



Bulletin

February 2026 Edition

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and Isabela Cameron

Editors' Report

Welcome to the latest Bulletin from the European Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand (ESAANZ)!

For 2026; we hope to release three bulletin updates, to inform readers on the ever-changing political climate.

Our current Executive Committee:

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and Isabela Cameron

We look forward to sharing updates, events, and insights with you in each edition.

Europe in the News

European Response to International Strife

Despite widespread international disapproval, Donald Trump remained steadfast in his aspiration to “acquire” Greenland from Denmark, which he claims is vital to US national security. Trump has revealed plans to purchase Greenland through negotiations and [has threatened imposing tariffs against several European countries until an agreement has been made.](#)

He has been inconsistent with his statement of tactics to “acquire” Greenland, making it unclear if he will be imposing tariffs or possibly applying military pressure. [On the 22nd of January, during discussions with Mark Rutte, NATO Security General,](#) it was pointed out to Trump how significant security in the Arctic region is to the United States and its allies. Following this meeting [Trump seems to have changed his position, suggesting tariffs and military pressure may not be imposed,](#) although the future on this issue remains unclear.

Multiple other European countries, all with different political alignments have suggested or implemented military resistance. Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister, [Sergey Ryabkov has stated they will respond with military resistance](#) should the United States take military action against Greenland. [French military also arrived in Nuuk, Greenland, along with several other states,](#) who deployed a small number of contingents. This deployment involves Norway, Germany, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.

This tension between countries within NATO can create a danger of erosion of credibility with other allies. Although the threats of tariffs and military force from Trump have dropped, [the shattering of trust and confidentiality seem to have passed a point of no return.](#) Trust that each state sticks to their word in terms of protecting partnered countries, such as Denmark through NATO, is vital to the stability of these partnerships.

Trump’s claims that the US has not benefited from NATO can also be harmful to this alliance. [He declared:](#) “So what we have gotten out of NATO is nothing, except to protect Europe from the Soviet Union and now Russia. I mean, we’ve helped them for so many years. We’ve never gotten anything.” This statement is rather contradictory to [the economic, political, and military benefits the States have received.](#) One example being when NATO came to the US’ defence after the [September 11 attacks and Article 5 of the Treaty was activated for the first and only time.](#)

France’s strong reaction to Trump’s military threats has been doubled down on by President Emmanuel Macron. [As of 11 February, he has shown his intent to assert European power more. He claimed they need to start acting like a “power” to match the power moves made by other states](#) like China, Russia and the US.

This newfound strict reaction shows the doubt in alliance Trump's actions have caused, [Macron stating](#): "Today Europe faces a massive challenge, in a world of disorder... The US – which we thought would guarantee our security for ever – is no longer sure... Today, we Europeans are on our own. But we have each other. We are 450 million people. It's huge. For me [becoming a power] is the fulfilment of the European adventure... We came together to stop war; we came together to build a market. But we always forbade ourselves to think of power."

This view has been furthered by the German foreign minister, Johann Wadepful, stating that [defence spending should be increased in Europe, specifically France](#). The consensus of European self-sufficiency being of high importance is being accepted by more European states. [Urgency of this is becoming more apparent under the strain of the transatlantic relationship](#). This may signify a change in European strategy if this rhetoric continues, almost seeming more protectionist and military focused to match the tense political climate of today.

Ukraine and Russian Peace Talks

Since the outbreak of full-scale war in February 2022, [Ukraine and Russia have periodically sat down to negotiate](#), trying to find a way out of one of the bloodiest conflicts in Europe in generations. These talks—sometimes direct, sometimes mediated through third parties—have taken place amid ongoing fighting, and so far, they haven't produced a peace deal that would end the war. Instead, been used to keep a diplomatic channel open, even as the fighting continues.

A central focus in these negotiations has been how to stop the fighting. Various ceasefire proposals have been discussed, but [disagreements over terms and verification have repeatedly derailed progress](#). The most fundamental sticking point remains territorial control. Ukraine insists on restoring its full internationally recognized borders, while Russia continues to demand recognition of control over occupied areas, a point Ukraine has firmly rejected.

