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GEOPOLITICS

Dr Eunsook Chung from the Sejong Institute in Seoul gives a strategic outlook on China's influence in the Indo-Pacific

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SPACE

"2026 – a pivotal year for ESA and Europe's space policy"
Interview with Pascal Legai, ESA, Paris

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CIVIL PROTECTION

Dr George Boustras from the University of Cyprus provides insights into the new EU firefighting hub in Cyprus

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EDITORIAL

The American President always wants to be on the winning side: regarding the war waged by Putin, Trump now hails Ukraine's military successes and is increasingly distancing himself from his "loser" buddy in the Kremlin. There was also a score to settle with Iran in the Middle East, yet Trump has failed in his attempt, undertaken jointly with Israel, to topple the mullah regime in just a few days. Moreover, the spineless US-Iran agreement of June 2026 represents an unqualified success for Tehran, which has regained a strategic foothold in global politics. In the Middle East today, the US appears to be part of the problem rather than the solution; it is unable to escape the influence of Beijing, which relies on Iran to secure its oil and gas supplies. As for Putin, whose Ukraine war appears to be turning decisively against him, we should ask ourselves the following question: how might a battered dictator try to regain the initiative? History provides the answer: usually through a war of aggression against a neighbour. NATO and the European Union would do well to prepare for such a scenario.



PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL
DIRECTOR HARTMUT BÜHL

European defence

No politics without symbols

(ENJ/hb) Germany and France are deepening their defence cooperation in a so-far unexplored field. "We are strengthening European deterrence. Starting this year, we will participate in a nuclear exercise of the French armed forces", declared the German Chancellor Friedrich Merz following the Franco-German Defence and Security Council held at Augustusburg Palace in Brühl, Germany, on 17 July 2026. A truly revolutionary stance for Germany, which until now has sworn exclusively by American deterrence.

The idea of opening a dialogue regarding the role of French nuclear deterrence for European partners was articulated by French President Emmanuel Macron on 2 March 2026 at Île Longue, the operational base for France's ballistic missile submarines. Nine EU Member States have already expressed interest in discussing this initiative. Furthermore, Berlin and Paris have established a high-level Franco-German steering group on nuclear issues, intended to serve as a bilateral framework for doctrinal dialogue and the coordination of strategic cooperation.

However, beyond the symbolism of greater European autonomy, are we really witnessing an evolution in French nuclear doctrine? It is worth recalling that every president since De Gaulle has emphasised the European dimension of French deterrence, while reserving the decision to use nuclear weapons exclusively for the French president. This stance has not changed under Macron, who reiterated in his speech that there would be "no sharing of the ultimate decision, nor of its planning or execution."

European News Journal examines this subject in the current edition.



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Discover the conversation our Editorial Director Hartmut Bühl held with Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schuman Foundation in Paris, on the topic of the "Europeanisation of the French nuclear deterrence".
[\(pp. 10-12\)](#)





Giuliani's comment

Europe's intelligence

by Jean-Dominique Giuliani,
Robert Schuman Foundation, Paris

The spectacular progress of artificial intelligence presents a challenge to everybody. Even Pope Leo XIV was moved to address it in his encyclical "Magnificat Humanity". Philosophers and public figures are debating the limits of this technology which can radically change life in society but also the economy, finance and armed conflict.

Europeans have chosen to regulate the use of digital platforms by stating that "what is banned in real life cannot be authorised on social media". The aim, of course, is to protect privacy, children, society and democracy itself, under attack from outside interference and disinformation, often for political or financial motives.

They are criticised for allegedly holding back progress and accused of slowing innovation.

The European Union and its Member States are governed by their constitutions and their laws, treaties and charters, focusing on respect for the human person, human rights and the principle of freedom of which they are a part. Prime consideration must therefore be given to non-discrimination, respect for minorities and the rule of law which is both strong and accepted.

Human beings cannot countenance being reduced to a collection of tradeable data, to consumers or targets for advertising. No more than they should fall victim to manipulation by lies and fake news.

Regulating the uses of social media to bring them into line with our laws is anything but regressive. On the contrary, it gives them the chance to develop without fear of being corrupted.

Europe, which possesses these technologies, but not yet the immense financial resources of the tech oligarchs, can invent its own models and must insist on making its regulation extra-territorial in the name of individual freedom and democracy.

More than intelligence and common sense, and regardless of its own interests, this is a duty and a message that Europe owes to the world.



Jean-Dominique Giuliani has been the President of the Robert Schuman Foundation since 2000.

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www.jd-giuliani.eu
www.robert-schuman.eu

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Professor Jäger from the University of Cologne describes how Trump's war against Iran is dividing American society and splitting the Republican Party, while a clear majority emerges that firmly opposes the president.

Are Trump's "wars for peace" dividing American society?



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By Professor Dr Thomas Jäger, Chair of International Relations and Foreign Policy, Cologne University, Cologne

President Trump had consistently criticised his predecessors' policies in the Middle East. He claimed that Bush had waged a foolish war against Iraq and that Obama had negotiated a very bad deal with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA). Trump then withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 during his first term. It was considered unlikely that he himself would start a war in the Middle East, at least until 28 February 2026. But following the military strikes carried out by the US military in June 2025, Trump decided in February 2026 to start a war intended to topple the regime in Iran through a decapitation strike. "Just like in Venezuela," he said repeatedly in the weeks that followed. But things turned out differently. Contrary to his hopes, the war against Iran was neither short nor successful. Rather, the US's entire military superiority over Iran was not enough to force the regime into "un-

conditional surrender" (as per Trump in March 2026).

Iran responded asymmetrically: using drones, it attacked the US in other countries in the region but also fired on targets outside American military bases. Above all, Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz. Trump had been warned about this, but he brushed it off because he believed in the Venezuela scenario. Now the Carter Doc-

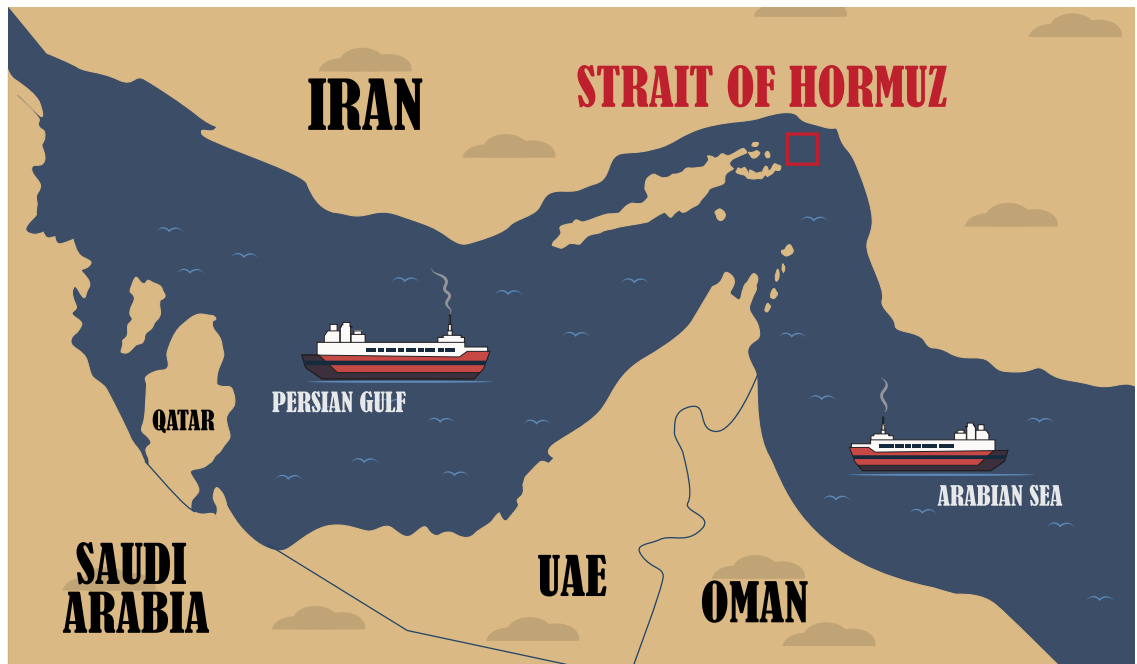
trine, – which had threatened since 1980 to open the Strait of Hormuz by force should anyone dare to close it, was exposed as a bluff. The US could not open the strait militarily as it would have required at least 100,000 troops in the Iranian coastal region and entailed a full-scale war against Iran for which Trump lacked support at home. That went far beyond his fantasies – and his followers' support.

