



Key Quotes

The European Union said the door was still open to Iceland and denied that Reykjavik's decision to drop its membership bid was a setback for the bloc. **"The doors of the EU of course remains open to Iceland,"** European Commission spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic told reporters. Margaritis Schinas, the spokesman for European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, rejected suggestions that Iceland's decision was a new blow for the union. **"The power of the attraction of the EU is measured across the continent and across the world,"** Schinas said, adding that there were **"many countries"** that still wanted to join the bloc. **"When things went tough for Iceland they wanted to join, now they want to take a break, that's fine. It's a sovereign decision, our door is open, we continue to be in business,"** he added (eubusiness.com, UK, 14/3).

<http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/iceland.1092>

Summary

Visit of Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev to the Republic of Serbia

Mr Plevneliev has paid a visit to Serbia at the invitation of his Serbian counterpart Tomislav Nikolić, the visit reflects the focus of the foreign-policy programme of President Plevneliev - regional cooperation, better connectivity between countries in the region and their Euro-Atlantic perspective. President Rosen Plevneliev met with representatives of Serbian businesses at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and discussed possibilities for stimulating contacts between businesses from both countries. Mr Plevneliev also met with representatives of the Bulgarian national minority in Serbia (focus-news.net, BG, 13/3).

- focus-news.net, BG, 13/3, <http://www.focus-fen.net/news/2015/03/13/366011/bulgaria-presidents-visit-to-serbia-continues.html>

Vote rigging scandal

The line crackles with static but the voice on the phone recording is clear. *"The electricity for the lifts should have been turned off this morning. Now we'll switch them off mechanically"* the man says. The man speaking is — according to the opposition leader in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia — Mile Janakieski, the country's transport and communications minister. The date is April 27 last year, the same date as the parliamentary elections. Mr Janakieski's alleged motive? To stop elderly residents in an apartment building from leaving their homes to cast ballots against the government. The exchange is just one grim detail from what is emerging as one of the worst election scandals in Europe in recent memory. EU sources said that a delegation from the European parliament may seek to mediate in the crisis, an idea supported by Johannes Hahn, the EU's Commissioner for Enlargement. Opposition figures said only fresh elections administered by a caretaker government would resolve the deadlock (ft.com, UK, 13/3).

- ft.com, UK, 13/3, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/666fe0ac-c889-11e4-8617-00144feab7de.html#axzz3UEtqcWZj>

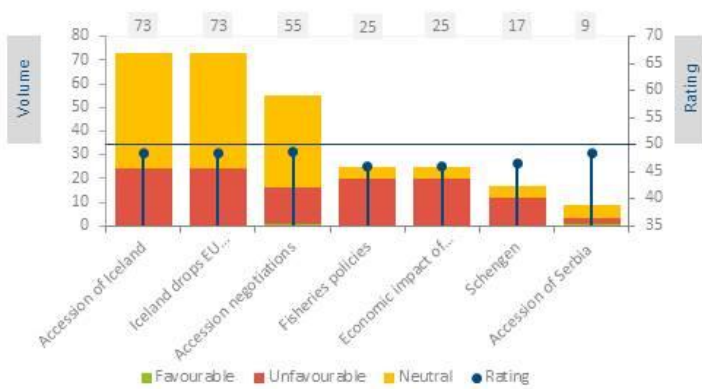
Iceland to go it alone

"Iceland's interests are better served outside the European Union" wrote Foreign Minister Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson on his website. Iceland first applied for EU membership in 2009, when the country was badly shaken by an economic crisis that saw the Icelandic Krona lose almost half its value. That made Eurozone membership an attractive prospect. But the thorny issue of fishing quotas was seen as a key obstacle to joining the bloc, although it was never brought up in the accession talks. Fishing represents an important part of the Icelandic economy and it was never made clear how differences between Brussels and Reykjavik on the subject could be resolved. The head of the Social Democratic opposition, Arni Pall Arnasson, lamented that the government had taken the decision without approval from a majority in parliament (Euractiv, BE, 13/3).

- Euractiv, BE, 13/3, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/enlargement/iceland-officially-drops-eu-membership-bid-312877>

Charts

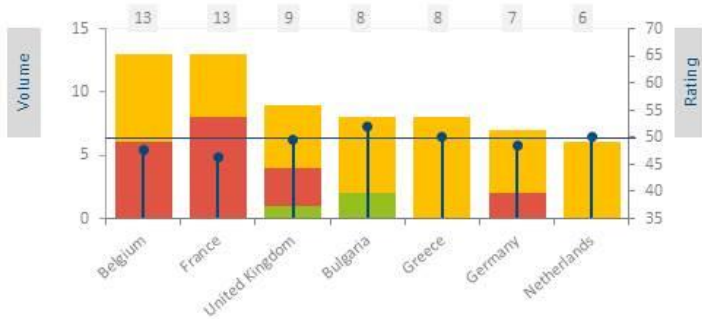
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|---|--------------------|
| Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson - Iceland FM | 70 |
| Rosen Plevneliev - Bulgaria President | 5 |
| Tomislav Nikolić - Serbia President | 4 |
| Federica Mogherini - HR Foreign Affairs | 4 |

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