

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE



**CROSSROADS
OF DESTINY**

**Georgia's future
in question**



Octobre 2024

N°63

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GENEVA

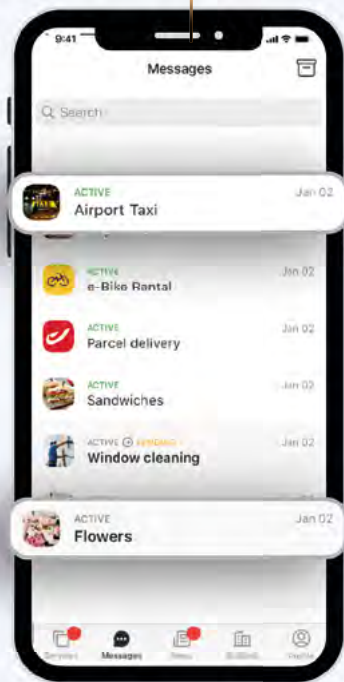
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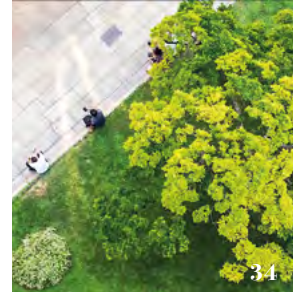
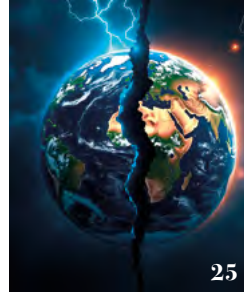


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“Europe Diplomatic Magazine” is characterized by a very open editorial line that allows it to capture all the themes that affect directly or indirectly the European political, economic, social and security issues. Whether piracy in the Gulf of Aden and its threats to the global economy, articles about political leaders, geostrategic situations or technological developments affecting our civilization, Europe Diplomatic Magazine strives to work in comparing opinions and providing an objective analysis based on extensive research. For a wide audience composed of both members of the diplomatic corps, lobbyists, international officials or academics, the magazine gives everyone the necessary and useful information about all topics that make up our daily lives. Covering sensitive issues such as nuclear, the rise of Islamism and energy dependence, the magazine opens its pages to recognized specialists who would like to express first order and exclusive information. But Europe Diplomatic Magazine is not only a source of information on recent topics. It is also addressing older facts with deep thought for further analysis. Whether it’s news, security, diplomacy, technology, energy, terrorism, European affairs, no subject is treated superficially. Europe Diplomatic Magazine is an independent media, conveying balanced ideas of openness and analysis based on almost 30 years of experience in the journalistic world.

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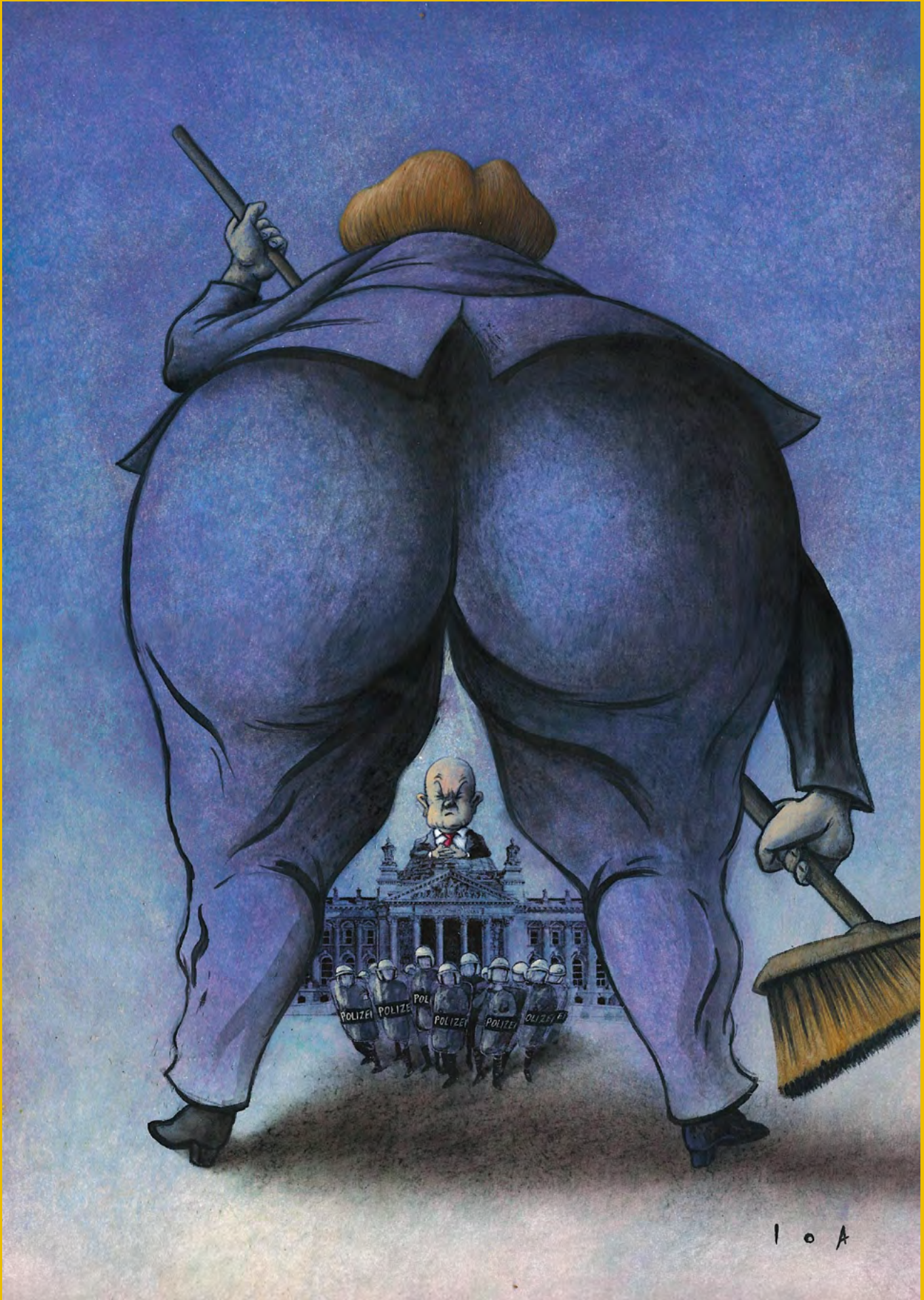
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BERLIN'S STRATEGIC REBOOT



The Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany

Embracing change in a complex world

Germany may be relatively wealthy by European standards, but its riches are not endless (whose are?) and poor people in Germany, of which there are quite a few, of course, don't want to see the country spending whatever wealth it has on foreigners.

Berlin has felt obliged to strengthen its controls at the border to exclude those asylum seekers it doesn't want, (or at least that many of its citizens don't want) which in reality for many Germans is most of them. It shouldn't feel the need to. And Germany is nothing like as well off as many of its people believe. Indeed, it has a deep economical problem that is not being addressed. There is, of course, no shortage of people in a wide variety of places who are desperately poor and in danger of meeting a violent end who would love to start a new life, whether in Germany, France, Belgium or any other relatively peaceful country, (the "relatively" is important here), preferably in Europe, but especially, it seems, in comfortable and relatively compassionate Germany.

In fact, Germany has deep economic problems, although it has denied they exist, even to itself but, especially, to its people. Governments can only focus, it seems, on one crisis at a time and the degree of importance is often dictated by the populist media. However, large-scale industry has been moving away to other locations, while its problems with asylum seekers have made it shut its collective eyes to a worsening economic situation. When you compare Germany's economy with that of Russia, you may get a shock. Russia's economy is growing at an annualised rate of 4% and things are looking good, and of course immigration is not the big issue it is in Germany. Of the EU's 448.8-million residents, 42.4 million were born outside the Union while 27.3 million are not even EU citizens, although they make up some 6% of the population. Federal Chancellor Olaf

Scholz does not appear consistent over the issue, either, signing a migration deal with Uzbekistan to enable its people to work in Germany whilst simultaneously making it easier to deport incomers he doesn't want. Perhaps we should not be surprised that he showed the lowest ever approval ratings for a German leader, even before the current economic crisis was recognised. Despite this, recent polls have suggested that most Germans see immigration as a more pressing problem than the economy. They're wrong. Germany's economy is rated as the weakest in the G7.

Rapidly rising inflation and increasing borrowing costs have hit blue chip companies like Volkswagen and Intel hard in Germany, as well as at several companies in France. Together, Germany and France have Europe's worst-performing economies. The latest Weil European Distress Index, from April 2024, which surveyed 3,750 listed companies, revealed a number of worrying issues in the corporate sector. Examining such issues as liquidity, profitability, exposure to risk and positions on the issues of valuation, investment and overall stress levels, Weil seemed to reckon that things are not looking good for Berlin (or Paris). Needless to say, Germany with its perceived wealth still poses an ill-deserved attraction for asylum seekers wanting to escape poverty and war, but few people outside economic circles realise what's going on there. Everyone knows Germany has



© VOLKSWAGEN

Volkswagen assembly plant

cash (relatively speaking), jobs and ingenuity, so who can blame them? Wealth means an end, hopefully, to potential starvation and perhaps the chance to get a job, to work and earn money, and get children educated. If only it was so simple.

It's those countries around the edges of Europe, which are usually the first places asylum seekers arrive, and leaders there are, unsurprisingly, not pleased with Germany's new-found opposition to granting asylum, with Austrian interior minister Gerhard Karner saying that his country will not accept what he referred to as "Germany's rejects". Similarly, the Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis has stated that his country won't accept Germany's rejects either, while the prime minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, has described Germany's action as "unacceptable". He said that Poland doesn't need tighter border controls but better discussion about the problems with Berlin. Poland has even accused Russia of smuggling people from Africa and the Middle East through Belarus and on towards the Polish border.



Austrian Interior Minister, Gerhard Karner

It's not kindness on Moscow's part, of course, nor generosity towards the poor asylum-seekers; Putin likes to cause problems for other countries in any way he can, and it seems he can afford to. He is not a nice man. Hungary's far-right Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has poked fun at Scholz and invited him to "join the club" of those opposed to migration in any form. Olaf is almost certain to ignore him, as most people do. We must remember that Germany, nevertheless, accepted more than a million asylum seekers in the period 2015-2016, many of them from Syria, and it has also taken in more than a million Ukrainians since Orbán's pal, Vladimir Putin, decided to invade that country in a bid to take it over, being the megalomaniac he clearly is.

Germany is often thought of as being "at the heart of Europe" because of its geographical location at the centre. It has land borders with no fewer than nine countries and is now seeking to curb irregular migration, turning people away from its borders if it can, preferably by persuasion, not force of arms. Previously, it had an "open door" policy, but that has had to come to an end. Berlin started by imposing temporary, time-limited controls. It said it would look in great detail at those seeking asylum in



An AfD poster that reads : "Annual Federal Police report shows an explosion in the crime rate by foreigners"

order to decide if they should be Germany's responsibility at all. The government rejected a proposal by the opposition conservatives to reject all asylum seekers automatically at the borders, which would in any case contravene EU laws. Many of the would-be asylum seekers are from Gaza, where 90% of the population are seeking shelter in community buildings such as schools or home-made shelters. It's hardly surprising that they think things could be better in Europe, no matter what Orbán may believe. It's probably safe to assume that people wouldn't necessarily be better off in Putin-loving Hungary, although I liked Hungary when my work took me there briefly. Germany's control of what is officially still the Schengen Zone is supposed to last for six months, but it may have to be extended. Migration remains a big election issue in Germany and the matter is bound to affect the outcome of the next elections. According to polls, migration remains the biggest issue for residents in the eastern German state of Brandenburg, and it's a growing issue elsewhere, which shows that few people read the financial news. Germany's anti-immigration far-right political party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), recently became the first far-right party since the Second World War to win a state election.

Asylum seekers have been blamed for a spate of knife attacks around the country, although it was the Islamic State group that claimed responsibility for them. In Germany, of course, they, too, are technically asylum seekers. Having taken the trouble to read the Koran, I can only assume that members of Islamic State have not, nor ever will, or they wouldn't act in the way they do. Meanwhile, travellers to Germany can expect more checks of their passports and travel documents, at least for the moment.

I Playing politics



© UNICR/ZIYAD AL-HAMADI

Asylum seekers

Anyone thinking the new regulations are the result of fears about more asylum seekers turning up would be wrong. It's really a bid to put barriers in the way of far-right political groups keen to capitalise on a rise in immigrant numbers seeking asylum and a concomitant upsurge in violence to justify their political beliefs. There is no shortage of places where people face daily danger. Some streets in London can be pretty unpleasant. This has led to dismay among some of Germany's neighbours, who fear that having been turned away at the German border, they may try to gain entry to their country instead. It seems quite likely, in fact; desperate people will always seek refuge somewhere. Germany needed

the agreement of the European Commission, of course, to change its access rules, because its plans will affect freedom of movement within the Schengen Zone, albeit only for an initial six months, but that may be extended. Germany had already begun to become increasingly strict about its asylum rules, detaining asylum seekers while German authorities determine if Germany is even responsible for processing their applications, although it rejected the demands of the far right that all asylum seekers should be automatically rejected at the border. Such a move would, in any case, break EU law. However, polls in Germany suggest that migration is the top issue for many, which makes controlling it a priority for any political party, especially if it is in office.

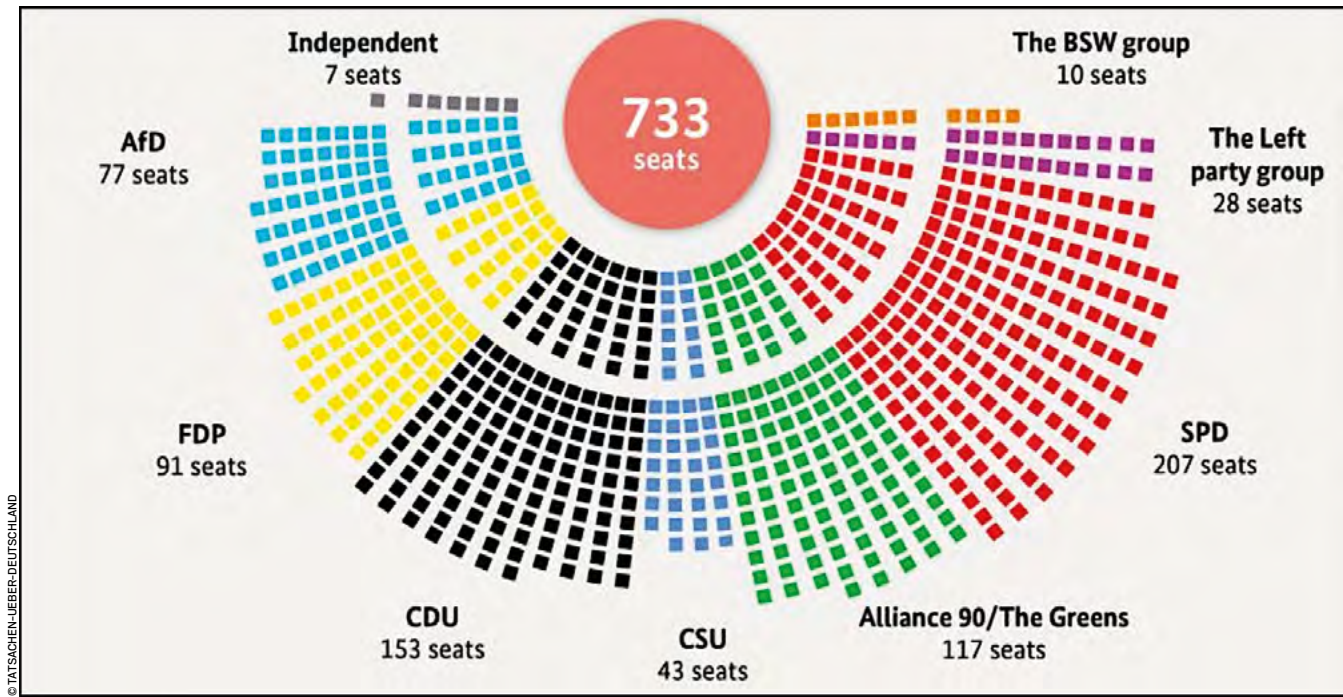
Some asylum seekers have unintentionally provided propaganda in favour of tighter controls by violence and public knife fights. In recent incidents, the attackers were known to have been asylum seekers. The fact that the attackers had clearly failed to appreciate how such actions might affect their requests for asylum suggests exceptional stupidity on the attackers' part. One thing they have achieved is a general tightening of security procedures at all Germany's borders, with more random checks being carried out on cars, buses and trains, which will inevitably cause delays.