[Security guarantees have also featured prominently](#). Ukraine wants strong, long-term assurances that any ceasefire or settlement will be backed by credible international support. Russia, for its part, continues to reject arrangements involving Western troops or formal alliances on Ukrainian soil.

Against this backdrop, a series of recent talks in Abu Dhabi have become the focal point of the latest diplomatic push. In [late January and early February 2026](#), delegations from Ukraine, Russia, and the United States met in the United Arab Emirates in what were described as trilateral, U.S.-brokered discussions on parameters for ending the war. These were the most sustained negotiations among the three parties since the conflict began, and they were [officially welcomed as “constructive”](#) by Ukrainian leaders.

Despite that diplomatic goodwill, the Abu Dhabi meetings did not produce a ceasefire or breakthrough. Russia stuck to its position demanding control over more territory in eastern and southern Ukraine—a demand Ukraine has repeatedly rejected as

unacceptable. The most tangible outcome of the talks was an agreement to exchange prisoners of war, [with 314 POWs swapped \(157 from each side\)](#). This was the first such exchange in about five months, and it was welcomed as a small but concrete result amid continuing hostilities.

The talks also opened the door to extended diplomatic engagement. U.S. officials said further rounds of negotiations were expected, [with proposals floated for meetings to be held in Miami, United States next](#). There was even an agreement to re-establish high-level military-to-military communication channels between the U.S. and Russia—an attempt to reduce the risk of misunderstandings on the battlefield.

Humanitarian issues have been another area of limited progress. In addition to [prisoner swaps, negotiators have tried to address evacuations, displaced civilians, and protection of critical infrastructure](#). These agreements have generally been narrowed and temporary, but they underscore the fact that both sides see value in reducing suffering even as core political disputes fester.

Throughout all these diplomatic efforts, fighting has continued. Both sides have accused the other of undercutting talks by launching attacks [while negotiations are underway, reinforcing mistrust](#). Major escalations on the battlefield have frequently coincided with negotiation periods, further dimming hopes of an early breakthrough.

International actors have remained deeply involved. [Countries and organizations, especially Western states, continue to support Ukraine with military aid and sanctions pressure against Russia](#), while also pressing for de-escalation and respect for international law. The United States has taken a lead role in mediating the recent talks and is pushing for further negotiations in the coming weeks.

Looking ahead, the gap between Ukrainian and Russian positions remains wide. While the Abu Dhabi talks produced small, positive steps like the [prisoner exchange and renewed dialogue channels](#), they underlined just how far apart the two sides remain on the fundamental questions of territory and security. Most analysts see diplomacy as a long process, with any meaningful progress likely to be incremental and focused on technical or humanitarian issues rather than a comprehensive peace agreement soon.

EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement

The [EU-Mercosur agreement](#) is an agreement between the European Union and four Mercosur countries: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, which has been in the making for about 25 years. Earlier in the year, the European Council adopted the decision to the [authorise the signature](#) of the EU-Mercosur agreement, as well as for the interim Trade Agreement. The EU-Mercosur agreement is said to [create one of the largest free trade areas in the world](#) that would lead to a path of [“increasing its economic security, and reduce excessive dependencies”](#). Additionally, the [European Commission outlines this agreement](#) to increase bilateral trade and investment; create more stable and predictable rules for trade and investment; and to promote shared values and sustainable development. Overall, the signing of this agreement is intended

to be beneficial to both the European Union and the Mercosur countries, as outlined in by the European Commission, but not everyone has expressed their favour for it.

Consequently, opposition has already surfaced. Beginning in Belgium, protests from farmers had struck in late December/Early January, as reports showed that around [7,000 farmers](#) in Brussels set up blockaders on main roads and highways. Similarly, farmers arrived in tractors on the roads of France to [slow down traffic outside of famous landmarks, including the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe and House of Parliament](#). Generally, the protests from farmers are from rising concerns that the agreement [“undermines domestic markets”](#) and [“jeopardizes both agricultural livelihoods and food standards”](#). For example, farmers feared that [South American beef](#), that are not produced under European standards would flood their markets, as well as others products such as rice, sugar and honey. Although, most protests were said to be [peaceful, with only a few brief tensions](#), including [fires and fireworks](#).

Countries alongside France, such as Greece, Ireland, Poland and Hungary have shown opposition to this agreement, although Belgium is [likely to abstain](#). On the other hand, countries such as [Germany, Spain and the Nordic countries are in support of this deal](#).

