Issue №4: January – February 2026

UDO NATION

EEYES
EASTERN EUROPE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SPACE

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Think Tanks Essentials

ABOUT US

The International Charitable Foundation "UDONATION" is a young and ambitious organization that brings Ukrainians around the world together to drive systemic change. We initiate cooperation between representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora and Ukrainian youth to strengthen their capacities, expand access to knowledge and resources, and implement projects aimed at protecting and supporting every Ukrainian.

We strive to create a unified intellectual space for Ukrainian youth in Ukraine and abroad. It is a platform for exchanging ideas, knowledge, and experience—where new initiatives emerge and a shared vision for the future of Ukraine is shaped.

"In unity there is strength."
We believe that unity is the source of strength. Together, we are building a future in which every Ukrainian feels supported and has the opportunity to realize their full potential.

This project is implemented within the youth initiative EEYES – Eastern Europe Youth Empowerment Space. We sincerely thank our team and experts who actively contribute to our initiatives, as well as all partners whose support made this project possible.

The publication is supported by the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU of the Youth Council under the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

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In a rapidly changing world, think tanks have become key players in shaping international debates and strategies. They not only generate ideas but also define the direction of political decision-making and influence public opinion.

The magazine “ThinkTanks Essentials” was created to summarize and analyze the most important expert research, demonstrating how it shapes our understanding of the global order.

This publication is valuable for anyone seeking to navigate the increasingly complex landscape of international politics. It allows readers to track key trends and explore the arguments of leading experts who influence the decisions of governments and international organizations. For researchers and students, it serves as a convenient source of analytical insights and up-to-date case studies; for diplomats and policy experts, it is a tool for understanding global processes and anticipating possible scenarios; and for a broader audience, it offers an opportunity to look beyond news headlines and grasp the deeper context behind them.

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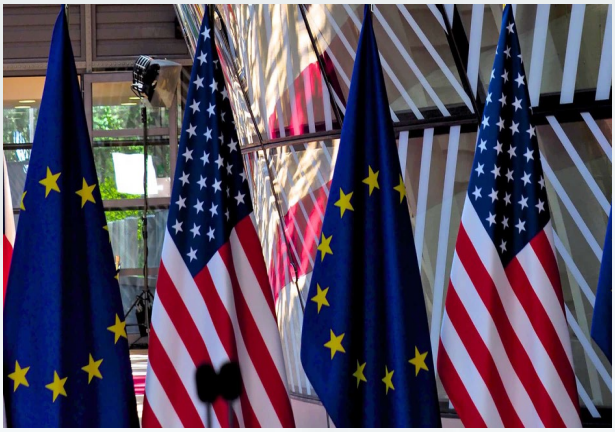
Overview of key trends in December 2025 and January 2026



December 2025 and January 2026 marked a period that saw a further shift in global politics toward power, a weakening of traditional norms of international order, and growing strategic tensions in Europe.

One of the key trends was the deepening crisis of the rule-based international order. The US military operation in Venezuela and Washington's use of force against Russian "shadow fleet" tankers in international waters demonstrated the United States' willingness to use coercion to achieve political and economic goals, even in legally controversial circumstances. The fall of Nicolas Maduro's regime was a symbolic blow to Russia's global position and highlighted the limitations of its resources for projecting influence beyond its own region.
At the same time, transatlantic tensions have escalated. The Donald Trump administration's rhetoric on Greenland has become a serious stress test for NATO and international law, undermining confidence in the US as a stable ally. European debates increasingly focused on the need for strategic autonomy, the search for realistic models to reduce dependence on Washington, and the formation of a more independent European security role.

In the field of European security, there has been a growing awareness of new regional challenges. The European Parliament has initiated a review of the EU's Arctic policy, recognizing the region as a strategic front due to Russia's militarization and China's growing presence. At the same time, discussions on European missile defence intensified, given the experience of the war in Ukraine and the reality of the ballistic threat from Russia. The development of the European Sky Shield Initiative and the idea of a multi-layered missile defence system became part of a broader course to strengthen Europe's defence capabilities.

An important trend has been the strengthening of assessments that Russia is moving into a phase of more extensive hybrid escalation. Analysts predict an increase in sabotage, disinformation campaigns, political interference in electoral processes, attacks on critical infrastructure, and demonstrative military provocations in Europe during 2026. At the same time, it is emphasized that the Russian economy, despite its short-term stability, is entering a phase of structural exhaustion, which increases the risk of more aggressive external behavior by the Kremlin.

Russia's war against Ukraine has finally established itself as a central factor in the transformation of European and global security. Four years of war have prompted a review of the West's strategy for supporting Ukraine, growing criticism of the "limited assistance" approach, and a realization that the conflict has long-term implications for the international order. Ukraine is increasingly seen not as a peripheral theater of war, but as a key element in the architecture of future European security.

The energy and economic dimensions have also taken on strategic importance. Events surrounding Venezuelan oil have confirmed that fossil fuels remain a powerful tool of geopolitical influence. At the same time, the EU has intensified discussions on diversifying energy supplies, developing the Black Sea region as a critical logistics and energy hub, and expanding transport corridors between Europe and Asia.

Overall, December 2025 and January 2026 marked a period of growing strategic uncertainty, a review of transatlantic relations, increased security risks for Europe, and the consolidation of the war in Ukraine as one of the key factors shaping the new international order.

Belgium is Right: Borrow… Get the Money… Don't Get Emotional

Bernard Siman, Egmont Institute, Belgium
04.12.2025

In this analytical commentary, the author argues in favor of the Belgian government's position that the politicized use of frozen Russian assets held by Euroclear is unacceptable without adequate collective guarantees from the EU and its allies. The author demonstrates that the current proposal of the European Union effectively shifts a disproportionate financial and legal risk to Belgium, creating a potential threat to both its national financial system and the stability of the eurozone and confidence in the international financial infrastructure as a whole.

In the event of the war ending or court rulings in Russia's favor, the issue of asset recovery could turn into a major liability crisis, with the risk of massive capital flight, increased borrowing costs, and undermining the EU's role as a predictable financial actor. The author considers the lack of "ironclad" guarantees to be a key institutional mistake.

