

## **Agriculture: an adjustment variable in trade agreements?**

Nicolas-Jean Brehon - 12 Mar 2024

In a context of liberalised trade, agriculture has a special place in the agreements negotiated by the European Union. Often the source of disputes, it must be analysed on a sector-by-sector basis to assess the impact of these agreements on European producers. The beef sector appears to be the weak link in the trade negotiations. Even if no trade agreement radically changes a market, certain lessons can be learned: negotiations remain too opaque, the environmental impact is not taken into account, controls are difficult and safeguard clauses are ineffective. Naivety must also be avoided when considering the strategic stakes behind these agreements, and when addressing the disruptions they cause.



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### ■ Elections :



#### **General Election Results in Portugal**

The Democratic Alliance, comprising the Social Democratic Party (PSD), led by Luis Montenegro, the Christian Democratic Social Centre/People's Party (CDS/PP), led by Nuno Melo, and the Monarchist People's Party (PPM), came out ahead in the 10 March general elections in Portugal, with 29.52% of the vote. The alliance beat the Socialist Party (PS), led by Pedro Nuno Santos, which obtained 28.63%, followed by Chega (Enough) (CH), André Ventura's radical right-wing party, which came third with 18.06% of the vote. [Read more](#)

## ■ Foundation :



### A site to find out everything you need to know about the European elections

From June 6 to 9, Europeans are invited to elect 720 Members of the European Parliament for the next five years. The Foundation has set up a website to help you better understand the election and what's at stake, and to follow the campaign with the lists of candidates and party platforms in each member state. [Read more](#)



### "Paris Defence and Strategy Forum"

The Foundation is a partner of the Paris Defence and Strategy Forum, the first international summit of its kind in France. From 13 to 14 March, the École Militaire de Paris and its ACADEM, under the aegis of the European Commission, are organising 63 meetings on the major themes of European security and defence. Jean-Dominique Giuliani, Chairman of the Foundation, will be chairing the round table "Europe's new borders: Interparliamentary dialogue - Confronting Russia" on 14 March. Elise Bernard, Head of Research, will moderate the panel "European defence: industry, funding, cooperation instruments, challenges and prospects" on 13 March. [Read more](#)

## ■ Commission :



### Defence Industrial Strategy

On 5 March, the Commission unveiled its plan to improve the competitiveness and readiness of the European defence industry. These objectives will be achieved through policies that encourage Member States to invest collectively, through existing defence instruments and initiatives, and in partnership with NATO and Ukraine. The strategy aims to procure at least 40% of defence equipment collaboratively by 2030. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Ursula von der Leyen, EPP candidate

At its congress in Bucharest on March 6, the European People's Party (EPP) endorsed the candidacy of Ursula von der Leyen for re-election as head of the European Commission. Nominated by 82% of the national delegates present at the congress, the current President of the European Commission now heads the EPP list. The EPP will need to emerge victorious from the elections for Ursula von der Leyen to be reappointed as Commission President, following nomination by the 27 Heads of State and Government and a vote by the European Parliament. [Read more](#)



## Fine of over 1.8 billion € against Apple

Apple was fined €1.84 billion by the European Commission on 4 March for abusing its dominant position in the distribution of music streaming applications through the App Store. The Commission found that Apple had created "unfair trading conditions" by abusing its total control over iOS - its operating system - to force developers to deny the existence of cheaper services outside iOS. [Read more](#)



## Entry into force of the DMA

The Commission has announced that the designated gatekeepers - Apple, Alphabet, Meta, Amazon, Microsoft and ByteDance - will have to comply with all the obligations of the Digital Market Regulation (DMA) from 7 March. This regulation aims to combat the anti-competitive practices of the Internet giants and correct the imbalances in their dominance of the European digital market. [Read more](#)

## ■ Council :



## Meeting of Ministers responsible for Competitiveness

The ministers for the internal market and industry met on 7 March to discuss the progress made on the regulation of late payments in commercial transactions, as well as the 2024 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report (ASMCR). They also discussed the future of industrial policy, the European tourism programme 2030, and the need to establish a European maritime strategy. [Read more](#)



