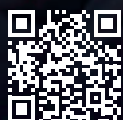


# EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE

**BRIGHTER  
BEGINNINGS**

**A Mental Health  
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June 2024

N°59

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# IN THIS ISSUE

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# Misinformation on vaccines prevents you from making healthy decisions



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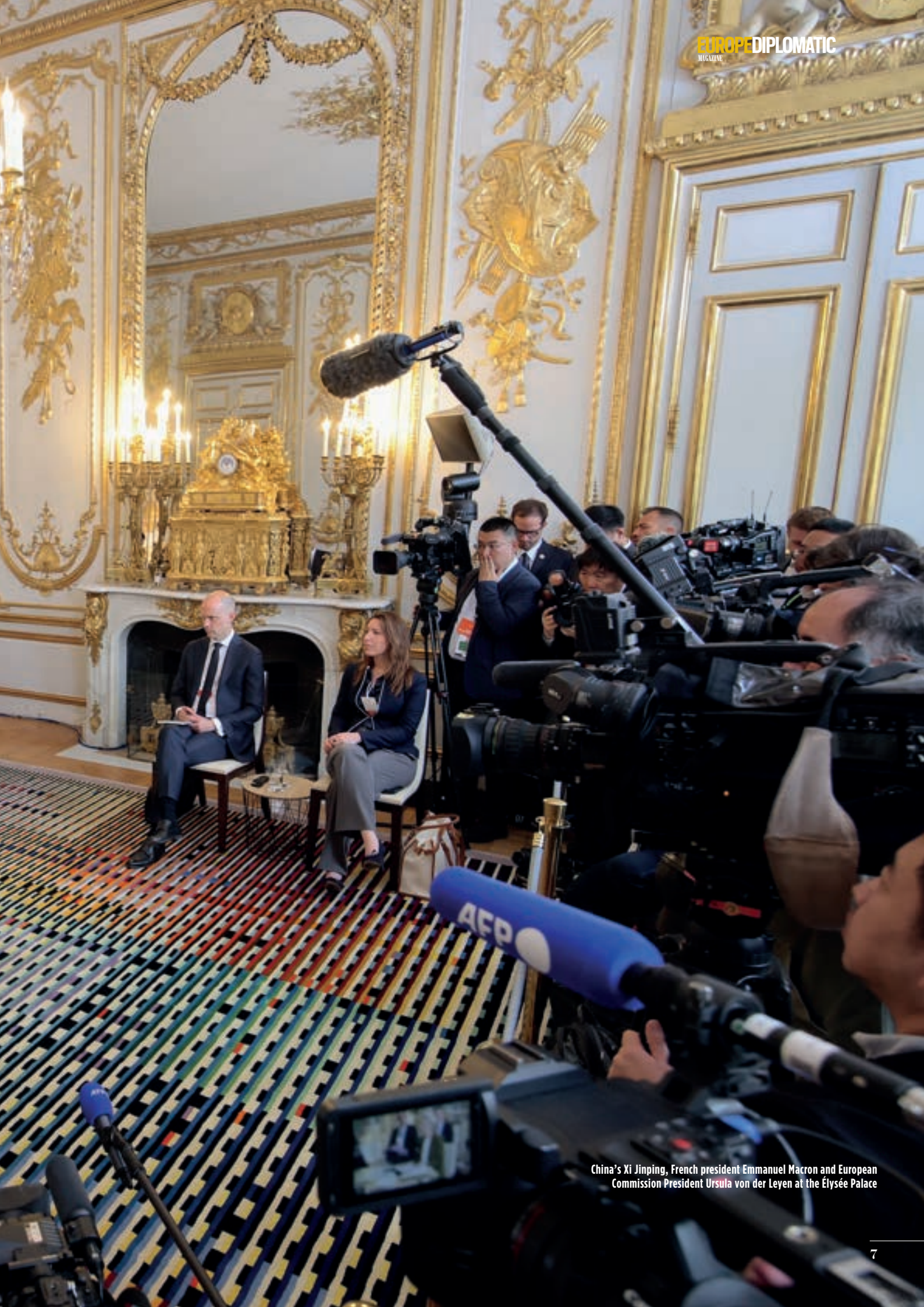
*Nikola Hendrickx*



# RED CARPETS AND STRAINED RELATIONS

**Xi Jinping's  
European quest**





China's Xi Jinping, French president Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the Élysée Palace



Amidst complex diplomatic circumstances, the Chinese president embarked on a grand European tour, adorned with fine French cognac, a coveted Tour de France jersey and the weight of an old grudge against NATO. It was a carefully orchestrated diplomatic endeavour that many saw as China's bold attempt to push the transatlantic alliance to its limits.

From the sidelines, Washington kept a watchful eye on the action, aware of the high stakes. Xi Jinping's five-day tour of Europe, beginning on 5 May in France, included visits to Serbia and Hungary, each characterised by different themes and objectives. Despite the obvious differences, however, there was a common thread running through these various encounters.

Viewed through a multi-layered prism, the Chinese head of state's visit to Europe was perceived as a delicate balancing act between a charm offensive and resolute exhibition of realpolitik in which Xi Jinping promoted China's vision of a multipolar world.

His first visit in five years, it was also aimed at expanding China's global influence and offering Europe an alternative to the US-led foreign policy that has prevailed on the continent for decades. This could be interpreted as an attempt to gradually distance Europe from the United States, as the rising power of China and the seemingly waning power of the United States appear to be on the path to increasing tensions.

This intricate manoeuvre covered a wide range of issues from trade to the conflict in Ukraine, potentially undermining the unity of the EU-US alliance on both fronts. Throughout his visit, Xi paid attention to established bastions of European influence such as France and the



Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte with Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan at the Tourmalet Pass in the Pyrenees mountain range

European Union, recognising their importance. However, he also placed great emphasis on forging stronger ties with autocratic allies on the continent's periphery. In this way, Xi is seeking to extend China's reach and influence beyond the traditional centres of power and strategically expand its network of alliances.

In the picturesque setting of the high peaks of the Pyrenees, the Chinese president stood in a jersey awarded to him by the prestigious Tour de France and shared a momentous occasion with President Emmanuel Macron. Together, they called for a global ceasefire and urged the world not to allow hostilities during the upcoming 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

In the heart of the Serbian capital, Xi's arrival coincided with the poignant commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ill-fated NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. This incisive event continues to fuel passionate anti-Western sentiment among Serbian nationalists and is a poignant reminder of historical grievances.

Meanwhile, in Hungary, Xi Jinping sought to consolidate China's economic presence in the European Union and heaped warm praise on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the unyielding prime minister who has stubbornly challenged European allies for over two years. This strategic move has further consolidated China's economic influence, despite the discord it could cause among European partners.

Observant analysts interpreted Xi's trip as a deliberate attempt to reaffirm China's determination to counter American influence wherever the opportunity presents itself. It served not only as a pointed reminder to close American allies, but also as an impetus to reflect on whether its own interests coincide or clash with those of Washington. With this strategic move, China wanted to encourage a re-evaluation of alliances and bring about a more nuanced assessment of the balance between national interests and loyalty to the United States.

It also shows how skillfully Beijing masters the balancing act between vigorously pursuing its economic interests and maintaining friendly diplomatic relations, possibly even strengthening its influence in certain regions of the continent.

The Chinese president's visit came at a time when Europe



French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Paris

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and the United States formed a largely united front in their support for Ukraine. Within this collective stance, however, there are faint signs of divisions, and China subtly showed signs of possible exploitation. It indicated a strategic inclination to capitalise on existing fault lines and use them to its advantage.

## Setting the stage in Paris

When Xi Jinping set foot on French soil on 5 May, he praised the strength of Sino-French relations, describing them as a model of peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between nations with different social systems. This tribute was in line with the “global strategic partnership” between China and France declared the previous year. By supporting the concept of European strategic autonomy, Beijing has actively promoted division in the transatlantic community and sought to create a climate in which divergent interests and priorities undermine the cohesion of Western alliances.

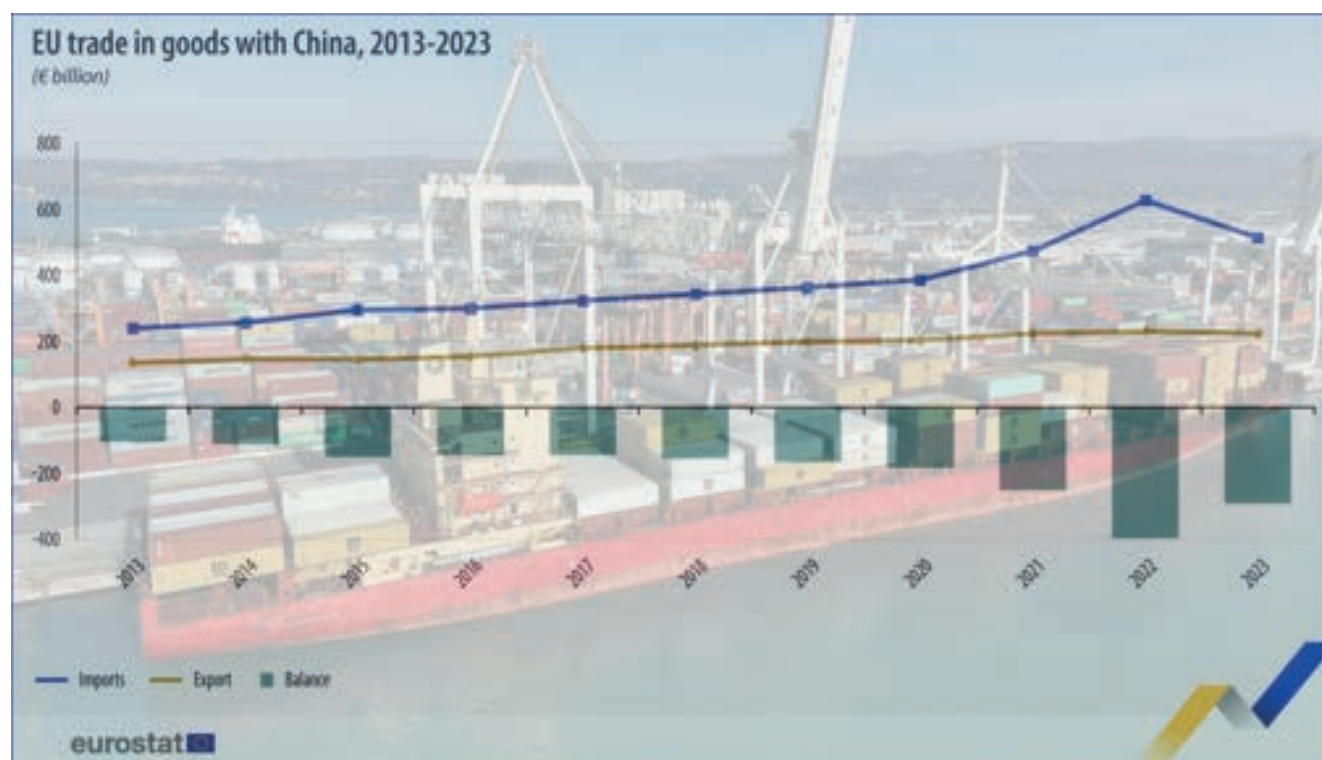
As for French President Emmanuel Macron, he reiterated a speech he had made at the Sorbonne last April when he had stressed the need to achieve “strategic autonomy” and to cultivate military resilience and transform Europe into a formidable global power. Macron also spoke in favour of eliminating “strategic dependencies” in key sectors, ranging from semiconductors to key raw materials.

This multi-layered approach aims to protect the EU’s sovereignty, reduce vulnerabilities and ensure the Union’s self-

sufficiency so that it remains strong and resilient in an ever-changing world.

Emmanuel Macron also spoke of trade disputes and diplomatic efforts on Ukraine. In a remarkable speech, he emphasised the importance of fair competition and stressed the need to implement “reciprocity strategies” in trade agreements, while highlighting the environmental benefits of the “Made in Europe” approach. Interestingly, Macron lined up China and the United States in terms of trade rules, claiming that both leading world powers have chosen to flout these regulations. He added, *“we want trade that benefits us but many others are starting to change the rules of the game, who are over-subsidising, from China to the United States”*.

On trade issues, the focus was on eliminating overcapacity in order to restore the balance in European trade with China. This includes reviewing subsidies, with France playing an important role in the EU Commission’s investigation into Chinese electric vehicles. In addition, ensuring fair market access for French companies and building robust supply chains are important objectives. What has become known in political circles as the French “cognac diplomacy” centres on a Chinese anti-dumping investigation into European brandy, particularly the famous French cognac. These specific trade issues highlight the subtleties and complexities that require attention and negotiation between France and China.





This bilateral visit is also important at European level, as shown by Macron's previous talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the participation of Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, in the trilateral meeting. However, expectations need to be tempered regarding possible concessions from Xi Jinping. Although he lifted the restrictions on beef and apple imports for Germany, he remained adamant on the issue of industrial overcapacity. Xi justified this stance by arguing that Chinese exports of green technologies have not only enriched the global supply chain and eased inflationary pressures, but have also made a significant contribution to combating climate change.

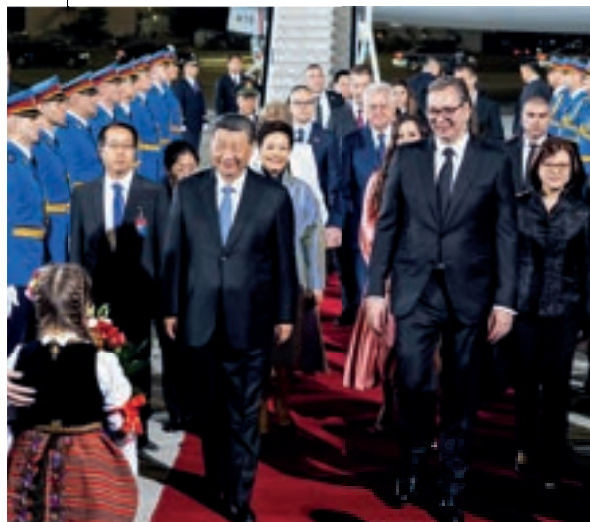
Since China was invited to join the World Trade Organization in 2001, trade relations between China and the EU have experienced a remarkable 900% growth, with the total trade volume reaching 927 billion dollars in 2022. In parallel, the EU's trade deficit with China has increased by 930%, rising from 46 billion in 2001 to 429 billion in 2022. Chinese foreign direct investment in the EU is mainly concentrated in three countries: France, Germany and Hungary. In particular, Chinese exports to France have increased significantly, from less than 4 billion in 2001 to 42 billion in 2022. At the same time, French exports to China have risen to 25 billion dollars. (Source <https://rhg.com › research › chinese-fdi-in-europe-2022-update>)

The second major topic on the agenda was securing Xi's support for a peace settlement in Ukraine, as Macron seeks co-operation with China "on global issues". The Sino-Russian friendship pact has added to European fears about China's strategic aspirations, its reluctance to denounce Russia's war in Ukraine and its economically supportive stance towards Russia.

