

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE



GREENLAND

**High-Stakes Politics
in the Arctic**



February 2025

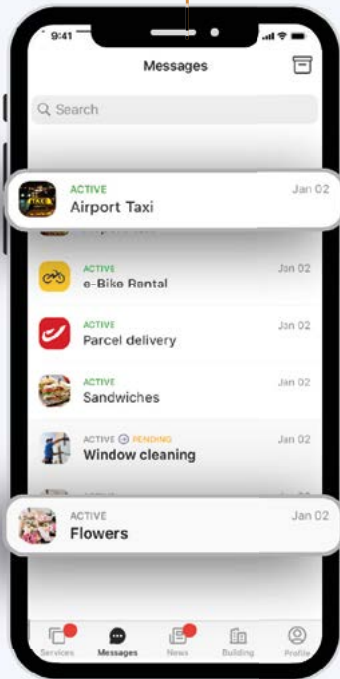
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Publisher: **Karel Verpoorten**
 Editor-in-Chief: **Trajan Dereville**
 Editor: **Galaxydigisat Sarl**
 29, bd d'Italie - 98000 Monaco
 Legal Deposit: on publication
 Monthly publication



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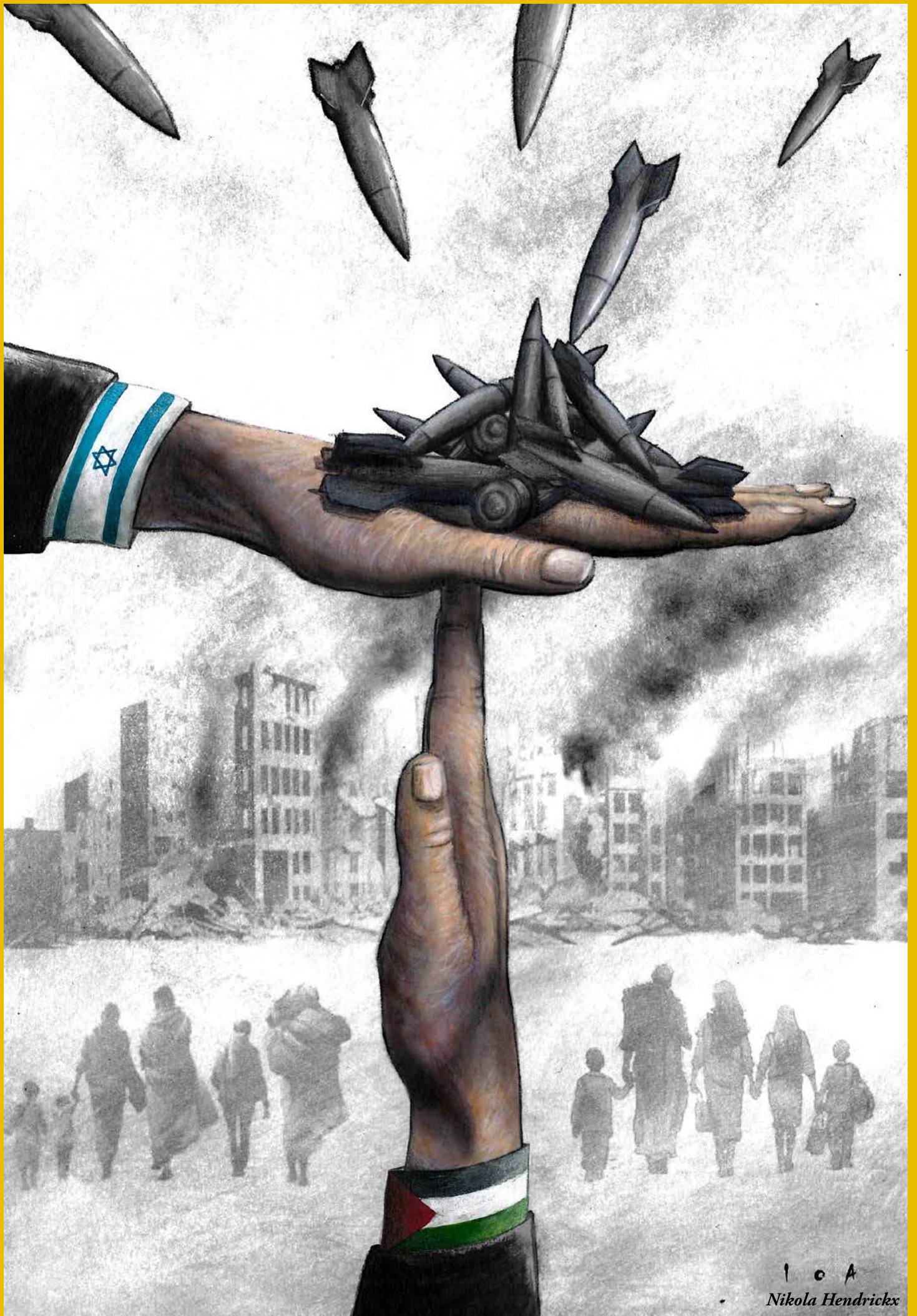
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Nuuk, capital of Greenland

GREENLAND

High-Stakes Politics in the Arctic

Greenland—what a curious name! It sounds like it should be a lush, green paradise, but in reality, much of it is frozen and covered in ice. This remote land, situated at the extreme north of our planet, was once thought of as the legendary Hyperborea during the Renaissance—a harsh and mysterious place known for its lost Viking explorers, icy landscapes, and roaming polar bears. Until very recently, Greenland didn't pop into the minds of most Europeans or Americans, except perhaps when President Donald Trump yet again showed interest in purchasing it from Denmark. This raises an intriguing question: how did a region so close to North America, where the inhabitants speak a language closely related to the Inuit languages of Canada and Alaska, come to be ruled by Denmark?

Greenland may have a tough climate, but it has an incredibly captivating history. It served as the first meeting point between the Old World and the New, where Inuit and Scandinavian cultures have blended since the Viking era. This vibrant story is still evolving as Greenland works toward greater autonomy and seeks to carve out its role in an ever-more connected world.

I Viking beginnings

Before going into Greenland's history, it is necessary to clear up a number of points that seem to have created some confusion as to who actually owns the territory. Greenland isn't exactly a colony of Denmark, but more like a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Imagine it like a country within the United Kingdom – it has its own leadership, with a prime



Erik the Red (950-1003/04) sets sail for Greenland

© BOOK OF DISCOVERY BY T.C.

minister and parliament, and manages many of its own affairs.

The confusion arises from the nature of Denmark itself, which is a country in its own right but is also a larger entity that includes Greenland and the Faroe Islands; a kind of federation, with a shared monarch, Queen Margrethe II. This arrangement gives Greenland a degree of autonomy similar to that of the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man within the United Kingdom. This unique set-up allows Greenland to maintain a distinct identity, with its official language, Kalaallisut — the Inuit language — and its culture significantly different from that of Denmark. While Greenland has been part of the Danish Realm since 1814, Denmark has always recognised the importance of Greenland's autonomy.

Figuring out who really owns Greenland is like trying to untangle a really complicated piece of yarn. There are three different groups that claim a right to it: the Danes, the Norwegians, and the Inuit people who live there. While the Inuit are undeniably Greenland's indigenous people today, their arrival is a relatively recent chapter in the island's story. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Dorset culture, an ancient Paleo-Eskimo society that existed in the Canadian Arctic and Greenland from around 500 BCE to 1500 CE and pushed out by the Inuit around 1200 AD, were the first human inhabitants. This pushes the potential window for Scandinavian claims back to the Viking Age, a period rich with tales of exploration and intrepid adventurers.

The Nordic claim to Greenland hinges on the establishment of Norse settlements in the 10th century. Erik the Red, a legendary Viking chieftain and explorer, is said to have landed in Greenland after Icelandic exile for murder, according to the epic saga named after him. Norse settlers, driven by a pioneering spirit, established three main settlements in Greenland, the communities surviving on livestock farming and hunting seals and walrus. Their reach extended beyond the southern tip, with Norse hunters advancing as far north as Disko Bay in pursuit of valuable walrus ivory. Between the 10th and 15th centuries, these Norse settlements flourished under Norwegian rule, solidifying a trade route for Greenlandic ivory into Europe.

Prosperity under norwegian rule

These early Norse settlements in Greenland weren't exactly self-made. For the first few hundred years, they were actually managed by Iceland, but as these Greenlandic communities prospered, they started to turn heads. The Kingdom of Norway saw a chance to expand its reach, as King Haakon IV wasn't one to miss a good deal. Through



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Ruins of the Garðar Cathedral (Danish: Garðar Domkirke), known formally as the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas at Igaliku, Greenland

clever negotiations, he managed to bring Greenland under the Norwegian crown in 1261.

This event proved to be a game-changer; Greenland suddenly had a direct connection to the rest of Europe, and things really boomed for the settlements. Greenland became a major supplier of walrus ivory, which was a hot commodity in Europe back then. Norway's coastal cities and the British Isles became the main hubs for shipping this valuable treasure. Fuelled by the lucrative ivory trade, the Greenland Norse went on a building spree. Churches and convents popped up thanks to this newfound wealth. The St. Nicholas Cathedral, built in 1126 at Igaliku, in southern Greenland, and dedicated to the patron of seafarers is the oldest building of its kind in the entire Western Hemisphere. Archaeologists began digging up the site in 1926, and what they found was pretty fascinating. The oldest parts of the cathedral were built right on top of an ancient pagan shrine; they found 25 walrus skulls and 5 narwhal tusks buried there.

Denmark enters the fray

Greenland had a long history with Norway and Iceland, going way back to the days of Erik the Red. Denmark and Sweden were more focussed on expanding their power in the Baltic and Eastern Europe. So, neither country really paid much attention to Greenland for a long time. Then, in 1397, things changed. Queen Margarethe I of Denmark, a really powerful woman, managed to unite Denmark, Norway, and Sweden under one ruler – her grand-nephew. They called it the Union of Kalmar. This wasn't



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The tomb of Queen Margaret I of Scandinavia, Roskilde Cathedral, Denmark

like a single country, though. It was more like all three kingdoms having the same king, but still keeping their own governments and laws.

Greenland, which was part of Norway at the time, stayed that way under this union. The idea was that if Denmark and Norway ever split, Greenland would go with Norway. But then, a couple of big things happened between the 16th and 19th centuries that left Greenland under Danish control. It wasn't until the 20th century that things really got sorted out.

Beginning in the 14th century and for the next 200 years, the Norse settlements gradually diminished until they were totally abandoned. Historians have speculated that one important factor was probably the Black Death, which swept through Europe and killed millions of people. The plague probably hit Greenland too, and with a smaller population already, it could have been very difficult to recover.

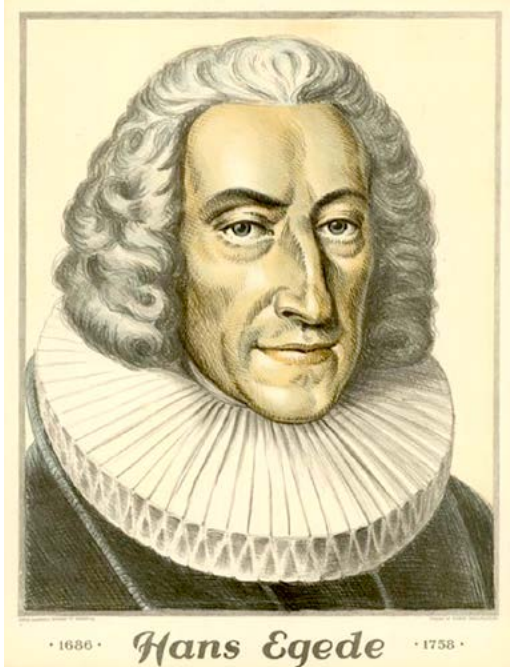


The Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, designated Greenland as the exclusive domain of Portugal by papal decree, prohibiting other Catholic nations from colonising the island. With the rise of the Protestant Reformation, England disregarded papal pronouncements and expressed interest in the polar regions as a potential gateway to North America.

Then, things got even harsher with the "Little Ice Age". According to researchers from NASA, this cooling period made it even harder to survive in the Arctic, and Greenland got cut off from Europe by all the extra ice. What's more, the Vikings weren't the only ones in Greenland anymore; newcomers called the Inuit arrived from Canada. Scholars generally agree that the decline in the demand for walrus ivory was a significant factor in the abandonment of the Greenlandic Norse settlements. Walrus ivory was a crucial trade commodity for the Norse, providing them with access to essential goods from Europe. However, as the market for ivory weakened, the economic viability of the settlements diminished, and the Norse gradually returned to Iceland.

The Inuit effectively governed Greenland, and European interest in the region waned until the voyages of Iberian nations to the Americas and Asia ignited a fervour for exploration, as European

powers vied to establish colonies in the New World and locate the elusive Northwest Passage. Scandinavia, including Greenland, was swept up in this fervent exploration era, known as The Age of Discovery.



The establishment of Godt-Haab (present-day Nuuk) on Greenland's western coast by a group of Moravian missionaries injected new life into the colonial endeavour. Dutch whalers, Danish-Norwegian hunters, and Inuit converts soon followed, and the Danish settlements in Greenland began to expand, despite a devastating smallpox outbreak that claimed many lives, including that of Egede's wife

In the early 17th century, King Christian IV of Denmark-Norway, motivated by a desire to reassert Scandinavian control over Greenland before England or another European power could lay claim to it, commissioned three expeditions led by English captain James Hall. These expeditions aimed to locate any remaining Norse Greenlanders so as to establish Danish rule. While the search for the Eastern Settlement, the largest of the three Norse settlements, proved unsuccessful, the explorers' accounts provided valuable cartographic data on Greenland, which would later prove instrumental in facilitating Danish colonisation efforts in the 18th century.

Norway appoints an envoy

Navigational challenges in the icy waters of the North Atlantic and uncertainty regarding the location of the Eastern Settlement hampered Danish efforts to re-establish contact with Greenland until 1721. But, as the grip of the Little Ice Age loosened, Norwegian Lutheran missionary Hans Egede renewed the crown's mission to locate

any surviving Norse inhabitants.

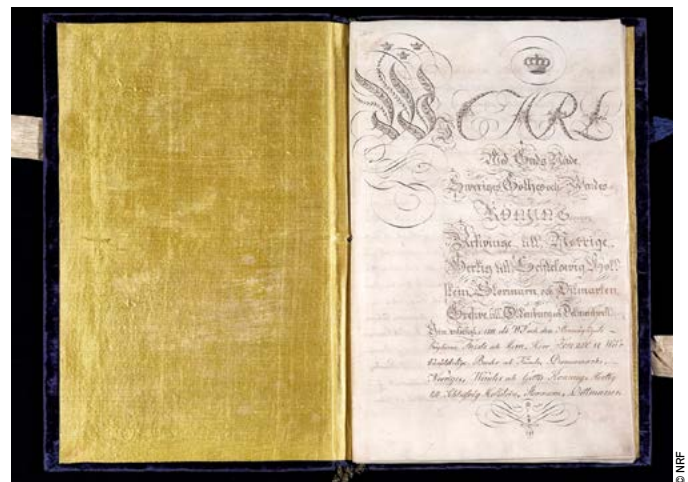
Egede believed that some Norse might have persisted in Greenland, either maintaining their Catholic faith despite the Reformation or having abandoned Christianity entirely. After months of fruitless searching for Norse survivors, Egede encountered only Inuit populations. He then dedicated himself to learning the local dialect and introducing Christianity to the Inuit, laying the groundwork for subsequent Danish colonisation efforts.

Denmark finalises Greenland's integration

Formal recognition of Danish control over Greenland and its *de jure* possession of the island would not occur until 1814. Ironically, this shift in Greenland's status arose from a Danish defeat at the hands of Sweden during the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon's aggressive expansion across Europe compelled many smaller nations to choose sides in the numerous conflicts between the French emperor and the opposing coalitions. Denmark initially pursued neutrality, but a violent British attempt to preempt a potential French capture of the Danish merchant fleet ultimately forced the Danes to align with Napoleon.

