

Letter n°1166 of Tuesday 8th September 2026

France – Germany– Europe: taking back control of our future

Joachim Bitterlich - 08 Sep 2026

Franco-German relations have become strained, whilst the two countries are struggling to respond to the current economic, political, security and geopolitical crises. Restoring Franco-German trust and leadership would enable Europe to regain its capacity for autonomous action. This requires reducing dependencies in key areas such as energy, technology, migration, defence and foreign policy. The priority is to build concrete and strategic cooperation in order to strengthen European sovereignty and stability.



[Front page!](#) | [Foundation](#) | [Russia-Ukraine War](#) | [Economy and Finances](#) | [Defence and Security](#) | [Digital, technologies and space](#) |

[Democracy and Politics](#) | [Culture](#) |

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

■ Front page! :



When Europe reveals its strength ... without politicians

Both contested and sought after, Europe embodies the relative exercise of sovereignty in the 21st century. Just as the 'European reflex' has taken hold amongst the continent's economic and social actors, Europe's neighbours are quietly embracing it. Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom are signing an increasing number of agreements with the EU to reap its benefits, whilst declining to join fully. Will the 2027 elections provide the opportunity for political leaders to acknowledge Europe's appeal... which is so evident elsewhere? [Read more](#)

■ Foundation :



NextGenerationEU: Sweden has reached 100 per cent of its plan

On 31 August, the European Commission approved Sweden's third and final payment request of €332.8 million under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. With this approval, Sweden has become the second Member State, after Denmark, to have achieved 100 per cent of the reforms and investments set out in its recovery plan. The Foundation provides a summary of the various national recovery plans on its website, setting out the amounts, timetables and priorities. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Swedish general election: can the opposition win, or are the Sweden Democrats on the verge of coming to power?

The Swedish general election on 13 September is taking place against a backdrop of a fragmented political landscape. The Social Democrats lead in the polls (29.2 per cent), ahead of the Sweden Democrats (18.9 per cent) and the Moderates (16.4 per cent). Immigration, crime and the economy are among voters' main concerns, alongside the environment and security. The ruling right-wing bloc, supported by the Sweden Democrats, faces a left-wing opposition that could form an alternative majority, with 175 seats required to secure an absolute majority in the Riksdag. Finally, the Liberals, credited with 3 per cent of voting intentions, are at risk of failing to win any seats in Parliament, as they are unlikely to reach the required 4 per cent threshold. [Read more](#)

■ Russia-Ukraine War :



Another meeting of the Coalition of the Willing

On 24 August, the leaders of the Coalition of Willing met to mark the 35th anniversary of Ukraine's independence at a gathering in Kyiv chaired by British Prime Minister Andy Burnham, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Coalition to reassert Ukraine's right to defend itself, as well as to reach agreement on the need to continue economic sanctions against Russia and on the urgent need to support Ukraine's energy sector ahead of the coming winter. [Read more](#)



21st round of EU sanctions against Russia

On 23 July, the Council adopted the 21st round of sanctions against Russia. Seeking to increase economic pressure on Russia in the context of the war in Ukraine, the European Union is, in particular, tightening restrictions targeting the Russian financial and energy sectors. In particular, the package introduces new bans on transactions with Russian financial institutions and certain banks in third countries. It strengthens measures targeting the oil sector and the Russian 'ghost fleet', and extends restrictions on the export of dual-use goods and technologies to new entities. The package also includes new individual sanctions targeting persons and entities linked to Russia. [Read more](#)

■ Economy and Finances :



The ECB launches a consultation to choose a new design for banknotes

On 23 July, the European Central Bank invited citizens of the euro area to choose the design of their future banknotes. They have until 21 September 2026 to give their views online on ten proposals, grouped into two themes: 'European culture' and 'Rivers and birds'. On the same day, the Governing Council decided to leave the ECB's three key interest rates unchanged. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Council gives the green light to a reform of the customs framework

On 3 September, the Council gave its final approval to a review of the EU's customs framework, which is the most comprehensive reform of its kind in decades. The updated legislation provides the EU with new, innovative tools designed to better facilitate global trade – particularly e-commerce – to collect customs duties more efficiently, and to strengthen controls on non-compliant, dangerous or unsafe goods. [Read more](#)