Although Beijing reiterated its pledge not to sell arms to Moscow, Xi expressed his displeasure at the criticism and firmly rejected any efforts by the West to exploit the crisis to blame or discredit another nation or to provoke a new era of Cold War-like hostility.

During the Beijing summit in December 2023, Ursula von der Leyen took a firm stance by declaring that China's response to the "Russian war of aggression against Ukraine" was the crucial issue for the EU in its bilateral relations with China. She warned that the EU could impose sanctions on Chinese companies suspected of supplying dual-use goods to Russia. China's subsequent vote in favour of a UN resolution explicitly recognising the "aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine" – although it was a broader resolution advocating closer cooperation between the UN and the Council of Europe – marked a diplomatic turning point. Although largely symbolic, it made it clear that Beijing has adapted its approach to maintain positive relations with EU institutions.

Although Xi's efforts to persuade Macron to support Beijing in combating the rise of European protectionism were not successful, the Chinese leader did manage to create an opportunity for further diplomatic relations with Europe, which is preferable to diplomatic isolation. This development is significant in that Beijing is expected to continue to pursue co-operation with individual European states as part of a strategy of "divide and conquer", with the aim of preventing the formation of a broader coalition, encompassing both economic and military aspects, aimed at countering China's influence.



© CHINADAILY

President Xi Jinping arrives in Belgrade for a state visit to Serbia at the invitation of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, May 7, 2024

## Deepening economic inroads

President Xi Jinping carefully chose the three countries he visited, as each of them shares significant historical milestones with China. However, the main motivation behind Xi's selection was probably the opportunity to deepen China's influence and build more ties in each of these countries.

In contrast to his visit to France, his trips to Serbia, an EU accession candidate, and Hungary, an EU member state, emphasised his commitment to strengthening political relations and promoting investment in Eastern and Central Europe.

Both countries are an integral part of Xi's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, a colossal infrastructure project to connect Asia, Africa and Europe, and maintain close ties with Russia.



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Stefan Vladislavljev



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Prof Wang Ywei

Serbia offered Xi the most favourable opportunity to deepen relations, as economic ties between Serbia and China have been steadily expanding. Upon his arrival at the presidential palace, Xi was enthusiastically welcomed by a crowd waving Chinese flags and chanting “China!, China!, China!” During his visit to Belgrade, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić supported Xi’s vision of a “global community of shared future” and the two heads of state celebrated their “ironclad partnership” while announcing the implementation of a free trade agreement signed in 2023, which will come into force on 1 July. According to official Serbian figures, China is now Serbia’s second largest trading partner after Germany.

Xi’s visit coincided with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unintentional bombing of the Chinese embassy in Serbia by NATO forces. He visited the site of the attack in 1999, in which three Chinese journalists lost their lives. According to Stefan Vladislavljev, Programme Coordinator of the Belgrade Foundation for Political Excellence (BFPE) in Serbia, “the commemoration of the embassy bombing serves to create a shared sense of victimhood among the people of China and Serbia and effectively positions the West as the enemy”.

Meanwhile, Professor Wang Yiwei, Director

© ECFR.EU



Alicja Bachulska

of the Centre for EU Studies at Renmin University of China, believes that *“the commemorative events could emphasise the detrimental consequences of NATO enlargement. However, given the improved relations with Washington, the United States should not be at the centre of criticism”*.

In an editorial published the same day, Xi issued a strong warning, emphasising that the Chinese nation would always remember the bombing and would never tolerate a repeat of such a tragic event. These remarks were widely perceived as being directed against NATO and Western countries.

Alicja Bachulska, Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, emphasised the significance of the timing of the visit in this situation. She stated: *“Xi’s decision to visit Belgrade on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NATO bombing of the embassy was crucial. This move positioned NATO, and indirectly the United States, as destabilizing factors.”* Bachulska went on to explain that Xi’s main aim in visiting Hungary and Serbia was to send a “definitive message” that a strategic alignment with China can bring benefits, especially to nations disillusioned with Western-led models of co-operation and what they see as hypocrisy.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin presenting Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic with a state decoration of the Russian Federation – the Order of Alexander Nevsky – for his major personal contribution to the advancement of multilateral cooperation with Russia

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In recent years, economic relations and mutual exchange between China and Serbia have increased significantly. According to Vladislavljev, Serbia’s relations with Russia deteriorated after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which gave China the opportunity to close this gap. Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shows that between 2020 and 2023, China was Serbia’s second largest arms supplier after Russia; China has supplied Serbia with military equipment, including medium-range missiles and transport aircraft.

And in October 2023, China hosted the third summit on international cooperation as part of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative. Both the Serbian President and the Hungarian





© TWITTER/VIKTOR ORBAN  
Presidents Xi Jinping of China and Vladimir Putin of Russia in Beijing

Prime Minister attended that meeting in Beijing.

Although Serbia is officially seeking membership of the European Union, it is gradually moving away from this path as certain agreements with China do not comply with the accession requirements set by the EU. President Vučić maintains a friendly relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin and has condemned Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, he has not participated in the international sanctions against Moscow.

## I A Strategic Partnership

The Chinese president's trip culminated in Hungary, a country widely considered Beijing's closest ally within the European Union and where his country is seen as an important partner rather than a competitor. President Tamás Sulyok and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán extended a warm welcome and accorded him a ceremonial display of military honours, followed by his participation in an elegant gala



© BYD  
A Chinese BYD EVs assembly plant

dinner. Subsequently, he engaged in lengthy discussions held at the Hungarian prime minister's residence.

A declaration was issued on the creation of an "all-weather partnership", which is intended to usher in a new era of economic cooperation. The Chinese president expressed his willingness to embrace this moment as a fresh beginning and stated: *"We are willing to take this as a new starting point to push bilateral relations and pragmatic cooperation into a golden channel and move towards a higher level"*.

According to Hungarian officials, Xi has made firm commitments to increase investment in transport and energy infrastructure. These initiatives included the construction of a high-speed railway line connecting Budapest city centre to the airport and cooperation in the nuclear sector.

Xi also promised progress on a major \$2.1bn project to link Budapest with Belgrade by rail. The project is primarily funded by a loan from China and is in line with the objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative.

In addition, both parties have reached an agreement on the construction of battery plants for electric vehicles and a solar energy storage facility in Hungary. In December 2023, Chinese car manufacturer BYD announced its intention to open its first European electric vehicle factory in Hungary - a decision that could not only pose a major challenge for European car manufacturers but also give President Xi Jinping the opportunity to circumvent the tariffs imposed by the European Union on Chinese electric vehicles, which is another issue that is likely to cause displeasure in Brussels.

Budapest's positive attitude towards China differs significantly from that of the leadership of the European Union and numerous member states within the bloc. They are considering reducing their dependence on a "systemic rival" and "strategic competitor". This view has increasingly strained Beijing's trade and investment relations with the 27-member bloc.

The right-wing Hungarian prime minister, whose country was the first European country to participate in China's "Belt and Road" initiative, has actively campaigned for closer relations with Beijing. At a press conference on 9 May, Viktor Orbán emphasised that China accounted for three quarters of the investments made in Hungary in 2023.

In Beijing's view, Hungary is an important Chinese base within the EU. This is reflected in the hope expressed by Xi that Budapest, which will take over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union from July, will contribute to the "stable and healthy development of relations between China and the EU".

In this context, the significance of Hungary in hindering Brussels' initiatives and efforts to



President of China Xi Jinping and President of Russia Vladimir Putin in Beijing

mitigate the risks related to China should not be overlooked; Budapest plays a role in safeguarding China's proxy veto power against EU measures that run counter to Beijing's interests, such as criticism of human rights, sanctions or technology restrictions.

## I The Xi Jinping factor

As the world's attention shifts to the ever-changing landscape of global politics, two leaders stand out among the rest. On 16 May, the Russian president arrived in Beijing for two days of talks with his Chinese counterpart and 'dear friend Xi Jinping'. The aim of the visit was to secure the diplomatic and economic support of a key ally as Russia's conflict in Ukraine continues and its dependence on China continues to grow.

Although both are known for their authoritarian grip on power, their approaches to international relations and global influence couldn't be more different. But surprisingly, Putin is increasingly keen to emulate Xi's success in consolidating China's position as a world power. Putin's Russia has long been seen as a rival to the Western world, with a foreign policy characterised by aggression and a penchant for disrupting the status quo.

In contrast, Xi's China has quietly risen to become a dominant player on the world stage, using its economic power and strategic partnerships to expand its influence.

While Putin's Russia has often been at odds with the European Union and the United States, China under Xi has managed to skilfully navigate these relationships, securing key trade deals and investments that have cemented its position as a major player.

So what is driving Putin's desire to emulate Xi's success? The answer lies in the Russian president's own ambitions to be recognised worldwide. Despite his country's considerable military and energy resources, Putin is aware that Russia's economy and global influence pale in comparison to China. Xi's ability to demonstrate power and influence through strategic partnerships, infrastructure projects and economic

diplomacy has created a sense of envy in Putin's inner circle.

One important area where Putin is trying to emulate Xi is in the field of international trade agreements. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was a masterclass in economic diplomacy, securing billions of dollars in investment and fostering partnerships with countries around the world. Putin, meanwhile, has endeavoured to replicate this success, and his own Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has failed in its attempts to create a rival economic bloc.

Another area where Putin is trying to follow Xi's example is strategic partnerships. China's ability to forge close relationships with countries such as Hungary, Pakistan and Singapore has given it a significant advantage in terms of global influence. Putin, on the other hand, has often relied on more coercive means to achieve his goals, alienating potential partners and undermining Russia's credibility on the world stage.

Ultimately, Putin's quest to emulate Xi's stature faces significant obstacles. Russia's economy and military might pale in comparison to China's, limiting Putin's ability to project power, and while Xi presides over a rapidly rising superpower, Putin commands a faltering, sanctions-battered regime. The Russian leader may find that the path to Xi-like dominance is far steeper than he had hoped.

One thing is certain, however: the world will be watching in nervous anticipation as these two leaders continue to shape the global landscape in their own particular ways.

*Hossein Sadre*

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Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Monument to Soviet Red Army Soldiers in Harbin, China



# NEWS IN BRIEF



A Sapper from the Royal Engineers removing a part from the cold metal 3D printer

## WORLD-LEADING 3D PRINTER USED BY BRITISH ARMY IN THE FIELD FOR FIRST TIME

A cutting-edge 3D printer is being used by the British Army for the first time in the field on the largest NATO deployment in Europe in a generation.

9 Theatre Support Battalion, Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, are using the technology to make spare parts for vehicles as well as print vital modifications to battle-winning equipment on NATO exercise Steadfast Defender - the largest NATO deployment in Europe in a generation.

The Army's use of both metal and plastic mobile printers in the field, which can be easily transported between locations, is the first time in the world the technology has been used by any military in direct support of a large-scale NATO Exercise.

With the ability to produce metal parts from the back of a truck in less than an hour, 3D cold metal printing can eliminate the need for parts to be shipped out for repair, saving on transport costs and time.

The metal printed technology works by using computer-aided design to digitally produce a component. A fine metal powder, such as copper, aluminium, or steel, is then fired through a nozzle at three times the speed of sound as a mechanical arm shapes the component, building the object one layer at a time. Once constructed, the component is then subjected to post-processing such as heat treating, milling, and finishing.

The printer is currently being used to maintain older vehicles such as the Land Rover by printing harder-to-obtain spare parts. Ambitions for the future include having catalogues of components for new fleets of vehicles such as

BOXER and AJAX, so parts can be printed on demand in the field.

Lieutenant Colonel John Anthistle, Commanding Officer of 9 Theatre Support Battalion, Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers yesterday said:

"This equipment gives the Army the flexibility it needs to make spares, components, and modifications to our equipment in the field, at point and time of need. Not only does it save us weeks and sometimes months of having to wait for replacement parts, it also enables us to print components which aren't available anymore; conduct battle damage repair, and modify equipment to match changing threats.

If you have a broken-down vehicle which needs to be back in the field the next day because it's a vital piece of equipment, that's where this technology comes in. It can reduce logistical issues, save money and critically, speed up getting battle-winning equipment back into the fight."

## MAJESTIC CHATEAU D'ARMAINVILLIERS HITS THE MARKET: LISTED BY IGNACE MEUWISSEN FOR €425 MILLION



Once home to the Rothschilds and King Hassan II. Ideally situated in the southwest of Paris, this property boasts 2,500 square meters of living space and is surrounded by 1,000 hectares of picturesque landscape.

Ignace Meuwissen, who confidentially represents buyers and sellers of off-market estates, mainly Eastern European, Central & East Asian clients, is managing the sale.

The estate consists of 36 buildings with services such as a hair salon, hammam, dental facility, staff accommodation, 50 horse stables, and a parking lot.

## TOBACCO SMUGGLING: OVER 600 MILLION ILLICIT CIGARETTES SEIZED THANKS TO OLAF IN 2023



During 2023, international operations involving the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) led to the seizure of 616 million illicit cigarettes, 140 tonnes of raw tobacco and 6 tonnes of water pipe tobacco. OLAF investigators took part in multiple operations with customs and law enforcement authorities worldwide to counter tobacco smuggling, preventing losses of over 150 million euro to the EU and national budgets.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *“These seizures averted over 150 million euro of damage to public revenue, shielding taxpayers from bearing the burden. Crucially, OLAF’s work against tobacco smuggling is also a blow to the criminal networks behind it. Their business model remains diverse: production inside and outside the EU, different means of transportation, various kinds of products. OLAF’s investigators cooperate closely with national authorities in the EU and in third countries alike. We stay ahead of evolving trends in illicit tobacco and support national authorities in their fight on the ground. Intelligence provided by OLAF investigators often results in raids, seizures and criminal networks dismantled.”*

331.1 million illicit cigarettes – from the overall total of 616 million – were intercepted at EU borders, before they could be smuggled into the European Union. Proving again that tobacco smuggling is a global issue, some of the countries involved were Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, Montenegro and Indonesia.

In addition, OLAF’s tip offs led to the confiscation of 144.2 million cigarettes outside of the European Union.

