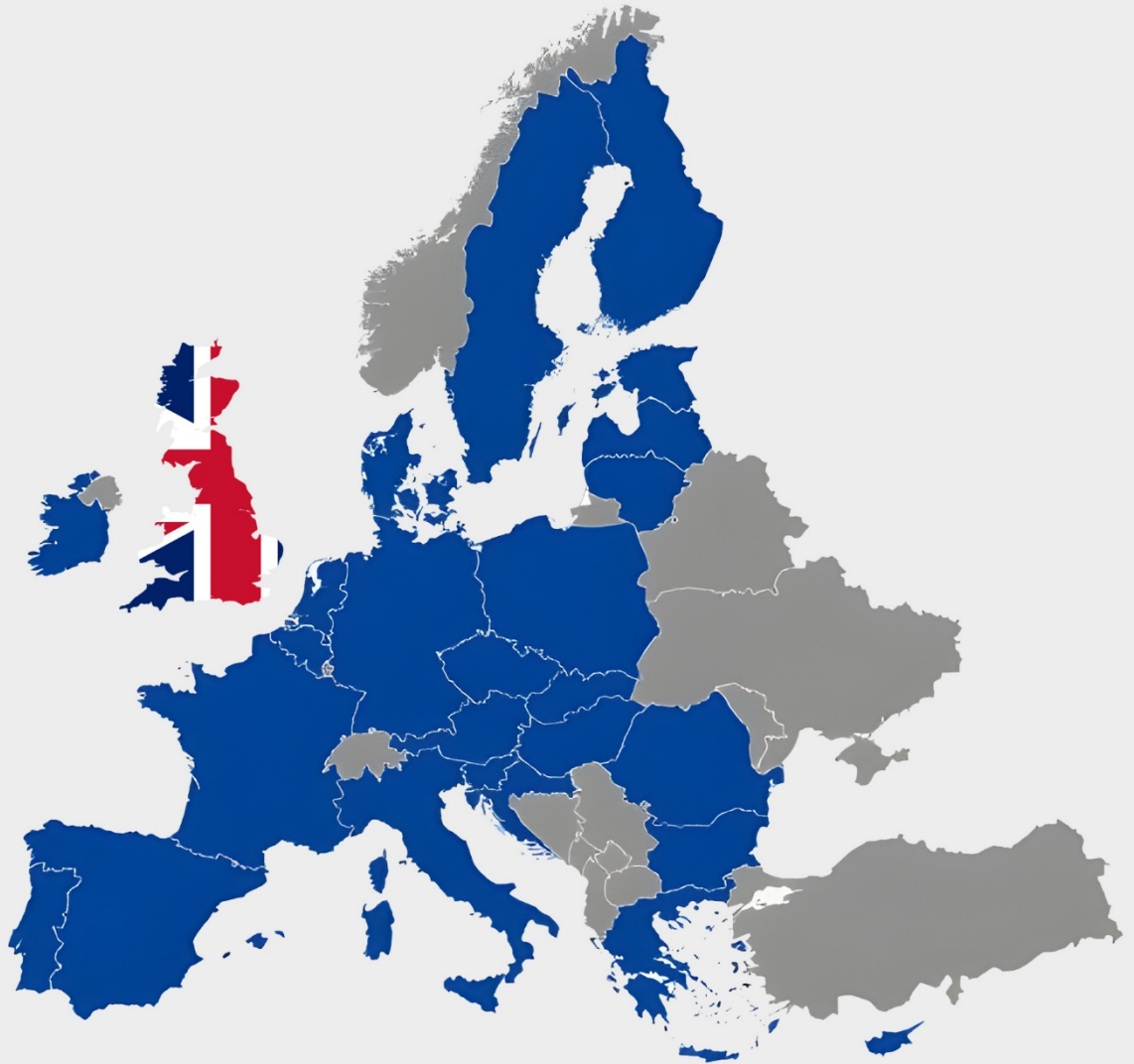


# CLAWS Newsletter



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by Nomita Chandola

## **EUROPE-US**

### **1. Europe backs Zelensky as Trump pressures Ukraine to step down ([CNN, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025](#))**

In a major geopolitical rift, Europe has embraced Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky after his tense Oval Office meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump, who is pressuring him to negotiate peace with Russia or step aside. Trump's administration, particularly National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, has questioned Zelensky's commitment to ending the war, while Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov echoed similar rhetoric, suggesting Zelensky must be "forced" into peace.

