



The collage consists of 20 individual images arranged in a grid-like fashion. The images depict various events and news stories related to the European Union in October 2015. Key elements include:

- Top Left:** A woman and a man (likely EU leaders) standing together.
- Top Center:** A rescue boat filled with people on the water.
- Top Right:** A man speaking at a podium with a 'EUROPE' backdrop.
- Second Row:** A meeting of the Eurogroup; a woman speaking at a podium with 'Google antitrust inquiries' on the backdrop; a protest scene with a person on a stretcher.
- Third Row:** A man speaking at a podium with 'PARIS2015' on the backdrop; a crowd celebrating 'Market Open'; a man speaking at a podium with 'Leaders' Meeting WESTERN PARTNERS ROUTE' on the backdrop.
- Bottom Section:** A large crowd in a city square; a group of people holding a banner; a boat with migrants; a group of people standing in front of a map; and a group of men shaking hands.

HIGHLIGHTS

On the cover

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	15				
6			7	24	
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1. The High Representative/Commission Vice-President and the Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs discuss Iran's nuclear programme. (© European Union)
2. The Competition Commissioner announces antitrust inquiries concerning Google. (© European Union)
3. Hungarian soldiers build a fence at the border with Croatia. (© Associated Press)
4. The Commission President at the opening of the climate change conference in Paris. (© European Union)
5. The Financial Services Commissioner chairs the opening ceremony of the London Stock Exchange. (© European Union)
6. Demonstrators outside the Greek parliament on the night of the referendum. (© Associated Press)
7. EU, German, Greek and French leaders discuss the state finances of Greece. (© European Union)
8. The Commission President and Spanish, French and Portuguese leaders announce improved connections between the Iberian peninsula and the rest of the EU energy market. (© European Union)
9. EU, Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Polish leaders announce the gas interconnector between Poland and Lithuania. (© European Union)
10. A Triton search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea. (© Frontex)
11. The UK Prime Minister discusses his proposals for renegotiating the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU. (© Associated Press)
12. The European Council meets in Brussels. (© European Union)
13. European dairy farmers protest in Brussels. (© Associated Press)
14. EU, Greek, French and Belgian leaders in discussion at the Euro Summit. (© European Union)
15. The Presidents of the Parliament and the Commission at the leaders' meeting on the western Balkans route. (© European Union)
16. Refugees arriving in Greece. (© European Union)
17. World leaders at the G7 Summit. (© European Union)
18. The Eurogroup President addresses the press. (© European Union)
19. Emergency services evacuate the injured after shootings in the Bataclan concert hall in Paris, France. (© Associated Press)
20. The European Council President addresses the press. (© European Union)
21. The signing of the European Fund for Strategic Investments agreement. (© European Union)
22. A minute's silence in Place de la République, Paris, France, following the November terrorist attacks. (© AFP)
23. Protestors demonstrate against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. (© Associated Press)
24. EU and Ukrainian leaders at the 17th EU-Ukraine Summit. (© European Union)

The EU in 2015

HIGHLIGHTS



An interactive version of this publication, containing links to online content, is available in PDF, ePUB and HTML format:

europa.eu/general-report/en

The introduction that follows is taken from the General Report on the Activities of the European Union, which is available at the same internet address.

The EU in 2015 — Highlights

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Citizens' Information
1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

Print	ISBN 978-92-79-49713-1	ISSN 2443-9258	doi:10.2775/243499
PDF	ISBN 978-92-79-49718-6	ISSN 2443-9487	doi:10.2775/6170
EPUB	ISBN 978-92-79-49746-9	ISSN 2443-9487	doi:10.2775/399833
HTML	ISBN 978-92-79-54817-8	ISSN 2443-9487	doi:10.2775/3157

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016

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Introduction



Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, gives his State of the Union address for 2015 in the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 9 September 2015.

At the beginning of my mandate in November 2014 I promised a new start for Europe and that this Commission would focus on 10 political priorities — the key challenges faced by our economy and society. As it turned out, the first year of our mandate, 2015, was a year when the world closely watched the EU and how it dealt with a series of crises.

