EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Mutually assured defence

In light of international conflicts and threats, along with the United States' unreliability, European leaders are assessing the cracks in the EU's armour and how to address them. Top of the agenda: bolstering European security and defence capability.

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Security blanket

Helsingin Sanomat dives into the current state of global security, with NATO ministers gearing up for meetings in Brussels and security policymakers prepping for the Munich Security Conference. From Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine to Israel's bombardment of Gaza, there is a lot on the table. At Thursday's meeting of NATO defence ministers, the implementation of the new defence plans approved at the Vilnius Summit is to be discussed. However, another topic that will certainly be heavily covered in the corridors is the recent rhetoric from Donald Trump where he questioned NATO's fifth article by indicating that the United States would not necessarily support allies that do not invest the two percent NATO goal – taking it as far as encouraging Russia to attack countries that do not pay the agreed share. In Munich, the discussions are expected to be centred around support for Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East. Finland's newly elected president, Alexander Stubb, is about to make his debut on the international stage, though still in his capacity as a professor. With tensions rising and everyone looking out for their own interests, there is a worry that we are heading for a "lose-lose" situation globally. It is certainly the super week of security policy.

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Stand your ground

Times of Malta reports on European Parliament President Roberta Metsola's views regarding the recent developments in EU defence. The president is calling for increased defence capabilities, stressing that Europe needs to "get practical" about its strategic autonomy. Following up on former US President Donald Trump's comments where he boldly encouraged Russia to attack countries not meeting their NATO spending obligations, Metsola insisted that "Europe cannot waver, when we see what could happen across the Atlantic … Europe needs to stand strong." This echoes the statements of European Council President Charles Michel who remarked that Trump's threats "reemphasise the need for the EU to urgently further develop its strategic autonomy and invest in its defence. And to keep our Alliance strong". Metsola explained that Members of the European Parliament intend to advocate for the collective procurement and development of weaponry to be funded by the European Union through a specific budget, subject to parliamentary co-decision and oversight. However, Metsola emphasised that a European "defence union" should complement, rather than oppose, NATO. A spokesperson for Metsola later clarified that the constitutional neutrality of certain Member States, such as Malta, would continue to be respected under her proposals.

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Atombombe, ja bitte

Amidst swirling discussions of European security and defence, *Corriere* examines a long-taboo topic that is becoming more relevant as of late: the concept of European nuclear deterrents, or autonomous nuclear weapons. Both German SPD *Spitzenkandidatin* Katarina Barley MEP and EPP President Manfred Weber MEP have recently floated the subject, the latter implying that the French nuclear arsenal might be useful as an EU nuclear deterrent. French President Emmanuel Macron, for his part, addressed in January the potential European need for a nuclear option in light of recent geopolitical affairs and considering that France is now the only EU nuclear power. Though French nuclear doctrine has not changed, its phrasing allows for the protection of France's "vital interests", which could reasonably include all of the EU. German experts, however, doubt that France alone would deter Russia from an attack on another EU Member State, and whether Europe would feel safe under only France's protection – especially if someone like Marine Le Pen were to take power. Overall, the issue is not replacing US-NATO protection, but nonetheless strengthening Europe's defensive abilities.

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Pumping iron

On Monday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz urged European countries to focus on the mass production of military equipment while inaugurating a new weapons factory in northern Germany, writes *Expresso*. Scholz took the opportunity to address what he called an "urgent need" in light of recent events – not just Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but Vladimir Putin's "imperial ambitions" as well, warning that we are not in an era of peace and that we need the ability to deter aggression. Despite all of the support that the EU has been giving to Ukraine, the EU's production capacity is not sufficient to continue support while retaining its own defensive stockpiles. The chancellor further called for closer cooperation between Member States; for united, decades-long defensive planning; and for the investment in more defensive capability.

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