

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE

© EUROPA EU

**AGAINST
THE TIDE**

**Pedro Sánchez fights
for Spain's soul**



August 2025

Nº73

BRUSSELS - PARIS - GENEVA - MONACO

Discover an innovative hospitality concept that turns workplaces into **Happy Buildings**

- ✓ Engaging tenant communication
- ✓ Amazing reception services
- ✓ Practical tenant services
- ✓ Digital application

IN THIS ISSUE

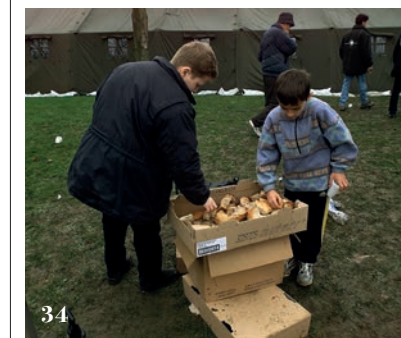
"Europe Diplomatic Magazine" is characterized by a very open editorial line that allows it to capture all the themes that affect directly or indirectly the European political, economic, social and security issues. Whether piracy in the Gulf of Aden and its threats to the global economy, articles about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

Visit our site and please give us your comments:
<https://europe-diplomatic.eu/>
europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com

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



46



34

24

6 AGAINST THE TIDE

Pedro Sánchez fights for Spain's soul

16 NEWS IN BRIEF

From around the World

24 FOR LOVE OR MONEY

War returns to the Korean Peninsula (it never really went away)

31 GLOBAL OPERATION TARGETS NONAME057(16)

A pro-Russian cybercrime network

34 WELCOMING SMILES OR DISMISSIVE FROWNS?

The UK, the promised land for refugees

42 UNCREWED HIGH-FLYING SOLAR AIRCRAFT

HAP-alpha passes key ground tests

46 FROM PERIL TO PRIDE

The story of Caminito del Rey

50 BOOKS



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





© LA MONCLIA

Outgoing prime minister, Mariano Rajoy (right), congratulating incoming prime minister, Pedro Sánchez (left), upon losing the no confidence vote on 1 June 2018

AGAINST THE TIDE

Pedro Sánchez fights for Spain's soul

There's a particular kind of irony in politics when the hunter becomes the hunted. Pedro Sánchez, Spain's socialist prime minister probably knows this better than anyone. In 2018, he was the young reformer who came to power on a wave of public outrage against corruption, using a historic no-confidence vote to topple the scandal-plagued conservative government of Mariano Rajoy. At the time, Sánchez positioned himself as the antidote to Spain's "corruption thriller" (his words) - a defiant idealist who would clean up the backroom deals and kickback schemes that had become institutionalised under decades of establishment rule.

The contrast between then and now could scarcely be more striking. The politician who built his reputation on moral rectitude and institutional reform today finds his administration embroiled in controversies that echo the very abuses he once condemned. His wife and brother are under judicial scrutiny, his closest political allies have resigned in disgrace, and his minority government - once hailed as one of Europe's last progressive strongholds - is barely holding on to power.

The transformation from anti-corruption champion to embattled incumbent raises profound questions about the nature of political power and reform. Sánchez's experience suggests that the forces of institutional corruption may prove more resilient than any individual reformer, capable of co-opting even those who arrive with the purest intentions. It also exposes how easily moral authority can erode political legitimacy - once compromised, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to reclaim.

As Sánchez deals with this crisis of credibility, observers are wondering whether his story represents a personal failure or a

systemic inevitability. The prime minister who once promised to rewrite Spain's political narrative now finds himself trapped in what appears to be a recurring national storyline - one where the would-be reformer becomes, in time, the subject of reform. This dynamic speaks not only to Sánchez's political fortunes but to broader challenges facing democratic governance in Spain and beyond. The ultimate irony may yet be that Sánchez's most lasting legacy could become a cautionary tale about the limits of anti-corruption politics, rather than the triumph of clean governance he initially promised.

Act I: The Rise of the Anti-Corruption Crusader

June 2018 marked a pivotal moment in Spain's political landscape - one of those rare instances when the established order truly gets shaken up. The conservative People's Party (PP), then led by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, had been gradually losing public confidence for years, particularly after the shocking revelations of the Gürtel



Pedro Sanchez giving a political speech in 2014



José Luis Ábalos

scandal. This wasn't just another political controversy, but a vast network of corruption where construction firms systematically bribed officials to secure public contracts. When Spain's National Court delivered its damning verdict, describing the PP's operations as an "authentic and efficient system of institutional corruption," the writing was on the wall.

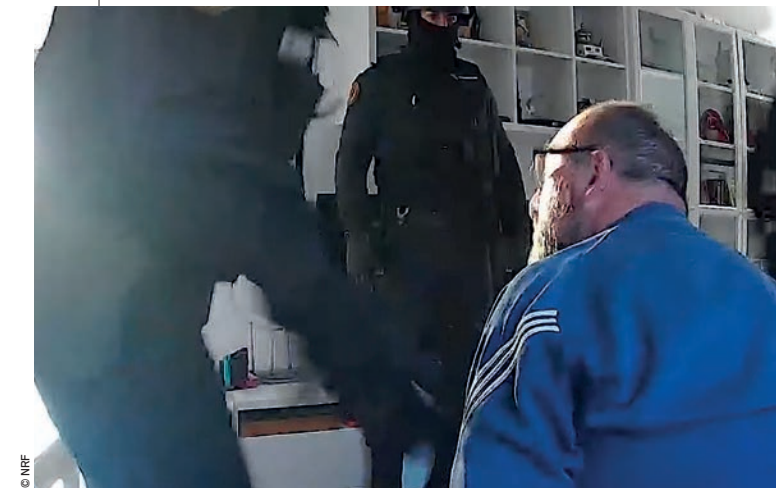
It was in this atmosphere of profound disillusionment that Pedro Sánchez, then the opposition leader, seized his historic opportunity. With the rhetorical skill of a seasoned statesman and the timing of a master political strategist, Sánchez stood before parliament and delivered his indictment: *'The PP has seriously damaged the health of our democracy.'* His words resonated with a public weary of systemic corruption. The subsequent no-confidence vote succeeded through an improbable alliance of left-wing and regional parties - a coalition united more by what they opposed than what they stood for. In one dramatic session, the 46-year-old economics professor-turned-politician became Spain's first leader to assume power through such constitutional means, positioning himself as the standard-bearer for a new era of transparent governance.

The early optimism surrounding Sánchez's ascent now feels like a distant memory, the kind that prompts regretful reflection on how quickly political fortunes can change. His light-hearted jab at himself in October 2018 - *'I know you think everything I do is illegal, immoral and even fattening'* - was delivered with the confidence of a leader riding a wave of popular support. Today, those same words carry an entirely different weight, serving as unintentional reminder on his current predicament.

The irony is huge, almost like in a Shakespearean play. The corruption allegations now plaguing Sánchez's administration have not only multiplied in number but surpassed in sheer audacity the very scandals that brought down his predecessors. Where the Gürtel case represented the old guard's systemic corruption, the current controversies suggest a more personal dimension - a troubling blurring of lines between public service and private gain. The scale and nature of these allegations have transformed Sánchez from Spain's great reform hope into something far more conventional: another politician struggling to explain why his inner circle appears entangled in impropriety.

This reversal of fortunes speaks to larger truths about political cycles and the challenges of systemic reform. Sánchez's experience demonstrates how quickly anti-corruption rhetoric can ring hollow when not matched by consistent action, and how the moral high ground, once lost, becomes nearly impossible to reclaim. The leader who once capitalised on his opponents' ethical failures now finds himself facing similar questions about judgment and accountability - a development that has left many Spaniards questioning whether any leader can truly break the country's cycle of political scandal.

As Sánchez confronts these challenges, his predicament serves as a case study in the fragility of political capital built on promises of reform. The very qualities that made his 2018 victory so remarkable - his outsider status, his clean image, his moral clarity - have become vulnerabilities in the face of mounting allegations. A tale that began with promises of democratic rebirth has turned into a warning about politics' immutable laws—and how swiftly revolutionaries become replicas of what they once opposed.



On February 20, 2024, nearly twenty officers from the UCO entered the home of Koldo García, former advisor of minister José Luis Ábalos, to arrest him and prevent the destruction of potential evidence

Act II: The Unravelling – One Scandal a Week

One can pretty much pin the beginning of the current crisis to February 2023, when the scandal around Koldo García first blew up. García, who used to work as an aide for José Luis Ábalos (the transport minister at the time), got caught up in what looked like a classic pandemic profiteering scheme. We're talking about allegedly taking bribes to push through these wildly inflated contracts for face masks when COVID was at its worst. Not



Santos Cerdán (left), Organisational Secretary of the PSOE, with Pedro Sánchez, Spain's Prime Minister and Secretary General of the PSOE

exactly a good look - the man allegedly used his government contacts to help some small company obtain €53 million in emergency deals, with very comfortable kickbacks finding their way back to certain pockets.

Now, José Luis Ábalos, one of those old-school Socialist operators who's been around forever - was actually Sánchez's organisational secretary before all this. When the scandal broke, he dug in his heels and refused to step down. That put Sánchez in a real bind, forcing him to publicly fire one of his own. That was the first real chink in the armour, the moment people started thinking, "Well, maybe these people aren't so different after all."

But the real bombshell dropped in February 2024. That's when Spain's Supreme Court let it slip they were investigating Santos Cerdán - Ábalos's replacement as party organiser and basically, Sánchez's right-hand man - for some shady business with public construction contracts. Some of the details that came out were beyond belief.

There were leaked wiretaps where Cerdán appears to be chatting about kickbacks with Ábalos and García. Then there's this another recording that seems to show them meddling in the 2014 party vote that originally put Sánchez in charge. And just when you thought it couldn't get worse, out comes this tape of Ábalos and García making all these gross comments about sex workers - which, quite frankly, is pretty awkward for a government that's always going on about feminism and equality.

By March, Cerdán was out, and Sánchez was stuck doing that thing politicians do when they're in damage control mode - saying things like "I should never have trusted him" while trying to keep a straight face. His little speech about how "I've always believed in clean politics" would've maybe played better if his party hadn't spent the whole day before insisting Cerdán did nothing wrong.

It's one of those classic political unravellings where each new revelation makes the last denial look worse. What started as one dodgy mask deal has turned into a whole web of questionable

connections that just keeps growing. And the really uncomfortable part? It's all coming from within Sánchez's own inner circle - the people he chose to surround himself with. It makes one wonder what else might still be waiting to come out.

Act III: The Family Under Fire

This whole crisis has gotten way too close for comfort for Sánchez - and that's exactly why it's so dangerous for him. It's one thing when political opponents come after you, but when they start dragging your family into it? That's when things can get really nasty.

In April 2023, a group linked to the far right called Manos Limpias (Clean Hands), filed a complaint against Sánchez's wife, Begoña Gómez. They claimed she had used her position as the prime minister's wife to line up sponsors for some university master's programme she was running. Then, in January 2024, Sánchez's brother David got hauled into court over some separate influence-peddling accusations.

Now, Pedro Sánchez isn't taking this lying down. He's crying foul, saying this is pure "lawfare" (the weaponisation of courts against politicians). And to be fair, he has got a point about Manos Limpias. These people have form - they have made a habit of going after left-wing figures, and even Spanish prosecutors initially wanted to throw out the case against Begoña Gómez.

But here's the thing - in today's political climate, where everyone is at each other's throats, how things look often matters more than what's actually true. And the optics here? Brutal. The whole thing hit Sánchez so hard that he actually disappeared from public view for five whole days to "think about his future" - which in politician-speak basically means "panic about whether my career is over." That kind of move was unprecedented. And instead of calming things down, it just made everyone even more convinced that something was seriously wrong.

What makes this whole situation particularly nasty is how it blurs the line between public and private life. When your opponents start going after your family, it's not just politics anymore - it's personal. And that changes the game completely. Sánchez can argue all he wants about political persecution, but when the scandal follows you home from the office, it's a whole different kind of crisis.

The really uncomfortable question hanging over all this? Whether these family troubles are symptoms of a deeper problem in Spanish politics, where no one's personal life stays private for long when the knives come out. Or worse - whether they suggest that in Sánchez's inner circle, the lines between political power and personal gain might have gotten a bit too blurry. Either way, it's a crisis that doesn't look like going away anytime soon.



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his spouse, Begoña Gómez

Act IV: The NATO Dilemma - Spain's Defence Spending Paradox

Amid Spain's ongoing domestic political turbulence, the Sánchez administration has found itself wrestling with an increasingly thorny NATO dilemma. The issue came to a head in early 2024 when alliance members began pushing for unprecedented defence spending increases - first to 2.5%, then 3%, and at one point even floating proposals as high as 5% of GDP in response to Russia's relentless aggression in Ukraine.

Spain's position in these talks has been cautious, to say the least. While Eastern European members, especially those bordering Russia, aggressively pushed for the steeper targets, Madrid quietly resisted. Instead of signing onto the more ambitious figures, Spain has stuck to its existing plan - a gradual climb toward NATO's original 2% benchmark.

And it's not hard to see why. Strategically, Spain sits in a very different position than frontline states. Shielded by both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, it faces none of the immediate territorial pressures that keep the Baltics or Poland on edge. But that doesn't make the balancing act any easier. With political tensions at home already stretching the government thin, Sánchez has had to walk a fine line - supporting NATO solidarity while avoiding commitments that could strain Spain's budget or spark domestic backlash. Geopolitics rarely offers clean solutions, and this is no exception. Even for a country with Spain's geographic advantages, the pressures of alliance politics are proving hard to ignore.

This whole debate over defence spending has exposed some deep cracks in Spain's political and economic foundation. The Spanish military has still not completely shaken off Franco's shadow and doesn't seem to command the same respect as in other European democracies. Public sentiment remains wary of militarisation, particularly among Sánchez's left-wing base. When Defence Minister Margarita Robles suggested Spain might reach 2% by 2029 - already a delayed timeline - critics were quick to point out Spain would still be lagging behind, especially if the 3% or 5% benchmarks gained steam.

True - money IS tight, and that's not just an excuse. With debt at 113% of GDP and youth unemployment stubbornly stuck above 30%, shifting billions from social programmes to fighter jets is...a tough sell, politically. The government keeps talking up Spain's other contributions - cybersecurity, peacekeeping missions, development projects in North Africa. Fair enough, but... Here's the thing - this approach is rubbing allies



Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez during a press conference at the 2021 NATO Summit

the wrong way. At last year's NATO summit in Washington, Spanish diplomats found themselves pretty much alone as the 5% proposal started gaining ground. American officials were privately expressing frustration at what they saw as Spain dodging its fair share. And you can't really blame the Eastern Europeans - when you've got Russian tanks on your doorstep, Spain's reluctance must look pretty damn privileged.