As an alternative, a technically sound and legally secure mechanism is proposed: financing Ukraine through long-term EU borrowing, in particular through the issuance of bonds under the auspices of the European Investment Bank with collective guarantees from member states. This approach allows Ukraine's support to be combined with compliance with the rules of the international financial system and avoids dangerous precedents.

Economy, trade, finance; war in Ukraine

The European Parliament Compels the EU to Address Arctic Security

Gilles Dannel, Marie-Anne Coninx, Egmont Institute, Belgium
05.12.2025

On November 26, 2025, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the EU to radically revise its Arctic policy with a clear security focus. The key message is that the Arctic is no longer a remote region of cooperation, but has become a strategic front for European security. This is due to the rapid militarization of the region by Russia, in particular the deployment of nuclear capabilities under the Bastion doctrine, as well as the growing economic, technological, and scientific infrastructure presence of China, which positions itself as a "near-Arctic state."

The Bastion doctrine is a Russian naval strategy for protecting nuclear forces, which involves creating heavily militarised coastal zones (mainly in the Arctic) to cover strategic submarines with ballistic missiles and deter NATO.

The current EU Arctic policy for 2021 has been criticized for its incompatibility with the new geopolitical realities. The European Parliament emphasizes the lack of attention to hard security, weak awareness of the Arctic domain, insufficient protection of critical infrastructure, and slow strategic adaptation by the EU. Instead, it proposes the development of a new, operationally oriented strategy that combines security instruments, close coordination with NATO and the US, climate policy, and compliance with international law.

The Arctic is emerging as a test of the European Union's strategic maturity: if the EU wants to be a full-fledged geopolitical actor, it cannot allow others to determine the future of a region that is critical to energy security, access to strategic resources, and the stability of Europe's northern flank. In a broader context, Russia's war against Ukraine is seen as a catalyst for this rethinking, confirming that Russian aggression has systemic implications for the entire European security architecture, including the Arctic.

International security; strategic autonomy of the EU

What the New US National Security Strategy Really Signals for Europe

David Kettler, International Centre for Defense and Security (ICDS), Estonia
08.12.2025

The author considers the new US National Security Strategy (NSS) to be a qualitative change in the American approach to Europe, going far beyond a routine policy update. The main signal of the NSS is Washington's transition to a model of managed stabilization of the European security space in order to free up strategic resources for priority areas, primarily the Indo-Pacific region. In this logic, Europe is seen not as a co-creator of security, but as a region that must be stable enough not to distract American attention.

A central element of the strategy is a rethinking of Russia. Unlike previous doctrines, the NSS does not make deterrence a key policy framework, but instead emphasizes de-escalation, diplomacy, and the restoration of strategic stability. This approach contrasts sharply with the assessments of Northern European states, which view Russia as a long-term adversary that is adapting to protracted confrontation.

At the same time, the NSS sets out tougher expectations for European self-sufficiency. Europe must independently ensure deterrence, increase defense production, and invest in critical capabilities. At the same time, its influence on the political framework of security is narrowing, as the diplomatic parameters of a settlement with Russia remain under American control.

The strategy primarily presents Ukraine as a conflict that needs to be quickly stabilized, rather than as the foundation of future European security. The author warns that a premature settlement without real deterrence does not eliminate the threat, but only postpones the next stage of confrontation, with consequences that Europe will have to live with for decades.

World order; international security; transatlantic relations

Building Connectivity, Managing Risk: The EU's Geopolitical Role in the Black Sea

Cengiz Günay, Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Austria
10.12.2025

The authors analyze the transformation of the Black Sea region from a peripheral area into a key geopolitical hotspot for European security, energy, and trade following Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. The authors argue that the region is gaining strategic importance as a critical element in the diversification of EU energy routes and alternative logistics chains designed to reduce dependence on Russia.

The central theme is the development of the Middle Corridor, a multimodal transport network between China and Europe via Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Black Sea. Although transport volumes have increased sharply since 2022, the authors emphasize that infrastructure constraints (ports, railways, maritime route security) prevent the corridor from becoming a stable long-term alternative. The network of logistics and energy links, they conclude, is no longer a neutral economic category, but has become an instrument of geopolitical competition.

Special attention is paid to the Black Sea Submarine Cable project—an underwater energy and digital connection between the South Caucasus and the EU, which is seen as a test of Brussels' ability to implement "geopolitical infrastructure." The project combines the potential for energy diversification, digital resilience, and strategic autonomy, while creating political, security, and regulatory dilemmas.

In this analysis, Ukraine emerges as a key factor in the strategic shift in the region: it was the war that forced the EU to rethink the Black Sea as an area of security and critical infrastructure.

Pretence or Preparedness? Germany`s New Military Service

Felix Gasper, Prannavan Surendran, International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), Estonia
11.12.2025

The authors examine Germany's adoption of a new law on military service as a key element in the transformation of the Bundeswehr into "Europe's strongest conventional army." The current decision is analyzed in a broader historical context: from the reintroduction of compulsory service in 1956 as a deterrent during the Cold War, through its gradual reduction and suspension in 2011 amid perceived security, to the return of the debate on service after Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

The key argument is that the suspension of conscription proved to be strategically short-sighted. The focus on a compact professional army did not provide sufficient numbers, reserves, or sustained public support for defense. The new law does not immediately reinstate full compulsory service, but introduces a phased, conditional model: compulsory questioning and medical examination for men, financial incentives for volunteers, and the possibility of a rapid transition to compulsory service in the event of a threat or shortage of recruits.

The study details the political and legal controversies surrounding this model: the conflict between voluntariness and coercion, the questionable constitutionality of "lottery" selection, the different positions of political parties, and the growing but still uneven support in society. The authors conclude that the current steps are more of a compromise transitional solution than a definitive response to security challenges. Without a clear mechanism for partial compulsory service and rapid political consensus, Germany risks failing to achieve its combat readiness goals by 2029 and its ambition of completely transforming the Bundeswehr by 2035.