Cigarettes seized thanks to OLAF from illicit production inside the EU amounted to 140.6 million units. These seizures contribute to fighting an evolving pattern in the illicit production of cigarettes inside the EU where traffickers and illicit producers have been fragmenting their production lines, with smaller reserves of raw tobacco or finished cigarettes. Their aim is to be able to move their production tools and goods faster, and to try to limit losses caused by law enforcement busts and raids.

Tobacco smugglers often operate as part of international trafficking networks, changing their business models swiftly to adapt to ongoing developments. Together with its partners, OLAF remains consistent in its efforts to analyse new trends and patterns.

### Background

The fight against tobacco smuggling is a central part of OLAF’s investigative activities. OLAF identifies and tracks lorries and/or containers loaded with cigarettes misdeclared as other goods at EU borders. OLAF gathers intelligence from a range of sources, including the industry, and exchanges its information in real time with EU Member States and third countries. If there is clear evidence that shipments are destined for the EU contraband market or that there are illicit production activities inside the EU, national authorities are ready and able to step in and stop them.

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE ADOPTS FIRST INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Council of Europe has adopted the **first-ever international legally binding treaty aimed at ensuring the respect of human rights, the rule of law and democracy legal standards in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems**. The treaty, which is also open to non-European countries, sets out a legal framework that covers the entire lifecycle of AI systems and addresses the risks they may pose, while promoting responsible innovation. The convention adopts a risk-based approach to the design, development, use, and decommissioning of AI systems, which requires carefully considering any potential negative consequences of using AI systems.

The Council of Europe Framework Convention on artificial intelligence and human rights, democracy, and the rule of law was adopted in Strasbourg during the annual ministerial meeting of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, which brings together the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the 46 Council of Europe member states.



AI generated image



The convention is the outcome of two years' work by an intergovernmental body, the Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), which brought together to draft the treaty the 46 Council of Europe member states, the European Union and 11 non-member states (Argentina, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, the Holy See, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Peru, the United States of America, and Uruguay), as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society and academia, who participated as observers.

The treaty covers the use of AI systems in the public sector – including companies acting on its behalf – and in the private sector. The convention offers parties two ways of complying with its principles and obligations when regulating the private sector: parties may opt to be directly obliged by the relevant convention provisions or, as an alternative, take other measures to comply with the treaty's provisions while fully respecting their international obligations regarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This approach is necessary because of the differences in legal systems around the world.

The convention establishes transparency and oversight requirements tailored to specific contexts and risks, including identifying content generated by AI systems. Parties will have to adopt measures to identify, assess, prevent, and mitigate possible risks and assess the need for a moratorium, a ban or other appropriate measures concerning uses of AI systems where their risks may be incompatible with human rights standards.

They will also have to ensure accountability and responsibility for adverse impacts and that AI systems respect equality, including gender equality, the prohibition of discrimination, and privacy rights. Moreover, parties to the treaty will have to ensure the availability of legal remedies for victims of human rights violations related to the use of AI systems and procedural safeguards, including notifying any persons interacting with AI systems that they are interacting with such systems.

As regards the risks for democracy, the treaty requires parties to adopt measures to ensure that AI systems are not used to undermine democratic institutions and processes, including the principle of separation of powers, respect for judicial independence and access to justice.

Parties to the convention will not be required to apply the treaty's provisions to activities related to the protection of national security interests but will be obliged to ensure that these activities respect international law and democratic institutions and processes. The convention will not apply to national defence matters nor to research and development activities, except when the testing of AI systems may have the potential to interfere with human rights, democracy or the rule of law.

In order to ensure its effective implementation, the convention establishes a follow-up mechanism in the form of a Conference of the Parties.

Finally, the convention requires that each party establishes an independent oversight mechanism to oversee compliance with the convention, and raises awareness, stimulates an informed public debate, and carries out multistakeholder consultations on how AI technology should be used. The framework convention will be opened for signature in Vilnius (Lithuania) on 5 September on the occasion of a conference of Ministers of Justice.

## A NEW DANISH MILITARY AID PACKAGE ENSURES AIR DEFENSE AND ARTILLERY FOR UKRAINE



Lockheed Martin F-16AM/BM Fighting Falcon of the Danish Air Force

The Danish Ministry of Defence has announced a new defence aid package to Ukraine valued at EUR 750 million. Of this, EUR 320 million kroner is allocated to air defense. A portion of the funds will also go towards the donation of the future Ukrainian F-16 capacity.

Additional contributions to the upcoming F-16 donation, air defense, maintenance of artillery pieces, and financial contributions for the donation of further artillery pieces, shells, and anti-tank mines are part of the capacities that a new package for Ukraine will help finance.

“With today's package, we are meeting Ukraine's urgent need for more air defense, artillery, and ammunition. As part of the package, the government is also reserving further funds for investments directly in the Ukrainian defense industry. It makes sense to produce the weapons where they are used and by those who use them. It is also about future-proofing Ukraine's defense capability. Ukraine has the skills but lacks the funding. Hopefully, more countries can be inspired to follow this model,” says Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen.

Additionally, funds are allocated for financing a number of NATO CAP projects. The government also plans to reserve further funds for investments in the Ukrainian defense industry.

“The situation in Ukraine is very serious. There is no doubt that Ukrainians need continued and massive support from allies. With this package, we are sending an unequivocal signal to both Ukraine and the world. We are providing donations now, and we are ready to invest massively and long-term in the Ukrainian defense industry. Their fight for freedom is also our fight,” says Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen.

The Ukraine Fund, established by the Danish government, has allocated a total of EUR 8.7 billion for military support to Ukraine for the period 2023-2028. This includes a recent increase of EUR 590 million for 2024, agreed upon in April 2024. To date, decisions have been made to provide military support worth EUR 5.7 billion under the Ukraine Fund during this period.

## IT TAKES TOO LONG TO RECOVER MISSPENT EU MONEY

- €14 billion of irregular EU expenditure reported from 2014 to 2022
- Money not recovered may incentivise further lax spending, and has reputational risks
- Auditors recommend better reporting and tighter recovery times

The EU auditors found that, while the European Commission ensures that irregular expenditure is recorded accurately and promptly, getting this money back often takes too long. For jointly managed agricultural funds where member states have primary responsibility, recovery rates are generally low, but with significant differences between EU countries. From 2014-2022, €14 billion of such irregular EU expenditure (misspent funds) was reported in all areas. Recovering it is a key element of the European Union's financial integrity and internal control system.

'Recovering' EU funds means requesting the refund of some or all of the amounts paid to an implementing organisation or beneficiary that was subsequently deemed not to have adhered to EU funding requirements. However, once that money has been paid out, it is often a lengthy process to get it back, if at all. The EU auditors noted that it typically takes 14-23 months from the end of the funded activities until a repayment request is even issued, and a further 3-5 months before the funds are retrieved, with 1-8% of them simply being waived.

'No effort should be spared to recover misspent EU money without delay', said Jorg Kristijan Petrovic, the ECA Member responsible for the audit. 'The EU owes this to taxpayers, and any failure to recover money would be detrimental to EU citizens' trust'.

According to the European Court of Auditor's 2022 Annual Report, between 2021 and 2022 the rate of misspending rose from 3% to 4.2% of the budget, making the effective recovery of funds an increasingly pressing issue. However, since just 20% of the budget is directly managed by the European Commission, eliminating error and recovering those funds can be difficult.

The auditors found that the main issues with recovering funds under direct and indirect management lie in the long delay between a financial irregularity being identified and a recovery order being issued. They also found that there is incomplete information in external actions about the impact of some irregular expenditure.

To improve the timeliness of recoveries in the area of



external actions, the auditors recommended reducing not only the time it takes to establish irregular expenditure, but also the time it takes to then launch recovery proceedings. To do so, they suggested improving the planning of audit work and examining the financial impact of systematic irregular expenditure. They also suggested that incentives that were present in the previous funding cycle should be reintroduced in order for member states to recover funds in agriculture. In the previous cycle, member states had to repay half of the funds that they had not recovered within 4-8 years to the EU budget.

The auditors further recommended that the Commission should provide accurate and complete annual data on what spending had been found to be irregular, and what measures were taken to correct it, so that the process can be refined in the future.

## INNOVATIVE AVIATION LIQUID HYDROGEN PROJECT LAUNCHED



An innovative aviation hydrogen handling and refuelling project, led by Airbus and supported by academic partners, airport operators and leading hydrogen-industry companies, has been launched to demonstrate small-scale liquid hydrogen aircraft ground operations at three European airports.

The urge to decarbonise our economy and to develop Europe's energy independence is leading to a major trend of hydrogen for mobility and stationary applications. Hydrogen will also be a solution to decarbonise short- and medium-haul aviation and will be crucial for the advancement of low-carbon aviation operations.

"The GOLIAT (Ground Operations of LIquid hydrogen AircraftT) project\* will receive funding of €10.8 million from the EU's Horizon Europe Framework Programme via CINEA, the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency. The project duration is four years and it will demonstrate how high-flow liquid hydrogen (LH2) handling and refuelling technologies can be developed and used safely and reliably for airport operations.

The GOLIAT consortium consists of 10 partners from eight countries: Airbus (France, Germany, UK), Chart Industries (Czech Republic, Italy), TU Delft (Netherlands), Leibniz University Hannover (Germany), Royal Schiphol Group (Netherlands), Rotterdam The Hague Airport



(Netherlands), Vinci Airports (France, Portugal), Stuttgart Airport (Germany), H2FLY (Germany), and Budapest Airport (Hungary).

The group will support the aviation industry's adoption of LH2 transportation and energy storage solutions by:

- Developing and demonstrating LH2 refuelling technologies scaled-up for future large commercial aircraft;
- Demonstrating small-scale LH2 aircraft ground operations at airports;
- Developing the standardisation and certification framework for future LH2 operations;
- Assessing the sizing and economics of the hydrogen value chains for airports.

As a clean and efficient fuel, LH2 offers a promising solution for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions associated with airport operations and their dependence on fossil fuels. LH2's high energy density enables long-range travel for aircraft, yet there are many steps to the widespread deployment of hydrogen at airports, including the need to better understand the operational, regulatory, economic and safety impacts, as well as the capacity and performance of technologies.

#### The benefits of hydrogen in aviation

Hydrogen is a high-potential technology with a specific energy-per-unit mass that is three times higher than traditional jet fuel. If generated from renewable energy through electrolysis, hydrogen emits no CO2 emissions, thereby enabling renewable energy to potentially power large aircraft over long distances without the undesirable by-product of CO2 emissions.

Because hydrogen has a lower volumetric energy density, the visual appearance of future aircraft will likely change to better accommodate hydrogen storage solutions that will be bulkier than existing jet fuel storage tanks.

Hydrogen has been safely used in the aerospace and automobile industries for decades. The aviation industry's challenge is to adapt this decarbonised energy carrier to commercial aviation's needs.

#### There are two primary uses for hydrogen:

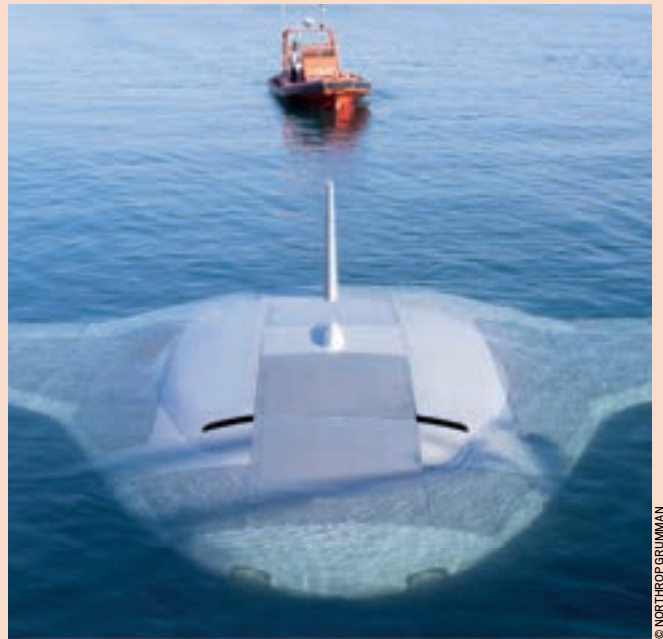
**Hydrogen propulsion:** Hydrogen can be combusted through modified gas-turbine engines or converted into electrical power that complements the gas turbine via fuel cells. The combination of both creates a highly efficient hybrid-electric propulsion chain powered entirely by hydrogen.

**Synthetic fuels:** Hydrogen can be used to create e-fuels, which are generated exclusively through renewable energy.

## MANTA RAY UUV PROTOTYPE COMPLETES IN-WATER TESTING

A Manta Ray is a social creature that frequents the tropical waters of the Great Barrier Reef. Their curiosity and playful nature make the Manta Ray a favorite among scuba divers. Inspired by the graceful glide of these magnificent sea creatures, Northrop Grumman is creating a new class of UUV for undersea missions.

The Manta Ray prototype uncrewed underwater vehicle (UUV) completed full-scale, in-water testing off the coast of Southern California. Testing demonstrated at-sea hydrodynamic performance, including submerged



Manta Ray vehicle on the surface between test dives off the coast of Southern California

© NORTHROP GRUMMAN

operations using all the vehicle's modes of propulsion and steering: buoyancy, propellers, and control surfaces.

"Our successful, full-scale Manta Ray testing validates the vehicle's readiness to advance toward real-world operations after being rapidly assembled in the field from modular subsections," said Dr. Kyle Woerner, DARPA program manager for Manta Ray. "The combination of cross-country modular transportation, in-field assembly, and subsequent deployment demonstrates a first-of-kind capability for an extra-large Unmanned underwater vehicle."

Northrop Grumman shipped the Manta Ray prototype in subsections from the build location in Maryland to its test location in California. The demonstrated ease of shipping and assembly supports the possibility of rapid deployment throughout the world without crowding valuable pier space at naval facilities.

"Shipping the vehicle directly to its intended area of operation conserves energy that the vehicle would otherwise expend during transit," said Woerner. "Once deployed, the vehicle uses efficient, buoyancy-driven gliding to move through the water. The craft is designed with several payload bays of multiple sizes and types to enable a wide variety of naval mission sets."

Manta Ray aims to develop and demonstrate a new class of long-duration, long-range, payload-capable UUVs ready for persistent operations in dynamic maritime environments. The US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is engaging with the U.S. Navy on the next steps for testing and transition of this technology.