In Britain, the leader of the former UK Independence Party, UKIP, the party that was dedicated to taking the UK out of the EU, Nigel Farage, was on a propaganda tour of



Nato Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg and German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz

© BUNDESREGIERUNG



Distribution of seats in the Bundestag in 2024

south-east England and turned up in the seaside town of Margate. In the end, of course, despite massive opposition, his policies triumphed, and Britain left the EU, doing massive economic damage to itself in the process. But getting back to that Margate incident, Farage’s minions tried to set up photo opportunities to prove his popularity. At one shop selling art and artists’ supplies, his assistant requested access and a photo of him shaking hands with the shop keeper, but the shop assistant he approached gently, politely, but firmly denied him access. The UKIP worker was apparently shocked and clearly couldn’t understand why Farage wouldn’t be welcomed. He was even more shocked when he was told that he too was unwelcome, and he was unceremoniously ordered to leave. Farage and his supporters may have been “carefully taught”, but not everyone agrees with racism, whatever the colour or politics of the victim or practitioner. I was not present for this little encounter in a shop, but I know the shop assistant very well and how much she was opposed to both racism and Brexit (and Farage, of course!). Good for her: her courage was admirable! The far right, it seems, can never understand why anyone might disagree with them, and are inclined to develop conspiracy theories when they do.

I The colours of hate

Naturally, of course, Germany’s tightening of the asylum rules will have a wider effect, with anyone deemed to be trying to enter the country illegally facing detention somewhere close to the border while their applications are examined. Not all are rejected, of course. Taking responsibility for new citizens involves cost, so the far-right are doing quite well, especially around Brandenburg in what used to be East Germany. Better, in fact, than

any far-right party has done there since the defeat of the Nazis and according to some polls, better than the governing slightly left-leaning coalition party in charge. Poland’s Prime Minister Donald Tusk has called for urgent talks with other countries likely to be affected by Germany’s action. He wants to talk about the issue in some detail before deciding what to do next. According to the UNHCR, Germany reported it had attracted almost 1.24-million refugees and 233,000



German Interior Minister, Nancy Faeser

asylum seekers by the middle of 2021, which makes it the biggest host country for refugees in Europe, half of the incomers having arrived from Syria. Under EU asylum law, arrivals must apply for asylum in the part of Europe in which they first arrived. Germany

currently attracts the fifth largest number of refugees in the world; it's a popular destination. We can speculate as to the cause until the cows come home but even if we can agree a reason, it doesn't end the resulting crisis. According to the European Agency for Asylum, In the first half of 2024, the EU and its near neighbours received more than half a million applications for asylum (513,000). This is a stable figure when compared with the same period of the previous year, which itself was the highest figure since the 2015–2016 refugee crisis.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg met with Chancellor Scholz in Berlin in April 2024 and thanked him for Germany's leading rôle in NATO and the support it has shown to Ukraine. "Germany makes major contributions to our shared security," said Mr Stoltenberg. For the first time since the early 1990s, German spending on NATO reached 2% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Germany has good reasons for helping Ukraine when it can. Relatively wealthy countries provide an irresistible attraction for those seeking new lives far from conflict and starvation. Germany's new controls are being brought into force as it witnesses a welcome drop in asylum applications, which the country's Interior Minister, Nancy Faeser, attributes to the new controls brought in last year. It's been claimed that this prevented more than 300,000 unauthorised entries.

Altogether, the EU received more than 1.14-million applications for asylum in 2023, which is the highest

number since the migrant crisis of 2016, according to the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). Even so, application numbers have fallen recently and in May 2024 were down by a third compared with last autumn's peak, although Germany continued to receive the greatest proportion: 22% of the total. Strangely, perhaps, Ireland received the greatest number per head of population, but of course it is a beautiful and inoffensive country with a largely friendly population and no internationalist ambitions. Oh, and also good beer and whiskey.

However, Olaf Scholz has expressed his determination to go ahead with his planned border controls, despite opposition from Germany's near neighbours, because he says they are "necessary". Germany has had checks in place at its borders with Czechia (more commonly known as the Czech Republic), Poland, Austria and Switzerland, having obtained official agreement for this break with the rules governing the EU's official "border free" travel area, while temporary restrictions have also been introduced at the borders with France and the Netherlands. This was mainly done to curb a rise in cross-border crime. Scholz is taking a pragmatic



© STEFFEN PROSSDORF

Friedrich Merz, Leader of the Christian Democratic Union

approach to asylum following a decision by political rivals the CDU/CSU to walk away from talks about migration issues. The CDU/CSU wanted all irregular applicants for asylum to be simply turned back at the frontier, although that would have breached EU Law. Scholz reminded his parliament that “the power of the Federal Republic of Germany ends at (its) border”.

Some Germans are in favour of migration and have demonstrated with placards upon which are written such slogans as “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Borders.” Admirable sentiments but not widely shared, of course. An influx of asylum seekers fleeing conflict in the Middle East has boosted support for Germany’s far-right and very conservative parties, especially as a small number of the incomers have resorted to violence to settle their personal disputes. They do no favours to their fellow countrymen that way. Many ordinary citizens, however theoretically liberal, believe the government should have acted earlier to curb the influx of unwelcome foreigners.

Meanwhile, Scholz is facing problems with his coalition partners and his own unpopularity. The group lost heavily in June’s European Parliament elections, with support for the Green Party, one of the partners, down by almost half, while Scholz’s Social Democrats had their worst result in a national vote for more than a century. National elections are not due until 2025, but rows among the partner parties cause some to doubt the government will last that long. The AfD, of course, seems to be polling strongly. Having three member parties – the Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats – makes the alliance especially vulnerable and it shows.

“Close the door, they’re coming in the window”

Will Germany’s clamp-down ease the burden? Will it have any effect at all? Time will tell, but it does look suspiciously like an ill-thought-out and somewhat desperate second thought, intended as a stop-gap measure to solve a short-term problem which will do nothing to ease the economic crisis. If that’s the case, then it probably won’t work anyway. It’s certainly not a long-term solution. But in order to avoid fighting in the streets and what amounts to gang warfare, it may prove to be better than nothing. However, it has aroused concerns, with even the UK’s medical periodical, The world famous medical journal, Lancet, expressing concern. The article points out that the new provisions will allow for longer periods of detention and expanded opportunities for the authorities to search accommodation, however temporary, of the asylum seekers and their families. Civil society bodies have already expressed the opinion that the new law is inhumane and arguably unlawful, posing as it does a threat to asylum seekers’ rights, personal safety and access to health care. The new law also proscribes the period during which asylum seekers are entitled to treatment for health difficulties that pre-existed or have arisen from their homelessness. Yes, they’re entitled to treatment for acute pain, perinatal care and immunisations, but that legal entitlement is limited. The very uncertainty of the asylum seekers’ futures puts

more mental stress on them and according to medical experts could affect their health in a variety of ways, causing depression, anxiety and possibly even coronary issues. The Lancet argues that all that uncertainty cannot help but lead to under-diagnoses of issues that could threaten life while greatly reducing the chances that those affected can integrate into society. It may even, perhaps, lead to a failure to diagnose treatable complaints. It may be a populist response but that doesn’t mean it’s also logical and sensible, and the United Nations has called on Germany to think again about what it is doing.

Partly, of course, what it is doing is acting as a sop to Scholz’s right-wing enemies and critics. It has also caused massive traffic jams at the German border, with cars redirected into waiting zones while the drivers’ and passengers’ papers are checked. Even though most of them were stopped fairly briefly it was described by some witnesses as “more theatrical than effective”, and it clearly isn’t enough to satisfy the far-right. The AfD party would prefer simply to turn all asylum seekers away. It also failed to satisfy Friedrich Merz of the centre-right CDU, who is making immigration a major electoral issue. The old expression “clutching at straws” springs to mind. It has, however, proved a nightmare for those living near the border whose jobs require them to cross it several times each day. Furthermore, many still see Scholz’s leftist government as being too weak on immigration, while shopkeepers on the Polish side of the frontier, for instance, say the inevitable long delays are seriously hampering trade, which will, of course, cause further economic hardship. Arguably, what the world needs is a great big melting pot, as the old pop song goes, “big enough for the world and all it’s got”. Sadly, we don’t have one and it probably wouldn’t work anyway. Maybe we could all just learn to live together in peace and harmony? It’s a nice idea but as you know and I know, that’s simply not possible. It seems the self-preservation part of human evolution ensured we go on fighting each other until the world ends. If anyone ever comes up with a solution that works, they’ll deserve more than a mere Nobel Prize. They’ll deserve (but certainly won’t get) the eternal gratitude of the entire world. German children may be kinder, but their grown-up relatives may not be.

T. Kingsley Brooks

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NEWS IN BRIEF

SPANISH ARCHITECT SELECTED TO CREATE THE STADIUM FOR THE GRAND FINAL OF THE MOROCCO 2026 WORLD CUP



© CRUZ Y ORTIZ

The nomination of Casablanca, Morocco, as one of the host cities for the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be a significant and pioneering event for many reasons. In order to accommodate the worldwide spectacle, Casablanca is intending to build a cutting-edge football stadium that will not only serve as the venue for World Cup matches but also establish itself as a significant symbol in the city's athletic and cultural future.

The new stadium in Casablanca, designed by the Spanish architectural company Cruz y Ortiz, will be a state-of-the-art, versatile facility with the capacity to accommodate more than 93,000 spectators, position it as one of the largest stadiums in Africa. The architecture will embody Morocco's abundant history and culture while seamlessly incorporating contemporary principles of modern architecture and technology. The stadium is anticipated to possess a streamlined, futuristic appearance characterised by curved contours and an open-roof design to accommodate ideal illumination and airflow. Moreover, the venue will have ecologically sustainable measures such as solar panels and rainwater harvesting systems, in accordance with FIFA's growing emphasis on environmentally responsible venues.

Geographically positioned in close proximity to Mohammed V International Airport, the stadium will provide convenient accessibility for international tourists. The stadium will be linked to Casablanca's growing public transport network, which includes the city's tramway system and an improved road infrastructure capable of accommodating the large number of tourists during the World Cup. The development will also provide advantages to the neighbouring regions around the stadium, as additional hotels, restaurants, and entertainment facilities are scheduled to cater to the substantial increase in the number of supporters.

Though the primary emphasis is on the 2026 World Cup, the Casablanca stadium is intentionally built to have a long-lasting impact. The stadium will be designated as the official home of Morocco's national team and will also play host to upcoming international tournaments and club competitions. Moreover, the stadium will serve as a renowned venue for concerts, cultural

activities, and extensive conferences, therefore guaranteeing its role as a dynamic component of Casablanca's social and economic structure for many years to come.

Ultimately, Casablanca's intended football stadium for the 2026 World Cup serves as more than a mere location; it represents Morocco's increasing significance in top-tier international sports. Features a contemporary architecture, economic advantages, and enduring impact, this project guarantees to bring about significant changes for both the city and the country.

IRAQI MINISTRY OF DEFENCE ORDERS 12 AIRBUS H225M HELICOPTERS

Airbus Helicopters has been awarded a contract for 12 H225M multi-role helicopters by the Republic of Iraq. The contract was signed in Baghdad by the Minister of Defence of Iraq Mr Thabet al-Abbasi in the presence of the French Ambassador Patrick Durel. These helicopters will be operated by the Iraqi Army Aviation command replacing older Mi-17s for a wider range of missions: counter-terrorism, special operations, tactical troop transport, attack, ground fire support, MEDEVAC and combat search and rescue. Deliveries will start in 2025. Iraq already operates a fleet of Airbus helicopters from the H125, H135 and H145 families.

"We are very pleased to welcome a new member in the H225M family," said Bruno Even, CEO of Airbus Helicopters. "The H225M is a combat-proven platform used around the world by many operators, including the French Air Force, for combat search and rescue missions. It has proven its worth and saved many lives since entering into service," he added. "The H225M is unmatched in terms of range, payload and also mission systems. It has been designed to operate challenging missions in the most demanding environments. We are looking forward to seeing the H225M contribute to Iraq's safety and sovereignty."

The H225M has proven its reliability and durability in combat conditions and crisis areas. Benefiting from Airbus' continuous



© AIRBUS

The Airbus H225M helicopter

improvement policy, the H225M is now equipped with new avionics, an enhanced main gear box, airborne communication systems and can be equipped with the HForce weapon system. The maximum take off weight has been increased by 160 kg to reach 11,160 kg.

There are more than 350 H225s and H225Ms in service across the world, totaling more than 880,000 flight hours. Military customers include France, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Mexico, Kuwait, Brazil, and Hungary.

THREE BELARUSIAN NATIONALS CHARGED FOR FORCING POLISH PLANE TO LAND TO ARREST DISSIDENT WASTE MEANS CLEANER BEACHES



Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko greets Russian president Vladimir Putin at Minsk airport

A three-year investigation has led to the charging of three Belarusian nationals for deceitfully seizing a Polish aircraft in Belarus to arrest a dissident. The forced landing in Minsk of a commercial flight caused a direct threat to the life and health of the 132 passengers and unlawfully deprived the crew and passengers of their liberty. Eurojust supported this high-profile case from the start of the investigations by Polish and Lithuanian authorities in 2021.

Belarusian air traffic controllers forced the aircraft to divert from its route to Vilnius by providing false information about an alleged explosive device, forcing the pilots to make an emergency landing at Minsk airport. After the aircraft landed in Minsk, the passengers were evacuated and their luggage was searched.

During the evacuation, two passengers, a Belarusian dissident and his companion, were arrested by officials. Investigations into the incident revealed that these arrests were the real reason the flight was diverted to Minsk.

Immediately after the incident, investigations were launched by the Polish and Lithuanian authorities. With the support of Eurojust, a joint investigation team (JIT) team was set up, which interviewed a number of witnesses, including passengers and the crew of the aircraft, and secured recordings and photographs taken during the incident.

The unprecedented nature of the case called for very close cooperation between multiple countries. Eurojust organised several coordination meetings and facilitated the execution of European Investigation Orders in Bulgaria, Greece and

Romania to secure evidence and the requests for legal assistance in Switzerland, Norway and the United States.

Witnesses testified that air traffic controllers were informed of the false bomb threat by their superiors. The air traffic controllers were then instructed by Belarusian officials on what action to take and what information to pass on to the pilots of the aircraft.

The cooperation of the authorities led to the issuing of arrest warrants for three Belarusian nationals. The suspects are charged with unlawfully depriving 132 people of their liberty through terrorist acts and intending to seriously intimidate numerous people, including groups opposed to the Belarusian regime. Detention on remand for three months is imposed on all suspects.

SERBIA ACQUIRES 12 RAFALE FIGHTERS



The Rafale : Dassault's Multirole Combat Aircraft

In the presence of the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, and the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, the Chairman and CEO of Dassault Aviation, Éric Trappier, have signed in Belgrade with the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Serbia, Bratislav Gašić, a contract for the purchase of 12 Rafale to equip the Air Force and Air Defence of the Serbian Armed Forces.