Fast forward to The Hague summit this year, and the pressure has only gotten worse. Certainly, Spain has made some symbolic gestures - extra aid for Ukraine, joining more air patrols... but this stubborn refusal to budge on spending targets continues to irritate partners. And those creative accounting methods - trying to count random non-military expenditures towards NATO commitments? Well, nobody seems to be buying that anymore.

Sánchez spelled it out quite bluntly in his letter to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte: *'Committing to a 5% target would not only be unreasonable but also counterproductive because it would move Spain further away from optimal spending and would hinder the EU's ongoing efforts to strengthen its security and defence ecosystem. It is the legitimate right of every government to decide whether or not they are willing to make those sacrifices. As a sovereign ally, we choose not to.'*

He's certainly got a point - but at the same time, you can't help but wonder how long Spain can keep playing this game. It's a classic catch-22 - meet the targets and alienate his base, or stick to his position and watch Spain's NATO influence slowly erode. And more recently, with US President Donald Trump making noises about cracking down on countries he calls "freeloaders", the timing couldn't be worse. As Sánchez gears up for what's

sure to be a complicated 2027 general election, this defence spending headache just adds another layer to his political juggling act.

The big question nobody can answer? How much longer Spain can stay in this comfortable middle ground. As NATO potentially shifts toward these massive spending hikes, Madrid might finally have to choose - step up or get left behind. And neither option looks particularly appealing from where Sánchez is sitting.

Act V: The Coalition Math of Survival

Let's be realistic - Sánchez's government has, from the very beginning, always been a precarious balancing act. His PSOE party never had a parliamentary majority to govern alone, so he's had to rely on this shaky patchwork of regional allies, including Catalan separatists who could wake up one morning and decide they're done with him.

The conservative People's Party (PP), led by Alberto Núñez Feijóo, doesn't quite have the votes to force him out yet—but that could change fast.

All it would take is a handful of Basque or Catalan deputies deciding the Socialists are more trouble than they're worth, and suddenly we're looking at another snap election. And those Guardia Civil (Spain's gendarmerie) raids on PSOE offices last month? Well, that's the kind of thing that usually means more bad news is coming down the pipeline.

You can practically smell the blood. PP insiders aren't even hiding it—they're just waiting for one more decent scandal to really trigger a crisis. This includes Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the president of the Community of Madrid, a PP political lightning rod and journalist, who's made it her mission to turn every minor stumble into proof the left is imploding. Never mind that her own partner's got tax problems—she seems to be a maestro at deflection.

Act VI: The Ghost of Portugal's Collapse

Just across the border, Spain's socialists are watching Portugal with growing unease - and to be honest, who can blame them? In March 2024, Portugal's Socialist Party got absolutely hammered in snap elections, collapsing to third place behind the far-right Chega party's shock surge. Certainly, Spain's situation isn't identical - Vox has been around longer than Chega had been - but the similarities? Well, they're keeping people up at night.

What really stings for Sánchez's team is that their crowning

achievement - keeping the far-right at arm's length while the rest of Europe veers right - could vanish in an instant if their fragile government topples. One can hear that fear in Sánchez's speeches, like when he dramatically declared last October that Spain faced a choice between being "an open, prosperous country or a closed-off, poor one." It's the kind of stark, us-versus-them rhetoric that shows just how high the stakes feel right now.

The Legacy at Stake

Here's the ironic twist in all this. For all his troubles, Sánchez has actually been one of Europe's most impactful progressive leaders. Consider this: he managed to cool down Catalonia's independence crisis through actual dialogue when everyone predicted disaster. His government pushed through groundbreaking feminist policies - we're talking menstrual leave and expanded abortion access that made other countries take notice. Then there's the minimum basic income that actually worked, cutting child poverty by a quarter. And let's not forget legalising euthanasia or standing up for immigrant rights



Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles



© POPULARES DE MADRID

The President of the Popular Party, Alberto Núñez Feijóo and Isabel Díaz Ayuso, president of the Community of Madrid

when few others would.

But here's the kicker - as Pablo Simón, university professor and one of Spain's sharpest political minds, put it: *'These corruption scandals have blown up the government's entire story. Everything the left claimed to stand for - equality, women's rights, clean politics - suddenly looks suspect.'* It's brutal when you think about it. All that progress, all those achievements, now overshadowed by the stench of scandal. The legacy's still there, but good luck getting anyone to focus on it now.

I The Endgame

So where does this leave Spain? Well, nobody really knows - but there are a few ways this could play out. First, there's the "hanging on" option: Sánchez somehow clings on by cutting new deals with regional parties, but he would basically be a lame duck until the 2027 elections. Not ideal, but possible. Then there's the nightmare scenario - another big scandal blows up, forcing early elections that could send the hard-right Vox skyrocketing. That possibility is probably keeping socialist strategists awake at night. Or - and this is interesting - we might see Sánchez's own party turn against him. If enough PSOE heavyweights decide he's become more liability than leader, they could push him out to try for a fresh start.



© GENERALITAT OF CATALONIA

The President of the Generalitat of Catalonia, Pere Aragonès, with Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez at the Moncloa

However, one thing's clear: Spain is in completely uncharted waters here. The man who promised to end Spain's "corruption thriller" has somehow become the main character. And what if this were an actual thriller? You just know there's going to be one last shocking twist before the end credits roll.

Hossein Sadre
hossein.sadre@europe-diplomatic.eu

EPIONE

CABINET ELISABETH THURAT

YOUR TRUSTED PODIATRY AND MEDICAL PEDICURE CLINIC IN BRUSSELS



PLANTAR REFLEXOLOGY LASER THERAPY TARGETED AROMATHERAPY



- Uses APIVITA natural French products
- Proposes various treatments using organic essential oils
- Uses the unique Low Level Laser Therapy (manufactured by Erchonia, a US company and world leader in the field of Low Level Laser Therapy)
- Bespoke treatment programs and state-of-the-art equipment
- Spotless hygiene

We provide the best care possible

ELISABETH THURAT CLINIC offers a wide range of care specifically tailored for young children, teenagers, adults, athletes, and people with disabilities.

AT EPIONE CLINIC, YOUR FEET ARE IN GOOD HANDS !

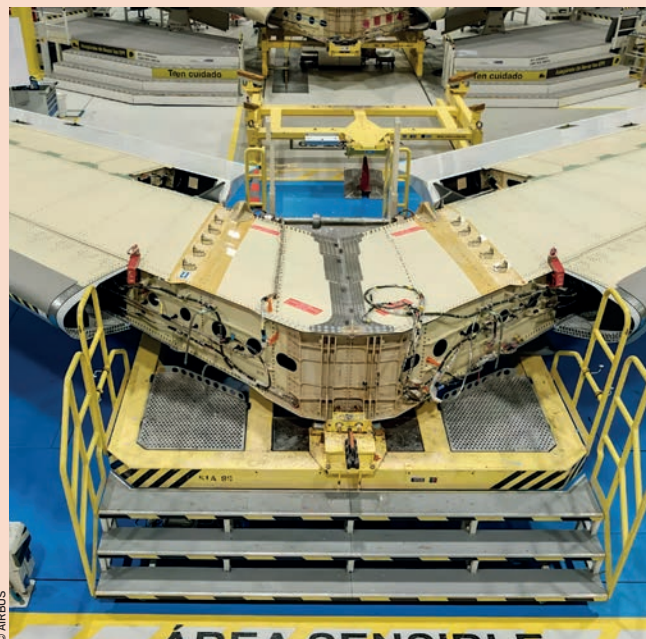
www.cabinet-thurat.be • +32 4 94 04 84 24

Avenue Brugmann 292 • 1180 Uccle • Belgium

Consultations only by appointment • From 8am to 8pm • Monday to Saturday

NEWS IN BRIEF

AIRBUS COMPLETES THE FIRST HORIZONTAL STABILISER FOR THE A350F FREIGHTER IN SPAIN



The horizontal stabiliser for the A350F freighter

Airbus has completed manufacturing the first horizontal stabiliser (HTP) for the A350F freighter at its plants in Spain. This milestone demonstrates Spain's key role in the production of commercial aircraft, including the A350F programme.

The production of the A350F's first horizontal stabiliser (HTP) involved the Airbus plant in Cádiz, where parts of the HTP were manufactured, and Getafe, for assembly and outfitting.

This HTP will be shipped to the Airbus Final Assembly Line (FAL) in Toulouse in the coming weeks to be joined with the fuselage of the first test aircraft. Airbus is manufacturing two A350F aircraft for flight testing in 2026 and 2027.

The A350F HTP can be manufactured in the same production line as the passenger version, delivering operational and industrial advantages and improvements.

Ricardo Rojas, President of Airbus' Commercial Aircraft business in Spain, said: "The A350F will offer a clean-sheet, specifically designed solution for air freight transport, bringing more efficiency and versatility to the cargo market. With more than 1,400 orders for the A350, including 66 A350Fs, Spain plays a key role in this programme that presents the future in air cargo transportation."

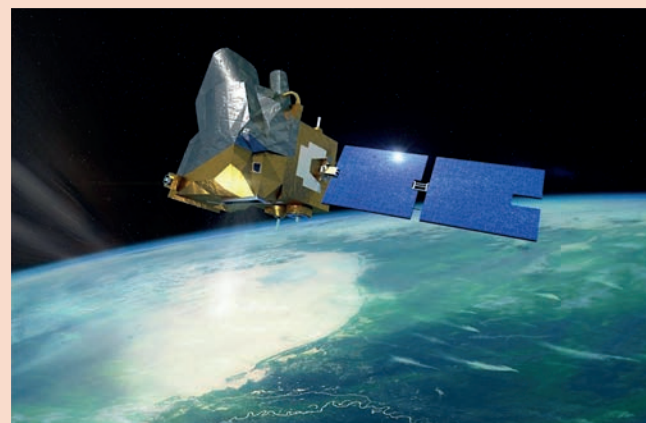
All in all, the horizontal stabiliser, rear fuselage (section 19) and lower wing covers for both the A350 and A350F are manufactured in Spain. In addition, the A350F's main deck cargo door, the largest in the industry, will also be manufactured in Spain. Made from composite materials, it has a 4.3-metre opening, making loading and unloading easier, faster and safer.



The A350F, the only new-generation freighter designed from the outset to meet the ICAO CO₂ emissions standards set for 2027

Designed to be the world's most advanced cargo aircraft, the A350F meets the evolving demands of the global air freight market. In terms of efficiency, it will offer at least a 20% reduction in fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions compared to cargo aircraft currently in service. Thanks to a range capability of up to 8,700 kilometres with a payload of up to 111 tonnes, it will allow operators to deploy it on international long-haul routes.

EUROPE'S FIRST STEP TOWARDS MONITORING HUMAN-CAUSED EMISSIONS



MicroCarb is a polar-orbiting satellite developed by CNES that will fly at around 650 km above Earth. Equipped with an infrared spectrometer, MicroCarb will analyse sunlight reflected from the Earth to measure oxygen and carbon dioxide concentrations at four specific wavelengths, allowing measurements with a precision of up to one part per million.

Distinguishing between natural CO₂ absorption and human-caused emissions is crucial for understanding the carbon cycle, accurately attributing climate change, and developing effective climate policies.

Natural processes like forests and oceans absorb CO₂ as part of a balanced system, while human activities add excess CO₂, disrupting that balance. Separating these sources helps scientists' model future climate scenarios, track the effectiveness of emission reduction efforts, and ensure accountability in meeting climate goals.

The CNES-led MicroCarb mission is Europe's first satellite dedicated to mapping global carbon dioxide (CO₂) sources and sinks. Using a high-precision spectrometer, MicroCarb will help distinguish between natural absorption of CO₂ and emissions from human activities—crucial for climate science and policy.

The MicroCarb satellite is based on CNES's Myriade platform. Its instrument was developed by Airbus Defence and Space, and integration was carried out by Thales Alenia Space UK with support from the UK Space Agency.

MicroCarb contributing to Copernicus

Although independent from the Copernicus upcoming CO₂M mission—MicroCarb will play a vital role as Copernicus Contributing Mission by providing early observations to the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, in particular the greenhouse gas monitoring products.

The expertise developed during MicroCarb's commissioning and operational phases will directly contribute to the preparation of the Copernicus CO₂M satellites, helping to optimise their launch and operations.

Together, MicroCarb and Copernicus CO₂M will form part of an expanding international satellite network focused on monitoring greenhouse gases, enabling scientists to better understand their sources, sinks, and atmospheric movement.

Backed by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme, the MicroCarb mission received critical support through the In-Orbit Demonstration/Validation (IOD/IOV) initiative—an essential stepping stone for Europe's space research and innovation community. Through the European Space Agency, the Commission funded the integration of a key data processing unit, a key element of MicroCarb ground segment, and secured launch services via Arianespace and the Vega-C rocket.

AUTONOMOUS DRONES TAKE FLIGHT AT NATO-BACKED COMPETITION

Four teams of seven researchers and professors from universities in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States and Austria challenged each other at the Huntsville UAS (Unmanned Aircraft System) and C-UAS (Counter UAS) test range in Alabama, as part of a competition supported by the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme.

The event, hosted by the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), was the second of three competitions organised through the SPS-supported "SAPIENCE" initiative, which aims to demonstrate how autonomous drones that cooperate with each other may be used in crisis management scenarios.

Expanding in scope from the first competition, which took place on 29 and 30 August 2024 in an indoor arena in London, United Kingdom, the Huntsville event required participating teams to develop autonomous drones suitable for outdoor conditions and for a scenario grounded in local conditions: the aftermath of severe storms that generated several tornadoes, which are an annual occurrence in the southeastern United States.

A flight test range simulated just such a disaster scenario, and the four university teams were assigned tasks such as damage assessments of residential communities, search and rescue



for victims, and the delivery of lifesaving medical supplies. They were encouraged to perform these tasks using multiple fully autonomous drones simultaneously, thus demonstrating innovative approaches to the technical challenges of autonomous multi-platform systems.

The third and final SAPIENCE competition will take place in 2026 in the Netherlands, where the four university teams will build on the lessons learned in London and Huntsville to complete tasks in a scenario combining indoor and outdoor conditions.

ECB LAUNCHES DESIGN CONTEST FOR FUTURE EURO BANKNOTES



The European Central Bank (ECB) today launched a public contest for the design of future euro banknotes – the next step in the euro banknote redesign process. The ECB's Governing Council has already selected two possible themes for the future euro banknotes after consulting experts and the public. These are: "European culture", focusing on shared cultural spaces and important Europeans; and "Rivers and birds", focusing on the resilience and diversity of Europe's natural ecosystems. In January the Governing Council also selected motifs to illustrate the two possible themes.