Coincidentally, Napoleon's general, Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, ascended to the position of Swedish crown prince through marriage in 1810, and he would subsequently become king. However, following Napoleon's decisive defeat at Leipzig in 1813, Swedish troops, with British endorsement, occupied Danish territory, prompting a swift surrender by King Frederick VI of Denmark. The resulting Treaty of Kiel in 1814 awarded Denmark control over the settled regions of Greenland, but the sovereignty of the entire island remained a contentious issue. Denmark had not undertaken any significant exploration or settlement efforts in the vast, uninhabited expanses of Greenland. This lack of comprehensive control left the island vulnerable to claims by other nations under the principle of *terra nullius* (nobody's land), that has been used to justify claims that territory may be acquired simply by a state's occupation of it.

The emergence of Norwegian claims in 1931, following the country's regaining of independence in 1905, ignited a minor international dispute that was brought before the Hague



Treaty of Kiel in 1814 awarded Denmark control over the settled regions of Greenland

tribunal, which ultimately ruled in favour of Denmark. These historically Norwegian territories remained under Danish control, establishing the geopolitical landscape that persists to this day.

I The U.S. Steps in

While the symbolic Norwegian occupation of Greenland might have appeared inconsequential, Denmark's anxieties stemmed from a very real threat posed by a far more powerful nation: the United States. This rising American power had ambitions to expand its influence into Greenland, either through diplomatic negotiations or, potentially, through the annexation of Arctic territories.

Following the successful purchase of Alaska from Russia for \$7,2 million in 1867, the U.S. attempted to acquire both Iceland and Greenland from Denmark in 1868. The motivation stemmed from a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and Department of State report that catalogued the resources and economic potential of both islands. However, Denmark's refusal to sell, thwarted American territorial ambitions in the Arctic until the early 20th century.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a surge in polar expeditions, as explorers ventured into the Arctic to map and explore the region, setting the stage for a future race for territorial control. American explorers were among the first to chart Greenland's interior, with some even attempting to claim portions of the island for the United States under the auspices of the Monroe Doctrine. To preempt a potential American takeover, Denmark strategically made recognition of Danish sovereignty over Greenland a condition for the sale of the U.S. Virgin Islands which had become Danish colonies in 1754, and were known as the Danish West Indian Islands. The United States accepted this demand in 1917.



In January 1979, an indicative referendum on Greenlandic home rule was held. 70 % of votes were in favour, 25 % against. On 1 May 1979, Greenland's Home Rule became a reality and Greenland assumed competence over its own affairs

I The road to independence

The United States renewed its efforts to acquire Greenland in 1947, offering Denmark a sum of \$100 million in gold. However, Denmark once again declined the offer. As the Cold War tensions extended to the Arctic region, Denmark took steps to solidify its control over Greenland, and in 1953, the territory

was formally incorporated as a Danish province by the Naalakkersuisut, the island's executive cabinet. This decision integrated Greenland fully into the Danish national territory, but the German occupation during World War II forced Greenland to operate independently for the duration of the war. This wartime experience contributed to the rise of an autonomist movement, eventually evolving into a push for full independence.

Greenland's status transitioned from a Danish province in 1979 to that of a self-governing territory, following a public vote in favour of home rule. The significant cultural distinctions between Greenland and Denmark, with over 90% of Greenland's population being Inuit, fuel strong sentiments in favour of independence. However, these aspirations are tempered by Greenland's economic dependence on Denmark.

In 2008, Greenland enacted legislation granting itself greater autonomy from Denmark. Notably, Chapter 8, Section 21 of this law enshrines the right to self-determination through a referendum process. Public opinion on independence remains divided. While a majority of Greenlanders favour the theoretical concept of independence from Denmark, Danish newspaper DR reported that 78% would oppose independence if it resulted in a decline in living standards and the cessation of Danish subsidies.



Former Greenlandic Prime Minister, Kim Kielsen

In a 2020 interview with High North News, an online news outlet based in Norway, the then- Prime Minister of Greenland, Kim Kielsen, emphasised the need to diversify Greenland's economy to prepare the country for potential independence, particularly in light of increasing efforts by the United States and China to expand their influence in the Arctic : *"The mandate we have from our people says that we must work towards independence. There should be no doubt that everything we do is part of this preparatory process. More than 70 percent of our population want us to move towards independence, and it is stipulated in the law on Greenland's Self Rule how this must happen. That is the mandate we have been given and it has been with us for a very long time,"*

Looking to the future

The sudden resurgence of significant U.S. interest in Greenland, culminating in August 2019 with the confirmation by Donald Trump, during his first presidency, of his desire to purchase Greenland, including its 57,000 inhabitants, did not alter Greenland's trajectory towards independence from Denmark, which retains sovereign authority over the island. Trump's proposal was met with immediate criticism and confusion, both domestically and internationally, and his remarks were viewed as impulsive and lacking an understanding of the complexities involved in acquiring a territory where independence is an increasingly likely prospect, and which operates under its own government, independent of Danish involvement.

The Arctic Institute, a think tank headquartered in Washington D.C. has documented Greenland's emergence as a focal point in international geopolitics in the growing rivalry between the United States and China. Chinese investments in the island's hydrocarbon and mineral resources have become a source of concern for the U.S. due to Greenland's strategic location near North America.

This explains why the longstanding dialogue with Denmark regarding lease agreements for specific parcels of Greenland, has turned into discussions about the acquisition of the entire territory.



Schading / Aerial view of the Pituffik Space Base, previously known as Thule Air Base

Greenland plays host to Pituffik Space Base, which was formerly known as Thule Air Base. It was renamed in 2023 in recognition of Greenlandic cultural heritage and better reflect its role in the U.S. Space Force. The base holds the distinction of being the United States military's northernmost installation, 1,210 km north of the Arctic Circle and 1,524 km from the North Pole.

This strategic location which was established during the Cold War is equipped with a radar

and listening post that includes a Ballistic Missile Early Warning System, capable of detecting and providing advance warning of incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles. The threat of nuclear war was seemingly ever-present during this 45-year period.

Moreover, its surveillance reach extends thousands of miles into Russian territory, underscoring its critical role in global security and defence monitoring.



Radar dome at Pituffik Space Base

The world's largest island possesses huge reserves of rare-earth metals used for a variety of high-tec applications, including electronics, electric vehicles, catalysts, medical applications and aerospace and defence. The receding Arctic ice cover also presents strategic opportunities for expanded trade via new sea routes, energy extraction and transportation within a region increasingly characterised by geopolitical competition among rival powers, China and Russia.

In January, the Wall Street Journal reported heightened U.S. interest in Greenland, with President Donald Trump again expressing an urgent desire to acquire the territory. This situation is probably best understood within the context of U.S. efforts to counter China's influence and reduce reliance on Chinese technology components.



Mette Frederiksen at the European Council in June 2024

Be that as it may, President Trump proposed that Denmark should transfer its autonomous territory to the United States, arguing, *“for purposes of national security and freedom throughout the world, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity.”*

Such statements naturally alarmed European allies and sent shockwaves through diplomatic circles, claiming that the idea that

he might using military means to assert control over a territory belonging to a NATO ally contradicted the principles of collective security and mutual respect that underpin the alliance.

Denmark, as a member of both the EU and NATO, found itself navigating a challenging diplomatic landscape as the threats from the U.S. president created tensions not just between the U.S. and Denmark, but also within the broader context of U.S.-European relations.

Denmark's government rejected Trump's proposal, emphasising Greenland's status as a self-governing territory, with its own parliament and exercising considerable autonomy over its affairs, although Denmark retains control over foreign policy and defence. The Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, characterised the idea of selling Greenland as "absurd," reinforcing the notion that Greenland's sovereignty could not be negotiated like a real estate deal. While Greenland is not officially a member of the European Union, its designation as an overseas EU territory affords it unique advantages. This status allows Greenland to tap into EU funding opportunities and grants its citizens the rights associated with EU citizenship.

In response to the brewing tensions, Denmark sought to strengthen its ties with other European nations and reaffirm its commitment to NATO. The Danish government emphasised the importance of collaborative security in the Arctic, particularly in the face of increasing Russian military activity in the region.

I The bigger picture



Mikkel Runge Olesen

Mute Egede

Mikkel Runge Olesen, a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies highlighted Greenland's escalating strategic significance amid the backdrop of geopolitical instability during an interview with Euronews: *"If relations between world powers are good, in the Arctic specifically, then Greenland becomes less strategically valuable. So, as the U.S. gears up for more confrontation with Russia and China, Greenland's presence becomes more important."* He then added, *"American strategic interest in Greenland is as much about their own presence as it is about denying their rivals' presence."*

As for Greenlandic Prime Minister, Mute Egede, he emphasised that the territory was not for sale and repeated again the fact that Greenlanders want to be neither Danes nor Americans. He insisted, *"Greenland's future is decided in Greenland, and by the citizens of Greenland"*.

However, adopting a pragmatic perspective, the prime minister conveyed an optimistic outlook at a press conference held on 10 January. He expressed Greenland's eagerness to enhance its partnership with the United States. He underlined the importance

of upgrading cooperation in defence matters as well as delving into the rich mining resources that Greenland has to offer. This commitment reflects a more thoughtful approach to fostering closer ties and collaboration in the current global landscape.

In the meantime, Denmark's Foreign Minister addressed President Trump's renewed interest in Greenland during a press conference held in Jerusalem. Lars Lokke Rasmussen remarked, *"I don't want to engage in any disputes with President Trump."* He noted the U.S. President has a distinctive approach when it comes to articulating his requests, and emphasised that Denmark is currently entering a more in-depth dialogue with him.



Lars Lokke Rasmussen

Rasmussen acknowledged shared concerns regarding the security situation in the Arctic, stating, *"We agree that the Americans have certain concerns about the security situation in the Arctic, which we share."* He further assured that Denmark, in close collaboration with Greenland, is prepared to continue discussions with Trump to safeguard and address *"legitimate American interests."*

In conclusion to this exploration of Greenland, we find ourselves at a juncture where a rich history meets the urgent realities of today's geopolitical landscape. The recent American interest—marked by both friendly overtures and pointed threats—has thrust this vast, icy territory into the global spotlight. With its immense natural resources and strategic significance, Greenland has silently witnessed the shifting tides of power for centuries. Now, as its people grapple with the challenge of maintaining their unique identity amidst external pressures, their future hangs in a delicate balance.

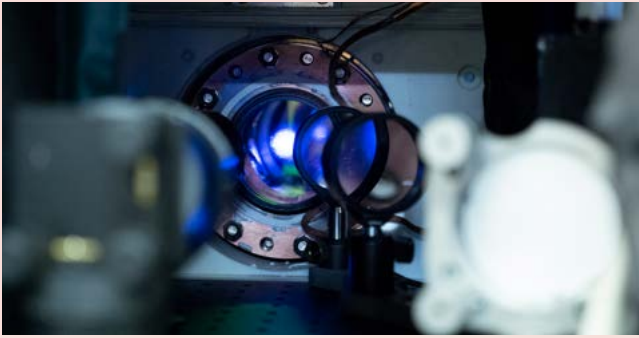
This story is not just about Greenland; it is about so much more. It touches on bigger themes like sovereignty, ambition, and the way different cultures interact. As we follow this narrative, it really hits home how history and our hopes and dreams can come together to shape not just a place, but entire regions and even the world at large. It is a powerful reminder of how interconnected we all are in this journey.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

TOP SECRET LAB DEVELOPS ATOMIC CLOCK USING QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY

© P. JACOBSON/NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY



A strontium atomic clock, at the University of Colorado, USA

A revolutionary UK-built atomic clock will make military operations more secure through experimental quantum technology

Military personnel will use groundbreaking quantum technology to conduct more secure and precise operations, thanks to a new high-tech atomic clock.

Developed at the top-secret Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, (Dstl) the quantum clock will be a leap forward in improving intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance by decreasing the reliance on GPS technology, which can be disrupted and blocked by adversaries.

The clock's precision is so refined that it will lose less than one second over billions of years, allowing scientists to measure time at an unprecedented scale. It is the first device of its kind to be built in the UK and will be deployable on military operations in the next five years.

The applications of quantum clocks extend beyond precision timekeeping. Further improvement to GPS accuracy could transform global navigation systems, aiding in everything from satellite communication to aircraft navigation.

The development of this cutting-edge technology supports key components of the UK Government's Plan for Change, safeguarding national security while supporting skilled, productive jobs which foster economic growth.

In addition, further research will see the technology decrease in size to allow mass manufacturing and miniaturisation, unlocking a wide range of applications, such as use by military vehicles and aircraft.

Improved clocks, such as this atomic device, will allow the Ministry of Defence to further support current and future capabilities. For example, quantum clocks can:

- Enable more precise and independent navigation systems, reducing reliance on GPS satellites, which are vulnerable to jamming or destruction in conflict scenarios.
- Secure communications systems, such as encrypted military networks, which depend on highly synchronised timekeeping.
- Enhance the accuracy of advanced weapon systems, like guided missiles, which rely on accurate timing to calculate trajectories and coordinate attacks.

- Allow our Armed Forces to gain an edge over adversaries in timing-critical operations, especially in areas like cyber warfare, where milliseconds can make a difference.

Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry, Maria Eagle MP, said:

“Integrating cutting edge technology into existing capabilities exemplifies the Government’s commitment to innovation in the defence sector, and to ensuring our Armed Forces have the best kit possible to keep us secure at home and strong abroad.

“The trialling of this emerging, groundbreaking technology could not only strengthen our operational capability, but also drive progress in industry, bolster our science sector and support high-skilled jobs.”

The trial is the first time that Dstl has tested a UK-built optical atomic clock outside of a laboratory, offering a new capability beyond the Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) that currently exist. GNSS vulnerabilities are a known national security risk, with atomic clock technology having the potential to provide a stable sovereign-controlled capability for maintenance of precise time for critical operations.

Dstl’s Chief Executive, Paul Hollinshead, said:

“This first trial of advanced atomic clock represents a significant achievement in the UK’s quantum technology capabilities.

“The data gathered will not only shape future Defence effort but is also a signal to industry and academia that we are serious about exploring quantum technologies for secure and resilient operational advantage.”

COPERNICUS GLOBAL CLIMATE REPORT 2024 CONFIRMS LAST YEAR AS THE WARMEST ON RECORD, FIRST EVER ABOVE 1.5°C ANNUAL AVERAGE TEMPERATURE



The Copernicus Global Climate Highlights Report 2024, published today, confirms 2024 as the warmest year on record and the first to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the annual global average temperature. Last year was also the warmest for all continental regions, including Europe, except Antarctica and Australasia.

As also highlighted in the 2023 European State of the Climate Report and the European Climate Risk Assessment, the European continent has been warming twice as fast as the global average since the 1980s, becoming the fastest-warming continent on Earth. European land in the Arctic remains the fastest-warming region on Earth, and changes in atmospheric circulation are favouring more frequent summer heatwaves. Likewise, glaciers are melting and there are changes in the pattern of precipitation.

The overall frequency and severity of extreme weather events

are increasing. Sea surface temperatures remained exceptionally high, with July to December 2024, being the second warmest on record for the time of year, after 2023.

The EU is committed to supporting global climate action and becoming climate-neutral by 2050. It has agreed on targets and legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and the Commission has already recommended a 90% net GHG emissions reduction target for 2040. The Commission published a Communication in April 2024 on how to effectively prepare the EU for climate risks and build greater climate resilience.

Copernicus, Europe's eyes on Earth, is the Earth observation component of the European Union's Space programme. Funded by the EU, Copernicus is a unique instrument that looks at our planet and its environment to benefit all European citizens.

HUMAN MEDICINES IN 2024

114 new medicines recommended for approval; 46 had a new active substance



In 2024, The European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended 114 medicines for marketing authorisation. Of these, 46 had a new active substance which had never been authorised in the European Union (EU) before. Among these are a number of medicines that stand out due to their contribution to address public health needs or the innovation they represent. The Agency recommended the first medicine to treat early Alzheimer's disease, the first needle-free and smaller form of adrenaline to treat allergic reactions, the first treatment for tumours associated with von Hippel-Lindau disease, and two new antibiotic medicines for the treatment of certain severe infections.