This contract reflects the importance of the bilateral relationship between France and Serbia, and testifies to the determination of both Presidents to make this partnership a success. Once again, it confirms the Rafale as an essential vector of national sovereignty.

“On behalf of Dassault Aviation and its partners, I would like to thank the Serbian authorities for the confidence they have placed in us by choosing the Rafale, and assure them of our total commitment to making its integration into the Serbian Armed Forces a success. Serbia’s decision to equip itself for the first time with a Dassault aircraft confirms the Rafale’s operational superiority and its proven excellence in serving the sovereign interests of a nation”, declared Éric Trappier.

About Dassault Aviation

With over 10,000 military and civil aircraft (including 2,700 Falcons) delivered in more than 90 countries over the last century, Dassault Aviation has built up expertise recognized worldwide in the design, development, sale and support of all types of aircraft, ranging from the Rafale fighter, to the high-

end Falcon family of business jets, military drones and space systems. In 2023, Dassault Aviation reported revenues of €4.8 billion. The company has 13,500 employees.

BELGIAN PORTS FLOODED WITH CHINESE ELECTRIC VEHICLES



The electric vehicle industry is poised for significant growth in 2024, reflecting a broader shift towards sustainable transportation as more consumers and governments prioritize clean energy. As the world becomes increasingly aware of environmental concerns, the demand for electric cars is on the rise. However, this optimistic outlook contrasts sharply with the current reality faced by many European nations, where interest in electric vehicles appears to be waning.

In 2024, Belgium is grappling with a significant challenge as its ports are inundated with unsold electric vehicles. This situation poses a serious concern for the Chinese automotive industry, which is likely to experience a downturn as a result of these unsold cars accumulating in the European market. Experts estimate that more than 15% of vehicles in Belgium's ports are currently sitting idle, a clear indication of the market's struggles.

China had strategically exported these electric vehicles to Europe with the aim of capturing a substantial share of the market—approximately a quarter—but these ambitions are now showing signs of faltering. The unsold vehicles piling up at key European ports, such as Antwerp and Zeebrugge, reflect the disconnect between production levels and actual consumer demand.

The news comes at a time when Chinese carmakers like BYD, SAIC, Great Wall Motors, and Chery among many others are looking to expand overseas, especially in Europe and South America, as demand for EVs is cooling in their domestic markets, whereas their manufacturing capacity is soaring.

Analysts attribute this growing backlog primarily to China's overproduction of electric vehicles. As production ramps up, it has outpaced the current market's ability to absorb these vehicles, leading to a surplus that is only expected to worsen in the near future. This situation not only affects the manufacturers but also raises questions about the sustainability of China's electric vehicle strategy in a rapidly changing market landscape.

However, Brazil has now overtaken Belgium as the largest export market for Chinese electric vehicles and hybrids, according to recent data. This change seems to stem from

Chinese car manufacturers focusing on boosting sales in non-European markets, especially in light of the European Union's investigation into subsidies for Chinese EVs.

The electric car market is undergoing a significant transformation as more consumers are gravitating toward eco-friendly vehicles. This shift in preferences reflects a growing awareness of environmental issues and a desire for sustainable transportation options. However, the rapid increase in imports has created logistical challenges for both automakers and distributors.

EQUINOR TO USE THE WORLD'S FIRST AMMONIA-POWERED SUPPLY VESSEL

Equinor has signed a contract with Eidesvik Offshore for the conversion of the Viking Energy supply vessel to ammonia operation. The vessel will be fully converted and put into operation with low emissions in 2026.

The vessel supplies Equinor's installations on the Norwegian continental shelf (NCS).

Viking Energy will be the world's first supply vessel fuelled by ammonia. Wärtsilä will build the engine on behalf of Eidesvik Offshore.

"We have an ambition to halve the maritime emissions associated with our Norwegian operations by 2030. With this contract, we will, in collaboration with Eidesvik Offshore, employ a new low-emission technology. We strongly believe in the use of ammonia as a fuel on our supply vessels," says Ørjan Kvelvane, Equinor's senior vice president for joint operations support.

Converting the vessel to ammonia operation Eidesvik Offshore and Wärtsilä will cut emissions from Viking Energy by at least 70 percent. Equinor and Eidesvik Offshore have a 21-year history of collaboration on environmental technology on Viking Energy.



The Viking Energy supply vessel

At the time of delivery in 2003, the vessel was the world's first LNG-fuelled supply vessel. The vessel was also the first in the world to receive DNV's «Battery Power» notation.

In addition to using the vessel in operations, Equinor will contribute significantly to funding the conversion to ammonia operation. The project receives five million euros in support through the EU Horizon Europe programme. The necessary conversion and installation of the new engine together with the

complete fuel gas supply system and exhaust after-treatment from Wärtsilä will take place in 2026.

The Norwegian government has announced that it will establish requirements for low-emission solutions from 2025, and zero emissions from new supply vessels from 2029. The orientation of these requirements has not yet been decided. In addition to this contract, Equinor has also made an inquiry in the market for supply vessels capable of running on ammonia.

UKRAINE: EU OPENS A DEFENCE INNOVATION OFFICE IN KYIV



A panoramic view of Kyiv

As a further sign of developing defence industrial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, the EU Defence Innovation Office started its activities early September in Kyiv.

The opening of the Office brings Ukraine and the EU a step closer in the implementation of the European Defence Industrial Strategy of March 2024.

Hosted by the European Union Delegation to Ukraine, the Office will promote cross-border cooperation between the Ukrainian Defence Technological and Industrial Base (DTIB) and the European DTIB. It will act as a focal point for Ukrainian partners, as well as a coordination and information hub.

The Office will play a crucial role in identifying Ukrainian needs and capacities on defence innovation, and facilitating joint initiatives and cooperation between innovative and industrial stakeholders of the EU and Ukraine. It will promote defence innovation activities in and with Ukraine, foster joint initiatives and bring together EU start-ups and innovators and Ukraine's industry and armed forces.

The EU Defence Innovation Office will inform Ukrainian defence innovation stakeholders on access to EU programmes and possible funding options. Through such activities, the Office contributes to strengthening cooperation between the EU and Ukrainian defence industries.

A strong Ukrainian Defence Technological and Industrial Base is vital for Ukraine's long-term security as well as its reconstruction. The reinforcement of Ukraine defence capacity contributes to Ukraine's integration into the Union defence equipment market.

Background

The EU Defence Innovation Office in Kyiv was announced by President von der Leyen in a joint Press Conference with President Zelenskyy on 24 February 2024 in Kyiv.

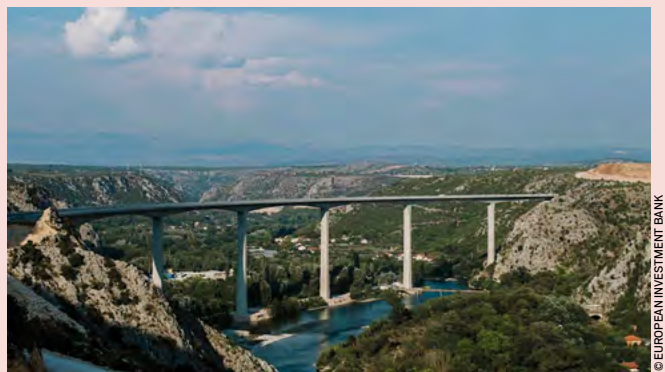
The Office is a joint effort by the European External Action Service and the European Commission, with the support of the European Defence Agency.

Adopted on 5 March 2024, the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) aims at further supporting the Ukrainian DTIB, including through the activities of the Office, and to support the transmission of technological breakthroughs to frontlines. The Strategy acknowledges the crucial role of Ukraine as a partner to the EU and sets the objective to leverage this partnership to support EU defence readiness. To that end, the Strategy in particular stressed the importance of stimulating cooperation between the Ukrainian DTIB and the European DTIB.

The Office is also another sign of the EU's unrelenting support to Ukraine in its fight for freedom, as reflected in the Joint security commitments between the European Union and Ukraine, signed on 27 June 2024. It showcases the EU's willingness to accompany Ukraine in its accession path to the EU.

In its European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) regulation proposal that accompanied EDIS, the European Commission proposes measures that will directly strengthen the Ukrainian DTIB and enhance its industrial cooperation with the European DTIB.

EIB FUNDS HERZEGOVINA BRIDGE COMPLETION



Herzegovina Bridge

If you take a look at Croatia on a map, you'll notice its quirky shape and how it shares a coastline with Bosnia and Herzegovina. This little bit of land used to split Croatia in two, separating the north from the south, where Dubrovnik is located.

Until now, people had to cross a border to travel between these parts. This caused delays and disruptions, especially during peak tourist season. Now that Croatia is in the Schengen area, this new link ends delays, strengthens Croatia's unity, and benefits tourism and trade.

The new Herzegovina Bridge, spanning nearly 1km over the Neretva River, is a major milestone for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's part of Corridor Vc, a key transport route that aims to improve connectivity, travel times, safety, and economic ties.

In line with the European Union's Global Gateway strategy, the project has been financed with a €5 million EU grant under the Western Balkans Investment Fund, as well as a €105 million loan from the European Investment Bank (EIB Global), allocated to the entire Počitelj-Bijača section.

The Počitelj-Zvirovići section includes a 11.7 km motorway, an interchange, three viaducts, a tunnel, and the impressive Herzegovina Bridge. This bridge, standing over 100 meters tall, supports four lanes of traffic and is a major highlight of the project. Stefano Ellero, Head of Cooperation at the EU Office to Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasised that the bridge's

completion symbolizes progress, cooperation, and the enduring partnership between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU. The bridge represents a key point on the route that connects not only the south and north of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also provides a corridor to the European Union through the territory of the Republic of Croatia, enabling transport connectivity that will ensure multiple developments in the industrial and economic sectors.

As the host of the inauguration ceremony, Denis Lasić, Director of JP Autoceste FBiH, underlined the monumental achievement of completing the motorway, and stressed the fact that this ambitious project wasn't just a feat of engineering, but also a powerful economic catalyst for the nation.

Corridor Vc, a major artery of European transportation, stretches from Budapest, Hungary, through Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, ultimately reaching the Adriatic port of Ploče in Croatia. This vital route serves as a linchpin for trade and transportation across Southeast Europe, connecting key markets and fostering regional cooperation. It's a testament to the power of infrastructure in driving economic growth and strengthening ties between nations.

THE HAGUE FIRST IN THE WORLD TO BAN ADVERTISING FOR FOSSIL FUELS



The Hague is the first city in the world to ban fossil fuel advertising through local legislation. The city council has voted in favor of the initiative proposal from the Hague's Party for the Animals, which enacts this ban. Leonie Gerritsen (PvdD -Party for the Animals) stated, "The Hague will be the first city in the world to truly ban fossil fuel advertising. This is an important signal from the nation's capital: we need to break our fossil fuel addiction. The Hague aims to be climate-neutral by 2030. Allowing advertisements for products from the fossil fuel industry does not align with that goal."

The ban will take effect on January 1, 2025, and applies to advertisements for fossil fuel products and services such as air travel, cruise vacations, gasoline cars, and gas providers. In four months, these ads will disappear from public spaces in The Hague.

Femke Slegers from the organization Fossil Free Advertising said "The Hague is showing the courage needed to tackle the climate crisis. If you want to move away from fossil fuels, you stop promoting fossil fuel use through advertising. The Hague is demonstrating that it can be done through local legislation.

This decision could spark a snowball effect globally."

The Hague had previously attempted to ban fossil fuel advertising. First, unsuccessfully, by appealing to the social responsibility of advertising operators. In 2022, the Party for the Animals also tried to ban fossil fuel ads through local law.

UPPSALA HAS CLEANEST CITY AIR IN EUROPE



The historical district of Uppsala, Sweden

The European Environment Agency's (EEA) updated European city air quality viewer shows that people in Uppsala and Umeå, Sweden, and Faro, Portugal, can enjoy the cleanest city air in Europe. Three out of four Europeans live in urban areas and most of them are exposed to unsafe levels of air pollution. Improving air quality to levels recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) could significantly reduce premature deaths caused by air pollution.

The EEA's European city air quality viewer ranks 375 cities from the cleanest to the most polluted based on average levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5). The data was collected from over 500 monitoring stations at urban locations across EEA member countries over the past two calendar years, 2022 and 2023.

The viewer shows that only 13 European cities had average fine particulate concentrations that were below the World Health Organization's (WHO) health-based guideline level of 5 micrograms per cubic meter of air (5 µg/m³). These cities include four northern capitals: Reykjavik, Tallinn, Stockholm and Helsinki.

The European Green Deal's zero pollution action plan sets a 2030 target of reducing premature deaths caused by fine particulate matter by at least 55%, compared with 2005 levels, and a long-term goal of no significant health impacts by 2050. Earlier this year, the EU institutions reached an agreement on a proposal to update the ambient air quality directives with the aim to align the EU air quality standards closer to the WHO's guideline levels and help deliver on the objectives of the zero pollution action plan.

The European city air quality viewer provides an indication on the typical air quality in European cities over the past two years. The viewer focuses on long-term concentrations of PM2.5, as it is the air pollutant with the highest negative health impacts. Later this year, the EEA will publish an analysis on the impacts of air pollution on ecosystems and human health. This includes estimates on deaths and ill health that can be attributed to poor air quality.



© DEFENSE MINISTRY OF GEORGIA



Georgian jets in fly-past during Independence Day parade

CROSSROADS OF DESTINY

**Georgia's future
in question**



Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili addressing members of the Supreme Council of Georgia who signed the Act of Restoration of Independence of Georgia on 9 April 1991

The Republic of Georgia, a country in Eastern Europe that gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, is poised to capture international attention for reasons far removed from its shared name with the US state. As disputes intensify over the future direction of this former Soviet republic, the potential for escalation looms large. The involvement of Russia's assertive and easily provoked president, Vladimir Putin, heightens the risk of the situation becoming increasingly intractable, perilous, and even bloody for those entangled in or proximate to the conflict. With Putin's interest piqued, the likelihood of casualties rises, as is often the case in disputes that draw his focus. Georgia's future now hangs in the balance, fuelled by the interests of Putin and other external actors, shrouding the country in uncertainty.

Georgia has, of course, been in the news before. Indeed, it was there, in the small town of Gori in 1878 (despite the claim in an official biography that it was a year later) that Ioseb Jugashvili first emerged into a world he would come to know very well. Some might say uncomfortably well. Jugashvili is better known by his adopted name: Joseph Stalin. He decided to be on record as one year younger than his real age only in the 1920s. It seems that nobody knows why, although the different ways of recording the passage of years in Russia may have something to do with it, so it could have been a simple error. In any case, Stalin's 50th birthday was celebrated a year later than it should have been, to go by the church records of his baptism.

There is an excellent biography of Stalin, written by Oleg Khlevniuk that I would recommend to anyone wishing to know more about the man and the monster. Khlevniuk certainly doesn't play down the horrors of Stalin's blood-soaked rule. We should also perhaps note in passing that Georgian is not only a nationality but also a language in its own right and one that uses a unique and rather beautiful alphabet that seems at first glance to more closely resemble Arabic in appearance than

it does, say, Cyrillic or Latin, which appear harsh and rather too angular by comparison. In fact, it seems to be unlike any other written language I've ever seen. I wish I could read it. In Georgia itself, of course it is in widespread use, certainly by some 88% of the people of Georgia, anyway.



