

## Transatlantic Trade | US and Europe – Week of February 28, 2022

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With military troops from the Russian Federation and aligned forces moving further into Ukraine, efforts were attempted – but failed, with Russia blamed – to establish ceasefire agreements that would allow Ukrainian civilians to evacuate Mariupol and Volnovakha, cities that faced heavy fire from Russian forces this week. European countries and the United States (US) reacted negatively to Russian shelling near Europe's largest nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine this week. While Russia has made some inroads further into Ukraine, it has faced fierce resistance and slow gains in some parts of Ukraine. With sanctions increasing against Russia and Belarus, the war has sent energy prices surging worldwide, stocks plummeting, and is threatening the global [food supply](#) chain, especially wheat prices, which have surged.

The US Congress and President marked a moment of solidarity with Ukraine at a joint session of Congress, where the American President gave his State of the Union address on 1 March. The US President also sought to frame a domestic agenda for the coming year that would address increased inflation in the United States. In the European Union (EU), one of the European Parliament's Committees opted not to have a role in shaping the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand signed a free trade agreement at the beginning of the week.

*In this issue, we cover:*

- *Ukraine and Russia at war and transatlantic responses;*
- *Other notable US, UK, and EU developments;*
- *A brief UK-EU trade deal update; and*
- *Some COVID-19 highlights among the transatlantic partners.*

**Ukraine-Russia War | Increasing Layers of Sanctions**

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Russian military troops slowly continued to make further inroads in Ukraine, facing fierce resistance in multiple regions of Ukraine, including in the capital, Kyiv, and second largest Ukraine city, Kharkiv. Nuclear concerns arose at the end of the week, after heavy Russian artillery and fires were reported at Europe's largest nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine infrastructure later captured by Russian forces. On 4 March, UK Ambassador Barbara Woodward [spoke](#) at the United Nations (UN) Security Council Meeting on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station. She stated,

[T]his is the first time that a State has attacked a fuelled and functioning nuclear power plant. International law requires special protection for nuclear facilities, and it is difficult to see how Russia's actions were compatible with its commitments under Article 56 of the first Additional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions. It must not happen again."

Ukraine has other nuclear power plants at similar risk, if Russian forces continue to advance.

The US Department of Defense continues to provide daily updates on the situation in Ukraine. A Pentagon [press briefing](#) on Friday, 4 March, reflected that Russia has launched more than 500 missiles since the start of the invasion; an estimated 92 percent of Russia's pre-staged combat power is now inside Ukraine. Ukraine's airspace remains contested. The assault on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant was described as demonstrating the "recklessness" of the Russian invasion, but US assessments, thus far, indicate no radioactive leakage from the plant. Meanwhile, the US (and other NATO countries) remains unwilling to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine, despite multiple pleas from Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to do so. Meanwhile, with Russia's intense bombing of Ukraine's urban centers, over 1.5 million Ukrainians have fled into adjacent European countries – the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II.

The US Government and other countries continue to coordinate on providing military assistance to Ukraine's Armed Forces. At the end of February, the UK hosted a donor's conference to expand strategic-level coordination to all allies and partners. In a call with President Zelenskyy on Saturday, President Biden [said](#) his Administration is working closely with the US Congress to secure additional funding for Ukraine.

This week, the US Government and allies continued to layer additional sanctions against Russia and Belarus. On 28 February, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) [prohibited](#) US persons from engaging in transactions with the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, the National Wealth Fund of the Russian Federation, and the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, OFAC sanctioned the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Kirill Dmitriev.

On 1 March, US President Joe Biden announced at his State of the Union address to a joint session of the US Congress that American airspace was closed to Russian planes, similar to Europe's airspace restrictions. A notable exception was made this weekend, when one Russian plane was allowed to land at Dulles Airport outside of Washington and New York's JFK Airport to pick up 13 expelled Russian diplomats. On 28 February, the US Mission to the United Nations announced it was expelling the diplomats, which were accused of spying on the United States. The diplomats and their families had to depart the United States by 7 March.

On 2 March, the UN Security Council convened an Emergency Special Session of the General

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Assembly under the Uniting for Peace mechanism in response to Russia's attack on Ukraine. The General Assembly [voted](#) 141 to 5, with 35 abstentions, on the "Aggression against Ukraine" resolution. President Biden welcomed the vote, [stating](#):

Today's vote lays bare Putin's isolation. It also holds Belarus accountable for its unacceptable involvement in this war."