Following the confrontation, European leaders, led by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, rallied around Zelensky in London, proposing a peace plan and pledging increased military support. Meanwhile, Trump and his allies, including House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senator Lindsey Graham, have indicated that the U.S. might cut aid to Ukraine.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stressed the need to make Ukraine "indigestible" for invaders, while Trump's intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard and billionaire Elon Musk dismissed Europe's initiative. The situation underscores a growing divide between the U.S. and its European allies on Ukraine policy, as Trump pursues closer ties with Russia.

### **2. EU's ReArm Initiative ([The Local, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))**

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has announced an ambitious €800 billion defence plan, named "ReArm Europe", to bolster European security and provide military support to Ukraine following US President Donald Trump's suspension of aid.

Key takeaways from the plan:

- Relaxing EU budget rules – Loosening deficit limits could free up €650 billion over four years for defence spending.
- €150 billion loan facility – A new instrument will provide funding for defence investments, including air and missile defence, drones, and artillery.

- Redirecting EU funds – Cohesion funds meant for economic development in poorer regions could be repurposed for military spending.
- Expanding European Investment Bank (EIB) financing – The EIB may remove lending limits on defence projects, allowing it to fund large-scale strategic military initiatives.
- Creating a defence investment framework – A broader savings and investment strategy to help defence companies access capital.

The initiative comes as Europe faces growing security concerns, particularly with the US pivoting away from its traditional role in NATO and supporting Ukraine. Von der Leyen described the current geopolitical situation as a "clear and present danger", urging immediate action to strengthen European defence capabilities.

The plan will require approval from EU member states, and while it aims to provide immediate support to Ukraine, experts warn that its impact may be felt in weeks or months rather than instantly. The upcoming Brussels summit will determine how quickly Europe can act on this ambitious military rearmament plan.

### **3. Macron's plan sparks political division in France** ([Euro News, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

French President Emmanuel Macron is pushing to increase France's defense spending from 2% to 3.5% of GDP, requiring an additional €30 billion annually. This comes as the EU advances an €800 billion defense sovereignty plan in response to U.S.-Russia rapprochement and Trump's wavering support for NATO. However, Macron's proposal clashes with France's goal of reducing its budget deficit, leading to debates on funding methods, including a national loan or defense-specific savings accounts.

Public support for increased defense spending remains high at 68%, but political divisions persist. The Socialist Party and Greens back military strengthening but oppose burdening citizens, advocating for corporate taxation instead. The far-right National Rally (RN) supports aiding Ukraine but rejects a unified European defense strategy. Hard-left politicians warn increased spending may primarily benefit the U.S. defense industry. Meanwhile, some MPs propose taxing billionaires to help finance the budget increase.

#### **4. EU under attack with US trade war** ([BBC, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

The European Union is bracing for higher prices as US President Donald Trump's 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum take effect, prompting EU countermeasures on US goods starting April 1. Targeted products include jeans, bourbon, peanut butter, and motorbikes, with further tariffs on textiles, food, and home appliances possible by mid-April.

Germany's trade federation warns of rising costs for American products, while EU officials stress the €26bn in countermeasures will protect European industries. Trump has vowed retaliation, escalating tensions. The steel and drinks sectors face severe risks, with whiskey and cognac producers particularly affected. The European Steel Association warns that Trump's trade policies could severely damage the EU steel industry.

#### **5. Sánchez backing the EU defence plans** ([Euro news, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has reaffirmed his support for the EU's 'ReArm Europe' defence initiative, emphasizing that increased military spending will not only strengthen Europe's security but also boost Spain's reindustrialisation in sectors like satellite communications.

At a political conference in Madrid, Sánchez highlighted the need for Europe to reduce dependence on external actors for defence, particularly amid doubts about the US commitment under Trump. Spain currently spends only 1.28% of its GDP on defence, one of the lowest among NATO members. However, Sánchez reiterated his commitment to reaching the 2% NATO target by 2029.

Despite his stance, Sánchez faces strong opposition from political rivals. His socialist coalition government lacks a majority in parliament, making it difficult to pass defence-related legislation. Conservative PP leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo has criticized Sánchez for attempting to bypass Congress, while far-left coalition partner Yolanda Díaz has also opposed the move. Sánchez has suggested that only parts of the defence reform budget will be presented in Parliament, with other measures expedited by the government—a decision that has further fueled political tensions.

**6. Trump hints at NATO's role in Greenland Annexation** ([Euro News, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

US President Donald Trump met with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte in Washington, where they discussed Greenland's potential annexation by the US. Trump again pushed for the move, citing security concerns, and hinted that Rutte could be "instrumental" in the process.

