

Hungary as a Trailblazer: the Rise of Illiberal Democracy and its Discontents

[Péter Magyar - 31 Mar 2026](#)

With two weeks to go before the general election in Hungary, the Foundation has published Péter Magyar's article, which originally appeared in the "Schuman Report 2025". As Viktor Orbán's main opponent, Péter Magyar outlines the core principles of his party, Tisza, which currently leads in the polls and advocates a break with the existing system. The emergence of illiberal democracy in Hungary marks a profound break with European standards, replacing pluralism with a centralisation of power. It creates a polarisation that calls for a civic renewal based, in particular, on digital tools. The country's recovery now rests on pragmatic governance aimed at addressing the stagnation and inequalities resulting from structural mismanagement. This approach prioritises stability and job creation for all rather than the preservation of privileges for a select elite.



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■ Elections :



Results of the Danish general election

In Denmark's snap general election on 24 March, the "red bloc" narrowly took the lead with 84 seats, ahead of the "blue bloc", which won 77 seats, thereby depriving the outgoing Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, of a majority. An absolute majority requires 90 seats out of 179. On 25 March, Mette Frederiksen tendered her resignation to King Frederik, who asked her to lead negotiations to form a new government in light of the election results. [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



Recovery Plan: Green light for new payments to Greece and Latvia

On 26 March, the European Commission gave the green light to Greece's seventh payment request for €1.18 billion and Latvia's fourth payment request for €371 million, as part of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan. The Foundation is monitoring the implementation of the recovery plan in each country. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Commission :



New forest fire risk management strategy

On 25 March, the European Commission presented a new strategy on the integrated management of forest fire risks. With forest fires expected to become more severe across the continent, this approach aims to cover prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The strategy also includes the acquisition of 12 aircraft to expand rescEU's firefighting fleet, as well as the establishment of a regional training centre in Cyprus. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



AGILE: a new funding instrument for defence technologies

On 25 March, the European Commission unveiled a new funding instrument designed to accelerate the development of disruptive innovations in the defence sector (AGILE). Russia's war against Ukraine has demonstrated that the ability to test and deploy technologies such as artificial intelligence and drones is essential in the face of the new realities of modern warfare. The AGILE programme will provide faster and more flexible funding to businesses, with a focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Approval of the SAFE plans for France and the Czech Republic

On 25 March, the European Commission gave the green light to two loan agreements for France and the Czech Republic under the SAFE initiative. Adopted as part of the 'Preparedness 2030' package, the SAFE programme is designed to help Member States strengthen their defence capabilities through favourable loans. It allocates €150 billion across 19 Member States to strengthen Europe's defence industrial base. Following the approval of their national defence plans, 16 Member States have already received funding. [Read more](#)

■ Parliament :



Global Gateway: an investigation into the involvement of Chinese companies is necessary

On 26 March, MEPs adopted their first report on Global Gateway, acknowledging its importance for Europe's geostrategic ambitions but calling for a thorough investigation into the possible involvement of Chinese companies in the project. In particular, they deplore the lack of transparency regarding the initiative's funding history and the inability of the Parliament to exercise its oversight functions. Launched in 2021, the Global Gateway initiative is a €300 billion infrastructure programme aimed at offering a sustainable alternative to the aggressive actions carried out by China and Russia in the transport and infrastructure sectors. [Read more - Other link](#)



Measures on Artificial Intelligence

On 26 March, MEPs approved a simplification of the implementation of harmonised rules on artificial intelligence. The proposal postpones and sets the date for the entry into force of certain rules relating to high-risk artificial intelligence systems, with a view to ensuring the predictability of the standards. Targeted measures have been added to increase flexibility and support for mid-market companies. Finally, MEPs introduced a ban on 'doxing' applications that use artificial intelligence to create sexually explicit images identifying a person without their consent. [Read more - Other link](#)



Regulation on returns

On 26 March, MEPs approved the opening of negotiations with the Council on the new common legal framework for the return of persons without a right of residence in the Union, by 389 votes to 206, with 32 abstentions. The text provides for a tightening of European migration policy, introducing the concept of 'return hubs' – centres set up to send migrants outside the European Union. [Read more](#)



Trade agreement with the United States subject to conditions

On 26 March, MEPs gave their conditional approval to the implementation of the tariff provisions of the Turnberry trade agreement between the European Union and the United States. Amid economic tensions with Washington, however, MEPs attached three safeguard clauses to the agreement to protect the Union's interests. Firstly, a clause suspending these preferential tariffs if Washington introduces new customs duties. Secondly, these new preferences will only take effect if the United States honours its commitments, with an expiry date for the agreement set at 31 March 2028. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Council :