EMA also recommended several new vaccines, including one to protect against Chikungunya disease and a new mRNA vaccine against lower respiratory tract disease caused by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and extended the use of an mpox vaccine to protect adolescents from 12 to 17 years of age.

As in previous years, cancer was the strongest therapeutic area, with 28 recommendations for oncology products. There were also 28 recommendations for new biosimilar products, covering a wide range of diseases, including several types of cancer, osteoporosis, macular degeneration, and diseases that involve an abnormal immune response like plaque psoriasis, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. This is good news for patients, as biosimilars make treatments more accessible and can provide broader access to potentially life-changing medicines.

The overview of the 2024 key recommendations published today includes figures on the authorisation of medicines and a selection of new treatments that represent significant progress in their therapeutic areas.

Once a medicine is authorised by the European Commission and prescribed to patients, EMA and the EU Member States continuously monitor its quality and benefit-risk balance and take regulatory action when needed. Measures can include a change to the product information, the suspension or withdrawal of a medicine, or a recall of a limited number of batches. An overview of some of the most notable safety-related recommendations is also included in the document linked below.

EUROPOL HOLDS LARGEST-EVER OPERATION TO INCREASE SEIZURES OF CRIMINAL ASSETS WORLDWIDE



For the first time ever, Europol has welcomed to its headquarters over 80 financial experts from all around the world to participate in Project A.S.S.E.T. (Asset Search & Seize Enforcement Taskforce), a unique initiative aimed at enhancing the number of criminal assets seized globally. In total, 43 law enforcement agencies from 28 countries joined the operation, as well as authorities from international organisations, including Eurojust and Interpol.

From 13 to 17 January, the specialists pooled their knowledge and expertise to establish a new organisational workstream to identify, freeze and seize criminal assets through all possible means available. This includes sharing expertise in identifying persons and new modi operandi surfacing in money laundering schemes, and planning joint actions to seize assets.

Throughout the operation, experts identified:

- 53 properties, 8 of which were valued EUR 38.5 million;
- Over 220 bank accounts, including one with a US \$5.6 million balance;
- 15 companies, over 20 yachts and luxury vehicles, 4 of which were valued more than EUR 600,000;
- 83 cryptocurrency addresses and wallets.

Another key result of the operation was the freezing of EUR 200 000 in cryptocurrencies.

The initiative was organised by the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) and supported by Europol's specialists and analysts in asset recovery, cryptocurrencies, open-source intelligence and innovation tools.

Objective: seizing criminal assets...

The seizure of criminally acquired assets is extremely low worldwide. It is estimated that law enforcement manages to take just a fragment of criminal assets out of criminals' hands; below 2% of the estimated yearly proceeds of organised crime. The remaining 98% provides the fuel for the continuation and expansion of organised crime activities. The most threatening criminal networks in the EU use real estate as one of the main

industries to launder their illicit –and untaxed– profits (41%).

Even though Project A.S.S.E.T. has taken place this week, law enforcement in all EU Member States and beyond are already setting up joint actions to increase the number of criminal assets recovered. Recent major operations Whitewall and Gorgon are good examples of this international law enforcement cooperation to increase seizures.

Based on the findings from these two investigations, Europol supported authorities from six countries in taking down underground bankers who were laundering the proceeds of large-scale drug trafficking and other serious crimes. One of the most successful outcomes of this operation was the seizure of EUR 27 million in cryptocurrencies alone.

...through joint action

Project A.S.S.E.T. is a decisive step taken by EU Member States and third parties towards prioritising financial investigations, one of the areas which Europol is focusing on to successfully tackle top criminals.

In addition, the new Directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation, which came into force in 2024, will become an important tool in the confiscation of these criminal assets. It gives new powers to the Asset Recovery Offices to efficiently freeze assets when required and to take immediate action to preserve the property until a freezing order has been issued.

The initiative exemplifies how Europol aims to strengthen the fight against all forms of serious international and organised crime by bringing relevant partners together. In this regard, a crucial element of Project A.S.S.E.T. is the participation of financial actors from the private sector, especially organisations from the banking sector and cryptocurrency exchanges.

Project A.S.S.E.T. is supported by the @ON Network funded by the EU Commissions, led by the Italian Antimafia Investigation Directorate (DIA).

BREAKTHROUGH IN ENERGY WEAPONS IN CHINA

A real-world “Death Star”

A recent article in the South China Morning Post reported that researchers at the Xia Navigation Technology Research Institute have made further strides in the development of a “Relativistic Klystron Amplifier” or RKA, a microwave weapon that works just like the Death Star’s super laser in the film Star Wars.

The development of microwave weapons systems specifically designed to target and disable, or destroy enemy satellites by using a concentrated beam of microwaves, was reported by the same news outlet in September 2023. These weapons which are part of the “directed energy” family, together with lasers, offer the advantage of low operating costs compared to traditional munitions, since they only require energy to power the emitter.

This means that as long as there is a power source, these weapons can be fired almost endlessly. With the global arms race heating up, China is increasingly interested in this new technology which it views not as a replacement for traditional weapons, but as a way to enhance its military strength.

Unlike ground-based laser beam emitters, these weapons can be mounted on satellites to get them close enough to the targets and burn out their electronics. The system consists of seven vehicles, each equipped with microwave emitters, and it operates on a principle similar to the super laser of the Death Star: multiple beams come together to create a single, powerful ray aimed at a target. Early tests have already shown that this system can jam American GPS signals and disrupt other satellites. This innovative

technology is not just useful for military purposes; it also has potential applications in training and simulation within defence settings.



Artist’s impression of Chinese Microwave Weapon

To ensure the weapon’s effectiveness, it demands extreme precision in both positioning and timing. Scientists had to devise a complex system that allows all beams to converge at exactly the same point, which means each vehicle must be positioned within just a few millimeters of the desired location. Even with the advanced accuracy of China’s Beidou satellite navigation system, achieving this level of precision was a significant challenge. To facilitate this, laser measurement devices were installed on each vehicle to ensure millimeter-level localisation.

What’s more, the beams must not only meet at the same spot but also at the exact moment. The synchronisation of the emitters is crucial, requiring an extremely high level of precision of 170 picoseconds (0.00000000017 seconds), which is even more precise than the atomic clocks used in GPS systems. To achieve this remarkable temporal accuracy, fibre optic connections link the timing devices of each vehicle. This method has already proven capable of synchronising two points 1,800 kilometres apart with an incredible accuracy of just 10 picoseconds.

All the location and synchronisation data is then sent to a command centre where it is analysed to issue attack orders. However, because this project is highly sensitive from a military standpoint, the specific capabilities and performance details of this technology remain confidential and have not been made public.

NEW! SUMMER SCHOOL ON MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH



Technological advancements have revolutionised global communication and information sharing, offering unparalleled opportunities for collaboration across disciplines. However, they have also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech, jeopardising the integrity of the information ecosystem. Addressing these challenges is critical to safeguarding human rights, peace, and sustainable development.

Recognising the risks, the international community is working to counter these threats. The United Nations has taken

significant steps, including the adoption of the Global Principles for Information Integrity in 2024, promoting transparency, accountability, and collaboration among stakeholders to create a safer and more inclusive digital environment. Initiatives like the International Day for Countering Hate Speech underscore the urgency of collective action.

From 30 June to 4 July 2025, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the Italian Society for International Organization (SIOI) will host the 3rd Summer School on Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech. Delivered in a hybrid format, the course provides participants with a comprehensive understanding of these issues, exploring their role in war and political propaganda, international legal frameworks, and the impact of artificial intelligence. Participants will also gain practical tools to detect, debunk, and counter harmful narratives while fostering effective change in public policies and practices.

The programme features expert-led lectures, dynamic case studies, and practical exercises, offering diverse perspectives from academia, international organisations, and civil society. Participants can join in person at SIOI's historical premises in Rome or online, benefiting from intercultural dialogue and networking with global peers.

Designed for students, professionals, and anyone keen to tackle the challenges of disinformation and hate speech, this course equips attendees to become advocates for meaningful change in today's information landscape.

Applications are open until 16 June 2025, with confirmation of acceptance and payment required within one week of application approval.

NEW EU RULES ON HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT OPEN UP A NEW ERA FOR PATIENT ACCESS TO INNOVATION

Since Sunday, 12 January, the Regulation on Health Technology Assessment (HTA) has become applicable, marking a significant step forward in ensuring that innovative and effective health technologies are available to patients across the EU.

The new rules create an EU framework for the assessment of health technologies, such as medicines and medical devices, by fostering collaboration and coordination between EU Member States. This will help national authorities to make more timely and informed decisions on the pricing and reimbursement of health technologies and streamline the procedure for health technology developers. This will contribute to faster and wider access to new and more effective innovative products for patients.

The rules will apply to companies seeking marketing authorisation for their products by introducing a new and permanent EU framework for Health Technology Assessment, including through:

- introducing a single EU-level submission file for joint clinical assessments in order to ensure pooling of resources at the EU level and strengthening the scientific quality of HTA across the EU while avoiding duplication of assessments at national level.
- establishing faster procedures requiring Joint Clinical Assessments to be completed within 30 days after the authorisation of the medicine;
- the systematic consultation of patients and clinicians during the preparation of the assessments as well as the involvement

and consultation of the HTA stakeholders.

As a first step, these new rules will apply to marketing authorisation applications for a new cancer medicine or an advanced therapy medicinal product (ATMP). The rules will be extended to orphan medicines in January 2028 and will as of 2030 cover all new medicinal products. Selected high-risk medical devices will also be assessed as of 2026.

The new EU framework replaces the long standing EU-funded project-based cooperation between Member States on health technology assessment, while fully respecting Member States' responsibility for the management of their health services as their national context requires.



AI generated image

Background

Health technology assessment is a scientific, evidence-based process that aims to inform the creation of safe and effective health policies by summarising information about the medical, social, economic and ethical issues related to the use of a health technology.

The European Commission adopted its proposal for a Regulation on Health Technology Assessment on 31 January 2018. Adopted in December 2021, the Regulation, a key deliverable of the EU Pharmaceutical Strategy, entered into force in January 2022. It applies from 12 January 2025. During this three-year transitional period, the Commission and the Member States prepared by setting up the necessary governance structure and drafted preparatory documents to support an effective application.

LEONARDO UNVEILS DESIGN OF PROTEUS UNCREWED ROTORCRAFT TECHNOLOGY DEMONSTRATOR



- Key design elements include an innovative modular payload bay.
- Leonardo is using advanced digital design and manufacturing techniques in the development of Proteus, including a digital

twin for synthetic development, more than 40 components manufactured with advanced composite materials and the use of AI in its control software.

- The fast-moving programme will see the first flight of the new rotorcraft in mid-2025, following contract award in June 2022.

Leonardo, the Royal Navy and the UK Ministry of Defence's Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) Future Capability Innovation (FCI) team have unveiled the design of the Proteus technology demonstrator aircraft. The circa three-tonne uncrewed rotorcraft will be used to demonstrate advances in autonomy and payload modularity and interchangeability, whilst developing cutting-edge new rotorcraft technologies including design and manufacturing techniques. Its development supports the Royal Navy's Maritime Aviation Transformation (MATx) strategy, which covers the evolution of maritime aviation out to 2040. This includes building mass at sea and supporting future anti-submarine warfare missions.

The design of the Proteus technology demonstrator, images of which were published today, reveals that it has drawn on components from throughout Leonardo's helicopter portfolio in order to reduce costs and accelerate aircraft development. Leonardo has also drawn on knowledge and experience from across its existing Uncrewed Air System (UAS) programmes.

This design will demonstrate the viability of large UAS in the maritime environment and will function as a test bed for the development and demonstration of autonomous capability. This includes flight control laws and algorithms for large autonomous Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft.

Uniquely, the Proteus design features a modular payload bay. This is designed to enable flexibility in mission roles, including the ability to trade fuel for mission payload. The ability to plug in specific payloads for different missions aims to give commanders in the field a wide range of options from a single type of aircraft. This is both operationally useful and delivers value for money by avoiding the need to buy and maintain multiple different fleets of aircraft.

Leonardo's site in Yeovil, the Home of British Helicopters, maintains an aggressive autonomy development roadmap, which covers the capabilities required to conduct autonomous flight and deliver mission capability. In practice, this means maturing and testing a range of transformative technologies and techniques, for the design and manufacture of rotorcraft as well as on-board the aircraft itself.

For instance, Leonardo has created a 'digital twin' of the Proteus technology demonstrator to aid in development. Utilising a digital twin, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) algorithms in a synthetic environment enables Leonardo to test, modify and prove capability without the need for live aircraft trials, thereby reducing costs and significantly accelerating development when compared to traditional rotorcraft programmes.

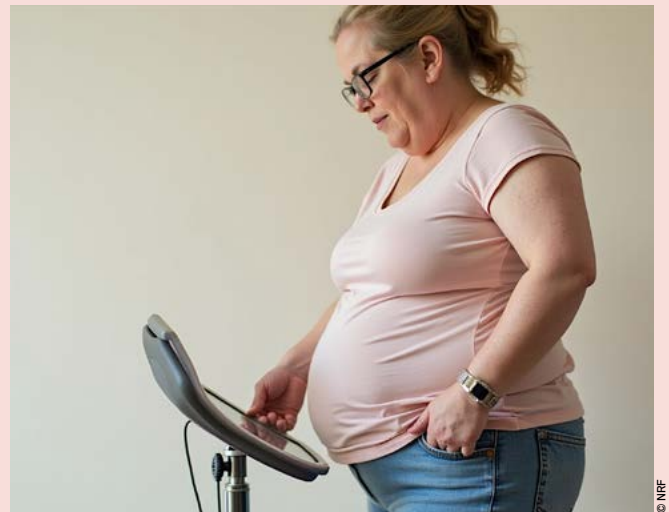
Leonardo is also experimenting with the application of new digital manufacturing technologies in rotorcraft production, including additive layer manufacturing (3D printing) and the use of cost-effective low temperature cure composite materials, which require fewer manufacturing stages in the production of parts.

Once proven, these technologies will be employed more extensively to deliver agility through spiral development techniques, reduce through-life costs in comparison to conventional crewed aircraft, and improve manufacturing resilience and sustainability throughout Leonardo's supply chain.

PREDICTING OBESITY COMPLICATIONS – IN THOSE WHO ARE NOT OBESE

The IMI Sophia project identified five subgroups of people whose risk for obesity complications is not aligned with their body mass index (BMI)

If you're obese, you're at a higher risk for cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and other complications. But some people, despite having a high body mass index (BMI), have a low risk for these complications. On the other hand, about one in five people with a normal BMI are at high risk – for instance, a person might have a much higher amount of fat or sugar in their blood than you would expect when considering their body weight alone, which could put them at a higher-than-expected risk for heart disease or diabetes.



The IMI Sophia project used machine learning techniques to analyse health data from a database of 170 000 adults from the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. They also developed powerful algorithms to cluster people whose risk profiles didn't match what was expected given their body weight.

The study defined five subgroups of people whose risk for obesity complications and BMI are not aligned. For instance, about 5% of women and 7% of men had a profile with high "bad" cholesterol (LDL), high levels of fat in the blood, and had higher blood pressure than expected for their weight. This indicates that, despite their weight being within the normal range, these people are at risk of a cardiovascular event, diabetes, or another complication commonly linked to obesity.

This finding can help to identify people who are at risk of developing cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes or other complications commonly associated with obesity, but who are not obese. Since a lot of these complications are preventable, it is possible to reduce the number of people who go on to develop these complications.

What's more, better and more precise treatments can now be developed that are targeted for a specific subtype.

"The subgroups of people with obesity identified by the IMI SOPHIA project allows us to understand why two people with exactly the same body mass index and the same body fat distribution can have completely different obesity related complications," said Carol Le Roux, project coordinator of SOPHIA.

"We are now starting to no longer think of obesity as one disease but rather as multiple different diseases that can lead

to the same level of adiposity. This will improve how patients, clinicians, payers, and regulators view obesity as a subset of disease.”

