

# our eye on the EU

## Monthly synopsis



In February 2026, Europe faced pivotal developments across migration, security, and economic policy. The European Parliament advanced the Pact on Migration and Asylum by expanding “safe country” and “safe third country” rules, fast-tracking asylum rejections based on nationality while human rights groups warn this risks overlooking specific protection needs and exacerbating the human cost at Europe’s borders. At the Munich Security Conference, US-European relations were tested as Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered a conciliatory tone but framed a vision rooted in colonial nostalgia, prompting EU leaders to call for strategic autonomy, stronger defense capacity, and moral clarity in global affairs. Simultaneously, debate over the digital euro highlighted tensions between democratizing public money, privacy protections, and financial sector influence, while the European Commission’s “Buy European” strategy sought to link industrial policy with climate goals, raising questions about trade compliance, inclusivity, and implementation risks.



# our eye on the EU

## Monthly synopsis

February revealed where Europe is heading and what's at stake. The European Parliament advanced "safe country" rules that could speed up asylum rejections and shift protection beyond EU borders, even as deaths persist at its frontiers.

At the Munich Security Conference, leaders faced a tougher geopolitical moment: a more openly imperial United States and a Europe still searching for its strategic and moral footing.

At the same time, debates on the digital euro, green industry, and "Buy European" policies exposed a deeper question: who really benefits from Europe's push for autonomy?





# MIGRATION

## Fortress Europe Grinds On: Parliament Expands “Safe Country” Rules

On 10 February, the European Parliament approved major reforms under the Pact on Migration and Asylum, expanding the EU’s “safe country of origin” and “safe third country” rules, allowing faster rejection of asylum claims from countries where 20% or fewer applicants are granted protection, including Egypt, Tunisia, India, and several EU candidate states.

Critics warn that these measures undermine the principle of individualized assessment, putting political dissidents, journalists, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and other vulnerable groups at heightened risk, while effectively externalizing Europe’s asylum responsibilities.

The reforms remove the requirement for a personal connection to “safe third countries,” opening the door to mass deportations, and come amid ongoing border tragedies, such as deadly incidents near Chios and off Libya, highlighting the human cost of a policy that prioritizes border fortification over protection and solidarity.

[Read More](#)

## Digital Euro: Is it about public money in the digital age?

Debate over the digital euro intensified in February 2026, exposing tensions between Europe’s goal of monetary sovereignty and concerns over privacy, democratic accountability, and financial sector influence.

While framed by the ECB and European Commission as a tool to strengthen strategic autonomy and reduce reliance on private payment networks, disagreements in the European Parliament over its design, whether as offline “digital cash” or a broader bank-based system, highlight the risk that the project may favor commercial banks over citizens.

Civil society advocates warn of potential surveillance and limited access, raising broader questions about whether the digital euro can truly democratize public money or will simply reproduce existing inequalities in Europe’s financial system.

[Read More](#)



# FLASH NEWS



# EU FROM THE INSIDE

## Munich Security Conference: Europe's Strategic Autonomy in an Age of American Revisionism

At the February 2026 Munich Security Conference, European leaders confronted a shifting transatlantic order as US foreign policy under the Trump administration pursued a revisionist, imperial vision of Western power, emphasizing unilateral interests and civilizational narratives rooted in colonial nostalgia.

While US Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered conciliatory rhetoric, his speech reinforced far-right ideologies, prompting EU leaders, including Kaja Kallas, Friedrich Merz, and Ursula von der Leyen, to stress the need for European strategic autonomy, stronger defense capabilities, and moral clarity.

Against the backdrop of Russia's war in Ukraine and US threats like the push for Greenland, the conference underscored urgent questions about Europe's ability to secure itself, uphold democratic values, and resist militarism while navigating a fraught and increasingly illiberal transatlantic relationship.

[Read More](#)

## "Buy European": Green Ambition or Industrial Protectionism?

In February 2026, the European Commission advanced its "Buy European" strategy to prioritise low-carbon, EU-made products in public procurement, aiming to support the green transition and strengthen domestic industrial capacity.

While hailed as a step toward strategic autonomy in green technologies, critics warn the plan could spark trade disputes, exclude smaller suppliers, and concentrate benefits among larger firms.

Linking environmental criteria to procurement marks a notable shift in EU industrial and climate policy, but questions remain over accountability, transparency, and compliance with international trade rules, leaving the initiative's practical impact uncertain despite its political and symbolic significance.

[Read More](#)



# ENVIRONMENT

# POLICY MONITORING CORNER



## Gender Equality and Reproductive Rights

- The European Commission is expanding support for reproductive healthcare access. It announced that Member States may use the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to support cross-border abortion services, following the European Citizens' Initiative "My Voice, My Choice", which gathered over one million signatures across all 27 Member States.

## Social Rights and Welfare

- EU Member States agreed to extend temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive. Approximately 4 million Ukrainian refugees in the EU currently benefit from residency rights; access to labor markets; healthcare and education. The program remains one of the largest coordinated social protection responses in EU history.

## Corporate Sustainability Reforms

- EU institutions began implementing simplifications to corporate sustainability reporting rules linked to the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, with the goal of reducing administrative burdens while maintaining transparency about environmental and social impacts. However, environmental and civil society organisations warn that simplifying the rules could reduce the amount of information companies must disclose, making it harder to monitor their environmental and social performance.

## Climate Policy

- EU discussions on the 2040 climate target under the European Climate Law aim for a 90% reduction in emissions. Civil society observers note that the target still relies heavily on Member States' voluntary measures and may not be sufficient without strong enforcement mechanisms.

## Youth

- EU policymakers are increasing efforts to involve young people in policy discussions on democracy, security and climate action. This month, the new Advisory Council on Youth began its 2026–2027 mandate, while the European Rural Youth Forward Conference and the EU4Youth study visit to Tromsø, European Youth Capital 2026, brought young people into direct discussions on democracy, security, and climate action.