European security

Confronting the Russian Hydra: Continuity and Innovation in the Grey Zone

Ivan Klyshch, Marek Kohv, International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), Estonia
15.12.2025

This analytical study is devoted to a systematic analysis of Russian hybrid activities in Europe and their historical context, from the Bolshevik Cheka (Extraordinary Commission) to the modern special services of the Russian Federation. The central thesis is that current hybrid threats such as disinformation, sabotage, undermining critical infrastructure, and operations of influence are not a situational response by the Kremlin, but a logical continuation of the established strategic culture of the Russian intelligence community.

In the first part, the authors reveal in detail the so-called chekist mindset – a set of four key attitudes: a sense of moral and professional superiority, a conviction of self-innocence, deep paranoia with regard to external and internal enemies, and a tendency toward extremism that blurs the line between peace and war. It is this mental matrix that explains the willingness of Russian special services to act without regulatory restrictions and to view any opposition as an existential threat.

The second part demonstrates that modern Russian hybrid warfare is based on a Soviet template from the Cold War era: active measures, agent networks, sabotage, and deniable force.

The term «deniable force» is a tool of hybrid warfare that allows a state to use military force while officially claiming, «It wasn't us.»

At the same time, the innovation lies in combining classic methods with digital tools, information operations, and economic pressure. As a result, Russia is waging a constant «hybrid cold war» against Europe, the goal of which is to intimidate, demoralize societies, and deter support for Ukraine.

Ukraine appears in the study as the central, but not the only, target of Russia's hybrid strategy. The authors directly state that the intensification of sabotage and influence operations in Europe is aimed at weakening Western support for Ukraine and forcing European governments to self-restrain. Ukraine also figures as the main target of Russian information operations in Europe, confirming its role as a key field of confrontation between Russia and the West.

Hybrid threats

Shielding the Skies: European Ballistic Missile Defence

Finn-Niklas Brünner, International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), Estonia

17.12.2025

This analytical study addresses the issue of protecting Europe from the growing Russian ballistic missile threat in the context of the war in Ukraine and the gradual decline of the United States as the main security guarantor on the European continent. The starting point for the analysis is Russia's massive use of ballistic missiles against Ukraine, which demonstrated both the key role of missiles in modern warfare and the limited capabilities of missile defense in the event of intensive attacks.

The author examines Russia's missile arsenal in detail and links it to the doctrine of «active defense,» in which missiles are used as a tool of coercion, escalation dominance, and the threat of strikes against military and critical infrastructure. On this basis, two scenarios are outlined for NATO: a limited invasion with nuclear blackmail or a large-scale conflict with missile strikes on key Alliance nodes.

The author also critically assesses NATO BMD's architecture, which remains overly dependent on the US, has a limited number of interceptors, and is unable to protect large areas of Europe. In response, he proposes the gradual formation of a European BMD, in particular through the European Sky Shield Initiative, shared procurement, the development of the defense industry, and a combination of active and passive defensive measures.

Russia's war against Ukraine serves as the main evidence of the reality of the ballistic threat to Europe. The Ukrainian experience shows the limits of interception, the problem of BMD saturation, and the importance of combining air defense with strikes on launchers. The author directly recommends strengthening EU and NATO cooperation with Ukraine in the field of BMD, including joint analysis, training, and data exchange.

Germany: Friedrich Merz's political and strategic priorities

(fr. Allemagne : quelles orientations politiques et stratégiques sous Friedrich Merz ?)

Jacques-Pierre Gougeon, Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS), France

18.12.2025

An analytical review of Friedrich Merz's first six months as chancellor captures the transitional, contradictory state of German domestic and foreign policy. The main conclusion is that, despite its visible ambitions and more active international presence, Merz's government faces deep structural constraints that are holding back both economic reforms and Germany's strategic reorientation.

In domestic policy, the author notes a gap between expectations and results. Merz positioned himself as a reformer capable of reviving the economy and stopping the rise of the far-right AfD, but industrial decline, weak GDP growth, and job losses have undermined this image. The grand coalition with SDP significantly limits the chancellor's room for maneuver, creating a sense of political stagnation that the radical right is actively taking advantage of.

At the EU level, Merz demonstrates more pronounced leadership than his predecessor. The author emphasizes that Germany is increasingly acting as a coordinator of European positions not only in economic debates, but also on issues of security and the war in Ukraine. At the same time, in transatlantic relations, Merz seeks to maintain special relations with the US, viewing Germany as Washington's key partner in Europe.

The author notes a certain shift: while France took the initiative in European policy towards Ukraine at the beginning of the full-scale war, Germany is now increasingly taking on a leadership role. The summit on Ukraine held in Berlin and Germany's willingness to take financial responsibility, in particular guarantees for loans related to Russian assets, are symbolic.

Germany

How resilient is Russia's economy after four years of war?

Marek Dabrowski, Bruegel, EU-level think tank
18.12.2025

The study examines why Russia's economy has retained a degree of resilience nearly four years four years after the launch of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, despite the imposition of unprecedented Western sanctions. The author shows that the widely predicted economic collapse did not materialise: following a GDP contraction of 1.4% in 2022, Russia recorded sustainable growth in 2023–2024 (exceeding 4% annually), driven primarily by massive military spending, high energy revenues, and a boom in corporate lending.

The key conclusion is that the current macroeconomic and fiscal stability is short-term in nature. Financing the war increasingly relies on the National Wealth Fund, domestic borrowing, and large-scale quasi-fiscal operations conducted through state-owned banks and corporations, which obscure the true fiscal costs and generate risks for the financial system. Meanwhile the economy is facing intensifying structural challenges, including demographic decline, labour shortages, inflationary pressures, overheating in credit markets, and the displacement of civilian and social spending by defence priorities.

The author emphasises that while Russia retains the capacity to finance the war in the short run, its long-term economic prospects are steadily deteriorating due to sanctions, isolation from the West, dependence on energy exports, and a worsening investment climate. The war against Ukraine has become a central driver of Russia's transformation into a wartime mobilisation economy. The core strategic conclusion of study is that betting on Russia's rapid economic exhaustion is misguided since the effective containment must take into account Russia's medium-term resource capacity.

