

Letter n°1055 of Tuesday 20th February 2024

The Defence of Europe by Europeans: a myth, a necessity, an ambition, a hope?

Jean-Paul Palomeros - 20 Feb 2024

2024 will be a "stress test" year for European defence. Unfortunately, "efforts are too dispersed to create an overall dynamic" and to "produce major federating projects". The risk of American disengagement calls for an analysis of European aid to Ukraine: modern and effective, the weapons systems are nonetheless limited in number. Europe's strategic autonomy will depend on its ability to master the new technologies that will determine the future of its industry and its place in the world. The strategic debate also raises the question of nuclear deterrence. On this sensitive issue, there is no denying the link between the vital interests of nuclear-armed France and those of the European Union. In a fast-changing world, "do we Europeans want to withdraw into ourselves or continue along the path laid out by our predecessors after two devastating wars? Are we ready, as they were, to invent a common future of peace and prosperity and to defend it together?"



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■ **Front page! :**



Europe, the moment of truth

Rule of law, prosperity, stability - Europe has exceeded the expectations of its founders. But Russia poses an existential challenge. In the face of attacks and interference, "every Member State has the right to consider that its own national security is now at risk". Europe's response has been too cautious. The determination of Europeans requires "massive support for the Ukrainians and Moldovans, who are for us 'our defence on the front line'". In addition to massive investment in our security, Jean-Dominique Giuliani calls for "a declaration, agreement or treaty between European states, including the United Kingdom" in which "the signatories undertake to defend and protect each other". [Read more](#)

■ Elections :



Snap Election in Portugal

The Portuguese are due to go to the polls on 10 March to renew the 230 members of the Assembly of the Republic, the single chamber of Parliament. This snap election, two years ahead of schedule, follows the resignation on 7 November of Prime Minister Antonio Costa (Socialist Party, PS), who had been in power for eight years, following the indictment and provisional detention of his chief of staff, Vitor Escaria. According to the opinion poll carried out by the Consulmark2 institute between 6 and 12 February, the Democratic Alliance, which includes the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Social Democratic Centre/People's Party (CDS/PP) and the Monarchist People's Party (PPM), is expected to win the election by a very narrow margin, with 30% of the vote, ahead of the PS, which is expected to win 27.4%. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Derogation for fallow land in 2024

On 13 February, the Commission definitively adopted a derogation from the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which makes the payment of aid conditional on the reservation of 4% of arable land for non-productive areas or set-aside land. For the year 2024, farmers will have the option of not following this rule, provided that they devote this 4% of their land to intermediate or nitrogen-fixing crops, without the use of pesticides. [Read more](#)



Revised economic forecasts

According to the Commission's economic forecasts, published on 15 February, growth will resume later than expected in 2024, and inflation will fall rapidly. It estimates that growth in the eurozone in 2024 will be 0.8% and inflation 2.7%. These trends should continue in 2025, with growth at 1.5% and inflation at 2.2%. [Read more - Other link](#)



Ursula von der Leyen to stand for a second term of office

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced on 19 February that she was standing for a second term of office at a press conference after receiving the backing of the CDU, the German party of which she is a member. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



Meeting of Ministers responsible for Development

The development ministers, meeting on 12 February, discussed the alignment of development policies with other external policy initiatives, such as the Global Gateway. They also spoke with Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the recent accusations made against this organisation. [Read more](#)

■ Digital :



Entry into force of the regulation on digital services

The Digital Services Act (DSA), which already applied to platforms with more than 45 million users, officially came into force on 17 February for all European digital platforms. These platforms are now subject to stricter moderation rules, particularly with regard to hate speech and disinformation, and must share information on compliance with these rules with European regulators. They are also prohibited from targeting minors for advertising, or from targeting on the basis of gender, political views or religious affiliation. [Read more](#)

■ Trilogues :



Maritime Safety: agreement on inquiries into accidents

On 13 February, Parliament and the Council reached agreement on the revision of a directive on accidents in the maritime transport sector. This legislation provides a framework for investigations carried out when an accident occurs. It will now apply to small fishing vessels, and the legal definitions it refers to will be clarified. [Read more](#)



Agreement to extend the measures to combat sexual abuse of minors

On 15 February, the European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on the extension of a derogation from data protection rules enabling digital messaging services to combat sexual abuse of minors more effectively. The derogation was due to expire on 3 August 2024, but has now been extended to 3 April 2026. In the meantime, legislators hope to adopt a specific law to combat online sexual abuse of minors. [Read more](#)

■ Diplomacy :