The design contest, which is open to graphic designers residing in the European Union, aims to identify the best design proposals for the future euro banknotes. The contest will proceed in two phases: an application phase and a design proposal phase. During the application phase, designers must meet the specific requirements listed in the contest notice. The applicants will be assessed on the basis of their qualifications and achievements.

Selected designers will be invited to participate in the second phase and submit their design proposals. A group of independent experts – the Design Contest Jury – will evaluate the proposals and select up to five per theme.

“The euro is more than a currency – it symbolises European unity and diversity. Through this contest, we invite designers across Europe to shape the future of our banknotes to reflect our shared cultural identity and natural heritage,” said ECB President Christine Lagarde.

After the contest finishes, the public will be invited to provide feedback on the designs selected. The Governing Council is expected to decide on the final design by the end of 2026. The new banknotes will be ready to enter circulation some years after this decision and following the production process. For detailed information about the contest, please refer to the ECB’s website and the Official Journal of the European Union. Designers interested in participating are invited to submit their application by 12:00 CET on 18 August.

<https://ted.europa.eu/en/notice/-/detail/461742-2025>

NORDIC CAPITALS RANK AS CLEANEST IN UPDATED EUROPEAN CITY AIR QUALITY VIEWER

What is the level of air pollution in your city? Stockholm, Reykjavik and Helsinki rank as the cleanest European capital cities in terms of air quality in the updated European Environment Agency’s (EEA) European city air quality viewer.

City air quality viewer

Users can check out how well their city is doing in the online European city air quality viewer, which has an updated methodology on how the rankings are calculated. Cities are ranked from the cleanest city to the most polluted, based on the risk of mortality associated with long-term exposure to fine particulate matter, (or PM2.5), nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and ozone (O3) over the past two calendar years.

This tool is focused on long-term air quality, as long-term exposure to air pollution causes the most serious health effects. The viewer is updated once a year. A new feature also allows easier comparison between the capital cities of each country.

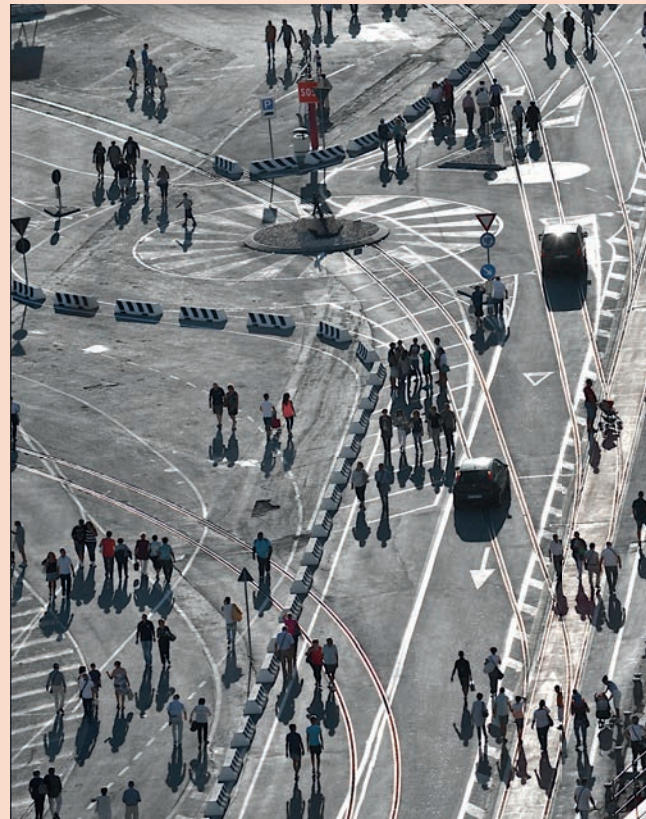
European Air Quality Index

The EEA has also updated the European Air Quality Index. Users of the web-based index can now access more real-time information on air pollution levels with broader coverage as of today.

The updated service gives Europeans an even more accurate picture of the air quality around them, based on hourly data updates on concentrations of key air pollutants from more than 3,500 monitoring stations across Europe.

Hourly data is now used for all key pollutants to estimate the index, including particulate matter pollutants (PM2.5 and PM10), which were presented until now as 24-hour averages. The index presents the potential impact of short-term exposure to air pollution on health, with the index bands now updated to take into account the 2021 World Health Organization’s air quality guidelines.

The index is determined using a combination of up-to-date data reported by EEA member countries and forecasts of the air quality level as provided by the EU’s Copernicus Atmospheric Monitoring Service (CAMS). It also includes modelled data where information can be found for every single 1x1 km grid in Europe, in addition to the points where the monitoring stations are located.



© CLAUDIO MARCOZZI, NY CITY / EEA

Background

The European city air quality viewer has been published since 2019. Until now, cities were ranked only based on average concentration levels of fine particulate matter from urban or suburban background or traffic air quality monitoring stations. This limited the number of cities included to around 372, given the dependency on the stations. Furthermore, only fine particulate matter was used, excluding two other key pollutants and thereby preventing a more comprehensive comparison of air quality in cities, as is now delivered in the updated version.

The European Air Quality Index was launched in 2017 and helps users to understand more about local air pollution and its impact on their health. The Index is operated by the EEA and based on reported data provided by member countries, cooperating countries and other voluntary reporting countries. Forecast air quality levels are provided by the Copernicus Atmospheric Monitoring Service.

FRONTEx HELPS 1.200 VICTIMS IN GLOBAL CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In a sweeping international crackdown, Frontex helped identify nearly 1 200 victims of human trafficking during *Operation Global Chain 2025*. This week-long effort brought together nearly 15 000 officers from 43 countries in a coordinated strike against one of the world’s most exploitative crimes.

Behind the numbers are real human stories of women, children, and men from 64 countries, forced into sexual exploitation, criminal activity, and begging. Some were



© FRONTEx

trafficked across multiple countries, separated from their families and stripped of their freedom.

This global effort, coordinated from Frontex headquarters in Warsaw, focused on cases of sexual exploitation, forced criminality and forced begging. Frontex supported its partners by deploying border officers, enabling real-time information exchange, and helping detect signs of trafficking, particularly at Europe’s external borders.

“Human trafficking destroys lives and crosses every border. That’s why we need to respond as one,” said Hans Leijtens, Executive Director at Frontex. “By working together, we not only disrupt criminal networks but also help bring protection and hope to people who have been through the worst.”

The operation led to 158 arrests and the identification of a further 205 suspects. Authorities launched 182 new investigations, including 15 cross-border cases. Many of these cases have already led to rescues and critical breakthroughs in ongoing investigations.

Operation Global Chain 2025 was conducted under the framework of EMPACT, with funding from Frontex, INTERPOL’s I-FORCE Project, and the German Federal Foreign Office. INTERPOL supported the operation by providing access to its databases and deploying criminal intelligence officers to Warsaw.

Key examples from the operation

- In Italy, police uncovered 75 suspected victims during raids on massage parlours, along with weapons and drugs.
- In Romania, eight children trafficked for forced begging were rescued. Nine suspects were arrested.
- In Thailand, police dismantled a prostitution ring that targeted minors through social media.
- In Portugal, Frontex-supported border officers spotted indicators of labour trafficking involving Paraguay nationals.
- In Ukraine, an operation was exposed that recruited women for exploitation in Germany.

The success of the operation shows the power of international cooperation in tackling human trafficking and protecting those at risk. Frontex remains committed to protecting the most vulnerable at Europe’s borders and defending fundamental human dignity against those who seek to exploit it.

Participating countries

Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece,

Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo*, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Vietnam

Participating agencies and projects

Europol, INTERPOL, Frontex, EU4FAST, AMERIPOL

INNOVATION FUND: SIX ADDITIONAL PROJECTS SUPPORTING THE DECARBONISATION OF EUROPEAN INDUSTRY



Six projects from the Innovation Fund 2023 general call for Net-Zero Technologies (IF23 Call) reserve list have signed their Grant Agreements. This brings the total number of projects supported under this call to 83, notably including the first Innovation Fund project located in Luxembourg. Together, these six new projects will benefit from a total of nearly €319 million in grants financed via the EU Emissions Trading System.

These six projects aim to reduce 24.1 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent over the first ten years of operation. They will deploy innovative decarbonisation technologies in the hydrogen, hydro/ocean energy, energy storage (other) and refineries and chemicals sectors. In line with the Net-Zero Industry Act and the Clean Industrial Deal, these projects will contribute towards Europe’s transition to a net-zero economy and strengthen the EU’s competitiveness and clean technological leadership. Discover all the projects that have signed their Grant Agreements under the IF23Call.

The following six projects have signed their Grant Agreements:

- ARCaDe - Antwerp Refinery Carbon capture and DeNOx, located in Belgium (Total Energies)
- ECHO-WAVE - Energy Community for Hydrogen On-site Production from Wind and AgriVoltaics for Industry DEcarbonisation, located in Luxembourg (Green Power Storage Solutions)
- GRHENA - Green heat generation hub at the Chemical Industrial Park of Tarragona, located in Spain (Iberdrola Clientes Sociedad Anonima)
- H2M Eemshaven - Kick starting the EU hydrogen value chain by realizing a 1,000 MW low-carbon hydrogen production plant, located in The Netherlands (Equinor).
- LARS - First European large-scale integrated pre-treatment and chemical recycling plant for mixed plastic waste to

generate pyrolysis oil as an alternative raw material for fossil-based raw materials, located in Germany (Green Dot Advanced Recycling).

• VianaWave - Accelerating the transition to net zero with large-scale generation of clean electricity from ocean waves, located in Portugal and Sweden (CorPower Ocean).

Currently, CINEA is evaluating the project proposals received under the Innovation Fund 2024 general call for Net-Zero Technologies (IF24Call).

The Commission is also looking ahead to the upcoming Innovation Fund 2025 general call for Net-Zero Technologies (IF25Call), which is planned to launch at the end of 2025.

LITHIUM BATTERIES IN AVIATION: POWERING THE FUTURE, AND MANAGING THE RISKS



A lithium external battery

It's hard to imagine a world without lithium batteries. They power everything – from our smartphones and laptops to electric cars – and store renewable energy. Being used in a wide range of devices and applications, lithium batteries have made modern life more convenient, but they also come with risks – especially when taken onboard an aircraft. Every year, airlines report incidents involving overheating, or even fires, caused by lithium batteries. This is precisely why strict rules exist for carrying these powerful, yet somewhat unpredictable, energy sources.

Why are lithium batteries a risk?

The same technology that makes lithium batteries so efficient also makes them volatile. If damaged, overcharged, or exposed to extreme heat, they can go into “thermal runaway” – a chain reaction where the battery overheats, releases gas, and potentially catches fire - causing safety hazards. Such reactions have already occurred during flights, sometimes due to damaged phone batteries, improperly packed power banks, or even spare batteries being stored in checked luggage.

As a passenger, you need to be aware of how to handle these batteries when flying.

The *do's* and *don'ts* of flying with lithium batteries according to EASA's Safety Information Bulletin

- DO carry spare batteries (including power banks) in your hand luggage instead of your checked luggage.
- DO carry e-cigarettes and power banks where they can be monitored.
- DO ensure your device's batteries are below 100Wh (examples of compliant devices are normal cell phones, laptops, and tablets)
- DO check with the operator if you plan to carry devices where you are not sure about their energy level (e.g. tools, power banks, drones), and request appropriate approvals (between 100 and 160Wh).
- DO NOT charge your electronic devices using anything other than the aircraft power supply at your seat (Do NOT use power banks to charge your devices onboard the aircraft).
- DO NOT ignore airline-specific rules – some have specific restrictions as per the maximum number of devices allowed and their watt-hour rating.

The growing role of lithium batteries in aviation

Although the hazards that lithium batteries carry can be significant for airline safety, they also have many uses in the airline industry itself. Pilots use lithium battery-powered tablets for flight planning and aircrafts rely on lithium backup systems. With the rise of e VTOLS and battery-powered planes, the ability to properly manage lithium batteries goes beyond the safety of the passengers and leans into the future of sustainable flying.

As lithium batteries are becoming increasingly essential not only in our everyday lives but also in the next generation of aviation, it's now more important than ever to handle them with caution and responsibility. So next time you fly take a moment to check how your batteries are packed and whether you comply with your airline's rules: a little caution can go a long way to keeping air travel safe.

NEW ECDC WEEKLY REPORTS AND GUIDANCE TO TACKLE MOSQUITO-BORNE DISEASES ACROSS EUROPE

As Europe enters this year's mosquito season, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has launched a new series of weekly surveillance updates to help public health authorities monitor mosquito-borne diseases in a timely way. The reports cover chikungunya, dengue, Zika, and West Nile viruses, providing a comprehensive view of the evolving situation across European countries.

ECDC's new surveillance updates aim to enhance timely public health response and strengthen coordination among countries. By offering consistent, near real-time epidemiological data, the updates can inform both national and regional control strategies, especially as Europe faces longer and more intense mosquito seasons due to climate change.

In order to support national and regional preparedness efforts even further, ECDC is also publishing new public health



Female, *anopheles albimanus*, mosquito

guidance on locally acquired Aedes-borne diseases in Europe. The document outlines practical surveillance, prevention, and control measures for chikungunya virus disease, dengue, and Zika virus disease, with recommendations tailored to four risk levels based on vector presence, environmental conditions, and recent transmission. A similar guidance for West Nile virus is also available.

The guidance also includes criteria for risk classification, actions for each level, and strategies for vector management, outbreak response, and public awareness. It is designed for public health authorities, laboratories, and emergency planners to help them assess risks, prioritise resources, and strengthen integrated vector control.

Current situation

The main vectors of concern for Europe include *Aedes albopictus*, which can transmit dengue, chikungunya, and Zika viruses; *Aedes aegypti*, which also spreads yellow fever virus; and *Culex pipiens*, the primary vector for West Nile virus. These species are expanding across Europe. *Aedes albopictus* is currently established in 16 countries and 369 regions – up from 114 regions about a decade ago. *Aedes aegypti*, once eliminated from Europe, has re-emerged in Cyprus. Meanwhile, *Culex pipiens* continues to enable widespread West Nile virus transmission, especially during the summer and early autumn.

Last year, 304 cases of locally acquired dengue were reported in Europe, an increasing trend compared with previous years (130 cases in 2023 and 71 cases in 2022). In the same year, 1 436 cases of West Nile virus infection were recorded, with infections spanning 212 regions in 19 countries. These figures underline the growing geographic spread and public health impact of mosquito-borne diseases in Europe.