A costly war with little support

In the US, the costs of the war were felt immediately. Gas prices skyrocketed at the pump. Inflation picked up, reaching 4.2 % in May 2026. The trend was set to continue unless the war ended. But how could the US extricate itself from this war without making Iran pay a heavy price? The pressure on Trump was intense from many directions. In June 2026, just under 37% of US citizens supported the war and those opposing it rose to 57%. There was not the usual rally in support of the commander-in-chief during a war. On the contrary, it became increasing-



Trump has always thrived politically on dividing the US.



The Strait of Hormuz has become a headache for the American president
© Shutterstock/avijit bouri

ly unpopular with even 25% of Republicans opposing it. Public opinion in the US was united on only one issue: 92% believed it was important for the war to end quickly.

Given the deep divisions in the country Trump could not have expected to receive broad-based support. Yet this strong opposition is remarkable.

Diverging opinions among Republicans

It is also noteworthy how deeply divided the Republicans became over this issue. Even within the MAGA movement, opinions diverged sharply. On the one hand, there were highly influential figures (Tucker Carlson, Megyn Kelly, Joe Rogan) who believed the war was wrong from the start. Trump had promised not to wage wars. They claimed that there were no US interests at stake and that Trump was waging the war for Israel, not for the US. Here, isolationism and antisemitism came together to reinforce a trend that had already been emerging in the MAGA world.

Opposing them were those who accused Trump of not waging the war hard enough. The view of many commentators, who had long advocated a war against Iran, was that the regime should be hit harder and defeated once and for all. This too further divided the

Republicans, as just after a few weeks, with the US far from achieving its initial objectives, the two sides agreed to a ceasefire. In the end, therefore, Trump had to disappoint all his critics. Despite his stated goal of regime change, he never seriously pursued it. He wanted the same success as in Venezuela, but he wanted it without risk.

Dividing American society

Trump continues to enjoy the support of two-thirds of Republicans, which is the core of the MAGA movement. They back whatever their leader does. 35% of US citizens still stand by him, even now. They secured victories for his candidates in the Republican primaries with not a single candidate running successfully against Trump in the primaries in 2026. Trump now completely dominates the Republican Party. But with this war and its economic consequences in the US, he has turned all other citizens even more strongly against him. In this respect, Trump's war against Iran is dividing American society and splitting the Republicans into three opposing blocs. At the same time, a clear majority is emerging that firmly opposes the president. November will show whether this is reflected in the election results. But no matter how it turns out, Trump has always thrived politically on dividing the US.

That will continue to be the case.

But it is becoming increasingly difficult for Trump to achieve political success from such divisions, as he no longer enjoys the support of a majority in any policy area. Even on immigration policy, where he had very high approval ratings in early 2025, only 45% still support him. That is the highest figure he has now achieved anywhere. Only one-third believe the US is heading in the right direction. Only 25% say they have benefited from Trump's presidency. It is quite possible that his presidency will effectively end in 2027 when the next Congress convenes. At that point, Trump is likely to lash out even more fiercely.

PROF DR THOMAS JÄGER



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The president of the Research Institute for Peace and Security (RIPS) in Tokyo emphasises the new dynamic of the NATO-Japan partnership at a time when the international rules-based order has been thrown off balance.

NATO and Japan are closer than ever. An observation from Tokyo

By our Asia correspondent Hideshi Tokuchi, Tokyo

Democracies in Europe and east Asia face common challenges. The international order built on the principle of the rule of law was the prerequisite for their security and prosperity, but it is under serious pressure. While authoritarian revisionist countries such as Russia and China are contesting it from outside, the United States, its longtime champion, is disrupting it from inside.

An international order out of balance

While Europe's immediate concern is the Russian aggression on Ukraine, east Asia's challenge is China's attempts to alter the status quo by force and coercion, particularly at sea (but not limited to it). Putin and Xi are strengthening their "no-limits" partnership, including in the war on Ukraine, as they have common interests in their objection to an international order that they believe protects US interests at their expense.

The shift of the US engagement with the world is serious. The rule of law was ensured internationally as the US had the power to de facto "enforce" it. That is why European and east Asian democracies allied with the US, which is now abandoning this role without understanding that alliances and partnerships are assets, not a burden. In addition, the American withdrawal from frameworks such as WHO and the Paris Climate Agreement makes the global agenda harder to address.

Converging interests

While European and east Asian countries are already aware of the need to pursue greater resilience and autonomy in this critical situation, they must work together harder to enhance their collective power as the traditional and

non-traditional challenges they face are too big for any one nation or region to bear alone. They are connected by oceans, so they must stay vigilant of the maritime expansion of the revisionist powers and take advantage of alignment with the US as a maritime power.

As much as the US has become volatile and less dependable, imagining an international order without it is not realistic. It is a maritime power with global reach, and its nuclear umbrella cannot be replaced. Staying away from the US is not a viable policy option. Instead, Europe and Asia must use their respective alliances with the US, i.e.



Both NATO and Japan must work more closely to jointly build enough power to restore the rules-based order.

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HIDESHII TOKUCHI



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the North Atlantic Alliance and the US alliances in the Asia-Pacific including the Japan-US one, to keep the US engaged in international security. This is the new rationale for cementing the partnership between NATO and Japan.

NATO-Japan partnership

The policy framework of the NATO-Japan partnership was established as an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) in 2014. The IPCP was revised twice and replaced by the Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) in 2023, defining strategic objectives for cooperation and 16 goals in four priority issues: cyber defence is top of "Emerging security issues" and maritime security of "Longstanding security issues." Emphasis on emergency management and interoperability in "Expansion of cooperative activities" shows the development of the partnership in operational terms. "Promotion of fundamental values," is increasingly important today as the US underrates shared values as the basis of its alliances.

The NATO-Japan partnership is growing in practical terms as was shown by the Japan-NATO dialogue on defence industrial cooperation and capacity held in Brussels (October 2025) to contribute to greater resilience and shared security. In January 2026, the 19th Japan-NATO High-Level Consultations and the 2nd Japan-NATO Cyber Dialogue were held. In April, NATO Permanent Representatives visited Japan, and in May Japan contributed \$14,658,000 to NATO's "Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List".

Capitalising on the current momentum, both NATO and Japan must work more closely to jointly build enough power to restore the rules-based order, which is not "empty globalist rhetoric" but a meaningful realist approach.



Dr Chung, of the Sejong Institute in Seoul, analyses China's strategy of countering western alliances by positioning itself as an alternative to these US-led partnerships.



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By Dr Eunsook Chung,
Sejong Institute, Seoul

China under President Xi Jinping is reshaping the Indo-Pacific through a dual-track policy; deepening economic and diplomatic engagement in the Global South to counter US-led alliances, while asserting maritime claims in the South China Sea and expressing its strong will to unify Taiwan.

China's multifold strategy

First, both globally and regionally, Beijing presents itself as an alternative to western-led institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by promoting its own

Global Development Initiative (2021), **Global Civilization Initiative** (2023), and **Global Governance Initiative** (2025). It provides developing economies with speedy financial support for infrastructure without the strings attached by western powers.

Second, despite intensive military buildups and expanded activities, China avoids rigid defence alliances. Instead, it uses strategic partnerships, the **Belt and Road Initiative** (BRI, 2013) and trade frameworks like the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** (RCEP, 2020) to build deep economic leverage.

Third, China rejects US-led Indo-Pacific framing like the Quad (Quadri-

lateral Security Dialogue: US, Japan, Australia, India, 2017) or phrases like "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" as containment. It backs the **New Asian Security Concept** (2014) and **Global Security Initiative** (2022), designed to lessen western military influence and display Beijing as the primary sponsor of regional security.

Southeast Asian nations stay vigilant

Nevertheless, China's strategy under Xi for the reshaping of the Indo-Pacific has faced challenges.

First, southeast Asian nations take diverse approaches to China, often hedging between Beijing and Washington. While highly dependent on China economically, states like the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia are pushing back against aggressive maritime intrusions in the South China Sea. The Philippines in particular perceives China as a direct threat, increasing its defence budget by 4.2 % in 2026.