The countries in support, believe that the agreement can [boost exports](#), as a comparison to Chinese competition and the tariffs in the United States. This shows the division in opinions on the agreement between the European countries.

Despite these protests, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen travelled to Paraguay on 17 January, alongside President of the European Council, Antonio Costa, to [sign the long-awaited partnership](#). This agreement becomes one of the largest FTAs in the world as it covers [31 countries with over 700 millions citizens](#).

It supports EU jobs and the European Commission’s strategy of diversification, allowing for [the EU to increase its economic security, and reduce excessive dependencies](#). Although, Ursula von der Leyen had acknowledged the concerns regarding the agreement, by stating that measures were taken in the agreement to ensure that [“sensitive agri-food products benefit from necessary production”](#). This indicates that the protests from countries opposing the agreement had an effect.

However, not long after the agreement was signed, [European lawmakers had gathered around the EU Parliament Headquarters](#) in France to request to the European Court of Justice to assess the agreement. On 21 January, the European Parliament voted to [refer the EU-Mercosur agreement to the European Court of Justice](#), to assess whether the agreement aligns with the [European Union’s norms](#). The vote number for this request showed that there were [334 in favour, 324 against and 11 abstentions](#). This process results in a delay in ratifying the agreement by a potential two years, which becomes an obstacle for those in support of this free trade agreement. The court’s review determines whether the EU Parliament can officially sign the deal into law.

Accordingly, the final vote for this agreement is likely to be postponed until the [European Court of Justice ruling](#), which is certain to leave supporters in disappointment. Despite the delay, Ursula von der Leyen stated that [“We will be ready when they are ready”](#), suggesting remaining hope and confidence in the agreement.

On the other hand, opinions on this delay differ from Latin Americans. The

Paraguayan [President Santiago Peña is growing impatient](#), as he has stated the already existing and developing agreements with other countries, to show their progress and persistence. Similarly, Brazil's President, Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva, stated that [the EU should decide now](#). Therefore, the EU-Mercosur agreement remains with the question of what is to happen for the future of both partners.

News from the Jean Monnet Centres' of Excellence

EU Centre of Excellence at RMIT

Author: Karin Chen

The European Union and Australia Trade Relations and Ambitious Negotiations ([EUATRAN](#)) Centre of Excellence at RMIT University is a three-year (2025–2027) research project co-funded by the European Union Erasmus+ Programme. Its key objective is to develop an international program of research and policy development which promotes deeper understanding of how a comprehensive trade agenda, such as that pursued by the EU and Australia, can contribute to a stronger security environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

In 2025, the Centre's first year of research focused on reviewing the history of EU Trade Policy from the 1950s onwards and investigating key existing bilateral agreements as well as critical moments of debate and development. Following an end-of-year two-day roundtable presenting our draft research for input from academia, government and civil society, the Centre's 2025 research outputs comprised six reports on the EU's free trade agreements with various parties since 2010 and a working paper on the history of EU trade policy since 1950 (accessible [here](#) via the dropdown menu 'Working Paper and Reports'). Representatives from the Centre were also pleased to attend the ESAANZ Conference in 2025 to present a paper on its research into the EU's free trade agreements and what the future may hold for the imminent agreement with Australia.

The Centre hosted the following public events in 2025:

- Seminar 1 *European Union Trade Policy: Evolving Priorities* (8 July 2025)
- Seminar 2 *Advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Institutions and Policy* (31 July 2025)
- [Seminar 3](#) *The European Union and World Trade Organization: Turbulent Times* (14 October 2025)
- [Redefining Education: Harnessing AI for Cognitive Growth](#) Lecture by Dr Kristina Kallas, the Estonian Minister of Education and Research (27 November 2025)

In 2026 as a free trade agreement seems likely to be finalised imminently, the EUATRAN Centre will look closely at EU–Australia trade relations, examining key difficulties in negotiations, disruptive factors and preconditions to achieve a comprehensive agreement. The Centre will continue to hold public seminars, exploring the EU and Australia's like-mindedness and discord in trade, the role of key interest groups in shaping negotiation outcomes and the current geo-political crisis.

