the problem of structural surpluses.

**31 March:** citizens' initiatives. The European Commission publishes a report on citizens' initiatives in the EU, COM (2015) 145.

**31 March:** EU/Ukraine. The Council decided to lend up to 1.8 billion euros to Ukraine over a period of two and a half years. These loans will be disbursed in three instalments, with a maximum maturity of 15 years (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2015/03/31-macro-financial-assistance-ukraine/>).

## April

**1 April:** ECB/Greece. The ECB raised by 700 million euros the ceiling applicable to Greek banks giving them access to 'emergency liquidity assistance' (ELA) via the national Central Bank. This brings the ceiling to 71.8 billion euros. The ECB has been helping Greek banks in this way since early February 2015.

**5 April:** Greece/IMF. The Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, confirms the repayment of a €460 million loan from the IMF, falling due on 9 April, Press Release, IMF 15/162.

**18 April:** Stop TTIP. 700 events take place on the day of action organised to protest against negotiations between the United States and the EU.

**23 April:** extraordinary meeting of the European Council on the refugee crisis.

**27 April:** EU/Ukraine summit. The 17<sup>th</sup> EU/Ukraine summit is organised in Kiev. It is the first summit of its kind to take place in the context of the EU/Ukraine association agreement. The general provisions of this agreement, as well as the political and cooperation chapters, have been applied provisionally since November 2014, while those relating to the ‘deep and comprehensive free trade area’ will apply from 1 January 2016.

**28 April:** European Agenda on Security. The Commission sets out the Union strategy to tackle threats to security in the EU over the period 2015-2020, MEMO/15/4867.

**30 April:** the Italian Constitutional Court rejects some of the pension reform measures introduced by Mario Monti’s government in 2011 as unconstitutional. Sentenza N. 70 Anno 2015 Giudizio Di Legittimità Costituzionale In Via Incidentale, 30 aprile 2015 (<http://www.corte costituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=2015&numero=70>).

## May

**5 May:** spring Economic Forecast. According to the European Commission, economic growth in the EU is benefiting from favourable economic conditions. According to this forecast, ‘these short-term factors are boosting an otherwise mild cyclical upswing’: ‘oil prices remain relatively low, global growth is steady, the euro has continued to depreciate, and economic policies in the EU are supportive’ ([http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/eu/forecasts/2015\\_spring\\_forecast\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu/forecasts/2015_spring_forecast_en.htm)).

**7 May:** general election in the United Kingdom. Victory for the Conservatives under Prime Minister David Cameron, with an absolute majority of 331 seats. This result means that a referendum will be held by 2017 on whether the United Kingdom will remain in a ‘reformed’ Union. The Conservative government also wishes to change its relationship with another European institution: the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The new government wishes to free itself from the constraints

imposed by this Court and reaffirm the supremacy of British law over the European Convention ([https://www.conservatives.com/~media/files/downloadable%20Files/human\\_rights.pdf](https://www.conservatives.com/~media/files/downloadable%20Files/human_rights.pdf)).

**7 May:** complaint filed in Germany against the ECB's 'quantitative easing' ([http://www.lesechos.fr/07/06/2015/lesechos.fr/021118259864\\_le-juge-allemand-saisi-d-une-plainte-contre-le-qe-de-la-bce.htm#5BPFUWozKJTLuwmi.99](http://www.lesechos.fr/07/06/2015/lesechos.fr/021118259864_le-juge-allemand-saisi-d-une-plainte-contre-le-qe-de-la-bce.htm#5BPFUWozKJTLuwmi.99)).

**7 May:** Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The Foreign Affairs Council discusses progress made in the TTIP negotiations with the United States, looking in particular at the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system.

**11 May:** Greece/Eurogroup. The Eurogroup was briefed on 'the ongoing discussions between the Greek authorities and the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund on Greece's comprehensive list of reforms'. The disbursement of the remaining financial assistance to Greece 'can only take place once these reforms have been agreed and a review by the three institutions has concluded that they have been implemented' (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/eurogroup/2015/05/11/>).