Manta Ray is:

- Payload-capable to support a variety of missions
- Autonomous, without the need for on-site human logistics
- Energy-saving, with the ability to anchor to the seafloor and hibernate in a low-power state

Modular, for easy shipment in five standard shipping containers to support expeditionary deployment and in-field assembly world-wide

## THE EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY AND NASA UNITE TO LAND EUROPE'S ROVER ON MARS



NASA's Associate Administrator for the Science Mission Directorate Nicky Fox and ESA's Director of Human and Robotic Exploration Daniel Neuenschwander signing an agreement on the Rosalind Franklin mission at ESA's headquarters in Paris

NASA and ESA (European Space Agency) announced they signed an agreement to expand NASA's work on the ExoMars Rosalind Franklin rover, an ESA-led mission launching in 2028 that will search for signs of ancient life on the Red Planet.

With this memorandum of understanding, the NASA Launch Services Program will procure a U.S. commercial launch provider for the Rosalind Franklin rover. The agency will also provide heater units and elements of the propulsion system needed to land on Mars. A new instrument on the rover will be the first drill to a depth of up to 6.5 feet (2 meters) deep below the surface to collect ice samples that have been protected from surface radiation and extreme temperatures.

"The Rosalind Franklin rover's unique drilling capabilities and onboard samples laboratory have outstanding scientific value for humanity's search for evidence of past life on Mars," said Nicola Fox, associate administrator, Science Mission Directorate at NASA Headquarters in Washington. "NASA supports the Rosalind Franklin mission to continue the strong partnership between the United States and Europe to explore the unknown in our solar system and beyond."

Through an existing, separate partnership with the German Aerospace Center (DLR) and the French space agency CNES (Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales), NASA is contributing key components to the Rosalind Franklin rover's primary science instrument, the Mars Organic Molecule Analyzer, that will search for the building blocks of life in the soil samples.

NASA has a longstanding partnership with the Department of Energy to use radioisotope power sources on the agency's space missions and will be partnering again with the Energy Department for the use of lightweight radioisotope heater units for the rover.

The Rosalind Franklin rover mission complements the Mars Sample Return multi-mission campaign led by both agencies.

## RARE ROLEX FETCHES RECORD \$3.5 MILLION AT MONACO AUCTION

A rare Rolex with a split-second chronograph sold for €3.3 million at an auction in Monaco, a record price for the model. The Rolex 4113, produced in 1942 and one of just 12 ever made and nine known to exist, was sold at the Monaco Legend Group auction. The sale beats the model's previous record of € 2.4 million which was paid in 2016 at a Phillips auction in Geneva.

The Rolex 4113 is no stranger to breaking auction records. In 2011, it became the first Rolex ever to cross the million-dollar mark. Rolex only made 12 of these watches in the 1940s, and they were never sold publicly. These pieces were originally designed for aviation but, according to Monaco Legend Group, race car drivers adopted them as well. Instead of selling them, Rolex gave them to members of various racing teams, making them even more exclusive and attractive eight decades later. Another feather in this model's cap is that it's the only split-seconds chronograph Rolex ever made. (A split-seconds chrono, or rattrapante, is a feature that allows the wearer to time intervals, like a lap function on a stopwatch).



## AI-ASSISTED OPTRONICS: AN UNPRECEDENTED EUROPEAN PROJECT TO INCREASE COMBAT PERCEPTION CAPABILITIES

- The European Commission signed the Grant Agreement for the launch of the STORE (Shared daTabase for Optronics image Recognition and Evaluation) collaborative research project, coordinated by Thales and funded by the EDF (European Defence Fund).
- Bringing together a consortium of 20 partners (manufacturers, SMEs and academics) from 8 EU





© THALES

Member States and Norway, this project aims to build a shared image database secured by most advanced technology and to develop and evaluate artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms dedicated to data analysis of ground platform imaging systems.

- This project will contribute to the automatic management and tactical analysis of information in land combat situations, thanks to technological innovation in deep learning of optronic data.

**To address a complex and constantly changing threat environment, the European Defence Fund is supporting the European Union's STORE collaborative project to accelerate the introduction of AI and associated shared database in the imaging systems for land forces.**

As threats become increasingly sophisticated (hypersonic missiles, combat drones, drone swarms, etc), optronic sensors are more strategically important than ever and need to deliver the highest levels of performance in the field.

STORE will lay the foundations for Europe's first shared, scalable database of defence imagery and explore different algorithm solutions for threats detection. In particular, it will address issues of data governance and the cost-effective development of sovereign technologies. The STORE project, by combining optronic sensors with AI-based analysis techniques, will set-up future functionalities related to augment war fighters' perception of the battlefield, enhancing their tactical situational awareness, shortening the decision loop to accelerate reaction times and, consequently, improve survivability.

*"We are proud that the EDF is financing this project which entrusts Thales as project lead and coordinator of this network of partners, European industrial and technological jewels. We will leverage all of our experience and expertise in optronics and artificial intelligence to offer high perception capacities, providing decisive tactic superiority on battlefields."* Benoît Plantier, Vice-president of Optronics and Missile Electronics activity, Thales.

## UKRAINE PLAN: COUNCIL GREENLIGHTS REGULAR PAYMENTS UNDER THE UKRAINE FACILITY

The Council has adopted an implementing decision giving a positive assessment to the 'Ukraine Plan', which sets out the intentions of the government of Ukraine regarding the recovery, reconstruction and modernisation of the country, and the reforms it plans to undertake as part of its EU accession process in the next four years.

The Council considered in particular that thanks to this plan, Ukraine fulfils the precondition for support under the Ukraine Facility (up to €50 billion), and that now regular payments can start to flow.

"An important step has been made to deliver much-needed, regular and predictable financial support to Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction, and modernisation over the next four years. The EU has once more confirmed its commitment to Ukraine's stability and growth" says Vincent van Peteghem, Belgian Minister of Finance and President of the Council

Payments to Ukraine will be disbursed by the EU subject to the implementation of the agreed reform and investments in the form of the qualitative and quantitative steps set out in the annex of the Council implementing decision. The reforms and investments foreseen have a significant potential to enhance growth, sustain macroeconomic stability, improve the fiscal situation and to support Ukraine's further integration with EU.

The decision provides further details on the arrangements and timetable for its implementation, including the envisaged timetable for disbursement of the support and its payment schedule. The final qualitative and quantitative steps are to be completed by the end of 2027.

In addition, financial support under the 'Ukraine Plan' will be made available under the precondition that Ukraine continues to uphold and respect effective democratic



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Vincent van Peteghem, Belgian Minister of Finance and President of the Council

## European Commission

endorses

## Ukraine Plan

Pillar 1 of the €50 billion  
Ukraine Facility

mechanisms, including a multi-party parliamentary system and the rule of law, and to guarantee respect for human rights. Financial support is also dependent on strengthening of the rule of law, upholding the independence of the judiciary, strengthening the public administration reform, and fighting corruption - in particular high-level corruption - and money laundering.

The decision will enable the Commission to disburse up to €1.89 billion in pre-financing until regular disbursements tied to the implementation of reform and investment indicators under the Ukraine Plan will start.

### Background

The Ukraine Facility, which entered into force on 1 March 2024, foresees up to €50 billion of stable financing, in grants and loans, to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction, and modernisation for the period 2024 to 2027. Of this, up to €32 billion of the Ukraine Facility is indicatively earmarked to support reforms and investments set out in the 'Ukraine Plan', whereby disbursements will be conditioned to the delivery of identified indicators. Since its entry into force, the Ukraine Facility already disbursed €6 billion by way of bridge financing, after fulfilment of agreed policy conditions.

## PARLIAMENT APPROVES FIRST EVER EU RULES ON COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- Actions to prevent rape and increase understanding of consent
- Forced marriage and female genital mutilation considered crimes
- Disclosing private information online without consent is prohibited, as is "cyber-flashing"
- Specialised assistance for victims

The new rules aim to prevent gender-based violence and protect its victims, especially women and victims of domestic violence.

The EU Parliament has adopted with 522 in favour, 27 against, and 72 abstentions, the first ever EU rules on combating violence against women and domestic violence. The directive calls for stronger laws against cyberviolence, better assistance for victims, and steps to prevent rape.

The new rules prohibit female genital mutilation and forced marriage and outline particular guidelines for offenses committed online, such as the disclosure of private information and cyberflashing.

The new legislation will include a longer list of aggravating circumstances for offenses that carry more severe penalties,

such as crimes against public figures, journalists, or human rights defenders. The list also includes the intention to punish victims based on their gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, religion, social origin, or political beliefs, and the desire to maintain or restore "honour."

Sexual and reproductive health services to be made available

The safety and well-being of victims should be prioritised, including through access to sheltered accommodation. Healthcare should be made accessible, including sexual and reproductive health services. Member states authorities will have enhanced reporting and evidence gathering obligations, and will have to raise public awareness of the fact that non-consensual sex is considered a criminal offence.

Due to Parliament's insistence, the Commission will report every five years on whether the rules should be revised.

The co-rapporteur from the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee, Frances Fitzgerald (EPP, IE), said: "Today Parliament has taken the first steps to make Europe the first continent in the world to end violence against women. This is a wide-ranging piece of legislation that will prevent violence against women, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators, thereby ensuring a holistic approach to tackling these heinous crimes. There can be no equality without eradication of violence against women; we must ensure that there can be no impunity for those who commit such crimes."

The co-rapporteur from the Civil Liberties Committee, Evin Incir (S&D, SV), said: "This ground-breaking directive embodies our unwavering commitment to strengthening the rights of women and saving lives. As we march forward, let us remember this moment as a first historic step in strengthening women's rights and illuminating the path towards a future where every woman can live free from fear and oppression. This is a victory for justice and equality across the European Union."

### Next steps

The new rules will come into force twenty days after their publication in the EU Official Journal. Member states have three years to implement the provisions.







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Georgians protesting against the  
“foreign agents” bill in front  
of the Georgian Parliament

# PUPPET SHOW

**How the Kremlin's  
puppets are seizing back  
countries that seemed  
to be heading out of  
Russia's grasp**





**The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has also strongly condemned the violence: "I strongly condemn the violence against protesters in Georgia. Georgia is an EU candidate country, I call on its authorities to ensure the right to peaceful assembly. Use of force to suppress it is unacceptable"**

It was the late, great, Ray Charles who sang: "Just an old sweet song

Keeps Georgia on my mind." Set to music or not, it seems that Georgia (the country, of course, not the American state) has been very much on the minds of those who would prefer to have the Kremlin in charge of things, as well as those who would prefer otherwise. And, despite protests and demonstrations, there are plenty of them. An enormous demonstration was staged in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, against the ruling Georgian Dream party's plans to introduce a bill on "foreign agents" (which seems to mean anybody who doesn't support the Kremlin and may have some ability to persuade others). It is supposed to restrict "foreign influence" in Georgian affairs. Critics say the proposed new legislation resembles laws used by Russia to silence dissent. The EU has warned that the measures, if adopted, would seriously undermine Georgia's chances of succeeding in its application for membership.

A protest march against the proposed legislation stretched for a kilometre through the capital, Tbilisi, but there has been no sign that the government is taking much notice. Demonstrators have, however, been detained by police, which suggests that the similarity to the way things are done in Russia is very real. That includes a fair voting system.

For instance, in a vote for new members of a top judicial body, five opposition politicians switched to support Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party to ensure the election of pro-government candidates. By an odd coincidence, one of those who voted that way received a favourable ruling to end a long-running land dispute over two sports related companies, giving the governing party complete control of the judiciary. The MP involved told journalists that the timing had been "pure coincidence". That often seems to be the case when Russian interests are involved. Indeed, I suspect that Moscow sees nothing wrong with such clearly dishonest fiddling, nor with the lies that follow.

Much the same applies in Slovakia, which has just elected Peter Pellegrini, a pro-Russia candidate, as its president. Just in case anyone feared that it would mean a lot of Russian interference in Slovakia's affairs, he offered this reassurance: "I can promise that I shall be president of all Slovak citizens. I can promise I'll always be by the side of Slovakia." Certainly not on the side of Ukraine, however. Slovaks apparently fear political interference by the European Union's institutions and believe that Russia would provide a surer path to peace. For one thing, Pellegrini's

Slovakia would end the war in Ukraine, if only by handing sovereignty to Moscow. Former Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok, who is seen as pro-Western, conceded defeat. Disagreements over the war in Ukraine dominated the election campaign, with Pellegrini and populist (and pro-Russian) Prime Minister Robert Fico, questioning Ukraine's sovereignty and its people's right to self-determination. Both men have called for peace with Russia and an end to the war (surrender, in other words).

After the vote, Pellegrini said in Bratislava that his victory was "a huge satisfaction" and that he would ensure that "Slovakia remains on the side of peace and not on the side of war," which seems to mean giving in to Russia to end the fighting. Various analysts had stated that a victory for Pellegrini would put liberal democracy at risk in Slovakia. The result, although clear, has worried some, including the defeated pro-Western candidate. "It turns out that it is possible to become the president of the Slovak Republic by spreading hatred," Korčok said. "The campaign can also be won by making me a war candidate." Fico had accused Korčok of being a "warmonger" for supporting Ukraine. Fico said of Korčok that: "he will support everything the West tells him without hesitation, including dragging Slovakia into the war". But then, Fico is on the side of Russia there, and would seem to be in support of whatever Moscow tells him. Journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée had previously suggested a link between Fico and the Italian Mafia, which had led to Fico's resignation, but that is all in the past; Kuciak and his fiancée were both murdered soon afterwards. It's not wise to impugn the integrity of the Mafia and then propose to write about it.



© EUROPA/EU

**"I informed Ursula von der Leyen that from now on, Slovakia will have its own opinion in Brussels," said Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico on October 2023 while meeting Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission**





Murdered Martina Kušnírová and Ján Kuciak

## I More threats

Georgia has applied to join the NATO alliance and has cooperated with it on a number of operations, while NATO for its part has supported Georgia's reform efforts. Georgia takes part in the NATO-led Operation Sea Guardian and has helped in various other areas. Allies agreed at the Bucharest NATO Summit in April 2008 that Georgia will join NATO as a full member, as long as it meets all necessary conditions. This has since been reconfirmed at various NATO summits. The Alliance stands firm in its support for Georgia's right to decide its own future and foreign policy, free from outside interference.

Russian forces invaded Georgian territory in August 2008 and the Allies have repeatedly reiterated their belief in Georgia's territorial integrity and right to remain independent within its established borders. Of course, it's more complicated than it sounds, and NATO has had to call on Russia to withdraw the forces it stationed there (without the country's consent, of course), and also to reverse its decision to recognise the independence of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. A NATO-Georgia package for mutual defence involves a number of support activities at the tactical, operational and strategic levels, including conducting regular joint NATO-Georgia exercises.

It's something that members of the NATO alliance take very seriously. At the 2022 Madrid Summit, the Allies endorsed a set of support measures, tailored for Georgia, as one of NATO's partners most directly affected by external threats, especially in the current security environment resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.