If you would like to get in touch or receive updates from the Centre, please register via this [form](#).

Updates from the European Union Delegation in New Zealand

Authors: Lucy Ross and Lydia Dina Hubert

As 24 February this year marks four years since Russia's full-scale, illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU Delegation in New Zealand is stepping up its efforts to show support for Ukraine. On 15 February, members of the EU Delegation, the European embassies in Wellington, and the Ukrainian community took part in the Round the Bays run: "Going the Distance for Ukraine", wearing a T-shirt in support of the Ukrainian people. On 17 February, the EU Delegation co-hosted a roundtable on accountability in war with the Embassy of Ukraine in Australia, focusing on international justice and accountability for Ukraine. Ukrainian legal experts presented their ongoing efforts for the establishment of a special Tribunal and a Claims Commission to follow-up on the existing registry of damages. On 22 February, the EU and Member States Ambassadors will mark the fourth anniversary of the war both in Auckland and Wellington. The Delegation's work reinforces the robust expressions by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas at recent international events, including the World Economic Forum in Davos and the Munich Security Conference.

Following the highly successful first EU-New Zealand Business Summit in October 2025 in Auckland attended by Prime Minister Luxon, Hon Todd McClay, five other ministers and 500 other senior businesses leaders, the EU Delegation in New Zealand is building on its success. We will organise a major forum on cleantech and renewable energies in the spring.

On 4-5 February Director General of EU Budget Stephanie Riso and Senior Adviser Siegfried Ruhl completed their EU Borrowing and Lending Asia-Pacific tour in New Zealand where they were welcomed by EU Ambassador Lawrence Meredith and the EU Delegation team. She met with Trade Minister Todd McClay to discuss the EU and New Zealand's growing trade and investment opportunities. Director General Riso also met with key interlocutors from the banking, investment, and treasury sectors in both Auckland and Wellington to present them the resilience and transformation of the EU economy and the EU's borrowing and lending framework. This series of meetings takes place at a time of global shifts during which the European Union stands as a strong, stable, and reliable partner for its allies and for countries willing to invest in the EU.

Between 26 November and 10 December 2025, the EU Delegation in New Zealand took part in the United Nations "Orange the World" campaign, to raise awareness on violence against women and girls. The theme was digital violence. EU Ambassador to New Zealand H.E. Lawrence Meredith met with Hon. Nicola Grigg, Minister for Women to exchange on New Zealand and the EU's best practices and possibilities to counter online harassment, particularly against women. He also met with Reuben Davidson MP and Laura McClure MP to discuss their respective bills focused on ending online harassment and violence against women. The videos are available on our social media platforms.

In November, the EU conducted a Horizon Europe Roadshow across New Zealand to meet Horizon Europe Research Programme partners and to explore new areas of cooperation. Horizon Europe is the European Union's key funding programme for research and innovation, with a budget of €95.5 billion for the period of 2021-2027.

New Zealand is Horizon Europe's first global partner since 2023 and has demonstrated a high success rate with 21 successful projects since its association.

ESAANZ Events

On 18 February, the first 2026 ESAANZ executive board meeting has been held online to plan for events, activities and collaborations in the upcoming year.

The board has agreed to be represented by Dr Mathew Doidge at the annual EUSAAP conference which is taking place in Tokyo and is titled: The EU in the Age of Turbulence: Crises and Beyond (1 – 2 June 2026). Details can be found [here](#).

In 2026, the ESAANZ annual essay prize competition will run mid-year which means undergraduate and postgraduate students will be able to submit their university essays from semester 2 2025 and semester 1 2026. We will be circulating the details including the due dates on our website soon.

Recent publications by ESAANZ members and colleagues

A new issue of the Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies (ANZJES) - a Scopus and DOAJ indexed, Diamond Open Access journal – has been published. This is a Special Issue, edited by Alexandr Akimov and Milenko Petrovic, is an output of 2025 biannual conference of the Australasian Association for Euro-Asian Studies (formerly the Australasian Association for Communist and Post-Communist Studies). For details please see [here](#).

If you wish to have something included in a future ESAANZ bulletin, please contact

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If you wish to have anything promoted on the ESAANZ social media accounts, please contact May Simpson may.simpson@pg.canterbury.ac.nz