

Letter n°1104 of Tuesday 25th March 2025

Slovakia: civil society opposes its leaders

Radovan Gura, Gilles Rouet - 25 Mar 2025

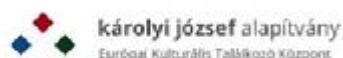
"Slovakia has been going through a period of profound political change in recent years. Marked by a complex history influenced by the Pan-Slavic movement and the legacy of the Communist period, the Slovak political scene is characterised by growing instability, a divided society and the rise of populist discourse." The economic crisis, the many social inequalities and the demands of the European Union to which the country must respond are crystallising discontent around the personality of the Prime Minister, Robert Fico.



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■ Foundation :



Geography, cartography and politics

As part of the Francophonie month, the Joseph Karolyi Foundation, in partnership with various organisations including the Robert Schuman Foundation, is organising a conference entitled "Geography, cartography and politics: what are the historical foundations?", in Hungary on 28 and 29 March. The programme includes four round tables bringing together various European experts to discuss the history of these disciplines and their applications, which have now become interdependent. [Read more](#)

■ European Council :



Conclusions

The European heads of state and government meeting on 20 and 21 March deplored the breakdown of the ceasefire in Gaza and approved the Arab recovery and reconstruction plan adopted at the Cairo Summit. The issue of competitiveness was addressed, as the year 2025 is seen as a "tipping point", with the adoption of texts such as the simplification package, the competitiveness compass and the clean industry pact. The theme of defence was also addressed, with leaders calling for an acceleration of work on all aspects to ensure Europe's preparedness over the next 5 years. Finally, there were initial discussions on the next multiannual financial framework. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Savings and investment union strategy

The European Commission presented a strategy for savings and investment on 19 March. The aim of this initiative is to improve the channelling of savings into productive investments within the financial system in order to promote prosperity for citizens, while stimulating growth and competitiveness. The initiative comes in the wake of the Draghi report, which called for €750-800 billion of additional investment per year between now and 2030. The pool of household savings that would be targeted by this initiative represents almost €10,000 billion in bank deposits. The union will be implemented through a series of legislative and non-legislative measures involving the Member States, the private sector and civil society. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Presentation of the White Paper on European defence and the ReArm Europe plan

On 19 March, the European Commission presented a White Paper on European defence and measures under the ReArm Europe plan. The plan aims to consolidate pan-European defence capabilities through new financial resources, while the White Paper defines a new approach to defence and identifies investment needs. The aim of these measures is to respond to the short-term emergency of supporting Ukraine, while strengthening European security in the long term. The main thrusts of the White Paper include support for the European defence industry, support for Ukraine, deepening the defence market and strengthening partnerships with third countries. [Read more](#)



Action plan for a competitive and low-carbon steel and metals industry

On 19 March, the European Commission presented an action plan to develop European industrial capacities in the steel and metals sectors. The steel industry is seen as essential to the ReArm Europe plan, presented on the same day. Yet it faces major challenges: high energy costs, unfair global competition and the need to invest to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The action plan aims to guarantee an affordable and secure energy supply for the sector, prevent carbon leakage, and develop and protect European industrial capacities. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Google and Apple in breach of European regulations

On 19 March, the European Commission issued preliminary findings against Apple and Alphabet (Google) for non-compliance with the Digital Markets Regulation (DMA). It found that Google Alphabet gave more favourable treatment to its own services than to other developers offering similar services, which is prohibited by European regulations. On the same day, the Commission recommended that Apple improve access for its products to connected objects manufactured by competitors. If these digital giants fail to comply, they could be fined up to 10% of their annual worldwide turnover. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Council :



Meeting of energy ministers

The European energy ministers met on 17 March to discuss the Affordable Energy Action Plan presented by the Commission at the end of February. They stressed the need to act quickly to bring down energy costs and complete the Energy Union. The architecture of energy security was also discussed, with regard to gas supply and risk preparedness in the electricity sector, as well as the need for diversification in the light of current and future geopolitical challenges. The energy situation in Ukraine was also discussed, with Russia targeting the country's energy infrastructure. [Read more](#)



Meeting of eurozone leaders

The leaders of the euro zone members, meeting on 20 March, emphasised the resilience of the European Union's economies and its labour market in the face of the current economic and financial situation. They called for urgent, rapid and decisive progress towards a savings and investment union, in particular within the framework of the capital markets union. The theme of the digital euro was also discussed, with the aim of strengthening the euro's competitiveness and its international role, as well as contributing to the continent's economic security. [Read more](#)