Russian tanks invading Georgia in 2008

These measures increase both political and practical support for Georgia. The political measures aim to intensify the dialogue between Georgia and NATO. The practical measures are designed to help Georgia accelerate its transition from using Soviet-era equipment to equipment meeting today's NATO standards and also to enhance Georgia's situational awareness. Georgia is one of four countries that now have enhanced opportunities for dialogue and cooperation with the Alliance (known as 'Enhanced Opportunity Partners') in recognition of their particularly significant contributions to NATO operations and other Alliance objectives. The other Enhanced Opportunity Partners are Australia, Jordan and – perhaps significantly – Ukraine.



Memorial dedicated to soldiers of the Georgian Legion killed during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, at the base of the 9 April Memorial in Tbilisi

Coincidentally, Slovakia (yes, really) became only the second NATO country to promise fighter jets to Ukraine, although that deal may now be shelved, at least it looks that way at the time of writing. Interestingly, they were MiG-29 aircraft bought in to replace Slovakia's own fleet, grounded in 2022. However, they have been overtaken by events, with the delivery of some of the fourteen US-built F-16 "Block 70" fighters, a delivery that has been seriously delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile air policing of Slovakia's skies has remained in the hands of the Czech Republic and Poland, although their patrols were due to end in 2023. Slovakian pilots began training on the new F-16 aircraft in 2019, some of it conducted in the United States. With the latest Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radars and other innovations, Slovakia's air force will become a force to be reckoned with, but despite the country's NATO membership, it remains to be seen how the aircraft will be used and on whose side.

With both Fico and Pellegrini taking a pro-Russian stance against any kind of help to Ukraine, it's hard to see how the arrival of the new aircraft could benefit Kyiv. After all, Pellegrini has become Slovakia's sixth president since the country



Prime Minister of Slovakia Peter Pellegrini and Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2019 at the Kremlin

gained its independence and he succeeds Zuzana Čaputová, the country's first female head of state. She had staunchly backed Ukraine in resisting the Russian invasion but said she would not seek re-election after receiving death threats. Politics in the former Communist countries is a hazardous game to play.

## I Another long march?

It's clear that Putin's dislike of Western-style democracy is dictating events. He denies a free press and freedom of thought, which suggests cowardice on his part. He seems afraid that people may not like him if they're allowed to voice their thoughts and opinions. It's called politics, Vlad. Grow up and get used to it. Meanwhile, as I mentioned earlier, he has Georgia on his mind (and in his sites). It's been claimed that the country has been ruled from the shadows for more than a decade by the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, who has nurtured relations with Moscow after it grabbed swathes of the Caucasus country, while also continuing to promise a future inside the EU. Clearly, that would not please Putin, who has no love for the EU, nor indeed for any part of western Europe, having threatened to turn it into a radioactive bomb site on one occasion.

Furthermore, he is inclined to show off, especially on his walks from his office in the Kremlin towards the glittering Andreyevsky Hall for his inauguration as President. It's a long walk but his entire journey is invariably filmed, although it appears somewhat odd to those of us in the West. Meanwhile, Russia appears to



Bidzina Ivanishvili

have won the support of bankers and investment specialists in the West because of the vast amount of Russian money pouring into, for instance, the City of London.

Back in Georgia, Ivanishvili has declared that NGOs are "enemies within" and that he is determined to control them with a revived Moscow-style "foreign influence" bill, a plan which provoked massive public protests. Last year he was appointed "honorary chairman", which empowers him (despite a lack of popular support or a vote of any sort) to appoint all those who will hold positions of power. He is also steering his country away from its path towards EU membership. He seems to share Putin's dislike of the Union. Russia, of course, dislikes any country that is not under its control. Recently, a GPS jamming attack took place in the Baltic region, causing a Finnish airline to pause some flights to Estonia for a month. It appears that the jamming



Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margus Tsahkna

signal was almost certainly launched from Russia. Jamming incidents are part of a continuing pattern of GPS interference now thought to be centred on St. Petersburg. The number of such incidents has increased since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, apparently targeting countries that have borders with Russia. Suspected Russian jamming of GPS signals in the airspace above the Estonian capital, Tallinn, began in 2023, increasing dramatically from the beginning of 2024, with up to thirty reports each day from various airlines. Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margus Tsahkna, has described the latest spate of such incidents as a "hybrid attack" by Russia. Another transmitter identified by analysts for frequent jamming attacks of GPS signals above Poland, Sweden and Germany that affected more than 1,600 flights, as well as affecting ships in the Baltic Sea, has been tracked down to Kaliningrad – the Russian enclave between Lithuania and Poland and undoubtedly Russian in origin.

The attacks included one lasting 63 hours. Some experts suspect a deliberate attempt to bring ships and aircraft into conflict with each other. It





Georgia's PM Irakli Kobakhidze (seen here (left) with President of the European Council Charles Michel in Brussels in February 2024) has accused the US of encouraging violence amid enormous rallies against the "foreign agents" bill in the country. He also accused the US of meddling in the country's affairs and making "false statements."

seems to be a simple case of mischief, as if Russia has cast itself in the rôle of wasp at the picnic, irritating, annoying and worrying people, but in Russia's case with the added intention of causing bloodshed and perhaps even war, if it can. Wasps, after all, are famously aggressive predators and very destructive, while bees are innocent pollinators. Putin is certainly more wasp-like than bee-like.

So, what does all of this mean for Georgia and for Slovakia? Predicting Putin's actions is never easy, partly because he changes history to suit himself and no Russians are allowed by law to contradict him. He won't allow people to voice their opinions, although as I wrote earlier, that suggests cowardice. In his view, those parts of Ukraine that Russia has seized are now parts of Russia, however illogical that may seem. The Georgian government is still advancing its proposed new laws on "foreign influence", despite continuing protests and demonstrations. The People of Georgia clearly oppose the idea of Russia-inspired laws to silence them and cut off access to other news sources. But the government isn't listening; it knows it has the backing of the Kremlin, so it will go its own way, even if that means abandoning its population's dreams of joining the EU. At the beginning of May and



Luboš Machaj

despite the protests, Georgia's lawmakers voted by 83 votes to 23 to adopt the law for its second reading.

There seems little doubt that it will go through, despite pleas to the contrary from the United Nations, the EU and the United States. Politically, it makes no sense, other than that it will silence critics with the force of law and the threat of judicial punishment for offenders. Despite its support for NATO in past operations, Georgia seems destined to remain forever outside the EU but inside Putin's "inner circle".

Turning our attention to Slovakia, things look bad there from a democratic standpoint, too. Robert Fico has been attacking the media, including the state TV channel. He says that current RTVS boss, Ľuboš Machaj, will be dismissed and one of the top candidates to replace him is Lukáš Machala, who recently argued that the Earth isn't round. Fico's government recently approved a controversial proposal to scrap public broadcaster RTVS altogether and replace it with what many fear could be a mere mouthpiece for the ruling coalition. Fico has often criticized RTVS for not being "sufficiently objective" in his view. In other words, it hasn't always agreed with him. The EU is worried that Fico's team are lurching towards the repressive government style of Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, by such acts as the abolition of the anti-corruption office (corruption, it seems, is celebrated there), halting any support for Kyiv and repeating whatever talking points Moscow dictates. In effect, the Eastern and formerly Soviet-supporting countries of Europe would revert to type, just in time to join a third world war, choreographed by Putin for his own personal advantage. Fico says he just wants to bring the Slovakian media to heel, obeying the government and not questioning its decisions. I'm sure that all over the world governments wish the media would refrain from criticism, but life (I'm pleased to say) just isn't like that.

## I New directions or none?

Where do we go from here? That's a worrying question, because it seems that Putin and his allies want to pick a fight with the West. Given that one of his team seems to believe in a flat Earth, perhaps he seems his potential enemies as "little green men", or invaders from Mars, although Russia's admirable scientific community and army of brilliant physicists know it's all utter nonsense. Nonsensical it may be, but there's no space for logic or common sense in the claimed political beliefs of Putin's allies, nor in the new governments of, say, Slovakia or Georgia. I don't know about you, but I certainly don't want a war, although that fact will hardly impinge on Putin's strange way of thinking. He's turning what was a wasp at a picnic into a nuclear bomber with deadly intent. Perhaps it's because at 71 he knows he hasn't got as much time left as he would like in which to reframe the world to his design. It's an awful design and it means a lot of people will die, but don't worry: with his bunker under the Kremlin he'll probably stay safe while he makes lots of money. It seems like an attempt to turn the clock back to the 1960s when we all lived in fear of a devastating East-West confrontation and, of course, the inevitable and long anticipated nuclear war. It didn't happen then, because ultimately common sense triumphed. Let's hope it does again, and we honest workers can still triumph, too. «Пролетарии всего мира, соединяйтесь!», as it was put: "Proletarians of the world, unite!". Another vodka, anyone?

*T.Kingsley.Brooks*

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# BRIGHTER BEGINNINGS

## A Mental Health Perspective

<p><b>‘You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection’ (Buddha)</b></p> <p>According to the latest figures from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the World Bank, there are around 1.9 billion children aged 0 to 14 worldwide. The number of mental illnesses in this young population group has increased globally, and anxiety and depression are among the most common mental disorders in young people. Factors such as school pressures, social media use, economic instability and uncertainty about the future have contributed to higher levels of stress and mental health problems. Meanwhile, there has been an alarming increase in suicide attempts among young people, especially adolescents, mostly related to untreated mental illness, bullying, social isolation, but also difficulties in accessing the necessary mental health services. Trauma and negative childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect, household dysfunction or violence, can have profound and long-lasting effects on mental health. The ever-increasing use of social media platforms has both positive and negative effects on young people’s mental health, exposing them to unrealistic body norms, constant comparisons and social pressure, sometimes leading to cyberbullying or low self-esteem.</p> <p>Disparities in mental health exist between different demographic groups, with marginalised communities often experiencing</p>	<p>greater difficulties in accessing mental health care and support. Factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation or physical disability can influence the mental health outcomes and experiences of the younger generation.</p> <p>Therefore, we must be aware of and monitor trends in adolescent mental health and prioritise early intervention, prevention efforts and the development of comprehensive mental health support systems to meet the growing mental health needs of young populations. In addition, fostering a supportive environment and reducing the stigmatisation of mental illness are critical components of promoting the mental well-being of youth worldwide.</p> <p>In today’s fast-paced world, where stressors seem to lurk around every corner, protecting the mental health of our youngest has never been more crucial. Taking care of their emotional and psychological needs is just as important as their physical well-being. It is imperative that we encourage open communication at home and at school so that children feel safe to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement. Similarly, developing strong self-esteem is the foundation for good mental health.</p> <p>We need to teach our children practical coping mechanisms to deal with stress and adversity. We also need to emphasise the importance of a balanced lifestyle with nutritious meals, regular exercise and adequate sleep, as it is well known that physical health and mental wellbeing are inextricably linked. Children need to be encouraged to have open conversations about emotions and mental wellbeing from an early age so that it becomes normal to seek help when needed. Mental health professionals can offer tailored interventions and support strategies to address specific needs and challenges. In most cases, strong social relationships within the family,</p>
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Postage stamps issued by the United Nations Postal Administration on 10 October, 2023  
To coincide with the annual recognition of World Mental Health Day

school and community can provide an important safety net for children and young people, strengthening their resilience during difficult times.

Promoting the mental health of children and young people should be seen as a multifaceted approach that includes open communication, resilience-building, healthy habits and easy access to support networks. By prioritising their emotional wellbeing and equipping them with the tools they need to succeed, we can lay the foundations for a brighter and more resilient future.

10 October has been designated World Mental Health Day by the World Health Organisation (WHO) since 1992. It serves to raise awareness of mental health issues, encourage open discussion and advocate for more support and resources for mental health services. Each year, the day focuses on a specific topic or aspect of mental health and highlights various facts related to mental well-being and the challenges faced by people living with mental illness.

Several organisations are actively involved in promoting the mental health of children around the world. As the leading authority on global public health, WHO also plays a critical role in promoting children's mental health by providing technical assistance to countries to strengthen their mental health systems, conducting research, developing guidelines and advocating for increased investment in children's mental health. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works to protect the rights and well-being of children worldwide, including their mental health. UNICEF supports programmes that aim to improve access to mental health services for children, advocate for policies that prioritise children's mental health, and raise awareness of the importance of addressing childhood mental health issues.



Zeina, 8, paints with friends in a UNICEF-supported Makani centre in Irbid; a safe, nurturing environment for children's recovery, psychosocial well-being and protection

Many countries have their own national institutes or organisations dedicated to mental health promotion, offering support services, school-based mental health initiatives or awareness campaigns. Numerous non-governmental organisations around the world are involved in children's mental health. Many schools have introduced mental health awareness programmes, counselling services and initiatives to create a supportive and inclusive environment for students. Demi Lovato, Prince Harry, Emma Stone or Lady Gaga are just a few names of celebrities who are committed to youth mental health. Overall, collaboration between all of the above parties is essential to effectively promote children's mental health and ensure they receive the support and care they need.

The United Nations (UN) and its various agencies are working with partner organisations to promote policies that prioritise mental health, including those specifically targeting young people. This includes calling on governments to provide resources and implement strategies to support youth mental health initiatives. Mental health is recognised as a critical component of sustainable development and the UN is promoting its integration into the broader development agenda. Goal 3 of the SDGs specifically targets good health and well-being, including mental health, with a focus on ensuring universal access to mental health services. The United Nations also supports research efforts to better understand the prevalence of mental health problems among young people and the factors that contribute to them.

Through its agencies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF, the United Nations provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to countries to strengthen their mental health systems, including training health professionals, improving access to mental health services and integrating mental health into primary health care. The United Nations emphasises the human rights aspects of mental health and the right of young people to access mental health services without discrimination or stigmatisation. Efforts are being made to ensure that mental health policies and practices respect the rights and dignity of young people.

The United Nations regularly organises awareness-raising campaigns and events to destigmatise mental health issues and promote the mental well-being of young people. On 3 April 2024, an event entitled "Mental Health of Children and Young People: How can we do better?" took place at UN Headquarters in New York. Initiated and organised by the Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations in collaboration with the missions of five other countries (Canada, Indonesia, Mexico, Qatar



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**H.E. Cornel Feruta, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations**

and Kuwait) and with significant support from the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the UN Youth Office, it brought together policy makers, experts and activists on this topic. The high-level audience included the President of the UN General Assembly, Dennis Francis, the American professor and author Andrew Solomon (winner of the National Book Award) and the famous actress and activist for mental health, Uma Thurman.

