

**Letter n°1145 of Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026**

## **From a set of values to a normative framework: the European Union, world champion of women's rights**

[Helen Levy, Juliette Bachschmidt - 03 Mar 2026](#)

In 2026, the European Union asserted itself as a unique power in the field of women's rights, transforming the ideal of gender equality into binding legal obligations in the face of global democratic setbacks. Through directives on wage transparency, gender parity in decision-making and the fight against violence, it establishes a protective model that now influences international standards. This shift from values to sanctions embodies a political ambition to guarantee the autonomy and security of women in Europe and make it a model for the world.



[Front page!](#) | [Elections](#) | [Foundation](#) | [Commission](#) | [Council](#) | [Diplomacy](#) |

[Court of Justice](#) | [Germany](#) | [The Netherlands](#) | [Iceland](#) | [Ukraine](#) | [Studies/Reports](#) |

[Culture](#) | [Sport](#) |

[Agenda](#) | [Other issues](#) | [Contact](#)

■ **Front page! :**



## The choice of war

On 28 February, against a backdrop of growing tensions over Iran's nuclear programme and following the regime's bloody crackdown on popular uprisings, the United States and Israel made 'the choice of war' by launching a series of coordinated strikes against military and strategic targets. Faced with this new phase of escalation in the Middle East, Europe is prioritising law and diplomacy, faithful to the democratic values on which it is founded, and is committed to preserving peace, the price of which it knows only too well after so many conflicts. [Read more](#)

## ■ Elections :



### Parliamentary elections in Denmark on 24 March

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has called an early general election in Denmark on 24 March, partly in response to pressure from Donald Trump over Greenland. The political landscape is crystallising around the ruling Social Democratic Party. At the head of a centrist coalition with the Liberals and Moderates since 2022, the Social Democratic leader is seeking a third term. The question is whether she will succeed and with which other parties she will be able to form a coalition. [Read more](#)

## ■ Foundation :



### European Women leading the Way

The Robert Schuman Foundation launched the 'European Women leading the Way' project to highlight the decisive role played by women in the construction and influence of the European Union. This publication presents 27 portraits of influential European women, each representing a Member State, illustrating the diversity of their backgrounds and areas of expertise. It highlights the contribution of women to the construction of the Union and demonstrates that Europe is a place where there are no barriers to women's success. [Read more](#)



### Monitoring of the recovery plan

On 2 March, the European Commission approved Slovenia's fifth payment request under NextGenerationEU, amounting to €266.8 million. All NextGenerationEU disbursements can be found on the Foundation's website. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Commission :



### Combating arms trafficking and terrorism

On 26 February, the European Commission published a programme to prevent and combat terrorism. The aim is to anticipate threats, prevent radicalisation, protect people online and offline, and increase cooperation with international partners. It also presented a proposal for a directive to combat firearms trafficking by introducing an EU-wide framework with common definitions of offences and penalties, supporting closer cooperation between Member States and improving data collection and use. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



### Provisional application of the agreement with Mercosur countries

On 27 February, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that the European Union would proceed with the provisional application of the trade agreement with Mercosur, following ratification of the text by Argentina and Uruguay, even though the European Parliament has not yet given its final approval and the case is pending before the Court of Justice of the European Union. She reiterated that the aim was to enable businesses and citizens to reap the benefits of this historic agreement as soon as possible, while continuing to work with all institutions towards its full implementation at a later date. [Read more](#)



### Telephone roaming with the Western Balkans

On 25 February, the European Commission proposed opening negotiations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia to integrate them into the European Union's 'Roam Like at Home' scheme, which allows travellers from these countries to use their mobile phone plans at the same price as at home. This means seamless connectivity at domestic rates not only for citizens and businesses from the Western Balkans visiting the European Union, but also for travellers from the EU visiting the Western Balkans. [Read more](#)