In 2010, the pro-Western Georgian government removed Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin's statue in Gori, planning to replace it with a monument to war victims

But where does all this place us today? Georgia's president, Salome Zurbishvili, has warned that the upcoming election there is far more than a regular and routine political event. It represents the chance for Georgian citizens to choose between lining up with the West or returning to Russia's sphere of influence: European integration or the dominance of Moscow? Which would you choose? And, most importantly, which will the people of Georgia choose? The plain fact is that Georgia cannot afford to dither: making the right choice now is vital and will decide Georgia's future into the years ahead. The current government, led by the Georgian Dream political party, does not have an unblemished record of governance. In fact, it has been responsible for several "mishaps", caused by poor judgement, mismanagement and a lack of accountability, but opposition parties are reluctant to describe it as a "Russian government", despite the strong Moscow influence.

It will not be easy for the opposition parties to position themselves as representing a bright new future for the country. The opposition is divided, too, rather than being a single party or even an alliance, and it will have to convince voters that it will stand against authoritarianism and give the ordinary people a chance to flourish. And “do their own thing” in the common parlance of today. Convincing voters of that intention will not be easy, despite the current government’s unpopularity. It goes without saying that Putin is engaged in trying to prevent democracy from taking hold, partly through its antidemocratic “foreign agent law”, the existence of which prevents Georgia having any chance of joining the EU. Originally introduced in Russia in response to criticism of Putin’s insistent control of any activities in Russia involving foreigners, it requires anyone in the country who receives support from outside Russia or who is seen to be under influence from outside the country to declare themselves to be “foreign agents”, which means being subjected to additional audits as well as marking any publications they publish with a 24-word disclaimer stating that they are being distributed by a “foreign agent”. The law, which is utterly ridiculous, was introduced in response to objections to Putin’s fears that voices other than his might gain an audience. Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, claims that the United States and France have such laws but that they are even tougher. This is, of course, an outright lie, but truth plays little part in the Putin rule book and hardly ever in any statements by Lavrov. Some might argue that Putin is only displaying sensible caution; others might say he is plainly displaying paranoia that is verging on madness. You choose.

Behind The Gay Iron Curtain

Lavrov also claims that the West is trying to impose LGBTQ rights on Russia, and now on Georgia, too, and he claims that the current Georgian government is only now becoming aware that the people of Georgia “have the values of Orthodoxy and national culture, which will be eroded, erased and subjugated by the ‘rules’ that the West is imposing on everyone, primarily in the context of the values of liberal democracy or, if you will, democratic liberalism.”



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin

That would seem to suggest that personal freedom is a bad thing and that only Russian influence can save Georgia from adopting it. Only Russia can prevent Georgians from having free will. Lavrov seems oddly unaware that just because it’s not illegal to be gay doesn’t mean that it’s compulsory, either. The idea in much of the West, even if disapproved of in many places, is that



Georgian Dream leaders on stage. From left to right: party chair and ex-PM Irakli Gharibashvili, founder and honorary chair Bidzina Ivanishvili, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, and faction leader in parliament, Mamuka Mdivanadze at the microphone. In the background: Minister of Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauri

those who feel gay can exercise their preferences without prosecution. They're not forced into it, Mr. Lavrov; have no fear! In fact, following the October Revolution of 1917, the new Bolshevik rulers rewrote the country's laws, and they left off the articles banning homosexuality. Indeed, a wedding was held in Petrograd (St. Petersburg, as it's now known) between Russian sailors dressed in women's clothes. In fact, one of the organisers was a member of the secret police and all the guests were arrested and accused of being counter-revolutionaries, but the case was thrown out and young gay men (I can find no reference to gay women) identified their preferences by wearing red ties, shawls or other fashions, or even make-up, and no-one seemed to mind. That doesn't mean, of course, that the famed Red Army was gay. Even so, it's a good job Lavrov wasn't there. Despite Soviet Russia's fairly open attitude to gay rights, homosexuality was criminalised eventually, although that changed after the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia had been the first modern country to legalize homosexuality and same-sex marriage, which seems odd when one considers that conditions in much of the country were virtually feudal.

That was then and this is now, but in some ways Russia seems to be going backwards and trying to drag its former satellites along with it. Lavrov is clearly acting as Putin's faithful lapdog, supporting his view that only his opinions about anything are right. He is wrong.



Anti-LGBTQ+ Protest in Tbilisi

Georgian President Zurabishvili is portraying the election as a battle between those in favour of a western-style democracy and those who would prefer a Moscow-led state lacking individual freedoms, especially freedoms that stand in the way of a Russian hegemony and the obsessive one-man rule of Putin, our latter-day would-be tsar. The last time I was in Moscow was several years ago, when Putin was not trying to play at being the Tsar and matters were therefore rather more relaxed. Walking through Red Square was an enjoyable experience without the fear of imminent arrest. It was possible to admire the handsome, if somewhat austere, architecture. But Putin is opposed to freedom, of course, and

seems to believe he should not only impose the law (which would be fair enough for any leader) but also his own narrow set of morals, too, (which would not). Poor old Georgia. I don't imagine that many Georgians believe the Lavrov narrative that the West is trying to "drag them" into "a vortex of liberal democracy". How could it be described as "a vortex"? Even if it were proved to be true, would many Georgians mind? Their choice is really between a pre-Soviet-style iron rule by one man and the freedom of personal choice offered by Western-style democracy.

I A Question of Choices



Otar Partskhalaze

The head of the State Security Service, Grigol Liluashvili (second from the left) with the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Mikheil Chkhenkeli (first from the right)

Voters who previously supported the discredited Georgia Dream party have been urged to open their minds to the alternatives. One opponent of Georgia Dream has defined it as "the party of disaster", drawing attention to "the preventable tragedies that have occurred under their watch due to negligence and mismanagement". Certainly, the party's record in government has not won it many plaudits. Opposition parties must show their determination to prevail, despite the fear of violence and repression, both of which are ever-present when Russia opposes something. Politicians who are against the current government have expressed the fear that the country is being drawn inexorably into the bottomless pit of Russian rule, from which escape is all but impossible. Georgia has applied to join the EU, a policy that is now enshrined in its constitution, and an Association Agreement was signed in 2014, but some Georgian officials have tried to sabotage that move by supporting the country's Russia-style "foreign agents" law, designed to silence independent media and suppress dissent. It will become illegal to criticise Putin. Lavrov would love it, as would the oligarchs who support him.

The plain fact is that there are Georgian businessmen with close ties to Russia and the FSB, Moscow's secret service. Otar Partskhalaze, for instance, has been sanctioned by the United States, along with his FSB "handler", Aleksandr Onishchenko. Then there's Giorgi Liluashvili, Georgia's head of state security and a close advisor to the current prime minister, who stands accused of helping companies to evade Russian sanctions. He also arranged and oversaw the Security Service's private security escort for the daughter of Sergei Lavrov, Yekatarina, who travelled to Georgia in 2023 to participate in a wedding. It seems to be one law for rulers and oligarchs and very different ones for everybody else.

Bidzina Ivanishvili: Georgia's Kingmaker



Bidzina Ivanishvili

Bidzina Ivanishvili is a Georgian billionaire and influential political figure, best known for his role as the founder of the Georgian Dream party, which has been the ruling party in Georgia since 2012. He served as Prime Minister from 2012 to 2013, after leading Georgian Dream to victory against the United National Movement, led by then-President Mikheil Saakashvili. Ivanishvili formally stepped down from politics in 2013, though many believe he continues to exert significant influence behind the scenes.

Ivanishvili's wealth was estimated at \$7 billion in 2024 and informal power give him considerable influence over Georgian politics, including the

upcoming elections. Even though he no longer holds an official position, he is seen by many as the de facto leader of Georgian Dream. His decisions and influence within the party often shape the party's policies and strategies.

This influence could play a crucial role in future elections. Critics argue that his control over media outlets and business sectors gives him undue influence over public opinion and political outcomes in Georgia. As such, his actions, endorsements, or any shifts in the leadership of Georgian Dream could significantly impact the results of the upcoming elections and the direction of Georgian politics.

Opposition parties have long accused Ivanishvili, who made his fortune in Russia in the 1990s, of loyalties to Putin.

On 9 June 2022, the European Parliament issued a six-page resolution accusing the government of Georgia and Ivanishvili of eroding press freedom in the country. The resolution also described Ivanishvili as having "personal and business links to the Kremlin", and recommended that the European Union sanction Ivanishvili for "his role in the deterioration of the political process in Georgia." The resolution had a significant impact in Georgia, coming amidst a request for European Union candidate status.



The residence and trade center owned by the Georgian tycoon Boris (Bidzina) Ivanishvili in Tbilisi



Map of Georgia, Ossetia, Russia and Abkhazia

The prime aim of Georgia's Russia-sympathising officials seems to be power, influence and personal enrichment, not the good of the country. Despite everything, the EU is still Georgia's largest and most important trading partner, and that trade is still growing, despite the likes of Putin and Lavrov, although the adoption of the "Foreign Agent" law may have a negative impact. Meanwhile, the EU has informed the Georgian government that it should reverse its controversial Russian-style law so that negotiations for full membership can proceed. They are currently suspended in the hope that Georgia will change course. EU leaders also expressed their wish to undertake short-term and long-term monitoring of elections and called for an end to increasing acts of intimidation, threats and physical assault against representatives of Georgia's civil society, civilians, politicians and journalists and reaffirmed their solidarity with the Georgian people. As always with the EU, at the end of the day, it's just words, however well-meaning, while Russia prefers to reinforce its views with threats and violence. The ghost of Stalin, it seems, still haunts the corridors of power, especially where Georgia is concerned. The EU believes that the "Foreign Agent" law, so closely based on Russia's example, is intended to stifle debate ahead of this autumn's elections. As we have seen, Putin doesn't favour debate when simple threats and violence seem to work so well in his favour.

Interestingly, the new law was passed despite massive street protests by Georgians who have dubbed it "the Russian law", with any organisation that receives more than 20% of its funding from overseas having to register as "acting in the interests of a foreign power". It seems that Russia itself doesn't count as "foreign", although it very clearly is. The Georgian government, fervently pro-Moscow, argues that the new law will ensure transparency while protecting Georgia from "foreign influence". Again, we must assume that "Russian" doesn't count as "foreign", at least in the eyes of some.



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EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski

Meanwhile, there have been several examples reported of NGO workers, activists and opposition politicians being threatened and even physically assaulted at rallies up and down the country. The EU has described them as "increasing acts of intimidation" and called on the government to ensure that the elections are free and fair, although it's by no means certain that it's what the existing government really wants. Currently, the

EU's ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, has said recently that Tbilisi and the European Union were going through "a difficult period". Despite this – and despite the enormous block on further integration caused by the "foreign agents" law – there has been progress in the reform of laws relating to human rights. In the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy, following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Georgia has aligned itself with international and EU initiatives in support of Kyiv (which is a lovely city in my memory, as well as being the seventh most populous city in Europe, and an important industrial, scientific, educational, and cultural centre). When I was there, there was some sort of fancy-dress event taking place, presumably linked to the university, and I especially recall one young woman walking proudly through the main square dressed as Minnie Mouse (I'm only assuming it was a woman because she was wearing a headdress that completely covered and hid her face). Georgia has supported resolutions on the subject of Ukraine adopted by the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council as well as the Council of Europe, although it did not align with the EU's proposed restrictive measures against Russia and Belarus. Some might argue that a small helping is preferable to an empty plate, if only just in this case. Certainly, protests against the "Foreign Agents" laws have attracted thousands. It's a very unpopular idea, however much Putin and Lavrov may like it.

Is History Repeating Itself?

Georgia has had a very chequered past, after it was first established as a unified kingdom in the early 11th century by King Bagrat III, who assembled the country from a number of the ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia. The current country became independent in 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Back in those early years it had rulers with such wonderful names as King David IV "the Builder" and Queen Tamar the Great, back in the days before it succumbed to a Mongol invasion in 1243. It later re-emerged as an independent kingdom under George V "the Brilliant", who lost it in turn to the Timurid Empire in 1403. That didn't last and by 1490 it had been broken up into a lot of petty kingdoms and principalities which struggled to retain their independence against the Ottoman Empire and then the Iranians (or Persians, as they were then), finally becoming a part of the Russian empire in the 19th century. It enjoyed brief independence as the Democratic Republic of Georgia before being swallowed up by the Soviet Union prior to its dissolution. In its present form, it has only been an independent state since 1991,



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A Russian tank in South Ossetia in 2008

and now, it seems, Russia has its eyes on Georgia once again. Mr. Putin is a greedy man.

We should not forget that Russia seized Abkhazia and South Ossetia back in 2008 and they're still there, despite protests. Few people believe the message picked out in stones that reads "thank you Russia", which is assumed to have been put there by Russians. Most of the Georgians living there have protested against Russia's unwelcome presence and there have been demonstrations against it, too, but it takes courage to participate in them: Moscow doesn't like dissent. Babies born in any territory under its control must be registered as "Russian", whatever their parents may say. In fact, Putin seems to be basing his policies on those employed by Attila the Hun: invade, capture, control, silence any opposition. Just like Putin today, Attila and his brother failed to keep their promises over the years that followed. At one of the anti-Russian demonstrations in South Ossetia, one man can be seen holding a placard that reads: "Russia is an occupant!!!" (note all the exclamation marks). That message is something that no-one can deny and an attempt by Georgia to seize back its territory met with defeat, despite both territories being recognized internationally as Georgian, not Russian.

Several Georgian towns, a military airport and a Black Sea port were bombed by the Russian air force, while several Georgian villages in South Ossetia were completely destroyed. Putin doesn't do things by halves.

As it is, hundreds of Georgians were killed in the ensuing conflict and thousands were displaced by Russian forces. We must suppose that Putin wants people to desire Russian rule and to enjoy it, but he has a very odd way of showing it. As it is, the "foreign agent" law is impacting on charitable organisations trying to improve social care and health, such as Sotsium, a small local charity working to stem the spread of HIV. To describe Putin's law as immoral falls far short of reality, but don't expect him to change his mind. In his address to the parliament of the Russian Federation on the first anniversary of the war against Ukraine on February 21, 2023,

Russian Putin labeled those Russians who share Western liberal ideas as "national traitors." He also said: "the West will obviously try to undermine and split our society, betting on national traitors, who at all times have the same poison of contempt for their own fatherland and the desire to make money by selling this poison to those who are willing to pay for it." He would appear to believe that he and he alone should be in charge of everything. What he is saying is, it seems, that unless you would like to trade democracy for a one-man dictatorship by someone who may be mentally unstable, you are a traitor. Such self-obsession is hard to imagine and impossible to justify. Putin is, clearly, a very disturbed and some might say evil man, so a few extra deaths probably won't bother him, based on current evidence. It's hard to try to think how he thinks, although large-scale bank robbers and gangsters running organised crime probably share similar ideas. He talks about the need for high morals although his own have been called into question by some.

Where does Georgia go from here? It's a big question, because the indications are that if the elections don't bring the results Putin would like, it won't end there. He's not known for "letting sleeping dogs lie", as the saying goes. Would he plunge the whole of Europe and perhaps the wider world into war just because he wants to be in charge? Based on the evidence so far, that would appear to be the case. I'm beginning to suspect that even Stalin would be shocked.

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THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN EUROPE

**A growing
challenge**

Imagine a world where some people are constantly connected, with lightning-fast internet and the latest gadgets, while others struggle to get a basic signal or afford a simple smartphone. That's the reality of the digital divide which is rooted in socio-economic disparities, geographical isolation and limited digital literacy.

Despite significant advancements in digital infrastructure and technology, this situation poses a growing challenge to European cohesion, economic growth and overall quality of life. This divide isn't just about technology; it's about opportunities, inclusion, and quality of life.

The digital divide is like a chasm between those who have easy access to the digital world and those who don't. It's not just about having an internet connection; it's about having the skills to use it effectively and the opportunity to engage with it meaningfully.

The most obvious part is of course, access. If you don't have a reliable internet connection or a device to use on it, you're on the wrong side of the divide.