The meeting coincided with Russian President Vladimir Putin agreeing in principle to a US proposal for a Ukraine ceasefire. Trump argued that Greenland is strategically important, mentioning Chinese and Russian activities in the Arctic. He also revealed that the US has ordered 48 icebreakers, matching Russia's 40.

Rutte attempted to distance NATO from the Greenland discussion, emphasizing that the seven Arctic nations are already working under US leadership on security matters. However, Trump dismissed Denmark's claim over Greenland, stating that it is too far away and lacks the ability to secure the territory. He hinted at a US military buildup there, noting that American bases and soldiers are already present.

Trump also reiterated his demand for European nations to increase defence spending, particularly in support of Ukraine's war efforts against Russia.

**7. Italy divided over the ReArm Initiative** ([Euro News, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

Defence spending remains a highly debated issue in Europe, with Italy and Spain under pressure to meet NATO's spending targets. An opinion poll reveals that Italians are evenly split on the matter, with strong opposition from supporters of the Five Star Movement.

The survey also shows that 41% of Italians oppose sending troops to Ukraine unless it is part of a UN-led peace mission. Public sentiment on the streets of Rome reflects this divide, with some supporting the ReArm Europe plan for deterrence, while others oppose military expansion.

Daniele Gallo, an EU law professor at Luiss University, warned that Italy's high debt levels make increased defence spending risky. He also pointed out that Cohesion Funds are being redirected to defence and that countries like Austria and Sweden oppose creating European public debt for military purposes.



Despite government support for strengthening Europe's defence, political parties remain divided, adding to the challenges of meeting NATO's expectations.

#### **8. Poland seeking US help against Russia** ([BBC, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

Polish President Andrzej Duda has reiterated his call for the US to deploy nuclear weapons in Poland, arguing that it would enhance the country's security against Russia. He views Russia as an aggressive threat and condemned Moscow's "imperial greed," citing Russia's deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus as justification for Poland's defensive response.

Duda supports NATO's strengthening in the region and welcomes France's proposal to extend its nuclear protection to other NATO states. Poland, which spends nearly 5% of its GDP on defense—more than any other NATO country—has also begun fortifying its border with Russia's exclave, Kaliningrad.

Despite political differences, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has also suggested exploring nuclear weapon options due to shifting US geopolitical priorities. Meanwhile, Duda remains a staunch Trump ally but is much harsher on Russia than the former US president. He also supports using frozen Russian assets in European banks to aid Ukraine in both defense and reconstruction efforts.

#### **9. US threatens Europe with 200% tariffs on Alcohol** ([Reuters, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened a 200% tariff on European wine, cognac, and other alcohol imports in response to the EU's planned tariffs on American whiskey. The move is part of an escalating trade war sparked by Trump's new steel and aluminum tariffs. The S&P 500 fell over 10% from last month's record high as investors reacted to rising trade tensions.

Talks between U.S. and Canadian officials over metal tariffs failed to yield progress, while EU countermeasures worth €26 billion target U.S. goods, including bourbon. Trump insists the tariffs are needed to protect U.S. industries, but industry leaders warn of economic risks. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent argues the EU has more to lose, while a Reuters/Ipsos poll shows 70% of Americans fear higher prices due to tariffs.

#### **10. France, Italy and UK order more Air Defence Missiles** ([The Local, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

France, Italy, and the UK have announced a new order for 218 additional Aster missiles and the accelerated delivery of 134 previously ordered missiles in response to growing pressure on European defence capabilities.

The move comes after US President Donald Trump questioned NATO's security commitments, prompting European nations to bolster their air defence systems. The Aster 15 and 30 missiles, produced by MBDA, will be used in the future French and Italian SAMP/T land-to-air defence systems and on naval vessels of all three countries.

The new Aster 30 B1 missiles, entering service in 2026, will have a 150-kilometre range and the ability to intercept aircraft, ballistic missiles, and hypersonic weapons traveling at speeds exceeding five times the speed of sound. A single Aster 30 missile costs over €2 million, according to the French Institute of International Relations.

This joint missile order reaffirms France, Italy, and the UK's commitment to strengthening their defence capabilities amid shifting geopolitical dynamics.