## Support for loans to EU Member States bordering Russia

On 25 February, the European Commission announced the launch of an initiative to facilitate access to loans for EU Member States bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. This initiative, called the EastInvest Facility, is a €20 billion financing mechanism specifically designed for border regions, bringing together some of Europe's largest sources of public and private financing. Over the next two years, EastInvest will offer targeted loans to harness the region's potential through projects focusing on renewable energy, agriculture and forestry, among other areas, as Commission President Ursula von der Leyen explained at the launch of the Communication on Eastern Border Regions on 26 February. [Read more - Other link](#)

## ■ Council :



## Meeting of Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries

On 23 February, Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries discussed the national recommendations for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). They also discussed a future review of the EU Unfair Trading Practices Directive in 2026, to strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain and improve the effective implementation of the existing framework across the European Union. Finally, they discussed the European Union's strategic priorities for the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations for 2026 and 2027. [Read more](#)



## Meeting of ministers responsible for competitiveness

On 26 and 27 February, trade and industry ministers called for the rapid adoption of the 28th company law regime, the creation of a genuine capital markets union, new trade agreements and the implementation of measures under the Critical Raw Materials Act. They reached agreement on a legislative package comprising two proposals to reform the Coal and Steel Research Fund. Finally, they held a policy debate on the Horizon Europe programme in the next EU budget (2028-2034). [Read more - Other link](#)



## Meeting of European Affairs and Cohesion Ministers

On 24 February, European Affairs Ministers held an exchange of views to mark the launch of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience. They adopted the directive simplifying the obligations relating to the publication of sustainability information and the duty of care applicable to companies, a decision authorising the signing of a package of agreements with Switzerland, a regulation implementing enhanced cooperation on the establishment of the support loan to Ukraine for 2026 and 2027, and a regulation amending the facility for Ukraine. On 26 February, cohesion ministers approved conclusions on cities, highlighting their essential role in the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the Union. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Diplomacy :



### Foreign Affairs Ministers' Meeting

On 23 February, Foreign Affairs Ministers decided to increase pressure on Russia and support Ukraine by working on a 20th package of sanctions. They adopted restrictive measures against eight additional Russian individuals responsible for serious human rights violations in Ukraine. With regard to the Middle East, they discussed the Union's contribution to the implementation of the comprehensive plan to end the conflict in Gaza, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2803. The ministers repeated their concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. Finally, they agreed to extend the mandate of the EU's maritime security operation to protect freedom of navigation in relation to the crisis in the Red Sea (EUNAVFOR ASPIDES) until 28 February 2027. [Read more](#)



### Cooperation agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom

On 25 February, the European Commission and the United Kingdom signed a cooperation agreement on competition. It will establish a clear framework between the Commission, the competition authorities of the European Union Member States and the UK Competition and Markets Authority. This is the first specific agreement following Brexit. Among other things, the agreement requires competition authorities to protect the confidentiality of shared information and to exchange information on important investigations into anti-competitive practices and mergers. [Read more](#)



## Signing of agreements with Switzerland

On 2 March, Swiss President Guy Parmelin and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen signed bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the European Union in Brussels covering the following areas: air transport, land transport, free movement of persons and conformity assessment; trade in agricultural products; food safety, health and electricity; Switzerland's permanent and equitable financial contribution to the economic and social cohesion of the Union; agreement allowing Switzerland to participate in several Union programmes: Switzerland's participation in the European Space Agency. [Read more - Other link](#)



## Situation in Iran and the Middle East

On 1 March, the French President convened a defence and national security council meeting on the situation in Iran and the Middle East. Together with the German Chancellor and the British Prime Minister, they condemned Iran's indiscriminate and disproportionate missile attacks against countries in the region, including those not involved in the initial military operations by the United States and Israel. On 28 February, the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council issued a statement expressing the European Union's grave concern about developments in Iran. Following a meeting of foreign ministers on 1 March, the High Representative pledged to support European citizens in the region and called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, protect civilians and fully respect international law. [Read more - Other link - Other link - Other link](#)