H.E. Cornel Feruta, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Romania to the United Nations, led the discussion and began his presentation by presenting some of the staggering data on mental health today. *"This event was dictated by reality. One in seven 10- to 19-year-olds today suffers from a mental health disorder. Depression and anxiety are among the most important factors leading to disability in the young population. Suicide is today the fourth leading cause of death in 15-20 year olds!"*

The following speaker, Andrew Solomon,



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**Andrew Solomon**

took a similar line, emphasising very clearly that "mental illness is a poison that undermines social order. The cost of treating mental illness is real, but what is impossibly expensive is the cost of NOT treating mental illness".

It is indeed an urgent, escalating and major problem that needs to be fully acknowledged and addressed. It is estimated that 20 per cent of all children in the world have been diagnosed with a mental disorder at some point. Suicide rates among young people are higher than ever before and the Covid years are thought to have had a huge negative impact on everyone's mental health, but especially that of our children. Appropriate strategies and holistic tools are needed.

*"Never again should the body be treated without treating the soul,"* said the representative of Mexico in the same discussion. However, it was also noted that medical services are often too expensive and out of reach for many who urgently need them. The WHO is now working with UNICEF to develop special mental health programmes for young people in 13 countries and reached 38.9 million children last year as part of this approach.



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**Kathryn Goetzke**

UNICEF has now published a report entitled 'Child and adolescent mental health. The state of children in the European Union 2024', which states that around half of all mental health problems occur by the age of 18: *"Approximately 11.2 million young people (19 years or younger) suffer from a mental disorder. The rates are higher for boys up to the age of 14 and higher for girls aged 15-19. In the EU, almost half of young adults have an unmet need for mental health care."* UNICEF estimates that suicide is the second leading cause of death (after road traffic accidents) among young people, accounting for 17 per cent of all deaths.

Unfortunately, mental illness is not easy to recognise. *"You don't think it's going to affect your child until it happens"*, said Andrew Solomon. Parents usually do not have the necessary resources, knowledge or awareness to recognise it and ask professionals for help. Meanwhile, there is also a stigma associated with mental health problems, especially among young people. Therefore, problems of this nature are often kept hidden, but they will not simply go away untreated.

An expert from the International Telecommunication Union pointed out in his contribution that cyberbullying is also on the rise due to the increasing networking we are confronted with nowadays - a child goes online every half a second. *"One*





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in five children has skipped school at least once because of that". Increasing connectivity also leads to better access to violent online content and a greater risk of bullying.

Kathryn Goetzke, representative of the World Federation for Mental Health at the United Nations, spoke during the UN event about hope and its absence as the main symptom of depression and anxiety and the only consistent predictor of suicide. "Hope is a protective factor for anxiety, depression, addiction and violence. Moments of hopelessness (emotional despair and motivational helplessness) are normal, it is how we manage them that matters".

In a subsequent conversation, Kathryn Goetzke described the methods that society and parents can use to ensure the mental well-being of our youth: "From a mental health perspective, we need to invest more resources in health budgets for mental health. It must be seen as a priority. It is important to diagnose early, close treatment gaps, use technology to improve access to care, invest in peer-to-peer solutions and highlight the issue of mental health on days like 10 October, World Mental Health Day. It's time to normalise the use of language and work together to develop strategies for coping and finding hope in these moments of hopelessness, big and small. We have developed a free parent guide to help parents learn what hope means and how to use the language of hope at home. The idea is to normalise the conversation, get all children to learn these important skills and work together to improve hope. It's also important that parents know the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression when children are struggling to manage their emotions, and that they offer their children medical help. The earlier you intervene, the better it is. When we teach 'how' to

hope, we teach stress competence, happiness habits, inspired action, nurturing networks, and the elimination of challenges (negative thought patterns that can get in the way of hope). In terms of hope, we are working to create 'hopeful cities' around the world where we have a common language and framework for hopelessness. Events like the one at the UN are important as they publicise evidence-based approaches. The media plays a key role in spreading messages and reducing stigmatisation. We are working to pass a resolution at the United Nations for an International Day of Hope (the draft resolution can be found at [internationaldayofhope.org](http://internationaldayofhope.org)) as we want to highlight the science, stories and strategies that deal with hope. These events are important to highlight the magnitude of our challenges and, more importantly, to find solutions on how we can overcome them. Remember: hope is teachable. It's a powerful concept!"

At the end of the UN conference, Ambassador Feruta added: "the fact that we are talking about mental health is important. It is a great way forward for what we want to achieve. We need to cater for the most important needs of the young generation. In my opinion, this is also an investment in conflict prevention and management."

Today, less than half of all UN Member States have national strategies for adolescent mental health. The United Nations must provide a coherent blueprint for addressing and treating this social scourge that threatens the future of entire generations. The United Nations can formulate solutions, but also talk more about it, as it can help change the general perception and attitude towards this issue.

Such UN events on children's mental health can be a significant step forward in addressing the pressing issues facing young people around the world and can encourage a collective commitment to prioritising mental health. There is still a long way to go to ensure the mental well-being of all children, but it is not just a matter for policy makers and professionals, but also a collective responsibility shared by communities, families and society as a whole.

**Alexandra Paucescu**  
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# GIRLS GO CIRCULAR TRAINS 40,000 GIRLS

Education programme surpassed its ambitious  
target well ahead of schedule



**THE EUROPEAN  
INSTITUTE OF  
INNOVATION AND  
TECHNOLOGY**

**Training 40 000 young  
women in science, technology,  
engineering, and mathematics  
across 33 countries**

The Girls Go Circular project of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) has reached its ambitious target of training 40 000 girls in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) three years ahead of schedule.

Working together with partners, schools and teachers across 33 countries, the EIT Community is delivering a unique course that equips young women with critical digital and leadership skills.

Inspiring the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs, the programme was launched in 2020 by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), part of the EU's research and innovation programme Horizon Europe. The objective of the project – now achieved – was to train 40 000 girls by 2027. The programme will continue to offer educational and innovation support services to more young innovators (aged 14-19 ) across Europe.

*"The Girls Go Circular project was launched with a clear mission: to show young girls and women that Europe's innovation landscape is incomplete without their ideas, their passion and their visions. Funded under Horizon Europe, our research and innovation programme, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and its community have a key role to play in closing the gender gap in research and innovation. I look forward to seeing these girls and young women shape the future of Europe says" Iliana Ivanova, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.*



Iliana Ivanova, European Commissioner-designate for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

*"The EIT is a champion of women-led innovation and entrepreneurship - pioneering, supporting, and celebrating initiatives that build a more inclusive innovation landscape. We are extremely proud of the Girls Go Circular programme who have reached their target of training 40 000 young girls across 33 countries in record timing. The programme initially started out in only a handful of countries mostly in Eastern and Southern Europe, but thanks to our agility and the demand, it has expanded to all EU Member States and beyond showing the EIT's power to harness its partners as Europe's largest innovation network" says Nektarios Tavernarakis, Chair of the EIT Governing Board.*

The Circular Learning Space – Girls Go Circular's educational platform accessible for schools and individuals – offers students challenge-based learning on a diverse range of topics like e-waste, climate change, health, semiconductors, or robotics. All resources are available in 22 European languages. In the last three years, the programme has been implemented in over 1 000 schools across all EU Member States and also in Armenia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine, a testament to its widespread appeal.



Nektarios Tavernarakis, Chair of the EIT Governing Board

## Closing the gender gap

According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022, women represent only 19% of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) specialists and one-third of STEM graduates. In the deep-tech sector, currently valued at EUR 700 billion, women account for only 10% of patent applications, and less than 15% of start-ups are founded or co-founded by women. By encouraging young women to explore traditionally male-dominated careers, Girls Go Circular contributes significantly to the positive change of Europe's innovation landscape.

Girls Go Circular programme is part of the EIT Community efforts to close gender gaps and empower women in European entrepreneurship and innovation. The EIT Community focuses on gender mainstreaming, and is home to a several specialised women entrepreneurship and leadership programmes. These include:

- Supernovas, offering support to women at all levels of business creation, from those trying to start a business to women who want to be venture investors to those seeking to improve their leadership skills.
- Empowering Women in Agrifood is a project that promotes female entrepreneurship in the agrifood sector and boosts the amount of women in leadership positions.
- Women Entrepreneurship Bootcamp a programme for new health sector businesses led by women, offering business and product trainings, mentoring, and networking.
- Strada is a leadership development programme for women who want to become leaders in the manufacturing sector
- The European Prize for Women Innovators (in association with the European Innovation Council) is a prestigious award celebrating and promoting trailblazing women. Most recently, The EIT was awarded the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) Diversity & Inclusion Award for its work in powering outstanding women innovators and entrepreneurs through the EIT Women Leadership Award.



## Women and girls in stem forum

Every year, Girls Go Circular – in collaboration with the European Commission and the EIT – organises the Women and Girls in STEM Forum. The fourth edition will take place in October 2024 in Budapest, Hungary. This annual event has



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1,375 participants gathered in Brussels at the 2023 Stem Forum

become a platform for leading voices of students, teachers, and policymakers – attracting thousands of participants – to identify key actions to bridge the gender gap in STEM and ICT and empower girls to pursue their career goals in science and technology

This year's Forum dives into the world of Artificial Intelligence for their Student Challenge 2024 to explore its potential to solve real-life societal challenges ethically and creatively. Through interactive mentoring sessions, participants and alumnae have access to leading experts of the field in a valuable exchange aimed to boost confidence by connecting girls and young women with tangible career options.

## EIT community education

Girls Go Circular is an EIT Community initiative coordinated by EIT RawMaterials. The EIT Community Education portfolio consists of dynamic education programmes targeting learners of all ages. Through a “Learner Lifecycle” approach, the EIT Community offers cross-cutting opportunities and fosters peer-learning among students, scholars, professionals, and partners working and studying in Europe. An innovative learner can begin their journey as an inventive teenager in the Girls Go Circular programme or a visionary Deep Tech Talent pioneer or an eager learner accessing new skills through the EIT Campus.

**What is the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)?**

The EIT strengthens Europe's ability to innovate by powering solutions to pressing global challenges and by nurturing entrepreneurial talent to create sustainable growth and skilled jobs in Europe. The EIT is an EU body and an integral part of Horizon Europe, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

The Institute supports dynamic pan-European partnerships, EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities, among leading companies, research labs and universities. Together with their leading partners, the EIT Community offers a wide range of innovation and entrepreneurship activities across Europe: entrepreneurial education courses, business creation and acceleration services and innovation driven research projects.





# Smoking causes lung cancer



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# INNOVATION IN DIGITAL AND CLEAN-ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES BOOSTS DEMAND FOR PATENTS IN EUROPE

The EPO's Patent Index 2023, shows that innovation remained robust, with companies and inventors filing a record number of European patent applications last year.

Companies and inventors filed 199 275 patent applications at the EPO last year, an increase of 2.9% on the previous year and the highest number to date, according to the latest Patent Index 2023 published today. This follows growth of 2.6% in 2022 and 4.7% in 2021.

*"Our latest Patent Index shows that innovation remained vibrant around the world in 2023," said EPO President António Campinos. "The EPO was entrusted with examining more applications than ever before, attesting to both the attractiveness of the European technology market and the high quality of our products and services. Europe's small and medium-sized enterprises are making ever-increasing use of patents, with the share of applications from SMEs at its highest level yet last year. These businesses can also now benefit from the new Unitary Patent, which significantly improves the environment for innovation in Europe, providing a simpler and more cost-effective option for innovators to protect their inventions and bring them to the vast EU market."*

#### Digital communication and energy technologies on the rise

The leading technical fields for patent applications at the EPO last year were digital communication (which covers technologies related to mobile networks), medical technology and computer technology. The strongest growth among all technology fields in 2023, however, was in electrical machinery, apparatus, energy (+12.2% over 2022), which covers inventions related to clean-energy technologies, including batteries (+28%). Patent activity in biotechnology (+5.9%) also continued to rise further.

#### Global and European trends

The top five countries of origin for European patent



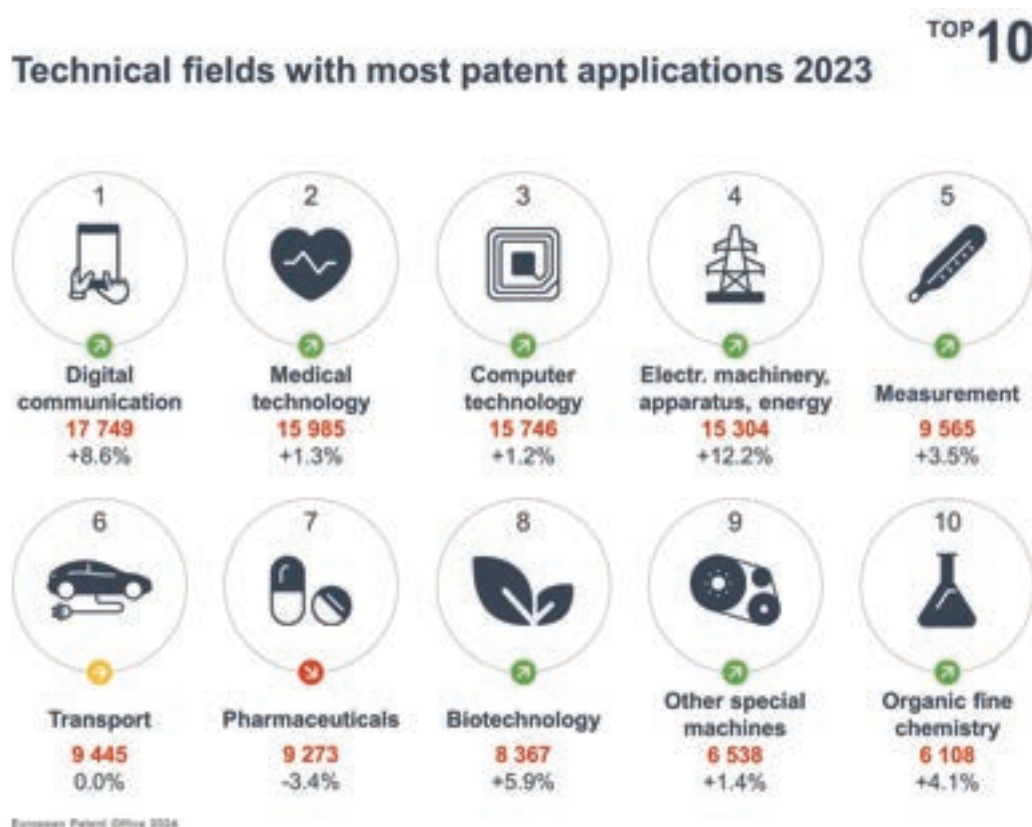
EPO President António Campinos

applications in 2023 were the United States, Germany, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea. Some 43% of the total applications came from companies and inventors from the EPO's 39 member states, while 57% originated from outside Europe.