Partnership Council with Armenia

The Armenia Partnership Council met for the fifth time in Brussels on 13 February. The meeting confirmed the mutual interest and commitment of the European Union and Armenia to strengthen and deepen their relations on the basis of shared values. To this end, they agreed to launch work on a new partnership programme, setting out more ambitious joint priorities for cooperation in all areas. [Read more](#)



Launch of the European "Aspides" mission in the Red Sea

On 19 February, the European Union began a military mission in the Red Sea to protect commercial vessels from attacks by the Houthis. This defensive mission will not strike targets on Yemeni soil. States wishing to do so will be able to send frigates under the general command of Greece and the operational command at sea of Italy. France, Belgium and Germany have announced that they will be sending frigates. [Read more](#)

■ Germany :



Munich Security Conference

The Munich Security Conference was held from 16 to 18 February, in the presence of the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, and the Vice-President of the United States, Kamala Harris. Several conferences and round tables were held on major geopolitical issues, such as the international economy, disinformation and sustainable development. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

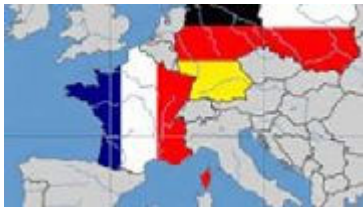
■ France :



A Russian propaganda network exposed

Viginum, a French organisation that combats foreign digital interference, has uncovered a Russian propaganda network, dubbed "Portal Kombat", targeting European countries and the United States. 193 sites were identified between September and December 2023, designed to legitimise the war in Ukraine and serve Russian propaganda. In a report published on 12 February, Viginum states that the sites in this network do not produce any original content, but instead massively relay publications from the social networking accounts of Russian or pro-Russian actors, or from Russian press agencies. [Read more](#)

■ Poland :



Revival of the Weimar Triangle

On 12 February, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk travelled to Paris and Berlin for talks with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The aim of the visit was to revive the Weimar Triangle, a historic format for cooperation between the three countries. The three men underscored their commitment to strengthening Europe's military, energy and food security. At the same time, the foreign ministers of the three countries met in La Celle-Saint-Cloud, France. They focused on the creation of an alert and response programme, with the aim of stepping up the fight against disinformation, cyber attacks and Russian political interference. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



David Cameron visits Bulgaria and Poland

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron visited Sofia and Warsaw on 14 and 15 February, where he reiterated his support for Ukraine as a global security issue. At the same time, he and his Polish counterpart Radek Sikorski called on the US Congress to vote in favour of aid to Ukraine, which is currently blocked by the Republican opposition. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Meeting with Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo

On 16 February, the Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, met his Finnish counterpart, Petteri Orpo, to discuss the strengthening of borders in the face of illegal immigration, particularly that organised by Russia to put pressure on the European Union. They also announced closer cooperation on developing a strict European policy against illegal immigration. [Read more](#)

■ Russia :



Death of Alexei Navalny

Alexei Navalny, Russia's emblematic anti-corruption opponent, died on 16 February in the Arctic prison where he was serving a 19-year sentence for "extremism". His death quickly sparked a wave of international condemnation, with many accusing the Kremlin of being responsible for his death. The European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2021. Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, paid tribute to the memory of a man who fought for freedom and democracy, making the ultimate sacrifice with his life. The President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, urged that Navalny's fight for democracy should continue. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Threats against leaders of the Baltic States

Russia has issued wanted notices for Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Estonian State Secretary Taimar Peterkop and Lithuanian Culture Minister Simonas Kairys, in connection with an unspecified "criminal case". The Kremlin has accused them of destroying monuments to Soviet soldiers. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Switzerland :



Green light for the resumption of negotiations with the European Union

On 13 February, two Swiss parliamentary committees gave the go-ahead for the resumption of negotiations between Switzerland and the European Union, which have been at a standstill since 2021. Discussions with the Swiss Federal Council resumed in 2022 and culminated last December in the publication of a joint document laying the foundations for negotiations in a number of areas, such as freedom of movement, electricity and integration into major European programmes. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Ukraine :



Bilateral security agreements with Germany and France

On 16 February, Volodymyr Zelensky travelled to Paris and Berlin to sign two security agreements with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. France has pledged military support for Ukraine over a 10-year period, valid until the country joins NATO, through the provision of equipment, the training of soldiers and the development of the Ukrainian military industry, as well as €3 billion in additional military aid in 2024. Germany has pledged to support the development of military forces and civilian service "for as long as necessary", as well as an additional €1 billion in military aid in 2024. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ NATO :



Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers

NATO's defence ministers met on 15 February. They welcomed the overall increase in defence spending within the Alliance, which should reach an average of 2% of GDP for its member countries by 2024. The allies held talks with the Ukrainian defence minister, Rustem Umerov, as part of the NATO-Ukraine Council, and announced the creation of a joint analysis, training and education centre for NATO and Ukrainian forces. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