On 2 March, the US Government imposed additional costs on Russia and Belarus; a White House [fact sheet](#) details the actions, noting it includes full blocking sanctions on Russian defense entities, among other actions. The US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) [imposed](#) new export controls on Belarus, in response to Belarus' "substantial enabling of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine." Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Administration Thea D. Rozman Kendler said of the action:

Belarus's choice to enable Russia's horrific assault on the people of Ukraine has rightly drawn international condemnation. Today's action will significantly impair Belarus's ability to abet Russia's unjustifiable aggression."

In addition, OFAC [issued new public guidance](#) to cut off avenues for potential sanctions evasion by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation.

On 3 March, the United States, in coordination with Allies and partners, targeted additional Russian elites and family members "who continue supporting President Putin despite his brutal invasion of Ukraine." A White House [fact sheet](#) stated,

These individuals have enriched themselves at the expense of the Russian people, and some have elevated their family members into high-ranking positions. Others sit atop Russia's largest companies and are responsible for providing the resources necessary to support Putin's invasion of Ukraine."

Apart from expanding sanctions on some Russian elites, full blocking sanctions were also imposed on 19 additional Russian oligarchs and 47 family members and close associates. Sanctions were also imposed on seven Russian entities, SDN Strategic Culture Foundation and associated outlets Odná Rodyna, Rhythm of Eurasia, and Journal Kamerton; SouthFront; SDN InfoRos; New Eastern Outlook; Oriental Review; United World International; and Geopolitical. In addition, the US Department of the Treasury [designated](#) 26 Russia and Ukraine-based individuals who play central roles in these organizations, enabling the spread of Russian disinformation and influence perceptions as a part of their invasion of Ukraine. On 4 March, the US Department of Commerce [issued two new regulations](#) to further restrict exports of commodities, software and technology to Russia's oil refining sector and 91 entities that support Russian military activities.

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On 5 March, the US Department of State [issued an advisory](#) recommending that American citizens do not travel to Russia, and in [a separate advisory](#) that same day cautioned those in-country to depart the country immediately. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is in the region, with stops in Belgium, Poland, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, from 3-8 March. In Brussels, he participated in a NATO Foreign Ministerial, met with EU counterparts, participated in a Group of Seven (G7) Ministerial Meeting, and held additional meetings with partners to discuss the global response to Russia's invasion. The G7 Foreign Ministers [issued a statement](#) on 4 March, again condemning Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. In Poland on 5 March, Secretary Blinken met with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau and other Polish leaders to discuss Russia and the growing regional humanitarian situation. In Lithuania on 6 March, he met with President Gitanas Nausėda, Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, and Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis. In Moldova, the Secretary met with the Moldovan President and held a [joint press conference](#).

Complementing sanctions imposed last week, the EU agreed this week on a series of new sanctions in the aviation, finance and oil sectors, and included targeted sanctions against Russian oligarchs. On 28 February, the EU agreed to restrict all Russian air carriers from permission to land, take off or overfly the bloc's air space – including commercial carriers, any Russian registered aircraft, or non-Russian registered aircraft that is owned, chartered or controlled by a Russian legal or natural person. Transactions with the Russian Central Bank or any legal person, entity or body acting on behalf or at the direction of the Russian Central Bank was also prohibited. In addition, the EU designated another 26 Russian oligarchs in the oil, banking and finance sectors, individuals who have been close to Putin's regime. Of these, one entity was included in the [sanctions list](#), with asset freezes and a travel ban imposed.

On 2 March, the EU proceeded with [banning](#) certain Russian banks from the global payment system, SWIFT, namely Bank Otkritie, Novikombank, Promsvyazbank, Rossiya Bank, Sovcombank, Vnesheconombank (VEB), and VTB Bank. Further measures included the prohibition of participation, or contribution to projects co-financed by the Russian Direct Investment Fund; the sale, supply, transfer or export of euro denominated banknotes to Russia was also prohibited. The EU further [announced](#) the suspension of the broadcasting activities of Sputnik' and RT/Russia Today (RT English, RT UK, RT Germany, RT France, and RT Spanish) in the EU, or directed at the EU, due to the 'systematic, international campaign of disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts'.

Apart from sanctions, the EU also provided assistance to Ukraine by means of the European Peace Facility, with a total of 500 million EUR worth of equipment and supplies to the Ukrainian Armed Forces that included lethal equipment. Additionally, on 4 March, the Council introduced a temporary emergency mechanism for the protection of persons fleeing the war. This will enable the protection to displaced persons across the EU with the right of residence, access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children.

