

#TRENDY THURSDAY

DEFENCE

Unprecedented €800 billion defence plan

Von der Leyen has announced a major EU defence spending following the US halt of its military aid to Ukraine. Up to €800 billion could be unlocked through the ReArm Europe plan aimed at increasing Member States' military expenditure out of national finance control limits. The plan involves activating the national 'escape clause' to allow the 27 EU countries to increase their defence spending while providing them with additional €150 billion of loans to either strengthen their military capabilities or ramp up support for Ukraine. Von der Leyen assured mobilising private capital and accelerating the Savings and Investments Union will be crucial to allocate more funds in the future.

EMPLOYMENT

Job-related plan to boost EU competitiveness

The Commission has presented its strategic document Union of Skills to address skill shortages and labour gaps in EU businesses. Combining education, training and employment policies with a competitive approach, the Union of Skills will mobilise €150 billion to ensure that all workers have access to the education and training they need to develop their careers and contribute to their company's competitiveness. The strategic plan includes several initiatives, such as an Action Plan on Basic Skills that disregards age limitations, a Skills Portability Initiative that eases the recognition of skills and qualifications across the EU and a Skills Guarantee Pilot to support workers' restructuring efforts.

ENVIRONMENT

Clean transition postponed for carmakers

The European Commission plans to extend the emissions reduction target for the automotive sector for two years. The current legislation requires carmakers to reduce their emissions by 15% this year – compared to 2021 levels – or face a fine of €95 per gram of carbon dioxide per kilometer emitted above the target for each non-compliant vehicle sold in the EU. Under the new proposal, the automotive sector will be required to meet the emissions reductions for 2027. "We have to stick to the agreed targets, but we need to listen to voices who ask for more pragmatism and technological neutrality" said Von der Leyen, who will submit an amendment for fast-track approval later this month.

HEALTH

Pressing need for a Critical Drugs Law

The Critical Medicines Alliance urges the European Commission to prioritize actions to strengthen the supply of critical medicines. In its Strategic Report, the Alliance finds that the EU is extremely reliant on certain countries for the provision of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and points out the financial gap in hindering competitiveness within European industries. The Critical Medicines Act, expected to be published this month, will develop a coordinated European industrial framework to address shortages on critical drugs. The EU Stockpiling Strategy will complement it by assessing existing stockpiling capacity in the EU, but will not take place until late 2025.

DIGITAL

Biggest digital summit spotlights AI technology

The 2025 Mobile World Congress is currently underway in Barcelona, bringing together leaders in mobile technology to showcase innovations and discuss the future of digital connectivity. This year's event places a significant emphasis on artificial intelligence and its integration into various aspects of digital infrastructure. At the Mobile World Congress, the European Union announced the upcoming launch of its Digital Diplomacy Initiative, which aims to strengthen international partnerships in digital technology, address global challenges and promote EU values in the digital realm.

ENERGY

EU plan to get rid of Russian energy postponed

The European Commission roadmap towards ending Russian energy imports, which aimed at entirely phasing out all dependence from Russian energy supply, has been postponed indefinitely. Initially scheduled for March 26th, the Commission has delayed the plan's presentation for a second time, with no specified date in advance. Following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU set a non-binding objective to cease Russian natural gas imports by 2027, which raised concerns among those EU countries more dependent on Russian long-ago energy supply.