

## Press review: 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2010

The European Commission is considering introducing legislation to tackle poverty by increasing education levels. Furthermore, the EU offers assistance to vulnerable farmers in Lesotho with the aim of increasing the country's food production. Elsewhere, Yelisieiev, the foreign minister of Ukraine, stated that his country is in favour of a "pragmatic approach" towards European intergration.

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## **EU Affairs**

### **EU mulls education actions to tackle poverty**

The European Commission is considering introducing legislation to tackle poverty by increasing education levels, at the request of social partners gathered in Italy for an unprecedented forum. 80 million citizens currently live below the poverty line, according to EU statistics. This figure is expected to increase because of the ongoing economic crisis, which is pushing unemployment to new highs. The situation is worsening at a time when the EU has proclaimed 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

To help fight poverty, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), an EU consultative body, is holding an international conference in Florence, Italy, to gather experts and decision-makers in the field of education and social exclusion. Some of the ideas floated in Florence include teaching Muslim immigrants European languages in mosques to favour social integration, supporting the education of women and young people, backing life-long training and supporting businesses that act in favour of social integration. Education and training has often been touted at EU level for its potential to reduce poverty and meet the bloc's 2020 targets on social exclusion

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/socialeurope/eu-mulls-education-actions-to-tackle-poverty-news-494402>

## **Enlargement**

### **Hungary backs speedy Montenegro accession**

Hungary, the largest investor in Montenegro, is supporting the country's accession to the European Union. The integration into the EU of the Western Balkans is a top priority of the Hungarian government and its EU presidency in early 2011 will be a prime opportunity to promote the Montenegrin cause.

Hungary, like the EU and NATO, has acknowledged the efforts Montenegro has made in its preparations for integration. The EU has accepted Montenegro's accession request and NATO has included it in its Action Plan for prospective members. Montenegro was among the first of the Balkan countries to gain the right to enter the Schengen area without visa requirements.

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/hungary-backs-speedy-montenegro-accession-news-494338>

### **Euro 2012 cup could spur Ukraine's EU application**

The successful preparation of Euro 2012 will be a moral application for Ukrainian EU membership, the country's deputy foreign affairs minister, Konstantin Yelisieiev stated. Yelisieiev said that his country was in favour of a "pragmatic approach" to European integration. He mentioned two main goals: achieving a visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens within the Schengen space, and creating a "deep and comprehensive free trade area" (FTA) with the EU.

Regarding the FTA, he said Ukraine was striving for "one of the most advanced" forms of such integration, leading in his words to the gradual integration of his country into the EU's internal market. He said that a customs union, as proposed by Russia, was not on the agenda, as Ukraine's biggest neighbour is not a WTO member. On the visa issue, Yeliseiev expressed optimism that his country would soon be given a "roadmap", similar to those held by Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, who have already achieved visa-free travel for their nationals. He also was categorical in saying that his country would be "the next country in this list" to lift the visa obstacle. As Russia is reportedly making the visa issue a top priority of its EU agenda as well, he said that each country should be judged according to its merits. Yeliseiev repeated that his country welcomed cooperation between Russia and the EU.

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/east-mediterranean/euro-2012-cup-could-spur-ukraine-s-eu-application-news-494401>

### **EU mediators try to save Albania from political chaos**

The leaders of the two largest political groups in the European Parliament will receive Albania's prime minister and main opposition leader for dinner in Strasbourg tonight (20 May), in an attempt to prevent the country from slipping into political chaos. Sali Berisha, Albania's prime minister, and Edi Rama, his main opponent from the Socialist Party, have accepted an invitation to bridge their differences over dinner in Strasbourg.

Martin Schulz, leader of the European Parliament's Socialist & Democrats group, and Joseph Daul, chairman of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), sent a joint invitation on 19 May, urging the Albanian political foes to accept their mediation offer and bring to an end the country's political deadlock. The Albanians are on their way and EU Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle will also attend, spokespersons for the two political groups told EurActiv.

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-mediators-try-save-albania-political-chaos-news-494387>

## **Development**

### **European Union food facility brings increase in food production**

The European Union (EU) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) are offering assistance to about 36,000 farmers in Lesotho, more than half of its vulnerable farmers.

Soaring food prices and the recent global economic downturn struck Lesotho hard, especially the majority of its 1.9 million people that rely on agriculture. In just one year, the cost of planting crops rose more than four times. Assessments found that over half of the country's arable farm land was lying idle. According to Farayi Zimudzi, FAO's Emergency and Rehabilitation Coordinator in Lesotho, "unacceptable risks of hunger and household-level food shortages among Lesotho's poor soon

became apparent." The EU responded by allocating 6 million Euros to agriculture, as part of the 1 billion euro European Union Food Facility (EUFF), the European Union's massive response to increased food insecurity around the world. Four million Euros was channelled through FAO to swiftly stave off the food crisis and at the same time make a long-term impact on Lesotho's food situation. Andrew Headey, Acting Head of the European Union Mission in Lesotho, stressed that the "activities were well chosen. If successful, they will lay the foundation for an improved situation in the future, enhancing sustainability and building on existing initiatives."

<http://www.afriquejet.com/news/africa-news/european-union-food-facility-brings-increase-in-food-production-2010052149693.html>

### **Constitutional Crunch Time in Kyrgyzstan**

Is Kyrgyzstan about to re-establish its image as the most democratic state in Central Asia, or will the interim government only worsen the spirit of discontent? This week the country faces a pivotal moment, when a special council releases a draft of the new constitution up for approval in a national referendum in late June.

Kyrgyzstan's interim government has been in power for just over a month since crowds chased President Kurmanbek Bakiev from office in early April. The new leadership said from the start that Kyrgyzstan needed a new constitution, suggesting it should stray from previous constitutions that centred on a dominant executive branch by specifying a parliamentary system of government. A parliamentary system, if implemented, would reduce the role of the president to a figurehead, a new condition not only for Kyrgyzstan but for Central Asia in general. Other alternative ideas are flourishing as well. More than 20 different constitutional variations have been sent to the council drafting the document.

[http://www.rferl.org/content/Constitutional\\_Crunch\\_Time\\_In\\_Kyrgyzstan/2044729.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Constitutional_Crunch_Time_In_Kyrgyzstan/2044729.html)

### **Azerbaijan Calls Nagorno-Karabakh Elections 'Illegal'**

Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission has denounced as illegal the upcoming parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan's breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The commission said in a statement that the May 23 elections violate Azerbaijan's constitution and international law. It says holding elections and referendums on the territory of Azerbaijan is the exclusive prerogative of the country's Central Election Commission. It further condemns as interference in Azerbaijan's domestic affairs the arrival of international observers in Stepanakert to monitor the voting. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry has also condemned the upcoming elections.

[http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijan\\_Calls\\_NagornoKarabakh\\_Elections\\_Illegal/2048357.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijan_Calls_NagornoKarabakh_Elections_Illegal/2048357.html)