EU sanctions this week also [targeted](#) 22 high ranked members of the Belarusian military personnel, with an asset freeze and travel ban imposed. Further restrictions in trade have also been agreed in the package targeting Belarus on specific products such as wood, cement, and gaseous products (among others), while export controls were announced on dual-use goods and technology, particularly these who can contribute to Belarus' military, technological, defence and security development.

The European Parliament held an Extraordinary Plenary on 1 March 2022, adopting a [resolution](#) condemning Russia's war on Ukraine. Ukraine President Zelenskyy [spoke](#) before the

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plenary by video conferencing, a few days after [issuing](#) an appeal to initiate Ukraine's accession to the EU via a new special procedure. European Parliament President Roberta Metsola strongly [condemned](#) Russia's actions and underlined the need to "re-double our efforts to diversify our energy systems towards a Europe that is no longer at the behest of autocrats"; she continued to call on "social media and tech conglomerates to take their responsibility seriously" with regard to stemming the disinformation campaign led by Russia. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [outlined](#) the broad range of sanctions that were imposed by the EU; she underlined:

The destiny of Ukraine is at stake, but our own fate also lies in the balance. We must show the power that lies in our democracies; we must show the power of people that choose their independent paths, freely and democratically. This is our show of force."

President von der Leyen reiterated the package of sanctions and export controls on Russia have been closely coordinated with allies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Norway, Japan, South Korea and Australia.

EU trade diplomats further discussed whether to support Kyiv's call to suspend Russia from the World Trade Organization (WTO). While no official statement was issued after the meeting, [reports](#) indicate there may be support for suspending Russia's 'most-favored nation' status.

An extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council [meeting](#) was convened on 4 March with US Secretary Blinken, Canadian Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly, UK Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, and Ukraine Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. A joint press conference with Secretary Blinken and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [reiterated](#) the close EU-US cooperation in the ongoing transatlantic response against Russia, adding they have *"pulled together an ever-growing number of countries that apply identical or similar sanctions. Our G7 partners, UK, Canada and Japan, but also countries like Norway, Switzerland, South Korea, Australia. By now, over 40 countries partially or completely aligned with our sanctions."*

Meanwhile, on 28 February, Switzerland [decided](#) to fully endorse the first package of EU sanctions that were agreed on [23](#) and [25](#) February. This includes freezing of the assets of the individuals and companies listed in the EU sanctions and the immediate imposition of financial sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

On 6 March, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke with Ukraine President Zelenskyy. A 10 Downing Street [summary](#) stressed,

The leaders discussed the increasing threat Russia's barbaric attacks pose to Ukrainian civilians and the Prime Minister underlined the UK's determination to ensure Putin fails."

Meanwhile, the UK continues to "call on other countries to take further action to remove Russia from SWIFT."



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This past week, the UK [imposed sanctions](#) on 3 March against two Russian oligarchs – Alisher Usmanov and Igor Shuvalov. The UK also announced it was establishing an Oligarch Taskforce of ministers and officials from various departments to coordinate cross-government work to sanction oligarchs by helping to build cases against the list of oligarchs it has identified as targets.

The UK's Oligarch Taskforce aligns with the US Government, which announced its Task Force KleptoCapture on 2 March, an interagency law enforcement task force dedicated to enforcing the sweeping sanctions, export restrictions, and economic countermeasures that the United States has imposed against Russia. [According](#) to the US Department of Justice:

Task Force KleptoCapture will ensure the full effect of these actions, which have been designed to isolate Russia from global markets and impose serious costs for this unjustified act of war, by targeting the crimes of Russian officials, government-aligned elites, and those who aid or conceal their unlawful conduct.”

On 3 March, the UK Government [announced](#) Russian companies in the aviation or space industry are no longer able to make use of UK-based insurance or reinsurance services directly or indirectly. On 1 March, the UK Government [banned](#) Russian ships from UK ports, said UK individuals and entities are restricted from undertaking financial transactions with the Russian Central Bank; and sanctioned Russia's state-owned sovereign wealth fund and its chief executive. Further details on the UK ports action can be found [here](#). Similar to the US and EU, on 1 March, the UK [launched a first tranche of sanctions](#) against Belarusian individuals and organisations in response to Belarus' role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UK Government [also led efforts](#) this week to bring together allies to expedite an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine, through state party referral. With 37 countries joining the UK, it is the largest referral in the history of the ICC. State party referral, made by a group of 38 countries[1], will enable the Prosecutor to proceed straight to an investigation, without the need for judicial approval.