So far in 2025, France has reported six outbreaks of locally acquired cases of chikungunya virus disease, with symptoms onset in late May or June. This indicates a very early start of the mosquito season. In previous years, such cases occurred in July or August, highlighting how changing environmental conditions are creating longer and more favourable periods for transmission.

What can be done?

Everyone has a role to play in reducing the risk of mosquito-borne infections – personal measures include applying mosquito repellent on exposed skin, wearing long sleeves and trousers, especially during dawn and dusk when mosquito activity peaks,

and sleeping under bed nets or in rooms that are screened or air-conditioned if possible. Travellers returning from regions where diseases like dengue or chikungunya virus disease are circulating should continue these precautions for at least three weeks to avoid introducing viruses into areas where competent mosquito vectors are present.

Environmental and community actions are also essential to reduce mosquito breeding and to prevent outbreaks. Removing standing water from containers such as flowerpots, buckets, and clogged gutters can significantly limit breeding grounds. In some cases, larvicides may be used in larger water bodies, and adulticides applied during active outbreaks, always considering the ecological impact.

Taken together, these measures can reduce the impact of mosquito-borne diseases across Europe.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EU-RAIL PRIVATE MEMBERS URGE BOLD ACTION TO DRIVE FUTURE EUROPEAN COMPETITIVENESS, RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY



Europe must take decisive steps to simplify and modernise its rail systems to strengthen competitiveness, sustainability and sovereignty. That is the central message of the High-Level Paper on “A Future Policy-Based Public-Private Partnership for Rail”, officially adopted by the Governing Board of Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-RAIL). The paper proposes a major co-investment strategy between the public and private sector to make rail systems more agile, resilient and competitive across the EU, calling for EUR 18 billion between 2028 and 2034 – with EUR 3 billion for research and innovation, plus EUR 15 billion for pre-deployment of harmonised technologies and system-wide implementation.

The European rail sector is a major socio-economic and sustainable asset, employing 2.3 million people and contributing EUR 143 billion to EU GDP. The European railway value chain is a global leader in design, manufacture and maintenance and it has sustained a positive trade balance over the past decade in an increasingly competitive global market. Yet, to maintain global leadership, Europe must continue to invest in rail's competitiveness, harmonising and modernising its systems and operations.

To preserve its position, the EU must adopt a bold R&I and deployment strategy. Without a coordinated European approach towards system simplification, the EU's industrial leadership and competitiveness will be significantly undermined, along with Europe's ability to respond to passengers' and businesses' transport needs.

Developed by the members of EU-RAIL, the paper sets out ambitious targets to simplify and digitalise rail operations,

harmonise standards, and accelerate the deployment of interoperable, affordable, and secure solutions. It builds on the success of Shift2Rail and the current Europe's Rail programme, while expanding its scope to support policy-oriented research, innovation, and pre-deployment activities, capable to respond to the European Union priorities for a Prosperous and Competitive Europe.

A mission oriented approach

Rail is vital for Europe. A well-functioning rail system is strategically important for the economy and security of the EU and its Member States. Rail is also central to achieving sustainability in transport, being the greenest and most energy efficient mass transport mode, delivering the policy objectives of a Single European Rail Area (SERA) and strengthening the Single Market.

To achieve its mission of simplifying the rail system to make it more attractive, and creating the conditions for a faster and more effective and affordable deployment of innovations, the High-Level paper identifies three core objectives requiring targeted investment:

- **Agility:** Developing systems capable of reacting dynamically to disruptions and implementing shorter innovation cycles through enhanced modularity and simplified certification processes. This includes advancing digital systems integration and automated harmonised operations to improve responsiveness to market demands.
- **Resilience:** Ensuring cybersecurity, maintaining sovereignty over rail system operations, building environmental change resistance, and supporting critical infrastructure protection against current and future threats. This objective directly supports the EU's strategic autonomy goals.
- **Competitiveness:** Targeting significant cost reductions in both upfront and lifecycle expenses, improved asset utilisation and system performance, and strengthened EU industrial leadership in global markets. The aim is to deliver EU reliable and competitive solutions that make rail more attractive for both passengers and freight operators.

SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES DONATED TO UKRAINE

Denmark - the EU Member State currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union - announced its donation of satellite communication services to Ukraine via the European Defence Agency.



© EDA

The donation includes solutions that increase Ukraine's access to secure and stable satellite-based communications, such as receiver terminals that will contribute to the country's ability to defend itself. These terminals will ensure robust and secure connectivity, which can be crucial for the conduct of military operations. Secure and stable satellite-based communications solutions remain in high demand by Ukraine.

The framework provided by EDA can help diversify satellite communication service usage over Ukraine. Such a donation contributes to promoting both Ukraine's and Europe's technological strategic autonomy and freedom of action in space. Satellites play a crucial role in modern defence today. Other EU countries may be considering similar donations.

STAR OF THE SEAS OFFICIALLY JOINS ROYAL CARIBBEAN AS THE NEXT ICONIC VACATION



© ROYAL CARIBBEAN

Royal Caribbean kicked off the countdown to a new era of family vacations, officially welcoming Star of the Seas* into the family.

After nearly two years of construction at the Meyer Turku shipyard in Turku, Finland, the keys to the next revolutionary Icon Class ship were officially handed over to Royal Caribbean just a few weeks ahead of its August debut in Port Canaveral (Orlando), Florida.

The delivery of the new ship marked the transfer of ownership between Royal Caribbean and Meyer Turku and celebrated the incredible feats of engineering accomplished during construction, like the installation of the glass-and-steel AquaDome, the development of six record-breaking waterslides and more. Soon, Star will make its way from Turku to Cadiz, Spain, where Royal Caribbean will put the finishing touches before Star sets sail on 7-night Eastern and Western Caribbean adventures to top-rated destinations, including the vacation brand's fan-favorite Perfect Day at CocoCay in The Bahamas.

Star will double the world's best vacation count with record-breaking thrills, unrivalled ways to chill, and more than 40 ways to dine, drink and be entertained across eight neighborhoods that are destinations in themselves, including:

- **Thrill Island** – Adrenaline lovers can find thrills of all kinds at Category 6, the largest waterpark at sea with six record-breaking waterslides including family raft slides, a drop slide and dueling mat racers; Crown's Edge, the part skywalk, part thrill ride 154 feet above the ocean; and fan favorites, such as the FlowRider surf simulator and rock-climbing wall.
- **Chill Island** – The three-deck slice of paradise is the ultimate spot for vacationers to kick back at four pools, including

Royal Bay, the largest pool at sea. Vacationers can enjoy live bands and DJs while they party poolside and sip on tropical drinks from the Swim & Tonic swim-up bar or at The Lime & Coconut just steps away.

- **Surfside** – Designed for young families, Surfside is the place to stay and play all day together. Kids and tots have more ways to splash at Splashaway Bay and Baby Bay, while adults relax at the nearby Water's Edge. When it's time for a bite, Surfside Eatery and Pier 7 have menu options for all ages.



© ROYAL CARIBBEAN

- **AquaDome** – With wraparound ocean views, the tranquil oasis by day and vibrant hot spot at night features deck-defying shows at the marquee AquaTheater with high divers, aerialists, robots and more. AquaDome is also home to a variety of food and drink spots including the AquaDome Market food hall, the Rye & Bean bar, Hooked Seafood and The Overlook bar for unparalleled views.
- **The Hideaway** – Tucked away at 135 feet above the ocean, the adults-only spot features a suspended infinity pool – the only other pool of its kind having been first introduced on Icon – a DJ, bar, a terrace with whirlpools and vast ocean views.

Fleet favorites reimagined for the Icon Class round out vacationers' experience, including the Royal Promenade complete with floor-to-ceiling ocean views and the Pearl, the world's largest kinetic art sculpture; the open-air Central Park with more than 30,500 real plants; the new 1930's Chicago-inspired Lincoln Park Supper Club; convenient pick-up windows for sushi, champagne, sparkling wine and more.

UBIGI PARTNERS WITH ROGERS AVIATION VIA BLUESKY TO OFFER SEAMLESS MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TO TRAVELLERS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Ubigo, a global eSIM services provider, has formalised a strategic partnership with BlueSky, the travel agency network of Rogers Aviation. The goal is to deliver an integrated mobile connectivity solution as part of travel services in this fast-growing tourist region.

With over 50 years of expertise in business and leisure travel, BlueSky serves travellers across the Indian Ocean, including Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Réunion Island. The integration of Ubigo's eSIM allows customers to enjoy immediate, cost-effective mobile connectivity upon arrival - without needing a physical SIM card.

"This partnership addresses a growing traveller expectation: staying connected simply and instantly from the moment they land. By combining our solutions with BlueSky's on-the-ground expertise, we're significantly easing international mobility," emphasises Marie-Julie Le Guen, Marketing and Operations Director at Ubigo.

A Concrete response to regional growth

This collaboration aligns with a highly favourable context. In 2024, Mauritius welcomed over 1.38 million tourists, a 6.7% increase from 2023. France remains the top source market, with nearly 340,000 visitors, followed by Réunion Island and Germany. Réunion itself surpassed 550,000 visitors - a historic record. These figures confirm the region's renewed appeal, particularly for long-stay tourism.

Average trip durations remain high: about 11.4 nights in Mauritius and 18 days in Réunion, reflecting rising demand for reliable connectivity to support the entire travel experience, whether for tourism or business.

A digital experience Integrated into the customer journey

BlueSky's travel advisors now offer this seamless digital experience at the booking stage for leisure getaways, short trips, and business travel. The solution's pre-departure activation ensures smooth connectivity from the moment travellers arrive.

Ubigo **eSIM**

What is eSIM?

It's a **virtual SIM** activated via **QR code**.

Instantly activate data plans without removing your SIM.

Just **turn on mobile data** on your eSIM for seamless use.



FOR LOVE OR MONEY

**War returns to the
Korean Peninsula
(it never really went away)**



Kim Jong Un at a Hwasong-17 ICBM launch with top military officials

We have to face up to the fact that some people love war. Most of us are horrified by it and by its heavy toll of lost human lives, but for some militarily-minded people it's the only game in town. The lives lost on all sides are, to them, an irrelevance, or, at best, a way of keeping score. At present, the West, as a whole, is not a participant in the conflict going on in the Korean Peninsula. Vladimir Putin most certainly is, even if his great predecessor, Joseph Stalin, would have disagreed. He gets on very well with his friends, the North Koreans, who seem to share his love of armed conflict. It now looks, however, as if the Korean War (1950-1953) is staging a come-back, for which the West is unprepared. North Korea, interestingly, is the only country capable of producing weapons for Russia, something it does rather well, it seems, while also supplying its own very efficient troops to fight on the front line. They're apparently very good at that, too. We should, perhaps, remember the words of

Abraham Lincoln: "There is no honourable way to kill, no gentle way to destroy. There is nothing good in war. Except its ending." Sadly, that's not a view that is universally shared, and certainly not in Russia or North Korea.

I can remember a lot of talk about the Korean War when I was at primary school, but the East is a long way away, so what was going on there seemed to be largely an irrelevance in Europe. It wasn't, of course; wars have a habit of spreading from country to country until virtually everyone is caught up in one. The fact remains that for world leaders engaged in such conflict it all seems to be justified. As Martin Luther King Junior said back in the days of the Vietnam War: "We have guided missiles and misguided men". How true. At school, we heard talk about the Korean War without really understanding who the protagonists were nor what they were fighting about. With all our modern-day electronic communications, things are rather different today: we all know there's a war going on but we know little more than that people in another country far away are busy killing one another.

Take the views of Andrei Lanko a professor at Kookmin University in Seoul. From there, he observes what is happening in the world, occasionally (and usually very wisely) commenting on what is happening. He has a wide range of followers among English- and Russian-speaking audiences. "North Koreans proved good soldiers," he wrote, "and I think this is only the beginning. They are likely to be very good once they learn more about the technologies of modern war." He knows what he's talking about, so we can't say we haven't been warned. Russia-born Mr. Lankov pointed out that the bilateral partnership signed in 2024



Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, Chairman of State Affairs of the DPRK, inspect the Vostochny Cosmodrome during their meeting in September 2023



North Korean soldiers captured by the Ukrainian military in Kursk in January 2025

between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is “purely transactional”, although it works in North Korea’s favour. According to sources among South Korea’s intelligence services, North Korea has already provided Russia with up to 12-million artillery shells, while Putin also enjoys the military support of up to 13,000 North Korean soldiers. North Korea can certainly spare them: it has far more men under arms than even Russia can boast. In fact, it has the fourth largest army in the world, after China, India and the United States. It has an impressive 1.28-million men under arms. They’re not all what might be described as “crack troops”, but some 200,000 of them apparently are.

Mr. Lankov says that ideological differences among the fighters of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea should not lead us to

doubt their determination nor their capability in the field. He likened today’s situation to the world in the 18th century, when virtually all alliances could have been described as “marriages of convenience”. He pointed out that back then – as is the case today – ideology counted for nothing, so Mr. Kim’s deployment of North Korean troops to Russia could be seen as being inspired by a love of money, rather than of Mr. Putin. But there again, most wars are inspired and sustained by financial greed. As far as Putin is concerned, North Korea’s willingness to fight his war for him is very important. He doesn’t want to have to fight a war using draftees, which could seriously damage his popularity and support. He prizes that, too. Certainly, Ukraine rates the North Koreans higher than their Russian equivalents; it believes them to be fitter, more aggressive, more cohesive and better marksmen than their Russian equivalents.

Even so, the North Korean troops have so far limited themselves to fighting on Russian soil, without venturing into Ukraine. A Moscow export believes that is likely to continue, at least for the time being. However, with Mr. Kim’s Koreans guarding borders, installations and sensitive sites, it frees up Russian soldiers to undertake the required aggression of Mr. Putin’s war. That may continue, but Mr. Lankov believes that if the war drags on much longer, then North Korean soldiers will be obliged to take their arms into Ukraine. Mr. Putin

would prefer to avoid such a scenario, in case the presence of foreign forces, even Russia-loving North Koreans, would open the door for the entry of NATO troops on the other side.

For North Korea the traffic is not all one-way. Ukraine has noted an improvement in the accuracy of North Korean ballistic missiles, demonstrating a transfer of Russian technology. It’s also believed that Russia is passing on some of its drone-making expertise, especially guidance technology, while Russian air defence systems have been identified in North Korea, possibly together with naval propulsion and control technology. Russia is clearly enjoying its war and wants to see others getting their share of the enjoyment that goes with mass slaughter. Apparently, Russia is also passing some of its agricultural produce to North Korea which is geographically badly situated for agriculture. There’s another point we shouldn’t forget: North Korea’s soldiers are not as well paid as their Russian allies, so they’re cheaper.