Economy, trade, finance; war in Ukraine

Russia is Losing – Time for Putin's 2026 Hybrid Escalation

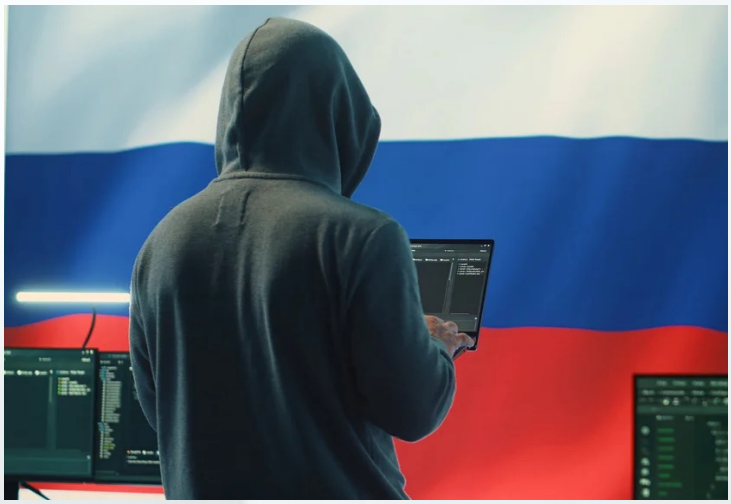
William Dixon, Maksym Beznosiuk, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), United Kingdom
19.12.2025

The authors argue that 2025 represented the most favourable moment for the Kremlin to exit the war, yet Vladimir Putin deliberately rejected this option. The strategy of Moscow rested on the expectation of a political fracture in the West - a US-imposed "peace" forced on Ukraine by a new American administration, fragmentation of European unity, and the consolidation of Russia's territorial gains. This calculation failed: neither Ukraine's nor Europe's positions softened.

Russia has lost most of its strategic objectives in the war, retaining only partial territorial control. Its economic resilience, international legitimacy, and internal regime stability have all deteriorated. As a result, Russia is entering a phase of heightened strategic instability: a weakened state becomes more aggressive, as escalation shifts from being a policy choice to a necessity for regime survival.

The authors project that 2026 will mark a year of systematic hybrid escalation, structured along three main lines. First, sabotage - attacks on Europe's defence industry, logistics, and weapons supply chains to Ukraine, aimed at causing delays, raising security costs, and exhausting allies from within. Second, subversion and disinformation, implying large-scale information operations and political interference in electoral processes across Europe and the United States to strengthen pro-Russian forces and erode support for sanctions. Third, coercion - routinised military demonstrations, violations of airspace and maritime boundaries, and nuclear blackmail as instruments of psychological pressure.

The drivers of this escalation are structural. Russia's economy is entering a fiscal spiral: surging military expenditure, declining energy revenues, depletion of sovereign wealth funds, and mounting off-budget liabilities are narrowing the space for conventional warfare. At the same time, Russia's conventional military capabilities are being depleted - losses of equipment and manpower, slow industrial regeneration, make large-scale offensive operations increasingly unrealistic. Against this backdrop, hybrid warfare emerges as the only remaining viable tool of escalation.



Hybrid threats; European security; war in Ukraine

Maduro's Fall: Russia's Strategic Defeat in a World Without Rules

Nona Mikhelidze, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Italy
06.01.2026

The author analyses the fall of Nicolás Maduro's regime as both a symbolic and strategic defeat for Russia in an increasingly unstable international environment, where the erosion of international law is gradually normalising the logic of "might makes right." The US strike against Venezuela, despite its inconsistency with international norms, accelerates the global shift toward power politics, paradoxically realising a worldview that Russia itself has actively promoted over recent decades.

The central argument is that the war against Ukraine has become a decisive strategic turning point for Moscow. Russia's failure to subjugate Ukraine, fracture Europe, or impose a new regional order has exhausted its military, economic, and diplomatic resources. This has significantly constrained the Kremlin's ability to support allies and project influence beyond its immediate region.

The study identifies a cascading pattern of Russian losses in other regions, including Syria, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Latin America, where Moscow is progressively relinquishing its role as a security guarantor and strategic patron. Maduro's fall fits squarely into this broader pattern, serving as evidence of the growing gap between Russia's global ambitions and its actual capabilities.

The paper also highlights the economic dimension of this defeat. A potential increase in oil production in Venezuela could further undermine Russia's energy-dependent economy, exacerbating its structural vulnerabilities. Ukraine emerges as the core of this entire transformation since the failure of Russia's war against Ukraine has exposed the limits of Russian power and reduced Moscow from a would-be global actor to a weakened regional state.

World order

Detention by the United States of Russian ships from the «shadow fleet»

(pl. Zatrzymanie statków rosyjskiej «floty cieni» przez USA)

Filip Bryjka, Anna Maria Diner, Rafał Tarnogórski, Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), Poland

08.01.2026

The analytical commentary examines the forceful operation of the United States for the detention of Russian tankers of the so-called "shadow fleet", which were used to circumvent American sanctions against Venezuela. The key conclusion is that Washington demonstrated readiness to apply military and law-enforcement instruments for the coercive enforcement of its own sanctions.

The authors reconstruct in detail the course of events. The United States pursued a Russian tanker that was illegally carrying oil and attempted to flee from the American maritime blockade. The tanker hastily re-registered under the Russian flag in order to appear "officially Russian" and avoid seizure. Despite this, American special units forcibly boarded the vessel in international waters between Iceland and Great Britain with the participation of American special forces and aviation. The parallel detention of another ship in the Caribbean Sea underscores the systematic, not one-off, character of US actions.

A separate emphasis is placed on legal aspects. Detention on the high seas calls into question the United States' argumentation from the position of international maritime law: the norms of the right of visit and hot pursuit in this case are formally not applicable, and Russia's possibilities to obtain legal protection are limited, in particular because of the United States' status outside the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The restrained political reaction of Moscow without forceful intervention is interpreted as a sign of unwillingness and limited capability for direct escalation with the United States. At the same time, the authors forecast a possible strengthening of Russian escorting of the "shadow fleet" and the risk of future incidents with other states.

World order

Who owns Greenland?

Professor Mark Weller, Chatham House, United Kingdom
09.01.2026

The author considers the «Greenland episode» as a litmus test for the international legal order and the resilience of the transatlantic alliance. The public rhetoric of Donald Trump and his circle, where international law is pushed to the background and force becomes an instrument of bargaining, indicates a global shift: from a rules-based system to an overt policy of force. However, it is precisely by the example of Greenland that the author shows how international law is capable of restraining aggressive ambitions, leveling the chances in the obvious asymmetry between the United States and Denmark.