But having access is one thing, and knowing how to use it is another. Digital literacy is therefore crucial, and not everyone has it.

However, even with access and skills, how you use the internet matters. Some people might just use it for basic tasks like email and social media, while others are running businesses, e-commerce, learning new skills, or even creating the next big thing.

I Roots and Causes

So, what is causing this divide? The following are the five main factors according to experts in this field:

- **Geographic disparities:** Urban areas generally tend to have better digital infrastructure than rural regions. This fact is particularly felt in Eastern and Southern Europe, where rural communities often lack a decent internet access.
- **Socio-Economic factors:** Money matters very much, and

lower-income households often can't afford to buy the latest devices or pay for broadband subscriptions.

- **Educational levels:** People with higher levels of education are more likely to have the digital skills necessary, while those with lower educational levels may struggle.
- **Age:** Older adults are less likely to be digitally savvy because of a lack of exposure to digital technology during their formative years, as well as a reluctance to adopt new technologies.
- **Gender:** While the gender gap is closing, women are still less likely to have access to the internet and digital technologies in some regions of Europe.

The digital divide isn't just about who can send an email or post on social media; it has real and tangible impacts on individuals, communities and nations.

Lack of digital access and skills can seriously limit economic opportunities, so that people without digital literacy may struggle to find employment in an increasingly digital job market, and companies and businesses in poorly-connected areas may face difficulties competing with those in better-connected regions.

As for social inclusion, the digital divide can exacerbate social inequalities so that those without access to digital technologies may be excluded from online services, social networks and educational opportunities. This results in feeling isolated and marginalised.

In the field of health care, digital health services such as telemedicine have become game-changers, especially in rural areas. But those without digital access may miss out on vital medical services.

In education, with more and more learning happening online, students without access to the internet, devices or the necessary skills may find it



difficult to keep up with their peers.

And then, there is the important concept of democratic participation where digital technologies can facilitate civic engagement and democratic participation. But those without digital access may be excluded from online debates and decision-making processes.

Case Studies of Some European Regions and Policy Initiatives

Let's first look at Eastern Europe. Countries such as Romania and Bulgaria face significant challenges in terms of digital access and skills. Rural areas in these countries often lack high-speed internet and digital literacy levels are relatively low. Efforts to bridge the digital divide in these regions include government initiatives to improve broadband infrastructure and educational programmes to enhance digital skills.



Online surgery

As far as Southern Europe is concerned, in countries like Greece and Italy, the digital divide is influenced by economic factors. The economic crisis in these countries has led to a reduction in public investment in digital infrastructure, further widening the divide. Furthermore, older adults in these regions are less likely to have digital skills, which only exacerbate the divide.

Lastly, Northern European countries such as Sweden and Finland are generally well-connected and have high levels of digital literacy. But even in these advanced digital societies, there are some disparities; rural areas and older adults may still face challenges in accessing and using digital technologies.

But as a general rule, governments, international organisations and private sector entities are implementing various initiatives to address the digital divide in Europe. These can be roughly divided into five distinct categories or areas of focus:

Infrastructure development: Investing in better digital infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas is crucial. The European Union's Connecting Europe Broadband Fund (CEBF) aims to support the deployment of high-speed broadband networks in underserved areas. This Luxembourg-based investment company was created to help implement the European Commission's Gigabit Society targets, which are a set of connectivity goals aimed at ensuring that Europe has the high-

speed internet infrastructure necessary to support a digital society and economy by 2025.



Data center

The main targets include 'Gigabit Connectivity' where all European households should have access to networks offering download speeds of at least 1 Gigabit per second, and '5G coverage', where all urban areas and major terrestrial transport paths should have uninterrupted 5G coverage.

These targets were set to support the increasing demand for high-speed internet, the growth of digital services, and the development of new technologies such as the 'Internet of Things' (IoT), cloud computing and artificial intelligence. These all aim to bridge the European digital divide.

Digital skills training: Programmes to enhance digital literacy are essential for ensuring that individuals can effectively use digital technologies. The European Union's 'Digital Education Action Plan' focuses on promoting digital skills and competencies among students and teachers.

This strategic initiative is aimed at supporting the use of technology and digital competences in education. It was first adopted in 2018 and was updated in 2021 to cover the period until 2027. The plan focuses on two strategic priorities: firstly, fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem, and secondly, enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation.

The overall goal of the Digital Education Action Plan is to ensure that Europe's education and training systems are fit for the digital age, equipping citizens with the digital skills they need to thrive, and driving innovation in teaching and learning.

Affordable access: Making digital technologies and internet access more affordable can help, and subsidised broadband and low-cost devices can make a big difference.

Public-Private partnerships: Collaboration between governments and private companies can accelerate efforts to bridge the divide.

Regulatory frameworks: Effective regulations can promote competition and innovation, leading to better access and affordability. The European Union's Digital Single Market (DSM) strategy, adopted by the European Commission in 2015

is an initiative aimed at creating a seamless digital marketplace across the EU, with the primary goal of breaking down regulatory barriers and enabling the free movement of persons, services and capital, as well as the free flow of data within the EU.

The DSM strategy is designed to enhance Europe's competitiveness, stimulate innovation, and create jobs, while also providing better services and protections for consumers. It involves a range of legislative and non-legislative initiatives, as well as coordination among EU member states.

I Full Speed Ahead

In June 2022, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached an agreement on the "2030 Policy Programme: Path to the Digital Decade". This agreement marked a significant step forward in establishing a comprehensive strategy to guide Europe's digital transformation over the coming decade. The policy programme aims to ensure that Europe becomes a global leader in digital technologies by 2030, fostering innovation, economic growth and social inclusivity.

On 15 December 2022, a monumental step was taken towards a digital future that truly puts people at the centre. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, together with the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and the Czech Prime Minister, Petr Fiala, representing the rotating Council Presidency, signed the ground-breaking European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles.

Born from the Commission's January 2022 vision, this Declaration is more than just a document — it is a promise. A promise to drive a digital transformation that is safe, secure and sustainable. A promise to uphold the EU's fundamental values and rights in the digital age.

This is not just a step forward, but a leap into a future where technology serves people and people are at the centre of innovation.

The 2030 Policy Programme focuses on advancing skills and infrastructure, such as internet connectivity, digitising businesses, and putting public services online. It also emphasises upholding the EU's digital rights and principles in achieving the general objectives.



(from left to right) Roberta Metsola, Petr Fiala and Ursula von der Leyen

Margrethe Vestager, the Executive Vice-President for 'A Europe Fit for the Digital Age' said: *"The Digital Decade is about making digital technology work for people and businesses. It is about enabling everyone to have the skills to participate in the digital society. To be empowered. It is about empowering businesses. It is about the infrastructure that keeps us connected. It is about bringing government services closer to citizens. Europe's digital transformation will give opportunities for everyone."*

Commenting on the same subject, the European Commissioner for the Internal Market added: *"The Digital Decade policy programme is the way*

EU's 2030 Digital Decade targets

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF BUSINESSES

SMEs with at least a basic level of digital intensity



There are



towards a more innovative, inclusive and sustainable future for Europe. Unlocking the potentials of the digital transformation, specifically by setting up and implementing multi-country projects, will pave the way for a competitive and sovereign Europe. We have to swiftly embark on the Path to the Digital Decade to make sure Europe is ready for the challenges in an evolving and inter-connected world.”

In order to keep tabs on progress, key performance indicators, derived from an improved Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) will be used. Overall progress will be assessed against established trajectories and derailed in an annual ‘State of the Digital Decade’ report which will be submitted to the European Parliament and Council.



© EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Margrethe Vestager Executive Vice-President for ‘A Europe Fit for the Digital Age’

Artificial Intelligence: Good or Bad?

Artificial Intelligence (AI), meaning the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think and learn like humans, encompasses a wide range of technologies, from simple chatbots to complex neural networks that can perform tasks like recognising speech, translating languages, and even driving cars.

AI has a significant impact on the digital divide, both in Europe and globally. While it has the potential to bridge some gaps, it also risks exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new divides. When considering AI, various factors and perspectives must be taken into account, rather than adopting a one-sided view.

Clearly, AI has had a number of positive impacts on the digital divide. Among these, some of the most important are improved accessibility. AI has certainly made digital technologies more accessible to individuals with disabilities through applications such as voice assistants, text-to-



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speech technologies and AI-powered translation tools that can help people with visual, auditory or cognitive impairments access digital content more easily.

AI offers enhanced educational opportunities due to tools such as personalised learning platforms and intelligent tutoring systems that can provide tailored educational experiences. These tools can be particularly beneficial for students in underserved areas, offering them access to high-quality educational resources.

In the medical field, telemedicine and AI diagnostics make healthcare more accessible, especially in remote and rural areas. AI also optimises resources by helping governments and organisations allocate them more efficiently for digital infrastructure; this is like having a smart GPS for investment needs!

And then, there is the important skill-building aspect, where AI-powered training programmes and online courses help people develop digital skills and compete better in the job market, no matter where they live.

While technological breakthroughs often bring significant advances and benefits, it’s important to recognise that they also bring challenges and negative impacts. These can range from unintended consequences to ethical dilemmas and societal changes. For example, progress can lead to job displacement due to automation, privacy concerns over data collection or environmental issues related to resource depletion and e-waste. In addition, rapid technological change can exacerbate social inequalities and create a digital divide between those who have access to new technologies and those who don’t.

Last but not least, online privacy can be of real concern. AI systems often rely on large amounts of personal data, raising significant concerns about data privacy and security, especially for individuals in underserved areas who may lack the resources to protect their data.

So, AI has the potential to both bridge and widen the digital divide. It is therefore important that innovation is used wisely to minimise potential harm and ensure that the benefits are shared fairly.

The digital divide is not an insurmountable challenge. With the right policies and a multi-faceted approach that combines infrastructure investment, digital literacy education and targeted policy interventions, Europe can strive towards a more digitally inclusive society that leaves no one behind.

Hossein Sadre
hossein.sadre@europe-diplomatic.eu



Smoking causes lung cancer



World Health
Organization



AI GENERATED PICTURE

SKY WARRIORS

**The tactical shift
of drone combat in
Ukraine**

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been marked by an extraordinary integration of drone technology, with the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) reaching levels never before seen in modern warfare.

The skies above the battlefields have been abuzz with thousands of these drones, their silhouettes stark against the grey expanse, as they diligently carry out a myriad of tasks.

These mechanised sentinels have been instrumental in monitoring the ebb and flow of enemy movements, their unblinking electronic eyes providing a constant vigil. They have served as invisible conduits, guiding the deadly ballet of artillery fire with an accuracy that is as chilling as it is awe-inspiring. Furthermore, these drones have been utilised to execute precision strikes on targets, their payloads delivered with a cold, calculated efficiency that is a hallmark of this new age of warfare.



The SKYFIST drone manufactured by the Ukrainian company Uadcom can be armed with 75mm explosive bombs

This cutting-edge technology is not merely augmenting military capabilities; it is fundamentally transforming the very landscape of war. Tactics and strategies that were once the stuff of science fiction are now being employed with devastating effect. The battlefield has evolved into a complex, interconnected web of sensors and shooters, where the hum of drones has become as ubiquitous as the thunder of artillery.

The prominence of drones in this conflict serves as a stark testament to their burgeoning significance on the battlefield. Yet, it also raises profound questions about the future of military engagement. As we venture further into this uncharted territory, we must grapple with the ethical implications of such advanced capabilities.

In essence, the conflict in Ukraine is not just a clash of arms; it is a window into the future of warfare, where technology and ethics intertwine in a complex dance, and the humble drone plays a starring role. The lessons we learn from this conflict will

shape the battles of tomorrow, for better or for worse.

Drones have indeed metamorphosed the battlefield, introducing accessible and affordable capabilities on a scale hitherto unseen. These unmanned aerial vehicles have presented significant challenges to the concentration of forces, the element of surprise, and the execution of offensive operations. Whilst it is true that drones do not possess the survivability of crewed aircraft, they do allow for a greater acceptance of risk.

Moreover, the longevity of drones in combat is not necessarily a critical factor when they are both economical and abundant. In such cases, their resiliency can be bolstered through sheer numbers, a strategy similar to the Hydra of ancient myth, where heads of the serpent-like monsters regrow in the place of those severed. However, it is essential to note that the overall impact of drones has been more akin to an evolution than a revolution.

Drones, when integrated with ground-based firing units, have transformed common artillery shells into precision-guided weapons. Furthermore, so-called 'kamikaze drones' have demonstrated remarkable accuracy in striking mobile targets, rendering the frontlines even more deadly.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand that even a multitude of small drones cannot rival the raw power or volume of artillery fire., and thus, cannot serve as a substitute for the traditional howitzers that have long dominated the battlefield. Additionally, while drones offer an affordable form of air power, they have not supplanted traditional air forces, nor have they been able to secure air superiority.

In essence, the advent of drones has significantly altered the landscape of warfare, introducing new strategies and challenges. However, their role is not one of dominance, but rather of augmentation, complementing existing forces and tactics in this ever-evolving dance of military engagement.



The Proletarsk oil depot in Russia's Rostov region hit by a Ukrainian drone

Fact and Fiction on the Battlefield

Distinguishing fact from fiction during a war can be a formidable challenge, especially when both sides are actively engaged in information warfare, each striving to shape perceptions to their advantage. When considering the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, many immediately think of the much-hyped Turkish-built Bayraktar TB2 drone, which played a significant role in the early days and weeks of the war, helping to repel Russia's initial assault.

However, contrary to expectations, medium-altitude, long-endurance drones like the TB2 or the Russian Orion have not been as influential in this war as initially believed.

Turkish propaganda was quick to portray the TB2 as a marvel of modern warfare, a weapon so advanced that it could evade even the most sophisticated air defences, all while being remarkably affordable. Yet, the reality on the ground painted a different picture.

Once Russia adjusted its rules of engagement and began to more aggressively deploy its surface-to-air missiles, most of the TB2s were swiftly shot down.

Consequently, these drones essentially vanished from the battlefield, their impact having diminished far more rapidly than initial reports might have suggested. This stark contrast between the propaganda and the actual events underscores the complexities and deceptions inherent in the information warfare that is part and parcel of modern conflicts.



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Ukrainian UJ-22 kamikaze drone with a flight range of 800 km

In the context of the current conflict, the deployment of large, reusable military drones has been rather infrequent. However, both Ukrainian and Russian ground forces have integrated smaller military and commercial or homemade drones extensively into their operations.

Military intelligence, surveillance, and

reconnaissance (ISR) drones, such as the Ukrainian Furia or Flyeye, and the Russian Orlan-10 or ZALA 421 variant, possess advanced capabilities and are significantly more costly than their commercial equivalents.

As a result, these sophisticated drones are typically operated by larger military units, such as battalions. This ensures that their advanced features can be fully utilised and that their deployment is strategically coordinated to maximise their impact on the battlefield.

In contrast, commercial or homemade drones, while possessing fewer advanced features, have proven to be highly effective and versatile tools in the hands of smaller units or even individual soldiers. Their accessibility and ease of use have made them indispensable for a wide range of tasks, from reconnaissance to target designation, demonstrating that even less sophisticated technology can play a crucial role in modern warfare.

A very clear example was provided when a large Russian arms depot was destroyed by a huge explosion near Tikhoretsk in Russia, on 20 September. Ukraine said munitions from North Korea had been among those it was targeting, and the governor of the Krasnodar region confirmed Ukrainian drones were involved in the attack.

He said debris from a drone had sparked a fire, which “spread to explosive objects” and caused detonations. Residents nearby had been evacuated, and nobody was reported injured.