Annual Report on the Single Market and Competitiveness

On 14 February, the Commission published its first annual report on the single market and competitiveness. In this report, it identifies 9 operational drivers of European competitiveness measured by performance indicators. The report recommends strengthening the capital markets union and mobilising public investment for the digital and climate change transitions. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Implementation of the regulation on terrorist content online

On 14 February, the Commission presented a report on the implementation of the regulation adopted in 2021 to facilitate the fight against the digital proliferation of terrorist content. Since its entry into force, 349 content removal orders have been issued by the authorities of the Member States, and in most cases these have led to the rapid removal of content by the platforms. [Read more](#)

■ Culture :



"Kafkaesque", a tribute to Franz Kafka in Prague

Until 22 September, Prague's Centre for Contemporary Art is paying tribute to Franz Kafka, a native of the city, to mark the centenary of his death. The exhibition, entitled "Kafkaesque", features works by some thirty international artists that illustrate the artist's literary and poetic work. The exhibition highlights the notions of existential fears and personal anxieties, which are very much present in Kafka's work and still relevant today. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Jeff Wall

Until 21 April, the Fondation Beyeler in Basel is showing the work of Canadian photographer Jeff Wall. Considered to be the father of "staged" photography, he produces large-format photographs composed in complex ways from a number of separate shots, in black and white or colour. The 55 works on display, from private collections, international museums and the artist's own holdings, are housed in eleven exhibition rooms. [Read more](#)

● JEU DE PAUME

Tina Modotti in Paris

The Italian photographer Tina Modotti is being honoured at the Jeu de Paume in Paris until 12 May. Her work continues to be influenced by the historical events of her time: the economic emigration of Europeans to America, the rise of political muralism, the emancipation of women in the public sphere, the opposition between Stalinists and Trotskyists after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Spanish Civil War. [Read more](#)



Józef Mehoffer in Krakow

Until 8 April, Krakow's National Museum is hosting an exhibition by the painter Józef Mehoffer, one of the leading exponents of Polish Art Nouveau and Symbolism. Through his still lifes, he brings out the discreet beauty and hidden mystical meanings of everyday elements. [Read more](#)



Vincent Munier in Lyon

Until 27 April 2025, the Musée des Confluences in Lyon is presenting the exhibition "En forêt" ("In the Forest") by French photographer and film-maker Vincent Munier. A keen traveller, he has been roaming the forests of the Vosges in particular since he was a child. His sound and visual work is an invitation to explore nature. The still and moving images invite us to observe the often little-known flora and fauna of the forest. [Read more](#)

100 years of surrealism in Brussels



Until 21 July, Belgium's Royal Museums of Fine Arts are offering the public "IMAGINE!", an exhibition on the surrealist poetry of artists such as Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Dorothea Tanning. This immersion in Surrealism is the result of a partnership with the Centre Pompidou (Paris). [Read more](#)



Van Gogh in Trieste

In collaboration with the municipality of Trieste and the Arthemisia group, the Revoltella museum in Trieste is hosting an exhibition dedicated to the work of Vincent Van Gogh until 30 June. More than fifty of the artist's works are on display, complemented by videos, creating a complete immersive experience in the painter's work. [Read more](#)



International Film Festival in Berlin

The 74th Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) is being held until 25 February. A major film market and competition venue, the festival is also a platform for intercultural exchange and cinematic exploration. [Read more](#)



Design Festival Madrid

Until 31 March, Madrid will be hosting the seventh edition of the Design Festival, which will be showcasing craftsmanship from Castilla-La Mancha, as well as 53 exhibitions and installations, 177 brands, institutions and spaces, and involving 695 professionals. It links design with disciplines such as science, fashion, music, art and craft. [Read more](#)



Sargent and Fashion in London

Until 7 July, Tate Britain is presenting an exhibition on John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), one of the most important portrait painters of his time. He beautifully documented the luxury and opulence of turn-of-the-century Europe, and this exhibition examines the importance of fashion in shaping ideas of identity and status in art. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 20 February 2023

EU-Georgia Association Council (Brussels)

 20 February 2024

 23-24 February 2024

Meeting of Economics and Finance Ministers (Ghent)

 23 February 2024

Eurogroup (Ghent)

 25-29 February 2024


Foreign Affairs Council (Abu-Dhabi)

 26 February 2024

Agriculture and Fisheries Council (Brussels)

 26-27 February 2024

Meeting of Ministers responsible for Gender Equality (Brussels)



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