

Letter n°1099 of Tuesday 18th February 2025

The challenges facing European agriculture: Crisis or opportunity for transformation?

Hervé Pillaud - 18 Feb 2025

'2024 will remain a pivotal year for European agriculture, faced with major climatic, economic and geopolitical crises. The new European Commission is demonstrating its commitment to pursuing ambitious transformations striking a fine balance between competitiveness (the new Brussels mantra) and sustainability, voluntarism and budgetary realism". This study looks at the agricultural challenges facing the European Union if it is to retain its place on the world stage of food production.



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■ Front page! :



Facing the spectre of 1938

"It is rather more a period of great risk, a moment of truth for a continent that is once again confronted with war and must face up to it, including militarily." An expansionist and dictatorial spectre hangs over Europe, faced with an unstable position from its historic American ally. There can be no negotiations on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict without the Europeans, who will dictate the outcome. [Read more](#)

■ Elections :



Konstantinos Tasoulas elected President of Greece

The Greek Parliament elected Konstantinos Tasoulas President of their Republic in the fourth and final round of voting on 12 February. Backed by the ruling New Democracy party, he received 160 of the 151 votes required. The former President of the Vouli, the Greek Parliament, will succeed Ekateríni Sakellaroú, the first woman to be elected at the head of the country, in mid-March. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Inaugural meeting of the European Media Services Committee

The European Media Services Committee held its inaugural meeting on 10 February. The Committee is an independent advisory body and will promote the implementation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. It replaces and continues the work of the European Audiovisual Media Services Regulators Group. The role of this new committee will be to issue opinions on national measures relating to this sector and on common measures concerning the internal market for media services. Mr Carlos Aguilar Paredas and Ms Amma Asante have been elected Chairman and Vice-Chairwoman respectively. [Read more](#)



Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships awarded

On 11 February, the European Commission announced the results of the call for Marie Skłodowska Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships for the year 2024. These fellowships represent total funding of €417 million under the EU's Horizon Europe research programme. These funds will support 1,696 post-doctoral researchers in the development of their projects, particularly in the social sciences (23% of projects), life sciences (21%) and information sciences and engineering (15.63%). The next call for applications for these grants will take place on 8 May 2025. [Read more](#)



Presentation of the 2025 work programme

On 11 February, the European Commission adopted its work programme for 2025. Its stated ambition is to act to improve the Union's competitiveness, security and economic resilience. The determination to reduce administrative burdens and simplify EU rules was also communicated, via the Omnibus Directive. The implementation of the new compass for competitiveness was also mentioned, as was the presentation of the new multiannual financial framework. [Read more](#)



Launch of the InvestAI initiative

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, attended the AI Action Summit in Paris. On 11 February, she announced the launch of an initiative to invest massively in artificial intelligence. This initiative represents almost €200 billion, including €20 billion dedicated to AI gigafactories. These factories specialise in training large, complex AI models. [Read more](#)

■ Parliament :



ECB Annual Report

On the occasion of the European Central Bank's annual report for 2024, MEPs adopted recommendations for the ECB, calling on 11 February for the institution to do more to curb inflation and to assess the impact of war and conflict on price stability. [Read more](#)



Renewal of the scientific and technological cooperation agreement with Ukraine

On 11 February, MEPs renewed the scientific and technological cooperation agreement between the European Community and Ukraine. The agreement aims to encourage, develop and facilitate activities in scientific and technological fields of common interest between the two parties. Among other things, it enables Ukrainian entities to take part in EU scientific and technological projects, as well as exchanging information on scientific practices and legislation. [Read more](#)



VAT in the digital age

On 12 February, the European Parliament gave the go-ahead for an update of VAT rules to bring them into line with the digital age. By 2030, VAT will also apply to services provided via online platforms. This update will help to put an end to a practice that is unfair to competition from similar products supplied in the traditional way, and to combat VAT fraud. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Further deterioration in the political situation in Georgia

Members of the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 13 February stating that the self-proclaimed Georgian Dream authorities in Georgia have no legitimacy and consider Salomé Zourabichvili to be the legitimate President of the country. They are calling on the international community to join in this boycott of the Georgian leadership. [Read more](#)

■ Diplomacy :



International conference on Syria

The Paris Conference on Syria took place on 13 February, in the presence of French President Emmanuel Macron, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, his Syrian counterpart Assaad Hassan el-Chibani, delegations from Syria's neighbouring states, the United States, the League of Arab States, the European Union and the United Nations. The participants signed a joint declaration recognising and supporting the Syrian transitional government, coordinating humanitarian aid and acknowledging the importance of Syria's cultural heritage for the country's development. [Read more](#)