AI in the service of Ukraine

In a groundbreaking development, Ukrainian innovators have verified that their drones are now executing autonomous strikes against Russian forces, eliminating the need for a human operator at the controls. This marks a significant milestone, as it is the first confirmed use of such autonomous drones in combat. Previous allegations by the United Nations regarding autonomous attacks in Libya in 2020 remain unsubstantiated.

The Saker Scout drones are equipped with advanced capabilities that enable them to independently locate, identify, and engage a wide array of Russian military targets, with a repertoire comprising 64 different types of ‘military objects’. Remarkably, these drones can operate effectively even in areas where radio jamming disrupts communication, rendering other drones inoperable.

The Saker Scout, a quadcopter that entered service in October 2023, boasts an impressive payload capacity of three kilograms and can deliver its ordnance to targets up to approximately 12 kilometres away.

The effectiveness of small, remotely controlled drones as bombers has already been demonstrated, as they have been successfully modified to carry RKG-3 anti-tank grenades or RPG warheads, capable of destroying even heavily armoured tanks. This technological advancement underscores the evolving nature of modern warfare, where autonomous systems are increasingly playing a pivotal role.

A novel enterprise has recently emerged from its stealth phase, dedicated to the manufacture of kamikaze drones for Ukraine. ‘One Way Aerospace’, a company whose moniker is derived from the Pentagon’s term ‘one way attack drones’ is an innovative venture helmed by a distinguished team of founders,

AQ 100 BAYONET

Lightweight foam and carbon airframe allows for high performance and affordable construction

High payload to weight ratio

Custom-designed, high-aspect ratio wing optimizes lift at cruise speeds for energy efficiency and long range while keeping a low noise profile

Double canard design decreases wing span and facilitates stacked storage

Cheap wooden construction permits mass production without tools and assembly by unskilled labor

Designed for precision, affordability, and simplicity.

Designed and Made in Ukraine

Feature	Specifications
Wingspan	1 m
MTOW	10 kg
Payload	4 kg
Cruise speed	144 km/h
Comms Range	+40 km
Max range	140 km
Endurance	1 hour
Cost	\$2,000

The AQ 100 Bayonet is an affordable loitering munition or platform for unmanned logistics or reconnaissance. Capable of carrying a variety of cameras, sensors, and kinetic munitions

including an undisclosed British Royal Air Force veteran, James Earl, alongside Francisco Serra-Martins, a former Australian combat engineer and an investor recognised in Forbes' prestigious '30 under 30 list'. Rounding out the leadership is Roman Antonov, previously the Chief Technology Officer of Doroni and an engineer hailing from Ukraine's renowned Antonov Design Bureau.

One Way Aerospace's flagship product, the Scalpel attack drone, has already demonstrated its formidable capabilities in active combat scenarios. Impressed by its proven performance, the company is now accelerating its production efforts to meet the growing demand. This scale-up in manufacturing underscores the urgent need for such advanced technologies on the modern battlefield and highlights the company's commitment to delivering cutting-edge solutions to support Ukraine's defence efforts.

Foreign allies stepping up aid

On 7 March this year, Britain significantly bolstered its support for Ukraine by announcing a comprehensive aid package valued at £325 million.

This substantial investment is set to provide more than 10,000 advanced drones to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. This initiative will leverage the United Kingdom's world-renowned defence industries to deliver state-of-the-art drone capabilities to Ukraine throughout the year 2024.

But besides Britain, many other allies have supplied drones to support Ukraine's defence, including, of course, the United States as well as Poland, and several Baltic and European nations. This collective effort has significantly enhanced

Ukraine's military capabilities and demonstrated the international community's commitment to its sovereignty.

Anticipating this, the Russians are trying to solve their air-defence problem without redeploying their best systems hundreds of miles from the front line.

According to Russian state media, the Kremlin is forming its own mobile air-defence groups. The problem, for the Russians, is scale. Russian air-defenders must protect many more targets than Ukrainian air-defenders protect. And since Russia is much bigger than Ukraine is, it's harder for the mobile groups to anticipate which direction a Ukrainian drone might come from.

Russian forces seem to encounter difficulties in effectively positioning short-range air-defence systems along the anticipated flight paths of Ukrainian drones. Moreover, the Russian military appears to have neglected to safeguard crucial potential targets even in supposedly well-fortified areas within Russia, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). The extensive deployment of mobile fire groups across western Russia could present similar obstacles for Russian forces.

In the most favourable outcome for Ukraine, its drone strikes would persist in targeting Russian oil refineries while also compelling Russia to disperse its air defences. However, even if Russia succeeds in shielding its refineries, it is likely to do so at the cost of adequately protecting its front-line troops.

James Lookwood



EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

**EU recovery fund
probably not as green
as claimed**

- Spending allocation on climate projects could be overestimated by €34.5 billion
- Not all measures tagged as ‘green’ were assessed as being so
- No full account of the actual sums spent on climate action in EU countries

The contribution of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – the main pillar of the EU’s pandemic recovery fund – towards climate action and the green transition is unclear, concludes a new report by the European Court of Auditors. At least 37 % of RRF funds have to be earmarked for climate action. The European Commission has assessed that, as of February 2024, measures in support of the EU’s climate goals reached 42.5 % (or €275 billion) of the RRF funds. However, the auditors warn that those contributions could be overestimated by at least €34.5 billion, with more issues besides. They also found weaknesses in the milestones and targets for climate-relevant actions, the reporting of actual expenditure, and the environmental friendliness of some projects tagged as ‘green’.

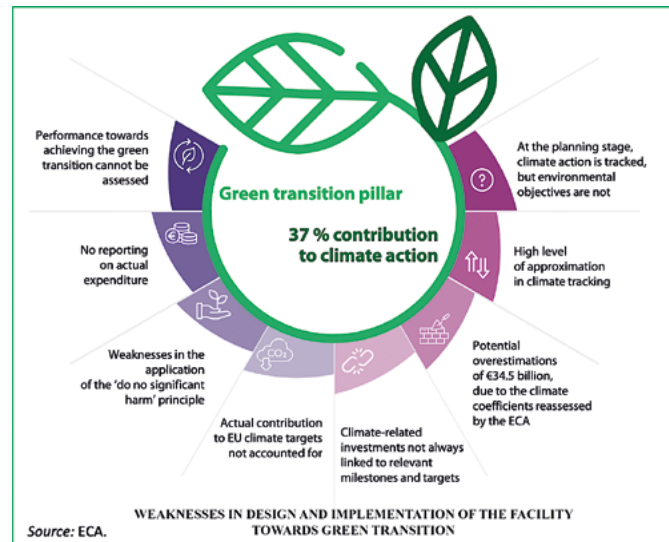
One of the main objectives of the RRF is to contribute to Europe’s climate targets and the green transition in the EU member states. Unlike other earlier forms of EU spending, RRF funds are disbursed on the basis of milestones and targets reached, rather than in response to actual expenditure. Alongside other weaknesses, the auditors found that this financing model and the relatively short timeframe for implementing the RRF have cast doubt on whether all the money planned for climate action will actually contribute to it.



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Joëlle Elvinger, ECA member and responsible for the report

“The RRF is a major investment across the EU and, if properly implemented, should greatly accelerate the fulfilment of the EU’s ambitious climate targets”, said Joëlle Elvinger, the ECA Member responsible for the report. “However, it currently suffers from a high level of approximation in the related plans, as well as discrepancies between planning and practice, and ultimately provides little indication of how much money goes directly to the green transition.”



In practice, the climate contribution from RRF measures is not always fine-tuned, point out the auditors. To calculate the share of money planned for ‘climate action’, the European Commission uses a ‘climate coefficient’ formula. Actions assessed as making a substantial contribution to climate change are given a 100% coefficient; actions with a non-marginal, positive contribution a rate of 40%; and funds with a neutral or insignificant contribution a rate of 0%. However, many measures were not clear-cut, and the auditors found that their climate contributions were overestimated in certain cases. Furthermore, some projects tagged as green were found to lack a direct link to the green transition upon closer inspection. For instance, one measure to improve water management was given a 40 % climate contribution rate. In reality, funds were spent on government IT solutions to digitalise the water supply system, meaning that a 0 % contribution would have been more suitable. To avoid such cases, EU auditors recommend that climate-relevant projects should be assessed in more detail and more accurately in future.

The auditors also found that some measures were not as green as they appeared. One project which literally muddied the waters was a pumped-storage hydro plant for which the significant environmental impact was not assessed before the plant was funded. To reach climate spending targets, countries give cost estimates in their plans, which are checked upfront but not after implementation. The actual costs of any RRF measure can differ significantly from estimates, meaning there is no full account of the funds spent on climate action. To avoid such discrepancies, EU auditors recommend that links between future instruments and climate targets should be strengthened, and that a full account of money spent should be collected and published.

Background information

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is the €700 billion special funding package made available by the EU in the wake of the COVID pandemic. It comprises a mix of loans and grants. Member states that receive the funds set out milestones to be achieved and the estimated costs in Recovery and Resilience Plans. At the planning stage, at least 37% of funding has to be allocated to climate action contributing to the EU’s 2050 net-zero target.

Climate-tracking methodology was established for the 37 % of RRF funds to be allocated to climate action. The RRF also contained methodology for tracking environmental objectives, but it was not used.



© BACIA

Loading blades into WindRunner

WINDRUNNER

**The world's
largest aircraft
specialised in
delivering onshore
wind turbines**

The renewable energy revolution is well underway, with wind energy at its forefront. The demand for larger and more powerful wind turbines has skyrocketed as countries around the globe seek to reduce their carbon footprints and transition to sustainable energy sources. However, one of the significant challenges in this industry has been the transportation and installation of these massive turbines, particularly in remote or hard-to-reach locations. Enter WindRunner, the world's largest aircraft, specifically designed to tackle this challenge head-on by delivering the largest onshore wind turbines with unprecedented efficiency and precision.

The Birth of WindRunner: A Response to a Growing Need

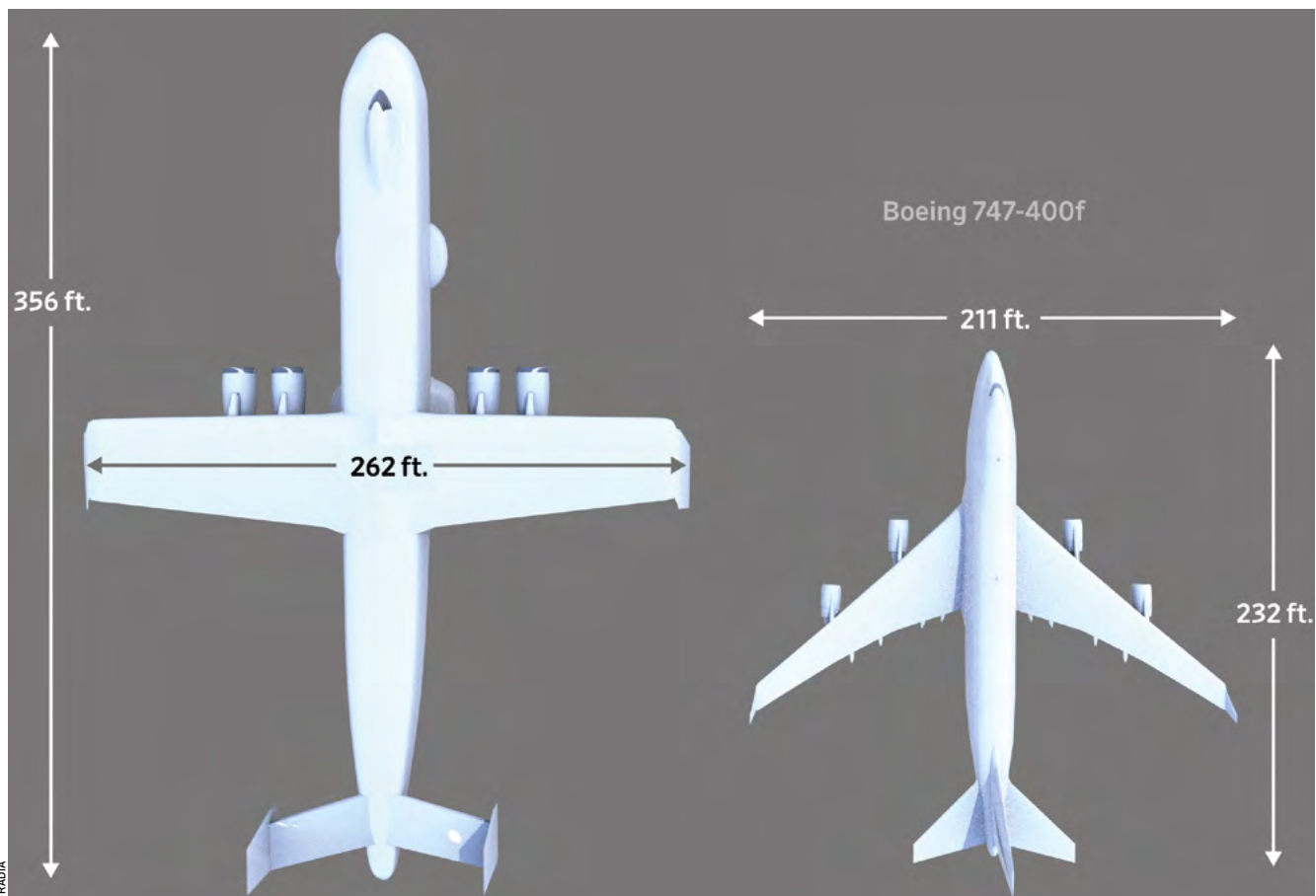
US company Radia has been quietly developing Windrunner for about six years out of a necessity to address the logistical challenges that come with the deployment of modern wind turbines. As turbines have grown in size—both in terms of tower height and blade length—transporting these colossal components has become increasingly complex. Traditional transportation methods, which often involve lengthy and cumbersome road convoys, are not only time-consuming but also costly and prone to delays due to infrastructure limitations such as narrow roads, low bridges, and challenging terrain.

The aerospace engineers and renewable energy experts behind Radia recognized these challenges and set out to create an aircraft that could overcome them. The result is a revolutionary cargo plane that combines advanced aeronautical engineering with a deep understanding of the specific needs of the wind energy industry.

Design and Capabilities: A Giant in the Sky

WindRunner is a marvel of modern engineering, designed to be the largest and most capable cargo aircraft ever built. With a wingspan of over 100 meters (328 feet) and a maximum takeoff weight of 700 tons, WindRunner surpasses the capacity of any existing aircraft. But what truly sets WindRunner apart is its specialized cargo bay, which is designed to accommodate the oversized components of the world's largest onshore wind turbines.

The cargo bay of WindRunner is not only vast but also equipped with state-of-the-art handling and securing systems that ensure the safe and efficient transport of turbine blades, nacelles, and



tower sections. These components, which can reach lengths of up to 100 meters for the blades and weigh several dozen tons, fit securely within the aircraft's spacious hold, thanks to an innovative modular loading system that allows for easy customization based on the specific dimensions of the cargo.

WindRunner's powerful engines, coupled with its aerodynamic design, enable it to carry these heavy and bulky loads over long distances with minimal fuel consumption. This efficiency is crucial for reducing the overall cost of wind turbine deployment, making renewable energy more accessible and affordable.

Revolutionizing Wind Turbine Logistics



© RADIA

Ground transport of wind turbine blade

The introduction of WindRunner is poised to revolutionize the logistics of wind turbine deployment, particularly for onshore wind farms located in remote or challenging terrains. Traditionally, transporting wind turbine components to such locations has been a logistical nightmare, often requiring extensive planning, road modifications, and sometimes even the construction of new infrastructure to accommodate the oversized loads.

With WindRunner, these challenges are significantly mitigated. The aircraft can deliver turbine components directly to the nearest airstrip, regardless of the distance from manufacturing sites. This capability is especially valuable in regions with limited infrastructure, such as mountainous areas or rural locations with narrow and winding roads.

