

Press review: 27^h of May, 2010

The European Commission is expected to grant visa-free travel to Albania and Bosnia. Elsewhere, Russian opposition activists ask the Kremlin for help. In addition, universal education remains a difficult issue for girls in Liberia.

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ENoP – EUROPEAN NETWORK OF POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS

INDEPENDENT ACTORS IN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION, DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

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This project is
co-funded by the
European
Commission

A project implemented by
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
e.V. and the partner
organizations:

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Fondation Jean-Jaurès
Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung
Eduardo Frei Stichting

Heinrich Böll Stiftung
Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung
And by the stakeholder:
Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung

EU Affairs

European Council seen as winner under Lisbon Treaty

Not quite six months in place, the EU's Lisbon Treaty has already led to a significant shift in the Brussels power landscape, with many of its main actors still trying to find their feet in the new order. The new rulebook, in force since December 2009 after many years of negotiation and then ratification, greatly increases MEPs' co-legislating powers and creates a beefed up foreign policy post and a president of the EU council.

The changes have led to relative decreases in power of the European Commission, in past times the engine of EU integration, and the Council of Ministers, representing member states. In contrast, the European Council - the union's collected premiers and presidents and now an institution with its own budget and president - and the parliament are winning out in the power stakes, say academics. This has been most evident in the current debate over increased economic governance in the EU, where member states, rather than the commission, have taken the lead in the discussions.

<http://euobserver.com/9/30142>

Commission to greenlight visa-free travel for Albania and Bosnia

The European Commission on Thursday (27 May) is expected to say that Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina are fit to be granted visa-free travel, a move that needs the approval of member states and the European Parliament. The commission's green light will include some reservations, but they are considered technicalities that can be overcome by the time the legislature and member states formally endorse the decision, possibly this autumn. Both Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina fell behind fellow Balkan states such as Serbia and Macedonia, who were included on the visa-free list already last December.

Meanwhile, the two have made enough progress – for instance by introducing biometric passports and adopting re-admission agreements, according to an evaluation carried out by commission experts last month. But the expert assessment also pointed to deficiencies in applying the rule of law, security matters and the fight against organised crime and corruption. Apart from the technical assessment, the decision to lift visa requirements to EU countries is also a political one, especially in the view of the October elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where ethnically-charged tensions are mounting.

<http://euobserver.com/9/30141>

Enlargement

Montenegro: A surprise regional champion

Ambition is rarely matched by sufficient reform when it comes to Balkan countries' desire to enter the European Union. The region's aspirants for EU accession seldom make the news with their achievements - more regularly they are associated with stalled political effort and delayed results. This is not

the case with tiny Montenegro, which appears to be the EU's best student in the Western Balkans. It is politically stable and remarkably assiduous in following Brussels' reform recommendations. This month the European Commission is finalising clarifications with the Montenegrin authorities before it delivers an opinion on the country's readiness for EU candidate status. Sources from within the EU institutions expect Montenegro will become a candidate for EU accession in the first half of next year, during the Hungarian presidency of the EU.

<http://waz.euobserver.com/887/30147>

Hungary citizenship law fuels Slovak resentment

The Hungarian parliament, which is overwhelmingly dominated by centre-right party Fidesz following April national elections, yesterday (26 May) passed a law making it easier for ethnic Hungarians living abroad to obtain Hungarian citizenship. The move sparked an angry response from neighbouring Slovakia.

Almost simultaneously, Slovakia voted to amend its own citizenship law, stripping anyone of their Slovak citizenship if they apply for Hungarian nationality. Southern Slovakia is home to roughly 500,000 ethnic Hungarians, about a tenth of the country's population of 5.4 million. Many ethnic Hungarians live in Slovakia and Romania, as a result of post-World War I division of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Slovak leader Robert Fico has called Hungary's move a "security threat", BBC reported. He told the Slovak parliament on Tuesday that Hungary was attempting to revise history, and accused Hungary of gross ignorance of the bilateral friendship treaty. Many Slovak politicians say they see the idea of dual citizenship for its large ethnic Hungarian minority as an attack on the small nation's sovereignty. Aside from the Hungarian case, dual citizenship is generally allowed in Slovakia.

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/hungary-citizenship-law-fuels-slovak-resentment-news-494553>

Development

Armenia Praises Karabakh Parliamentary Elections

Armenia has hailed the parliamentary elections in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory as a sign of the breakaway Azerbaijani region's strengthening democracy, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said on May 24 that recognition of the right of the people in Nagorno-Karabakh to decide their fate is "central".

Voters in Karabakh went to the polls on May 23 to elect their fifth parliament since the unrecognized republic broke free from Azerbaijan's control in the early 1990s. Nalbandian said that with the latest elections, "the citizens of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic once again have proved their resolve to express their will to live freely and independently." Officials in Karabakh said the polls demonstrated the unrecognized republic's commitment to democracy. But Azerbaijan condemned the elections. Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission described the vote as a "new election farce." Furthermore,

European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton late last week called the planned elections in Karabakh illegal and said the event "should not prejudice the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."

http://www.rferl.org/content/Armenia_Praises_Karabakh_Parliamentary_Elections/2052293.html

Russian Opposition Activists Ask Kremlin For Help

Russian opposition leaders and human rights activists have called on President Dmitry Medvedev's chief of staff to intervene in their efforts to have their rallies approved by the authorities. A petition signed by Moscow Helsinki Group Chairwoman Lyudmila Alekseyeva, Other Russia opposition coalition co-leader Eduard Limonov, and Left Front movement representative Konstantin Kosyakov was sent on May 24 to presidential chief of staff Sergei Naryshkin.

The petition urges Naryshkin to help the activist group gain official approval for their mass gatherings held on the 31st day of those months with that number of days. The activists have been trying for several months to hold such rallies in a symbolic reference to Article 31 of the Russian Constitution, which guarantees citizens the freedom of assembly. But Moscow authorities have consistently refused to give permission for the opposition gatherings, with police violently dispersing the rallies claiming they are being held without official approval.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Opposition_Activists_Ask_Kremlin_For_Help/2052355.html

Universal Education an Empty Promise for Liberia's Girls

In a small office tucked behind the stairwell in Liberia's Ministry of Education, the once-proud staff of the Girls' Education Unit appears defeated. The workers in this fourth floor office, entrusted with charting a new course for the education of the country's girls and women, have no salaries, no budget, and few projects under way. "We attend meetings. We attend workshops. But when we put a project proposal together, it is not supported," sighs the Unit's director, Lorpu G. Mannah.

Despite the 2006 election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa's first female president, and the introduction of free and compulsory primary education, many young girls in this post-conflict West African nation continue to drop out of school to cook and clean for their family, or earn a meagre living selling food or fresh water on the streets. They face discrimination, sexual violence, family pressures, early pregnancy, forced marriage, and harmful traditional practices. Three out of five Liberian women can't read. In the budgetary cash contest, Liberian girls and women are competing with war-destroyed roads, electricity grid, limited running water and sewage systems, a dysfunctional justice system, and other institutional and infrastructural problems.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=51596>