Horrifying terrorist attacks took place in Paris in January and November. Together with the Member States we needed to reduce the risk of such brutal attacks becoming a recurring phenomenon. The European agenda on security, which was adopted in April, set out how the EU contributes to a more effective and coordinated approach to fighting terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime. Within the framework of the agenda the European Commission put forward a set of measures in December to step up the fight against terrorism and the illegal trafficking of firearms and explosives. Member States also found agreement on the Commission's proposal for an EU passenger name record system. This will ensure air carriers provide EU Member States with data on passengers entering or departing from the EU — an important part of EU security policy.

In parallel, in 2015 our continent witnessed the greatest mass movement of people seen since the Second World War, as hundreds of thousands of refugees from conflict zones began to arrive in Europe. Over 1 million people took the long and dangerous journey, the vast majority fleeing from war and terror in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya and Syria.

Earlier this year the Commission put forward a comprehensive migration policy and took immediate steps to manage the crisis. We tripled our presence in the Mediterranean Sea, helping to save lives. We fought back against the criminal networks of smugglers and traffickers. Under the Commission's leadership Member States agreed rules to relocate and resettle hundreds of thousands of people in clear need of international protection. The EU agencies

continue to help the often overburdened national authorities in the most affected Member States to identify, screen and fingerprint incoming migrants, speed up the processing of asylum seekers and coordinate the return of those who do not qualify for protection. The EU also mobilised billions of euros to help the refugees who had already arrived on our shores, as well as those in neighbouring countries, while efforts to tackle smugglers and dismantle human-trafficking groups were redoubled. In October in Brussels 11 countries agreed a 17-point plan to achieve the gradual, controlled and orderly movement of persons along the western Balkans route, while in November in Valletta an EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was launched to address the root causes of irregular migration that force people to escape and migrate: poverty, wars, persecutions, violations of human rights and natural disasters.

It is clear that the refugee crisis will not simply go away. While the crisis put the spotlight on immediate needs it also revealed much about the limitations of EU migration policy and the tools at its disposal. Nevertheless, we must and we will continue our efforts to tackle the crisis. We Europeans should remember well that Europe is a continent where nearly everyone has at one time been a refugee. Our common history is marked by millions of Europeans fleeing from religious or political persecution, from war, dictatorship or oppression.

Earlier this year we experienced a difficult period during which Greece's continued membership of the euro area was in question. After months of talks and many difficult moments a new stability support programme for Greece was finally agreed in August. I never doubted we would find a solution; adopting the euro is an irrevocable decision, and all members stand together to make it work. As the impact of the Greek crisis continues to be felt in the euro area and throughout the European economy and society, I would, however, like to see the programme we agreed respected by every Greek government, past, present and future.

The crisis will be over when full employment returns to Europe. Today over 23 million people are unemployed in the European Union. This is an unacceptably high number. There is a clear need to invest in Europe's sources of jobs and growth, notably in our single market, and to complete our economic and monetary union to create the conditions for a lasting recovery. We have acted on both fronts.

For example, the €315 billion investment plan is now up and running, and should generate more than 2 million jobs. The first projects have already been launched and many more will follow. At the same time we are upgrading our single market to create more opportunities for people and businesses in all 28 Member States. Thanks to projects such as the digital single market, capital markets union and energy union we are reducing obstacles to cross-border activities while stimulating innovation, connecting talents and offering a wider choice of products and services.

In June I presented, together with the presidents of other key EU institutions, a report on the completion of our economic and monetary union. The five presidents involved agreed a roadmap that should allow us to stabilise the euro area by early 2017 and then, on the basis of a renewed convergence of our economies, move from crisis resilience to new growth perspectives. This was a bold political decision to look ahead amidst the Greek crisis.

The European Union and its Member States were pivotal in brokering the historic agreement in Paris in December, where 195 countries adopted

the first ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The agreement sets out a global action plan to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2 °C. It will steer the world towards a global clean energy transition and is a success for the European Union. Europe has long been the global leader in climate action; the Paris agreement now reflects our ambition worldwide.