■ Diplomacy :



Meeting of foreign affairs ministers

The foreign affairs ministers met on 17 March to discuss the situation in Ukraine, in the presence of the Ukrainian minister, Adrii Sybiha. The High Representative, Kaja Kallas, announced political support for a €40 billion defence initiative for the invaded country and reaffirmed the European Union's support for a ceasefire between the two belligerents. The situation in the Middle East was also discussed, and the Arab plan for the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza presented on 4 March was welcomed by the ministers. [Read more](#)



Conference on Syria

The ninth Brussels Conference on Syria took place on 17 March, bringing together representatives of the Member States of the European Union, neighbouring and partner countries, international organisations and members of the Syrian transitional government. During this meeting, the European Union reiterated its support for Syria's unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and announced the mobilisation of €5.8 billion in financial aid for a fair and peaceful transition in the country. [Read more](#)

■ Germany :



French President visits Berlin

On 18 March, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Berlin. He met the outgoing Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, to prepare for the European Council on 20 and 21 March. They called on Russia to sign a total ceasefire. The French head of state also had the opportunity to exchange views with the future Chancellor, Friedrich Merz, on strengthening European defence, trade tensions with the United States and the competitiveness of the European Union. This second meeting marks the commitment to relaunch the Franco-German partnership at this time of crisis. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Historic amendment to the Constitution

On 18 March, the German Bundestag passed a bill to amend the Constitution to take account of international developments in defence policy. The amendment would allow the creation of a special €500 billion fund for additional investment and the achievement of the climate targets set for 2045, by overriding Germany's debt brake rules, which are characteristic of the country's dominant ordoliberalism. A two-thirds majority (requiring 489 seats) was achieved, with 512 German MPs voting in favour of the amendment. The German Bundesrat voted in favour of this text on 21 March, by a two-thirds majority. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Cyprus :



Meeting on the reunification of Cyprus in Geneva

On 17 March, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders met in Geneva to discuss the possibility of reopening negotiations for the reunification of Cyprus. The representatives of the European Union and the United Kingdom present called for dialogue to reunify the island. The meeting, organised by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, agreed on a number of cooperation measures, such as the opening of new crossing points in the "buffer zone" and demining operations. [Read more](#)

■ Estonia :



Defence budget to rise to 5% of GDP from 2026

On 18 March, the Estonian government announced a significant increase in its defence budget, aiming to allocate at least 5% of GDP to defence spending from 2026. This decision aims to deter any potential Russian aggression in an increasingly worrying security context. Indeed, as Prime Minister Kristen Michal pointed out, this increase is necessary because of Russia's unchanged strategic objectives and the persistent threats to neighbouring countries. These funds will be used to strengthen military capabilities in key areas, including air defence, drones and electronic warfare. [Read more](#)

■ France :



New Canadian Prime Minister visits Paris

On 17 March, the French President welcomed the new Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney, to Paris for his first trip abroad. In his speech, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of Franco-Canadian cooperation in the face of global challenges. In particular, he spoke of the crisis in Ukraine, calling for coordinated action to support the country in the face of Russian aggression. He emphasised the efforts of both countries to promote the energy transition and ecological funding. The aim of this meeting is to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly in the fields of green finance and diplomacy. [Read more - Other link](#)



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Rearming and financing the defence industrial and technological base

The French Ministries of the Economy and of Defence organised a conference in Paris on 20 March to discuss the challenges of financing the defence industry. Faced with the challenges raised by the war in Ukraine, France is strengthening its defence technological and industrial base (DTIB) to ensure its strategic autonomy. The 2024-2030 military programming law provides for investment of €413.3 billion. Although the context is favourable, SMEs and ETIs in the sector have been facing financing difficulties since 2020. [Read more](#)

■ Czech Republic :



Call to save Radio Free Europe

On 17 March, the Czech government expressed its concern about the suspension of funding for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) by the United States. Jan Lipavský, Minister of Foreign Affairs, called for discussions within the European Union to protect this Prague-based media institution. According to the minister, closing the radio station would weaken democracy and strengthen authoritarian regimes. The Czech Republic, the radio station's host country, considers this organisation to be essential for press freedom. [Read more](#)

■ Bosnia and Herzegovina :