I have read that Russian blogs, viewed in North Korea, carry references to Russian chocolate, canned foods and sausage, while the media in North Korea

no discussion of constructing a pipeline, which would be very expensive, leaving Pyongyang reliant on Chinese fuel that comes through a dedicated pipeline under the Yalu River.

A labour force cannot be transported through pipes, of course, but with a shortage of civilian labour in Russia’s far East, some solution will be needed, and North Korea is not without a ready supply of workers, after all. The Philippines earns a lot of its foreign capital from exporting its civilian labour; the hands of its workers help to balance its books. Mr. Lankov reckons that North Korea could send as many as 300,000, or even 400,000 civilian workers to help meet Russia’s shortages. He believes that Russia really needs North Korea. Indeed, North Koreans and Russians are enjoying considerable prosperity at present, in much the same way as the Philippines makes a useful profit from exporting its much-needed workers. Some of the worst mistakes, however, have been on the West’s part. It could have (some would argue “should have”) mothballed NATO after the USSR collapsed, but instead it expanded it eastwards, putting the wind up Moscow for nothing.

Peace moves are under way, however. South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has pledged to improve his country’s strained relations with Pyongyang. Seoul is exploring the possibility of permitting individual tours to North Korea, which a spokesman for the Unification Ministry believes would be permitted under the rules controlling international sanctions.

Ironically, the whole country is suffering an infestation of what are called “love bugs” (*plecia longiforceps*, to give them their scientific name) *but there still seems to be little love lost between the two countries. Perhaps both of them could learn from the bugs?* As it turned out the conflict caused heavy losses of life that could have (should have) been avoided.

Up to three million civilians were killed, together with more than a million military personnel, all of them in the period from June 1950 to late July 1953. The conflict ended with an armistice but no formal peace treaty, so in a sense it could be said to be still going on. Joseph Stalin had warned Soviet representatives in North Korea back in May 1947: “We should not meddle too deeply in Korean affairs.” According to Oleg V. Khlevniuk in his biography of Stalin, Soviet troops began to withdraw in 1948, followed a year later by the Americans. North Korean leaders saw this as an opportunity, opening the door to military intervention. Stalin disagreed, however, and continually rejected the insistent requests for action, preferring to follow the principles of realpolitik. The North Koreans were disappointed and couldn’t understand the Russian leader, even suggesting that they might get Mao Tse Tung’s newly victorious Chinese involved. It never happened, partly



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, during a visit to a military training base



South Korean President, Lee Jae-myung

have been flagging up the health benefits of such things as wheat flour and baked goods that can only have come from Russia, and that traffic looks certain to increase. A new road bridge between the two countries is being constructed to augment the existing rail link. Mr. Lankov has stated that the roads leading to the border are rather rough and difficult for vehicles, especially those with cargoes to transport, so now flights are beginning between Pyongyang and Moscow, although they are unlikely to be carrying fuel. There is no natural gas being used in North Korea but there has been



“Eternal President” Kim il-Sung and Joseph Stalin before the Korean War



Official portrait of Kim Yo-jong, sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, following her election to the State Affairs Commission in 2021

because the North Korean leaders remained Stalin's puppets. In any case, Khleviuk argues, even the Chinese relied on Soviet assistance, so the idea was never seriously considered. That being said, the idea of a Russia-North Korea alliance is a frightening one, according to Andrei Lankov (yes, him again).

As he has pointed out, North Korea is the only country willing and, indeed, able to produce ammunition for Russia. Russia and North Korea together, he believes, are spearheading a "brutal new world order for which a weakened West is unprepared". It seems that Mr. Lankov has a very high opinion of North Korea's military forces. It may well prove to be a justified opinion, too.

For its part, South Korea seems increasingly keen to talk peace and to try to ensure it. But in reality that's not what has been happening. Indeed, North Korea has accused its neighbour to the south of making the existing tensions worse by flying drones into its capital, building up existing tensions by dropping propaganda leaflets over Pyongyang, which the North warned could lead to armed confrontations.

The South warned that it would be willing to respond in kind in the event of enemy fire. Tensions, though, seem to be getting worse. There have been a number of exchanges between the two Koreas, with the tensions said to be worse than ever, especially since the North's leader, Kim Jong Un declared early in 2024 that he views the South as his regime's "number one enemy". The north has claimed that the propaganda leaflets that have been dropped by the South's drones contain "inflammatory rumours and rubbish". Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, who holds a lot of influence, has warned Seoul of what she called "horrible consequences" if the alleged drone flights were to be repeated. The North has yet to produce irrefutable proof that the drone flights actually took place, although it has produced photographs that it claims to be genuine. Kim Yo Jong claimed she had "clear evidence" that what she called "military gangsters" from the South were behind the drones and their supposed leaflets. Having initially denied sending drones over the North, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff later declined to either confirm or refute their involvement in the wave of drones. Looking at the claims and counter-claims, I have to say that the



North Korea's military parade at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang marking the 90th anniversary of the Korean People's Army in 2022



Three South Korean soldiers stand guard at the Panmunjom border crossing inside the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), separating North and South Korea

whole thing appears to be rather childish. Park Sang-hak, leader of the Free North Korea Movement coalition, denied having been involved in the drone flights, stating that: "We did not send drones to North Korea". There has been a lot of sabre-rattling on both sides, although whether they would take the next step, without support from Washington or Moscow, remains far from certain.

All in all, these supposed peace overtures show little sign of making any difference, or even of existing. On the ground there is little or no evidence of a search for peace. The South has made clear its determination to put in place its effective self-defence plans. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff public relations officer, Lee Sung-joon told the media that the North could mount what he called "small-scale provocations" without provoking retribution, although shortly afterwards the North set off explosions along the Gyeongui and Donghae roads, which are regarded as being "symbolic". Both roads had already been closed for quite a long time, but their total destruction goes significantly further. Expert Korea-watchers reckon it shows that Kim is not interested in negotiating with the South. The explosions themselves provoked the South into firing weapons on its side as a "show of force", which probably also failed to provoke a response. Little boys arguing in a school playground would understand. The government of Gyeonggi Province, which surrounds the capital, Seoul, responded swiftly, designating the whole area as "extremely dangerous" and making it clear that scattering propaganda leaflets towards the North "could trigger a military conflict", in the words of Kim Sung-joon. "The scattering of such leaflets," he said, "could threaten

the lives of our residents," adding that in his view "inter-Korean relations are rapidly deteriorating". It's a dangerous part of the world and it has been for a very long time.

There seems to be little or no sign of matters improving any time soon. In 2024, North Korea announced that it would cut road and rail access between North and South, permanently blocking off the border while fortifying the area on its side, a move the Korean People's Army (KPA) described as "self-defensive" with the aim of "inhibiting war". The North blamed the decision on the allegedly frequent presence of American nuclear weapons in the border area and on military exercises by the South.. Tensions between the two Koreas are said to be at their most tense in years. It's in reality more of a symbolic than a strategic measure because roads and rail links between the two Koreas are rarely used and have been incrementally dismantled by the North Koreans over the last couple of years.

Early in 2024, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un announced that he was no longer striving towards reunification with the South, which has raised fears that this long local cold war could be about to heat up again. He has also talked about revising his country's constitution, deleting references to the northern or southern parts of one country and to



US President Donald Trump and his Secretary of Defence Peter Hegseth

such ideas as “peaceful reunification” and “national unity”. From the North’s perspective it seems clear that unification with the South is a non-runner. Nobody seems to know for sure which way the road to the future lies, but the prospect of a peaceful solution is not on the cards, it seems, any more than is a mutually acceptable co-existence. It’s thought that some of the prevarication was because nobody was sure of what would happen under a Donald Trump US presidency. His main concern seems to be China and its strategic position, as well as its growing power in the region. He wants South Korea to significantly increase its share of paying for US troops stationed near Seoul, as well as spending more on military expenditure. Meanwhile, both North and South are talking openly about live firing, which could be seen as dangerous talk. What’s more, while these demands by the US, aimed at advancing U.S. interests, could, some experts have argued, unintentionally destabilize South Korea’s government and drive Lee Jae-myung, the newly elected president, closer to China, the most formidable U.S. rival. The plain fact is that there is no love lost between the two Koreas; they dislike and distrust each other in equal measures. As for Russia, relations with North Korea are somewhat uneasy. Mr. Putin may not be opposed to a war in principle, but it would have to be on his terms.

Things have hardly been peaceful in South Korea, what with martial law, impeachments and vicious rows among the political parties and it’s unlikely that it will all end peacefully any time soon. The row over the presidency and who holds it looks likely to continue for some time yet. Reconciliation looks unlikely at the moment while the entire country is wracked by conspiracy theories which may make reconciliation all but impossible. Both of South Korea’s main political parties fear being overlooked. As much as they fear President Trump’s threatened (promised?) tariffs or a reduction in available US troop numbers to come to their aid, the politicians of the South seem unable to reach any sort of settlement. They have appealed to Washington for help, perhaps more in hope than expectation. After all, with only an unelected acting President, establishing any sort of meaningful relationship is no easy matter. The future has never seemed so uncertain or

worrying since the full-blooded Korean war of the early 1950s. In a worst case scenario, we could be about to witness a full re-run.

In South Korea itself, there is a growing fear of anti-Americanism over-shadowing the relationship and deeply affecting what happens next. It’s not looking rosy in the Korean peninsula. There have been misunderstandings, too. Comments by Donald Trump and his Secretary of Defence, Peter Hegseth, that North Korea is a “nuclear power” have been interpreted by some as meaning that the United States has abandoned denuclearisation as a policy goal for North Korea, which would represent a major policy shift. It’s almost certainly a misinterpretation. After all, denuclearising North Korea is not only a long-standing US policy, it is also a legal requirement of eleven UN Security Council Resolutions, as well as U.S. legislation, such as (among other things) the North Korea Policy Oversight Act of 2022. Japan, of course, also plays a key part in US defence policy for the region. Washington must surely realise that there can be no security negotiations without them. South Korea, along with Japan, is a stalwart security partner against perceived regional threats to peace. It’s easy for us in Europe to forget those places far away and their importance to world peace. We must not. Europe must work as closely as possible with Seoul and Washington to underpin peace wherever and whenever we can. After all, we’ve only got one world. We may not always agree with each other but we must avoid falling out in such a way that we blow it up, or allow others to do so, if we can avoid it.

Jim Gibbons
Jim.Gibbons@europe-diplomatic.eu



GLOBAL OPERATION TARGETS NONAME057(16)

**A pro-Russian
cybercrime
network**



© EUROPA.EU

Last month, a joint international operation, known as Eastwood and coordinated by Europol and Eurojust, targeted the cybercrime network NoName057(16). Law enforcement and judicial authorities from Czechia, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United States took simultaneous actions against offenders and infrastructure belonging to the pro-Russian cybercrime network. The investigation was also supported by ENISA, as well as Belgium, Canada, Estonia, Denmark, Latvia, Romania and Ukraine. The private parties ShadowServer and abuse.ch also assisted in the technical part of the operation.

The actions led to the disruption of an attack-infrastructure consisting of over one hundred computer systems worldwide, while a major part of the group's central server infrastructure was taken offline. Germany issued six warrants for the arrest of offenders living in the Russian Federation. Two of these persons are accused of being the main instigators responsible for the activities of "NoName057(16)". In total, national authorities have issued seven arrest warrants, which are directed, inter alia, against six Russian nationals for their involvement in the NoName057(16) criminal activities. All of the suspects are listed as internationally wanted, and in some cases, their identities are published in media. Five profiles were also published on the EU Most Wanted website.

National authorities have reached out to

several hundred of individuals believed to be supporters of the cybercrime network. The messages, shared via a popular messaging application, inform the recipient of the official measures highlighting the criminal liability they bear for their actions pursuant to national legislations. Individuals acting for NoName057(16) are mainly Russian-speaking sympathisers who use automated tools to carry out distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. Operating without formal leadership or sophisticated technical skills, they are motivated by ideology and rewards.

NoName057(16) has professed support for the Russian Federation since the start of the war of aggression against Ukraine. Since the start of the war, it has executed multiple DDoS attacks against critical infrastructure during high-level (political) events. The group has also exhibited anti-NATO and anti-U.S. sentiment. During a DDoS attack, a website or online service is flooded with traffic, overloading its capacity and thus making it unavailable. The hacktivist group has executed 14 attacks in Germany, some of them lasting multiple days and affecting around 230 organisations including arms factories, power suppliers and government organisations. Attacks were also executed across Europe during the European elections. In Sweden, authorities and bank websites were targeted, while in Switzerland multiple attacks were carried out during a video message given by the Ukrainian President to the Joint Parliament in June 2023, and during the Peace Summit for Ukraine in June 2024. Most recently, the Netherlands was targeted during the NATO Summit at the end of June.

To execute their attacks, the group recruited supporters through a messaging service. It is estimated that the hackers were able to mobilise around 4000 users who supported their operations

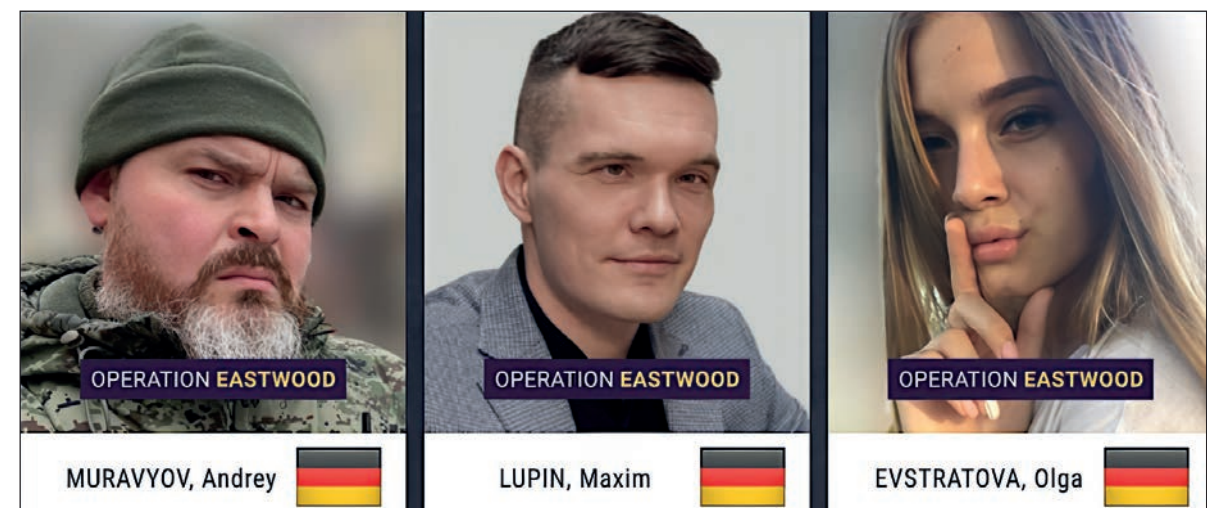
by downloading malware that made it possible for them to participate in the DDoS attacks. The group also built its own botnet using hundreds of servers around the world that increased the attack load, causing more damage.