**12 May:** the ECOFIN Council adopts Conclusions on the in-depth reviews of the economic imbalances in Member States, stressing the need for strong commitment to structural reforms, Press release 262/15.

**13 May:** European agenda on migration. The European Commission describes the immediate measures to be taken to address the crisis situation in the Mediterranean, as well as the actions to be taken in the next few years to better manage migration in all its aspects, MEMO/15/4957.

**13 May:** European Semester. The European Commission adopts Country-specific Recommendations for 2015 and 2016, in which it calls upon 'Member States to take measures to create jobs and stimulate growth', MEMO/15/4968.

**18 May:** refugee crisis. The Foreign Affairs Council decides to carry out an EU naval operation, christened EUNAVFOR Med, to disrupt the business model of people-smugglers in the Mediterranean. This decision

is one element of the EU's comprehensive response to the challenge of migration, Doc 8966/15.

**19 May:** Regulatory fitness and performance programme (REFIT). The European Commission adopts a programme on Better Regulation. This set of reforms will 'boost openness and transparency in the EU decision-making process', MEMO/15/4989.

**27 May:** agenda on migration. Two weeks after the presentation of the European agenda on migration, the Commission adopts the first proposals of its overall approach to improve management of migratory flows.

**28 May:** David Cameron's Conservative party propose that the European Convention on Human Rights be abandoned in favour of adoption of a 'British Bill of Rights'. The party's manifesto referred to the Conservatives' wish to 'break the formal link between British courts and the European Court of Human Rights', a measure listed in the section on 'Fighting crime and standing up for victims'. This commitment was also included in the Queen's speech on 27 May 2015 (<http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/royaume-uni-abandonner-la-convention-europeenne-des-droits-de-lhomme-un-projet-critique>).

**29 May:** EU/Japan summit. The leaders decide to speed up negotiations on a strategic partnership agreement and a free trade agreement between the EU and Japan.

## June

**4 June:** no referendum on the EU in the Netherlands. Two and a half years after it was registered, a citizens' initiative asking for a referendum to be held on the EU is rejected following a discussion in Parliament, on the basis of a 2014 Council of State opinion. Advies W01.14.0025/I/Vo/B, 17 July 2014 (<https://www.raadvanstate.nl/adviezen/zoeken-in-adviezen/tekst-advies.html?id=11313>).

**17 June:** structural reform. The European Commission decides to set up a new 'Structural Reform Support Service'. This service, set up within the European Commission's Secretariat-General, is tasked with

steering and coordinating support to individual Member States, in cooperation with other Commission services, other Member States and/or international organisations. Statement 15/5218.

**17 June:** The Greek central bank sends out an alarming warning to the country's government on the risk of the country leaving the euro, even the EU itself, if negotiations with debtors fail: no conclusion to these negotiations is currently in sight. In its annual report, the Bank of Greece had warned that failure to reach an agreement would lead to 'a Greek default, and ultimately to the country's exit from the euro area, and, most likely, from the European Union', and highlighted that 'little ground remains to be covered' to reach a compromise.

**16 June:** the CJEU declares the ECB's OMT ('Outright Monetary Transactions') programme compatible with EU law (<http://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2015-06/ep15007ofr.pdf>).

**18 June:** the ECB's Governing Council takes note of the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union confirming that the OMT programme announced in 2012 is compatible with European Union (EU) law. It recalls that the programme was created in order to preserve the singleness of monetary policy in the euro area and ensure the transmission of the ECB's policy stance to the real economy (<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2015/html/pr150618.en.html>).

**18 June:** early general elections in Denmark. Lars Lokke Rasmussen forms a minority liberal government.

**22 June:** report on completing Europe's economic and monetary union. The 'Five Presidents' Report' (European Commission, in close cooperation with the Presidents of the Euro Summit, the Eurogroup, the European Central Bank and the European Parliament) contains proposals on strengthening the EMU from 1 July 2015, with a view to its completion/stabilisation in 2025 ([http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/economic-monetary-union/docs/5-presidents-report\\_fr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/economic-monetary-union/docs/5-presidents-report_fr.pdf)).