There is much more to be said, and more detail is provided in the report, but in touching upon the main challenges that have confronted us over the last 12 months I am struck by one inescapable conclusion, and that is that when faced with the refugee crisis, the economic crisis or foreign policy challenges there is only one way to succeed: solidarity. We can only succeed as a Union. Collectively we are stronger than the challenges that confront us. It is time we had a little more faith in Europe's ability to provide collective solutions to problems felt acutely and independently by each Member State.

At the end of a difficult year, during which the very nature of the European Union has been called into question, it is important that we Europeans remember that it is Europe that represents a haven of stability in the eyes of people in the Middle East, in Africa and elsewhere in the world. That is something to be proud of.



Jean-Claude Juncker

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 1

'My first priority as Commission President will be to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and to stimulate investment for the purpose of job creation.'

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014



A new boost for jobs, growth and investment

► A top priority in 2015 was to get the EU growing again and increase the number of jobs and the amount of investment without creating new debt. The Commission came forward with proposals for structural reforms and advocated the responsible management of finances. In order to restore investment levels in the EU's economy it launched the [investment plan for Europe](#), including new financial instruments, in cooperation with the [European Investment Bank](#). The plan was agreed in record time by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, and a new [European Fund for Strategic Investments](#) was created. The fund contains an initial €21 billion of EU money, and is expected to lead to

investments 15 times larger thanks to a multiplier effect, thus triggering investments of more than €315 billion.

The [European Structural and Investment Funds](#), with a budget of €454 billion for 2014-2020, invested in EU priority areas throughout the year. Operational programmes under the European Social Fund, worth €86.4 billion, continued to invest in people, while the EU also frontloaded €1 billion to speed up the youth employment initiative, helping young people find jobs.

Intense negotiations were held at EU level regarding the ongoing economic and financial situation in Greece. In July the Commission launched a [jobs and growth](#)

[plan for Greece](#), mobilising up to €35 billion to support it until 2020. Then, in August, the negotiations were successfully concluded and an agreement on the third economic adjustment programme for Greece was signed by the Commission, acting on behalf of the [European Stability Mechanism](#). The agreement pulled Greece back from the brink of default and safeguarded its future in the euro area. It paved the way for mobilising up to €86 billion in financial assistance until 2018, linked to progress by Greece in delivering the agreed reforms.

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 2

► In 2015 the Commission began to implement its strategy for connecting the digital single market. The strategy aims to remove online barriers that lead to EU citizens missing out on goods and services. The barriers also mean that internet companies and start-ups cannot take full advantage of growth opportunities online.

In May the Commission took the first steps in implementing the strategy, which aims to transform the EU from 28 national markets to a [digital single market](#), create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and contribute

€415 billion per year to the EU economy.

The EU institutions reached a landmark agreement in December to finally end mobile [roaming charges](#) in June 2017, provided that certain legal acts are adopted. From that date citizens will be able to travel throughout the EU without paying extra charges for using their mobile phone, smartphone or tablet. They also agreed to guarantee an [open internet](#) for all. The first legislative proposals of the digital single market strategy were presented in December. They included [new rules](#) to give EU residents

the right to enjoy the films, sports broadcasts, music, e-books and games that they have paid for in their home Member State when they travel in the EU. The Commission also proposed new [cross-border contract rules](#) to better protect consumers who shop online across the EU and help businesses expand their online sales.

Political agreement was reached on a new [EU data protection regime](#), and on new rules to ensure a high common level of [network and information security](#) across the EU.



'We must make much better use of the great opportunities offered by digital technologies, which know no borders. To do so, we will need to have the courage to break down national silos in telecoms regulation, in copyright and data protection legislation, in the management of radio waves and in the application of competition law.'

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014

A connected digital single market

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 3

‘Current geopolitical events have forcefully reminded us that Europe relies too heavily on fuel and gas imports. I therefore want to reform and reorganise Europe’s energy policy into a new European energy union.’