Coordination of the many international partners was crucial for the success of the operation. Through Eurojust, authorities were able to coordinate their findings and plan an action day to target the hacktivist group. The Agency ensured that multiple European Investigation Orders and Mutual Legal Assistance processes were executed. During the action day Eurojust coordinated any last-minute judicial requests that were needed during the operation.

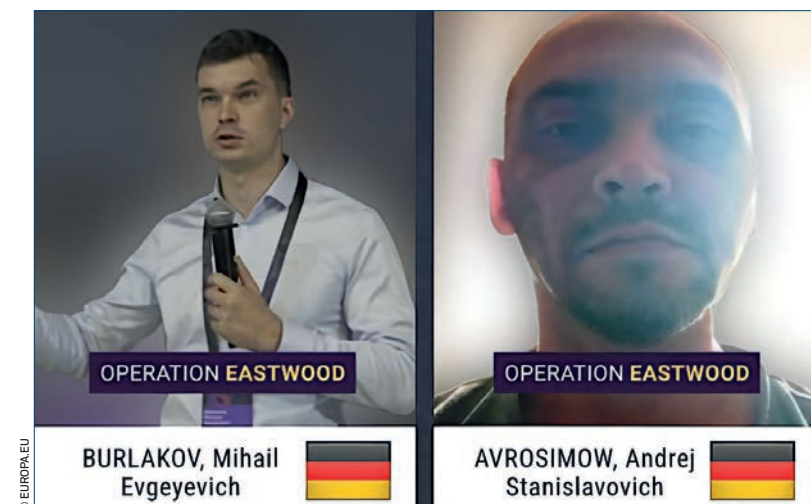
Europol facilitated the information exchange, supported the coordination of the operational activities and provided extended operational analytical support, as well as crypto tracing and forensic support during the lent of the investigation, and coordinated the prevention and awareness raising campaign, released to unidentified yet offenders via messaging apps and social media channels. During the action day, Europol set-up

a Command Post at Europol's headquarters and made available a Virtual Command post for online connection with the in-person Command.

The investigation culminated in an action day where actions targeting the group took place in eight countries. Authorities were able to disrupt of over 100 servers worldwide. Searches took place in Germany, Latvia, Spain, Italy, Czechia, Poland and France to gather evidence for the investigation. Additionally, authorities informed the group and 1100 supporters and 17 administrators about the measures taken and the criminal liability they bear for their actions. Seven international arrest warrants have been issued. Germany issued six warrants which are directed inter alia against suspects living in the Russian Federation. Two suspects are accused of being the main instigators responsible for the activities of NoName057(16).



Some of the suspects on Europol and Interpol's wanted lists as displayed on their official websites



© EUROPA.EU



© WESLEY R. DICKEY

WELCOMING SMILES
OR DISMISSIVE FROWNS?

The UK, the promised land for refugees



© GOV.UK

Migrants crossing the English Channel in unauthorised attempts to reach the United Kingdom

The arrival of small boats bringing would-be migrants from France to the UK continues to raise eyebrows as well as big political problems for the government and the police – and for the EU.

Mandy Felderhof is credited with writing a short children's poem about youngsters' first day at school: "Welcome, children, I'm happy you're here. We're all going to have a wonderful year." We hope. It continues in a similarly cheery and encouraging vein: "We'll read and we'll write and we'll sing and we'll play. We'll build and we'll paint and learn new things each day." Lovely sentiments, of course, although most children normally arrive at their first school with a sense of dread, rather than anticipation of all the fun that lies ahead, not to mention their regret at the loss of the freedom to do more or less whatever they like all day, mothers permitting. And in addition to all those jolly things, the children will fight and hit each other and steal each other's pencils and paint brushes. At least these days they don't face getting a stroke of the cane if they're naughty, as we did in my day (I know: I got some!). One of the welcome quotes I found, and perhaps my favourite, simply goes: "You are always welcome to the places you have never been." That was written by Marcel Proust. I just wish it was true. It was for me; my job as a journalist has taken me to lots of places where I met new people and encountered new customs and practices, fondly remembered. I believe I've been extraordinarily lucky.

The Channel itself, known as La Manche in France, varies in width from 34 to 240 kilometres and extends to some 560 kilometres in length. It has long protected Britain from invasion, although the age of fast vessels and of air travel ended that particular kind of security. It certainly didn't deter Adolf Hitler's bombers. It can get quite rough out

there if the weather is unfavourable, but that risk has not put off those determined to begin a new life in the UK.

It won't be easy when they do, because it never is. Asylum seekers are seldom if ever made welcome anywhere. Judging by the animosity shown between groups of people based purely on the place they came from it's amazing that we ever got beyond the Neanderthals. In Britain recently there have been violent protests outside an Essex hotel thought to be housing asylum seekers which have seen eight police officers injured and to have cost some £100,000 (more than €115,000). Chief Superintendent Simon Anslow of Essex Police said he's much rather see that money spent on fighting crime. In one protest, locals could be heard chanting "save our kids" since one asylum seeker had been charged with sexually assaulting a 14-year-old girl. The accused man has, of course, denied the charge in court, while a local man also denied violent disorder and causing criminal damage during the demonstration. It's what guilty people do.



© EDM

French border police detain undocumented migrants near the English Channel crossing zone

I It wasn't me, Honest

There have also been violent clashes between protestors and asylum seekers in a number of locations throughout Britain. The display by anti-asylum protestors of such very English symbols as the Cross of St. George and the Union Jack suggests that the protests are at least as much based on simple racism and nationalism as on racial fear or a wish to close the doors to foreigners. It's simply not true to say that British people don't like foreigners living among them. Why else would they buy Indian curries, Italian pasta or American burgers in the quantities they do? But there is undeniable tension, and one migrant hotel in Norfolk has threatened to close its doors if it is forced by the Home Office to house single adult men as protestors gathered outside. Supporters of far-right activist Tommy Robinson have talked quite encouragingly about the clashes. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has been warned that Britain is becoming a 'powder keg' that could explode into a repeat of the street violence that was witnessed after murders in Southport a year or so ago, unless Labour can get a firm grip on migrant hotels and their occupants. Some 150 arrests were made outside the Norfolk hotel I mentioned following clashes between pro-migrant and anti-migrant groups, while children were seen marching with banners that read "stop the boats". Maybe if the migrants arrived carrying banners that read "we want to open restaurants" or "why not try our burgers/pizzas/curries?" there would be less opposition.

The Prime Minister's official spokesperson, Angela Rayner warned the government that "17 of the 18 places that saw the worst of the disorder last summer ranked at the top of the most deprived," which suggests that poverty breeds race hatred, which

is understandable if hardly laudable. She added that "while Britain was a successful multi-ethnic, multi-faith country, the Government had to show it had a plan to address people's concerns (and) provide opportunities for everyone to flourish". A good idea but how can it be achieved? According to the right-leaning newspaper, the Daily Mail, "The demonstration in Norfolk started with around 60 people shouting 'we want our country back'. They were met by about 30 counter-protesters from Stand Up To Racism holding signs that read 'refugees welcome'." The problem is that in many parts of Britain they're not, and there are politicians keen to exploit that division, if only to gain votes.

There are, of course, political implications involved here too, and not just for Britain. There are ramifications for the European Union as a whole. It's a very big issue, and not just for the Tommy Robinsons of this world. It's also extremely sensitive. The people organizing the smuggling are, of course, criminals. Often, they're violent and invariably they're bad and very greedy people trying to make a fast buck. Several of them have now been arrested and had their assets seized. It has become illegal for anyone to engage in any sort of business with them. Among the 25 traffickers and organisations named by the Foreign Office are the well-known gang leader Bledar Lala, an Albanian who leads the Belgian operation of an organised criminal group.



© WINCOMMONS/ALISA RE HICKSON

Right wing anti-immigration protesters, escorted by police in Dover, UK



Police raid boat storage facilities used by human traffickers in Channel crossing operations

There's no place like home (I hope)

They are making massive profits from moving people across Europe, with no consideration whatsoever for the welfare of the people they have been transporting. It has had repercussions, of course. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Macron have agreed to return illegal migrants to France. The aim is to dismantle the people-smuggling networks and jail the culprits. Keir Starmer told the UK media: "This ground-breaking deal is a crucial further step in turning the tide on illegal small boat crossings and restoring order to our immigration system." It's a start, and it looks set to continue, as he said: "For the first time illegal migrants will be sent back to France – targeting the heart of these gangs' business model and sending a clear message that these life-threatening journeys are pointless." It's unlikely to stop the illegal people-smuggling altogether, however. Where there are profits to be made with only other people put at risk the activity will continue. The Home Secretary has hosted her French counterpart, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, in Downing Street, where they discussed the work being done both internationally and domestically to prevent illegal migration, including issues like clamping down on illegal working and increasing the removal of those with no right to be in the UK. The trend is

spreading; now Greece has closed the door to illegal migrants, having grown tired of being used as a staging post, purely to enrich violent criminals.

France is also trying to deal with the issue of illegal migration; it's not only Britain that's affected. Now France says it plans to set up "hotspots" in Libya to process asylum seekers, in its bid to stem the flow of migrants to Europe. President Emmanuel Macron said the move would stop people who are clearly not eligible for asylum from "taking crazy risks". He said that up to a million people were currently in camps in Libya hoping to get into Europe, but many of them did not have a right to asylum. He pointed out that migrants were destabilising Libya and Europe by helping to fuel people-smuggling, which in turn has funded terrorism and other forms of crime. It's a dirty business and it



French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer

must be brought to an end, although the ever-inventive criminals will doubtless find some other nasty way to make a profit out of people's misery. The English Channel is, in any case, not the most dangerous route towards a life in Europe. The UN refugee agency says that an increasing number of migrants trying to get from Libya to Italy have been dying on the way, and that the traffickers are becoming ever more ruthless. It wants \$420m (€360m) to stop people risking their lives on this deadly Mediterranean route.

A better life?

President Donald Trump has criticised Europe over its record on illegal immigration, boasting during a visit to Scotland that the United States has successfully "shut it down", as he put it. He did not appear to mention the problems that make people leave their home countries to seek a better life elsewhere. After all, if everywhere was as friendly and supportive as everywhere else people simply would not take the inevitable risk that migration invariably entails.



President Donald Trump inspecting sections of the U.S.-Mexico border wall during a visit to Otay Mesa, California

They only do it because life in their home country has become unbearable in some way and offers few prospects for children. It has led to great tensions in the countries where the migrants have settled or tried to settle. Looking at Britain's case (and it's not alone, of course) between 2020 and the autumn of 2024, some 175,000 illegal migrants had been recorded. There may have been more who evaded detection, of course. And it would seem that Mr. Trump was not being entirely accurate anyway. Since the 1960s, the number of immigrants in the United States has gone up by around 400%, giving a total of around 52-million immigrants who make up around 15% of the population. Most of them appear to have come from Mexico. According to the World Population Review, from which I have drawn other data I've used here, the country with the highest number of illegal immigrants is Russia (yes, really) with 12-million, but the United States is close behind with 11.4-million. Next comes India, with 10 million. All of those right-wing protestors in the UK should, perhaps, bear in mind that even within Europe, Britain lags far behind France

and Germany in terms of its appeal for would-be migrants. Surprisingly, perhaps, Saudi Arabia attracts more asylum seekers than the United Kingdom. The 14 million immigrants living there account for 39% of the country's population.

Trouble outside the Pub (as usual)

Getting back to the United Kingdom, protests and violence continue in hitherto peaceful suburban areas. Take Epping, for instance, in the county of Essex, which according to some reports has become a focal point for violent disorder arising from protests over housing for asylum seekers.

Local residents have spoken of their fears about the ongoing disorder, with some of them questioning the checks being applied to migrants who arrive in small boats. One resident complained that within just over a week of arriving on Britain's shores, the migrants are being granted free access to the whole country. Locals are suspicious about the mobs staging protests (both for and against the migrants) describing them as rent-a-mob", saying that many of them had been bussed in simply to cause trouble. Members of far-right political groups have helped to organise the protests that have been staged outside The Bell hotel. Police officers have been injured in the virtual riots and the protestors have been seen throwing fireworks, bottles and eggs at police vehicles. Local people say they are starting to feel unsafe in the streets of their own town.

Nobody, it seems, has an answer to this conundrum. People always dream of a better life with more opportunities for progress, for themselves and their children. But violent protests are certainly not encouraging. "Our kids go to school here," one local mother told The i Paper, "and they can't freely walk around with the worry." She denied that local



Protests in Epping, Essex UK, over housing for asylum seekers



Nigel Farage addressing a Reform UK campaign rally in Trago Mills, Devon, UK

opposition to the asylum seekers was a form of racism. She also resented the way in which the incomers were being invited to give their side of the story to the media while local residents stay quiet. The far right have been calling for strong action against the asylum seekers, with the Chief Constable of Essex, Ben-Julian Harrington facing calls from Nigel Farage, the leader of the far-right Reform party, to resign after his officers were accused of escorting counter-protesters to one demonstration in the area.

Mr. Farage has also accused the police of “mishandling” the various protests and counter-protests. Some locals are also growing concerns about the reputation for unrest that could be damaging the county. The Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, has urged the public to support the police and has had strong words for Mr. Farage and his Reform followers for criticising officers.

I Home Comforts?

Illegal immigration is a widespread issue and different countries have adopted a variety of measures. Australia, for instance, has very strict policies on immigration. Applying what it calls the “Pacific Solution” a lot of effort is applied to apprehending asylum seekers at sea. Under this policy those caught trying to get to shore are transferred to offshore processing centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, rather than being allowed to reach their true destinations. It’s thought that this technique discourages people from undertaking dangerous journeys by sea to reach countries where they’re not wanted. The EU tries to manage asylum seeking by working together with neighbouring countries to control the immigrants before they can land. It’s a “carrot and stick” appr, offering financial benefit to Istanbul in return for its help in stemming the flow of migrants. And it is a flow, described by those most strongly opposed to it as “an invasion”. Indeed, it may well be unwelcoming but it’s still better than the country (which ever it is) that they’ve left behind. Perhaps that’s why the numbers trying to make it to a new life in a new country are on the rise. In addition, of course, there are networks of smugglers willing (for a price) to provide to the travellers available transportation and short-term accommodation. It’s not just an issue of who any one country lets in. Concern about the issue has led to the growing influence of far-right political parties, happy to use the misery of others to boost their votes.