## ■ Court of Justice :



### Air freight cartel: appeals by 12 airlines rejected

On 26 February, the Court of Justice ruled on appeals by several airlines against fines imposed by the European Commission for participating in an air freight cartel. According to the Court, the airlines agreed to apply abusive tariffs, supposedly to compensate for fuel price fluctuations in order to increase their revenues, while refusing to pay commissions to freight forwarders, practices deemed contrary to competition rules. Only the appeal by SAS Cargo Group was partially upheld, due to errors in the calculation of its fine by the Court. For the other companies, the Court confirmed the fines imposed by the Commission, amounting to approximately €775 million. [Read more](#)



## Hungarian State violates media law

On 26 February, the Court of Justice ruled against the Hungarian State for illegally removing Klubrádió from the radio landscape. It concluded that the refusal to renew the radio station's licence was based on disproportionate national rules and opaque administrative procedures. In doing so, the Hungarian authorities violated the regulatory framework for electronic communications and the principles of non-discrimination. The ruling specifically emphasises that these measures constitute a serious infringement of freedom of expression and media freedom. The Hungarian state is now obliged to comply with this decision or face financial penalties. [Read more](#)

## ■ Germany :



## German Chancellor visits China

On 25 February, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang in Beijing to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries and discuss economic cooperation. The Chancellor emphasised the need to establish fair competition and a market based on common rules, while reiterating his commitment to cooperation, as evidenced by China's announcement of an order for 120 Airbus aircraft, which is likely to support the European aerospace industry. Finally, they took advantage of this visit to discuss international issues, with a view to ensuring regional stability in Asia and promoting global security. [Read more](#)

## ■ The Netherlands :



## New government led by Rob Jetten

On 23 February, the new government of Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten was sworn in before King Willem-Alexander. This government, comprising a coalition of Democrats 66 (D66), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), marks a new political phase. The Prime Minister, the youngest in Dutch history, will work with 17 ministers and 10 Secretaries of State. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

## ■ Iceland :



## Towards a referendum on EU membership?

On 25 February, during a visit to Poland, Icelandic Prime Minister Kristrún Frostadóttir announced that a referendum on Iceland's accession to the EU would be held in the coming months. Initially planned for 2027, this project is now being fast-tracked due to current geopolitical tensions. Iceland had already begun the accession process in 2009, with official negotiations opening in 2010, but these were suspended in 2013 and Iceland officially requested the withdrawal of its application in 2015. The date has yet to be confirmed. [Read more - Other link](#)

## ■ Ukraine :



### 4th anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine

On 24 February, on the 4th anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European institutions reiterated their unwavering support for Ukraine and its people, emphasising that the prospect of lasting peace could only be viable if it was fair and based on law. During a special session of the European Parliament, Volodymyr Zelensky addressed MEPs to express his gratitude for the Member States' continued support for Ukraine. At the same time, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa travelled to Kyiv to reiterate the EU's unwavering solidarity with Ukraine and its continued support for a lasting and robust peace. [Read more - Other link](#)

### Joint statement by the Nordic and Baltic countries



On 24 February, the leaders of the Nordic and Baltic states (NB8) condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and reaffirmed their support for Ukraine's independence and sovereignty. They pledged to continue their military, financial and humanitarian aid and to contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine. In addition, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda signed an agreement with his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, on the production of defence equipment for Ukraine in Lithuania. On 25 February, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre met with Volodymyr Zelensky to develop a strategic partnership between the two countries, particularly in the areas of defence and energy. [Read more - Other link - Other link](#)



## Visit by the Croatian Prime Minister

On 24 February, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković attended the commemoration of the fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion in Kyiv. He emphasised Croatia's commitment to Ukraine's European integration and reiterated Croatia's support for Ukraine, particularly in the field of energy, through the new bilateral aid programme adopted by the Croatian government specifically for the reconstruction of the energy sector. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## LNG delivery via a German terminal