Negotiations on the future EU budget

On 25 August, the President of the European Council, António Costa, began a tour of EU capitals to discuss the Union's priorities and finalise negotiations on the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2028–2034. On 27 August, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden called for a review of this budget, advocating a more "realistic" approach. They called for a reduction of "several hundred billion euros" in the MFF, the amount of which, as proposed by the Commission, stands at nearly 2,000 billion euros. The MFF was on the agenda for the informal meeting of ministers responsible for European affairs, held in Dublin on 3 and 4 September. Following discussions on "the balance of expenditure in the next MFF", Irish Minister Thomas Byrne held talks with his counterparts with a view to fostering a consensus. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#) - [Other link](#)



G20 Finance Ministers' Meeting

On 31 August and 1 September, G20 finance ministers and central bank governors met in Asheville, in the United States. Against a backdrop of heightened inflationary risks due to the US-Iran conflict, the focus was on ways to stimulate economic growth, notably by reducing redtape and encouraging investment, whilst securing supply chains and accelerating the resolution of debt issues for countries in difficulty. China opposed the stated aim of reducing global trade imbalances, which specifically targeted countries with large surpluses. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Defence and Security :



France and Sweden strengthen their partnership

On 31 August, French President Emmanuel Macron travelled to Stockholm to attend the signing ceremony for Sweden's contract to purchase four French defence and intervention frigates, manufactured by Naval Group. This purchase forms part of a policy of cross-purchases between the two countries, as France has ordered two Swedish airborne early warning and command aircraft. A framework agreement to strengthen defence cooperation between France and Sweden in the "operational, capability and industrial fields" was also signed. [Read more](#)



Greece buys an 'Achilles Shield' from Israel

On 31 August, the Greek and Israeli defence ministries announced the signing of a €3 billion contract for the export of an air defence system. The future "Achilles Shield" will make Greece the first European Union member state to adopt an integrated missile defence system based on the Israeli model. Whilst a rapprochement between the two Mediterranean states has been underway for the past decade, the recent agreement comes against a backdrop of deteriorating relations with Turkey and the modernisation of military strategies. [Read more](#)

■ Digital, technologies and space :



Epsilon mission: Europe's longest crewed space mission

On 3 September, the European Space Agency's Epsilon mission became Europe's longest crewed space mission, after 202 days in space. French astronaut Sophie Adenot, who has been on board the International Space Station since February 2026 as part of this mission, has notably conducted a series of European scientific and technological experiments and carried out three spacewalks (EVAs). The experiments cover topics ranging from human physiology to technologies useful for future missions to the Moon and Mars. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



ChatGPT now subject to the DSA

On 31 August, the Commission designated ChatGPT as a "very large online search engine" within the meaning of the European Digital Services Act (DSA). As such, ChatGPT will now have to comply with stricter obligations, particularly regarding the assessment and mitigation of systemic risks associated with its activities. ChatGPT is also already subject to the European AI Act, which came into force in August 2024. [Read more](#)



Franco-Dutch dialogue on technology

French President Emmanuel Macron travelled to Eindhoven in the Netherlands on 2 September to meet Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten to discuss their shared priorities for strengthening European sovereignty, against an international backdrop characterised by significant imbalances and profound economic and technological transformations. [Read more](#)

■ Democracy and Politics :



Andy Burnham's first speech in the House of Commons

On 1 September, British Prime Minister Andy Burnham delivered his first speech to the House of Commons. He began by praising his predecessor, Keir Starmer, for his work on immigration policy and support for Ukraine. He then set out the policy priorities he intends to pursue during his term in office, notably a return to growth through measures to ease the cost of living, a renewed role for the state in the economy, an ambitious industrial policy and a continuation of both economic and political devolution. [Read more](#)



The AfD comes out on ahead in the Saxony-Anhalt elections but fails to secure an absolute majority

