

Letter n°1139 of Tuesday 20th January 2026

From Turnberry to Mercosur: the European Union at a critical juncture

Iana Dreyer - 20 Jan 2026

The European Union is experiencing an existential crisis in the face of aggressive protectionism from Trump's United States and pressure from China, weakening its global normative influence. To guarantee its economic security, it is attempting to diversify its partners by concluding strategic agreements such as the one with Mercosur, which aims to secure access to raw materials and offer new industrial and agricultural opportunities, despite strong internal political opposition.



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■ Front page! :



Greenland, the turning point

Trump's insistence on acquiring Greenland appears to be a risky initiative, widely rejected in the United States and deemed unacceptable by Europeans. This provocation has prompted the European Union to respond firmly by mobilising economic, legal and commercial tools capable of exerting significant pressure on the United States. The Europeans seem ready to defend their interests without escalation, relying on a measured but resolute response. [Read more](#)

■ Elections :



Antonio Jose Seguro and Andre Ventura will face off in the second round

The first round of the Portuguese presidential election on 18 January saw Antonio José Seguro (PS, 31.11%) and André Ventura (Chega, 23.52%) qualify for a second round, the first since 1976, which will be held on 8 February. Voter turnout reached 52.35%, a significant increase. Henrique Gouveia e Melo (independent, 16%) and João Cotrim Figueiredo (Liberal Initiative, 12.32%) complete the top four, while the ruling party's candidate, Luís Marques Mendes, came in fifth. [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



European Women leading the Way

The Robert Schuman Foundation has just published a study entitled 'European Women Leading the Way'. This project features profiles of 27 women — one for each Member State of the European Union — and highlights exceptional women who illustrate in concrete terms the wealth and diversity of their careers in various strategic fields. With this publication, the Foundation hopes to highlight the decisive role played by women in the construction and influence of the European Union. [Read more](#)



Monitoring of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan

On 15 and 16 January, the European Commission gave a positive assessment of Lithuania's fifth payment request for €360 million and Slovakia's sixth payment request for €591 million. These assessments are part of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan. Details of how the recovery plan is being used are available on the Foundation's website. [Read more](#)



New publication on the Schuman Network

Since 2023, the Schuman Network has been working with 22 organisations from 13 European countries. With nearly 196 shared publications, the Schuman Network strives to promote cooperation between European research centres with a view to sharing reliable, high-quality analysis. Through this work, the Schuman Network affirms its role as an essential platform for strengthening intellectual cooperation and supporting democratic resilience in Europe. [Read more](#)

■ Commission :



Signing of the free trade agreement with Mercosur countries

On 17 January, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Antonio Costa, and the leaders of the Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) signed the EU-Mercosur trade agreement in Asunción, Paraguay. On this occasion, President Antonio Costa emphasised that this agreement, the result of 25 years of effort, brought the two regions closer together by creating the largest free trade area in the world. He presented the agreement as a strong message in favour of rules-based free trade, multilateralism and international law. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



SAFE: first wave of defence funding

On 15 January, the European Commission approved the defence plans of eight countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, Portugal and Romania) under the SAFE programme. The approval paves the way for the first wave of low-cost long-term loans, enabling these countries to urgently step up their military preparedness and acquire the necessary modern defence equipment. The SAFE instrument will enable accession countries, candidate countries, potential candidates and countries that have signed security and defence partnerships with the EU to join common procurement markets for more effective defence. [Read more](#)



Presentation of the State Aid Scoreboard

On 15 January, the European Commission presented an analysis comparing EU expenditure between 2024 and 2025. While this report notes a decline in overall expenditure, Member States continued to focus on the key priorities set by the European Union, devoting nearly 90% of their state aid to environmental protection, energy, research and innovation, and regional development, reflecting a clear reorientation of resources towards the Union's strategic policies. At the same time, crisis aid measures related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic continued to be phased out, in line with the objectives of returning to more structured budgetary management. [Read more](#)



New rules against persistent pollutants come into force

Since 12 January, Member States have been required to monitor levels of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) – persistent pollutants – in drinking water in a harmonised manner to ensure compliance with the new European Union limit values. This implementation is part of the recast of the Drinking Water Directive of December 2020. The new reporting system is simpler than under the previous Drinking Water Directive and reduces the amount of data to be reported. [Read more](#)

■ Council :