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014

► The EU headed into 2015 with a commitment to deliver secure and affordable energy to its citizens and businesses, while also fighting the causes of climate change. It [launched the energy union in February](#) to help consumers save money and energy, help the environment and ensure security of supply. A number of [related proposals were launched in July](#) that covered revising the EU emissions trading system, making energy-efficiency labels clearer and delivering a better deal for consumers. The Commission also launched a [public consultation](#) regarding the new design of the electricity market.

In February the Commission presented a communication on how to achieve a [10% electricity interconnection target](#) in all Member States by 2020. By the end of 2015 several interconnection projects had already been unveiled, linking the Baltic states in the north, the Iberian peninsula in the south and Malta with the rest of the EU.

In September the Commission adopted the new strategic energy technology plan. Its aim is to accelerate the development and deployment of low-carbon technologies.

In November the Commission issued the [state of the energy union report](#), which showed the progress made since the adoption of the energy union framework strategy. Its implementation will require further efforts, however, and 2016 will be a crucial year for the delivery of energy union.

In addition [the EU played a central role](#) in brokering the world’s first universal, legally binding climate deal, which was adopted by 195 countries in December in Paris. The agreement set out a global action plan to enable the world to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C. It also sent a clear signal to investors, businesses and policymakers that the global transition to clean energy is here to stay and that resources have to shift away from polluting fossil fuels.



A resilient energy union with a forward-looking climate change policy



A deeper and fairer internal market with a strengthened industrial base

► The Commission presented plans in 2015 to build on the strength of the EU single market and fully exploit its potential. The single market already offers easier access to many products and services, lower prices, greater commercial opportunities and higher standards of safety and environmental protection.

The Commission is further developing the single market to enable EU companies and industry to thrive in the global economy. In October it launched the [single market strategy](#) to help create new opportunities for consumers and businesses.

In the autumn the Commission launched the

[capital markets union](#), together with an [action plan](#) of 33 measures. These will make it easier for smaller businesses to tap into capital markets and find the funding they need. This access to funds is an essential part of the EU's financial stability.

The EU also needs a framework for the fair and efficient taxation of corporate profits. This would help distribute the tax burden equitably and promote sustainable growth and investment. It would also diversify funding sources and strengthen economic competitiveness. In March the Commission proposed a [package of measures](#) to create more transparency

'Our internal market is Europe's best asset in times of increasing globalisation. I therefore want the next Commission to build on the strength of our single market and to fully exploit its potential in all its dimensions.'

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014

in corporate taxation. This was followed in June by an [action plan](#) to achieve a comprehensive approach to ensuring fair and efficient corporate taxation. During the year the Commission launched investigations under State aid rules into whether certain Member States had granted tax advantages to selected companies.

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 5

► On 1 January 2015 the euro area welcomed Lithuania as its 19th member.

Throughout the year the EU continued to prioritise the completion of [economic and monetary union](#). By doing so it aims to create a better and fairer life for all citizens and prepare for future global challenges. The EU's future prosperity depends on the euro achieving its potential in delivering jobs, growth, social fairness and financial stability. The euro is, however, a political project, requiring political supervision and democratic accountability. The Parliament played a leading role in ensuring that accountability in 2015.

The EU moved forward in building the solid architecture needed for the euro area, the world's second largest economy. Despite progress in recent years divergence across the euro area remains significant, and the recent crisis further highlighted existing shortcomings, with 18 million unemployed in the euro area and many people exposed to the risk of social exclusion.

The [five presidents' report](#) on how to complete economic and monetary union was launched in June. The report was the result of joint reflections by the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Council, the Eurogroup, the European Central Bank and the European Parliament. In the short term the report proposes using existing instruments

and the current treaties to boost competitiveness and structural convergence, to achieve responsible fiscal policies at national and euro-area levels and to complete financial union. In the longer term the convergence process must be more binding, for example through agreed benchmarks for convergence and a euro-area treasury. In October the Commission adopted a [first package of measures to start implementing the plan](#).