Meeting on Ukraine in Paris

On 12 February, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot welcomed his counterparts from Germany, Poland, Spain and Italy to the so-called Weimar+ talks. They were joined by the British and Ukrainian ministers, David Lammy and Andrii Sybiha. High Representative Kaja Kallas and European Defence Commissioner Andrius Kubilius also took part in the discussions. The European ministers warned that the future of Ukraine must involve both Europe and Kyiv. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



European leaders meet Canadian Prime Minister

On February 12, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met the President of the European Council António Costa and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels. They underlined the strong ties that unite Canada and the European Union, notably through the Strategic Partnership Agreement and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). As the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine approaches, the leaders renewed their unwavering support for Kyiv. [Read more](#)



Extension of the ASPIDES mission in the Red Sea

On 14 February, the Council of the European Union decided to extend the mandate of the ASPIDES maritime security operation, the aim of which is to guarantee freedom of navigation in the light of the crisis in the Red Sea. This extension runs until 28 February 2026 and will cost around 17 million euros for the entire period. The aim of the operation is to gather information on arms trafficking and phantom fleets in order to share it with allied players. [Read more](#)

■ Germany :



Polls one week ahead of German federal elections

One week before the German federal elections scheduled for 23 February, the CDU/CSU party is in the lead with 30% of the vote. The AfD could make a major breakthrough and win almost 21% of the vote, well ahead of the SPD, which is estimated to have 15% of the vote, and the Greens with 13%. It should be noted that the Liberal Party, FDP, with 4%, will not be represented in the Bundestag. [Read more](#)



Temporary border controls extended for six months

On 12 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a six-month extension to the temporary border controls introduced in September in the name of internal security and the fight against illegal immigration. He stated that these measures, which derogate from the principle of free movement within the Schengen area, had been effective in reducing illegal migration. The German government has notified the European Commission of the extension of these controls for a further six months. Last September, the Commission reiterated the exceptional nature of these controls and the need for them to be proportionate. [Read more](#)



Munich Security Conference

The Munich Security Conference took place from 14 to 16 February. A number of speeches marked this 2025 edition, against a backdrop of renewed dialogue between Washington and Moscow on the issue of the war in Ukraine. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, suggested triggering an emergency clause that would exempt defence spending within the limits of the EU budget deficit. US Vice-President J.D. Vance gave a speech denouncing Europe, whilst Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged his partners to create a European army. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Austria :



Collapse of negotiations between FPÖ and ÖV to form a government coalition

Herbert Kickl, leader of the far-right FPÖ party, informed the President of the Republic, Alexander van der Bellen, on 12 February that negotiations with the ÖVP had broken down. Negotiations had begun on 6 January, following the FPÖ's historic victory in the general election on 29 September, with 29% of the vote. The failure of these negotiations could lead to new elections, unless fresh talks are resumed between other political parties. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Spain :



Situation in the Eastern Mediterranean

After being hosted by the King of Spain, Felipe VI, the European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica, met the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, José Manuel Albares, on 10 February. During this exchange, they stressed that peace and stability in the Middle East were the hallmark of European policies in the Mediterranean. José Manuel Albares also reaffirmed Spain's willingness to contribute to strengthening the EU's Mediterranean policy. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ France :



International Agricultural Show

The Salon International de l'Agriculture is a not-to-be-missed event in the world of agriculture. As every year, the event returns to Paris from 22 February to 2 March for its 61st edition on the theme 'Agriculture, the pride of France'. This year's show promises to highlight the essential role played by farmers in ensuring food sovereignty and feeding the population. [Read more](#)



Meeting with the Indian Prime Minister

The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, made an official visit to France from 10 to 12 February, during which he met the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron. On this occasion, the two leaders signed a joint declaration aimed at strengthening the partnership for security and sovereignty within the framework of the historic defensive cooperation between the two countries and reaffirming their ecological and economic commitments, while calling for a reshaping of multilateralism to preserve an equitable and peaceful world order. Emmanuel Macron and Narendra Modi also inaugurated the opening of the Indian Consulate General in Marseille on 12 February, with a view to consolidating the cultural ties between France and India. [Read more](#)