Ali Farzaneh, one of the lead researchers involved in the study, said that these results illustrate how powerful machine learning techniques and personalised medicine approaches can be for health research.

“These findings redefine the understanding of obesity by identifying distinct subtypes that drive cardiometabolic risk, offering new precision tools for early disease prevention and intervention. This work demonstrates the potential of advanced algorithms and large-scale data to improve health outcomes.”

SOPHIA is supported by the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a partnership between the European Union and the European pharmaceutical industry.

PESCO: SWITZERLAND WILL BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ‘MILITARY MOBILITY’ PROJECT

Leopard main battle tanks from the Swiss Army participating in the “Steel Parade” of the Army Days in Thun, Switzerland © Wikicommons

The Council has adopted a decision confirming that the participation of Switzerland in the PESCO project ‘Military Mobility’ meets the general conditions set out in Decision (CFSP) 2020/1639 of November 2020, and will bring substantial added value to the project.

Today’s decision authorises the Netherlands as project coordinator to formally invite Switzerland to join this PESCO project, in response to Switzerland’s request of September 2024. Once Switzerland completes an administrative agreement with the project, they will become formal members.

The PESCO project ‘Military Mobility’ aims to simplify and standardise national cross-border military transport procedures. It enables the swift movement of military personnel and assets throughout the EU, be it via road, rail, sea, or air. Canada, Norway and the United States of America were invited to join the project in 2021, and in 2022, the United Kingdom was invited to join.



Leopard main battle tanks from the Swiss Army participating in the “Steel Parade” of the Army Days in Thun, Switzerland

Background

The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is one of the pillars of EU Defence Policy. It provides a framework for defence cooperation among the 26 participating EU member states who

have entered into more binding commitments between one another. They jointly develop defence capabilities, coordinate investments, enhance the operational readiness, interoperability and resilience of their armed forces, and collaborate in projects.

On 5 November 2020, the Council adopted Decision (CFSP) 2020/1639 establishing the general conditions under which third states could exceptionally be invited to participate in individual PESCO projects. The countries applying must meet political, legal, and substantive conditions, including sharing the values on which the EU is founded and not contravene the security and defence interests of the EU and its member states.

VARIAN’S RAPIDARC DYNAMIC SOLUTION UNLOCKS NEW DIMENSIONS IN TREATMENT PLANNING AND DELIVERY



Varian, a Siemens Healthineers company, has introduced the RapidArc Dynamic solution, a cutting-edge advancement in radiation therapy designed to enhance treatment planning and delivery. This innovative technology integrates next-generation algorithms and dynamic hardware adjustments to improve precision, reduce treatment times, and minimize radiation exposure to surrounding healthy tissues.

Varian, has announced 510(k) clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration allowing sale of its RapidArc Dynamic solution, a ground-breaking technology leveraging advanced algorithms to revolutionize treatment planning to shorten the time between consultation to treatment.

One of the standout features of RapidArc Dynamic is its ability to significantly accelerate the treatment planning process. The advanced algorithms employed can optimize plans and calculate doses up to 70% faster than previous systems, allowing clinicians to handle a higher volume of cases without compromising quality.

In terms of treatment delivery, RapidArc Dynamic offers enhanced control through its dynamic collimator, which can be adjusted in real time. Additionally, the system allows for strategic pausing of the gantry during arc rotation, enabling precise modulation at optimal beam angles. This combination of features merges the directional control of Intensity-Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT) with the efficiency of Volumetric Modulated Arc Therapy (VMAT) in a single treatment field.

Clinical benefits of this technology are substantial. Early research indicates that RapidArc Dynamic can reduce radiation doses to organs at risk by up to 50%, thereby decreasing the

likelihood of long-term complications and improving patients' post-treatment quality of life. For instance, in treatments involving the breast or lung, minimizing radiation exposure to the heart is crucial, as each additional gray (Gy) of radiation can increase the relative risk of cardiac morbidity by 5% to 7%.

Workflow efficiency is further enhanced by built-in tools such as Auto-Skin Flash, which automates and simplifies multi-step processes. The system also integrates seamlessly with existing features within the Eclipse treatment planning software, including Multi-Criteria Optimization (MCO), RapidPlan, and clinical goals templates, streamlining the overall treatment planning and delivery process.

"RapidArc Dynamic represents a powerful new solution for personalizing treatment planning and delivery with the potential to further reduce doses to organs at risk which can help reduce toxicities without disrupting treatment workflow," Sushil Beriwal, MD, Vice President, Digital Oncology, Medical Affairs for Varian. "This new flexibility aims to help care teams reach new milestones in improving treatment outcomes."

LEONARDO UNVEILS DESIGN OF INTERPOL PUBLISHES FIRST SILVER NOTICE TARGETING CRIMINAL ASSETS

Inaugural Silver Notice seeks information on assets of a senior mafia figure



Interpol Expert Working Group on Asset Tracing and Recovery

Interpol has published its first-ever Silver Notice to help trace and recover criminal assets, combat transnational organized crime and enhance international police cooperation.

The Notice, requested by Italy, seeks information on the assets belonging to a senior member of the mafia.

The Silver Notice is the newest addition to the Organization's suite of colour-coded Notices and Diffusions, which enable countries to share alerts and requests for information worldwide. It is being launched as part of a pilot phase involving 52 countries and territories, which will run at least until November 2025.

Through Silver Notices and Diffusions, member countries can request information on assets linked to a person's criminal activities such as fraud, corruption, drug trafficking, environmental crime and other serious offenses. It will facilitate locating, identifying, and obtaining information about laundered assets including properties, vehicles, financial accounts and businesses. Countries may subsequently use such information as a basis for bilateral engagement, including bilateral requests for seizure, confiscation

or recovery of assets, subject to national laws.

Valdecy Urquiza, INTERPOL Secretary General said:

"Stripping criminals and their networks of illegal profits is one of the most powerful ways to fight transnational organized crime, especially considering that 99 per cent of criminal assets remain unrecovered. By targeting their financial gains, INTERPOL is working to disrupt criminal networks and reduce their harmful impact on communities worldwide."

Prefect Raffaele Grassi, Deputy Director General of Public Security and Director of the Italian Criminal Police, said:

"Italy is proud to chair INTERPOL's Expert Working Group on Asset Tracing and Recovery. We are confident the Silver Notice and Diffusion will bring positive results, encouraging global law enforcement to enhance asset recovery efforts. It is of particular significance that this inaugural Notice has been issued at the request of investigators from the Guardia di Finanza in Palermo—a city synonymous with the Transnational Organized Crime Convention and its emphasis on the 'follow-the-money' principle."

In 2023, INTERPOL's 91st General Assembly, held in Vienna, Austria, outlined the development and implementation of the Silver Notice and Diffusion pilot through Resolution GA-2023-91-RES-11. The resolution tasked the Expert Working Group on Asset Tracing and Recovery, in collaboration with the General Secretariat, with designing the pilot's scope, format, conditions and safeguard measures.

While Notices are shared with all 196 member countries, Diffusions may be directed to selected relevant countries. The General Secretariat will review every Silver Notice and Diffusion for compliance with the Organization's rules prior to its publication or circulation. This includes ensuring they are not used for political purposes, in contravention of Article 3 of INTERPOL's Constitution. During the pilot phase, extracts of Silver Notices will not be published on INTERPOL's website.

Participating countries in the pilot will be able to collectively request up to 500 Silver Notices and Silver Diffusions, with the total divided equally among all participating countries.



Countries and territories participating in the pilot phase:

Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, China, Colombia, Congo, Ecuador, Estonia, France, Gabon, Georgia, Gibraltar (UK), Guinea, Hungary, India, Iraq, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea (Rep. of), Kuwait, Latvia, Malawi, Malta, Moldova, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zambia, Zimbabwe.



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United Kingdom. Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks to members of the media on his way to Washington D.C in September 2024

LOST IN THE FOG

Navigating Political Uncertainty

“Doubt is not a pleasant condition,” wrote Voltaire (real name: François-Marie Arouet), the 18th century French writer and philosopher, “but certainty is absurd.” Very true. The other day, talking to me about British politics, a friend who has been a lifelong Socialist and therefore a UK Labour Party voter, swore he could never vote for Britain’s current Prime Minister, Sir Kier Starmer, the supposed leader of the country’s Socialists, ever again. “Why not?” I asked. “Because he’s a liar,” came the unexpectedly swift and stern response. Yes, a life-long British Socialist was being very rude about that party’s leader and saying he could never vote for him. That’s not to say he’d vote for anyone else I should point out. He hadn’t turned into a Conservative and nor would he ever do so, (and he would certainly never vote for Nigel Farage’s Reform party) but he’d certainly had a bellyful of Starmer. Starmer has also (somewhat unfairly, I think) come under attack from the American billionaire Elon Musk, who has been using his website to flag up tales of sexual abuse by the Labour Party in Britain, although he can’t really be blaming Starmer for all of them, can he? In any case, Musk, as a flag carrier for Donald Trump and with his far-right views is unlikely ever to pay compliments to a Socialist party in any country. His viewpoint would hardly be neutral, sexual tastes aside. I know some of my fellow countrymen (and women) have bizarre erotic fantasies, (so I’ve read) but they can’t all be Starmer’s fault, surely? He never struck me as the sort of man about whom women fantasise while dreaming of sexual dalliances, or certainly not frequently.

Whatever the truth of it all, it’s not doing Britain’s Labour Party much good. Clement Attlee, Barbara Castle and the pipe-smoking Harold Wilson would be horrified. None of them could be described as “sex symbols”. Indeed, I cannot think of a single politician of any party who might be described that way. I cannot personally testify to Starmer’s reliability or otherwise; I have personally had no experience of chatting with the man, nor of his alleged propensity for stretching the truth beyond breaking point; my days of chatting casually with party leaders belong in the past, so whatever he told me could be truth, could be lies; I would not necessarily know the difference. Of course, truth and politics have not been close friends for years. “In politics, the truth is strictly optional,” wrote Thomas Sowell, the American economist, economic historian, social philosopher and political commentator, “and that also seems to be true in parts of the media.” Yes, we journalists are not known for always being truthful. The American Humourist Will Rogers wrote:



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Victoria and Kier Starmer outside 10 Downing Street

“If you ever injected truth into politics, you have no politics.” Very true, if rather depressing. Of course, it could be argued that if somebody offers you something for free out of their generosity, it would be rude to reject it. On the other hand, how many times have you been offered expensive freebies? No, neither have I.

In the case of Britain’s Prime Minister and his wife, the generosity of others seems to have been welcomed. While he was still leader of the opposition, before taking up his country’s leadership, Starmer accepted around £16,000 (almost €19,000) for clothes, £2,485 (over €2,941) for glasses and, in addition, accommodation valued at £20,000 (€23,675.67) so that his son could revise for the exams he had



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Nigel Farage

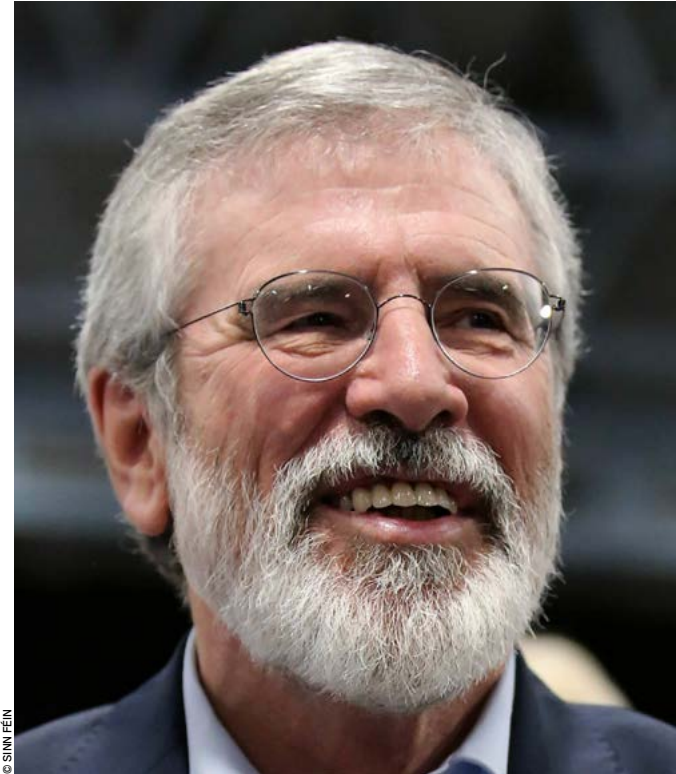
to pass to get into a good university while the media were camped outside his parents' home, keeping watch. Most of this generosity was provided by Lord Alli, a television executive, whose kindness didn't end there. It was all declared for the private office of the Labour opposition leader. Starmer's wife has also admitted to accepting clothes as "donations". Alli was recognised for his "kindness" once Starmer became Prime Minister with a temporary "free pass" to his Downing Street office. Starmer has also accepted a vast quantity of free football and concert tickets during his time in opposition. Lord Alli is a very valuable friend to have for an up-and-coming political leader. A very kind and generous one, too, it seems. It all looks very strange and would appear to have very little to do with politics at all. But, of course, it has; everything has.

Certainly, the Labour Party has been losing support since it was elected to office. That's not unusual; it happens after every election. Nigel Farage's far-right "Reform" party claims it's benefiting from these changes of allegiance, but that's not certain. There are signs that voters may be turning left, rather than right, despite a great deal of criticism over Rachel Reeves' handling of the economy (among several other things), with a surprisingly large number turning to the Greens and Liberal Democrats, despite the fact that Reform draws more votes than the Conservative Party, once thought of as the "natural" party of government, according to a survey of voters' intentions by YouGov.

But this is just one of a great many concerns about the Labour government that will be giving Sir Keir sleepless nights. Take the case of Gerry Adams, for instance, and the fact that this unrepentant Irish terrorist may be in-line for cash compensation over his internment. It was the former Conservative government that passed "Troubles Legacy Act" which would entitle Adams to claim financial compensation for his internment behind bars. The current Conservative leader, Kemi Badenoch, has described the idea as "shameful", even though it was introduced by the Conservatives. Starmer has described the act as "unfit" and "unlawful" and he told the House of Commons that he would block any payment to Adams. Northern Ireland's terrorists have lot to answer for. When I was reporting from a poor part of Belfast a good few years ago, I commented on the strong wire netting suspended over the small and rather sparse garden. It was explained to me as being necessary to save any children playing out there from the petrol bombs – sometimes known as "Molotov cocktails" – that were frequently thrown over the wall. It's hard to see how such actions advanced the cause of Irish nationalism but even harder to see how one of those supporting and even organising such acts should now be getting cash to compensate them for the periods they spent in internment for their indisputably illegal activities. Talking about Adams' possible compensation, Starmer told the media: "We will look at every conceivable way to prevent these types of cases from claiming damages". Good luck with that, especially when it will mean voting with the Conservatives when they attempt to rescind the law they created.

Other violent criminal acts seem to attract more public (and media) attention, such as the organised gang rapes of very young girls in the north of England. Research suggests that more than 1,400 girls, some of them as young as 11, were sexually exploited in the northern English town of Rotherham (and in other northern towns) between 1997 and 2013, a fact drawn to public attention by the American right-wing billionaire Elon Musk, using his website. Many of the girls were already known to the authorities because they had been victims of parental neglect

or had even been in care. It's thought that many – perhaps most – of the perpetrators were of Pakistani heritage and many of the girls suffered multiple rapes. Local officials are said to have regarded the rapes as examples of "consensual



Gerry Adams

sexual intercourse", although most of the girls in question were too young to have consented to having sex at all, assuming they even knew what was happening. It seems that the local authorities were wary of identifying the ethnic origins of the supposed perpetrators because they were afraid of upsetting the cohesion of the community or of being accused of racism themselves. The police and local authorities said they had not found signs of a cover-up, but then they do not seem to have been looking for one. It's not the first such case. A nationwide public inquiry into child sexual abuse, involving churches and schools, published a report in 2022 making a number of recommendations, none of which had been implemented at the time of writing. Why should this concern Sir Keir (other than because of the horror such cases inevitably and rightly) raise? Well, he was Director of Public Prosecutions between 2008 and 2013 and claims that during that period he tackled the issue "head-on", bringing the first large-scale prosecution of a gang accused of grooming young girls and gang-raping them. The Conservative party and Nigel Farage's far-right Reform party have both called for wide-reaching public inquiries into the whole issue.