'Over the next 5 years, I want to continue with the reform of our economic and monetary union to preserve the stability of our single currency and to enhance the convergence of economic, fiscal and labour market policies between the Member States that share the single currency.'

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014



A deeper and fairer economic and monetary union

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 6

‘Under my presidency, the Commission will negotiate a reasonable and balanced trade agreement with the United States of America, in a spirit of mutual and reciprocal benefits and transparency ... I will also be very clear that I will not sacrifice Europe’s safety, health, social and data protection standards or our cultural diversity on the altar of free trade.’

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014



A reasonable and balanced free trade agreement with the United States

► One of the EU’s biggest challenges in 2015 remained the negotiations with the United States on the [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership](#). Four rounds of negotiations were held during the year, with [progress](#) made across a range of areas. The Commission has been clear that any agreement needs to ensure that the EU’s current high standards of protection are maintained. The EU-US economic relationship is the biggest in the world. Independent studies and existing EU trade agreements suggest that a new free trade agreement with the United States would help generate growth, cut prices and give consumers more choice of goods and services.

To address civil-society concerns the Commission has ensured that the negotiations are more open and transparent than ever before. Throughout the year it engaged with stakeholders, published negotiating texts and provided detailed information about the negotiations.

The EU continued to actively implement its trade policy during the year. It sought to maintain the [global trading system](#) and played an active role in the World Trade Organisation. In the autumn the Commission published its new [trade and investment strategy](#).

Opening up markets with key partner countries remained a central element

of EU trade policy. The EU continued to negotiate free trade agreements with, among other countries, Japan and Vietnam. The agreement with Vietnam was concluded in 2015. The EU also participated in plurilateral negotiations, under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation, for a [Trade in Services Agreement](#) and an [Environmental Goods Agreement](#).



An area of justice and fundamental rights based on mutual trust

► Throughout 2015 the EU continued to develop its justice, fundamental rights and citizenship policies. These are based on the EU's core values of democracy, freedom, tolerance and the rule of law. EU citizens must have full confidence that, wherever they are in the European Union, their freedom and security are well protected.

In April the Commission presented a [European agenda on security](#). The agenda focuses on areas where the EU can make a difference, such as better exchange of information and strengthened police and judicial cooperation.

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and November the Member States [resolved to work together to defeat terrorism](#). They took steps to counter radicalisation, cut terrorist financing and enhance the cooperation between the EU's law enforcement agency, Europol, and its judicial cooperation agency, Eurojust.

In the area of justice the Commission delivered on its commitment to finalise [EU data protection reform](#), ensuring better protection of citizens' personal data. The Commission also made progress towards the establishment of the [European Public Prosecutor's](#)

'I intend to make use of the prerogatives of the Commission to uphold, within our field of competence, our shared values, the rule of law and fundamental rights, while taking due account of the diversity of constitutional and cultural traditions of the 28 Member States.'

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014

[Office](#), which will investigate and prosecute EU fraud affecting the Union's financial interests.

The Commission finalised negotiations on an [EU-US data protection umbrella agreement](#). The agreement will protect personal data transferred between the European Union and the United States for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences, including terrorism. It will also enable EU citizens to benefit from the possibility of seeking judicial redress in the United States under US law.

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 8

► In 2015 the world was shocked by the plight of thousands of refugees putting their lives at risk to enter the EU. Throughout the year Europe witnessed one of the biggest mass migrations of people since the Second World War. The EU stepped up its efforts to save lives, fight human trafficking and cooperate with countries of origin and transit. It also launched initiatives to tackle the root causes that force people to escape and migrate. These include poverty, wars, persecution, violations of human rights and natural disasters.

In May the Commission presented the [European agenda for migration](#), setting out a comprehensive approach to migration management. The agenda aims to reduce the incentives for irregular migration, save lives and secure the external borders of the EU. It provides for the development of a strong common asylum policy and a new policy on legal migration.

