

Brussels blog round up for 17-23 March 2012: The European Parliament drags its feet on EU wide constituencies, Ashton is criticized, and the IMF demands more guarantees on Greece.

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Chris Gilson and **Julian Kirchherr** take a look at the week in Brussels blogging.

The EU Centre

Spain has now [come under fire](#) for its use of European Union (EU) structural funds. This indicates that European Union regional spending is in urgent need of a radical overhaul, argues *Open Europe Blog*. *The German Marshall Fund Blog* discusses China's dispute with the EU, Japan and the United States over the [tariffs and export quotas](#) on rare earths. The authors find that rare earths are [nothing worth fighting for](#). Later, *Charlemagne* wonders whether or not a new European Commission proposal to give itself the power to close public-procurement markets to companies from countries deemed not to reciprocate in allowing European firms to compete for their public contracts is to protect the EU's trade, or to [help Nicolas Sarkozy in his election campaign](#).

This week, Catherine Ashton, the EU's foreign policy chief, is [under attack from Israeli leaders](#) for allegedly comparing the killing of four people at a Jewish school in Toulouse to the death of children in Gaza at the hands of the Israeli military.

Meanwhile Labour MEPs have expressed their outrage that the European Parliament may have [funded some of the parties of the extreme right](#), including the British National Party. The *NewFederalist* regrets that the European Parliament has again delayed the [creation of an EU-wide constituency of 25 MEPs](#) to be elected alongside national MEPs, saying that "advances in economic integration are not being coupled to progress in democratic accountability". *Jon Worth* issues a [spirited defence](#) of the Parliament, against its recent detractors who have called for it to be reduced in size and cost.

Open Europe looks at some of the problems with the [European Arrest Warrant](#), in light of the recent case of the extradition of a British man to Portugal for a crime he had already been cleared of.

EU Foreign policy and the European neighbourhood

On March 30th, the association agreement (whereby Ukraine must ensure its political institutions comply with European standards) between the EU and Ukraine will finally be initialled, reports *Marek Siwiec MEP on Poland & Europe*. This is [an important step](#) to bring the country



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closer to the EU.

The *FRIDE Blog* looks at the new 'special relationship' between British Foreign Secretary William Hague and Catherine Ashton, or 'Hashton'. *Nucleus* looks at whether or not Britain may be threatening the Anglo-French defence agreement in its potential decision to alter its jet fighter procurement.

The Euro Crisis and European Economic Governance

How do you let a big bank – such as Lehman Brothers – collapse without endangering the entire system? *Brussels Blog* argues that the European Commission has not yet found an answer. How can the state finance such large bail-outs? In the aftermath of the financial crisis, many commentators have argued for the implementation of a tax on financial transactions. Although the support for such a tax is growing steadily, *Protesilaos Stavrou* opposes it. He believes that banks can easily rollover the cost of taxation to the market and that it would not raise government's revenue.

On Friday, after much of Europe shut down for the week, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued its 231-page report on Greece's new bailout. The FT's *Brussels Blog* examined the report and finds that the IMF calls for even more guarantees and assurances for Greece – worrying news for European taxpayers. *Brussels Blog* also reports that Timothy Geithner, the United States treasury secretary, calls upon the European Union to increase its bail-out funds. Towards the end of the week, *The Honeyball Buzz* reports that the European Commission is certain that Greece will still be a member of the Euro by 2017. Meanwhile, *NpThinking* compares the European Central Bank with the United States' Federal Reserve, saying that the Fed has a much wider remit than the ECB.

Although the financial and debt crisis is still a hot topic, *Erkan's Field Diary* argues that Occupy Wall Street has lost momentum and is running out of ideas.

How to get out of the crisis? *Nucleus* argues that the very British medicine of supply-side reform, judicial rigour and privatisation is slowly transforming the European economy – a sign of hope. *The NewFederalist* argues that Europe's youth will be a lost generation if the European Commission and the Member States do not undertake additional measures to help young people to access the labour market. Meanwhile, *Europe mon beau souci* surveys recent moves towards quotas for women on corporate boards across Europe.

Across Europe

Beyond the Transition argues that in times of austerity the Polish state should stop funding churches, while Karpfenteich muses on the on-going political machinations ahead of Germany's federal elections in 2013. The *European Council on Foreign Relations* looks at the Americanisation of Turkey, saying also that the EU's reformist pressure on the country is weakening.

The EU blogosphere

Ronny Patz's article on the EU blogosphere has sparked an intense debate on the state of EU blogging: The new Bruegel blog used the occasion to proclaim that Europeans can't blog. Meanwhile, the Economist's *Free Exchange Blog* thinks that the room in which European bloggers are shouting is strikingly empty. *Kantoos Economics* agrees with this judgement and believes that the European blogosphere needs a "nucleus of bloggers with outstanding credentials" like Paul Krugman in the United States. Henning Meyer from *Social Europe Journal* argues that one of the reasons that the European blogosphere is not as strong as it could be is the language barrier. *Spanishwalker* will empirically explore the state of EU blogging in his Master thesis.

And finally...

Have you ever had an idea for improving the experience of children on the Internet? If so, you should share your ideas and apply to [this year's EU hackathon](#), run by Google and the European Commission.

Rhein on Energy and Climate looks at the current droughts in Britain and the Iberian peninsula, and warns that they may be a future scourge for Europe.

Open Europe asks [can a fictional character break EU law?](#)

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