Sir Keir has been unfortunate with the unwelcome resignations of some of his chosen ministers, too.

Take Tulip Siddiq, his treasury minister (among a range of other titles), for instance. She assured the media that she had never breached the ministerial code in her role as Sir Keir’s “Ethics Tsar” (actually Economic Secretary to the Treasury) but that her continued presence in government “is likely to be a distraction”. So rather than risk that, she has resigned the post. Siddiq, as the Minister responsible for financial services and for the fight against corruption has also been questioned about her financial ties to her aunt, Sheikh Hasina, who finally resigned as leader of Bangladesh amidst allegations of corruption. Tulip Siddiq had repeatedly denied any wrongdoing while serving under Sir Keir Starmer, and Prime Minister he had said he had full confidence in her.

So rather than risk that, she has resigned the post.



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Tulip Siddiq

That same willingness to step aside is not visible in Rachel Reeves, who has apparently shrugged off demands that she should resign and is still talking up her recent visit to China, arguing that her plans for the economy will deliver untold benefits. She has denied having “improper relationships” with foreign politicians and has also insisted that she always acted correctly with regard to the many properties she has owned or lived in. “My loyalty is and always will be to this Labour government,” she assured colleagues, but she still feared that her record could embarrass Sir Keir, although she sternly defended her recent visit to China.

Most of the problems facing the Labour Party are of its own making. Take the winter fuel payment debacle, for instance. The payments

have been cut for any pensioners not also receiving benefits and in future will be restricted to those on pension credits or other means-tested benefits. You have to prove you really need it before you can get it and even if you can it’s still not a done deal.

After all, Chancellor Rachel Reeves has sought ways to cut government spending in many areas, blaming an overspend of £22-billion (€26-billion) inherited from the previous Conservative government. She has said that she’s quite happy to be labelled “the Iron Chancellor”, although historically that was the nickname given to Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) who became chancellor of the newly-united German Empire from 1862 to 1890. It’s not a name I would like, but Ms. Reeves can choose it if she wishes. I’m not sure if the traditional spiked helmet would suit her, however.

Climate change is another hot issue. By a strange coincidence, former Conservative Prime Minister (very briefly) Liz Truss



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Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves presenting the Autumn Budget 2024

seemed to back the leader of the far-right Reform party, Nigel Farage, in joining a group that apparently doesn’t believe climate change is happening. They made the announcement in the same week that the UK-based scientific magazine *New Scientist* ran a lead story on why climate change is happening and how it breaches the threshold set under the Paris agreement. In fact, Berkeley Earth, a climate research group based in California, reckons the rise reached 1.62°C.

Truss became the shortest-serving prime minister in British history, serving only from September to October 2022. There was a running joke in Britain that a lettuce bought in a supermarket would have lasted longer. She lost her seat to Labour in the last General Election. Starmer’s Labour government had promised swift action to counter climate change, but most concerned environmentalists are somewhat disappointed, it seems. It’s a difficult area and views are very divided. A recent poll conducted by the political organisation “More in Common” suggests that climate change is a top priority for many people, with “climate change and the environment” ranking together as the “third most important issue facing the country”, behind only the tracking of Covid-19’s spread and support for the National Health Service.

The research body concluded that 79% of British people are concerned about the environment and three quarters of the people worry about climate change. More worrying for Labour, perhaps, is that 60% don’t think they’re doing enough about it.

According to scientists, 2024 was the hottest year in human history, reaching higher than 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial



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Former British Prime Minister Liz Truss

levels. It's harder to convince British people, however, because it was an awful summer here, but the British Met Office nevertheless estimated that the temperature had risen by 1.53°C. Despite that, on most days it was too cold or wet to sit in the garden. Perhaps I should also say the year was the hottest in "recorded human history"; we don't know for sure what the Neanderthals and Denisovans, among others, had to put up with. Sabre-toothed tigers (smilodons), mammoths and an ice age would seem more than enough for most people. However, sea temperatures have risen world-wide, although it's hard to see how that could be Starmer's fault. Most climate scientists now reckon that the 1.5°C Paris target is no longer reachable, no matter who runs the country. So, Truss and Farage don't believe it's happening, but the scientists say it is. Believe who you like, but my money is on the scientists. What's more, recent polling by the organisation More in Common suggests that tackling climate change is seen by most people as a top priority for the majority of people in Britain.

However, while most British people express their deep concern over climate change (four out of five of them or

83%), only a small percentage feel they should do anything themselves that might affect their lifestyle choices. This "action gap", as it's called, suggests that while they talk about taking action, not many people actually do. There are reasons, of course; take the issue of electric cars, which are not proving as popular as many experts hoped, partly because they're expensive, partly because of concerns over their reliability but perhaps mostly because of a lack of easy-to-reach charging points. Traditionalists and committed Conservatives are especially unlikely to invest. Once again, that is not the fault of Starmer, nor of his team.

Starmer admits that there is a "climate and nature bill hole in Labour's manifesto." Yes, Labour has said it will expand nature-rich habitats like wetlands and forests and plant million of trees, also introduce a pledge to help with cleaner air, banning fracking and increasing the tax on the oil and gas giants, including a ban on generous bonuses for the bosses. However, Labour made no promises to revoke existing oil or gas licences, nor to end fossil fuel subsidies. More action in this area would clearly be popular with most of the public. As the Big Issue magazine pointed out, an intention by the Conservatives and Scottish Nationalists to make this the deciding factor for voters clearly isn't working. Persuading people to eat less meat apparently is. It seems that some 60% of British citizens are either not eating meat all or are eating less of it. Big Issue points out that the Labour manifesto should have made a promise to involve the people more seriously in decisions affecting the environment and the use of polluting fuels. A group of 408 scientists have published an open letter to Labour warning that "any leader who doesn't make stronger climate action a priority will place at risk the prosperity and well-being of the British people."

All in all, it leaves you wondering: "who would want to run a country?". Let's take a quick look at the issues: the existence of "grooming gangs" that rape underage girls, the issue of generous gifts of clothing and tickets to key events, for the leader and his wife, the resignations of key members of the team, the tightening of the screws on pensioners and others dependent on benefits, the removal of winter fuel payments, the problems with the health service, the unfulfilled promises about tackling climate change...the list goes on. Can Sir Keir recover from his perilous position? Probably yes, is the answer.

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A Labour Party election poster



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The Chagos Archipelago

Keir Starmer’s choice to relinquish sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, while maintaining a long-term lease on the Diego Garcia military post, has generated tensions between the United States and the United Kingdom. Concerns focus on the geopolitical ramifications for the US-UK alliance and the possibility of heightened Chinese influence in the region. The situation is dynamic, with continuous negotiations and the need for coordination with the U.S. administration.

The public remember the last Conservative government, and not with affection. According to Luke Tryl of Labour List, “What Starmer’s biggest achievement is likely to have been is making Labour feel like a safe choice again.” Of course , that was before people started looking at all the new clothes and other generous gifts Sir Keir and his wife have received. Seeing that, some people are beginning to wonder if he’s really a Socialist at all. Indeed, immediately following Starmer’s massive election win, Luke Tryl warned of a danger that the result masks a deeper discontent with the whole of the political system, “not just a problem with one political party.”

Institute for Government, a political think tank, fears an unpredictable future for Britain” “Many of the key protagonists have stepped onto or left the main stage – we have the first Labour



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Luke Tryl

government in 14 years, a new leader of the opposition, a House of Commons in which over half of MPs are new, the Liberal Democrats are resurgent and a plurality of minor parties have greater voice, a new cabinet secretary, a new EU Commission and a new, albeit familiar, US president.” Isn’t life fun? The Institute has undertaken more recent polling with Deltapoll since Labour’s landslide win, and the outcome will make for uneasy reading for Starmer: “just over a fifth of people think that this government is being effective at improving their lives (22%) compared to 28% who now think the last Conservative government, which voters have just ejected, was effective.” Well, as the old saying goes, you can’t please everybody. Still, with possibly four years before the next general election, it could be worse.

“We are pleased that Starmer has adopted some of our recommendations, strengthening Pat McFadden’s role as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to focus on delivering the government’s priorities, making use of a smaller subcommittee of cabinet to make more focused decisions, and producing a set of priorities early in his term to focus the government’s activities – in the form of the ‘Plan for Change’.” Even so, Starmer could have had a smoother start to his premiership and he could have prevented his supporters from showing so much generosity. As it is, the electorate is left uncertain about his real beliefs and those of his team. Popular praise for Nigel Farage is generally of the “he tells it like it is” variety, but a far greater number have no time for him or his party. Sir Keir Starmer’s time in office is likely to be judged according to how well he gets hospital waiting lists down, whether he makes home buying easier and how well public transport works, among other things. The signs are fairly promising but he still has a lot of work to do. “A landslide masks discontent left, right and centre,” wrote Luke Tryl of Labour List, “Labour has its work cut out.” Whether or not it seriously addresses and deals with that work is something that only time will tell.

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PUTIN'S PHANTOM ARMADA



The Shadowy World of Russia's Ghost Fleet



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The Eagle S tanker believed to be part of the Russian shadow fleet

There is no shortage of ghost stories about ships and the sea, but Vladimir Putin has launched a whole ghost fleet. There's nothing spooky about it, though, just worrying.

When you hear tales of ghost fleets you somehow expect skeletal hands on the ship's wheel and a red-eyed skull glaring from the haunted bridge. No such luck. Where Vladimir Putin, Russia's acquisitive president is concerned, this is not so much a case of skulls and cutlasses as skulls and cross-bones. After all, Putin is more of a pirate than an "unquiet spirit". Please pass that flask of rum, somebody. Or perhaps it should be vodka, which is generally more to Russian tastes than rum. He may haunt the corridors of the Kremlin but only in strictly corporal form. He can certainly be unearthly and frightening, but he is never-the-less human, it seems, however much his actions and statements may suggest otherwise. Now he stands accused of launching a whole "ghost fleet" (as various politicians and sections of the media have named it) of ageing vessels to ship Russia's crude oil to potential customers, in violation of various bans, price caps and restrictions. In his case, of course, we should expect nothing else.

It's been referred to as a "shadow fleet", whose mariners know very well that they're engaged in sanctions-busting. It has also been called a "ghost fleet", despite the obvious lack of anything spiritual or spooky about it. It's not merely a case of shipping

oil to places where it's not supposed to go for profit. These "ghost ships" have also been dragging their anchors over the bed of the Baltic Sea between Finland and Estonia in order to snag the undersea cables that provide power and communications. Police in Finland have detained indefinitely the crew of a Russia-linked tanker, the Eagle S, which is accused of deliberately damaging a power cable. Finnish police arrested the entire crew of twenty-four, restricting the movements of the eight people being held most responsible, while they investigate who was behind the move. Finnish police are especially keen to establish who exactly plotted the vessel's route. The investigation is likely to take some time to reach its conclusions, during which the eight chief suspects will remain in custody, even though, unlike the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, they never shot an albatross.

The numbers of those under investigation may change, however, as the inquiries and hearings progress.

Another worrying aspect of this whole affair – apart from the sanctions-busting by Russia – is the use of very old and often poorly maintained tankers whose sea-worthiness has been questioned. In most cases they are not insured, either. They are not thought sufficiently important by Russia to waste the money it would cost to insure them. If they sink, it seems, they simply sink; "goodbye, sailors!". Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission has stressed the importance of maintaining pressure on Moscow, despite the insistence by Hungary (itself an EU member state, even if its actions display a disregard for the rules) on maintaining its close links with Russia. The current sanctions are part of the so-called "15th Package" since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Under it, Western companies – meaning members of the EU or G7 – are prohibited from providing services like insurance, financing and allowing the flying

of national flags to any fleet seeking to sell oil at prices above those agreed by the West. It would seem that Vladimir Putin's "ghost fleet" in no way resembles the famed *Mary Celeste*, found afloat off the Azores but minus crew and passengers in 1872. The most accepted version of the story is that the captain of that famous vessel believed (erroneously) that she was sinking and ordered everyone to abandon ship. A less well-known fact is that the *Mary Celeste* continued to be used as a cargo vessel long after she was found abandoned, indeed until 1885, when its captain sailed it into a reef deliberately as part of an insurance scam. It failed to sink, however, and its wreck eventually simply rotted away. In various works of fiction about the mystery, the ship became accidentally renamed the *Marie Celeste*, although she was really the *Mary Celeste*, despite having been launched originally in 1861 as the *Amazon*, and was only renamed the *Mary Celeste* seven years later.

I Spectre or spectacle?

In other words, there's not much of a mystery about the *Mary Celeste*. Her final demise in an attempted insurance fraud seems to fit with the stories told since, including those concerning Putin's "ghost fleet", which has no link to ghosts whatever.



Mary Celeste discovered by the British vessel, the *Dei Gratia*

There's nothing intrinsically spooky about smuggling or breaking shipment restrictions simply to make more money. It has a strong resemblance to the smuggling voyages of old, but no ghosts were involved. According to the Carnegie Politika publication, it's all fairly simple (and free of ghosts). It was towards the end of 2022 that supporters of Ukraine set a price cap for exports of Russian crude oil, with further rules supposedly to prevent Russia from chartering or insuring tankers to serve its needs. Needless to say, Moscow was not happy with this, so it decided to defy the rules by sourcing tankers and other maritime services elsewhere. The tankers employed in this clandestine series of operations are manned by crews that know they're breaking the rules but don't care (or have no choice), so they continue to operate, fully aware that they are doing so in defiance of Western sanctions. It's generally assumed that most if not quite all of the Russian oil they carry is being sold outside of the price cap regime, even if the owners and insurers are well aware that they're breaking international rules. They're not making friends in the West that way but they're certainly making money, which clearly matters more to them.

It may not prove quite as easy as they hope: Western naval nations have pledged to keep checks on the ageing tankers serving Putin's

need. EU authorities will demand the paperwork covering tankers that could potentially pose a threat to the environment. The Prime Minister of Estonia, Kristen Michal, has promised action since the EU imposed fresh sanctions on some fifty vessels that Moscow is believed to be using to evade Western price limits on crude oil exports. Six countries – Denmark, the UK, Sweden, Finland, Poland and Estonia have said that from now on they will ask suspected "shadow fleet" vessels for paperwork, including proof that they are covered by insurance when sailing through sensitive stretches of water such as the English Channel and the Danish Strait, according to Ms. Michal. If any vessels fail to cooperate, their details will be passed on for possible further action.



Prime Minister of Estonia, Kristen Michal

There is a clear determination to disrupt Putin's military aims. Western allies want to ensure that Russia faces the greatest possible difficulties in funding his war machine through using vessels that fly flags of convenience and switching off the transponders, leaving them virtually invisible. They have also been actively disguising the origins of their cargoes in order to conceal their actual trading links with Russia. It matters far beyond the money-grubbing of Putin: when two vessels from Russia were damaged in a storm in the Kerch Strait, it led to some 3,700 tonnes of crude oil being spilled, some of it washing up along the Russian coast, although Putin seems not to care.

Oil may have originated from ancient plant and animal life, but it poses a great risk to the environment now in its fossilised state. It can coat the wings of birds, leaving those affected unable to fly, and it can strip away the insulating properties of, for instance, a sea otter's fur, greatly reducing its chances of survival. That's not all: oil is made

up of a lot of harmful chemical compounds that threaten the health of marine creatures. These chemicals can cause all sorts of damage, harming the heart, stunting physical growth, undermining the natural benefits of the immune system and even causing death directly. There have been quite a few instances of such deadly damage being caused, with the Deepwater Horizon providing plentiful examples of the damage that can be caused. Just in case you've forgotten the details, Deepwater Horizon was a semi-submersible offshore drilling rig owned by Transocean and operated by the BP oil company. On 20 April 2010, while drilling in the Gulf of Mexico at the Macondo Prospect, there was an unexpected blowout which caused an explosion on the rig. It killed 11 crewmen outright and ignited a fireball that was visible from 40 miles away.