‘The recent terrible events in the Mediterranean have shown us that Europe needs to manage migration better, in all aspects. This is first of all a humanitarian imperative. I am convinced that we must work closely together in a spirit of solidarity.’

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014

In September the Commission mobilised an extra €1.8 billion to address migration and the refugee crisis. By doing so it increased the total EU budget for tackling the crisis to €9.3 billion for 2015–2016. Member States agreed to relocate 160 000 people in need of international protection from those Member States most affected to others. They also agreed to resettle 22 000 refugees from camps outside the EU. By tripling the funding for its maritime patrolling assets on the central and eastern Mediterranean migratory routes the EU contributed to saving over 252 000 lives.

It also redoubled its efforts to tackle smugglers and dismantle human trafficking groups. The EU mobilised around €4 billion to help Syrian refugees both in Syria and in neighbouring countries. In October [Commission President Juncker called a leaders’ meeting](#) on refugee flows along the western Balkans route.



Towards a new policy on migration

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 9

‘We need a stronger Europe when it comes to foreign policy. The Ukraine crisis and the worrying situation in the Middle East show how important it is that Europe is united externally.’

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014

► In July 2015, following years of EU-led diplomacy, a [historic international agreement was reached on Iran’s nuclear programme](#). The EU, together with China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, brokered the agreement. Iran pledged that under no circumstances would it ever seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons.

Throughout the year the EU continued to play a leading role in international efforts to solve crises in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine. It worked tirelessly with its international partners against the activities of ISIL/Da’esh.

Due to the above crises, in particular the war in Syria, an increasing number of people were forced to flee their homes. The EU continued to provide humanitarian aid to people displaced by conflict, tackle the root causes of crises and assist those trying to flee war zones.

During the year the Commission’s [Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection \(ECHO\)](#) provided [food, shelter, protection, healthcare](#) and clean [water](#) to more than 120 million people affected by natural disasters or conflict in over 80 countries. The EU also remained committed to promoting respect for human rights across the world and promoting international law through dedicated human rights dialogues, advocacy in multilateral forums and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.

2015 was also the [European Year for Development](#). With the political support of the EU and its Member States, the United Nations General Assembly adopted new sustainable development goals. These set out a global framework to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. The EU remained the world’s largest donor of development assistance in 2015.



A stronger global actor

THE EU IN 2015 PRIORITY 10

‘The proposal and election of the President of the European Commission in the light of the outcome of the European Parliament elections is certainly important, but only a first step in making the European Union as a whole more democratic. A European Commission under my leadership will be committed to filling the special partnership with the European Parliament ... I am also committed to enhanced transparency when it comes to contact with stakeholders and lobbyists ... I also intend to review the legislation applicable to the authorisation of genetically modified organisms.’

Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014



A Union of democratic change

► In 2015 the [European Parliament](#) provided significant input in debates ranging from the economic situation in Greece to the refugee crisis. In October it held discussions with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the French President, François Hollande. It was the first time in over 30 years that the leaders of the EU's two largest Member States had addressed the Parliament together. Also in October the Parliament awarded the [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) to Saudi Arabian blogger and human rights activist Raif Badawi.

[Latvia](#) and [Luxembourg](#) held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2015. The Council's agendas were driven by the

year's major developments, such as the tensions in Ukraine, terrorism, the refugee crisis and the situation in Greece.

The [European Economic and Social Committee](#) and the [Committee of the Regions](#) focused their activities on the Commission's work programme for 2015. Georges Dassis was elected as the new President of the European Economic and Social Committee, while Markku Markkula was elected as the new President of the Committee of the Regions.

[National parliaments](#) continued to express their views on EU matters via the [political dialogue with the European Commission and the Subsidiarity Control](#)

[Mechanism](#). The mechanism allows national parliaments in the EU to issue opinions if they consider that EU draft legislation does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. Members of the Commission made numerous visits to national parliaments to explain key priorities and major political initiatives.

During 2015 the Commission organised 53 [citizens' dialogues](#) throughout the EU, enabling citizens to make their voices heard by EU decision-makers.

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