European Commission visit to Cyprus

On 15 January, the European Commission visited Cyprus, travelling along the United Nations ceasefire line, known as the "Green Line". As part of Cyprus' Presidency of the Council of the European Union, this symbolic gesture underlines the shared commitment of Cyprus and the European Union to peace, stability and the search for a lasting solution to the Cyprus issue, in a context where the island has remained divided for almost 50 years. Since the Turkish invasion in July 1974, Cyprus has been the only EU Member State still divided due to foreign military occupation. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Creation of AI gigafactories

On 16 January, ministers adopted an amendment to the regulation governing the activities of the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking (EuroHPC). This amendment extends the objectives to facilitate the creation of artificial intelligence gigafactories in Europe and establishes a pillar specifically dedicated to quantum technologies. It also sets rules for funding and procurement, while preserving the interests of start-ups and scale-ups. The regulation will enter into force on 20 January. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Diplomacy :



G7 condemns repression in Iran

On 14 January, the foreign ministers of the G7 member countries signed a joint statement on the situation in Iran. The ministers condemned the violent repression of peaceful protesters by the Iranian state. They also expressed concern about the high number of deaths and injuries resulting from this repression. The G7 called for an end to the violence, arbitrary detentions and internet blackouts, warning that further restrictive measures would be imposed on Iran if these demands were not met. [Read more](#)



Palestine: Extension of sanctions against Hamas and Islamic Jihad

On 16 January, the Council extended restrictive measures against those who support, facilitate or enable violent actions by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad for one year, until 20 January 2027. The designated entities are subject to an asset freeze and EU citizens and companies are prohibited from making funds available to them. The individuals are also subject to a travel ban, which prevents them from entering or transiting through EU Member States. [Read more](#)

■ ECB :



Support for the Fed

On 13 January, a group of European and international central bankers issued a joint statement expressing their support for the US Federal Reserve (Fed) and its chairman, who is embroiled in a political battle with US President Donald Trump, accused of exerting legal pressure on him. They emphasised that the independence of central banks is a cornerstone of price, financial and economic stability in the interests of citizens. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ European Agencies :



Frontex reports a decline in irregular crossings into Europe in 2025

On 15 January, a report published by Frontex shows that detections of irregular crossings of the European Union's external borders fell by more than a quarter in 2025 (178,000). This is the lowest level since 2021. This significant decrease reflects the impact of surveillance and cooperation between Member States and partners. The agency stressed the need to remain vigilant in the face of the rapid evolution of this phenomenon, particularly given the uncertain situation at Europe's borders. The year 2026 will undoubtedly be a pivotal year, as the pact on migration and asylum is due to come into force in June. [Read more](#)



Cooperation agreement with the United Kingdom for financial system stability

On 14 January, European supervisory authorities and UK financial regulators signed a memorandum of understanding on the supervision of third-party service providers. Third-party services are external companies to which banks and financial institutions outsource their digital services, such as data storage or software management. The main objective of this memorandum is to strengthen the digital operational resilience of the financial sector by regulating third-party service providers. Based on the Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA), the signatories undertake to share essential information and coordinate their cross-border supervisory activities. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Germany :



Official visit by the German Chancellor to India

On 12 and 13 January, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz made an official visit to India. 2026 marks 75 years of bilateral relations and 25 years of strategic partnership between the two countries. Welcomed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the visit was an opportunity for the Chancellor to highlight the importance of values such as democracy, respect for the rule of law and sustainable international trade. The visit also served to strengthen economic and technological cooperation and political dialogue, with a focus on renewable energies and the digital transition. [Read more](#)

■ Denmark :



Joint statement on Greenland

On 17 January, Donald Trump increased pressure on eight European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom) by threatening them with additional customs duties of 10% on 1 February, rising to 25% in June, for daring to resist his claim to acquire Greenland. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and President António Costa reiterated the European Union's full solidarity with Denmark and the people of Greenland and insisted that tariffs would risk weakening transatlantic relations and creating a dangerous spiral. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Finland :



Return of anti-personnel mines to defence capabilities

Following its withdrawal from the Ottawa Treaty, the Finnish Ministry of Defence has announced plans to reintroduce anti-personnel mines into the country's defence capabilities. This decision comes against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and growing tensions with Russia, with which Finland shares a 1,340 km border. The country has announced that conscripts and reservists will be trained as soon as possible in the use of anti-personnel mines and that domestic production will begin immediately. [Read more](#)

■ France :