German police seize inflatable boats used by people smugglers to transport illegal migrants



Syrian refugees and migrants disembark from an overcrowded wooden boat after crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Lesbos, Greece

That has been happening in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy and Sweden, as well as in the UK and the United States. It has also boosted their financial benefits, as well as those of the criminal networks happily cashing in on this most unhappy situation.

Is there a solution? If there is then a lot of countries have yet to find it. It’s part of our human nature to seek out the best life we can find for ourselves and our loved ones (especially our children). That’s not going to stop until the world’s wealth is more fairly distributed. Don’t hold your breath; it’s not likely to happen any time soon. Or at all. And there is the fact that some of the destination countries lack the skills that some of the asylum seekers could bring. Some countries are trying to help the travellers fit into their new homes better, including Iceland, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia. Some of the migrants that have already arrived and settled have gone on to become entrepreneurs, providing jobs not only for those from their own countries but also people already resident in their adoptive home. In 2022, 17% of the self-employed in the twenty-five countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were migrants, and immigrants account for founding some of the most successful new companies now adding to the adoptive countries’ wealth. The new companies are often quite small but most of the workers they employ are native-born. Integrating the migrants has proved to be an advantageous strategy from which everyone benefits. I’m not sure that far-right politicians would agree.

It is true, however, that migrant entrepreneurship added almost four million jobs from 2011 to 2021 and also that migrants have been responsible for founding some of the most successful firms in the OECD.

Hazards by Sea, Hazards by Land

This is not an issue that’s about to go away. In fact, it probably never will. As I’ve said, people will always strive for a better life, however hard that is, and as long as there are disparities over the wealth of various countries, then immigration, including illegal immigration will thrive. Furthermore, people living in the immigrants’ destination areas will complain and campaign.

We have to learn to live with it. Strangely, the Channel between England and France is sometimes referred to as “the Pond”, and sadly some people in Britain dismiss those who cross it (or attempt to) as “pond life,” a derogatory term likening the migrants to those strange whiskery creatures that make their homes amongst the mud and slime that exist down there at the bottom of a pond. It’s a very unfair description and certainly too unpleasant to apply to those who try to cross that little stretch of water in the hopes of setting up home in the UK (it’s not very fair on the whiskery multi-legged little pond creatures, either). People will always be nasty to other people, of course, and insult them if they can, especially if they’re “foreign”.



An overloaded inflatable dinghy with Syrian refugees arriving at Molyvos, Lesbos (Greece), after crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey

Sea journeys carry a sort of romance, at least in our imaginations, but not for migrants seeking new lands in which to make their homes and perhaps raise their children. Not only do they face rough waves and winds at sea while sailing in fragile, poorly-maintained small boats, but also hostility from the natives wherever they land. Of course, the sea has always represented danger, but humankind has long adjusted to its tides and its moods: torrential rain, hurricane winds, monstrous waves and so on. We have to live with them, as this old sailors’ saying makes clear: “The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.” This quote highlights the importance of adaptability and flexibility in sailing. It reminds us to assess the situation realistically and make necessary adjustments to navigate through storms. And that continues to apply after landing. Newcomers arriving by sea unexpected and uninvited will face hostility at least and in some cases violence. But asylum seekers are not brigands, pirates or Viking warriors. They just want a peaceful life. Surely that’s not too much to ask?

T. Kingsley Brooks



The high-altitude uncrewed platform HAP-alpha will be capable of ascending into the lower stratosphere – at approximately 20 kilometres altitude

UNCREWED HIGH-FLYING SOLAR AIRCRAFT

HAP-alpha passes Key Ground Tests

Ultra-light flight platform for wide range of applications in Earth observation and communication

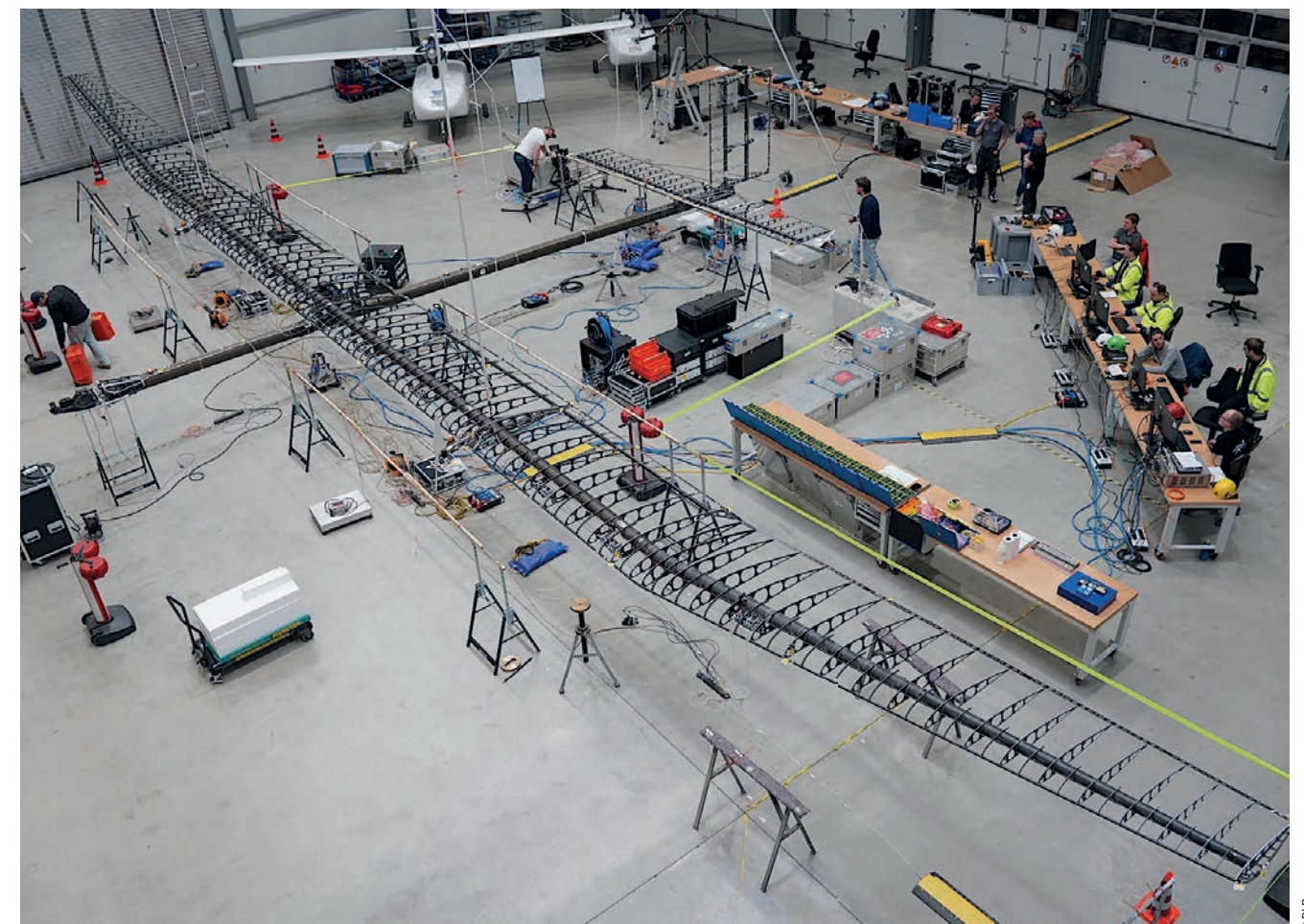
- DLR's high-altitude platform HAP-alpha has successfully completed ground vibration testing.
- HAP can remain in the lower stratosphere for extended periods, carrying out a variety of Earth observation and communication tasks.
- Extensive ground tests took place at DLR's National Test Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems in Cochstedt, Germany.
- The first low-altitude flight tests are planned for 2026.
- Focus: Aviation, flight systems technology

High-altitude uncrewed aircraft can remain in the lower stratosphere for extended periods, performing a wide range of Earth observation and communications tasks – from monitoring shipping lanes and supporting disaster response to providing internet access. The German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR) has now taken an important step in the development of its own high-flying solar aircraft by successfully completing a Ground Vibration Test (GVT) on its innovative HAP-alpha high-altitude platform. Extensive ground trials took place at DLR's National Experimental Test Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems in Cochstedt, Germany.

Further tests will follow and the first low-altitude flight trial is planned for 2026, subject to ideal weather conditions.

"With HAP-alpha, DLR is demonstrating its comprehensive systems expertise in the complete design, development and operation of a new and innovative aircraft, incorporating all disciplines," explains DLR Executive Board Member for Aeronautics, Markus Fischer. "This illustrates our engagement in an important field of innovation, to strengthen Germany as a location for technology and business and to open up new perspectives for our public stakeholders in collaboration and knowledge exchange."

HAP-alpha is a highly elastic, solar-powered flight platform with an extremely lightweight design, manufactured at DLR's site in Braunschweig with a total mass of just 138 kilograms and a wingspan of 27 metres. The goal of this DLR project is to develop, build and operate a high-flying uncrewed solar aircraft. It will serve as a test platform, flying into the lower stratosphere at an altitude of approximately 20 kilometres. There, sensor systems and technologies for long-term use on a high-flying platform will be tested.



With a 27-metre wingspan and total mass of only 138 kg, HAP-alpha's lightweight construction is visible in this test-phase image, showing its uncovered wing support structures



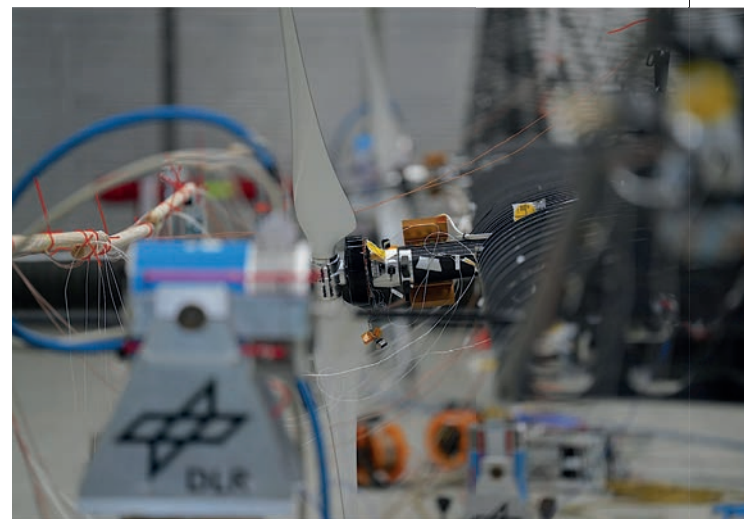
Electric motor on the wing of HAP-alpha, equipped with acceleration sensors

Key milestone in flight readiness achieved

The now completed GVT is an important milestone for investigating the vibration behaviour of an aircraft. The goal is to identify critical vibrations that can occur during flight, takeoff and landing. This determines whether an aircraft is safe and thus airworthy. For HAP-alpha, the successful GVT marks a key step on the way to the first flight tests next year, which will involve basic flight manoeuvres at low altitude.

"The successful Ground Vibration Test is a significant step in the development of our high-altitude platform," said Julian Sinske of the DLR Institute of Aeroelasticity, which conducted the GVT. "It shows that we are on the right track to overcoming complex aeroelastic challenges and preparing the platform for flight."

During the GVT, numerous sensors were used to record the dynamic properties of the platform, which was fitted with electromechanical vibrators so that its vibration characteristics could be identified. A particular challenge of the GVT on HAP-



Vibration exciter in use during a test run on the wing

alpha was its very lightweight and therefore very flexible design.

The acquired data will now be used to update simulation models and predict flight behaviour even more precisely – especially during manoeuvres, turbulence and gusts of wind. "This allows the project team to focus on the upcoming complete system tests, which will mark the completion of ground testing and enable subsequent flight testing," adds HAP project leader Florian Nikodem from the DLR Institute of Flight Systems.

Testing sensor systems and technologies

With HAP-alpha, DLR aims to build comprehensive expertise for the development of high-performance, high-altitude solar-powered aircraft. HAP-alpha will also serve as a carrier platform for testing sensor systems and system technologies under realistic operating conditions in the lower stratosphere. In addition to the platform itself, DLR is developing two sensor systems for use on HAP-alpha, as well as optimised evaluation methods.

The sensor systems are a high-resolution camera system (MACS-HAP – Modular Aerial Camera System High Altitude Platform) and a synthetic aperture radar (HAPSAR – High Altitude Platform Synthetic Aperture Radar). Through this work, DLR is developing sustainable, long-life high-altitude platforms that will enable a wide range of future applications in Earth observation, environmental monitoring and communications.

DLR institutes and facilities involved in HAP-alpha

The HAP-alpha project is led by the DLR Institute of Flight Systems and involves close cooperation with 15 other DLR institutes and facilities:

- Institute of Flight Systems (project lead)
- Institute of Lightweight Systems
- Institute of Aeroelasticity
- Institute of Aerodynamics and Flow Technology
- Institute of Flight Guidance
- Institute of Software Technology
- Systemhaus Technik
- German Remote Sensing Data Center
- Microwaves and Radar Institute
- Remote Sensing Technology Institute
- Institute of Atmospheric Physics
- Institute of Electrified Aero Engines
- Institute of Networked Energy Systems
- Institute of Space Research
- National Experimental Test Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems



Choose the Best Artists for your
Luxury Private and Corporate Events

Make your high society cocktail reception,
birthday party or wedding celebration a
unique and unforgettable happening

More than 30 years of experience worldwide

A dynamic and creative team,
at your entire disposal



Tel. : +33 (0)4 93 20 43 32 - Port : +33 (0)6 12 22 70 51 / +33 (0)6 23 46 79 53
Email : contact@noubamusic.com - Web : www.noubamusic.com



"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than one seeks." (John Muir)

FROM PERIL TO PRIDE

The Story of Caminito del Rey

This February, I had the unforgettable chance to explore the Caminito del Rey, the legendary 'King's Little Pathway' perched high above the stunning El Chorro gorge near Málaga. Every step along this narrow, cliff-hugging trail felt like walking through history, a thrilling blend of breathtaking views, daring engineering, and centuries-old stories. I loved the mix of adventure and awe that this several-hours trail offers, making it a must-visit for anyone craving a walk on the wild side.