Second, the US and its network of allies and partners like Australia, Japan, and South Korea continue to push back



Southeast Asian nations take diverse approaches to China, often hedging between Beijing and Washington.

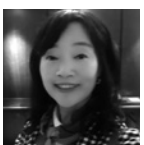
against China's rise through defence pacts and joint exercises. At the 2026 Shangri-La Dialogue (30 May), Pete Hegseth, US Secretary of War emphasised that "the Pacific has profound implications for US security and prosperity" and that "a Pacific dominated by any hegemon would unravel the regional balance of power."

Third, multi-polarity has been rising since the second Trump administration and its policies centered on greater burden-sharing have led regional powers like India and Japan to readjust their own security procurement and diplomatic networks. This ensures a fluid regional order where regional influence is constantly contested.

Outlook

To summarise, China's influence and regional ambitions continue to drive military modernisation efforts in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, skepticism of its model of development and way of cooperating has gradually emerged in the region. In this regard, Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae's announcement Hanoi on 2 May 2026 that she will be updating Japan's **Free and Open Indo-Pacific** policy in three key areas (building economic infrastructure, boosting economic growth, and enhancing economic security and supply chain) deserves great attention against a background of structural change in the international order.

DR EUNSOOK CHUNG



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Documentation

The updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)

On 2 May 2026, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi delivered a foreign policy speech announcing an update to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative.

The Prime Minister highlighted that ten years had passed since the FOIP was first proposed by Japan. She then stated that in the Indo-Pacific region – vital to the peace and stability of the future international community – Japan would play a more proactive role than ever in fulfilling its responsibilities and contributing to the construction of an international order based on freedom, openness, diversity, inclusion, and the rule of law.

She emphasised that, given the structural changes in the international order – such as intensifying geopolitical competition, rapid technological innovation, and the rise of the Global South – it is essential for countries in the region to achieve autonomy and resilience in the economic, social, and security spheres in order to shape their own futures within an increasingly complex net-

work of interdependence, which is indispensable for realising a FOIP.

The updated FOIP features three priority areas:

- Building economic infrastructure for the age of AI and data including by strengthening the supply of chain resilience for energy and critical materials.
- Co-creation of economic growth opportunities through public-private collaboration and rule sharing.
- Enhancing cooperation in the field of security to ensure regional peace and stability.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan



The Prime Minister's speech



As this region holds the key to the peace and stability of the future international community, I am renewing my determination to fulfill Japan's responsibilities, and indeed, to play an even more proactive role than ever before in building an international order based on freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law. At the same time, we must adapt to new realities, the structural change in the international order, such as intensifying geopolitical competition, accelerating technological innovation, and the rise of the Global South.

Sanae Takaichi



Professor Pașcu highlights the differing American and European perceptions of the Ukraine war, as well as the maximalist conditions Putin continues to set for ending a conflict that has long since reached his own country.



Left to right: European Council President António Costa, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the European Council meeting of 16–18 June 2026

© European Union, 2026

The Ukrainian conundrum

By our correspondent for eastern Europe, Professor Ioan Mircea Pașcu, former Defence Minister of Romania, Bucharest

The war in Ukraine is already longer than the first world war was, with no prospect of peace in sight.

Paradoxically, the more Russia loses its edge, the more dangerous it becomes (such as in the pressure on Belarus to join in). This is because Putin cannot accept anything other than “total victory” in the war he initiated to carve out his role in history, alongside the great tsars, who enlarged the already vast territories of Russia.

Russia’s maximalist conditions

One cannot say for sure whether Russia’s declaration of the total annihilation of Ukraine at the beginning of the “special operation” is the main obstacle stopping it from now accepting anything less in peace negotiations. What is certain is that Russia contin-

ues to formulate maximalist conditions, even though things are not going its way on the front. Indeed, what started as a faraway “special operation” has now turned into a brutal war at home, blasting the myth of complete protection of Russian citizens. Ukraine is hitting oil installations and logistical systems deep inside Russia, having



Paradoxically, the more Russia loses its edge, the more dangerous it becomes.

acquired its own long-range missiles and drones, and thus overcoming the veto attached to the western deliveries of such systems.

American and European perceptions

Strategically, there is a marked distinction between the European and American perceptions of this war: while Europeans perceive it as an existential threat, Americans seem to consider it an obstacle to unlocking the huge potential of the American-Russian bilateral relationship which somehow must be removed.

Of late, however, the common denominator on both European and American sides seems to be (at least for now) that Russia cannot be brought to the negotiating table unless compelled by force, hence the apparent American encouragement of Ukrainians to hit Russia hard. This has materialised in an operation just announced by President Zelenskyy, involving 40 days of bombardments.

Even if it is not clear whether this tactic will bring Russia to the negotiating

table, one should brace itself for tough, and perhaps long, negotiations, given the fact that Russian leadership cannot admit anything that would slightly resemble defeat, even if, for now, things are not going well for it on the front. (Some say this is because the highly centralised system created by Putin, with him at the top, appears to be gradually losing coherence as he becomes increasingly removed from reality.)

Ukraine's place is in the Union

Of course, under the circumstances, the path towards peace is still obscure, but it is increasingly clear that Ukraine's place is ultimately in the European Union. Admission negotiations have already started, even if their length might be prolonged by the recent opposition of the new Hungarian government. (A "collateral victim" might be Moldova, which is bureaucratically linked to Ukraine in these negotiations).

Although the final shape of Ukraine's borders cannot be predicted for now, what is certain is that, if admitted as a fully sovereign state, it will become one of the most important Member States, including militarily, representing a shield against future Russian adventurism.

IOAN MIRCEA PAȘCU



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Administration in Bucharest. He was Defence Minister of Romania from 2000-2004 and served as Vice-President of the European Parliament from 2014 to 2019.

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Publication

EUISS report on Ukraine

On 20 July 2026, the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) presented its new report on Ukraine to the media. Entitled **Strengthening Ukraine's capabilities: spending smarter, supporting more**, the report proposes ten concrete measures that require little or no new funding, focusing instead on making better use of existing instruments and opportunities, addressing systemic shortcomings, and bypassing obstacles that are impossible to remove.

The editor of the report, **Ondrej Dityrych**, EUISS Senior Analyst for Russia and the Eastern Neighbourhood stated: "Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Now is not the time for complacency. Europe should build on Ukraine's strengths and develop new ways to empower a partner whose success is directly linked to Europe's own security."

Recommendations:

- **Support joint ventures between European and Ukrainian defence companies** to accelerate Ukraine's integration into Europe's defence industrial base.
- **Launch an "integration accelerator"** that anchors Ukraine in the EU before membership through concrete integration milestones in areas like energy, digital policy, transport and defence-industrial cooperation, backed by phased participation in EU institutions.



EUISS' interactive report

- **Engage the five million Ukrainians living in the EU as a strategic constituency** for Ukraine's future by preparing for secure post-war elections and strengthening the diaspora's resilience to Russian interference.
- **Create a single digital "collector pipeline"** to manage reconstruction funding, improving transparency, coordination and the fair allocation of recovery resources across Ukraine.
- **Attract major international companies to Ukraine's reconstruction** through stronger investment incentives and better EU-backed de-risking mechanisms.
- **Establish an EU-Ukraine-Africa Anti-Scam Network** to expose and disrupt Russia's recruitment of foreign fighters.



Our Editorial Director discusses the new French nuclear strategy of “forward deterrence” with the President of the Robert Schuman Foundation in Paris.

The Europeanisation of French nuclear deterrence – a political symbol or a genuine step towards European strategic autonomy?

A conversation between Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schuman Foundation, and Hartmut Bühl, European News Journal's Editorial Director.

(ENJ, Hartmut Bühl) On 2 March 2026, the French President delivered a speech on France's nuclear deterrence at Île Longue, the operational base for France's ballistic missile submarines in the roadstead of Brest. Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed the robustness and effectiveness of France's deterrence posture in the current international context marked by a profound geopolitical rupture. And he presented a new stage in the French doctrine, referred to as “forward deterrence”. It bears a European dimension as it proposes to European partners to take part in nuclear exercises and may include the situational deployment of elements of France's strategic forces in the territory of allied nations. Furthermore, Macron highlighted the importance of mutual support between nuclear and conventional capabilities.

Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the respected Robert Schuman Foundation in Paris, reacted to this speech in an [editorial](#), describing Macron's announcements as a “significant step toward European autonomy”.

However, I was not convinced that there was a genuine shift in the French doctrine, which, in my view, had always de facto possessed a European dimension. I also wondered how this

forward deterrence, involving European partners, might be organised. I therefore invited Mr Giuliani to discuss the matter with me.

Mr Giuliani, I propose that we take as starting point for our conversation Macron's speech on the French nuclear deterrence. You were present when he delivered his speech at Île Longue. The president surprised his audience by announcing the gradual evolution of the French nuclear doctrine towards what he calls “dissuasion avancée” (forward deterrence), which takes into account the security interest of Europe, but – Macron was clear about this point – remains totally in the hands of the French president when it comes to decision-making.

So, Mr Giuliani, what are the new elements in Macron's vision and what are his motivations? Let me recall, that each president since Charles de Gaulle has stressed the European dimension of the French nuclear de-

terrence, which means that France's vital interests are linked to the European territory.

JEAN-DOMINIQUE GIULIANI: Let me first note that French deterrence predates De Gaulle. He formulated the theory within the context of the cold war with its two blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and France positioned between them, seeking to preserve its independence while standing in solidarity with its allies.

Today, what has changed, first and foremost, are the current geostrategic circumstances. We are no longer in the cold war era; we are in a period characterised by a revisionist, expansionist Russia whose preferred method – the Gerasimov doctrine – is cognitive warfare, societal manipulation, provocations, and so on. I believe this explains the inflection initiated by Macron.

You speak of an “inflection”...

J-D GIULIANI: ...yes, because, as you said, Macron did not announce a radical change of course regarding nuclear deterrence in general; France's nuclear force remains a powerful tool signaling to adversaries that any nuclear strike on their part would result in their own destruction.

Let us agree, then, to call Macron's stance an inflection rather than an abrupt shift, a move aimed at supporting allies among whom the Americans may not remain indefinitely. That, I believe, is the president's reasoning.

There is no doubt that nuclear deterrence remains necessary and that the American nuclear umbrella can no longer be taken for granted.



In this dangerous and uncertain world, you have to be feared if you want to be free.

Emmanuel Macron

“

What has changed since the early days of cold war deterrence is that today, our leaders talk to each other all the time.

Jean-Dominique Giuliani



“

Macron gives no nuclear guarantee for European partners in the strict sense of the term.

Hartmut Bühl

Jean-Dominique Giuliani (left) and Hartmut Bühl talking in the President's office at the Robert Schuman Foundation, Paris, 29 June 2026 © ENJ

J-D GIULIANI: What struck everybody was Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Putin sent in his little green men and immediately declared: "If you retaliate, I'll hit you with the bomb!"

And in Europe we haven't budged.

J-D GIULIANI: We did nothing because we were scared, and that deeply concerned military planners, who asked themselves: could this happen again, in Poland for instance, or the Baltic states?

Consequently, when Putin began threatening tactical nuclear strikes in 2022–2023, three French nuclear submarines demonstratively left the roadstead of Brest. That was a clear message to Putin: if you start something, we are ready. Macron emphasised in his speech at Île Longue: "In this dangerous and uncertain world, you have to be feared if you want to be free." And he added "...and to be feared, we must be powerful."

It was an unequivocal stance, and I am firmly convinced that French deterrence works – including for Europe. However, I wonder what Macron's new concept of forward deterrence would mean in practice? He was clear that, regarding the French nuclear force, "there will be no sharing of the

ultimate decision, nor of its planification, nor of its conduct". Consequently, there is no guarantee for the European partners in the strict sense of the term.

J-D GIULIANI: That is true, Macron argues that a rigid guarantee would not be wise as it would reduce the uncertainty of our adversaries.

Forward deterrence means three things: the first point is integrating the protection of European partners and the depth of the continent into the assessment of France's vital interests. The second point is targeted cooperation: allowing allied countries to participate in military exercises or temporarily deploying elements of the strategic nuclear force to partner countries. The third point is, indeed, maintaining French sovereignty over the deployment of the nuclear deterrent.

What the French doctrine expects is a complementarity between the armed forces in Europe. Common enemies should be dissuaded to attack the European territory by the nuclear forces of France and the United Kingdom, but also by strong conventional forces of the other European states.

Macron said: "For our nuclear deterrence to be strong, every dimension of our conventional capabilities must be strong."

That is what Macron calls "épaule-ment" (shouldering), which means mutual support between nuclear and conventional capacities.

J-D GIULIANI: Exactly, because we need both conventional and nuclear deterrence. That is where the real inflexion in the president's stance lies: the recognition of the importance of conventional military forces in Europe. The rearmament of Poland, the German brigade stationed in Lithuania, with a strength of 5,000 people, and the major rearmament effort currently underway across the continent create a conventional deterrent effect. That is what constitutes the "shouldering".

Mr Giuliani, we can agree that effective deterrence requires – in addition to a nuclear component – technologically advanced, deployable conventional forces capable of fighting below the nuclear threshold, thereby forming part of the overall deterrence posture.

However, I am not convinced by the proposal to temporarily deploy elements of the strategic air forces, which constitute one of the three components of French deterrence, to allied countries. Macron calls this an "archipelago of forces". To what end? There is no need to redeploy these

forces to forward positions, given the availability of a fleet of aerial refueling tankers and French airfields.

J-D GIULIANI: Yes, you are right. But I think European partners want to ensure France's involvement in their own security. And, just as with US troops in Europe, the best guarantee lies in stationing troops or assets on EU Member States' territory – bearing in mind that President Macron has deliberately opened the door to this possibility.

Isn't there another reason, cited by some, namely, that sharing nuclear deterrence and stationing forces on European soil outside France would also entail sharing the risk, so as to avoid being the sole target of an enemy strike? In other words, if Europeans wish to be protected by French nuclear deterrence, must they also share that risk?

J-D GIULIANI: No, I really think that idea has been abandoned. I did indeed hear that theory circulating in French military circles for a long time, but it is no longer current.

Forgive my critical stance, but do you think that dialogue and cooperation with European allies in the nuclear sphere, as outlined in Macron's vision, will bear fruit? To my mind, the most important outcome would be the establishment of mutual trust, so as to foster a spirit of joint action.

J-D GIULIANI: Dear friend, it is already working! Nine European countries¹ have so far responded positively to Macron's proposal, among them your country, Germany, which will even participate in a French nuclear exercise before the end of the year! Furthermore, Berlin and Paris have established a high-level Franco-German steering group on nuclear issues, intended to serve as a bilateral framework for doctrinal dialogue and the coordination of strategic cooperation.

This indeed shows that we have come a long way. When we think back to the time of the cold war, we remem-

ber that the United States and France possessed tactical nuclear weapons that were aimed at the territory of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which means German soil.

J-D GIULIANI: The president was clear on this point: France will not return to tactical weapons.

In this context, I remember the 1984 NATO Wintex exercise, in which I participated as part of the Federal Chancellor's staff; the aim was to simulate a mass concentration of Warsaw Pact tanks in the then-GDR, right along the border with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and ready to cross the border. NATO was determined to destroy these forces through the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl flatly rejected the use of nuclear weapons against targets on German soil. This caused a major stir within NATO. Kohl wanted a political decision regarding the future. With President Mitterrand, for example, he reached at least an agreement that the president would inform the chancellor in time if the use of French tactical nuclear weapons on German soil was being considered.

J-D GIULIANI: You see, what has changed since the early days of cold war deterrence is that today, our leaders talk to each other all the time. They meet very frequently, exchange views, and build close relationships.

So, the first step towards European autonomy is getting to know one another and understanding what we are doing. That's happening already, even if it is a bit slow. In the second step, when a crisis arises, such as the current situation involving the war in Ukraine or Trump's erratic behaviour, and so on, we see that European concertation works.

When Europeans deploy troops to Greenland, for, example, we know full well that the Germans might send one type of personnel, the French another, and the Norwegians and Danes yet another. So, if we enter in a confronting

nuclear situation with an enemy, the channels of cooperation between Europeans are already functioning.

However, I would like to emphasise that the British nuclear programme is not independent and relies heavily on American equipment. Under these circumstances, how could effective nuclear cooperation between the UK and France be envisaged?