Denmark's legal position is characterized as legitimate, yet the author emphasizes that the question of Greenland is not reduced solely to interstate sovereignty. Denmark's formal title is based on historical governance, the decision of the Permanent Court of International Justice of 1933, United Nations General Assembly resolutions and subsequent constitutional integration of the island into the Kingdom. At the same time, a key element of the modern legal status is the recognition of Greenland as a distinct unit of self-determination: the Acts on Self-Government of 1979 and 2009 transferred to it almost full internal autonomy and enshrined the right of the population to freely decide the question of independence by referendum. Thus, in this case international law simultaneously protects Denmark's territorial integrity and the political subjectivity of the Greenlandic people.

It is separately emphasized that the United States itself has repeatedly recognized the status of Greenland, which substantially weakens any American claims.

The author warns that the rhetoric of force undermines trust in the United States and risks politically isolating it among allies. As the optimal solution, a diplomatic resolution is proposed: a joint US–Denmark declaration, confirmation of Greenland's right to self-determination, and the expansion of security and economic cooperation with the participation of Greenland itself.

Transatlantic relations; European security

Navigating the Greenland Crisis: Europe's Imperfect but Viable Options

Tim Haesebrouck, Egmont Institute, Belgium
09.01.2026

The author considers the conflict over Greenland a serious stress-test for transatlantic security and a striking example of the narrowing of Europe's strategic room for manoeuvre amid an increasingly unpredictable U.S. policy. President Donald Trump's rhetoric about a possible revision of Greenland's status, reinforced by recent American forceful actions in Venezuela, calls into question entrenched assumptions about the reliability of alliance commitments within NATO and heightens anxiety in Europe.

The author argues that radical European responses — such as breaking with NATO, harsh economic escalation, or a rapid construction of an autonomous defence architecture — are currently either unrealistic or strategically harmful. Europe remains critically dependent on the United States for security, and plans to strengthen defence capabilities by 2030 appear overly optimistic.

The author therefore proposes three "imperfect but realistic" response strategies. First — soft balancing: coordinated diplomatic and institutional pressure to create political and legitimacy costs for the United States without direct confrontation. Second — a gradual reduction of dependence on Washington through flexible coalitions and a strengthening of the European pillar within NATO.

Third — an attempt to "anchor" the United States into shared institutional frameworks for managing Greenland's security and resources, which would at once grant Washington a role and restrict unilateral actions.

Transatlantic relations; European security

2026: Europe's year of bad choices

Kristi Raik, International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), Estonia
09.01.2026

The author describes the radical transformation of the international order, in which power definitely yields law. U.S. armed operation in Venezuela represents key evidence: even the states. Which for decades positioned themselves as the guardian of the rule-based order, currently openly acts based on logic of coercion. This creates a paradoxical situation for Europe, where the most complicated strategic decisions come from the west, not the east.

The author claims that such big states as the USA, China and Russia simultaneously are consolidating their spheres of influence, taking advantage of the transitional period of global instability. The USA focuses on the western hemisphere, China on Taiwan, and Russia is satisfied with the norm's destruction, which formerly restrained imperial ambitions. At the same time, for Moscow this is not a strategic advantage, since it was restrained merely by rules, but by the lack of resources, and the U.S. example only highlights Russia's lag in its ability to use force effectively.

Simultaneously, European fatigue from confrontation with Russia is expected to grow. A potential ceasefire in Ukraine creates the illusion of stability, but in fact would make Europe's security even more fragile. The voices for "normalisation" of relations with Russia will straighten, and Baltic states and Poland are again at risk of being marginalised as "excessively harsh". The author warns against extreme viewpoints, since Europe needs not the refusal from the dialogue itself, but a clear understanding of the goals, conditions and power positions, from which this dialogue is possible.

A separate part is dedicated to the erosion of the Transatlantic alliance. The U.S. threats about Greenland are radically different from the former crises: for the first time the US president openly encroaches on the territory of the ally. This undermines the foundation of NATO and raises an existential question for Europe, when ensuring the Alliance's safety at all cost grows to be more harmful for the European safety then maintaining a controlled distance from it.

Unfortunately, international law currently does not provide a protection, yet the full abandonment of it is also incorrect. The new order will arise after the period of chaos, and Europe's influence depends on the decisions that are going to be made in 2026.

International order; EU strategic autonomy

Venezuelan Oil: The Stakes and Implications of the Trump

(фр. Pétrole vénézuélien : les enjeux de l'opération Trump)

Francis Perrin, French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS), France

12.01.2026

The author believes that the U.S. military operation in Venezuela, which launched at the start of January, was mainly a strategic geoenergetical maneuver. Official statements about enhancement of security or fight against drug trafficking play a rather minor role here. The author's main conclusion claims that in Donald Trump's strategy oil continues to be the key power element. Control over Venezuelan resources is viewed as a powerful leverage,which allows pressure on global markets, restrains Geopolitical adversaries and undermines the position of Venezuela's regional allies.

The situation looks paradoxical: although Venezuela possesses one of the largest proven oil reserves (which are often estimated as high as astonishing 300 billion barrels), the country currently extracts only 0.8-1.0 billion barrels daily, which is far less than before. Specifically this decline creates an environment for the external "restart" of the field this time under the American protectorate. Washington's objective is purely pragmatic: to tighten its grip on commodity prices, displace China as the primary buyer of Venezuelan oil, sever energy lifelines to Cuba, and minimize the influence of Iran and its proxies in the region.

The actual mechanism of influence involves a naval blockade and control over export flows, whereby oil revenues are accumulated outside Venezuela and distributed under U.S. supervision. At the same time, the short-term impact on global oil markets remains constrained by a global supply surplus and other destabilizing factors, including the war in Ukraine and heightening tensions surrounding Iran.

Summarizing in a broader context, the author emphasizes that oil has not lost its status as a primary geopolitical instrument. The U.S. withdrawal from international environmental agreements and the relatively slow global energy transition during the Trump administration indicate that fossil fuels will remain a dominant factor in world politics for at least the medium term.