## Meeting of ministers responsible for energy

On March 4, the 27 energy ministers reached a political agreement on the extension of coordinated measures to reduce the demand for gas. They also discussed the importance of flexibility in the energy transition, and the need to move away from Russian fossil fuels. To this end, the ministers discussed the introduction of support schemes, as well as the lifting of the latest cross-border energy taxes, which date back to the energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers

On March 4, Interior Ministers reinforced the protection of the Schengen area via the "Schengen Barometer" and approved new actions against organized crime, such as the European Port Alliance. The Council welcomed the Pact on Asylum and Migration, and discussed Eastern Mediterranean migration routes and partnerships with third countries. On March 5, justice ministers examined the directive establishing minimum rules to prevent and combat the facilitation of unauthorized entry, transit and residence in the Union. The Council also exchanged views with Ukrainian prosecutor Andriy Kostin on the prosecution of war crimes in Ukraine. [Read more](#)

## ■ Diplomacy :



## Migration: partnership with Mauritania

On 7 March, the European Union and Mauritania announced a partnership aimed at strengthening their cooperation on migration. This partnership will provide better employment prospects for young Mauritians, as well as better management of the arrival of refugees in order to protect the right to asylum. Legal migration will be encouraged among students, researchers and entrepreneurs. Finally, border management will be strengthened through enhanced cooperation with Frontex. [Read more](#)



## The Swiss Federal Council approves the definitive negotiating mandate with the European Union

On 8 March, the Swiss Federal Council adopted a negotiating mandate for closer relations with the European Union. Negotiations will begin once the European Commission has obtained the green light from the European Council. [Read more](#)

### ■ ECB :



## Maintenance of key rates

On 7 March, the European Central Bank (ECB) decided to leave its three key interest rates unchanged, while inflation is decreasing in the eurozone. It has revised inflation downwards, forecasting - excluding energy and food - 2.6% for 2024, 2.1% for 2025 and 2% for 2026. The ECB's latest forecasts also predict that growth will fall to 0.6% in 2024, before recovering to 1.5% in 2025 and 1.6% in 2026. [Read more](#)

### ■ Bulgaria :



## Resignation of Bulgarian Prime Minister

Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov tendered his resignation on 5 March, nine months after taking office. The Bulgarian parliament approved his decision the following day. The product of a political agreement between the GERB and PP-DB parties to bring the country out of a political crisis lasting more than two years, Nikolai Denkov is to hand over to former European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, who is expected to govern Bulgaria for the next nine months. [Read more](#)

### ■ Cyprus :



## Announcement of a new humanitarian corridor to Gaza

Visiting Cyprus on 8 March, Ursula von der Leyen met Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and announced the decision by the European Commission, the Republic of Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and the United Kingdom to open a maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian aid from Cyprus to Gaza. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

### ■ France :



## Emmanuel Macron visits Prague

President Emmanuel Macron travelled to Prague on 5 March to meet his Czech counterpart Petr Pavel. They reiterated their support for Ukraine, and Emmanuel Macron announced that France would participate in the Czech platform for the purchase of munitions produced outside the EU. They also signed a 2024-2028 action plan setting out the broad guidelines for bilateral cooperation between the two countries on international, European and energy issues. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Meeting with Moldovan President Maia Sandu

French President Emmanuel Macron hosted his Moldovan counterpart Maia Sandu on 7 March. He reiterated France's support for Moldova's independence, security and sovereignty at a time of war in Ukraine. He also confirmed France's determination to support Moldova in its process of integration into the European Union. The two Heads of State discussed bilateral cooperation issues and reached an agreement on defence cooperation and a roadmap for economic cooperation. [Read more](#)