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The Deepwater Horizon was an ultra-deepwater, dynamically positioned, semi-submersible offshore drilling rig that sank on April 22, 2010, after an explosion and fire, killing 11 crew members

It is impossible to clear up all of the oil spilled in a rig accident by using high pressure hoses and hot water, as happened in the case of the Exxon Valdez. That did even more damage than the pollution itself. The whole operation is invariably hugely expensive, and if the vessel involved is not insured there's virtually no chance of recovering the cost. Putin is on a winner with his total disregard for anything apart from his wealth and profit (and, one assumes, power). As it is, oil spills harm sea creatures, they can ruin a day at the beach for holidaymakers and make seafood unsafe to eat, even poisonous. It could take years for the ocean environment to recover, however well the clean-up was done. With Russia deliberately using old and often uninsured vessels in poor condition, there is a genuine fear of widespread damage being caused.

Bypassing the rules to make illegal exports easier is one thing, but Russia goes much further. It's not the first country to have disregarded its responsibilities in keeping wildlife alive. Take the dodo, for instance, made famous by Lewis Carroll in his children's book, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", first published in 1865. The dodo was a flightless pigeon, up to one metre tall, with

grey-brown plumage and, it seems, an unpleasant flavour, although that didn't stop sailors from eating them. According to the English traveller Sir Thomas Herbert, writing after he had tasted some in 1634, "to the delicate they are offensive and of no nourishment." Hardly much of a recommendation, although much the same could be said today about burgers and pizzas in my opinion. In English we have a saying for something that has died out completely. We say: "it's as dead as a dodo", and I suppose we British should know, since we killed them. We humans certainly didn't mess about, however: the bird was first reported in 1598 and by 1662 it was extinct. Wow! Killed off in just 64 years. The birds were inquisitive and never learned to run away from humans.

Nowadays, the damage to the environment is mainly (it's thought) accidental but certainly just as deadly. Russian agents have disrupted train travel across mainland Europe, as well as damaging other infrastructure, ironically preventing attendances at a conference specifically about how to deter this exact sort of terrorist attack, for example. The indications are, however, that Putin would not have worried too much about the disappearance of the dodo. Germany and other European nations are getting used to acts of malicious sabotage and have mainly laid the blame squarely at Russia's door. It has led to cases of Western leaders softening their support for Ukraine to deter Russia's acts of sabotage, although with so many kilometres of vulnerable infrastructure, catching the perpetrators "in the act" has so far proved impossible. It is known, however, that Russia employs the skills of such organisations as the Kremlin's "Main Directorate for Deep Sea Research", not to mention the Russian navy and the GRU intelligence units to scout out vulnerable spots to attack and cause maximum disruption. Putin has, for a long time, conducted what are called "Grey Zone" operations that include cyberattacks, cuts in energy supplies and disinformation campaigns. Moscow makes no secret of its activities, either: Russia's ambassador to the UK has stated publicly that Britain's support for Ukraine, however tentative, makes it "a participant in Russia's war" and therefore a potential target for hostile acts. Kremlin officials have made similar comments concerning the United States.



© OXFORD UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Skeleton cast and model of a dodo at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, made in 1998 based on modern research

It presents the world with a deniable but highly dangerous war, in which there is only one single belligerent, at least officially. Who needs an obvious military enemy when secret agents can attack another country with virtual impunity? Some experts have expressed surprise that Western powers have still not invoked the Article 4 consultative mechanism of NATO's founding treaty



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The experimental research vessel Ladoga built at JSC “Leningrad Shipbuilding Plant “Pella” for the Main Directorate of Deep-Water Research

among NATO member states. Just to remind you, under the Article 4 I have mentioned, member states can raise any issue of concern, especially related to the security of a member country, for discussion with fellow member states within the North Atlantic Council. Since the Alliance’s creation in 1949, Article 4 has been invoked seven times. It may be part of NATO’s “escalation management” strategy, but many think that’s now misguided. Trying to prevent it becoming a full-scale war is one thing, but Western countries are getting bolder, with the Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala openly blaming Russia for a big arson attack on a Prague bus depot, a attack he linked to similar incidents in Poland and Lithuania. A South American was arrested over those incidents, but it seems likely they were organised and financed from Moscow. The UK has also blamed Russia for an act of arson that caused a fire at a warehouse storing goods intended for Ukraine. At least in this case one can see what Putin was trying to achieve, even if it doesn’t get him any invitations to prestigious events. He never was trying to be Mr. popular, after all.

I Still going bang

It does worry the Western countries, of course, understandably. In 2024, EU countries spent 1.6% of their GDP on defence. Now leaders are mainly in agreement that this figure must increase; Russia is a dangerous and unpredictable foe. The talk is of increasing the percentage earmarked for defence to 2% or even 3% of GDP.

That is a major increase, considering that Europe generally outsources its defence to the United States. Under a Donald Trump presidency that may not be quite so sure. Trump is on record as

having praised Putin and he has also said that he expects European countries to raise their defence spending to 5% of GDP if they expect the United States to provide them with protection. That means that that the EU countries may need to increase their spending on defence to around €100-billion,



Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala

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European Commissioner for Defence and Space, Andrius Kubilius

forcing the Union to cut other areas of spending, according to Andrius Kubilius, the EU's first-ever Defence Commissioner. It will mean changes; the current EU defence budget stands at a mere €8-billion. There will be wider implications, too. Some EU countries that are especially keen to keep on the right side of the United States, such as the Baltic states, may reject the idea of retaliatory tariffs against Trump, as well as siding with the US on any

measures against China, for instance, according to The Economist.

EU member states are not exactly rolling in unspent spare cash, either: public debt in France, Italy and Spain is above 100% of GDP and in 2023 France ran a deficit of more than 6% of GDP. Paris hopes to bring that down to 5% during 2025, a seemingly modest ambition but it will never-the-less be an uphill struggle. Again, according to The Economist, France will need to make spending cuts or tax rises that amount to 4% of GDP. The magazine says things would be tough for Poland and Italy, too. The EU changed its own fiscal rules in April 2024, now demanding that each member state puts plans in place for a better-balanced budget, either through lower public spending or higher taxes. The European Central Bank (ECB) insists that compliance with its new rules must be mandatory for any country that hopes to gain its support. Expect tough times ahead and a lot of bitter arguments.

Meanwhile, the US Treasury is taking decisive action against Russia's sanction evasion schemes. The prime target is a financial institution based in Kyrgyzstan that has effectively been laundering payments on Putin's behalf. This particular act of dishonesty has provided links between actors in Russia and the People's Republic of China to facilitate cross-border payments between the two countries. Like most financial institutions, the ECB is still battling with inflation, with the costs of services proving to be an especially tricky problem, standing 4% higher than they were a year previously. According to the World Bank Group's 2023 figures, services in the EU accounted for 65% of GDP overall, although figures vary widely across member states. It's harder to read the figures for Russia because the government there has now declared the Moscow Times to be a hostile foreign organ because it sometimes questions the brilliance of Putin's decisions. It's no longer a newspaper, merely a propaganda sheet for Putin and his cronies. According to Moscow sources, it sometimes "discredits



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The Khinzal Kh-47 hypersonic missile that has reportedly targeted Ukraine



Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer at a bilateral meeting at 10, Downing Street in London

the decisions of the Russian leadership”. Perhaps somebody should explain to Putin that questioning government decisions is what newspapers are supposed to do? But in Russia, it seems, nobody must ever question Putin’s brilliance. If he says or does something it can only be right, even if that sounds like paranoia to those of us on the outside.

It’s not all bad news for Putin. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has told him in a telephone call that he wants to expand trade between Ankara and Moscow. He took the opportunity to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine but also assured Putin of Turkey’s continuing “neutral stance” on the war itself.

Meanwhile, Russia continues to target Ukraine with missiles, including a new Oreshnik hypersonic intermediate-range missile (IRBM), fragments of which were shown to journalists by Ukraine at an undisclosed location. Ukraine admitted it was not a type of missile they had encountered before. It comes as no huge surprise, of course, but Ukraine is understandably worried when a new type of missile is used. Putin boasted that the new missile is exceptionally fast and that it can evade air defences. Kyiv’s unsurprising response was to appeal for updated air defence systems with which to ward off these new attacks. Ukraine continues to fire US-made ATACMS missiles and British-made Storm Shadow missiles into Russia. Putin has said he will continue to test-fire Oreshnik missiles at Ukrainian facilities, which will come as no surprise to anyone. The most recent such attacks were described by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as “the latest bout of Russian madness”. A war of words is hardly surprising but the use of more deadly forms of attack gives rise to concern, of course.

And just in case Putin might question the level of support Zelenskyy is getting from the West, Kyiv has now seen its first-ever visit by Britain’s (fairly) new Prime Minister, Sir Kier Starmer, during which he pledged to put Ukraine in its “strongest

possible” position vis-à-vis Russia, pledging that the UK will “never let up” in supporting Ukraine, signing what the Prime Minister’s office described as a “landmark 100-year partnership. Zelenskyy described it as a “truly historic day”, leaving Ukraine with a partnership that is “closer than ever”. The agreement formalises economic and military support already pledged to the country. It was clearly signed just before Trump assumed the Presidency of the United States, making it very significant. It should serve to encourage other Western nations sympathetic to Ukraine and not fond of Putin’s Russia.

Meanwhile, of course, Putin’s much-vaunted “ghost fleet” sails on, without a spook in sight. As that old rhyme says: “From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties, and things that go ‘bump’ in the night, Good Lord deliver us.” Delivering us from things that go “bang” in the night is generally more of a challenge (especially if it’s a very loud ‘bang’ with a wide blast radius), but the Ukrainians are discovering that a religious exorcism doesn’t work, not in Putin’s case. Using a chalice and a bowl of “holy water” won’t get rid of him. This seems to be a horror story without an identifiable spook, just a self-obsessed man whose behaviour to those of us outside Russia seems extremely irrational. In some ways, a ghost might be preferable. Perhaps it ought to be the ghost of a dodo? After all, we know they’re all dead now. We killed them.

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Bektashi World Headquarters

THE BEKTASHI ORDER

**A New Era of Sufi
Sovereignty**

Within nearly all the established religions in the world are groups of people who seek a deeper connection to God, not just through prayer and rituals, but through love, tolerance, and a search for inner peace. That is the essence of Sufism, the mystical path within Islam. And the Bektashi, a unique branch of Sufism in Albania are one of its many expressions. They have woven themselves deeply into the fabric of the country, influencing its culture and history for centuries.

The Bektashi Order was founded in the 13th century by Haji Bektash Veli, a mystic and philosopher. It spread across the Ottoman Empire and became particularly influential in the Balkans. The Order gained prominence after the Janissaries, an elite military force in the Ottoman Empire, many of whom were Albanian, brought this branch of Sufism, with its unique blend of spiritualism, back to the country with them. When all Sufi orders were dissolved in Turkey in 1925, the then head of the order, Salih Niyazi Dede Baba (1876–1941), relocated to Albania and established the World Headquarters of the Bektashi order in Tirana. The Albanian Parliament approved the statute of the Bektashi community in 1930 and the Albanian language was made the official language of the order. Over time, their teachings took root in Albanian society, mainly due to their emphasis on equality, tolerance and patriotism.

The Bektashi practice their faith in special places called “tekkes,” which serve as lodges or houses of worship, learning, and community gathering. These tekkes are not merely physical structures but living embodiments of the Bektashi tradition, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose among their members. They also have their own unique rituals and ceremonies, which are a blend of the mystical and the practical, often involving music, poetry, and whirling dances as means of connecting with the divine and cultivating inner peace. These rituals are not just formal observances, but opportunities for spiritual growth and self-discovery.

Today, the Bektashi continue to play a very important role in Albanian society, and serve as a reminder of the importance of love, tolerance, and social justice. They also actively contribute to the cultural and spiritual life of the country. According to the 2023 census, the Bektashi community in Albania represents about 10% of the population in a country that is known for its rich tradition of religious tolerance, with nearly half of its 2.4 million citizens identifying as Muslim.

A kind of “Sufi Vatican”

On 22 September, 2024, during his speech at the “Summit of the Future” at the United Nations in New York, the prime minister of Albania, Edi Rama unveiled an ambitious plan to create a sovereign micro-state within the capital, Tirana, centred around the Bektashi World Headquarters. He emphasised the importance of the Bektashi Order’s sovereignty in order to encourage inclusion, religious harmony and dialogue in an increasingly divided world.

In his speech, Rama underlined the special role Albania plays on the global stage, despite being a small nation. He celebrated the spirit of the Albanian people, who have consistently shown a commitment to protecting humanity, and he recalled their courageous actions during the Holocaust when they helped

save countless Jewish lives. Rama also took pride in Albania’s legacy of giving the world an extraordinary figure like Mother Teresa. He shared her inspiring words: *“Not all of us can do big things, but we can all do small things with big love.”* He added that this principle is the foundation upon which Albania stands as it seeks to transform the centre of the Bektashi Order into a hub of peaceful coexistence. The Prime Minister also explained how this new state would promote a version of Islam that embodies tolerance, which is a source of pride for Albania.

According to recent reports in local and international media, including The New York Times, the ambitious plan for the Sovereign State of the Bektashi Order was put forward by Muslim cleric Edmond Brahimaj, affectionately known as Baba Mondi. This proposed state would be the world’s smallest, covering approximately 27 acres (approximately 110,000 square metres) in Tirana and would function much like the Vatican. This distinctive approach aims to create a sanctuary for the Bektashi community, similar to the Vatican City’s sovereign status within Italy. Baba Mondi is the eighth “Bektashi Dede Baba” of the Bektashi Order, and like the Roman Catholic Popes, Dede Babas are the highest spiritual and religious authorities of the order, but do not consider themselves as divinely appointed.



A 15th century painting of Haji Bektash Veli

Baba Mondi shared his vision, highlighting that *“God does not forbid anything; that is why he gave us minds.”* His intention is to cultivate a welcoming atmosphere free from rigid lifestyle restrictions, allowing for the consumption of raki, permitting women to dress freely, and avoiding



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Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama speaking at the UN

strict regulations, all of which reflect the Order's tolerant ethos.

As far as citizenship is concerned, Baba Mondi clarified that it would be restricted to clergy members and those involved in administrative roles, mirroring the Vatican's structure. He emphasised that the primary aim of this new state is to serve as a spiritual haven dedicated to promoting peace and moderation. This would enable Bektashi followers around the globe to practice their beliefs freely and without interference. *"We must treasure this legacy of religious tolerance, which we should never take for granted,"* he asserted. He also assured those considering residency that *"all decisions will*



© ALBANIA.GOV

Baba Mondi

be made with love and kindness," reinforcing the nurturing spirit he hopes to foster.

Baba Mondi expressed his hope for support from the international community, underlining the importance of moderate voices in the ongoing struggle against extremism, while Prime Minister Rama emphasised its significance for the nation's identity. Rama presented the idea of establishing this sovereign enclave as a way to counter negative stereotypes often associated with Muslims. He stated, *"An avowedly moderate Islamic microstate would send a strong message: Do not let the stigma of Muslims define who Muslims are."*

I Lawmakers must step in

The foundation for this significant project was laid in September 2024 when discussions began on drafting legislation to create the new state within Albania. This legislative process is crucial and will require the approval of the Albanian Parliament, and to move forward, an amendment to the Albanian Constitution will be necessary, demonstrating the complexity and importance of this initiative. The eventual establishment of this state promises to be a landmark moment in Albania's history, intertwining religious and political elements in a fresh and fascinating way.

Although the initiative is still in its early days, both Baba Mondi and Prime Minister Edi Rama are optimistic that it will promote a culture of peace and acceptance, not just within Albania, but also reaching beyond its borders.