French President's New Year's greetings to the armed forces

On 15 January, French President Emmanuel Macron presented his New Year's greetings to the armed forces in Istres. On this occasion, he outlined his policy directions for national defence. The military programming law, updated in 2026, sets out three priorities: increasing stocks of all types of ammunition and strengthening the operational readiness of the armed forces, guaranteeing national sovereignty, and improving and modernising the army model in the short term. This speech also provided an opportunity to highlight France's international role by reiterating the need to work hand in hand with our European partners, particularly in protecting Greenland. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Greece :



Greek Prime Minister visits Spain

On 12 January, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez welcomed his Greek counterpart Kyriákos Mitsotákis. They discussed the need to strengthen relations between their two countries in the areas of economic cooperation, infrastructure development and the defence industry. At European level, they highlighted the need to develop new areas of cooperation. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Hungary :



Parliamentary elections on 12 April

On 14 January, Hungarian President Tamás Sulyok announced that the next parliamentary elections will be held on 12 April. From 3 February, political parties and organisations will be able to announce their intention to stand for election to the National Electoral Commission. The official campaign will begin on 21 February, 50 days before the election. Candidates must collect at least 500 valid signatures in each constituency in order to stand. [Read more](#)

■ Italy :



Presentation of Italy's national strategy for the Arctic

On 16 January, the Italian government presented a strategic document on Italy's policy for the Arctic. Entitled 'Italy and the Arctic: the values of cooperation in a rapidly changing region' and developed throughout 2025, this report highlights Italy's historic role in the region and sets out a long-term vision focused on security, scientific research and economic development. It reiterates Italy's strategic commitment to an Arctic undergoing transformation and geopolitical competition, reconciling security, prosperity and diplomacy, while promoting multilateral governance that respects international law. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Ukraine :



The United Kingdom steps up its support for Ukraine

On 16 January, as part of the centenary celebrations of the strategic partnership between the United Kingdom and Ukraine, London unveiled measures aimed at deepening cooperation and strengthening stability between the two countries. On this occasion, the United Kingdom confirmed £20 million in aid to strengthen Ukraine's energy infrastructure as the country faces the harsh winter. In addition, London announced the extension of its school twinning programme, which will benefit more than 54,000 students in both countries, once again demonstrating the UK's ongoing commitment to a strong partnership, enhanced mutual security and a prosperous future for generations to come. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Financial support for Ukraine for 2026–2027

On 14 January, the European Commission adopted proposals to provide continued financial support to Ukraine in 2026 and 2027. The legislative package includes a €90 billion support loan to Ukraine, an amendment to the Ukraine Facility as one of the means of implementing budgetary support for Ukraine, and an amendment to the multiannual financial framework regulation to allow the loan to Ukraine to be covered by the Union budget. The legislative proposals have been submitted to the European Parliament and the Council for consideration and vote. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ UN :



Entry into force of the treaty on the high seas

On 17 January, the treaty on the high seas came into force. Officially known as the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), this legally binding United Nations treaty covers ocean areas beyond territorial waters ('high seas') and international seabeds. It is the first binding legal instrument relating to the oceans that provides for ocean governance, with provisions for the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities. After two decades of talks that began in 2004, the Member States of the United Nations (UN) adopted the agreement on the International Treaty for the Protection of the High Seas on 19 June 2023. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Prize :



Mario Draghi, winner of the 2026 Charlemagne Prize

On 17 January, the International Charlemagne Prize organisation announced that the 2026 winner of this prestigious award was Italian Mario Draghi. This award, presented annually since 1950, celebrates efforts to promote cooperation, solidarity and unity among European states, values that are fundamental to addressing contemporary geopolitical challenges. The award ceremony will take place in May in Aachen. [Read more](#)

■ Studies/Reports :



Digital Strategy 2026-2028

On 13 January, the European Union's Financial Markets Regulatory and Supervisory Authority published the 'New Digital Strategy 2026-2028', a roadmap for strengthening innovation, efficiency and resilience in the Union. Key objectives include creating digital synergies within the EU, strengthening the digital capabilities of ESMA and the European System of Financial Supervision, improving operational efficiency and establishing a secure and sustainable ecosystem. It has updated the 'Data Management Strategy 2023-2028' to reflect the changing technological landscape and the desire to strengthen the Union's efficiency in data processing. [Read more](#)