J-D GIULIANI: Since the Saint-Malo declaration in 1998 and the Lancaster House treaties in 2010, the two nations have increased their cooperation including in nuclear matters. This is good news for European security! Do not forget that the best allies are the closest, because they share more common interests than with geographically distant allies.

Mr Giuliani, to conclude, you seem quite confident that Europe will progress in its strategic autonomy.

J-D GIULIANI: Europeans must reinforce every opportunity to discuss strategic issues in order to be able to react on their own in case of a European security crisis, that's the point for me.

The most important thing in these issues is confidence. We must be convinced we are able to defend ourselves and to protect our European societies against any threat. I am indeed confident we will take on the challenge!



The conversation was edited by ENJ's Senior Editor Nannette Cazaubon.

www.jd-giuliani.eu

www.robert-schuman.eu

¹ Germany, the United Kingdom, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden, Denmark and Norway.



We asked Dr Hans Christoph Atzpodien, Managing Director of the Federation of German Security and Defence Industries (BDSV) in Berlin, whether the complex legal framework of EDIP strengthens defence cooperation or whether, conversely, the associated additional bureaucracy ultimately risks stifling the very momentum that EDIP was intended to generate.

Read Dr Atzpodien's detailed analysis of the EDIP regulation in our **ENJ Policy Paper no.1/2026**

Will the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) live up to expectations? A look behind the scenes

Interview with Dr Hans Christoph Atzpodien, Managing Director of the Federation of German Security and Defence Industries (BDSV e.V.), Berlin

(ENJ/hb) The European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) is designed as a major EU initiative. At a geopolitically critical juncture, it aims to increase Europe's strategic autonomy by fostering enhanced defence cooperation, ramping up production capacities, and strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). The EDIP work programme for the 2025–2027 period allocates €1.5bn for targeted measures, including €300m for the Ukraine Support Instrument (USI).

Yet, how will the regulation's various provisions be monitored and applied in practice?

Dr Atzpodien, we know that you take a somewhat critical view of aspects of the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) regulation. But let us begin by asking you about the positive aspects of this major EU initiative.

HANS C. ATZPODIEN: EDIP was first mooted in 2024 together with EDIS, the European Defence Industrial Strategy. The EDIS paper published on 5 March 2024 definitely seemed like a good move, especially due to the fact that on page 25 it contained, for the first and only time so far, a clear state-



Illustration of drone production

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ment by the European Commission that the defence industry – insofar as it only produces “non-controversial” weapons – makes a positive contribution to Europe's sustainability, linking it with peace and security, similar to the terms of UN Resolution 70/1 of 2015 when setting out the famous 17 sustainability goals.

Beyond this personal observation, EDIP, in its adopted form, lays the groundwork for some useful incentives for more European armament cooperation, but they will produce their full effects only with more budgetary means under the new, upcoming ECF (European Competitiveness Fund) regime. This relates to common procurement as well as industrial reinforcement and supporting actions. Developing these kinds of tools and giving them the chance to be implemented is without doubt one of the benefits of EDIP.

Does this mean that you welcome the general approach of the EDIP?

HANS C. ATZPODIEN: To be quite clear, the Commission's intentions for EDIP are constructive and worth to be supported. It is meant to foster cooperation, ramp up production capacities and manage potential crises using intervention instruments, but only after highly sophisticated alignment negotiations between Member States and the Commission. It also aims to provide a much more precise picture of the state of Europe's defence industrial base in general. All this follows good intentions.

So, why are you concerned?

HANS C. ATZPODIEN: The problem I see is that EDIP will involve a huge burden of additional bureaucracy. Just one example generated by only one of the envisaged new measures: the set-

ting-up of a centralised catalogue of European defence products. Imagine how much effort it will take to ensure that such a catalogue is always up to date! On top of this, EDIP provides for further mapping and monitoring instruments which are meant to enable the Commission to detect supply crises before they arise, which will entail a lot of additional implementation costs.

Can we have a closer look at Article 10 on eligible actions funded under EDIP, which are subject to restrictions, such as: “the cost of components originating outside the Union and associated countries shall not be higher than 35 % of the estimated cost of the components of the end product.” It seems difficult to monitor or enforce these provisions.

HANS C. ATZPODIEN: The Commission's idea of securing more sourcing from European companies is a centre-piece of EDIS and EDIP. We support the overall strategic intention, as long as it leaves enough leeway for continuous production of existing products which may comprise a different mix of components, maybe with a higher number



Industry will only use instruments provided by EDIP if they contribute to a solid business case.

from outside the EU. Therefore, we see this percentage more as a programmatic target than as an immediately applicable rule.

Nevertheless, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted this target once again in her speech at the recent NATO Defence Industry Forum in Ankara. Following this, we would like to see the Commission implementing measures to help European suppliers to align under a regime that would lead to independence from strategic supply risks originating outside of Europe and NATO.

Let's take another example. Article 15 stipulates that “Member States may request the Commission to engage with them in a joint procurement (...) whereby Member States may acquire, rent or lease fully the defence products jointly procured”. Or it can be requested that the Commission “act as a central purchasing body to procure defence products on behalf of, or in the name of, the interested Member States.”

Does this not constitute an infringement of the national sovereignty of the Member States?

HANS C. ATZPODIEN: No, I don't think so, as this kind of regime would only come into play at the request of Member States. But digging further into this mechanism, there is again a lot of bureaucracy involved. The Commission is required to invite other Member States to join the respective exercise. Further, it is required that an expert group has to be set up to conduct such negotiations, with one member from each of the participating nations. For me as an industry representative, however, this is of less concern than the hurdles fac-

ing industry participants. Industry will only use instruments provided by EDIP if they contribute to a solid business case. As we have already experienced with the European Defence Fund (EDF) it will only work if indirect costs are manageable and recoverable under the respective programmes.

How will your institution, the BSDV, handle this regulation, and what advice would you offer to make EDIP an effective instrument for better armament cooperation in Europe?

HANS C. ATZPODIEN: For the moment our member companies have shown only limited interest. Our focus now lies with the ECF, which will be a powerful tool for supporting armament cooperation under the future EU budget.

As the EU will be committed to further massively support Ukraine in its fight against aggression, cooperation with Ukraine and Ukrainian industry will be of great importance in the years to come. The Ukrainian defence industry combines a lot of practical experience with great agility in terms of technological innovation.

Unless practised under the conditions of war in Ukraine, the EU-based defence industry with its highly agile OEMs as well as SMEs and start-ups will have to jump through a lot of administrative hoops to get their products tested and accredited in the respective Member States. In this respect it is very important that the EU set up a reliable set of common rules and standards to ensure a new and guaranteed “level playing field” for all players.

EDIP Factsheet
(European Commission)

DR HANS C. ATZPODIEN



has been Managing Director of the BDSV since 2017. He previously held senior management

positions in the thyssenkrupp Group, including CEO of the thyssenkrupp Marine Systems division (now known as TKMS Group) from 2007 to 2012 and CEO of the thyssenkrupp Industrial Solutions business area with sales of €6bn from 2012 to 2015. In 2009, Dr Atzpodiën was one of the co-founders of the BDSV, of which he was a member of the board from its foundation until 2016, including one year as President of the association. Dr Atzpodiën is a trained lawyer and also holds an academic degree in political and administrative sciences.



Our US expert on space analyses the recent structural changes in the American space policy, as well as their impact on the European Space Agency (ESA) and European industry.

Successful Artemis II mission – and painful lessons for Europe

By Sinead O'Sullivan,
European News Journal's
US expert on space,
Boston



The crew of the Artemis II mission aboard the Orion spacecraft, 6 April 2026

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On 10 April 2026, an Orion capsule splashed down in the Pacific, returning four astronauts that had looped around the far side of the moon. The Artemis II mission was executed flawlessly, being the first crewed voyage beyond low Earth orbit since 1972, and the first to carry a woman and a person of colour into deep space. However, the programme behind it is anything but.

NASA has delayed the first crewed landing from Artemis III to Artemis IV, now targeted for 2028; Artemis III, rescheduled for 2027, becomes a low-Earth-orbit validation flight, testing docking with SpaceX and Blue Origin landers rather than touching the surface.