Saxony-Anhalt elected a new state parliament on 6 September. The AfD, classified as "clearly far-right" by Saxony-Anhalt's Office for the Protection of the Constitution, secured 43.8 per cent of the vote – the party's best result ever and the highest result in a state election for a decade. The CDU suffered a sharp decline, securing 17.2 per cent of the vote, whilst the SPD achieved 9.3 per cent. The Greens secured 8.9 per cent and Die Linke 8.6 per cent. The BSW entered the parliament with 5.3 per cent of the vote. It therefore remains to be seen which parties will form a coalition. The AfD cannot form a government without another party: it secured 39 seats in the parliament, whilst a majority of 42 seats is required. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Failure of the referendum on EU membership in Iceland

On 29 August, Icelanders voted in a referendum on whether to resume negotiations on accession to the European Union. 52.8 per cent voted against. This result can be attributed in particular to concerns over the fishing industry: the fishing sector feared that a common fisheries policy with the European Union would lead to a loss of sovereignty in this sector, which plays a central role in the Icelandic economy. Whilst all negotiations with the EU have been on hold since 2013, this referendum followed US President Donald Trump's threat to annex neighbouring Greenland and the country's fear – as a nation without an army but a member of NATO – that it would be unable to defend itself. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



András Baka elected President of Hungary

On 11 August, the judge András Baka was elected President of the Republic by the Hungarian Members of Parliament. A former President of the Hungarian Supreme Court, he was removed from office in 2012 for his opposition to the judicial reform sought by former Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. His appointment by the new Prime Minister, Péter Magyar, follows the removal from office of President Tamás Sulyok, and forms part of a wider effort to curb the influence of Fidesz, Viktor Orbán's party, on the Hungarian political system. He took office on 19 August for a five-year term. [Read more](#)



King Haakon VIII of Norway is sworn in

The new King of Norway, Haakon VIII, was sworn in on 1 September before the Norwegian Parliament, the Storting, pledging to uphold the Constitution. King Haakon VIII succeeded his father, King Harald V, following the latter's death on 28 August at the age of 89, after a reign of thirty-five years. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)



Ülle Madise elected President of the Republic of Estonia

On 2 September, Ülle Madise was elected President of the Republic of Estonia by the members of the Riigikogu, with 71 votes out of the 78 cast – three more than the 68 votes required to achieve the two-thirds majority stipulated by the Constitution. Until now, she served as Chancellor of Justice, a post she had held since 2015, which involves, amongst other things, overseeing the constitutionality of legislation. She will take office on 12 October and succeed Alar Karis for a five-year term. [Read more](#) - [Other link](#)

■ Culture :



The Bayeux Tapestry on show at the British Museum

On 2 September, French President Emmanuel Macron, King Charles III and British Prime Minister Andy Burnham opened the exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry at the British Museum in London. Measuring 70 metres in length and depicting the conquest of England in 1066, this 11th-century tapestry is on loan from France to the United Kingdom until 11 July 2027. [Read more](#)



Perpignan Photojournalism Festival

Until 13 September, Perpignan is hosting the 38th edition of the Visa pour l'Image festival. Exhibitions, screenings, talks and personal accounts form the backbone of this international photojournalism festival. From Ukraine to Iran, and from climate change to the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, the programme invites visitors to explore current affairs, crises and conflicts from a new perspective. [Read more](#)



The Venice Mostra

The 83rd Venice International Film Festival runs until 12 September. Twenty-one feature films are in the running for the Golden Lion. However, the selection has sparked controversy due to the low representation of women: only two female directors have been selected. [Read more](#)



The Dresden Staatskapelle on tour across Europe

Until 13 September, the Dresden Staatskapelle, under the baton of its Italian conductor Daniele Gatti, is embarking on a European tour. The orchestra will be performing at several European festivals, including in Ljubljana, Verona, Merano, Künzelsau and Wrocław. [Read more](#)



Seville Flamenco Biennial

Until 3 October, Seville is hosting the Flamenco Biennial, an unmissable event for lovers of this artistic form that blends traditional Andalusian song and dance. The programme, which runs for a month, includes performances as well as classes, talks and discussions. [Read more](#)

■ Agenda :



10/09/26

ECB Council of Governors (Berlin)



13/09/26

General Elections (Sweden)



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