OSCE Chair in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Finnish Foreign Minister and OSCE Chair-in-Office, Elina Valtonen, concluded her visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 18 March, where she met senior officials to discuss security and stability in the country and the region. She reiterated the international community's commitment to the Bosnian authorities, while stressing that solutions must emanate from respect for democracy and constitutional integrity. She also visited the OSCE mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and met the commanders of operation EUFOR Althea and NATO headquarters. [Read more](#)

■ Georgia :



Government freezes assets of NGOs supporting demonstrators

On 17 March, three Georgian NGOs - Nanuka's Fund, Prosperity Georgia, and Human Rights House Tbilisi - announced that they had been informed by their banks that the Tbilisi City Court had ordered an emergency freeze on their accounts. Two other NGOs, Fund for Each Other 24/7 and Shame Movement, have also had their assets frozen. This decision, which targets civil society organisations that have provided financial support to demonstrators who have been arbitrarily detained, helping them to pay their fines and obtain legal representation, is yet another blatant attack on human rights by the Georgian authorities, according to Amnesty International. [Read more](#)

■ Serbia :



Council of Europe rapporteurs concerned about rising tensions

On 20 March, the rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Axel Schäfer of Germany and Victoria Tiblom of Sweden, expressed their deep concern about the escalation of tensions in Serbia over the management of the 15 March demonstration in Belgrade. In a press release, they call on the authorities to clarify the repression that left several people injured, and ask the Serbian government to respond to the legitimate demands of the population. [Read more](#)

■ Türkiye :



The Council of Europe condemns the arrest of the Mayor of Istanbul

On 19 March, the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem Imamoglu, was arrested by Turkish police as part of a corruption investigation. The main opposition figure to the head of state, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, he was due to be nominated on 23 March as the Republican People's Party candidate for the presidential election scheduled for 2028. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has strongly condemned this arrest, as well as the revocation of Imamoglu's university degree, preventing him from standing in the elections. Imamoglu's imprisonment is strongly contested by the population, who have been demonstrating across the country as never before since 2013. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Ukraine :



British Prime Minister pledges peace deal

At Northwood on 20 March, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer thanked his armed forces for their commitment to the UK. He stressed the need for a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia, provided that the security and sovereignty of the Ukrainian people are preserved. He pledged that the UK would work with its NATO and European allies in the coming weeks in the Multinational Force Ukraine (MFU) to secure and defend a deal. [Read more](#)



Kaja Kallas in London

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Kaja Kallas, met the British Foreign and Defence Ministers in London on 18 March to discuss Ukraine. They focused on ways of increasing pressure on Russia and establishing a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. These talks are part of the drive to strengthen relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union. [Read more](#)



New categories of compensation for victims of the war in Ukraine

On 19 March, the Register of Damages for Ukraine announced the creation of new categories of compensation claims for victims of serious human rights violations resulting from Russian aggression. The new categories include involuntary internal displacement, grievous bodily harm, sexual violence, torture, deprivation of liberty and forced labour. The Register, supported by over 50 countries and organisations, aims to ensure justice and reparations for Ukrainian victims of the war. [Read more](#)



Volodymyr Zelensky visits Helsinki and Oslo

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was welcomed by his Finnish counterpart Alexander Stubb and Prime Minister Petteri Orpo in Helsinki on 19 March. Discussions focused on the need to strengthen air defence and invest in arms production. On 20 March, he continued his visit to Norway, where he met Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre. They discussed Norway's continued support for Ukraine, particularly in terms of defence and energy. The Ukrainian head of state affirmed that Ukrainian nuclear power stations would remain under Ukrainian control despite American suggestions of a transfer of ownership. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Council of Europe :



Meeting of the Speakers of Parliaments

The Speakers of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe and many partner, observer and neighbouring countries, as well as several interparliamentary assemblies, met in Strasbourg on 20 and 21 March for a European parliamentary summit to mark the 50th anniversary of the first conference. They discussed in particular the safeguarding of democracy, freedom of expression in times of polarisation and the fight against violence against political figures. [Read more](#)

■ UN :



UN World Happiness Report

The United Nations' annual report on happiness was published on 20 March. The Nordic countries remain at the top of the list of happiest countries, with Finland in first place followed by Denmark, Iceland and Sweden. These results are based on data such as GDP per capita, level of social protection, corruption, freedom and personal satisfaction. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