Record number of intellectual property applications in 2025

On 14 January, the European Intellectual Property Office announced that it had received 327,735 new applications for trade marks and designs in 2025. This is the highest annual number of intellectual property applications since the Office began accepting filings in 1996. These results show that businesses, innovators and creators around the world continue to invest in protection through the EU's intellectual property system. The record figures recorded in 2025 confirm the confidence in the European Intellectual Property Office and its role in supporting a modern innovation ecosystem. [Read more](#)



Publication of the World Economic Forum's annual report

On 14 January, the World Economic Forum published the 21st edition of its Global Risks Report 2026, assessing the main global risks in the short and long term. For 2026, geo-economic confrontation is the main risk likely to trigger a major crisis, in a global context marked by increased competition between major powers for access to markets, resources and supply chains, which will weaken the international order and fuel persistent economic uncertainty. [Read more](#)



Report on climatic conditions

On 14 January, Copernicus published a report on climatic conditions in 2025. It highlights that global temperatures in 2025 ranked as the third highest ever recorded in Europe. The intense heat of the 2023-2025 period is linked to two main factors. First, greenhouse gases continue to accumulate in the atmosphere as emissions increase and natural carbon sinks, such as forests, decline. Second, sea surface temperatures have reached unprecedented levels, fuelled by warmer weather conditions. [Read more](#)

■ Culture :



Trieste International Film Festival

Until 24 January, the city of Trieste, Italy, is hosting its Film Festival, a must-see event for avant-garde cinema and Central European cultures. Over the years, this festival has established itself as a benchmark in the world of European and international cinema. This 37th edition showcases a discerning selection of feature films, documentaries and short films. Filmmakers, professionals and film lovers are invited to come together to watch bold, socially conscious works screened in iconic locations around the city. A true platform for discovery and exchange, the Festival symbolises cultural sharing, making cinema a special moment of encounter between cultures and sensibilities. [Read more](#)



BRAFA Art Fair in Brussels

From 25 January to 1 February, the BRAFA Art Fair, one of Europe's most prestigious art fairs, will be held at the Parc des Expositions in Brussels. It is an exceptional eight-day event during which rare works from antiquity to the 21st century are exhibited in a refined setting. Whether ancient or modern paintings, tribal art, jewellery, silverware or design, the most prestigious galleries in each speciality are carefully selected. [Read more](#)



Cézanne at the Beyeler Foundation

Until 25 May, the Beyeler Foundation in Riehen (Basel) is dedicating an exhibition for the first time in its history to the French painter Paul Cézanne, a pioneer of modern art and one of the major artists in the Foundation's collection. The exhibition focuses on the last and most important phase of the artist's work and highlights central themes in his late work, including still life, portraiture, landscape and scenes of bathers. Bringing together around 80 oil paintings and watercolours, the exhibition showcases Paul Cézanne's pioneering work in terms of form, light and colour, qualities and techniques that have inspired and influenced several generations of artists to this day. [Read more](#)



Mari Rantanen in Stockholm

Until 7 March, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm is hosting the exhibition 'Exit to Entrance'. The exhibition features paintings created between 2020 and 2025 by Mari Rantanen, with a particular focus on her most recent works. She draws her inspiration from art history, the contemporary art scene and everyday life. Her paintings refer to the multiple visual systems of our society, through different fields of shapes and patterns that create space and movement. Mari Rantanen's artistic expression incorporates elements from many cultures, approached from a personal perspective. [Read more](#)



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Style–Paper–Scissors in Berlin

Until 1 March, Berlin is hosting the exhibition 'Style-Paper-Scissors', which presents the creations of students from the Lette Verein Berlin, inspired by the cut-out silhouettes of Johanna Beckmann (1868-1941), kept in the collection of the Kunstbibliothek museum. The works on display showcase a wide variety of techniques and graphic media: screen-printed posters, cyanotypes, typography, illustrations, digital creations, books and animated image projects – all produced as part of the graphic design course. [Read more](#)



Modern Italian art in Brescia

The exhibition 'Liberty. Modern Italian Art' is being held at Palazzo Martinengo in Brescia until 14 June. The exhibition is dedicated to Art Nouveau, which marked an artistic and cultural transition between the 19th and 20th centuries, and highlights how new European sensibilities influenced painting, sculpture, advertising graphics, fashion, photography and the applied arts. More than a hundred works are on display. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :



19-22/01/2026

Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Strasbourg)

Eurogroup Meeting (Brussels)

 20/01/2026

Economic and Financial Affairs Council (Brussels)

 26/01/2026

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



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