On 23 February, Ukrainian company Naftogaz announced the first delivery of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Ukraine via a terminal in Germany. This new supply, carried out in partnership with Total Energies and the Deutsche ReGas terminal on the island of Rügen, means that LNG from the United States can be regasified and then transported by pipeline through Poland to Ukraine. This new route aims to diversify Ukraine's sources of supply, which have been particularly weakened by attacks on its gas infrastructure and difficult weather conditions. This cooperation paves the way for a long-term partnership and demonstrates the strengthening of European solidarity and cooperation in the energy sector. [Read more](#)



## The Council of Europe calls for a just and lasting peace

On 24 February, on the fourth anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Council of Europe, through its Secretary General, Alain Berset, reiterated its support for Ukraine and its people, stressing that lasting peace can only be viable if it is fair and based on law. All Council structures have been mobilised to support reconstruction, ensure accountability for war crimes and enable refugees and victims to file claims for compensation. The Secretary General stressed the importance of a strong European commitment to establishing a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression and opening an International Claims Commission. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



## UN support for Ukraine

On 24 February, the United Nations General Assembly convened for an emergency special session to mark the fourth anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It adopted a resolution calling for 'support for lasting peace in Ukraine,' and the United States, the European Union and several European countries called for an immediate ceasefire and peace based on Ukraine's territorial integrity, while promising military support and increased sanctions. Many delegations strongly criticised Russia, denouncing the continued strikes, military escalation and attacks targeting energy infrastructure in particular. Russia rejected the accusations and denounced European 'hypocrisy'. [Read more - Other link](#)

## ■ Studies/Reports :



### Report on women's economic equality

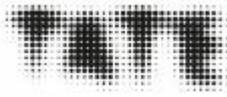
On 24 February, the World Bank published a report revealing that laws designed to guarantee women equal economic opportunities are only half enforced on average worldwide. Governments still have a long way to go in this area. Although countries are making progress in establishing new laws promoting equal opportunities, only 4% of women worldwide live in countries that guarantee them economic rights that are virtually equal to those of men. [Read more - Other link](#)



### Evaluation of the European Innovation Partnership in agriculture

On 26 February, the European Court of Auditors published an evaluation report on the European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability. It highlights that this instrument remains under-utilised despite an investment of nearly €1 billion. The audit reveals that only 25% of the projects examined generated concrete innovative solutions, while nearly a third had no direct link to agricultural practices. To remedy these shortcomings, the Court recommends refocusing funding on the real needs of farmers. Finally, it calls for the systematic dissemination of results, which is currently lacking for half of the projects, so that these innovations can bring lasting benefits to the entire European sector. [Read more - Other link](#)

## ■ Culture :



## Tracey Emin in London

Until 31 August, London's Tate Modern is hosting 'A Second Life', the largest exhibition ever devoted to Tracey Emin. This unprecedented retrospective of the British artist's career, a major figure in contemporary art, the exhibition traces forty years of practice through more than ninety works, including paintings, videos, textiles, neon lights, sculptures and installations, from the landmark installations of the 1990s to her most recent paintings and bronze sculptures, some of which are being shown to the public for the first time. [Read more](#)



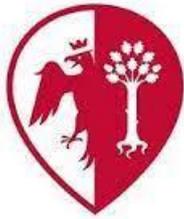
## Robert Capa, war photographer

Until 20 December, the Musée de la Libération de Paris is honouring Robert Capa, a major figure in 20th-century war photojournalism. This exhibition offers a retrospective featuring more than 160 items, including press prints, magazines, documents and personal objects from the period. It traces the journey of this young Hungarian immigrant, who immortalised key moments in major conflicts, from the Spanish Civil War to the Normandy landings and the Liberation of Paris. This exhibition helps to honour the commitment of witnesses to conflict and offers a historical perspective on the role of images in understanding wars. [Read more](#)



## Gustave Courbet in Vienna

Until 21 June, the Leopold Museum in Vienna is hosting the exhibition 'Gustave Courbet: Realist and Rebel'. This is the first exhibition devoted to Courbet in Austria, presenting works from all periods of the painter's artistic life. The exhibition begins with Courbet's first iconic self-portraits and continues through his revolutionary paintings on themes such as social realism and artistic bohemianism to his female nudes. [Read more](#)