NASA's pausing of the Lunar Gateway

Moreso, there is a shift that is deeply structural beyond moving timelines. At its "Ignition" event on 24 March, NASA formally paused the Lunar Gateway in its current form, redirecting resources toward a surface base. The move blindsided ESA, Canada and Japan, all of whom had treated Gateway as the successor to their Space Station partnership – and it sits awkwardly with US law, since Congress earmarked roughly \$2.6bn for Gateway through FY2028.

This turn of events is crucially impor-

tant for European industry. ESA's stake runs through the European Service Module that powers Orion, as Airbus is contracted for six modules, with four delivered – and through Gateway hardware, above all the Lunar I-Hab built by Thales Alenia Space in Turin. With Gateway paused, these elements suddenly have no destination. NASA has further strained ties by claiming the two delivered habitation modules were corroded, a charge ESA and Thales dispute as a known issue they expect to fix this year. Other transatlantic ties, from the EnVision Venus mission to the LISA observatory, face the same budgetary turbulence.

Europe plunged into uncertainty

Now, Europe must hedge its bets. ESA is weighing whether its hardware can be repurposed for low Earth orbit, and at the ILA Berlin air show in June, ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher reset expectations, stating that the crew allocations announced in late 2025 no longer hold because they rested on the old mission architecture. The one concrete result so far is modest; NASA has named ESA's Luca Parmitano of Italy as the Artemis III pilot, but the mission will no longer land on the surface, and ESA calls this nomination only the first step in a still-open negotiation. A European

astronaut on the lunar surface remains Aschbacher's goal, but he has not yet found an American commitment.

The lesson is painful, as Europe bought its seat at the lunar table with hardware, not through its sovereign launch capabilities or its own landing system. But if Washington can abandon Gateway – the most multinational piece of Artemis – then partners may ask what else can change unilaterally. Elsewhere, China and Russia's International Lunar Research Station offers an alternative coalition. For defence planners the outlook herein is blurry; dependency on a US-led architecture carries increasing political risk, and optionality requires sovereign capability that does not yet exist in Europe.

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The Advisor to the Director General of the European Space Agency (ESA) speaks about European autonomy in space, the geostrategic importance of the moon, and Europe's plans to land on Mars by 2040.

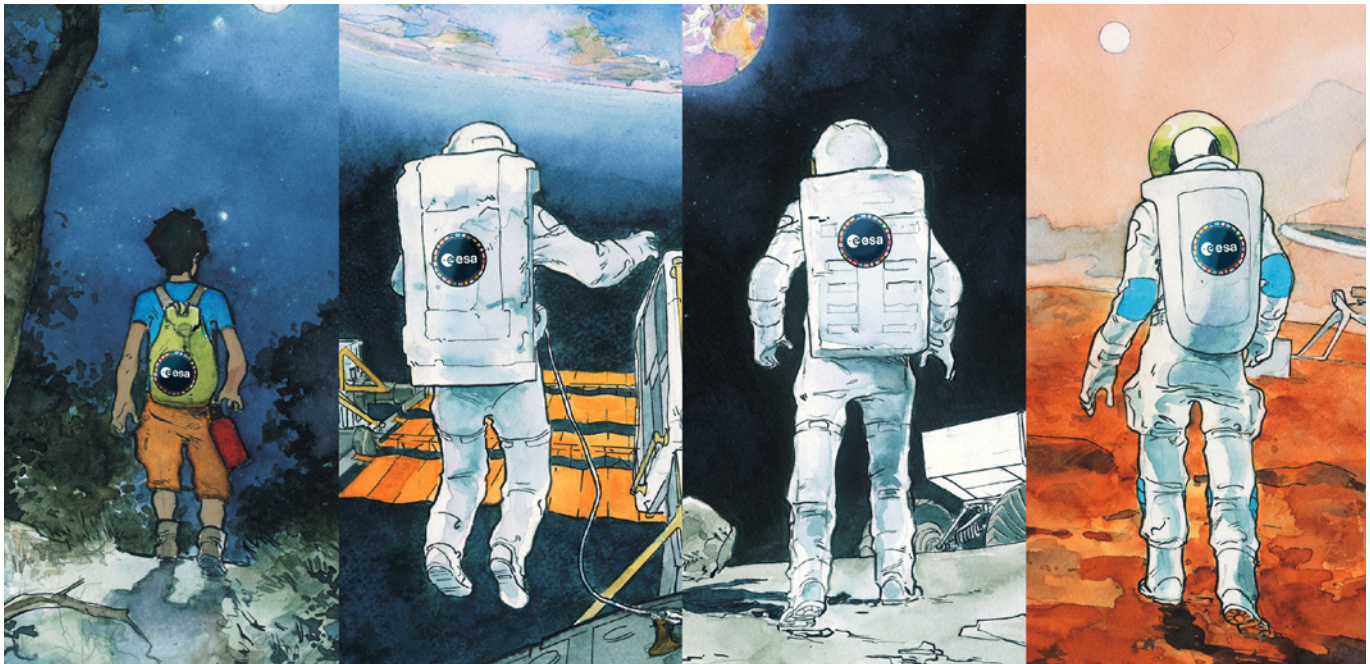


Illustration of ESA space explorations

© ESA-Olivier Pâques

2026 – a pivotal year for ESA and Europe's space policy

Interview with Pascal Legai, Advisor to the Director General of the European Space Agency (ESA), Paris

(ENJ/Hartmut Bühl) During my conversation with Pascal Legai at the European Space Agency (ESA) headquarters in Paris, we agreed that having abandoned its "pacifist" stance on space matters after more than six decades, Europe is finally ready to integrate the use of space into its security and defence policy. ESA, too, has made this shift, even though defence-related activities were long a taboo subject for some of the agency's member states, as highlighted by [ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher in an interview published in the European News Journal's](#) previous edition.

However, a revolution is also underway within the space sector itself, with the emergence of numerous private players, some of which compete with

state-led space activities. This could jeopardise Europe's autonomy in the areas of telecommunications, navigation, research and the use of space, including for defence. Europe must therefore reinvent itself, driven by a pioneering spirit and a willingness to take risks and invest in the future.

Mr Legai, on 25 November 2025, ESA's 23 member states approved a substantial budget of €22.3bn for the period 2026–2028, which provides great flexibility for the agency's work. However, does this allow ESA to realise the various projects announced by its Director General? What is your outlook for the European space sector?

PASCAL LEGAI: Above all, I foresee an acceleration of European autonomy by

a massive increase in public and private investment, and the transformation of space into a genuine critical infrastructure system rather than merely a technology sector. Several key areas are emerging regarding the outlook for the European space sector:

First, the agency plans a record 65 launches of missions and satellites in 2026, driven by the Ariane 6 heavy-lift launcher and Copernicus Earth observation satellites.

Second, there will be a strong focus on sovereignty in human spaceflight, as it is essential that Europe masters its own capabilities for accessing human spaceflight and low Earth orbit.

Third, I foresee major support for the space economy in terms of innovation and competitiveness vis-à-vis the United States, by stimulating private funding and developing disruptive technologies (defence, secure connectivity).

Finally, resilience through programmes such as Galileo and Copernicus will be strengthened, which is essential for security, the environment, and European autonomy.

You mentioned the Ariane 6 launches. The ESA Director for Space Transport announced that the agency intends to double them. Can you tell us more about ESA's launcher policy?

PASCAL LEGAI: ESA's launcher policy is centered on securing autonomous, resilient, and sovereign access to space for Europe using a fleet of European-built rockets, primarily the Ariane 6 and Vega-C. While Arianespace targets seven to eight flights in 2026, ESA's policies to bridge capacity and demand include several elements.

The **European Launcher Preference** strongly advocates for sovereign and institutional payloads to be given exclusively to European rockets whenever available. With the Expanding Domestic Capacity, ESA is studying methods to scale the Ariane 6 launch cadence to 12, 15, or even 20 flights per year to meet surging demand.

Moreover, with the **Commercial Space Transportation Element** and initiatives like the BOOST! programme and the European Launcher Challenge, ESA is commercialising its infrastructure and supporting private European operators and startups to foster a competitive new launch sector.

Finally, with **Future Ecosystems & Reusability**, ESA is heavily investing in the future of space transportation through programmes targeting green propulsion, reusable first stages, and orbital logistics, intending to transition to fully reusable, liquid-propulsion systems by 2030.