Economy, trade, finance; international order

Russia, Europe and the Danger of Strategic Reassurance

Joris Van Bladel, Egmont Institute, Belgium
13.01.2026

The author criticizes the dominance within European debates of two analytically flawed extremes in the perception of the Russian threat: alarmism and a false sense of security. Alarmism, while correctly identifying Russia as a threat, presents it in an overly dramatized form that undermines societal resilience and risks provoking political and social overstrain. Conversely, narratives of complacency are more dangerous, as they misdiagnose the very nature of the confrontation by reducing it to Russia's economic weakness or its military setbacks in Ukraine.

The author's central argument is that Russia does not pose a classic threat of a rapid invasion of Europe, but rather represents a long-term structural strategic challenge. This challenge cannot be measured through linear metrics such as GDP, population size, or defense budgets. Strategic power is interpreted as a multiplicative interaction of resources with political will, social cohesion, readiness for escalation, and the capacity to endure losses.

The author clearly distinguishes between two theaters of a single confrontation: Ukraine serves as the arena for a hot war of attrition, while Europe remains in a 'cold' theater of pressure. In the latter, Russia employs sabotage, information operations, intimidation, nuclear rhetoric, and strategic ambiguity. Nuclear threats are interpreted not as literal plans, but as a signaling tool designed to blur escalation thresholds and manipulate Western societies.

While Russia is systematically mobilizing its society for a protracted confrontation, Europe remains under an illusion of security. Europe's primary vulnerability, according to the author, lies not in military weakness, but in a lack of strategic clarity and readiness for a long-term standoff.

Enlargement and the EU Budget: Is the price to pay high? The case against fiscal alarmism

Ioannis Armakolas, Ioannis Alexandris, Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy, Greece
13.01.2026

The study challenges the widespread narrative of "fiscal alarmism" within the EU, according to which further enlargement of the European Union - particularly through the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkan countries - would allegedly impose an excessive budgetary burden on current member states. The authors demonstrate that these arguments are actively promoted by radical right-wing and Eurosceptic forces associating enlargement with losses for national budgets, agriculture, and social programmes, despite the weak empirical basis of such claims.

Based on an analysis of the proposals of the European Commission for the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework and the experience of previous enlargement waves, the authors demonstrate that even a large-scale enlargement (including Ukraine) would increase the EU budget only from approximately 1.12% to 1.23% of EU GDP - a level that is entirely manageable. Net costs for current member states would remain minimal, while the impact on new members would be transformative. According to the authors, far more serious are the alternative costs of non-enlargement, including the loss of economic benefits, weakened supply chains, reduced strategic autonomy, and growing geopolitical instability on the EU's periphery.

It is also separately emphasized that current budgetary shifts in the EU are driven not by enlargement, but by Russian invasion of Ukraine and uncertainty over long-term US security guarantees. Thus, enlargement should be seen not as a financial burden, but as an investment in stability, competitiveness, and security of Europe.

European integration

Europe after America: A Survival Guide for Moving on

Benedetta Morari, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Italy
13.01.2026

The current crisis in transatlantic relations represents a fundamental structural break rather than a temporary political deviation, and urges Europe to move beyond efforts to "restore the old deal" with the United States in favour of pursuing consistent strategic autonomy. Washington's threats regarding Greenland and the America First logic embedded in the new US National Security Strategy are viewed as symbols of a deeper transformation and of the gradual withdrawal of the United States from its role as the guarantor of European security and the liberal normative order.

The author employs the metaphor of leaving a toxic relationship — from denial and anger to awareness, independence, and ultimately flourishing. The nature of this "toxicity" lies in the infantilisation of Europe implying chronic dependence on the United States in defence, energy, and technology, which has fostered "learned helplessness" and systematic underinvestment in Europe's own capabilities. The responses of Europe to developments in Venezuela and its cautious approach toward Ukraine are presented by the author as the examples of appeasement aimed at preserving the relationship, even at the cost of normative consistency.

As an alternative, the author proposes a strategic reset of European policy built around three pillars: accelerated development of defence capabilities and the creation of an autonomous European security pillar; more assertive use of the EU's economic and regulatory power to protect strategic interests; and diversification of global partnerships beyond the US sphere of influence. At the same time, the institutional complexity of the EU should be transformed from a perceived weakness into a strategic advantage.

The objective is not to sever ties with the United States, but to forge a redefined partnership grounded in Europe's capacity to act from a position of strength.

Transatlantic relations; the strategic autonomy of the EU

How Trump is making China great again—and what it means for Europe

Timothy Garton Ash, Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), EU-level think tank
15.01.2026

The return of Donald Trump to power represents not merely a shift in US foreign policy but a structural transformation of the global order, accelerating the shift from a Western-centric system toward a competitive multipolar world. Ironically, Washington's confrontational approach toward China has reinforced Beijing's global standing, making it the primary beneficiary of this new era of global instability.

At the core of the authors' argument is the claim that the Trump administration acts not as a system guarantor but as a revisionist power, prioritising raw strength over the norms of international law. US military intervention in Venezuela, coercive diplomacy toward allies, trade protectionism, and open contempt for multilateral institutions have fostered a sense that rules no longer restrain power. In this environment, China appears not as an aggressor but as a rational and predictable actor, offering stability, economic reciprocity, and non-interference in domestic affairs.

Based on an extensive ECFR survey across 21 countries, the study highlights three fundamental shifts. First, a sharp decline in trust in the United States, particularly in Europe, where Trump is increasingly viewed not as an ally but as a risk factor. Second, a rise in positive or neutral attitudes toward China, especially in the Global South but also in parts of the EU. Third, a reassessment of the role of Europe, with Europe increasingly seen as a distinct geopolitical pole, even as Europeans themselves doubt their capacity for autonomous action.

The authors pay particular attention to an internal European paradox. On the one hand, European societies are scared of war, nuclear escalation, and Russian aggression. On the other hand, they are sceptical of the EU's ability to defend itself without the United States. This creates a psychological and political trap: Europe recognises the need for strategic autonomy while simultaneously fearing its practical implementation.