## **RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR**

### **11. EU on Trump's halt on Military aid to Ukraine ([Euro News, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024](#))**

Brussels has maintained that the U.S. remains an ally despite Donald Trump's decision to temporarily suspend military aid to Ukraine, a move welcomed by the Kremlin. The pause, affecting over \$1 billion in arms, comes after a heated White House confrontation between Trump, Vice President JD Vance, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The U.S. claims the suspension is to test Ukraine's commitment to peace negotiations, though Trump has refused to provide security guarantees, offering only an economic deal based on mineral exploitation.

EU leaders have refrained from direct criticism but emphasized the need to support Ukraine militarily. Ursula von der Leyen's €800 billion defense investment plan is expected to help EU nations strengthen their military capacity, indirectly benefiting Ukraine. Meanwhile, French Prime Minister François Bayrou condemned the U.S. decision, calling it an abandonment of Ukraine. Czech PM Petr Fiala urged Europe to step up its security efforts independently.

The issue will be discussed at an emergency EU summit, where leaders had planned to endorse a new military aid fund for Ukraine. However, a veto threat from Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán

has removed the proposed fund from the summit's conclusions, highlighting divisions within the bloc.

## **12. France extends nuclear protection to Europe** ([BBC, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

President Macron has proposed extending France's nuclear deterrent to European allies amid growing doubts over US security commitments. France, the EU's only fully sovereign nuclear power, has nearly 300 warheads, while the UK, reliant on US technology, has about 250.

Past French leaders hinted at protecting Europe, but with concerns over US reliability, Germany and others are now open to the idea. Possible measures include stationing nuclear bombers in allied countries or increasing patrols. Some advocate explicitly redefining France's nuclear doctrine to include European allies, while others argue strategic ambiguity remains a key deterrent.

## **13. UK helps in US-Ukraine ceasefire deal** ([BBC, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

The UK played a crucial role in securing an agreement between Ukraine and the US on a proposed 30-day ceasefire with Russia. According to government sources, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer led a European diplomatic push to repair relations between Washington and Kyiv. National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell worked with US, German, and French officials to draft a proposal, which was later agreed upon by both Ukraine and the US.

The ceasefire plan includes a temporary halt to fighting, prisoner exchanges, the return of Ukrainian children taken by Russia, and the release of civilians. Following this breakthrough, the Trump administration reinstated military aid and intelligence-sharing with Ukraine, reversing its earlier suspension after a dispute between Trump and Zelensky.

With the agreement now in place, pressure is mounting on Russia to respond. The Kremlin is currently reviewing the proposal, and a potential phone call between Putin and Trump may take place soon. Meanwhile, Russian attacks on Ukraine have continued, with missile strikes killing civilians in Kryvyi Rih and Odessa.

Starmer is set to host a "coalition of the willing" call with world leaders to discuss peacekeeping efforts and prevent future Russian aggression. The UK government insists the ball is now in Russia's court, questioning whether Moscow will accept the ceasefire or continue its offensive.



**14. EU debates seizing Russian Assets to support Ukraine** ([Euro News, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

The European Parliament is discussing whether to confiscate €258 billion in frozen Russian assets held across the EU, primarily in Belgium's Euroclear. While €1.5 billion in interest has already been sent to Ukraine, member states remain divided on full asset seizure. France and Belgium argue it could be illegal and harm investor confidence, while Baltic states and Poland push for immediate confiscation. Some leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, suggest using the assets as leverage in future peace talks. The debate continues as EU institutions assess the legal and financial risks.

**15. Macron Rallies Europe to Back Ukraine Amid Ceasefire Talks** ([The Kyiv Independent, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

French President Emmanuel Macron has urged European and NATO leaders to develop credible security guarantees for Ukraine if a ceasefire is reached. Speaking at a Paris meeting with military chiefs from 34 nations, he emphasized Europe's need to support Ukraine and bolster its own defense, amid concerns over Trump's shifting stance on military aid.

Macron and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer are leading a "coalition of the willing" to enforce a truce. European defense ministers will meet in Paris on March 12 to discuss military support and rearmament. France plans to double its defense budget to €100 billion, while the EU has announced an €800 billion defense boost. Turkey has also positioned itself as a key security player, backing Ukraine's aerial and naval truce proposal.

**16. Russia escalating tensions with deployment of ballistic missiles in Belarus** ([The Jamestown Foundation, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

Russia plans to deploy Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Belarus by late 2025, further integrating Belarus into its military strategy. While Minsk lacks full details, Moscow will maintain operational control. The missiles, likely stationed near Russia's western border, could target NATO sites in Poland and Romania, raising security concerns. Alongside this, Russia is expanding Belarus's arsenal with additional Iskander-M systems. The move signals possible military escalation, prompting NATO and Ukraine to bolster defenses.