**22 June:** reaction of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to the Five Presidents' Report. Commenting on the proposal to create national competitiveness authorities, Bernadette Ségol, ETUC General Secretary, said: 'There is no way trade unions would accept a body

separate from the social partners giving advice on wage negotiations'. 'What the European Commission's press release about the Competitiveness Authority fails to mention is that the authority in Belgium, as in other countries, is run by employers and trade unions – it is not a separate body handing down advice to social partners to follow' (<https://www.etuc.org/fr/presse/ce-sont-les-syndicats-et-les-employeurs-qui-fixent-les-salaires-pas-les-%C2%AB-autorit%C3%A9s-de-la#.VuKlZOaXQdV>).

**22 June:** refugee crisis. A military naval operation (EUNAVFOR MED) is launched, to tackle people-smuggling in the southern part of the central Mediterranean.

**22 June:** a draft agreement, proposed by the Greek government, and containing austerity measures involving an increase in value-added tax (VAT) and pension reforms, is examined by the Eurogroup. Following the euro area Euro Summit, President Donald Tusk states that the 'new Greek proposals to the three institutions' (European Commission, International Monetary Fund and ECB) are 'a positive step forward according to the initial assessment of the institutions'. (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/22-tusk-final-remarks-euro-summit/>).

**25/26 June:** European Council on the refugee crisis. No consensus is reached between Member States on arrangements to establish quotas to share out the 40 000 asylum seekers who have arrived in Italy and Greece.

**26 June:** Greece/Troika. Negotiations between the Greek government and the Troika 'institutions' break down.

**27 June:** Greece/Troika. The Greek Prime Minister announces the government's decision to hold a referendum on 5 July, on whether the terms of the 22 June agreement should be accepted or rejected.

**28 June:** the Emergency liquidity assistance (ELA) granted to the Greek banks is maintained at the same level. The ECB takes note of the decision taken to hold a referendum in Greece, and of the non-prolongation of the adjustment programme.

**29 June:** referendum in Greece. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who is calling for a ‘yes’ vote, together with other European leaders, claims that the referendum is really about whether or not Greece wishes to belong to the Eurozone ([http://www.lesechos.fr/29/06/2015/lesechos.fr/021174055325\\_referendum---les-europeens-exhortent-les-grecs-au---oui--.htm](http://www.lesechos.fr/29/06/2015/lesechos.fr/021174055325_referendum---les-europeens-exhortent-les-grecs-au---oui--.htm)).

## July

**1 July:** Luxembourg takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from Latvia. The Luxembourg Presidency is the last of the Trio Presidency made up of Italy (1 July 2014-31 December 2014), Latvia (1 January 2015-30 June 2015) and Luxembourg (1 July 2015-31 December 2015). This presidency intends to resume work on giving a social dimension to EU governance.

**1 July:** the structural reform support service is up and running. It draws upon the expertise, experience and practical know-how acquired over time by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) and the Support Group for Cyprus. The new service must focus on supporting the preparation and implementation of ‘growth-enhancing administrative and structural reforms (...) including through assistance for the efficient and effective use of the European structural funds’, European Commission, PV (2015) 2131 final, Brussels, 14-18.

**2 July:** the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, says that he expects a ‘technocrat government’ to be appointed in Greece in the event of a ‘yes’ vote in the referendum and the resignation of the government (<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/schulz-estime-que-la-fin-de-l-ere-syriza-serait-une-chance-pour-la-grece-5595a9003570c685851d7edo>).

**5 July:** referendum in Greece on the draft programme. The ‘no’ votes win with 61.3% of the votes cast, against 38.7% in favour of the programme. Turnout is 62.5%.