World order; transatlantic relations; EU strategic autonomy

Four Years On - Ten Lessons from Russia's War in Ukraine

Basil Gavalas, Greg Mills, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), United Kingdom
15.01.2026

The study frames Russia's war against Ukraine as a civilisational and systemic conflict that extends far beyond a bilateral confrontation. Russia's war against Ukraine has already lasted longer than the Soviet "great patriotic war," yet unlike that conflict, Russia's contemporary war lacks a legitimising myth, strategic clarity, and a compelling political sense. It persists not because it is inevitable, but because the Russian leadership refuses to acknowledge its own catastrophic mistake.

The central thesis is that war is a test of will, organisational capacity, and political imagination, rather than merely a contest of resources. Despite the asymmetry of forces, Ukraine has demonstrated resilience through motivation, adaptation (notably the large-scale use of drones), logistics, and societal mobilisation. The strategy of Russia, by contrast, has evolved from attempts at rapid breakthrough to a grinding war of annihilation that is slow, attritional, and extraordinarily brutal.

The authors strongly criticise the Western "Goldilocks strategy" - an approach that provides Ukraine with enough support to avoid defeat, but not enough to secure victory. According to the analysts, Western leaders' fear of escalation and reluctance to assume political risk have prolonged the war and increased its global costs.

The study also highlights the West's failure in the war of narratives: Russia continues to exert significant influence over global discourse, particularly in Africa and parts of the Global South, while the West has failed to convincingly frame Russia as the aggressor state.

A second Trump administration is presented as a source of transatlantic instability that undermines the principle of the indivisibility of European security. The US National Security Strategy no longer defines Russia as a threat, instead seeking "strategic stability" with the Kremlin, effectively marginalizing European security interests. This erodes the very logic of the post-war order, in which security was understood to be indivisible.

The war in Ukraine is rewriting the rules of the international order. Peace without justice, law, and credible guarantees will not end the conflict, but merely shift it into a new phase.

War in Ukraine; world order

Global Risks to the EU in 2026: What are the main conflict threats for Europe?

Veronica Anghel, Giuseppe Spatafora, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), EU-level think tank
20.01.2026

A study by the EUISS, based on a large-scale survey of 501 European experts, identifies key security risks for the EU in 2026 amid growing strategic instability and weakening transatlantic guarantees. The survey finds that the most likely and potentially devastating threat is not a direct military attack, but a hybrid strike on critical EU infrastructure – sabotage of energy systems, submarine cables, digital and transport networks – capable of paralysing the economy and undermining political stability.

Russia remains the central source of threats, but the risk lies not in open war with NATO, but in the gradual erosion of security through pressure, provocations and actions below the threshold of collective defence. Experts consider one of the most dangerous scenarios to be the end of the war in Ukraine on Moscow's terms, which would consolidate the results of the aggression, undermine European deterrence and create long-term instability on the EU's eastern flank. The risk of new Russian military action against non-NATO states is also considered high.

A separate systemic risk is the possible reduction or conditionality of US security guarantees. Experts believe that the weakening of the American role will have an effect on Europe comparable to nuclear escalation in terms of the scale of political shock. Non-European risks are also growing, in particular the threat of conflict over Taiwan and instability in the Middle East.

The study concludes that the EU must move from a reactive policy to actively shaping its own security environment – strengthening deterrence against Russia, protecting infrastructure, influencing negotiations on Ukraine and reducing critical dependence on the US.

European Security

How should the European Union respond to Donald Trump's trade attacks?

(фр. Quelles réponses de l'Union européenne face aux agressions commerciales de Donald Trump ?)

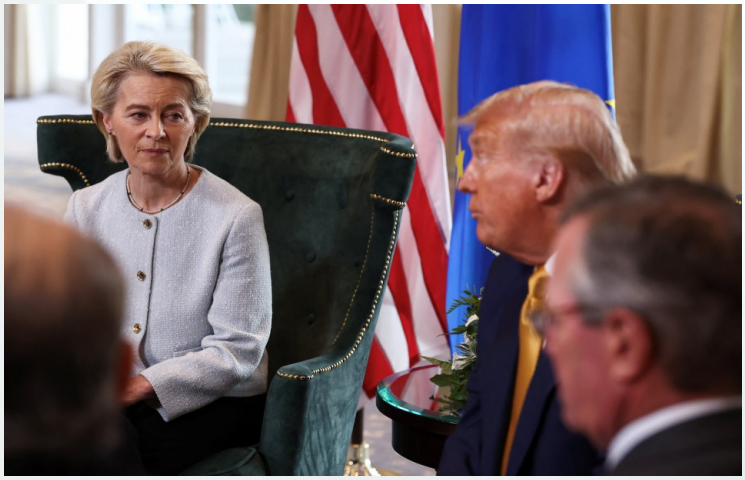
Pierre Jaillet, Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS), France

22.01.2026

The author analyzes the trade escalation between the US and the European Union in the context of Donald Trump's aggressive tariff policy and outlines the EU's dilemma between concessions and a tough response. Following new US threats to raise tariffs and the de facto political devaluation of the 2025 EU-US trade agreement, the European Union is faced with the need to review its economic deterrence strategy.

The central instrument of a potential response is the EU Anti-Coercion Instrument, adopted in 2023. It allows for the application of selective tariffs, restrictions on market access, investment blocks, and financial and regulatory measures against states that exert economic pressure. At the same time, the author emphasizes that the application of this mechanism is complicated procedurally and politically due to the need for a qualified majority of member states.

The author also considers other possible measures, such as trade defense mechanisms, anti-dumping instruments, and investment controls, but highlights a structural problem: the lack of unity among EU countries due to different economic interests and levels of dependence on the US market. An assessment of the economic impact shows that the tariffs already in place have slowed EU exports to the US and reduced economic growth by approximately 0.2% of GDP in 2025. An additional 10% increase in tariffs could cost Europe up to 0.5% of growth, with an uneven impact on national economies.



The study's final conclusion: the economic risk of a harsh response is real, but the political risk of concessions is much more dangerous, as it undermines confidence in the EU as an independent geo-economic actor and increases external pressure in the long term.