In addition to its ability to reach remote sites, WindRunner also offers unparalleled speed and efficiency. What once took weeks or even months to transport by road can now be accomplished in a matter of hours. This reduction in transportation time not only speeds up the overall project timeline but also reduces the risk of delays caused by weather, road conditions, or other unforeseen factors.

Moreover, WindRunner's ability to transport complete turbine components in a single trip, rather than having to disassemble them for transport, ensures that the turbines arrive on-site in perfect condition, ready for immediate installation. This streamlined process reduces the need for on-site assembly and minimizes the potential for damage or loss during transport.

WindRunner's commitment to sustainability is also reflected in its operational practices. Radia, the company behind WindRunner has implemented a comprehensive carbon offset program, ensuring that all flights are carbon-neutral. This program includes investments in reforestation projects and renewable energy initiatives that offset the emissions generated by the aircraft.

Three aerospace companies, Aernnova (Álava, Spain), Leonardo (Rome, Italy) and AFuzion (New York, N.Y., U.S.) are partnering with Radia on this project.



© RADIA



NATURE'S GOLDEN ELIXIR

**The legacy
of olive oil**

Olive oil, often referred to as liquid gold, has played an important role in the evolution of human civilisation for thousands of years. Valued for its rich flavour and numerous health benefits, olive oil is not merely a food but also a symbol of millennial heritage and traditions. Its origins can be traced back to the ancient Mediterranean, where it is believed that the olive tree, *Olea europaea*, was first cultivated more than 6,000 years ago.

The Minoans, one of the earliest civilisations in Europe, cultivated olive trees on the island of Crete. They used the resulting oil for cooking, lighting lamps, and as a base for perfumes and ointments. In ancient Greece, olive oil became a symbol of wealth, health, and fertility. The olive tree itself was considered sacred, particularly in Athens, where the goddess Athena was believed to have bestowed the city with its first olive tree. Olive oil was also awarded as a prize to the winners of sporting competitions, such as the ancient Olympics.

The Egyptians used olive oil in religious rituals and for mummification, as it was a key component in the sacred oils used in temple rituals and was often associated with the gods. The Romans further enhanced the olive oil trade and spread its cultivation, establishing olive groves throughout their empire, from Spain to North Africa, making olive oil a widely used commodity across Europe.

Through a combination of historical, cultural, and economic factors, olive oil eventually gained worldwide popularity.

The Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans traded olive oil extensively throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, reaching as far as Northern Europe and the Middle East. During the Renaissance, Italy and Spain became significant

producers and exporters of olive oil. The Age of Exploration and subsequent colonisation of the Americas introduced olive oil to the New World. Although initially limited to regions with a climate similar to that of the Mediterranean, such as California, Chile, or Argentina, the production and consumption of olive oil gradually increased across the American continent.



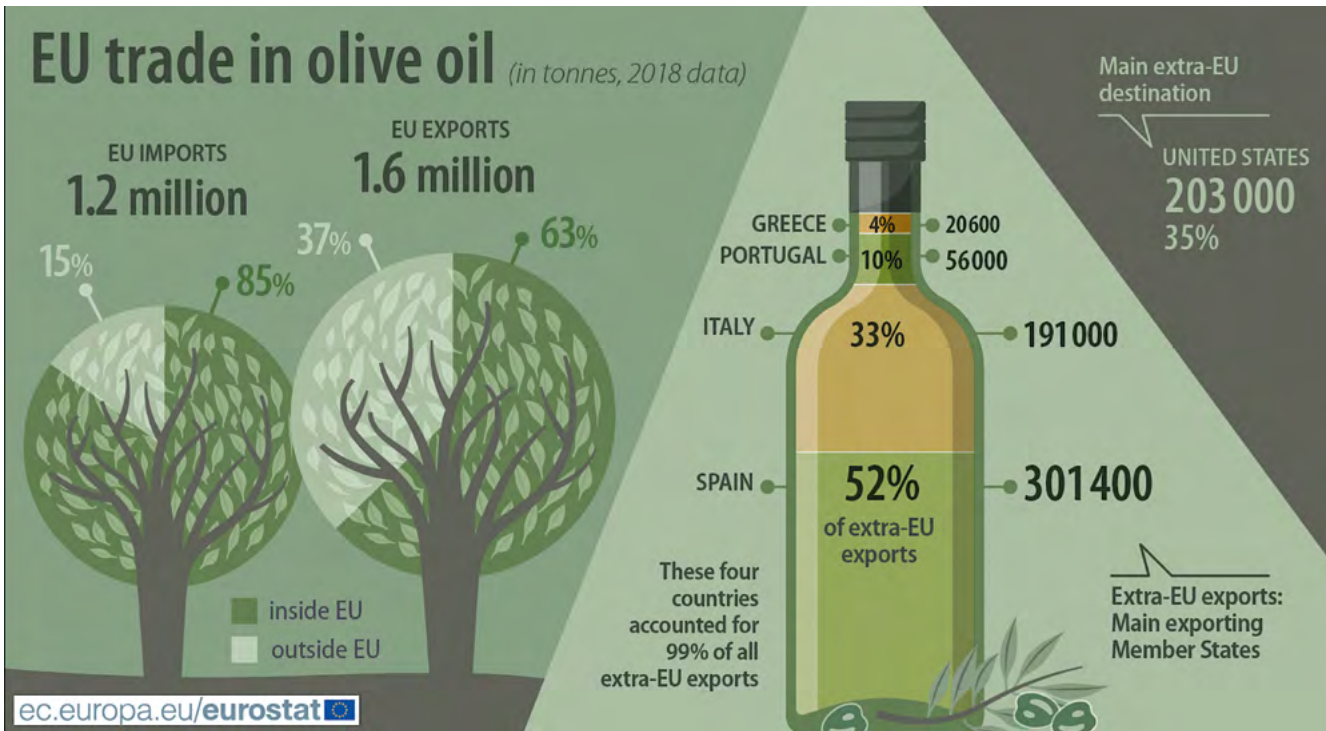
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Ripe olives awaiting harvest



© NATURAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION

Ancient Greeks harvesting olives for oil, by H.M. Hergé



During the 20th century, olive oil gained global recognition as a key component of the Mediterranean diet, heavily promoted for its health benefits. Scientific studies highlighting its positive effects on cardiac health and longevity have contributed to its popularity. Concurrently, globalisation has made various foods more accessible worldwide, leading to olive oil becoming a

staple in kitchens around the world, even in countries where it was previously unknown. Due to its versatility, the global demand for high-quality, extra virgin olive oil has surged, and it is now produced in many countries outside the Mediterranean, including the United States, Australia, and South Africa.

Olive oil is generally considered healthier than many other oils, particularly due to its composition and the health benefits associated with its use. It is rich in



Olive groves in Andalusia, Spain



© WIKICOMMONS

Olive blossom

monounsaturated fats, particularly oleic acid, which can constitute up to 80 percent of its total fat content. These monounsaturated fats are known to reduce inflammation, lower ‘bad’ LDL cholesterol levels, and increase ‘good’ HDL cholesterol, thereby contributing to a lower risk of heart disease. There is a high concentration of antioxidants and polyphenols, particularly in extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO), which have proven anti-inflammatory properties. Meanwhile, olive oil helps protect the body against oxidative stress, which is linked to some chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and neurodegenerative conditions. Olive oil also contains

oleocanthal, which has anti-inflammatory effects similar to ibuprofen. While extra-virgin olive oil has a lower smoke point, refined olive oils have a higher one, making them suitable for high-temperature cooking and less likely to produce harmful compounds when heated.

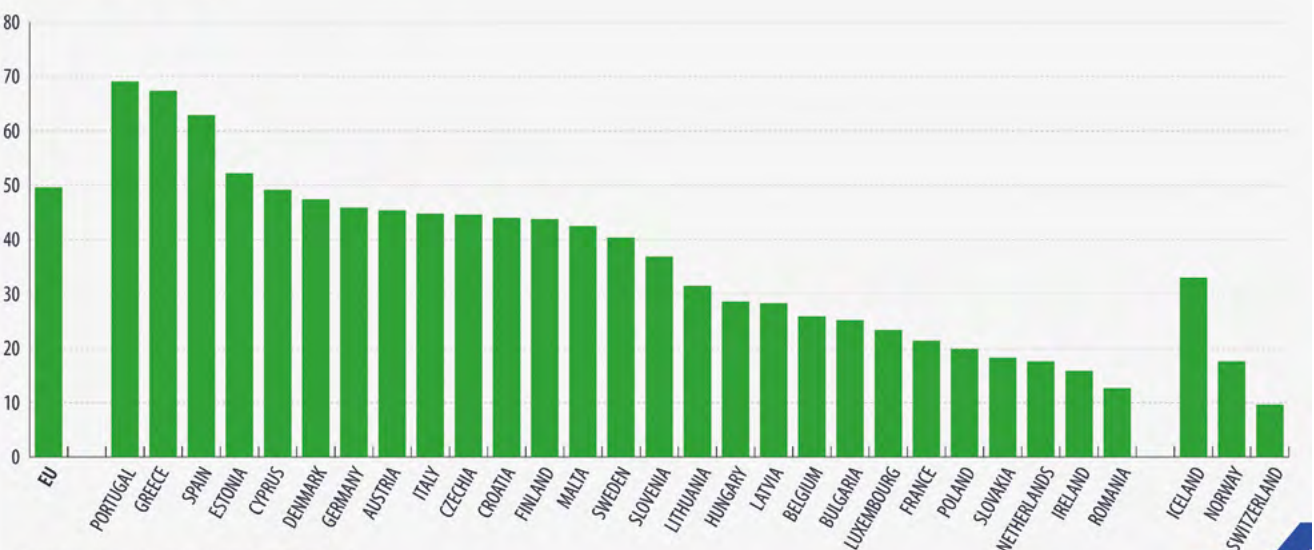
Other types of oil, such as soybean, corn, and even sunflower oil, are high in omega-6 polyunsaturated fats, which, when consumed in excess, can promote inflammation. Coconut and palm oil are high in saturated fats, which can raise LDL cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

The Mediterranean diet, which features olive oil as its main fat source, has been linked to increased longevity and a reduced risk of chronic diseases. The ‘Blue Zones’ diet, inspired by the Mediterranean lifestyle and associated with exceptional lifespans, has gained significant popularity. Olive oil offers a well-balanced fat profile, with a beneficial ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids that supports a healthy inflammatory response. Among oils with diverse nutritional compositions and applications, olive oil—especially extra virgin olive oil—stands out as exceptionally healthy and beneficial, earning it the title ‘king of oils’.

Virgin olive oils are classified into three distinct categories. Extra virgin olive oil is regarded as the highest quality, with no organoleptic defects and an acidity level not exceeding 0.8 per cent. Virgin olive oil may exhibit some sensory defects and has a maximum acidity of 2 per cent. Lampante

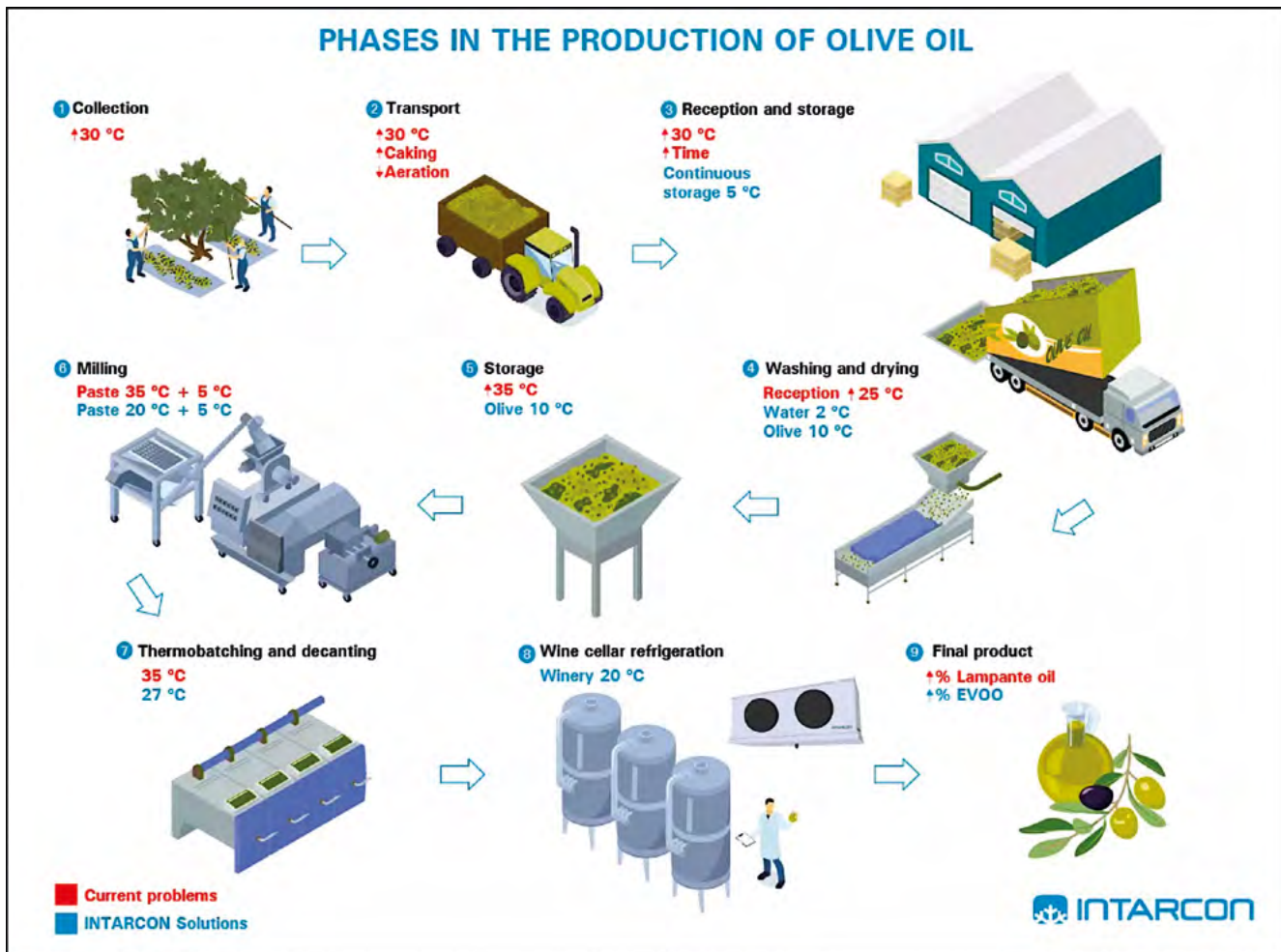
Inflation rate for olive oil in January 2024

(%, annual rate of change)



Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Poland: provisional data.

PHASES IN THE PRODUCTION OF OLIVE OIL



olive oil is of inferior quality, with an acidity level greater than 2 per cent and lacking any fruity characteristics. It is typically refined or used for general industrial purposes.

The world's largest olive oil producers are primarily Mediterranean countries, where the climate and terrain are optimal for olive cultivation. Spain is the global leader, responsible for approximately 40-50 per cent of worldwide production. The Andalusia region in southern Spain serves as the epicentre of the country's olive oil industry. Additionally, Spain is the largest exporter of olive oil, with a substantial portion of its production being exported beyond the EU, particularly to the United States and other markets.

Italy is the world's second-largest producer, accounting for around 20 per cent of global olive oil output. Regions such as Puglia, Tuscany, and Sicily are celebrated for their high-quality olive oils. Greece ranks third, with olive oil being an integral part of its culture and cuisine. Notably, Greece has the highest per capita consumption of olive oil worldwide, at 12 kg per person per year.