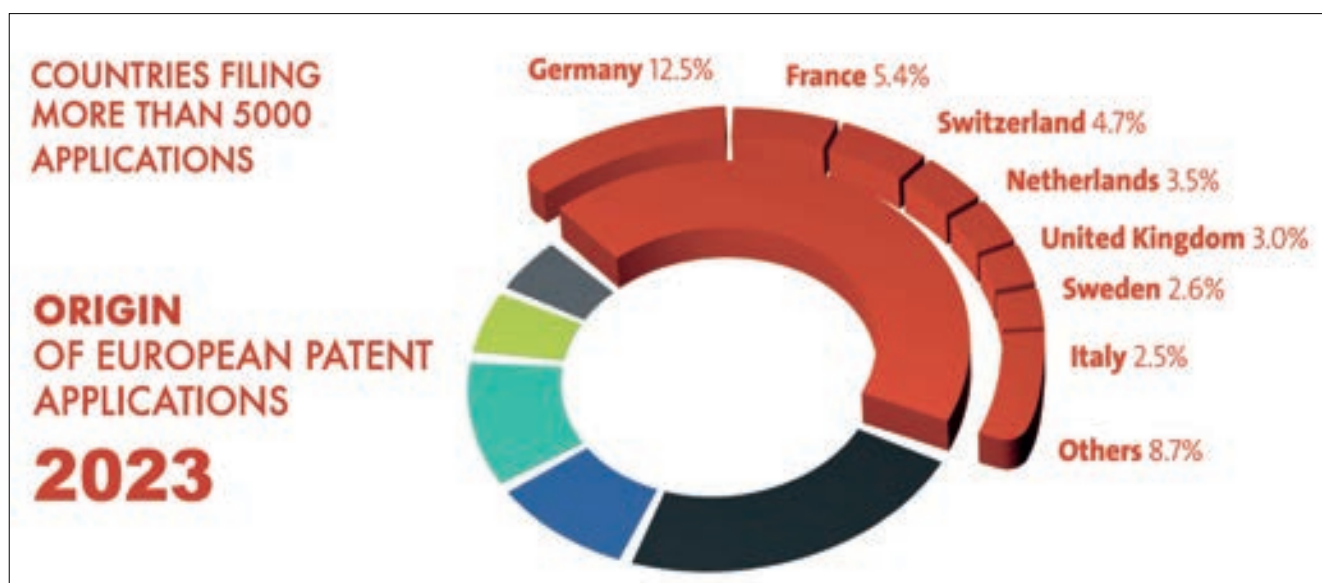
The number of patent applications originating from the EPO's 39 member states increased again in 2023 (85 748 applications, +1.8%). European companies posted above average growth in the fields of digital communication (+10.7%), biotechnology (+6.4%), computer technology (+4.2%) and measurement (+4.0%).

#### Finland, Spain, UK and Italy with strongest growth in Europe

While Germany, Europe's leading country of origin, was back to growth (+1.4%) last year,







French firms filed slightly fewer applications (-1.5%). Patent filings from most other European countries were up.

Among the larger patent filing countries (with over 5 000 applications), the highest growth came from the UK (+4.2%), Italy (+3.8%), the Netherlands (+3.5%), Switzerland (+2.7%) and Sweden (+2.0%). Even stronger increases (among European countries with over 1 000 applications) were posted by Finland (+9.2%) and Spain (+6.9%).

#### **More inventions from China and Republic of Korea**

The overall growth in patent applications at the EPO in 2023 was mainly fuelled by steep increases from the Republic of Korea (+21.0%) and the People's Republic of China (+8.8% compared with 2022). The Republic of Korea entered the top five for the first time, while patent applications from China have more than doubled since 2018.

#### **Nearly every fourth application from Europe filed by a small company**

In 2023, 23% of patent applications to the EPO originating in Europe was filed by an individual inventor or a small or medium-sized enterprise (with fewer than 250 employees). A further 8% came from universities and public research organisations. ( As part of its ongoing support for smaller entities, the EPO has announced new fee reductions as of 1 April 2024 for micro-enterprises, individuals, non-profits, universities and public research organisations.

#### **Spotlight on women inventors**

This year's Patent Index also looks at the contribution of women to innovation. For all patent applications filed with the EPO last year coming from Europe, 27% named at least one woman as an inventor. Among the larger European patent filing countries (with more than 2 000 applications per year), Spain (46%), France (33%) and Belgium (32%) had the highest share of patent applications naming at least one woman as inventor in 2023. In terms of technology sectors, the proportion ranged from 14% for patent applications in mechanical engineering to 50% in chemistry. This data can help in addressing the gaps that remain to be bridged to harness the full potential of women inventors.

#### **Solid uptake of new Unitary Patent**

Since 1 June 2023, innovators can also benefit from the Unitary Patent system – a new way to enjoy simpler and cheaper patent protection in 17 EU member states, in which a European patent has unitary legal effect and can be enforced or litigated before the new Unified Patent Court. The new system has already proven popular with patent owners: unitary protection was requested for 17.5% of all European patents granted in 2023 (more than 18 300 requests filed) and for 22.3% of those granted in the second half of 2023. Patentees from Europe (39 EPO member states) had the highest uptake rate at 25.8%, followed by those from the US and China (both 10.9%), Republic of Korea (9.7%) and Japan (4.9%). The top Unitary Patent requestors in 2023 were Johnson & Johnson, Siemens, Qualcomm, Samsung and Ericsson. Of the patentees who have transformed their European patents into Unitary Patents, some two-thirds are European.





**Going for a coffee? ... Lock your desktop first!**





# THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE IS IN YOUR EXCREMENT

In the fall of 2023, National Institute of Standards and Technology's scientists in Charleston, South Carolina, received a special shipment of containers packed with baggies full of frozen human feces.

Teams of scientists there and at an outside lab worked together to grind the material into fine dust and blend it with water until it had the consistency of a smoothie. It was then poured into 10,000 tubes and distributed among NIST's staff in Charleston and Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Scientists in both cities have been rigorously analyzing and studying the waste-matter mixture ever since.

All this excretory experimentation is helping to lay the groundwork for a new generation of treatments and medicines derived from human feces.

The power of poop comes from the microbes it contains. They are a rich sampling of the trillions of microbes living inside our gut, all part of the gut microbiome. In the last decade, scientists have linked the gut microbiome to a raft of human diseases, including inflammatory bowel disease, bacterial infections, autoimmune disorders, obesity and even cancer and mental illness.

Isolating fecal microbes and then turning them into therapies may be a way to treat many of these diseases. In fact, the FDA has recently approved two drugs for treating recurring bacterial infections, both of which are derived from highly processed human stool samples.

"This isn't just wishful thinking. It's already happening," said NIST molecular geneticist Scott Jackson. "We are at the beginning of a new era of medicine."

## I Why Poop?



Scott Jackson has spearheaded NIST's efforts to develop a fecal reference material

While human feces also contain water, undigested food and assorted inorganic matter, anywhere from 30% to 50% is made up of bacteria, viruses, fungi and other organisms that once lived in our guts.

We could not survive without these fellow travelers. They play a critical role in metabolism, vitamin production and digestion. By regulating the immune system, they help ward off harmful bacteria and toxins.

Their activity also impacts the nervous system via the gut-brain connection, affecting mood and mental health and influencing many neurological conditions, including Alzheimer's and autism.

We are only beginning to understand the relationship between microbes and diseases. We have significant gaps in our knowledge about how microbes affect other systems and processes in the body. And certainly, just because changes in the gut microbiome correlate with a particular disease doesn't mean they cause it.

Still, it's clear that the signals gut microbes send to each other and cells elsewhere in the body significantly impact our health.

Doctors could get a sample of your microbiome directly from your gut, but that means undergoing an invasive procedure like a colonoscopy or biopsy.

Getting a specimen of stool is (ironically) less messy.

"Fecal material is convenient," Jackson said. "Everybody poops."

## But Really, Poop Medicine?

Everyone's stool is different. The amount and types of microorganisms vary based on your genes, environment, health and diet. But scientists have discerned similarities in the poop of individuals with certain diseases. People with Parkinson's disease, for example, show both higher and lower concentrations of certain bacterial species. For people with asthma, poop has reduced levels of microbial diversity.

These correlations, some quite clear and others still unclear, may make it possible to use stool samples to diagnose a wide range of illnesses and conditions. You'd send a fecal sample to a lab, which would then identify the microorganisms in it by decoding, or "sequencing," their DNA.

Jackson said the results could be used to not only diagnose certain illnesses but also evaluate the risk of getting the illnesses in the future.

"We would analyze microbial DNA in stool for the same reason we test human DNA — to tell us about your risk of disease," he said.

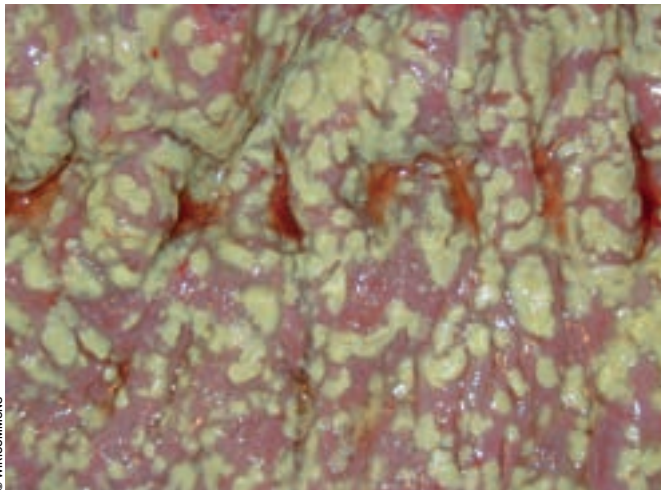
Beyond their use in diagnosing diseases, could feces-derived microbes be used to treat them?

This is actually already happening.

Fecal microbiota transplants (FMTs) are now used to treat recurrent *Clostridioides difficile* infection (CDI), a sometimes-deadly bacterial infection commonly picked up in hospitals. FMT is like any other kind of transplant, though in this case, it's someone else's fecal matter that's transferred into the sick patient.

The microorganisms from the transplant help regenerate the healthy ecosystem in the gut microbiome, assisting the immune system to fight off the infection. On recurrent CDI, the procedure has a success rate of 95%, a remarkable result for just about any therapy.





© WIKICOMMONS

**A pathological specimen showing pseudomembranous colitis resulting from a *Clostridium difficile* infection**

Research into other uses for FMT is exploding. According to clinicaltrials.gov, there are dozens of studies in the United States right now involving FMT, with clinicians and researchers testing it out on everything from cancer to colitis to alcoholic hepatitis.

Researchers are also exploring alternative approaches that involve genetically modifying fecal bacteria, creating disease-fighting microbes that would take root in your gut and help restore the microbiome to full health. There's even the possibility of altering your own fecal microbes, a personalized medicine approach that customizes the therapy to the individual patient.

In addition to the gut microbiome, there are multitudes of microorganisms in the nose, skin, throat and vagina, all part of what's known as the human microbiome.

Jackson said that the next generation of microbial medicines will be derived from all over the human microbiome. They will be much more scientifically proven and effective for treating diseases than today's probiotics, which are bacteria derived from fermented foods and categorized as dietary supplements.

"If things keep going the way they are now, I think in 30 years, medical doctors will have an arsenal of new microbial therapies to treat a broad spectrum of diseases," Jackson said.

## What's NIST's Role in All This?

NIST produces reference materials (RMs) that help laboratories and manufacturers calibrate their instruments.

For example, the agency sells peanut butter that comes with a detailed analysis and measurements of its compounds and chemicals. Food companies need to know how much fat is in their products. To ensure they are measuring the amount correctly, they can perform tests on NIST's peanut butter. If they get the same result as NIST, they know their equipment is accurate.

Having widely trusted and accepted reference materials, especially for complex materials, ensures quality control and accuracy across entire industries and research fields.

NIST is now developing an RM for human feces, officially called the Human Gut Microbiome (Whole Stool) Reference Material. NIST's peanut butter lists its amount of calcium, copper, tetradecanoic acid and many other components.

Similarly, the new RM, expected to be released this year, will itemize and describe the ingredients in feces.

It will identify hundreds of species of microorganisms and detail the concentration of thousands of different metabolites in the gut, many of which are produced by microorganisms and help to convert nutrients into energy or synthesize molecules for cellular functions.

Other ingredients listed include many compounds you might not even have known were in feces: cholesterol (a type of metabolite), for example, and serotonin, most of which is found in the cells lining the gastrointestinal tract.

The RM aims to become the gold standard in human gut microbiome research and drug development. A single unit of the RM will consist of a milliliter tube filled with slurry fecal matter accompanied by a lengthy report that labs can use to check their measurements and fine-tune their instruments.

Many scientists believe a reference material for feces is desperately needed. Right now, "If you give two different laboratories the same stool sample for analysis, you'll likely get strikingly different results," Jackson said. Many discrepancies arise from the different protocols and tools the labs use. Others are the result of differing standards and definitions.

"NIST's RM will help researchers develop, benchmark and harmonize their measurements," Jackson said. "It's the most detailed and comprehensive microbiological and biochemical breakdowns ever produced for human feces."

*Source nist.gov*



© T. SCHOCK/NIST

**NIST researchers handling frozen stool samples in Charleston**



# **UKRAINE:**

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# TIMELESS CHIC

## STANDOUT FASHION AND BEAUTY TRENDS

HEY,  
JUNE!

Discover the major trends, prestigious collaborations and shopping temptations of the month.  
This is where it's happening!

### | Sneakers : red alert!

It's no longer a secret that red is one of the trendiest colours of 2024... and even down to the tips of our toes! Here's the proof: Red sneakers are extremely popular again, especially the Adidas Gazelle. But they are regularly sold out on all e-commerce sites around the world. If, like us, you're on the waiting list for the red Gazelle sneakers, we can at least tell you that coloured sneakers in general are also extremely trendy this spring. Sneakers in light blue, purple and even yellow are very popular. The hardest part will be to choose!



© INSTAGRAM @ALAYMARIEE

### | Uniqlo X Inès de la Fressange: 'Curtain call'

Since its debut in 2014, the collaboration between Parisian style icon Inès de la Fressange and Japanese brand LifeWear has explored the enduring essence of "French effortless chic". This 20<sup>th</sup> collection, the culmination of a ten-year journey, seamlessly blends trousers, dresses, skirts, blouses and accessories, all equally elegant. Let yourself be tempted!