## ■ Hungary :



## Investiture of the Hungarian President

The inauguration of Hungary's new president, Tamas Sulyok, took place in Budapest on 10 March. He succeeds Katalin Novák, who resigned following a scandal that sparked a wave of demonstrations across the country. As soon as he took office, Tamas Sulyok signed the Hungarian parliament's decision paving the way for Sweden to join NATO. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Poland :



## Reform of the Constitutional Court

On 6 March, the Polish Parliament adopted, by 240 votes to 197, a resolution aimed at reforming the Constitutional Court in order to "eliminate the effects of the constitutional crisis of 2015-2023". The main aim is to strengthen the independence of judges, which has been undermined by decisions of the previous administration. The reform of the Constitutional Court is one of the conditions for the release of European funds, which have been suspended due to breaches of the rule of law in Poland. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Sweden :



### Sweden officially becomes the 32nd member of NATO

On 7 March, Sweden officially became the 32nd member of NATO, thereby renouncing its historic neutrality. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson travelled to Washington where he met US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, marking the end of the accession process initiated in May 2022. [Read more](#)

## ■ UK :



### Customs Partnership with France

Following a meeting of the Calais Group - which brings together the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands - in Brussels on 4 March, the United Kingdom announced that it would be setting up a customs partnership with France to target the supply chain for small boats used by smugglers to cross the English Channel illegally. A further meeting is scheduled for April to discuss the details of this agreement. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Ukraine :



### Visit of Greek Prime Minister to Ukraine

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy escaped a Russian strike on 6 March while visiting the port of Odessa. Kyriakos Mitsotakis had come to meet his Ukrainian counterpart to discuss Greek participation in the reconstruction of the country's civil infrastructure and cultural sites, and to underline its support for Ukraine's accession to the European Union. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



### Freezing of Russian assets in Switzerland

On 7 March, the Swiss Council of States adopted, by 21 votes to 19 with 3 abstentions, a motion to allow frozen Russian assets to be sent to Ukraine as war reparations. "Russia has seriously violated international law and must therefore repair the damage caused", said Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis. [Read more](#)



## Extension of transport agreements with the European Union

On 5 March, the Commission submitted a proposal to the Council to extend the agreements on road haulage between the EU and Ukraine and Moldova. These agreements allow Ukrainian, Moldovan and European hauliers to transit and operate between these territories in complete freedom. In addition, the agreement between the EU and Ukraine provides for the recognition of Ukrainian driving licences and certificates of professional competence. [Read more](#)



## Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers in Vilnius

The Estonian, Latvian, French, Lithuanian and Ukrainian foreign ministers met in Vilnius on 8 March to discuss their support for Ukraine. The head of Ukrainian diplomacy, Dmytro Kuleba, called on his counterparts to step up their support, stressing the threat to their own security posed by Russian aggression. [Read more](#)

## ■ Trilogues :



## Single European Sky

Ten years after the start of negotiations, on 6 March the Council and Parliament reached agreement on new rules to optimise air links in the Union. The agreement includes an assessment every three years of the performance plans of air navigation services and a mechanism for achieving carbon neutrality through climate and environmental performance targets, as well as air charges to encourage the use of fuel-efficient routes. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Plant health law

On 6 March, the Council and Parliament reached a provisional agreement to revise the plant health law designed to protect the EU from the entry onto the market of new organisms harmful to plants. The aim of the revision is to strengthen procedures for high-risk plants by simplifying the administrative declaration requirements for the transport of plants within the EU. [Read more](#)





## Sustainable packaging

On 6 March, Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement aimed at reducing packaging and waste, particularly plastic waste, by introducing restrictions on the use of certain packaging formats, such as a ban on "Perishable Chemicals" (PFAS) in packaging that comes into contact with food. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Combating cross-border crime and e-solidarity

On 6 March, the Council and Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the transfer of criminal proceedings, strengthening the fight against cross-border crime, and on the regulation on cyber solidarity, which aims to strengthen European detection and defence capabilities in the cyber domain. Both texts must be approved by the two co-legislators. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## Ban on products made using forced labour