Eurogroup meeting

On 27 March, on the basis of a note from the European Commission, Eurogroup ministers discussed coordinated measures in response to rising energy prices caused by instability in the Middle East. The discussion took place in the presence of the Executive Director of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, who warned of an energy crisis more severe than that of the 1970s. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Meeting of Trade Ministers

On 26 March, trade ministers issued their conclusions ahead of the start of the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). They emphasised the need for far-reaching reform of the organisation, warning that it risked losing its relevance, and supported the creation of a working group focused on WTO reform. In particular, the ministers underlined their commitment to a reform process centred on three pillars: predictability, fairness and flexibility. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Trilogues :



Reform of the EU Customs Code

On 26 March, the Council and the European Parliament finalised an agreement on the reform of the EU Customs Code. With players such as Shein and Temu flooding the European market with products that are often non-compliant, the reform allows these online sellers to be treated as importers: they will be responsible for product compliance and will have to bear the costs associated with checks. [Read more](#)

■ Diplomacy :



G7 Statement on Iran and Foreign Ministers' Meeting

On 26 and 27 March, G7 foreign ministers discussed international conflicts and crisis hotspots, in particular the situation in Iran and the Middle East, as well as Sudan, Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and the Indo-Pacific. A statement on Iran calling for the protection of civilians and civilian energy infrastructure was adopted. They held discussions with their Ukrainian counterpart during a working session on G7 support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. Finally, they discussed with India, Brazil, South Korea and Saudi Arabia the reform of global governance, reconstruction, the defence of sovereignty and the fight against cross-cutting threats, including drug trafficking and organised crime. [Read more](#)



Security and Defence Partnership signed with Ghana

On 24 March, the European Union and Ghana signed a security and defence partnership. Ghana is the first African country to sign an agreement of this kind with the European Union. It is expected to strengthen cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism and cybersecurity, notably by establishing a specific annual dialogue between the EU and Ghana. In parallel with the signing, the EU has delivered military equipment as part of a €50 million package under the European Peace Facility. [Read more - Other link](#)



Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and Australia

On 24 March, the European Union and Australia approved a free trade agreement, accompanied by a security and defence partnership. This agreement will remove tariffs on most trade between the EU and Australia and could boost European GDP by €4 billion by 2030. The EU is Australia's third-largest bilateral trading partner and its second-largest source of foreign investment. The agreement ensures European access to critical Australian raw materials, making the EU's supply chains more resilient. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ European Agencies :



Patents: a record year for Europe

On 24 March, the European Patent Office (EPO) published a comprehensive overview of global inventive activity for the year 2025 in its annual report. According to this index, the number of patent applications filed by the 39 European member states with the EPO exceeded 200,000 for the first time in a single year, representing a 1.4% increase compared to 2024. This growth was driven by technology sectors such as artificial intelligence, digital technology, quantum technologies, batteries and semiconductors. Furthermore, having deposited its final accession instrument on 25 March, Moldova has taken the final step towards joining the Convention and will become the Organisation's 40th member state on 1 June 2026. [Read more - Other link](#)



Europol ramps up its arsenal against illegal migrant smuggling networks

On 24 March, Europol announced the launch of the European Centre against Migrant Smuggling (ECAMS), a new body devoted to combating criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling and human trafficking. This centre aims to strengthen operational coordination, data analysis and information sharing between Member States, as well as with other European agencies, to dismantle transnational networks. According to UN data, 90% of irregular migrants arriving in the EU have used the services of smugglers, who generate profits of between €4.7 and €6 billion a year. This initiative forms part of a broader effort to strengthen Europol's role, in accordance with European agreements, providing it with greater resources and enhanced legitimacy in tackling this criminal scourge. [Read more](#)



Lille chosen as the seat of the EU Customs Authority

On 25 March, MEPs and the Council selected the French city of Lille as the seat of the future European Union Customs Authority (EUCA), after reviewing nine bids. This decision is one of the final steps before the conclusion of negotiations on the EU customs reform, presented in May 2023. The new Customs Authority is expected to play a coordinating role with global customs authorities whilst strengthening their capacity to address trade flows that pose risks to the EU's competitiveness and security. [Read more - Other link](#)

■ Croatia :



Parliamentary Summit of the Three Seas Initiative

On 24 and 25 March, Zagreb hosted the parliamentary summit of the Three Seas Initiative, an informal political platform created in 2015 to strengthen cohesion within the European Union and the wider European area, comprising Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. They highlighted the role of parliaments in achieving the Initiative's objectives and emphasised the importance of strengthening transatlantic relations, promoting investment and innovation, and supporting the reconstruction of Ukraine. [Read more](#)