Caminito del Rey is a spectacular walkway pinned along the steep walls of a narrow gorge in Andalusia, southern Spain. Its origin dates back to the early 20th century, and it was originally built for industrial purposes, not tourism. Today, the Caminito del Rey is more than an adventure trail. Its origins are deeply rooted in early 20th century Spanish industrial development. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Spain was rapidly industrializing, and southern Spain, including the province of Málaga, began developing hydroelectric projects to meet growing electricity needs.

The Caminito del Rey was originally built to provide access for workers and engineers to maintain and inspect the channel that carried water between the Gaitanejo and El Chorro hydroelectric power stations, both owned by the Sociedad Hidroeléctrica del Chorro, a forerunner of what would become ENDESA, one of Spain's major electricity companies nowadays.

It was constructed to facilitate transport of materials, maintenance of the channel, routine inspections and safe movement of workers between the two falls. Financed by the Sociedad Hidroeléctrica del Chorro, the project was a private industrial investment designed to enhance energy generation efficiency. The engineering project was quite ambitious for the time, as the trail clings to vertical rock faces, over 100 meters above the river. Construction of the original 1 meter wide path took place between 1901 and 1905. It was built mainly from concrete, wood and steel, affixed to the cliff using metal beams and brackets driven into the rock. At first it stretched on approximately 3 kilometers. Given the scale and danger, it was skilled and physically demanding work, dozens of local workers from nearby villages like Álora and Ardales, and engineers participated. Although detailed historical records are limited, it is very likely that there were also fatalities or serious injuries during construction, due to the extremely dangerous working conditions on sheer cliffs, the lack of modern safety equipment, manual tools and rudimentary scaffolding. At the time, occupational safety was minimal, and deaths in large infrastructure projects were sadly common.

Once the project was finished, it benefited from a royal inauguration. In 1921, King Alfonso XIII officially crossed the walkway for the inauguration of the Conde del Guadalhorce Dam. From that point on, it became known as *El Caminito del Rey* - The King's Little Path.



King Alfonso XIII visiting the Caminito del Rey in 1921

The walkway served its original industrial purpose for several decades, especially between 1905 and the 1950s, supporting the operations of the hydroelectric facilities. However, as technology improved and maintenance needs changed, its use declined, but locals and thrill-seekers continued using it informally, despite its increasingly poor condition.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, the Caminito del Rey had deteriorated dangerously. Large sections had collapsed, and it became known as one of the world's most dangerous walkways. Between 1999 and 2000, at least five people died attempting to cross it. The area has a history of both notorious accidents and fatalities, both work-related fatalities and later accidents involving thrill-seekers who attempted to cross the decaying structure. The most infamous incidents date back to 1999 and 2000, when five people died in separate accidents after slipping and falling from the deteriorated path. At the time, the walkway was crumbling, had no railings, and was often used by daredevils ignoring official warnings. As a result, the Spanish authorities closed it to the public in 2001. However, thrill-seekers kept sneaking in, climbing over barriers and risking their lives.

One tale involves a group of British tourists who misunderstood the nature of the trail back in its pre-renovation days. Expecting a casual scenic stroll based on a misleading travel brochure, they arrived in flip-flops and sun hats, only to find themselves clinging to rusty beams and dodging falling rocks. Local police had to escort them out, and one of the tourists later jokingly told a newspaper, *'We thought it was like a promenade along a beach. Then we saw the mountain goats walking more confidently than we were.'*

Also before the renovation, hikers would sometimes wear makeshift safety gear, like football helmets and climbing harnesses tied with rope bought from hardware stores. A viral YouTube video from around 2008 shows a man crawling across a broken plank while his friend shouts: *'You'll be fine!'*...not exactly reassuring.

In 2011, a major restoration project was approved by the Andalusian Regional Government and the Diputación de Málaga (Provincial Council), which was the main driving force behind the project, in response to both its historical significance and growing international interest in the dangerous path. Its then-president, Elías Bendodo, was a vocal supporter of the restoration as a tool for rural tourism and economic development in the region. Junta de Andalucía (Andalusian Regional Government) provided co-financing and administrative support as it recognized the project's potential for promoting Andalusia's natural and cultural heritage. Municipalities of Ardales, Álora, and Antequera, the towns closest to the Caminito, supported the plan, seeing it as an opportunity to revitalize local economies. Architect Luis Machuca was the chief architect in charge of the new design and restoration,

working under the Diputación. His work preserved the historical character while ensuring full modern safety compliance. As Elías Bendodo, then-president of the Diputación de Málaga, explained in 2014, ‘the restoration aimed to preserve a unique piece of industrial heritage and bring sustainable tourism to rural Andalusia’.

Restoration started in 2014 with a total cost of around 5.5 million EUR. The new path was built with wood and steel, just above the old concrete structure, maintaining historical visibility. It finally reopened to the public on March 28, 2015, when it was celebrated with large international media attention.

Now fully restored, the trail is heavily regulated, access is limited to a specific number of visitors per day, helmets are mandatory, tourists are supervised by trained staff and the trail paths, around 7.7 km long, are maintained regularly.

The project successfully increased rural and eco-tourism in the Málaga province, while preserving an iconic piece of industrial heritage. It also responded to rising international interest in the path, which had gained a cult reputation and succeeded to transform a lethal, decaying structure into a safe and educational experience. The restored path has since become a major success story, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, boosting the regional economy, and gaining multiple awards for sustainable tourism development.

The route showcases breathtaking views of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes gorge, an important natural habitat. Visitors to the Caminito del Rey begin their journey by receiving trail equipment and helmets, followed by a short walk with a guide to the trail’s

entrance. The 7 km long path is fully secured and safe, yet those with a fear of heights should be prepared for dizzying views as the walkway clings to vertical rock faces high above the gorge. Along the way, guides share fascinating insights into the history and geology of the area. Hikers can expect to traverse narrow passages between towering limestone cliffs, cross suspended bridges, and admire breathtaking natural scenery. One of the most striking features is the millions-of-years-old marine fossil visible in a rocky wall, as a reminder that this dramatic landscape was once submerged under ancient seas. The highlight of the journey is the slightly shaky suspended bridge at the end of the trail, offering both thrill and panoramic views. Just beyond, the landscape opens to reveal a tranquil lake with emerald waters, a perfect and serene reward after the exhilarating hike.

Caminito del Rey attracts now over 300,000 visitors each year. Since its reopening in 2015, the trail has welcomed nearly 3 million visitors, producing an estimated 400 million EUR in total economic activity across nearby communities. Only in the most recent year alone, it contributed approximately 64 million EUR, bringing significant annual benefits to local businesses and services. (Source: elpais.com)



Generally, the best time to visit Caminito del Rey is during spring (March to May) and autumn (September to early November), when temperatures are mild, skies are clear, and the trail is less crowded.

Caminito del Rey is not alone in offering heart-stopping thrills and spectacular scenery. Around the globe, similar cliff-side trails and pathways beckon the daring and curious. Half Dome Trail in the Yosemite National Park, USA is known for its steep granite dome and iconic cable-assisted climb. Like the Caminito del Rey, it combines natural wonder with a sense of adventure and accomplishment. Trolltunga Trail in Norway, a long and physically demanding hike above the fjords, extends as a jutting rock ledge offering jaw-dropping vistas. Its raw beauty and photographic appeal make it a bucket-list destination for many hikers. Via Ferrata Routes in the Italian Alps provides a thrilling blend of hiking and climbing. Like Caminito del Rey, Via Ferrata paths often trace historical or industrial sites, repurposed for recreational use. Gorge of the Verdon in France, known as the ‘Grand Canyon of Europe’, hosts several cliff-side trails along rugged limestone cliffs and turquoise waters, delivering a mix of natural beauty and adventure, akin to that of the Caminito del Rey. Mount Huashan Plank Walk in China, often dubbed the world’s most dangerous hike, consists of narrow wooden planks bolted to sheer cliffs. Hikers must wear harnesses and proceed with caution on this vertigo-inducing path, making it a unique thrill-seeker’s challenge. Kalalau Trail in Hawaii, USA, running along Hawaii’s Nā Pali Coast, offers lush landscapes, cliff edges and cascading waterfalls, beautifully combining tropical beauty with sections of rugged, exposed terrain, making it a popular trail for adventurous hikers.

But what sets Caminito del Rey apart is its rich history and the way it was meticulously restored to preserve its authentic character while ensuring modern safety standards. This blend of cultural heritage and natural splendor creates a unique experience that resonates deeply with visitors. Nowadays, in the digital era, the hike is becoming ever more popular. The hashtag #caminitodelrey has been used in more than 100,000 Instagram posts already. This figure reflects a steady usage rate of about 1 post per hour, indicating a consistent level of engagement from visitors and enthusiasts sharing their experiences on the trail. (Source: best-hashtag.com) The hashtags collectively contribute to a vibrant online community, sharing a wealth of photos, videos, and personal stories that showcase the trail’s allure and the experiences of those who venture along its path, proof that this hike fully deserves attention.

Walking along the Caminito del Rey’s narrow edges, surrounded by soaring cliffs and endless skies, I felt connected not only to Spain’s rich history but to a global community of adventurers drawn to nature’s most thrilling paths. Caminito del Rey is more than a walkway; it is an invitation to live boldly, embrace the beauty around us, and cherish every step of the journey.

Alexandra Paucescu
alexandra.paucescu@europe-diplomatic.eu

BOOKS



A different kind of power

A Memoir
By Jacinda Ardern

What if we could redefine leadership? What if kindness came first? Jacinda Ardern grew up the daughter of a police officer in small-town New Zealand, but as the 40th Prime Minister of her country, she commanded global respect for her empathetic leadership that put people first. This is the remarkable story of how a Mormon girl plagued by self-doubt made political history and changed our assumptions of what a global leader can be.

When Jacinda Ardern became Prime Minister at age thirty-seven, the world took notice. But it was her compassionate yet powerful response to the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks, resulting in swift and sweeping gun control laws, that demonstrated her remarkable leadership. She guided her country through unprecedented challenges—a volcanic eruption, a major biosecurity breach, and a global pandemic—while advancing visionary new policies to address climate change, reduce child poverty, and secure historic international trade deals. She did all this while juggling first-time motherhood in the public eye.

Ardern exemplifies a new kind of leadership—proving that leaders can be caring, empathetic, and effective. She has become a global icon, and now she is ready to share her story, from the struggles to the surprises, including for the first time the full details of her decision to step down during her sixth year as Prime Minister.

Through her personal experiences and reflections, Jacinda is a model for anyone who has ever doubted themselves, or has aspired to lead with compassion, conviction, and courage. *A Different Kind of Power* is more than a political memoir; it's an insight into how it feels to lead, ultimately asking: What if you, too, are capable of more than you ever imagined?



Empire of AI

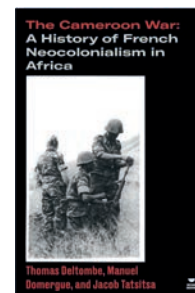
Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI
By Karen Hao

When longtime AI expert and journalist Karen Hao first began covering OpenAI in 2019, she thought they were the good guys. Founded as a nonprofit with safety enshrined as its core mission, it was meant, its leader Sam Altman told us, to act as a check against more purely market forces.

But the core truth of this massively disruptive sector is that it requires an unprecedented amount of proprietary resources: the 'compute' power of scarce high-end chips, the sheer volume of data that needs to be amassed at scale, the humans on the ground 'cleaning it up' for sweatshop wages throughout the Global South, and a truly alarming spike in the need for energy and water underlying everything. We have entered a new, ominous age of empire with OpenAI setting a breakneck pace, as a small group of the most valuable companies in human history try to chase it down.

In exhilarating prose and with unparalleled access to those closest to Sam Altman, Hao recounts the meteoric rise of OpenAI and shows us the sinister impact that this industry is having on society.

Karen Hao is an award-winning journalist covering the impacts of artificial intelligence on society. She writes for publications including *The Atlantic* and leads the Pulitzer Center's AI Spotlight Series.



The Cameroon War

A History of French Neocolonialism in Africa
By Thomas Deltombe, Jacob Tatsitsa and Manuel Domergue
Translated by Grey Anderson

The shocking history of France's secret war in Cameroon and its neocolonial afterlives.

Legend has it that the end of France's empire in sub-Saharan Africa was a peaceful affair. This book tells a very different story, exposing the shocking violence of a secret war.

Its theater was Cameroon in the 1950s and '60s, where a mass movement for self-determination emerged under the leadership of a pro-independence party, the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC). In response, the colonial power opted for brutal repression.

Employing the same methods as in Algeria, French forces waged a counterinsurgency campaign of extraordinary violence, eventually eradicating the opposition and installing a client dictatorship in Yaoundé. At the height of the Cold War, with attention focused on the Algerian bloodbath, the conflict in Cameroon received little attention at the time. Subsequently, its devastating consequences — and tens of millions of victims — would be intentionally obscured by French authorities and their local collaborators.

The Cameroon War uncovers this hidden history for the first time. It illuminates a forgotten struggle for decolonization at the origin of neocolonial rule in Francophone Africa that persists to this day.



The Illegals

Russia's Most Audacious Spies and Their Century-Long Mission to Infiltrate the West
By Shaun Walker

The definitive history of Russia's most secret spy program, from the earliest days of the Soviet Union to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and a revelatory examination of how that hidden history shaped both Russia and the West.

More than a century ago, the new Bolshevik government began sending Soviet citizens abroad as deep-cover spies, training them to pose as foreign aristocrats, merchants, and students. Over time, this grew into the most ambitious espionage program in history. Many intelligence agencies use undercover operatives, but the KGB was the only one to go to such lengths, spending years training its spies in language and etiquette, and sending them abroad on missions that could last for decades. These spies were known as "illegals." During the Second World War, illegals were dispatched behind enemy lines to assassinate high-ranking Nazis. Later, in the Cold War, they were sent to assimilate and lie low as sleepers in the West. The greatest among them performed remarkable feats, while many others failed in their missions or cracked under the strain of living a double life.

Drawing on hundreds of hours of interviews, as well as archival research in more than a dozen countries, Shaun Walker brings this history to life in a page-turning tour de force that takes us into the heart of the KGB's most secretive program. A riveting spy drama peopled with richly drawn characters, *The Illegals* also uncovers a hidden thread in the story of Russia itself. As Putin extols Soviet achievements and the KGB's espionage prowess, and Moscow continues to infiltrate illegals across the globe, this timely narrative shines new light on the long arc of the Soviet experiment, its messy aftermath, and its influence on our world at large.

EUROPE *Diplomatic* magazine

YOUR ESSENTIAL MONTHLY NEWSMAGAZINE



Offer a printed edition subscription to a friend
Contact us : europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com



Smoking causes lung cancer



World Health
Organization