**5 July:** ECB response to the Greek ‘no’. Greek banks retain access to the same level (89 billion euros) of emergency liquidity assistance (ELA), but the Governing Council turns down the request from the

Greek central bank for a further 3 billion euros. In its press release, the ECB indicates 'haircuts on collateral for ELA adjusted'. The ECB is taking a highly political approach. If the Greek banks are not solvent, ELA should be cut. The ECB is in an extremely powerful position. It could cut off support to the Greek banking system, which would result, in turn, in Greece leaving the euro: 'Grexit'. By maintaining ELA, it is putting strong pressure on the Greek government, so that the latter has no choice but to respect the conditions set by the Troika.

**8 July:** Greek stability programme. The Greek government submits a request for a three-year loan to the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). Jeroen Dijsselbloem, Chairperson of the ESM Board of Governors and President of the Eurogroup, asks the European Commission to assess the risk to the financial stability of the Eurozone, the sustainability of Greek debt and any financial needs of the country.

**12 July:** Grexit avoided. The Euro summit statement addresses a series of unusually detailed demands for reform to the Greek Parliament, linked to a very strict timetable.

**14 July:** end of the 2015 cycle of the European Semester. After approval by the European Council of 26 June 2015, the EU finance ministers officially conclude the procedures for the 2015 European Semester at the ECOFIN Council. OJ C 272, 18 August 2015.

**16 July:** an initiative to leave the euro is launched in Finland. The citizens' initiative, launched by the former Finnish foreign affairs minister and MEP (ALDE) Paavo Väyrynen, needs to collect 50,000 signatures in six months if it is to be discussed by the Finnish parliament.

**17 July:** short-term financial assistance programme for Greece. The ECOFIN Council adopts the Council implementing decision approving the financial assistance programme for Greece, for an amount of 7.16 billion euros (the amount of the second instalment of the second programme). This 'bridging' loan is financed by the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM), which draws on funds raised by the European Commission on the financial markets. OJ L 192, 18 July 2015.

**22 July:** popular initiative demanding a referendum on Austria leaving the EU. The Minister of the Interior announced that 261,056 people had

signed the petition, i.e. just over 4% of the electorate and more than double the minimum threshold required (100,000). A debate must be organised in the plenary session of the National Council, Austrian Parliament, by 17 February 2016.

## August

**14 August:** the Greek parliament adopts the third assistance programme, before its adoption by the Eurogroup. 43 of the 149 SYRIZA Members of Parliament vote against or abstain. Prime Minister Tsipras loses his majority in Parliament.

**14 August:** Eurogroup/Greece. The Eurogroup welcomes ‘the agreement that has been reached between Greece and the European institutions, with input from the IMF, on the policy conditionality underlying the new ESM (European Stability Mechanism) macroeconomic adjustment programme (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/eurogroup/2015/08/14/>).

**19 August:** start of the third Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece. The financial assistance provided under the programme – a maximum amount of 86 billion euros – comes from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). The programme should run until 20 August 2018. According to the Eurogroup, there will be a ‘buffer’ of up to EUR 25 billion for the banking sector in order to address potential bank recapitalisation and resolution costs’ (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/eurogroup/2015/08/14/>).

**20 August:** Greek government resigns. Following several defections from his political party, SYRIZA, and believing that the programme cannot be implemented, the Greek Prime Minister announced the resignation of his government.

**27 August:** refugee crisis. The German Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel and his colleague, Foreign affairs minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, believe that the Dublin system, which determines which Member State should process asylum requests to the EU, is obsolete. In their view, ‘a situation such as the present one, in which only some Member States are shouldering all the responsibility, is just as unacceptable as a system

which spreads the burden mainly between countries at the external border of the EU'. Tribune in French daily morning newspaper *Figaro*.

## September

**3 September:** refugee crisis/right of asylum. In a joint letter, François Hollande and Angela Merkel ask the Commission to use 'all the means at its disposal' to oblige States to respect the right to asylum rules, both on assessing asylum claims and on accommodation. They propose, 'in the long term', 'a unified system for the right to asylum' (Le Monde 4 September 2015).