■ France :



Defence agreement with the Philippines

On 26 March, the Philippines and France signed an agreement allowing soldiers from both countries to take part in joint exercises on each other's territory. With this agreement—the first of its kind between the archipelago and a European country—France is strengthening its geopolitical influence in the Indo-Pacific. Over the past two years, the Philippines has signed similar agreements with Japan, Canada and New Zealand, with a view to countering Beijing in the South China Sea. [Read more](#)

■ Italy :



Referendum: judicial reform bill rejected

On 22 and 23 March, Italians were called upon to vote in a referendum on a reform of the judicial system, initiated by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, aimed at separating the careers of judges and prosecutors and reorganising the governing bodies of the judiciary, presented by the government as necessary to modernise a system deemed "too politicised". Italians rejected the proposal by 53.75% of the vote. [Read more](#)

■ Luxembourg :



Strengthening ties with the European Union and NATO

On 24 and 25 March, Grand Duke Guillaume, accompanied by Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Xavier Bettel, travelled to Brussels for a visit to the European institutions and NATO headquarters. Discussions focused on current challenges in the field of international security. The visit aimed to reaffirm Luxembourg's commitment to European cooperation and Euro-Atlantic security. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Poland :



Poland strengthens its ties with South-East Asia

On 23 March, the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, opened a diplomatic forum dedicated to cooperation between Poland, the European Union and the countries of South-East Asia (ASEAN). Discussions focused on areas of collaboration in security, the economy and scientific diplomacy, whilst emphasising the importance of academic and inter-personal exchanges. On this occasion, Poland announced its forthcoming accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), thereby strengthening its ties with the countries of Southeast Asia and marking a milestone in the deepening of relations between Warsaw and ASEAN. [Read more](#)

■ Kosovo :



Constitutional Court rejects the dissolution of Parliament

On 25 March, Kosovo's Constitutional Court rejected the decree adopted in early March by President Vjosa Osmani, dissolving Parliament and calling for new parliamentary elections. The decree "has no legal validity", ruled the Court, which had been referred to by Prime Minister Albin Kurti. The MPs elected in December now have a further 34 days to attempt to elect a new Kosovar President, failing which Parliament will be dissolved, the Court stated. [Read more](#)

■ Moldova :



State of emergency in the energy sector

On 24 March, Moldovan MPs approved the declaration of a state of emergency for the energy sector for a 60-day period, starting from 25 March. This measure empowers the authorities to repair damaged power lines, protect critical infrastructure and, if necessary, order the rationing of consumption and impose special operating rules on economic operators. It was introduced after Prime Minister Alexandru Munteanu stated that Moldova's main power supply line had been disconnected following Russia's attacks on Ukraine's civilian energy infrastructure. [Read more](#)

■ Ukraine :



Sweden releases further humanitarian aid to Ukraine

On 23 March, the Swedish government announced further aid to Ukraine amounting to 240 million kronor (SEK), or approximately €22 million. This aid includes 150 million SEK (€14 million) for the Ukrainian Red Cross for humanitarian operations, with a particular focus on children's needs, supporting school meals near combat zones. This support is part of Sweden's ongoing commitment to civil resilience and the reconstruction of Ukraine in the face of war. [Read more](#)



Joint Statement by the Leaders of the Joint Expeditionary Force

On 26 March, the leaders of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, meeting at a Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) summit in Helsinki, renewed their commitment to European security and stability, their strengthened support for Ukraine and pressure on Russia, as well as their ongoing efforts to address regional security challenges together. [Read more](#)

■ Vatican :



The Pope's Visit to Monaco

On 28 March, Pope Leo XIV made his first trip to Europe, visiting the Principality of Monaco. Welcomed by Prince Albert II, he met with the Catholic community at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and with young people and candidates for baptism on the esplanade of the Church of Sainte-Dévote. Finally, he celebrated Mass at the Louis II Stadium, during which he condemned the ongoing wars, "the fruit of the idolatry of power and money", and delivered a message on the redistribution of wealth: "every good placed in our hands has a universal purpose". [Read more](#)

■ Reports :



Fourteenth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14)

From 26 to 29 March, the Fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was held in Yaoundé, Cameroon. At the conclusion of the conference, ministers agreed to continue negotiations on fisheries subsidies. They adopted two decisions on improving the integration of small economies into the multilateral trading system, as well as on sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade. With a view to preserving the multilateral trading system, discussions focused on WTO reform and the possible creation of a framework of rules to enable enhanced cooperation between willing countries. [Read more](#)