Transatlantic relations; economy, trade, finance

Dispatch From Davos: The Geopolitics of the New Realism

Michael Froman, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), United States
23.01.2026

The World Economic Forum in Davos, in the author's view, became a symbol of a deep transformation of the global order, in which multilateralism gives way to a tougher policy of force, and strategic uncertainty becomes the new norm. The central figure of the forum was Donald Trump, who effectively turned the event from a platform for dialogue into a demonstration of American political and economic dominance. His rhetoric underscored the end of the classical liberal international order while confirming the United States' desire to remain a key global center of influence.

Against this background, European and Canadian leaders, including Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney, outlined the need for a new strategy for "middle states": forming flexible coalitions, diversifying economic and security ties, and gradually reducing dependence on the United States. The approach of de-risking is increasingly used not only with respect to China but also in relations with Washington, through trade diversification, development of autonomous defense capabilities, and reform of international institutions.

At the same time, the study records a significant gap between political ambitions and real capabilities: the desire for strategic autonomy runs into economic, military, and domestic political constraints. The Greenland crisis became a telling example of how tactical signals of force can undermine trust within NATO and cause long-term damage to allied relations.

Attention to Ukraine, China, the Middle East, and climate challenges at the forum was secondary, while questions of force, influence, and geopolitical competition dominated. The author's overall conclusion is that the world is entering a phase of tougher competition, where adaptation, coalition-building, and the ability to make strategic decisions matter more than nostalgia for the old order.

World order

Focus Topic
Russian Organised Crime and Links to Hybrid War in Europe

Donald Bowser, GLOBSEC, Slovakia
December 9, 2025

One of the most dangerous illusions of the West lies in the belief that Russian organized crime is a criminal problem rather than a strategic threat. The GLOBSEC study shatters this illusion. It demonstrates that in modern Russia, crime is not a by-product of the system, but a functional element of it. Moreover, it is one of the key instruments of hybrid warfare against Europe.

Under Vladimir Putin's rule, there has been a transition from the autonomous criminality of the 1990s to a model of state co-optation of «violent entrepreneurs» – criminal groups, private paramilitary actors, semi-legal business networks, and cybercriminals. In other words, these structures no longer exist outside the state. They are integrated into the system of power as a source of funding, an instrument of pressure, a mechanism for circumventing sanctions, and a channel for operations with plausible deniability.

In the 1990s, Russian organized crime was chaotic, competitive, and often hostile to the state. In the 2000s, Putin reformatted its role: the state did not destroy crime, it brought it under control and turned it into a resource. Criminal networks were given the opportunity to «earn» money on condition of loyalty to the regime, financial contributions, and willingness to perform informal tasks.

This created a unique model: Russia uses the mafia as an off-budget instrument of state policy. Crime provides shadow financial flows, does the dirty work, carries out operations that the state formally denies, and at the same time fuels the system of corruption that maintains the political loyalty of the elites.

In this context, the Wagner Group appears not as an exception but as a prototype of a new form of state power. It combined military operations, resource exploitation, contraband schemes, disinformation, cyber operations, and the recruitment of proxy actors. It was an army that fought, earned money, and exerted influence – everything at once.

One of the strongest elements of the study is the analysis of the financial mechanisms of hybrid warfare. Russian criminal networks are involved in drug trafficking, human trade, tobacco and alcohol smuggling, financial fraud, money laundering, illegal trafficking of sanctioned goods, and cybercrime.

These revenues form what can be called the «black budget» of Russian hybrid policy. It is used to finance disinformation campaigns, interference in elections and political processes, bribery of agents of influence, sabotage and subversion, and operations against critical infrastructure.

This means that Russia's hybrid warfare is not only ideological or military, it is deeply criminalized. And fighting it without a financial and criminal dimension is a strategic mistake.

A separate aspect is the Russian cyber ecosystem, where the line between state hackers and criminal groups is deliberately blurred. Russian special services tolerate and encourage cybercriminals if they attack Western targets and are willing to carry out «patriotic» tasks.

Cybercrime becomes a force multiplier: it provides the ability to scale attacks, disguise state involvement, test vulnerabilities, conduct psychological operations, and generate revenue simultaneously. The result is a semi-official cyber army operating at the intersection of crime and geopolitics.

It is particularly important that Ukraine emerges in this study as a laboratory for countering hybrid threats. Its experience in combating proxy recruitment, sabotage, disinformation, and cognitive operations has direct practical value for Europe. Ukraine is a source of knowledge on how to counter hybrid warfare.

After 2022, Russia became even more reliant on criminal proxies, cyber networks, and semi-state actors to compensate for the loss of diplomatic and intelligence channels in Europe. Sabotage, arson, diversions, recruitment of marginalized individuals, and attacks on infrastructure are increasingly carried out through criminal or semi-criminal channels.

This is shaping a new reality: hybrid warfare is becoming increasingly criminalized, and crime is becoming increasingly politicized.

Research shows that future conflicts will look less and less like traditional warfare. They will be fought through criminal networks, hackers, shadow finance, disinformation, and proxy actors. Russia is already waging war in this way. And if Europe does not learn to respond to this model, it will remain vulnerable.

Summing up…

The end of 2025 and the beginning of 2026 were marked by the acceleration of processes that seemed unlikely just a few years ago but are now becoming the new norm. The international order is increasingly shifting from rules to force, and strategic coercion is becoming a common tool of state policy, both in Russia's actions and in the US's moves in Venezuela and the broader transatlantic context.

Russia's war against Ukraine has established itself as a central factor in the transformation of European security. Despite economic constraints and military losses, Moscow retains its capacity for prolonged confrontation and is moving into a phase of more extensive hybrid escalation. Sabotage, disinformation, influence operations, and attacks on critical infrastructure are increasingly becoming the main tools of pressure on Europe. The struggle is not only for territory, but also for narratives, economic leverage, social stability, and political will.

At the same time, Europe is gradually moving from a reactive policy to the formation of its own deterrence system. Discussions about missile defense, strategic autonomy, EU enlargement, and long-term security responsibilities indicate a slow but noticeable shift toward a more independent role.
2026 will be a year of strategic decisions for Europe and Ukraine. The choice between adaptation, self-restraint, or active formation of a new security architecture will determine the balance of power on the continent for decades to come.

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