**10 September:** United Nations (UN)/restructuring of sovereign debt. The UN General Assembly adopts, by a very large majority (136 votes in favour, 6 against – Germany, United Kingdom, United States, Japan, Canada and Israel – and 41 abstentions), a non-binding resolution listing nine principles to be followed when restructuring sovereign debt. Apart from Germany and the United Kingdom, which voted against, the EU countries abstained. Speaking on behalf of the EU, the Luxembourg delegate recalled that: 'the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is the appropriate institution to host global discussions on this subject and that the work on sovereign debt restructuring should remain in the IMF'.

**14 September:** refugee crisis/people-smugglers. Member States agree to move to the operational phase of EUNAVFOR MED – following an initial information-gathering phase launched on 22 June 2015. This transition will 'enable the EU naval operation to conduct boarding, search, seizure and diversion on the high seas of vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking, within international law', COM (2015) 490.

**15 September:** the CJEU confirms its case law of November 2014 (Dano judgment) by finding national legislation (German, once again) to be compatible with EU law. The German legislation excluded European citizens who have moved to and are staying in a host Member State without being able to support themselves from access to social assistance. Alimanovic, C-67/14 and Dano, C-333/13, 11 November 2014.

**16 September:** Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The European Commission proposes a new system for investor-state dispute settlement ([http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2015/september/tradoc\\_153807.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2015/september/tradoc_153807.pdf)).

**17 September:** long-term unemployment. The European Commission adopts a proposal for a Council recommendation ‘on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market’ (see Bouget and Vanhercke, this volume). COM (2015) 462.

**20 September:** general elections in Greece. Alexis Tsipras’ party is victorious in these elections, which are marked by a steep fall in turnout (56.5% compared to 63.87% in January 2015).

**30 September:** Capital Markets Union (CMU). The European Commission launches ‘an Action Plan to boost business funding and investment financing’, IP/15/5731.

## October

**29 September-2 October:** Congress of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The Italian Luca Visentini is elected ETUC General Secretary and the Belgian Rudy De Leeuw ETUC President.

**6 October:** end of the self-organised European citizens’ initiative against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In one year, nearly 3.3 million people have signed the citizens’ initiative against the TTIP and CETA.

**8 October:** Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council. The home affairs ministers of the Member States insist on the need to strengthen checks at the external borders and to send back quickly those foreigners with no justified claim for asylum.

**10 October:** ‘Stop TTIP’. Demonstrations are organised in Europe and North America with a view to stopping the negotiations between the United States and the EU.

**14 October:** one step closer to a referendum on the EU/Ukraine association agreement in the Netherlands. The Dutch Electoral Council endorses a list of 427,939 signatures of citizens asking for a referendum on the EU/Ukraine association agreement. A referendum will be organised on 6 April 2016.

**15 October:** refugee crisis. The European Council confirms the orientations of the JHA Council: cooperate with third countries to stem the flows of refugees, strengthen protection of the EU's external borders, respond to the influx of refugees in Europe and ensure returns to the countries of origin.

**21 October:** implementation of the Five Presidents' Report. The European Commission issues proposals intended to implement in concrete steps Stage 1 of the Five Presidents' Report. These measures contain a proposal for common external representation of the euro area, proposals paving the way for a financial union, including the capital markets union, ideas for a 'revamped European Semester', as well as 'an improved toolbox of economic governance' and proposals to create 'national Competitiveness Boards' and an advisory 'European Fiscal Board', MEMO/15/5876.

**27 October:** World Bank report 'Doing Business 2016'. Singapore takes the first place. Five European countries are in the top 10: Denmark (3<sup>rd</sup>), the United Kingdom (6<sup>th</sup>), Sweden, Norway and Finland (8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>).

**27 October:** the Juncker Commission's 2016 Work Programme, 'No time for business as usual' continues to emphasise the 10 political priorities presented in 2014, and proposes 23 initiatives, including one on the 'labour mobility package'. COM (2015) 610. In the view of the ETUC General Secretary, Luca Visentini, '2016 is the year President Juncker has to deliver on his promise for a Triple A social Europe'.

**28 October:** upgrading the single market. The European Commission publishes a roadmap 'to deliver on the political commitment of Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the EC, to unleash the full potential of the Single Market and make it the launchpad for Europe to thrive in the global economy', COM (2015) 550.