What about European flagship programmes and ESA's participation in the International Space Station (ISS)?

PASCAL LEGAI: Among our flagship programmes are Galileo Second Generation (G2); Europe's planetary defence mission Hera, which reached the Didymos binary asteroid system to survey the results of humanity's first asteroid deflection test; Moonlight, an ESA dedicated constellation of lunar satellites to provide robust communication and navigation services for the upcoming Artemis lunar surface missions, and the European environmen-



Ariane 6 liftoff from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana, 17 June 2026

© ESA/CNES/ArianespaceArianeGroup/Optique Vidéo du CSG-T. Leduc

tal flagship programmes such as the Copernicus Sentinel series (eg. Sentinel-3C) and collaborations such as the SMILE mission with China.

Regarding the ISS, Europe is actively planning its 2030 retirement. Rather than building a singular sovereign station, ESA has partnered with commercial space developers (Airbus, Vast).



I foresee an acceleration of European autonomy by a massive increase in public and private investment.

Will innovative projects such as the reusable civilian and military mini-navette Space Rider, or the Themis launcher remain purely European?

PASCAL LEGAI: Projects like Space Rider and Themis are fundamentally designed as European sovereign capabilities. They exist to guarantee autonomous European access to space and independent in-orbit operations,

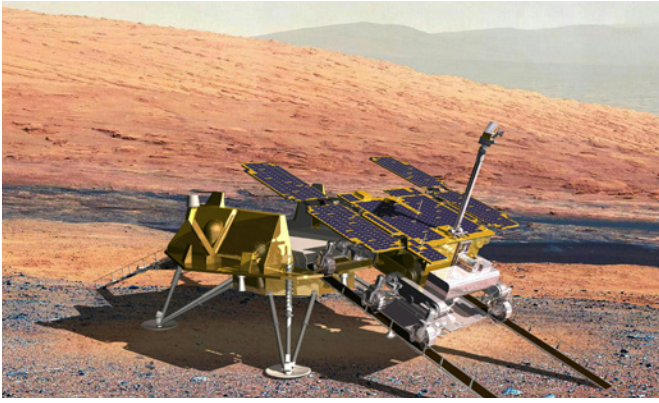
though they rely on partnerships with EU Member States' agencies (like CNES in France and DLR in Germany) and industry players (like ArianeGroup). Their core development and funding remain strictly European. As an example, the Themis Launcher programme focuses entirely on building a European technological ecosystem to compete with global integrated models, with low-altitude flight tests taking place at the Esrange Space Center in Sweden.

Let's look at the future of solar system exploration. First, will the Americans return to manned moon missions, or will the moon be left to the Chinese, who are making every effort to land a crew there by 2030?

PASCAL LEGAI: Americans announced and are preparing manned missions to the moon. Despite the massive investments in robotic and uncrewed architecture – and ongoing budget debates – NASA's Artemis programme is actively developing landers and staging infrastructure to put astronauts on the lunar surface, with goals for a crewed landing targeted between 2027 and 2028. That means the US will not leave the moon to China.

But why is the moon so important from a geostrategic perspective?

PASCAL LEGAI: The renewed geo-



Artist view of the landing platform of the ExoMars Rosalind Franklin mission on Mars.

© Airbus/ESA images



ESA's position on Mars exploration focuses on a short-term reliance on robotics combined with the long-term goal of sending European astronauts to Mars by 2040.

strategic focus on the moon – by both the United States and China – stems from several key factors.

First, both nations are targeting the same resource-rich region, with materials which can be used to sustain human life. Second, establishing a sustained, permanent presence on the moon creates a cheaper and safer test bed to learn how to survive on other planets before attempting crewed missions to Mars. Third, the race will ultimately dictate which nation establishes the infrastructure guidelines, technical standards, and foundational presence on the moon's surface. And finally, the US has formed the Artemis Accords, an agreement with over 60 countries for the peaceful use of space. Meanwhile, China is partnering with Russia and others to build the International Lunar Research Station.

Is there really a future for crewed missions? What is ESA's stance on Mars exploration? For instance, will it begin by establishing a permanent base on the moon, from which crewed expeditions to Mars could be launched, or will it prioritise more cost-effective robotic exploration?

PASCAL LEGAI: ESA's position on Mars exploration focuses on a hybrid approach: a short-term reliance on robotics combined with the long-term goal of sending European astronauts to Mars by 2040. ESA's Exploration Strategy focuses on **Robotics as the Precursor** such as the life-searching "Rosalind Franklin" rover (targeted for launch), and orbital missions that

Terrae Novae

Terrae Novae is ESA's human and robotic exploration programme. The main objectives are threefold: to create new opportunities in Earth orbit for a sustained European presence in the post-International Space Station (ISS) era, to enable the first European to explore the moon's surface by 2030 as a step towards sustainable lunar exploration in the 2030s, and to prepare for the goal of Europe being part of the first human mission to Mars.

characterise the Martian environment. The agency's overarching roadmap for the next decade is the **Terrae Novae 2030+** vision, which aims for the first European astronaut on the lunar surface before 2030, serving as a testing ground and stepping stone for the ultimate horizon goal of a human voyage to Mars by 2040.

As you rightly said, full-scale crewed Martian missions – and even Mars Sample Return campaigns – devour astronomical sums and require international cooperation, that's why the ESA Director General is advocating for increased European funding to secure sovereign, sustainable, and independent exploration capabilities.

Europe needs partners to develop and implement major projects. To conclude our conversation, could you give our readers a brief overview of such cooperation?

PASCAL LEGAI: ESA has prioritised international partnerships. In the area of global space exploration, collabo-

rations include major agreements with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for astronaut training and research using ISS facilities.

In the field of earth observation and climate action, we are closely collaborating with the European Commission on the Space for a Green Future accelerator, combining Earth observation data to support the European Green Deal and tackle climate change.

For international science missions, ESA has maintained strong transatlantic ties for the management of joint projects like the James Webb Space Telescope with NASA, and ongoing space science missions with Chinese partners like the SMILE satellite.

Finally, with regard to private and commercial sectors, ESA actively partners with venture capital firms and private banks to boost space technology investment across Europe.

Thank you, Mr Legai, for this insightful conversation.

PASCAL LEGAI



is the Senior Security Advisor to the Director General of ESA. A Major General in the

French Air and Space Force and an aeronautical engineer, he previously headed the European Union Satellite Centre (SatCen) in Madrid.

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George Boustras from the University of Cyprus provides insights into the newly established EU firefighting hub in Cyprus, created to address the increasingly long and intense forest fire seasons in Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Preparing for the next wildfire seasons – the new firefighting hub in Cyprus

By George Boustras, CERIDES, European University Cyprus, Nicosia

In 2025, we saw the year with the highest wildland fire losses recorded in the European Union. Nearly every Mediterranean country was affected by a major wildfire incident during the fire season, which is rapidly expanding: fires were recorded even in late November in Cyprus. Additionally, fires are becoming larger and more difficult to manage. Despite the increasing investment in prevention and the adoption of “new but old” strategies (eg. prescribed burning and grazing), a sustained investment on infrastructures is also required. With the establishment of #RescEU, the EU introduced a concerted effort in advancing shared aerial firefighting strategies through the acquisition of brand-new aerial means (see p. 20).



Firefighting in Cyprus, July 2025

© Shutterstock / world_by_savvas

Fostering regional cooperation

In her 2025 State of the Union speech, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the establishment of a regional aerial firefighting station in Cyprus (CRAFS). The aim of this hub, based at Paphos airport, is to strengthen the Union’s operational capacity to prevent and respond to large-scale wildfires with a particular focus on the

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, in full collaboration with the EU’s Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC).

Immediately after this declaration, the Ministerial Council of the Republic of Cyprus announced the creation of an interministerial committee tasked to manage the project. Cyprus invested time and money for CRAFS to be up and running before the start of the 2026 fire season.

Cyprus has a lot of experience in firefighting and regional cooperation. Through established bilateral partnerships, the country hosts Jordanian and Egyptian aerial resources and has been assisted on a number of occasions by Israeli and European Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) aerial means. It was Cyprus that first proposed a firefighting hub in 2022.