The OECD revises its global outlook

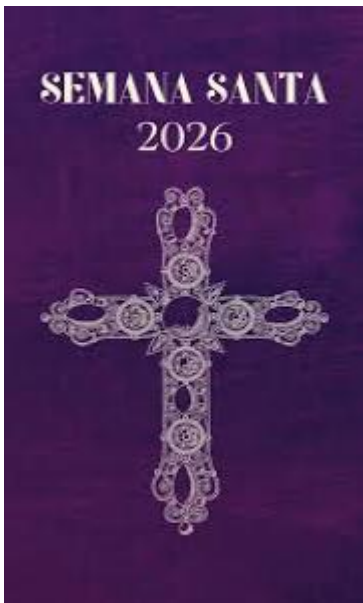
On 26 March, the OECD published an update to its global economic outlook, prompted by the global energy supply shock caused by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. According to the OECD Secretary-General, Mathias Cormann, this conflict is a real test of the global economy's resilience. Whilst global growth is expected to remain robust, it will undoubtedly slow compared to its pre-conflict trajectory, whilst inflation will rise significantly. Consequently, the OECD warns of persistent short-term risks and calls for prudent economic policies to preserve stability and support growth. [Read more](#)



NATO report on rising defence spending

On 26 March, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte presented his annual report for 2025, which states that military spending by European Allies and Canada has increased by 20% compared to 2024. For the first time, all Allies have met or exceeded the target of 2% of GDP spent on defence. The Secretary General welcomed this genuine shift in mindset. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Culture :



Spain celebrates Holy Week

Until 5 April, Spain will be celebrating Holy Week, the highlight of the country's religious and cultural calendar. Everywhere, the faithful gather to watch solemn processions, during which religious brotherhoods carry richly decorated sacred images of the Virgin Mary and Christ through the ancient streets of towns and villages. [Read more](#)



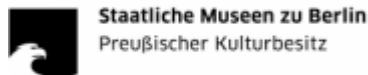
Matisse in Paris

Until 26 July, the exhibition 'Matisse, 1941–1954' at the Grand Palais in Paris highlights the artist's final creative years, marked by illness and war. Nearly 300 works, including drawings, cut-out gouaches, illustrated books and stained-glass windows, are on display, bearing witness to the vibrant creative energy that drove Matisse throughout his life. The major collections from this period are presented, some of them in exceptional form, such as the series of Blue Nudes. [Read more](#)



Van Dyck in Genoa

Until 19 July, the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa is hosting a retrospective dedicated to 'Van Dyck, the European'. Bringing together more than 60 major works from leading European museums such as the Louvre, the Prado and the National Gallery, this exhibition traces the artistic journey of the painter of the three capitals: Antwerp, Genoa and London, highlighting his ability to adapt and enrich his art across cultures. [Read more](#)



Brancusi in Berlin

Until 9 August, Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie is hosting, in partnership with the Centre Pompidou, a unique exhibition devoted to the Romanian sculptor Brancusi. Featuring over 150 sculptures, photographs, drawings, films and archival documents, it offers the most comprehensive overview to date of the multifaceted work of Brancusi – considered one of the most important sculptors of the 20th century. [Read more](#)



Women of the Dutch Golden Age in Ghent

Until 31 May, the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts is hosting the exhibition "Unforgettable: Women Artists from Antwerp to Amsterdam, 1600–1750", offering a unique insight into female artistic creation in the Low Countries. Conceived as a retrospective, this exhibition highlights the essential yet long-overlooked role of women in 17th-century artistic life. Bringing together works by more than 40 artists, it unveils a vast panorama ranging from painting and sculpture to engraving and textiles. [Read more](#)



1001 Nights and Orientalism in Lens

Until 20 July, the Louvre-Lens Museum is hosting a unique exhibition that traces, through a French lens, the cultural exchanges between East and West from the Middle Ages to the present day. Featuring nearly 300 works, it invites visitors on a journey through time to discover how forms, imaginations and knowledge circulate and transform. [Read more](#)

**HAMBURGER
KUNSTHALLE**

Maria Lassnig and Edvard Munch in Hamburg

Until 30 August, the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Hamburg is showcasing two artists, Maria Lassnig and Edvard Munch, brought together for the first time in an exhibition that draws parallels between the Austrian artist and the Norwegian painter, separated by more than half a century. It highlights their commonalities, their unique approach to colour and their way of expressing intense emotions. [Read more](#)



Konrad Mägi in London

Until 12 July, the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London is hosting the first exhibition dedicated to Konrad Mägi. A pioneer of Estonian modernism, this exhibition brings together over 60 of the artist's works, ranging from his Nordic landscapes to his strikingly colourful portraits. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :

 30/03/2026

"Agriculture and Fisheries" Council (Brussels)



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