**30 October:** according to Eurostat, the unemployment rate for September 2015 is 9.3% in the EU28 and 10.8% in the Eurozone. This is the lowest recorded rate since September 2009. Among the Member States, the lowest unemployment rates in September 2015 were recorded in Germany (4.5%), the Czech Republic (4.8%), Malta (5.1%), and the United Kingdom (5.3% in July 2015), and the highest were in Greece (25.0% in July 2015) and Spain (21.6%), 192/2015.

**30 October:** unity agreement in Spain. The Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, announces a national agreement between the main political parties (PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos, Podemos) in favour of national unity, in the light of the intention of Catalan separatists to vote through a text triggering the secession process.

**30 October:** according to Eurostat, the annual inflation rate for the Eurozone in October is zero, up from September 2015, when it stood at -0.1%, 193/2015.

## November

**3 November:** Brexit. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, asks Berlin for special protection for EU countries wishing to remain outside the single currency, the euro (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-in-berlin-to-discuss-european-union-reform>).

**9 November:** meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council to assess the progress made in managing the refugee crisis. Maintaining the Schengen area and reducing migratory pressure are the priorities. The Council emphasises the importance of cooperating with third countries, maintaining reception capacities and establishing 'hot spots'. Speeding up the still hesitant relocation process is also a priority, Press release 789/15.

**10 November:** 540,000 refugees have arrived in Greece over the first ten months of the year. According to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the European agency responsible for the EU external borders, more than 150,000 people left Turkey for Greece in October 2015, and more than 540,000 since the beginning of the year, i.e. 13 times more than during the same period in 2014 (<http://frontex>).

europa.eu/news/540-000-migrants-arrived-on-greek-islands-in-the-first-10-months-of-2015-4uH4FJ).

**11/12 November:** Valetta summit on migration. European and African Heads of State or government meet in order to strengthen cooperation and respond to the challenges and potential of migration. The Europeans launch a 1.8 billion euro emergency trust fund for Africa, to try and convince African countries to help them stem the flow of migrants. Their aim is to support the return of illegal immigrants to their countries of origin, as well as participating in local reintegration projects (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/11-12/>).

**13 November:** terrorist attacks in Paris; a series of shootings and suicide attacks. The terrorist organisation Islamic State, or 'Daesh', claims responsibility. The French President, François Hollande, declares a state of emergency.

**16 November:** state of emergency in France. The President of the French Republic, François Hollande, speaks to the Congress of the French Parliament meeting in Versailles to announce a number of measures following the Paris attacks, and declares that: 'the security pact takes precedence over the stability pact'.

**17 November:** Finland and the euro. The initiative launched on 16 July 2015, asking for Finland to abandon the euro, gathers the 50 000 signatures needed for a debate to be held in the Finnish parliament.

**20 November:** state of emergency extended in France. The French Parliament extends the state of emergency by three months.

**24 November:** state of emergency in France/human rights derogation. Having declared a state of emergency on 13 November 2015, France writes to the Council of Europe to express its wish to derogate from the European Convention on Human Rights during the state of emergency.

**25 November:** according to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 'the European Convention on Human Rights will continue to apply (in France). Where the Government seeks to invoke Article 15 in

order to derogate from the Convention in individual cases, the Court will decide whether the application meets the criteria set out in the Convention’.

**26 November:** the European Commission launches the 2016 European Semester, publishing the usual set of documents, i.e. the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), the draft Joint Employment Report (JER) and the Alert Mechanism Report (AMR). New for 2016 is the draft recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area, presented at the beginning of the exercise. COM (2015) 690.

**30 November:** Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM). The intergovernmental agreement on the SRM, signed in May 2014 by all EU Member States except for the United Kingdom and Sweden, is ratified by a sufficient number of Member States (90% of the total weighted votes of all participants). The SRM, which should make it possible to provide support to Eurozone banks in difficulty, will enter into force on 1 January 2016 ([http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2015/11/40802205655\\_fr\\_635845665000000000.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2015/11/40802205655_fr_635845665000000000.pdf)).