Our top 3 favourites to acquire before bidding farewell to the 'Inès' style:

- Printed, wrap sleeveless dress
- Denim coverall jacket
- Cotton linen blend trousers



© UNIQLO



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## | Capri pants: the resurgence

This is one trend that caught us off-guard: Capri pants (pants cut at mid-calf, also known as three quarter legs) have firmly secured their position in the ever-growing list of spring trends. They are ubiquitous, gracing catwalks, adorning fashion influencers and being admired by celebrities.

If you're unsure, opt for an all-black ensemble with high-heeled pumps to add a touch of elegance.



© INSTAGRAM @CASSIDIMICCO



© MANGO X VICTORIA BECKHAM

## | Mango X Victoria Beckham: Collection of the year

When the Spanish ready-to-wear brand meets one of the most prominent British designers of the moment, the result is the most feminine and glamorous capsule collection to hit the high street.

What's beautiful in this prestigious wardrobe? Semi-transparent, combined body silk dresses, silk lace tops, crochet dresses with open backs... not to mention a perfectly tailored trench coat and ultra-chic accessories.

Our 3 favourites to try (and buy) urgently in-store or on mango.com

- Asymmetrical dress with decorative stitching
- Suit blazer with adjustable back strap
- Leather sandals with inclined heels



© MANGO X VICTORIA BECKHAM BLAZER



© MANGO X VICTORIA BECKHAM BLAZER SANDALES



© MANGO X VICTORIA BECKHAM DRESS

## | Pandora Essence: 'Oh my Gold!'

Pandora Essence highlights the beauty of the natural world and presents a perfect combination of elegance and simplicity. 14-karat gold, silver and freshwater cultured pearls are the stars of this collection...with timeless elegance.

Our wish list

- Treated freshwater cultured pearl & organically shaped double band ring.
- Treated freshwater cultured pearl & organically shaped hoop earrings.
- Organically shaped heart pendant necklace.



© PANDORA

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# TO VISIT

## VALENCIA AND ITS CATHEDRAL WITH THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY GRAIL



The Holy Chalice of Valencia

Discover the historic city centre and its rich artistic heritage. You can visit the genuine Holy Grail at Valencia Cathedral; the Silk Exchange, a jewel of Gothic civil architecture; the Central Market, one of the largest and finest purveyors of fresh produce in Europe; the spectacular frescoes at the Church of San Nicolás; and many other breathtaking sites.

The Holy Chalice of Valencia, housed in the Valencia Cathedral, is revered by many as the true Holy Grail. This ancient relic is believed to be the cup used by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper. The chalice itself is made of dark agate stone and dates back to between the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, fitting the time period of Jesus. Its base and handles, however, are later medieval additions crafted from gold and adorned with precious stones.

According to tradition, Saint Peter brought the chalice to Rome, and it eventually came into the possession of Saint Lawrence, a Spanish-born deacon. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> century persecution of Christians, Saint Lawrence is said to have sent the chalice to his parents in Huesca, Spain, for safekeeping. The chalice was hidden in various locations over the centuries to protect it from invaders and religious conflicts.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was finally brought to the Valencia Cathedral, where it has remained ever

since. The Holy Chalice is displayed in a special chapel within the cathedral, attracting numerous pilgrims and visitors each year. Its religious significance is profound, and it has been used by popes, including Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, in significant religious ceremonies.

Scientific examinations have supported the antiquity of the chalice, particularly the agate cup, while acknowledging the later addition of the gold base. This combination of ancient and medieval craftsmanship makes the chalice a fascinating artifact for both historians and believers. The Holy Chalice plays a central role in various religious celebrations, especially during Holy Week and on the feast day of Saint Lawrence.

The story of the chalice intertwines faith, legend, and historical intrigue, making it a symbol of enduring spiritual significance. Pilgrims visit the Valencia Cathedral not only to see the chalice but also to connect with a tangible piece of Christian history. The Holy Chalice of Valencia continues to inspire devotion and curiosity, standing as a testament to the rich religious heritage of Spain.

Its presence in the cathedral enhances Valencia's status as a city of historical and spiritual importance. Whether viewed as the true Holy Grail or a revered symbol of faith, the Holy Chalice remains a focal point for worship and contemplation. It exemplifies the enduring power of religious artifacts to captivate and inspire across the centuries.

The cathedral was consecrated in 1238 by the first bishop of Valencia after the Reconquista, Pere d'Albalat, Archbishop of Tarragona, and was dedicated to Saint Mary by order of James I the Conqueror. It was built over the site of the former Visigothic cathedral, which under the Moors had been turned into a mosque. Valencian Gothic is the predominant architectural style of the cathedral, although it also contains Romanesque, French Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical elements.

The Valencia Cathedral contains numerous 15<sup>th</sup>-century paintings, some by local artists (such as Jacomart), others by artists from Rome engaged by the Valencian Pope Alexander VI who, when still a cardinal, made the request to elevate the Valencian See to the rank of metropolitan see, a category granted by Pope Innocent VIII in 1492.



Holy Chalice in Valencia Cathedral



The altar of the Church of San Nicolás de Bari and San Pedro Mártir

The Church of San Nicolás de Bari and San Pedro Mártir in the heart of Valencia's historic centre is a true artistic treasure with a lot of history. It was originally an early Christian temple that was transformed into a mosque in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, only to become a Christian church again after the conquest by Jaime I.

The real surprise of the Parish Church of San Nicolás de Bari, located in one of the most beautiful streets of the old quarter of Valencia, calle Cavallers, is that after a complete restoration of international technical relevance, some incredible frescoes of incredible value and beauty have recovered their spectacular nature.

Its mixture of Gothic and Baroque will surprise you, as well as the fantastic paintings, referencing the life of Saint Nicholas and Saint Peter in its vault. It is also a church much loved by devotees, who come every Monday on a ritual "stroll" from different villages.

## The Museum of Fine Arts of Valencia

The second largest art gallery in Spain, with works from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, including rooms dedicated to the magnificent oeuvre of the famous Valencian painter Joaquín Sorolla, as well as a room dedicated to Francisco de Goya.

The Gothic art rooms are very impressive, and the rooms of the painters and sculptors Pinazo and Benlliure are very representative of the Valencian school.

Furthermore the museum excels in its collection of Renaissance paintings, with Valencia being the entrance of the artistic influences of this style in Spain. Neither must one miss the Courtyard of Ambassador Vich and the previously unseen work of Velázquez.

The historical building that houses the museum was originally the San Pío Seminary College, founded in 1683 by Brother Juan Tomás de Rocabertí, the Archbishop of Valencia. The architect Juan Bautista Pérez Castiel, master of works on the Cathedral, was responsible for its design. Building work was carried out between 1683 and 1744, although the church was partly demolished in 1925. The building has been used for three different purposes: A Military

Cadet Academy, a Charity Centre, an army supplies storehouse and a Military Hospital, until 1946 when it was chosen to be used for the Museum of Fine Arts. The artistic journey begins with a selection of the so-called Primitivos Valencianos (medieval painters), which covers the period between the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, displaying the work of such emblematic artists as Alcanýs, Nicolau, Jacomart and Reixach among others.

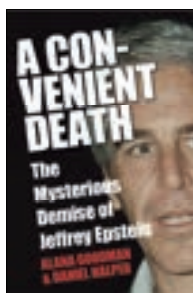
Also exhibited are the works of painters from the Valencian School such as Joanes, los Ribalta, Espinosa, Vicente López, Soralla, Pinazo and others. Other exhibits include works by Pintoricchio, Andrea del Sarto, Van Dyck, Murillo, Velázquez, El Greco and Goya. Also displayed is a wide collection of drawings and etchings as well as sculptures, archaeological pieces, architectonic fragments and some examples of portable art.



'The Annunciation' by Jaume Baco Jacomart (1411-1461)



## BOOKS



## A convenient death

The mysterious demise of  
jeffrey epstein

By Alana Goodman

**Who killed Jeffrey Epstein?**  
**Two journalists look for answers.**  
**A must-read for fans of the**  
**Netflix docuseries Filthy Rich.**

In *A Convenient Death*, investigative reporters Alana Goodman and Daniel Halper search for the truth of what really happened to Jeffrey Epstein. With access to Epstein's victims and lawyers, to doctors, Wall Street insiders and law enforcement officers, they reveal the dirty secrets and sinister ties that may have driven someone in Epstein's circle to take matters into their own hands.

On the morning of August 10, 2019, Epstein, friend and financier to the rich and powerful, was found unresponsive in his prison cell in lower Manhattan, where he awaited his second trial for sexual predation and other crimes. He was rushed to a local hospital and one hour later pronounced dead by suicide. Across the world, a sinister web of powerful billionaires, celebrities, and politicians, including Bill and Hillary Clinton, had reason to sigh with relief at news of Epstein's death. Having flown on his private planes and visited his many homes—the sites of so many illicit activities—they had much to lose if their transgressions were ever exposed. And now, Epstein was silenced for good.

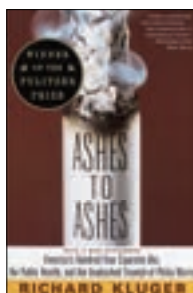
But cracks in the official story soon emerged. And the questions kept coming:

- Why did the surveillance cameras in front of Epstein's cell stop working that night?

- Why was Epstein's cellmate transferred out and never replaced?

- Why was a high-profile prisoner so suddenly taken off suicide watch and left unguarded for eight hours?

Was Epstein murdered to protect the powerful people who feared what he might reveal? The American public deserves to know the truth. With this book, they can finally understand the facts and decide for themselves.



## Ashes to ashes

America's Hundred-Year  
Cigarette War, the Public Health,  
and the Unabashed Triumph of  
Philip Morris

By Richard Kluger

Here for the first time, in a story full of the complexities and contradictions of the historical process—financial, social, psychological, medical, political, and legal—are woven together in a riveting narrative. The key characters are the top corporate executives, public health investigators, and antismoking activists who have clashed ever more stridently as Americans debate whether smoking should be closely regulated as a major health menace.

We see tobacco spread rapidly from its aboriginal sources in the New World 500 years ago, as it becomes increasingly viewed by some as sinful and some as alluring, and by government as a windfall source of tax revenue. With the arrival of the cigarette in the late-nineteenth century, smoking changes from a luxury and occasional pastime to an everyday—to some, indispensable—habit, aided markedly by the exuberance of the tobacco huskers.

This free-enterprise success saga grows shadowed, from the middle of this century, as science begins to understand the cigarette's toxicity. Ironically the more detailed and persuasive the findings by medical investigators, the more cigarette makers prosper by seeming to modify their product with filters and reduced dosages of tar and nicotine.

We see the tobacco manufacturers come under intensifying assault as a rogue industry for knowingly and callously plying their hazardous wares while insisting that the health charges against them (a) remain unproven, and (b) are universally understood, so smokers indulge at their own risk.

Among the eye-opening disclosures here: outrageous pseudo-scientific claims made for cigarettes throughout the '30s and '40s, and the story of how the tobacco industry and the National Cancer Institute spent millions to develop a "safer" cigarette that was never brought to market.

Dealing with an emotional subject that has generated more heat than light, this book is a dispassionate tour de force that examines the nature of the companies' culpability, the complicity of society as a whole, and the shaky moral ground claimed by smokers who are now demanding recompense.



## Skies of thunder

The Deadly World War II  
Mission Over the Roof of the  
World

By Caroline Alexander

**From the New York**  
**Times bestselling author, a**  
**brehtaking account of combat**  
**and survival in one of the most**  
**brutally challenging and rarely**  
**examined campaigns of World**  
**War II**

In April 1942, the Imperial Japanese Army steamrolled through Burma, capturing the only ground route from India to China. Supplies to this critical zone would now have to come from India by air—meaning across the Himalayas, on the most hazardous air route in the world. *SKIES OF THUNDER* is a story of an epic human endeavor, in which Allied troops faced the monumental challenge of operating from airfields hacked from the jungle, and took on "the Hump," the fearsome mountain barrier that defined the air route. They flew fickle, untested aircraft through monsoons and enemy fire, with inaccurate maps and only primitive navigation technology. The result was a litany of both deadly crashes and astonishing feats of survival. The most chaotic of all the war's arenas, the China-Burma-India theater was further confused by the conflicting political interests of Roosevelt, Churchill and their demanding, nominal ally, Chiang Kai-shek.

Caroline Alexander, who wrote the defining books on Shackleton's *Endurance* and Bligh's *Bounty*, is brilliant at probing what it takes to survive extreme circumstances. She has unearthed obscure memoirs and long-ignored records to give us the pilots' and soldiers' eye views of flying and combat, as well as honest portraits of commanders like the celebrated "Vinegar Joe" Stillwell and Claire Lee Chennault. She assesses the real contributions of units like the Flying Tigers, Merrill's Marauders, and the British Chindits, who pioneered new and unconventional forms of warfare. Decisions in this theater exposed the fault-lines between the Allies—America and Britain, Britain and India, and ultimately and most fatefully between America and China, as FDR pressed to help the Chinese nationalists in order to forge a bond with China after the war.

A masterpiece of modern war history.



## The wager

A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny  
and Murder

By David Grann

On January 28, 1742, a ramshackle vessel of patched-together wood and cloth washed up on the coast of Brazil. Inside were thirty emaciated men, barely alive, and they had an extraordinary tale to tell. They were survivors of His Majesty's Ship the *Wager*, a British vessel that had left England in 1740 on a secret mission during an imperial war with Spain. While the *Wager* had been chasing a Spanish treasure-filled galleon known as "the prize of all the oceans," it had wrecked on a desolate island off the coast of Patagonia. The men, after being marooned for months and facing starvation, built the flimsy craft and sailed for more than a hundred days, traversing nearly 3,000 miles of storm-wracked seas. They were greeted as heroes.

But then ... six months later, another, even more decrepit craft landed on the coast of Chile. This boat contained just three castaways, and they told a very different story. The thirty sailors who landed in Brazil were not heroes—they were mutineers. The first group responded with countercharges of their own, of a tyrannical and murderous senior officer and his henchmen. It became clear that while stranded on the island the crew had fallen into anarchy, with warring factions fighting for dominion over the barren wilderness. As accusations of treachery and murder flew, the Admiralty convened a court martial to determine who was telling the truth. The stakes were life-and-death—for whomever the court found guilty could hang.

The *Wager* is a grand tale of human behavior at the extremes told by one of our greatest nonfiction writers. Grann's recreation of the hidden world on a British warship rivals the work of Patrick O'Brian, his portrayal of the castaways' desperate straits stands up to the classics of survival writing such as *The Endurance*, and his account of the court martial has the savvy of a Scott Turow thriller. As always with Grann's work, the incredible twists of the narrative hold the reader spellbound.

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