James Lookwood

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EPIONE

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THE EUROPEAN HYPERLOOP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



**A vision for
the future of transport**



Preliminary traffic volumes of a hyperloop network generated by Hardt Hyperloop's "VESSEL"

The European Hyperloop Development Program (EHDP) is an exciting project aimed at transforming how we travel across Europe. This concept, which gained traction thanks to Elon Musk in 2013, envisions a cutting-edge transportation system that could offer remarkable speed, efficiency, and eco-friendliness.

Imagine a transport system that whisks passengers and goods through low-pressure tubes using magnetic levitation. It combines the quickness of flying with the energy-saving benefits and ease of train travel. With the potential to link major European cities in just three hours, the hyperloop could significantly enhance regional connectivity.

At its core, the hyperloop operates on a simple but revolutionary idea: minimising air resistance and friction to reach incredible speeds. Passengers or cargo are carried in pods that glide through sealed vacuum tubes, thanks to maglev technology. This innovative approach tackles the inefficiencies seen in traditional rail and air travel, allowing for speeds that can exceed 1,000 km/h.

Preliminary traffic volumes of a hyperloop network generated by Hardt Hyperloop's "VESSEL".

Hyperloop technology comes with several key benefits:

1. **Speed:** Imagine traveling between major cities in just minutes instead of hours.
2. **Energy Efficiency:** This system runs on renewable energy, aiming for a minimal carbon footprint.
3. **Capacity:** With frequent pods and smooth connections, hyperloop can easily meet growing transportation needs.
4. **Safety:** Thanks to automated systems and its enclosed design, risks from weather or human error are significantly reduced.

The European Hyperloop Development Program (EHDP) was launched to tap into Europe's innovative spirit and tackle its specific

transportation challenges. As the European Union works towards carbon neutrality by 2050, sustainable transport has become a key focus. The hyperloop fits perfectly into this vision, promising zero-emission travel.

The programme brings together a variety of stakeholders, including government bodies at both national and EU levels, which provide the necessary regulations and funding. Private companies, especially tech firms and startups, are at the forefront of innovation and implementation. Research institutions like universities and think tanks are also involved, conducting feasibility studies and developing new technologies. Additionally, public-private partnerships play a crucial role by pooling resources and expertise.

The goals of the EHDP are both ambitious and attainable, as long as everyone works together effectively. Key objectives include:

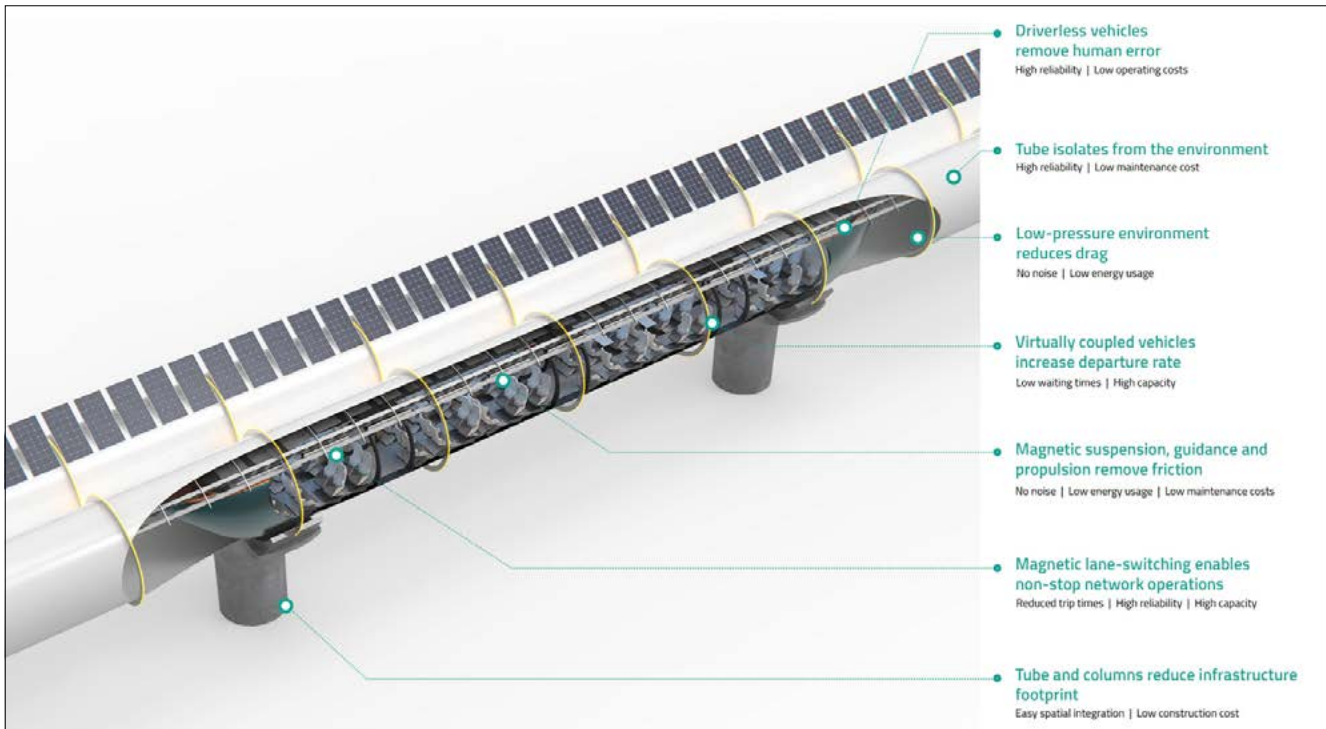
- **Building Test Tracks:** Setting up testing facilities across Europe to assess the technology and infrastructure.
- **Standardisation:** Creating a unified regulatory framework that allows for interoperability between different member states.
- **Commercial Viability:** Proving that hyperloop systems are economically feasible to attract investments.
- **Integration:** Ensuring smooth connections with existing transportation networks, such as rail, air, and road systems.
- **Sustainability:** Using renewable energy to power the system and incorporating sustainable materials in the construction process.



Several hyperloop test tracks have already been established throughout Europe, each demonstrating different levels of technological progress.

The city of Delft, in the Netherlands, features a 30-metre test track created by Hardt Hyperloop, which showcases impressive lane-switching technology. Over in Toulouse, France, Hyperloop Transportation Technologies (HTT) has set up a research facility that focuses on enhancing passenger experience and safety. Meanwhile, Zeleros, a company based in Valencia, Spain, is working on a scalable model that prioritises cost-effective infrastructure.

One of the key accomplishments of the EHDP has been sparking conversations about regulatory frameworks. In 2021, the European Commission established the Hyperloop Standardisation Committee to tackle issues related to safety,



environmental impact, and operational guidelines.

The European Commission is actively backing hyperloop development through various grants and investments from initiatives like Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (ERJU), the European Innovation Council (EIC), and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT).



This train successfully travelled the first 90 metres of a 420-metre tube at a speed of around 30 km/h

In September 2024, Hardt Hyperloop, a European company focussing on hyperloop technology, achieved a significant milestone at Europe's Hyperloop centre in Veendam, Netherlands. They successfully completed their first test launch, bringing the dream of travelling between European cities at speeds exceeding 700 kilometres per hour closer to reality. During this test, Hardt's hyperloop vehicle showcased its traction technologies, including the systems for magnetic levitation, guidance, and propulsion.

Roel van de Pas, the Commercial Director and soon-to-be CEO of Hardt Hyperloop, remarked, "This achievement is a major step toward making hyperloop a reality in Europe and beyond. It's a crucial move forward as we continue to test other important

aspects of the hyperloop, such as cornering, lane-switching, and the ability for hyperloop vehicles to branch in and out, all of which can be explored at the European Hyperloop Center."

This train successfully travelled the first 90 metres of a 420-metre tube at a speed of around 30 km/h © Hardt Hyperloop

The European Hyperloop Center is an open testing facility featuring 34 interconnected hyperloop tubes, each with a diameter of 2.5 meters. One standout feature is the lane-switch, which is crucial for developing hyperloop networks.

The global interest in hyperloop technology is rapidly growing, with various projects for development and implementation popping up in countries like Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, India, and Saudi Arabia. The European Union has recognised the hyperloop as part of its Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) agenda, aimed at enhancing connectivity among its member states.

James Lookwood





GENTRIFICATION



A Double-Edged Sword in Urban Development

The first documented cities in Europe emerged in ancient times, primarily in regions influenced by early Greek, Etruscan, and Celtic civilisations. Cities such as Knossos, Athens, Rome, and Cádiz laid the groundwork for later urban developments, blending cultural, political, and economic influences that shaped European civilisation. The journey from these initial settlements to the sprawling megalopolises we see today has been significant.

Recently, we have witnessed another interesting phenomenon: the gentrification of urban areas across Europe and beyond. This occurs when lower-income neighbourhoods experience a sudden influx of wealthier residents and investments, leading to a substantial rise in property values, improved infrastructure, and changes in the area's character. However, this transformation often displaces long-term residents who can no longer afford the cost of living.

Gentrification is a global phenomenon that impacts cities in various ways. Neighbourhoods such as Williamsburg and Harlem in New York City have experienced significant transformations as a result. Rising property values and luxury developments have displaced many long-time residents, altering the cultural and social fabric of these areas. Similarly, downtown neighbourhoods like Parkdale and Queen Street West in Toronto have also undergone gentrification, spurred by an influx of young professionals and high-end housing projects. In Buenos Aires, areas like Palermo and San Telmo have attracted increased foreign investment and redevelopment, pushing out lower-income residents while drawing in tourists and wealthier locals. Brazilian favelas, such as Vidigal in Rio de Janeiro, have seen substantial changes as affluent foreigners moved in, particularly in the lead-up to the 2016 Olympics. Districts in Seoul and Shanghai have likewise experienced the displacement of traditional communities and small businesses due to a surge in tourism and extensive redevelopment. In Sydney, inner-city areas like Redfern have undergone gentrification, significantly affecting Aboriginal communities.



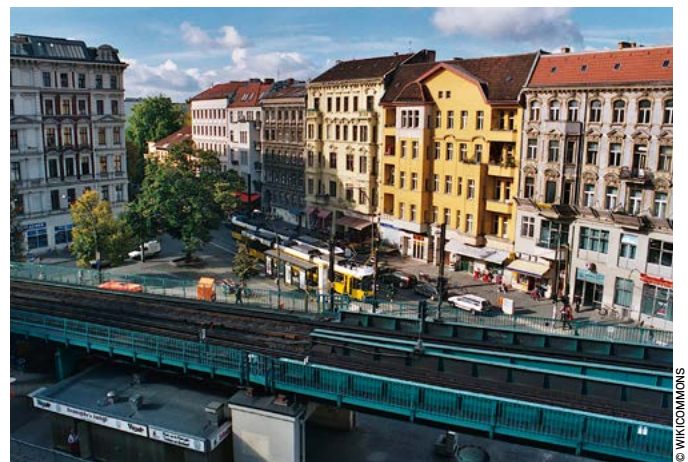
This Neo-Gothic building, clad in terra-cotta, stands at 299 Queen Street West in Toronto. It houses the headquarters of Bell Media, the media division of Bell Canada

Meanwhile, in Cape Town, the Woodstock area has witnessed a similar trend, with gentrification displacing lower-income residents, many of whom are people of colour.

These examples highlight how gentrification reshapes urban landscapes, often enhancing infrastructure and services while simultaneously exacerbating inequality and displacing vulnerable communities.

Across Europe, several cities have been significantly impacted, with rising property prices, tourism, and urban redevelopment transforming many traditional neighbourhoods.

Berlin, known for its vibrant art and cultural scene, has experienced dramatic gentrification in areas like Kreuzberg, Neukölln, and Prenzlauer Berg. As artists and expatriates moved in, property prices surged, altering the social fabric of these neighbourhoods.



Neukölln or Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, Germany

Barcelona is among the most affected cities in Europe. Tourism-driven gentrification, particularly in neighbourhoods like El Raval and Barceloneta, has resulted in soaring rents, the closure of traditional local businesses, and widespread protests against these changes.

Le Marais and Belleville in Paris have undergone a similar process, pushing lower-income residents to the outskirts of the city as wealthier individuals and high-end businesses move in. Once working-class neighbourhoods, De Pijp and Noord in Amsterdam are now sought-after hubs for young professionals and expatriates, resulting in rising property prices and a loss of local character. The rise of short-term rentals like Airbnb has transformed Alfama and Bairro Alto, Lisbon's historic neighbourhoods, leading to significant displacement of locals. While Airbnb has revolutionised travel and hospitality, its impact on rental markets has been somewhat controversial, often causing housing crises in certain urban areas, eroding community character, and placing pressure on local infrastructure. London has also experienced this trend, with redevelopment projects and skyrocketing housing prices forcing out long-term residents.

These cities exemplify the challenges of balancing urban renewal and tourism with the preservation of affordability and community identity. In general, 2024 saw a rental price increase of approximately 3.8 per cent in Europe, with cities such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Paris, The Hague, Munich, Rome, and Utrecht consistently ranking among the top ten most expensive across the continent. Rent prices in cities heavily affected by gentrification have generally seen substantial increases over the last decade, often driven by heightened demand, significant tourism,

and speculative investment.

In Barcelona, for instance, average rents have surged from around €700 in 2014 to about €1,200 in 2024 for standard apartments, reflecting a rise of nearly 70 per cent (Source: mdpi.com). Known for its relatively affordable rents a decade ago, Berlin is no longer part of that picture; prices have now doubled in some neighbourhoods. In an effort to keep rents down, the municipality has introduced maximum rent ceilings and other regulations, but their benefits remain limited (Source: Housinganywhere.com). In 2014,

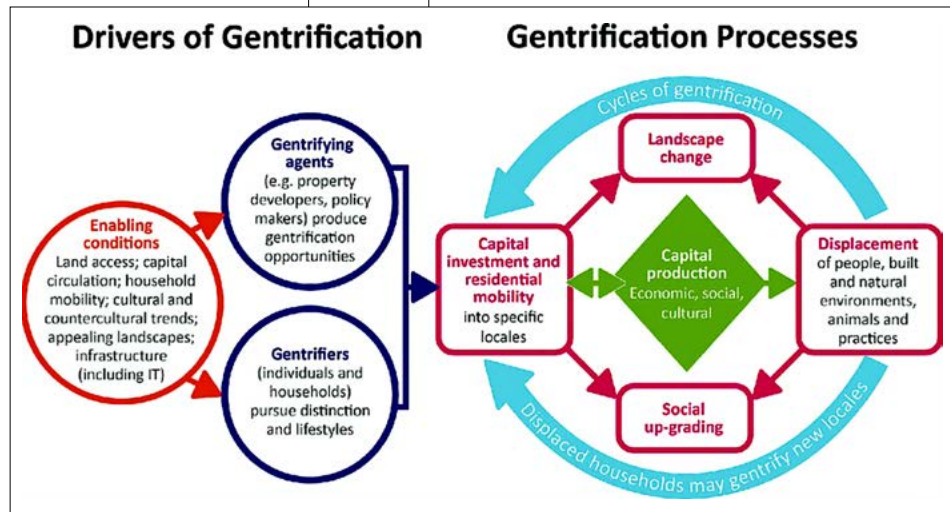
renting a one-bedroom apartment in Amsterdam required around €1,200; by 2024, you would need €1,900 for the same studio, marking a 58 per cent increase.

Amsterdam remains one of the most expensive cities in Europe and one of the most challenging places to find available accommodation, driven by housing shortages and high demand from expatriates, tourists, and students (Source: Housinganywhere.com). Rome has surpassed Amsterdam in apartment rents, averaging close to €2,500 for a furnished one-to three-bedroom apartment. In some areas of Lisbon, rents have tripled, with apartments that were previously available for €500 now costing €1,500 or even more.

Although recent regulatory measures have slightly cooled the market, the issue remains a concern for many. Already expensive in 2014, Paris saw its rents increase from €35 per square metre to €42.7 by 2024, making it the most expensive city in Europe by price per square metre (Eurostat).

These increases highlight the growing challenge of affordability for residents in gentrified cities, where the influx of wealthier populations and investors often displaces long-term locals. Student mobility also contributes to rent increases of up to 3.8% with each new academic year.