## December

**2 December:** circular economy package. The European Commission adopts several legislative drafts on the circular economy, including in particular water reuse, the promotion of organic fertilisers and reducing food waste, IP/15/6203.

**2 December:** allocation of refugee quotas. Slovenia files an action with the EU Court of Justice.

**2 December:** the Spanish Constitutional Court annuls the Catalan independence process. The Court annuls the Catalan parliament resolution formally launching Catalonia’s independence process ([http://www.tribunalconstitucional.es/es/salaPrensa/Documents/NP\\_2015\\_093/2015-06330STC.pdf](http://www.tribunalconstitucional.es/es/salaPrensa/Documents/NP_2015_093/2015-06330STC.pdf)).

**3 December:** prolongation of the ECB’s programme to buy in public and private debt (quantitative easing), from September 2016 to March

2017 (<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/govcdec/otherdec/2015/html/gc151218.fr.html>).

**3 December:** victory for the ‘no’ vote in the Danish referendum on whether Denmark should be part of EU cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs. The outcome of the referendum is a majority for the ‘no’ votes (53.1%), as against 46.9% of ‘yes’ votes. Turnout is 72%.

**4 December:** allocation of refugee quotas. Hungary files an action with the EU Court of Justice (<http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-justice/news/action-to-be-filed-in-case-of-mandatory-quotas-may-serve-as-precedent>).

**8 December:** United Nations/Greece. The United Nations Human Rights Council expert, Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, a specialist in the effects of foreign debt on the enjoyment of human rights, publishes a report on his visit to Greece. His assessment of the social impact of the European Commission’s third stability support programme to Greece is highly critical: the European Commission, he says, has not carried out an evaluation of the social impact of the two previous adjustment programmes, nor has it referred to rulings of the Greek Council of State on pensions or recommendations from other European and UN experts. Human rights pose limits to adjustment – Debt relief for inclusive growth in Greece, Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, Athens, End of mission statement, 8 December 2015 ([http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IEDebt/EOM\\_Statement\\_Greece\\_IETForeignDebt\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IEDebt/EOM_Statement_Greece_IETForeignDebt_EN.pdf)).

**12 December:** adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate at the ‘COP 21’, by 195 States. The agreement, deposited with the United Nations in New York, can be signed between 22 April 2016 and 21 April 2017. To enter into force, it must be signed and ratified by at least 55 countries accounting for at least 55% of world emissions. The Paris Agreement is to take over from the Kyoto Protocol from 2020. In 2023, a global stocktake will begin, to evaluate the collective progress made towards meeting the objectives of the agreement.

**14 December:** privatisation of 14 regional Greek airports. The privatisation contract was concluded for 40 years with Fraport, a German airport-management company. This privatisation, included in the third assistance plan, will bring in 1.2 billion euros for Greece (<http://www>).

ekathimerini.com/204315/article/ekathimerini/business/greece-signs-12-bln-euro-airport-deal-with-germanys-fraport).

**15 December:** external borders/Schengen area. The Commission adopts measures to strengthen protection at the Schengen external borders, by creating a European Border and Coast Guard, IP/15/6327.

**15 December:** EU-Canada free trade agreement. The Council decides to make public the guidelines given to the European Commission for negotiations on the EU-Canada free trade agreement.

**16 December:** action plan to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. The plan contains 16 actions with a budget of almost 300 million euros, to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and to increase the positive effects of migration on development, IP 15/6337.

**17/18 December:** Brexit/refugee crisis. During the meeting of the European Council, the Heads of State and Government emphasise the need for further integration of capital markets, the energy union and the digital market, and for a stepping up of EU action against terrorism. They undertake to reach agreements to keep the United Kingdom in the Union at the Council meeting of 17 and 18 February 2016.

**21 December:** economic sanctions against Russia extended by six months. The decision is taken by written procedure in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER). Italy had asked for a policy debate to take place on this issue. OJ L 334 of 22 December 2015.