EEAS annual report on foreign interference operations

On 19 March, the European External Action Service published its annual report on the manipulation and interference of foreign information. The report highlights the arsenals that Russia and China have equipped themselves with to manipulate and interfere in Europe and its partner countries. No fewer than 500 incidents were recorded in this area in 2024, and 322 organisations were targeted by the operations of the EEAS mission set up for this purpose. Case studies on Moldova and Africa highlight Russian strategy and its adaptation to local geopolitical and political changes. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



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Report on the European Fund for Strategic Investments

On 19 March, the European Court of Auditors published a report on the European Fund for Strategic Investments, set up in 2015 by the Commission. The Court concludes that this fund has made a significant contribution to reducing the investment deficit following the 2008 financial crisis, but has nevertheless only achieved three quarters of the initial target of €500 billion of planned investment. An overestimate of €131 billion compared to the €503 billion declared at the end of 2022 has in fact been revealed. Despite the fact that most of the objectives have been met, the Court notes that the monitoring has not been exhaustive and the reports have not been examined in sufficient depth. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Culture :



Marc Chagall in Düsseldorf

To mark the 40th anniversary of his death, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf is exhibiting works by the Franco-Russian painter Marc Chagall until 10 August. The focus is on his early works, produced between 1910 and 1923, in which he experimented with Fauvism and Cubism. The event pays tribute to the artist's poetic visions of injustice, pain and exclusion, through his characteristic motifs and colours. [Read more](#)



"Tous Léger" at the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris

Until 20 July, the "Tous Léger!" exhibition at the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris explores the links between the works of Fernand Léger and those of artists such as Niki de Saint Phalle, Yves Klein, Keith Haring and Roy Lichtenstein. Through almost a hundred works, the exhibition explores themes such as the misappropriation of the object, the representation of the body and the place of art in the public space. These artists transform elements of everyday life into works of art, fusing art and reality. This exhibition illustrates the creative exchanges between Europe and America in the 20th century. [Read more](#)

Royal treasures from West Africa in A Coruña

Until 13 July, the Barrié Foundation in A Coruña is hosting the exhibition "Akan Gold. Royal Treasures of West Africa". More than 300 objects are on show, all relating to the various Akan royal houses. [Read more](#)



Michelangelo in Copenhagen

From 29 March to 31 August, the Copenhagen Museum of Art is presenting the exhibition "Michelangelo Imperfect", highlighting the legacy of the famous Italian artist Michelangelo, a major figure in Western art. This is the largest retrospective of his sculptural work in 150 years, bringing together a unique collection of historical casts, previously unpublished reproductions, original drawings and sculptural models. [Read more](#)



Grayson Perry in London

From 28 March to 26 October, the Wallace Collection in London presents the colourful and original world of Grayson Perry, famous for his works combining ceramics, tapestries and works on paper. This exhibition explores the quest for perfectionism and the role of the artist in the future by comparing complex handmade objects with others made using digital technologies. [Read more](#)



Egon Schiele exhibited in Vienna

The Leopold Museum in Vienna is exhibiting the last works of the Austrian artist Egon Schiele from 28 March to 13 July. The museum is giving the public the chance to discover this period of the artist's work, little studied until now, as well as previously unpublished archives such as the diary of Edith, Schiele's wife, and four works on paper. In addition to the major Schiele collection in Vienna, the exhibition includes works on loan from national and international sources. [Read more](#)



"S'habiller en artiste": an exhibition at the Louvre Lens

Until 21 July, the Musée Louvre Lens is hosting the "S'habiller en artiste" exhibition. The exhibition explores the link between art and clothing and fashion throughout history. More than 200 works, including paintings, sculptures and fashion creations, show how clothing has been a form of expression for artists. The exhibition highlights how clothing has been used to assert identities and ideas. [Read more](#)

■ Sport :



A woman at the head of the IOC

Kirsty Coventry was elected President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on 20 March, becoming the first woman to head the organisation. The former swimmer and Olympic champion from Zimbabwe takes over from Thomas Bach and will officially take office on 23 June for an eight-year term. She will be responsible for organising four Olympic Games, including Los Angeles and Brisbane for the summer games, and Milan and the French Alps for the winter games. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 27 March 2025

"Environment" Council (Brussels)

 28 March 2025

"General Affairs" Council (Brussels)

 31 March 2025

Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Strasbourg)



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