PALAZZO  
ROVERELLA

## Degas and Zandomenighi in Rovigo

Until 28 June, Palazzo Roverella in Rovigo is hosting the exhibition "Zandomenighi and Degas. Impressionism between Florence and Paris," which offers an organic comparison between Italian painter Federico Zandomenighi and French artist Edgar Degas. It provides an in-depth look at the relationship between the two artists, based on a long friendship marked by mutual esteem and creative exchanges that were sometimes tense but always fruitful. [Read more](#)



MUSEUMSPORTAL  
BERLIN

## Giulia Andreani in Berlin

Until 13 September, Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof contemporary art gallery is hosting an exhibition by Italian painter Giulia Andreani to mark its 30th anniversary. Bringing together paintings that highlight the flaws within official narratives, her practice of 'painting with photographs' draws on the tension between authoritarian figures and forgotten characters from the past. [Read more](#)



## Julia Kochetova in Amsterdam

Until 25 May, the FOAM photography museum in Amsterdam is hosting the exhibition 'War is Personal', featuring the work of Ukrainian artist Julia Kochetova. A photographer and documentary filmmaker, she belongs to a generation that has experienced the war in Ukraine and documented it from the inside. While the international media often reduce war to statistics, Julia Kochetova turns her lens to the personal lives behind those statistics, to the homes, the people who remain and their language. She makes the personal realities of the conflict tangible and confronts visitors with questions about memory, survival and the meaning of home, even as the war continues. [Read more](#)

## Kerry James Marshall in Zurich

Until 16 August, the Kunsthaus Zurich is hosting an exhibition dedicated to Kerry James Marshall. A master of Black painting in the United States, he questions the place of Black figures in Western visual narratives and revisits art history in his own way: head-on, political and striking. His monumental canvases rewrite collective memory: genre scenes, portraits and mythologies are imbued with a rare chromatic intensity and historical tension. [Read more](#)



## Thessaloniki Documentary Festival

From 5 to 15 March, the city of Thessaloniki, Greece, will host the 28th edition of its International Documentary Festival. This event highlights socially conscious productions that explore powerful contemporary themes through different artistic perspectives. In addition to screenings, the programme includes discussions, tributes to certain artists and competitive sections designed to inform, mobilise and celebrate the art of documentary filmmaking, reinforcing Thessaloniki's position as an essential meeting place for film lovers and documentary film professionals. [Read more](#)



## 'Cité du Classique' Festival in Barcelona

From 5 March to 1 April, Barcelona will become the European capital of classical music for the best part of a month. More than 500 international artists and talents will perform in iconic and prestigious venues such as the Gran Teatre del Liceu, the Palau de la Música Catalana and the Barcelona Auditorium, with around 50 concerts set to fill the city with a programme of excellence. The 'opening of the city of classical music' thus unfolds an ambitious programme combining symphonic concerts, recitals and chamber music, between major institutions and heritage sites open to the public. The event aims to broaden access to classical music and strengthen Barcelona's international influence. [Read more](#)

## ■ Sport :



## Opening of the Winter Paralympic Games

The Winter Paralympic Games are being held in Milano-Cortina from 6 to 15 March. For this 50th anniversary, this event will bring together nearly 650 athletes in 78 events, providing a global showcase for Paralympic sport and adapted sporting excellence, promoting inclusion and pushing boundaries. [Read more](#)

### ■ Agenda :

 02/03/2026

**French President's Speech on Nuclear Deterrent**

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 5-6/03/2026

**"Justice and Home Affairs" Council (Brussels)**

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 09/03/2026

**Eurogroup**

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 09/03/2026

**Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (Social Policy)**

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 09-12/03/2026

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



### The Letter n°1145

PDF

**in English** -- Edition of Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026

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N° ISSN: **2729-6482**

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