CYPRUS REGIONAL FIREFIGHTING STATION (CRAFS)

CRAFS aims to

- Serve as a strategic operational hub for aerial firefighting assets in the eastern Mediterranean.
- Enable faster deployment, pre-positioning and seasonal readiness of aircraft and specialised teams.
- Support joint training, exercises and knowledge exchange through the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network.
- Strengthen cooperation with the EU’s southern neighbourhood, acting as a platform for regional solidarity and shared preparedness.



2025 was the year with the highest wildland fire losses recorded in the European Union.

CRAFS – a shared EU capability

Cyprus will work with EU Member States and the European Commission to ensure that the hub is developed as a shared EU capability, grounded in inclusiveness, transparency and mutual benefit. CRAFS is expected to enhance cooperation between EU Member States and the MENA region countries, by providing, in its full deployment, a base that will accommodate their needs. In effect, CRAFS will be a catalyst for the dialogue of the future expansion of the UCPM.

3rd Euro-Mediterranean workshop on wildfires

During its EU Presidency, Cyprus hosted the 3rd Euro-Mediterranean high-level workshop on fire risks¹ in Paphos on 7–8 May 2026. The event, organised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) was an opportunity for delegations from civil protection departments from EU Member States, the MENA region, the League of Arab States, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) to experience first-hand the new firefighting hub. The official inauguration of CRAFS will take place at a later stage.

European News Journal will continue following the development of CRAFS.

DR GEORGE BOUSTRAS



is a professor in risk assessment and director of CERIDES (Excellence in Innovation and

Technology) at the European University Cyprus. He is the UNESCO Chair in Disaster Risk Reduction and Societal Safety in South Eastern Mediterranean.

© private

¹European News Journal reported on the 2nd Euro-Mediterranean wildfire workshop in Barcelona (November 2025) in its last edition.

Documentation

RescEU at a glance

(ENJ/nc) Established in 2019 by the European Commission, rescEU complements the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

RescEU is a strategic reserve of European disaster response capabilities and stockpiles, fully funded by the EU and hosted at strategic locations across 22 Member States and participating states. rescEU reserves include aerial firefighting planes and helicopters, a medical evacuation aircraft, and specialised emergency medical teams.

RescEU wildfire fleet

To strengthen the EU's response to wildfires, the Commission is funding the standby availability of a firefighting fleet. Decisions regarding the deployment of these resources are made jointly by the Commission and the relevant Member States.

In the longer term, the European Commission has allocated significant financial resources for the acquisition of 12 new firefighting aircraft, to be based in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, and Greece, and 3 helicopters, to be based in

Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Romania. These aircraft will form the permanent „rescEU“ fleet. The first helicopter has already been delivered to Romania. Delivery of the first planes is scheduled for early 2028.

Pre-positioning of firefighting teams

The rescEU permanent fleet initiative complements other measures under the UCPM, notably the deployment of pre-positioned ground firefighting teams to ensure a rapid response in countries at risk of wildfires.

For the 2026 wildfire season, the European Commission has strategically pre-positioned a record 777 firefighters from 14 European countries in high-risk areas across Cyprus, Greece, Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal. At the same time, 22 firefighting aircraft and 5 helicopters from the EU fleet stand ready to assist countries facing critical situations.

Source: European Commission



The first helicopter of the rescEU fleet



European News Journal asked the President of the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) about upcoming challenges and the role of volunteers in civil protection.



A THW team on a search-and-rescue mission with a dog in front of a building destroyed following the earthquake in Venezuela

© Mareike Harms/THW

Modern disaster relief – the importance of involving society

Interview with Sabine Lackner, President of the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), Bonn

(ENJ/hb) Today, disaster preparedness faces challenges that are unprecedented in their complexity and dynamism. Climate change is creating extreme weather conditions that lead to fires and floods of unprecedented scale, and in the geopolitical power struggle, wars have once again become commonplace. Modern disaster preparedness involves coordinated planning and action by a wide range of state and civilian institutions, primarily encompassing civil defence, rescue services, and fire departments. While digitalisation and artificial intelligence, as well as state-of-the-art communication technologies, including satellite and drone reconnaissance, can increase efficiency in disaster relief, civil protection doesn't work without committed people.

Ms Lackner, you took office as President of THW in 2023 to adapt this previously highly successful institution to a new strategic and operational situation. What strategy are you pursuing, and where do you see the priorities in modernising THW?

SABINE LACKNER: The security situation in Europe has changed significantly, not least due to the war in Ukraine. For us, this implies that civil protection must be given greater priority. THW has been fulfilling its mission since 1950, but the range of threats has expanded, from hybrid warfare and cyber-attacks to widespread power outages.

With around 88,000 volunteers, we have a broad range and a strong basis, but we must expand our capabilities in a targeted way. To do so, we are



THW is deeply involved at the European level, particularly within the framework of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).



THW operational units are led at place through command centre vehicles equipped with state-of-the-art communications

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investing in the modernisation of our emergency response teams, replacing vehicles and technical equipment as well as modernising our training.

In terms of our duties, we are particularly strengthening our role in protecting critical infrastructure. Regarding emergency power supply, drinking water, bridge constructions or emergency shelters, THW is a key partner for all technical issues.

When I participate in conferences on disaster relief in the European Union, but also in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, I am, as a German journalist, repeatedly asked what success and efficiency THW is based on, and how it can work on a voluntary basis. So, what lies behind this “volunteerism” anchoring civil protection in society?

SABINE LACKNER: Volunteerism is at the heart of THW. Our volunteers bring not only enthusiasm and dedication, but often also highly specialised expertise and years of experience. To make sure everything runs efficiently in case of an emergency, our volunteer teams participate in regular training sessions and practical exercises, which improve their variety of skills.

Could you please give one or two examples?

SABINE LACKNER: One example is the flood disaster of 2021 in the Ahr valley, located between Koblenz and Cologne. In this case, our emergency response teams secured infrastructure, built temporary bridges, and assisted in securing drinking water supply under the most difficult conditions for weeks. All THW's specialised units were involved in this operation.

Another example is our response to international disasters, such as earthquakes, like the one in Turkey in 2023 or the recent one in Venezuela. Here, our specialised search and rescue teams demonstrated how important well-trained procedures and technical expertise are. The success of this kind of operation always depends on the combination of volunteerism, training, and modern equipment.

This leads me to the question of how you and your management team address challenging developments to critical infrastructure such as climate change and cyber threats. Is THW sufficiently resilient in terms of its configuration and equipment?

SABINE LACKNER: We work hard to further strengthen our resilience. Climate change and cyber threats are leading to more complex operational scenarios. That is why we are investing in preparedness and redundancy

(strategic duplication of critical components). For example, we are expanding our capabilities in emergency power supply, high-capacity pumps, logistics, and heavy equipment such as mobile cranes. At the same time, we are improving our operational awareness and visualisation in order to remain capable of acting even in the case of outages.

Where do investments need to be made to adapt to the new era?

SABINE LACKNER: We must organise THW so that it can take over vital functions of supply in the case of a critical infrastructure blackout. Therefore, we decided to invest in the expansion of our capabilities.

Another key topic for the future is the virtual operations support team, a newly established unit which researches, analyses, and maps specific information on events using digital tools. They supported us during the 2024 men's European Football Championship, for example.

Do you select your equipment, such as vehicles, generators, or protective clothing, or is that choice determined by others? Furthermore, are there any recommendations or requirements from Brussels regarding procurement?



Sabine Lackner and
Hartmut Bühl in
Bonn, July 2026

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SABINE LACKNER: Our procurements are based on the specific requirements of THW and they are carried out in close cooperation with the procurement office of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

There are no specific EU regulations for civil protection. However, we consistently prioritise sustainability, for example by ensuring that new vehicles can also run on climate-friendly fuels such as hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO).

Allow me to ask one last question regarding THW's training activities abroad. What is the basis of Germany's policy in that field and in which countries is THW involved in helping to develop disaster management procedures?

SABINE LACKNER: THW is deeply involved at the European level, particularly within the framework of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). Among other things, we lead training courses for international emer-

gency response teams. In addition, we assist partner countries in establishing civil protection structures, for example in Jordan, North Iraq, and Tunisia. The goal is to strengthen worldwide resilience and develop common standards.

Ms Lackner, thank you for this conversation. I wish you great success in your endeavors and wish THW continued success in its operations.

The interview was led by Hartmut Bühl



Preparing for a mission abroad



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