Türkiye is also a significant producer, with fluctuating output primarily from the

Aegean region. It consistently ranks among the top five producers globally, although it is not widely renowned for its olive oil. Tunisia is Africa's largest olive oil producer, while Morocco has been steadily increasing its production in recent years, investing heavily in modernising its oil industry.

Portugal is another important European producer, with its olive oil often praised for its distinctive flavour. The Alentejo region is a major hub for Portuguese olive oil production.

The European Union (EU) is the dominant region for global olive oil production, accounting for over 70 per cent of the world's total output. Approximately 4 million hectares of land in the EU are dedicated to olive tree cultivation, encompassing both traditional and super-intensive groves.

The EU is also the leading consumer and exporter of olive oil. Italy and Spain are the largest consumers within the EU, each with an annual consumption of around 500,000 tonnes. The EU accounts for approximately 53 per cent of global consumption and 65 per cent of global exports (Source: EU). The primary destinations for European olive oil exports are the United States, Brazil, and Japan.

The EU has implemented stringent regulations governing olive oil production and labelling, ensuring high standards and protecting regional denominations. This has contributed to the sustained reputation of

European olive oils on the global market.

The cost of producing one litre of olive oil varies depending on the geographical region, agricultural techniques, and processing methodologies employed. Cultivation costs, including land, labour, water, and agricultural inputs, range from €0.50 to €2.50 per kilogram of olives. Harvesting is labour-intensive, but mechanised techniques can reduce costs, unlike manual picking in small, traditional groves, which is more expensive. Converting olives into oil typically costs between €0.50 and €1 per litre.

Producing high-quality extra virgin olive oil requires a more meticulous process, which increases associated costs. In addition to production costs, bottling, labelling, and packaging expenses must be considered, ranging considerably from €0.50 to €1 per litre. Furthermore, costs related to shipping, marketing, and sales may add an additional €2-3 to the overall cost. Therefore, the average total cost to produce one litre of standard extra virgin olive oil in Europe may range from €3 to €6.

Profit margins in the olive oil industry can vary widely, depending on the scale of production, oil quality, market conditions, and geographical location. For premium extra virgin olive oil, profits can be relatively high, sometimes reaching 25 to 40 per cent. These producers often focus on small-scale, high-quality production with a distinctive brand identity, allowing them to command higher prices.

Producers of organic olive oil, which typically sells at much higher prices, may achieve higher margins compared to conventional producers. In some cases, organic olive oil can be sold for a staggering €1,000 or more per bottle.

Large-scale producers, particularly those in Spain, tend to have lower profit margins. However, they benefit from economies of scale while also facing significant competition and price volatility. Given the average retail prices in Europe, ranging from €7 to €10 per litre, profit

margins can vary widely. The profitability of the olive oil industry is highly sensitive to external factors, including poor harvests due to droughts or other climatic issues, which can reduce supply and drive up prices.

The olive oil industry comprises both family-owned small farms and large-scale commercial enterprises, reflecting its deep historical roots and modern economic realities. In some Mediterranean countries, olive oil production is deeply embedded in familial traditions, often passed down through generations. These family-owned farms typically operate on a small scale, producing high-quality olive oil in limited quantities, primarily for local consumption.

Particularly in Greece and Italy, a significant number of producers are small farmers who tend groves that have been in their families for centuries. These producers often prioritise quality over quantity and engage in artisanal production methods. Their goal is to preserve the distinctive flavours and qualities of their olive oils, which are marketed as premium or boutique products.

Conversely, countries such as Spain and Italy also host significant large-scale commercial olive oil production. These businesses manage expansive olive groves and employ industrial harvesting and processing techniques. Spain, in particular, is home to many large-scale enterprises with a substantial presence in global markets. These companies benefit from economies of scale, enabling them to produce olive



Members of the International Olive Council (IOC) during the 119th Plenary Session at IOC Headquarters, Madrid, June 2024

oil at lower costs and in greater volumes. They are often involved in all stages of the supply chain, from cultivation



to bottling and marketing. With substantial financial resources, they can invest in technology, research, and marketing, allowing them to compete globally.

In addition to small family farms and large commercial operations, cooperatives play a pivotal role in the olive oil industry, particularly in countries like Spain, Italy, and Greece. Cooperatives enable small farmers to pool their resources, share processing facilities, and collectively market their products. This helps small producers remain competitive in a market increasingly dominated by larger entities.

By mid-2024, the average price of olive oil in Europe had increased significantly, primarily driven by a confluence of factors, with extreme weather conditions impacting production in major olive oil-producing countries. The price of extra virgin olive oil was currently between €9 and €12 per litre, marking a significant increase of approximately 50 per cent compared to the previous year

(Source: The Independent). This surge was largely attributed to climatic challenges, including droughts and heatwaves, which had resulted in a substantial reduction in olive harvests across the Mediterranean region.

To bloom in spring, olive trees require exposure to temperatures of approximately 5 to 15°C during the colder months of the year. However, recent years have seen warmer winters across Europe, which now pose a significant threat to the production of olives and olive oil.

The price increase for olive oil has had a significant impact on various stakeholders across the supply chain, from producers to consumers. Consumers have been particularly affected. Following a 50 to 100 per cent price increase in some regions, olive oil, a dietary staple in many Mediterranean countries, has become prohibitively expensive. For instance, in Spain, the cost of essential olive oil products has risen substantially. The elevated prices have led to a reduction in olive oil consumption among many households. Spain witnessed a notable decline in retail purchases, with some reports indicating a decrease of up to 41 per cent in sales of extra virgin olive oil, as consumers opt for cheaper alternatives such as sunflower or other vegetable oils.

In regions where olive oil is a dietary cornerstone, the shift away from this healthy fat due to rising costs could lead to a decline in the overall nutritional quality of diets. Concurrently, price fluctuations have had a particularly adverse impact on small-scale farmers and family-run olive oil producers. Although higher prices theoretically result in greater revenues, these gains are often offset by increased production costs. The financial pressure has made it challenging for some small farmers to maintain their operations, potentially leading to industry consolidation where only larger, more resilient producers can survive.

However, large-scale commercial producers have also encountered difficulties. While they may be better equipped to absorb cost increases, the reduced demand for olive oil due to higher prices can negatively impact their sales volumes, affecting overall profitability.

Countries that rely heavily on olive oil exports, such as Spain and Italy, may face difficulties in maintaining their market share amidst potential challenges. The elevated prices make their products less competitive globally, which may lead to a reduction in export volumes and an impact on the global trade balance. The entire olive oil supply chain, from cultivation to retail, is experiencing challenges due to increased

costs and reduced demand. Consequently, the market has seen disruptions, with some retailers reporting stock shortages and price fluctuations.

In regions where olive oil production is a significant economic activity, the price increases can have broader economic implications, considerably impacting the local population. In response to public outcry, some European governments have taken steps such as lowering or even eliminating VAT on olive oil to mitigate the impact on consumers. For instance, Spain has temporarily eliminated the 5 per cent VAT on this essential ingredient.

Those with lower incomes, particularly in Mediterranean countries where olive oil is a dietary staple, are among the most affected by the current situation. The elevated cost of olive oil adds to the overall financial burden, leading to changes in consumption patterns. Small and family-run farms face the dual pressure of rising production costs and market uncertainty, making it challenging to maintain their businesses in a highly competitive and price-sensitive market. Retailers, particularly those selling high-end or artisanal olive oils, have seen a decline in sales volumes as consumers opt for more economical alternatives and reduce or even eliminate their olive oil consumption.

Globally, and particularly in Europe, several bodies are dedicated to monitoring and supporting the olive oil industry, addressing both large producers and small-scale artisans. The European Union, in particular, exercises careful monitoring, regulation, and protection of the olive oil industry, recognising its importance. Meanwhile, the International Olive Council (IOC), an intergovernmental organisation based in Madrid with 16 member states plus the European Union, plays a crucial role in promoting olive oil worldwide. The IOC tracks production, defines quality standards, and monitors authenticity.

To safeguard this significant sector for the EU, several measures have been implemented. For instance, between 2019 and 2020, the EU introduced an aid scheme for the private storage of olive oil, adopted in November 2019. This scheme encompassed a total volume of 213,500 tonnes of olive oil, representing approximately 27 per cent of the total EU stocks. Other aid schemes frequently provide olive oil farmers and producers with access to low-interest loans or fiscal facilities.

This year, the European Union has implemented a series of measures aimed at alleviating the adverse effects of recent olive oil price increases. These price rises have been attributed to a combination of factors,

including unfavourable weather conditions and poor harvests in major production regions across the continent.

The EU and national governments are developing strategies to support farmers affected by the crisis, including exploring improved water management practices and genetic research to enhance the resilience of olive trees to climate change. The goal is to stabilise future production and prices.

These efforts are focused on ensuring that the market remains as stable and strong as possible despite ongoing climatic challenges and future expected hardships. However, prices are expected to remain high, at least for a while.

To further shield the population from the impact of high olive oil prices, the EU and European governments could consider additional measures. Establishing strategic reserves of olive oil could help stabilise prices during times of scarcity. Although potentially affecting its own producers in the long run, the EU could encourage imports and increase trade agreements with non-traditional producers outside the EU, at least for limited periods, to stabilise supply in the event of poor harvests on the European continent.

Meanwhile, expanding EU-wide climate adaptation programmes specifically for agriculture, including funding for research on crop resilience and climate mitigation strategies, could address the root causes of the present price increases. Additionally, strengthening regulations against speculative trading in agricultural commodities could help prevent price manipulation and ensure that prices reflect actual market conditions rather than financial speculation.

As Europe navigates the complexities of modern agriculture combined with the consequences of climate change, olive oil remains not just a culinary staple, but a symbol of the region's deep agricultural heritage. The olive oil industry today supports millions of European families, particularly in the southern part of the continent, and is essential to the cultural identity of countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece. For consumers, olive oil is more than just a cooking ingredient; it is a link to the Mediterranean diet and tradition.

The recent increase in olive oil prices underscores the vulnerabilities of this economic sector in the face of climatic conditions and various economic pressures. Therefore, robust strategies are needed to protect both the industry and the consumers who rely on it. A sustainable and innovative approach to agriculture can safeguard the legacy of this 'liquid gold' for future generations.

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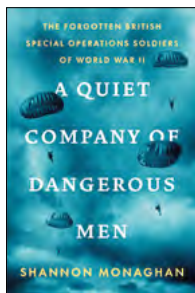


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BOOKS



A Quiet Company of Dangerous Men

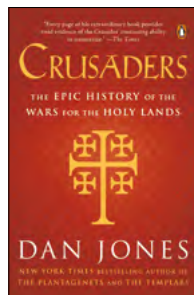
The Forgotten British Special Operations Soldiers of World War II

By Shannon Monaghan

The untold story of four special operations officers who fought together behind enemy lines across multiple theaters of World War II, and then continued to serve, officially and unofficially, for decades after in the hottest parts of the Cold War

There have always been special warriors; Achilles and his Myrmidons are the obvious classical examples. What we now think of as “special operations,” however, were born in World War II, and one of the earliest and most exciting units formed was Britain’s SOE. In the early years of the war, when Britain stood alone against the Nazis, Winston Churchill put them on a mission to “set Europe ablaze”: to foment local revolt, to gather intelligence, to blow up bridges, and to do anything that could help to disrupt the Axis cause. *A Quiet Company of Dangerous Men* follows four SOE officers who distinguished themselves in this fight: the Spanish Civil War veteran Peter Kemp, the demolitions expert David Smiley, the born guerrilla leader Billy McLean, and the political natural Julian Amery.

With new and extensive research, including unprecedented access to private family papers that reveal the men’s unbreakable bonds and vibrant personalities, Shannon Monaghan has uncovered a story of war in the twentieth century that, due to the secretive nature of the SOE’s work, has remained largely unknown. *A Quiet Company of Dangerous Men* is a thrilling and inspiring story of four remarkable men who, through sheer determination and daring, as well as unwavering friendship and loyalty, fought for a better world.



Crusaders

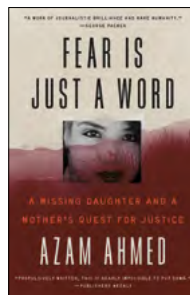
The Epic History of the Wars for the Holy Lands

By Dan Jones

For more than one thousand years, Christians and Muslims lived side by side, sometimes at peace and sometimes at war. When Christian armies seized Jerusalem in 1099, they began the most notorious period of conflict between the two religions. Depending on who you ask, the fall of the holy city was either an inspiring legend or the greatest of horrors. In *Crusaders*, Dan Jones interrogates the many sides of the larger story, charting a deeply human and avowedly pluralist path through the crusading era.

Expanding the usual timeframe, Jones looks to the roots of Christian-Muslim relations in the eighth century and tracks the influence of crusading to present day. He widens the geographical focus to far-flung regions home to so-called enemies of the Church, including Spain, North Africa, southern France, and the Baltic states. By telling intimate stories of individual journeys, Jones illuminates these centuries of war not only from the perspective of popes and kings, but from Arab-Sicilian poets, Byzantine princesses, Sunni scholars, Shi’ite viziers, Mamluk slave soldiers, Mongol chieftains, and barefoot friars.

Crusading remains a rallying call to this day, but its role in the popular imagination ignores the cooperation and complicated coexistence that were just as much a feature of the period as warfare. The age-old relationships between faith, conquest, wealth, power, and trade meant that crusading was not only about fighting for the glory of God, but also, among other earthly reasons, about gold. In this richly dramatic narrative that gives voice to sources usually pushed to the margins, Dan Jones has written an authoritative survey of the holy wars with global scope and human focus.



Fear is Just a Word

A Missing Daughter and a Mother’s Quest for Justice

By Azam Ahmed

Fear Is Just a Word begins on an international bridge between Mexico and the United States, as fifty-six-year-old Miriam Rodríguez stalks one of the men she believes was involved in the murder of her daughter Karen. He is her target number eleven, a member of the drug cartel that has terrorized and controlled what was once Miriam’s quiet hometown of San Fernando, Mexico, almost one hundred miles from the U.S. border. Having dyed her hair red as a disguise, Miriam watches, waits, and then orchestrates the arrest of this man, exacting her own version of justice.

Woven into this deeply researched, moving account is the story of how cartels built their power in Mexico, escalated the use of violence, and kidnapped and murdered tens of thousands. Karen was just one of the many people who disappeared, and Miriam, a brilliant, strategic, and fearless woman, begged for help from the authorities and paid ransom money she could not afford in hopes of saving her daughter. When that failed, she decided that “fear is just a word,” and began a crusade to track down Karen’s killers and to help other victimized families in their search for justice.

What do people do when their country and the peaceful town where they have grown up become unrecognizable, suddenly places of violence and fear? Azam Ahmed takes us into the grieving of a country and a family to tell the mesmerizing story of a brave and brilliant woman determined to find out what happened to her daughter, and to see that the criminals who murdered her were punished. *Fear Is Just a Word* is an unforgettable and moving portrait of a woman, a town, and a country, and of what can happen when violent forces leave people to seek justice on their own.



Honeymoon in Tehran

Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran

By Azadeh Moaveni

Azadeh Moaveni, longtime Middle East correspondent for Time magazine, returns to Iran to cover the rise of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Living and working in Tehran, she finds a nation that openly yearns for freedom and contact with the West but whose economic grievances and nationalist spirit find an outlet in Ahmadinejad’s strident pronouncements. And then the unexpected happens: Azadeh falls in love with a young Iranian man and decides to get married and start a family in Tehran. Suddenly, she finds herself navigating an altogether different side of Iranian life. As women are arrested for “immodest dress” and the authorities unleash a campaign of intimidation against journalists, Azadeh is forced to make the hard decision that her family’s future lies outside Iran. Powerful and poignant, *Honeymoon in Tehran* is the harrowing story of a young woman’s tenuous life in a country she thought she could change.

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