Paris Summit on AI

The Paris Summit on Artificial Intelligence (AI) came to a close on 11 February. On this occasion, nearly 60 countries and organisations, including China, India and the European Union, signed an agreement, rejected by the United States and the United Kingdom, for an inclusive and sustainable AI, underlining the importance of accessibility of AI and multilateral dialogue around it. A series of agreements were also ratified, such as the Charter of Paris for Artificial Intelligence in the Public Interest, with a view to promoting openness and transparency in sustainable AI, and the Paris Declaration on the maintenance of human control in weapons systems using AI, in order to guarantee the application of humanitarian law. [Read more](#)

■ Italy :



Austro-Italian talks and meeting on the Balkans

After meeting the President of the Italian Council, Giorgia Meloni, with a view to strengthening bilateral relations between Austria and Italy, the acting Austrian Chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg, took part in the ministerial meeting on the Western Balkans in Rome on 10 February. Against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions, the participants agreed to strengthen strategic cooperation between the European Union and the Balkans in various areas such as the fight against organised crime and hybrid and cyber threats, while prioritising the process of European integration in the region. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Poland :



The government unveils a massive €155 billion investment plan

On 10 February, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced an investment plan worth a record €155 billion for 2025, aimed at strengthening Poland's security in the wake of the war in Ukraine and boosting growth. Tusk also stated that Poland's ambition would be to overtake the economies of the western EU countries, and pledged to attract foreign investment. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Romania :



Resignation of President Klaus Iohannis

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis announced his resignation on 10 February. He passed it on to the presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies to avoid the debate on the request for suspension, initially scheduled for 11 February. He faced opposition within Parliament. He resigned after several deputies from the pro-European USR party signed a request for his suspension. Since 12 February and for a period of 90 days, the President of the Senate and interim leader of the National Liberal Party, Ilie Bolojan, has been acting as interim President, ahead of new elections scheduled for 4 May and 18 May. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Armenia :



Parliament adopts application to join the European Union

On 12 February, the Armenian parliament adopted on first reading a draft law aimed at opening negotiations to join the European Union, illustrating Armenia's wish, at odds with its traditional ally Russia, to draw closer to the West. The bill was passed by 63 votes to 7 and will now go to a second reading. It was submitted to the elected representatives by Prime Minister Nikol Pachinian's government on 9 January. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Moldova :



The Secretary General of the Council of Europe in Chisinau

On 12 February, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Alain Berset, made his first official visit to Moldova, with the aim of reasserting the Council's commitment to strengthening cooperation with the country. During his visit, he launched the Action Plan 2025-2028, which aims to support the reforms that are essential for Moldova's accession to the EU. This plan, with a budget of €30 million, covers areas such as justice, media freedom and the fight against disinformation. Moldovan President Maia Sandu stressed the importance of this support in the face of hybrid threats to democracy in the country. [Read more](#)

■ Ukraine :

Aid of 1 billion euro from the EIB for Ukrainian development

The President of the European Investment Bank, Nadia Calvino, visited Kyiv on 10 February, where she met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. She repeated that Ukraine was her absolute priority and announced agreements to mobilise €1 billion of investment for the recovery and development of the country, in both the public and private sectors. The priority areas are education, healthcare and the supply of clean water. [Read more - Other link](#)



Meeting of European leaders on security in Paris

A meeting on European security and the situation in Ukraine was held at the Élysée Palace in Paris on 17 February. This informal summit brought together the heads of government of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as the President of the European Council, Antonio Costa, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the Secretary General of NATO, Mark Rutte. Faced with the direct dialogue between Washington and Moscow on Ukraine, the European leaders urged the United States to remain involved in the security of the continent. Despite a consensus on strengthening defence capabilities, divisions persist over the sending of troops to guarantee a possible lasting peace agreement. [Read more](#)

■ ECHR :



The ECHR condemns Russia for the infringement of the freedom of expression

On 11 February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned Russia for violating the right to freedom of expression under the European Convention on Human Rights. From the start of its invasion of Ukrainian territory, Russia has adopted legal provisions making it a criminal offence to make any statement or report contradicting the official line that the invasion of Ukraine was a "special military operation". The Court thus found the existence of a systemic and widespread pattern of restrictions on reporting on the war in Ukraine, revealing a coordinated effort to silence criticism rather than to respond to a threat to national security. [Read more](#)

■ NATO :



Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers

The defence ministers of the Atlantic Alliance met on 13 February for their first summit in the presence of Pete Hegseth, the new US Secretary of Defence. The ministers were joined by their Ukrainian counterpart Rustem Umerov and EU High Representative Kaja Kallas for a NATO-Ukraine Council. Although the Alliance pledged €40 billion to Ukraine last year, the aid provided has exceeded expectations, with more than €50 billion disbursed to the country. On the fringes of the ministers' meeting, the Organisation launched two new multinational initiatives to further improve the protection of its airspace. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



Report from the Commission on Gender Equality in Research

On 11 February, the European Commission published the latest report in its 'She Figures' series of publications, presenting statistics on gender equality in research and innovation since 2003. The report shows that women are grossly under-represented in this field, particularly in leadership positions, and that this represents a threat to Europe's potential for innovation. The gap is even widening in critical sectors such as ICT, exacerbating skills shortages but also the competitiveness of these sectors. [Read more](#)



Court of Auditors report on the reception of refugees in Europe

In a report published on 12 February, the European Court of Auditors acknowledges the immediate measures taken by the European Union to deal with the massive influx of people from Ukraine from 2022 onwards. In particular, the EU has adapted the rules of its cohesion policy, with 3 so-called 'CARE' regulations, to deal with the presence of 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees at the end of October 2024. The Court of Auditors recognises the complexity of implementing these funds and considers that the projects were selected efficiently. However, it notes shortcomings in the monitoring of the funds allocated and a lack of specific data on the number of aid programmes for Ukrainian refugees, making it impossible to measure CARE's effectiveness. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Eurobarometer :



Report on the use of AI in the world of work

A Eurobarometer survey on the perception of artificial intelligence in the world of work was published on 13 February. 62% of those questioned have a positive perception of AI and are convinced that these technologies will have a positive impact on their work, the economy and their quality of life. Furthermore, 70% of those surveyed believe that AI will increase productivity. Nevertheless, 84% of them are in favour of careful management of these technologies to ensure respect for privacy and guarantee transparency in the world of work. [Read more](#)

■ Culture :



Discovering the changing face of Egypt in London

The Young V&A in London is presenting its exhibition 'Making Egypt' until 2 November. The event takes visitors on a journey through the ancient past to the present day, exploring the creativity of ancient Egypt and its enduring influence on contemporary art, design and popular culture. [Read more](#)



Golden Thread in Paris

Until 6 July the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac is running an exhibition devoted to the mysterious and fascinating origins of gold and its marriage with the textile arts. Discovered almost 7,000 years ago, gold is the world's most precious and noble metal, an object of covetousness and a symbol of wealth and splendour. In a dialogue combining scientific discovery and artistic perspective, the exhibition reveals the beauty, diversity and richness of costumes from a vast region stretching from the Maghreb to Japan, via the countries of the Middle East, India and China. [Read more](#)



The changing narratives of the end of the world in Göteborg

The Swedish Art Museum in Göteborg is presenting the exhibition 'The Apocalypse: from the Last Judgement to the Climate Threat', until 18 January 2026. Through a selection of sculptures, paintings and videos, this event explores five centuries of apocalyptic art, from representations of the Last Judgement to contemporary visions of climatic catastrophes, wars and technological advances. The works highlight the changing nature of end-of-the-world narratives over the centuries. [Read more](#)



belvedere

"Klimt: Pigment and Pixel" in Vienna

Until 7 September, the Belvedere Museum in Vienna is hosting an exhibition entitled "Gustav Klimt - Pigment & Pixel". This exhibition comes after recent analyses have offered new insights into the painter's working practices and methods. [Read more](#)



Luxury, calm and pleasure in Cannes

The Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes is hosting an exhibition devoted to the beauty of the Mediterranean landscape until 20 April. This exhibition immerses visitors in the timeless appeal of the golden age of the Mediterranean, a land of inspiration where nature and art intertwined for generations of modern and contemporary artists such as Monet, Picasso and Matisse. [Read more](#)



MUSEO NACIONAL
DEL PRADO

El Greco in Madrid

Until 15 June, the Prado Museum in Madrid is presenting an exhibition devoted to Domínikos Theotokópoulos, known as El Greco, a painter of Greek origin who settled in Spain. Most of the works painted by the artist between 1577 and 1579 for the Santo Domingo el Antiguo Convent in Toledo, including the famous Ascension of the Virgin, are on show, in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 18/02/2025

"Economic and Financial Affairs" Council

 23 February 2025

Legislative Elections (Germany)

 24/02/2025

"Agriculture and Fisheries" Council "Foreign Affairs" Council (Brussels)

 24 February

EU-Israel Association Council (Brussels)



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