### **17. EU Extends Russian Sanctions After Hungary Compromise** ([Politico, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

The EU has renewed its sanctions on Russian oligarchs, military figures, and elites after securing a last-minute deal with Hungary, which had threatened to veto the entire framework. As part of the compromise, sanctions were lifted on four individuals: banker Vladimir Rashevsky, businesswoman Gulbakhor Ismailova, businessman Viatcheslav Kantor, and Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarov.

Hungary has repeatedly used its veto threat during sanction renewals, citing Donald Trump's ongoing ceasefire negotiations with Russia. However, EU officials remain firm that conditions are not yet met for lifting broader sanctions. The sanctions, which require unanimous approval from all 27 EU nations, are renewed every six months.

### **18. EU's plans against Russia** ([Politico, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))

The EU is set to launch a large-scale defense investment plan to strengthen its military, reduce reliance on the U.S., and support Ukraine. A draft of the White Paper on Defense highlights key priorities:

- **Boosting EU's Defense Industry:** Prioritizing local weapons production, easing defense financing, and streamlining investments.
- **Increasing Military Aid to Ukraine:** Supplying 1.5 million artillery shells, air defense systems, and training while integrating Ukraine into EU defense programs.
- **Reducing U.S. Dependence:** Addressing risks as America reconsiders its NATO commitments.
- **Enhancing EU Defense Cooperation:** Pushing for 35% joint defense spending and coordinated arms purchases.
- **Strategic Military Investments:** Focus on air/missile defense, artillery, drones, cyber warfare, AI, and military mobility.

The €1.5 billion European Defense Industry Programme will drive these efforts, ensuring NATO remains central while preparing the EU for independent action.

## **EUROPE-CHINA**

### **19. EU's Kallas warns trade wars benefit China ([CTV News, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))**

EU Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas has warned that trade wars between Western nations, such as U.S. tariffs on Canada and Europe, ultimately benefit China. Speaking at the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting in Canada, she urged higher defence spending to counter Russia's threats.

Kallas emphasized the need for deeper EU-Canada cooperation in economic security and military matters, including a potential defence partnership. She stressed NATO's strength depends on strong allies and warned that Russia remains a global security threat, particularly in the Arctic. With Russia spending 9% of its GDP on defence, she urged NATO allies to increase their defence budgets to deter future aggression.

## **EUROPE-INDIA**

### **20. India-EU FTA talks resume ([The Indian Express, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025](#))**

India and the European Union have begun the 10th round of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations in Brussels, with a deadline to finalize the pact by the end of the year. The discussions are taking place against the backdrop of a global tariff war triggered by the United States, India's evolving approach to import duties, and the EU's willingness to be more flexible on issues like carbon tax.

Both sides are aiming to expand trade, but key differences remain. The EU is pushing for deeper tariff cuts, particularly on wines, automobiles, and dairy products, while India is reluctant to fully open its markets. Indian textiles continue to face high tariffs in Europe, making them less competitive compared to exports from Bangladesh and Vietnam, which enjoy preferential treatment. Meanwhile, European businesses are seeking greater access to India's banking, legal, and financial services sectors.

In the automobile sector, the EU wants India to significantly reduce high import duties on fully built vehicles. India, however, has previously resisted such demands in trade deals with Japan and South Korea, and a possible compromise may involve allowing a limited number of European cars at lower tariffs. Another major point of contention is the EU's new Carbon

Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), or carbon tax, which India argues should exempt small and medium enterprises. The EU has shown some willingness to address these concerns following discussions at the Trade and Technology Council meeting.

With both sides showing flexibility on certain issues, experts believe this round of negotiations could lead to significant progress in finalizing the long-awaited trade agreement.





## About the Author

**Nomita Chandola** is a dedicated scholar in International Relations, with a strong academic foundation and a passion for understanding complex global issues. She recently earned her master's degree in International Relations from the University of Leeds, where she focused on modules such as global governance and climate security. Prior to this, she completed her bachelor's degree in Political Science with a minor in Economics from Kamla Nehru College, University of Delhi.

Currently, Nomita is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, where she delves into critical issues of strategic affairs and geopolitical dynamics. Her primary area of interest lies in South Asian studies, emphasizing security dynamics and their intersections with global politics. She aspires to pursue a PhD to further explore these themes. With a keen eye for policy analysis and research, Nomita aims to contribute meaningfully to the academic and policy discourse on international security and regional stability.



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