The most expensive city in the world to rent is Hong Kong,



where rents for a one-bedroom apartment average approximately \$2,970 per month, making it the global leader in housing costs. In Europe, however, Zurich currently holds the title for the most expensive city for renting, with one-bedroom apartments averaging around €2,570 per month, closely followed by London.

Gentrification in Europe is driven by several interrelated factors, including economic, social, and policy-related influences. Governments and private investors often target neglected neighbourhoods for redevelopment, aiming to modernise infrastructure, attract new businesses, and improve housing conditions. However, while this enhances the area's appeal, it frequently raises property values, displacing long-term residents. Meanwhile, the growth of tourism has fuelled demand for short-term rentals. As online platforms like Airbnb, Vrbo, and Plum Guide have gained immense popularity among travellers, millions now use them to find reasonable accommodations for their trips. This trend reduces the availability of long-term rental housing in these cities and drives



Hong Kong has the highest rental costs in the world. The average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment is approximately US\$ 2,970



© AIRBNB

Luxury apartment offered on Airbnb in Barcelona, Spain

up prices, reshaping neighbourhoods for tourists rather than local residents.

Meanwhile, wealthy foreign investors often purchase properties in major European cities, viewing them as safe assets. However, such actions only increase competition for housing and drive up prices, particularly in cities like Paris, London, Brussels, and Berlin.

Young professionals and creatives are frequently drawn to affordable, culturally vibrant areas. As these neighbourhoods become trendy, wealthier residents and businesses follow, accelerating gentrification.

The often-limited housing supply in urban centres, combined with growing populations, also contributes to rising rent prices. Policies aimed at attracting investment, such as tax breaks for property development or lax regulations on short-term rentals, can inadvertently encourage gentrification. Deindustrialisation in the 20th century left many urban areas in decline. Subsequent shifts towards service-based economies and knowledge industries have led to the revitalisation of these areas, often accompanied by gentrification. In Cluj (Romania), rents have increased by 80 per cent since 2015. Only Berlin and Athens have reported higher increases for renting a one-bedroom apartment. This surge is primarily due to the development of the local IT industry, which has attracted employees with greater purchasing power to the city, thereby increasing demand for housing beyond the existing supply.

Proposed solutions to address gentrification aim to balance urban revitalisation with protecting vulnerable residents and maintaining neighbourhood diversity and identity. The measures typically focus on housing policies, community engagement, and sustainable urban development.

Imposing limits on rent increases helps prevent displacement by keeping housing costs

manageable for most. Cities like Berlin and Vienna have implemented rent caps and freezes, although these measures face legal and practical challenges. Requiring developers to include affordable housing units in new projects, thereby ensuring mixed-income communities, is another approach, primarily used in cities like London and Paris. Additionally, increased funding for social housing projects can provide affordable alternatives for low-income residents.

Cities like Barcelona, Lisbon, and Amsterdam have implemented stricter regulations on platforms like Airbnb, including limiting the number of rental days allowed per year, imposing higher taxes, or even completely banning short-term rentals in certain areas.

Community Land Trusts, nonprofit entities that buy and hold land in trust for community use, ensure permanent affordability for accommodations in Brussels and London. Cooperative Housing, which gives residents collective control over housing and protects them from speculative markets, is another ownership model aimed at safeguarding local residents. Paris has introduced taxes on vacant homes and speculative real estate investments to discourage property hoarding and drive down prices. Allocating revenue from tourist taxes to fund affordable housing or community development projects is another approach, seen in Barcelona and Venice.

Engaging residents in the planning process allows them to



© VENICE TRAVEL GUIDE

shape policies that directly affect their lives and the areas where they live. Cities like Amsterdam and Copenhagen are regarded as benchmarks in the fight against artificial rent increases, where community input and involvement guide housing and infrastructure decisions.

In highly touristic places, limiting cruise ship arrivals, capping tourist numbers, and diversifying attractions outside city centres can also reduce the strain on residential areas, as demonstrated in Venice and Dubrovnik.

The tourist tax (usually between €0.5 and €5 per person per night), introduced by many cities to mitigate the impacts of over tourism, can indirectly help combat gentrification by generating revenue to address housing affordability and urban challenges

when paired with policies that directly target those issues. By reinvesting in affordable housing, infrastructure, and community programmes, cities can alleviate some of the pressures caused by tourism and preserve the livability of urban neighbourhoods.

However, while these solutions show promise, their effectiveness often depends on strong political will, enforcement, and balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders, including developers, residents, and policymakers. This is why tailoring solutions to local contexts is crucial for long-term success.

Vienna is widely regarded as a model for affordable housing and preventing displacement. Over 60 per cent of residents live in publicly subsidised housing, as the municipality owns much of the housing stock, ensuring long-term affordability. Measures that have proven their effectiveness include the integration of people from various income levels into new projects, preventing socio-economic segregation, and limiting the ability of private landlords to increase rents. Amsterdam is also addressing the effects of over tourism and housing shortages and has taken proactive measures to support this. Residents can rent out their homes for a maximum of 30 nights per year via Airbnb or similar platforms, and only in apartments with proper registration.

Barcelona has implemented even stricter regulations on short-term rentals, successfully returning properties to long-term rental markets. The city also limits the number of visitors and cruise ships allowed in certain areas while increasing investment in affordable housing to stabilise rents. Copenhagen emphasises sustainable development that benefits both residents and the environment, while urban renewal projects focus on creating affordable, energy-efficient housing.

Generally speaking, cities should combine public policy, regulation, and community engagement to address gentrification. The success of these strategies often hinges on political will and active enforcement to protect residents while promoting inclusive urban growth. A long-term solution for balancing the economic benefits of tourism with the need to maintain affordable housing lies in adopting sustainable tourism practices, regulating short-term rentals, and investing in community-centred urban planning.

There are several strategies that have produced notable results when addressing increased tourism and its consequences on the well-being of long-term residents. Venice, for example, is working on promoting visits to lesser-known islands, away from traditional tourist hotspots, and during off-peak seasons. Other cities provide financial incentives to property owners who offer long-term leases instead of converting apartments into Airbnb accommodations, and they also support low-income tenants with subsidies. Educating tourists on responsible travel behaviours and encouraging them to support local businesses while respecting residential spaces is another effective approach.

These measures can help cities benefit economically from tourism while ensuring that housing remains accessible for residents. Success requires collaboration among governments, local communities, and private stakeholders, along with continuous monitoring and adaptation of policies.

In recent years, due to the limited impact of these proposed measures, many large cities have witnessed protests and

demonstrations against gentrification and over tourism. In July 2024, thousands marched in Barcelona to highlight the negative impacts of mass tourism, which they claim have made housing unaffordable and disrupted local communities. Overcrowding from cruise ships and tourists has also led to protests in Venice, with residents complaining about the erosion of the city's fragile infrastructure under the immense pressure of millions of visitors. In Lisbon, demonstrations have focussed on the rising costs of living and displacement linked to tourism and foreign investment. Similar protests have been taking place in other major cities worldwide, all highlighting the growing tensions between preserving local communities and managing the economic benefits of tourism and urban redevelopment.



Dan Jørgensen

As evidence that the issue of housing shortages and rising housing costs in Europe is being taken seriously, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen appointed Danish social democrat Dan Jørgensen as the first EU commissioner with direct responsibility for housing at the end of 2024. *“House prices remain too high in most of the European Union and risk harming economic growth in some countries,”* said Jørgensen in his end-of-year review, highlighting the situation.

However, as cities evolve, the challenge remains: how do we balance growth and opportunity with equity and inclusion? Gentrification is not just about rising rents or changing skylines—it is about the people and stories that define the soul of a city. It concerns the change, often irreversible, of the social composition, and the unique combination that makes every place on the planet distinct. The future of our urban areas depends on finding viable solutions that allow communities to thrive without leaving anyone behind.

Alexandra Paucescu
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TIMELESS CHIC

STANDOUT FASHION AND BEAUTY TRENDS

Every year, the announcement of Pantone's next chosen colour is a highly anticipated moment, as it always sets the tone for future fashion, beauty, and interior design trends. In 2024, "Peach Fuzz," a very soft, almost sorbet-like orange, replaced the 2023 pink, "Viva Magenta". The 2025 selection also appears to be guided by a sense of softness and comfort, with the chosen shade being "Mocha Mousse".

MOCHA MOUSSE: THE FASHION STATE- MENT OF 2025

The world leader in colour standards, Pantone,* has unveiled its "Colour of the Year": Mocha Mousse. Discover the most stylish inspirations for incorporating this soft and creamy brown shade into your daily life.



Back to life's little pleasures

The 2025 edition seems to be shaping up under the theme of warmth, harmony and comfort.

It has to be acknowledged that this warming, brown hue, imbued with richness, nurtures us with its suggestion of the delectable qualities of a piece of chocolate, or a warm cup of coffee, answering our desire for comfort food during the winter season.

An unpretentious classic

Mocha Mousse redefines luxury by combining natural earthy tones with high-end materials. Think of soft cashmere jumpsuits, lace lingerie sets, silk shirts, or leather timeless bags. This works just as well for makeup and manicure, by adding a touch of discreet elegance.

This trend proves that comfort and sophistication can go hand in hand.



Pointy-toe
leather pumps
Ralph Lauren

© RALPHLAUREN.COM



Highly pigmented
eyeshadow
M.A.C

© MACCOSMETICS.COM

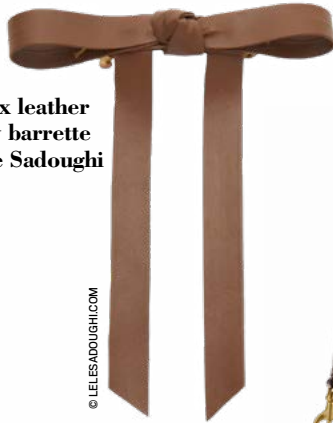


Teddy Bear
Icon coat
Max Mara



Reversible
cashmere scarf
Burberry

© ROWEBURBERRY.COM



Faux leather
bow barrette
Lele Sadoughi

© LELESADOUGHICOM



Glossy patent
leather
shoulder bag
Coach

© UK.COACH.COM



High waisted
leather trousers
Baum Und Pferdgarten

© MAXMARA.COM



Suede heeled
boots
Jonak

© JONAK.FR

Nail lacquer
"You don't know
Jacques !"
OPI



© OPI.COM

Sequined mid-
length skirt
Vanessa Bruno



© VANESSABRUNO.COM



Cable-knit high neck
cashmere jumper
Eric Bompard

© ERIC-BOMPARD.COM

Satin Kajal Liner
"Cinnamon"
Victoria Beckham



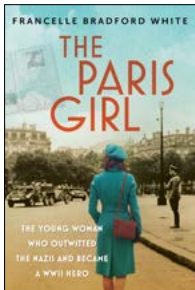
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*The Pantone Color Standard is a proprietary colour space used in a variety of industries, notably graphic design, fashion, product design, printing, and manufacturing. Developed by Pantone Inc., this system is widely recognised for its ability to ensure colour consistency and accuracy across different materials and production processes.

BOOKS



I The Paris Girl

The Young Woman Who Outwitted the Nazis and Became a WWII Hero

By Francelle Bradford White

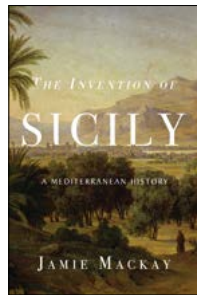
Movingly written by her own daughter, this captivating and intimate biography chronicles the astonishing courage Andrée Griotteray, a teenage girl in Nazi-occupied Paris who would become a hero of the French Resistance through her harrowing work as an underground intelligence courier. For readers of *Three Ordinary Girls*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *Lis Parisiennes*, *The Girls Who Stepped Out of Line*, and the many other untold stories of WWII's "hidden figures."

Andrée Griotteray was just 19 when the Germans invaded France and occupied Paris, where she worked as a clerk in the passport office. When her younger brother, Alain, created a resistance network named Orion, Andrée joined his efforts, secretly typing up and printing copies of an underground newspaper, and stealing I.D. cards which allowed scores of Jewish citizens to escape persecution.

Charming and pretty, Andrée nimbly avoided the unwanted attentions of German officers, even as she secretly began working as an undercover courier. Displaying fearlessness in the face of immense pressure, she traveled throughout the county delivering vital intelligence destined for France's allies—until the day she was betrayed and arrested.

Throughout her ordeal, Andrée stayed composed, refusing to inform on her comrades. Before she was set free, she even duped her interrogators into revealing who had betrayed Orion, and continued her underground activities until France's liberation.

Weaving in diary entries, letters, and conversations, Andrée's daughter, Francelle, brings a uniquely personal slant to her mother's story. *The Paris Girl* reveals the narrow escapes and moments of terror, the daily acts of bravery and defiance, and the extraordinary courage displayed by Andrée and so many of her contemporaries, that helped turned the tide of war.



I The Invention of Sicily

A Mediterranean History

By Jamie Mackay

Whether you're vacationing in Italy or simply an armchair traveler, this guide to the Mediterranean island of Sicily is a dazzling introduction to the region's rich 3,000-year history and culture.

A rich and fascinating cultural history of the Mediterranean's enigmatic heart Sicily is at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, and for over 2000 years has been the gateway between Europe, Africa and the East. It has long been seen as the frontier between Western Civilization and the rest, but never definitively part of either. Despite being conquered by empires—Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Hapsburg Spain—it remains uniquely apart. The island's story maps a mosaic that mixes the story of myth and wars, maritime empires and reckless crusades, and a people who refuse to be ruled.

In this riveting, rich history Jamie Mackay peels away the layers of this most mysterious of islands. This story finds its origins in ancient myth but has been reinventing itself across centuries: in conquest and resistance. Inseparable from these political and social developments are the artefacts of the nation's cultural patrimony—ancient amphitheatres, Arab gardens, Baroque Cathedrals, as well as great literature such as Giuseppe di Lampedusa's masterpiece *The Leopard*, and the novels and plays of Luigi Pirandello. In its modern era, Sicily has been the site of revolution, Cosa Nostra and, in the twenty-first century, the epicenter of the refugee crisis.



I Patriot

A Memoir

By Alexei Navalny

ALEXEI NAVALNY was a Russian anti-corruption campaigner, activist, opposition leader and political prisoner who won international recognition and respect. His many international honors included the Sakharov Prize, the European Parliament's annual human rights prize. He died in 2024.

NEWYORKTIMES BESTSELLER • A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR: THE NEW YORKER, THE ATLANTIC, NPR • LONGLISTED FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD • The powerful and moving memoir of a fearless political opposition leader who paid the ultimate price for his beliefs.

"Patriot is by turns funny, fiery, reflective and tragic, laced with Navalny's trademark wry humor and idealism...a gutting personal account from a husband and father facing the reality that he will never be with his family again."—*The New York Times*
 "Honest"—*The Washington Post*
 "Shocking"—*The Atlantic*
 "Uplifting."—*Vanity Fair*
 "A testament to resilience" — *Associated Press*
 "Will be seen as a historic text."— *The Economist*



I Building Your Money Machine

How to Get Your Money to Work Harder for You Than You Did for It!

By Mel H. Abraham

Make financial freedom real with the right mindset, right process, and right action steps

Does it feel like you're missing out on life because you can't get your finances in order? Are you seeking a life free of financial fear and full of meaning, purpose, and impact?

The key to building the life you desire and deserve is to build your Money Machine—a powerful system designed to generate income that's no longer tied to your work or efforts. This step-by-step guide goes beyond the general idea of personal finance and wealth creation and reveals the holistic approach to transforming your relationship with money to allow you to enjoy financial freedom and peace of mind.

Part money philosophy, part money mindset, part strategy, and part tactical action, these powerful frameworks will show you how to:

- Demystify wealth creation through proven processes like The Wealth Priority Ladder™ and The Five Incomes™

- Build the three pillars of your Money Machine—Earn, Grow, and Protect

- Optimize your earnings, transform them into assets, and protect them from loss

Whether you are a dreamer, doer, or believer—or all three!—your financial freedom is a birthright. Now is the time to embrace your financial potential with confidence and courage.

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