On 5 March, MEPs and the Council adopted a provisional agreement aimed at banning products produced using forced labour. To this end, the Commission and national authorities will be empowered to investigate the proven or suspected use of forced labour and, if necessary, request that the products in question be withdrawn from the market. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Studies/Reports :



## Europe is not prepared for the rapid increase in climate risks

Europe could be faced with "catastrophic" situations if it does not take the measure of the climate risks it faces, many of which are already at a critical level, warned the European Environment Agency (EEA) on 11 March in its first report on the assessment of climate risks in Europe. [Read more](#)



## Report on the safety of journalists

The annual report of the Council of Europe's Platform to strengthen the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists was published on 5 March. Entitled "Press freedom in Europe: time to reverse the trend", the report expresses concern about the illegal deployment of spyware, such as Pegasus, on journalists, as well as the misuse of legal proceedings against them. The report is also concerned about the fate of journalists in exile, particularly those from Russia and Belarus. [Read more](#)

## ■ Culture :

### TEFAF MAASTRICHT 2024

#### Maastricht Art Fair

The Maastricht Art Fair, TEFAF, runs until 14 March. The event brings together 270 exhibitors of exceptional works of fine art, antiques and design. Every year, collectors and museums from all over the world come together to admire and acquire classic, sometimes forgotten and even hitherto unseen masterpieces by the greatest artists. [Read more](#)



#### Poets' Spring

Printemps des poètes runs until 25 March on the theme of Grace, chosen for this 25th edition. After L'Ardeur, La Beauté, Le Courage, Le Désir, L'Éphémère and Les Frontières, Grace is the emblem of the seventh letter of the alphabet. From good grace to bad, from consoling grace to carnal grace, this cultural event explores and plays with the polysemy offered by the theme of this new edition. [Read more](#)



#### Rubens, Rembradt and Vermeer in Dublin

The National Gallery of Ireland is hosting an exhibition on Dutch and Flemish painters of the 15th and 17th centuries - Rubens, Rembrandt and Vermeer - until May 26. The exhibition features a large collection of works by these adepts of "tronie", face painting. [Read more](#)

## Exhibition on the Hague School

Works by the Hague School are on show at the city's Kunstmuseum from 16 March to 1 September. This artistic movement emerged in the Netherlands in the second half of the 19th century, inspired by Impressionism and Romanticism. The works on show reflect a search for feeling, spontaneity and poetry. [Read more](#)



## Nassio Bayarri in Valencia

The Bancaja Foundation in Valencia is hosting the collection of Valencian sculptor Nassio Bayarri until 16 June. The exhibition, which includes sculptures, drawings, poems, letters, sketches and collages, showcases the artist's work throughout his career, from the 1950s until his death in 2023. [Read more](#)



## On the trail of the Livonian pilgrims

Until September 8, the Estonian Museum of Art is exhibiting the majority of objects found in connection with pilgrimages to Livonia during the medieval period. Pilgrims left behind a variety of artistic symbols, clothing, everyday objects and souvenirs that trace their passage through these Baltic lands. The exhibition provides an insight into this rich textual and artistic heritage. [Read more](#)



## French Painting in Cologne

The exhibition "Paris 1863-1874: Revolution in Art - from the Salon to Impressionism" runs from 15 March to 28 July at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne. It traces the development of French painting from the official salons, marked by academic constraints, to the emergence of the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874. [Read more](#)



## Martin Margiela in Athens and Brussels

A double exhibition by Martin Margiela is on show at the Bernier/Eliades galleries in Athens until 15 May, and in Brussels until 11 May. Originally a fashion designer and founder of a haute couture house, this Belgian artist has devoted himself to art since 2009. Known for his radicalism and romanticism, in this exhibition he explores his penchant for the unconventional, finding beauty in the ephemeral. [Read more](#)

## ■ Agenda :

 11-14 March 2024

**Plenary Session of the European Parliament** (Strasbourg)

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 12 March 2024

**Economic and Financial Affairs Council** (Brussels)

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 18 March 2024

**Foreign Affairs Council** (Brussels)



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