British Prime Minister Johnson travelled to Poland early in the week, where he [announced](#) the UK was pledging another £80 million in aid to help Ukraine deal with humanitarian crisis stemming from Russia's aggression. Among other things, the new funding will help provide aid, including medical supplies, to Ukraine and the broader region. This new funding brings total UK support during current Ukraine crisis to £220 million, which includes £120 million of humanitarian aid.

A number of companies have also responded to the ongoing situation in Ukraine, increasing pressure on the Russian Government. Following last week's announcements from [BP](#) and [Equinor](#) that they would be exiting shareholdings and joint ventures in Russia, Danish shipping giant Maersk [announced](#) it would temporarily suspend its operations in Russia. In addition, [TotalEnergies](#) said it would halt funding new projects in Russia, and Apple [decided](#) to pause all product sales in Russia. Social media players also reacted, with Google's YouTube and Google News search, Meta (Facebook), TikTok and Twitter removing access to RT and Sputnik following the EU sanctions decision. On 4 March, [Visa](#) and [Mastercard](#) suspended operations in Russia, prompting Sberbank, Alfa Bank and Tinkoff [to say](#) they would begin using a Chinese card operator's system on Sunday. A White House [readout](#) of a phone call between President Biden and Ukraine President Zelenskyy on Saturday, 5 March, reflected President Biden welcomed private industry's efforts to

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raise the costs on Russia, including spotlighting Visa and Mastercard's decisions. That same day, the White House also [issued a statement](#) welcoming global efforts to address Russia's disinformation efforts.

Attributable to Russia's war on Ukraine, northern European countries may be re-evaluating their security interests. On 4 March, after a meeting at the White House, President Biden and Finnish President Sauli Niinistö [said they](#) would start a process that would strengthen US-Finnish security cooperation, in close consultation with other Nordic countries. Meanwhile, Vice President Kamala Harris [will travel](#) to Poland and Romania from 9-11 March to demonstrate US support for NATO's eastern flank allies.

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## **Notable US Developments**

A bipartisan group of lawmakers released legislation – the [Ban Russian Energy Imports Act](#) (one-page summary available [here](#)) – on 3 March that would block imports of Russian oil despite White House opposition to cutting off the shipments, setting up a potential standoff over how to increase sanctions against the Kremlin for its war in Ukraine. Lead co-sponsors of the measure, Senator Joe Manchin (D-West Virginia) and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), said that should Congress approve the bill, they would take the blame for a jump in gasoline prices in America. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-California) affirmed that same day that she would back the growing push in Congress to ban Russian oil. Representatives Josh Gottheimer (D-New Jersey) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pennsylvania) introduced an identical version of the bill in the House. The bill's supporters say they hope other countries will introduce their own bans, as a US prohibition would only affect a small slice of the global energy market.

Meanwhile, on 5 March, Senator Manchin and 200 Members of Congress spoke with Ukraine President Zelenskyy. Senator Manchin issued [a statement](#) that reflected:

I questioned President Zelensky about the need for the United States to ban Russian energy imports and he wholeheartedly agreed. I will continue utilizing my role as Chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee to ensure that the full commitment of the American government is behind the Ukrainian people and to prevent Putin from gaining control of Ukraine. This includes supporting the transfer of Soviet-era military jets from Poland and any other ally to Ukraine's military forces to counter Russian jets and cruise missiles."

On 2 March, Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) Ranking Member James Risch (R-Idaho) led his Republican colleagues in a [press conference](#) to discuss Russia's war against Ukraine and efforts to support the Ukrainian people and punish Putin. He stressed,

Let me be clear here, when it comes to the bottom line, when it comes to the objective of what we are trying to do here, Republicans and Democrats are united. We do have differences on how to execute. We do have differences on the details of what it is going to take to get this done. But, we're all untied to accomplish the bottom line here."

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American lawmakers [are also exploring](#) avenues that would stop the US from giving Russia the tariff rates it gets as a member of the WTO, and possibly even suspend or throw it out of the institution.

SFRC Chairman Bob Menendez (D-New Jersey) [sent a letter](#) to Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen and Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 3 March, suggesting additional steps the Biden Administration could take to increase pressure on Russia and Belarus. He notably recommended the Administration “close a current loophole in the U.S. sanctions regime by denying Russian nationals the ability to continue making significant deposits at U.S. banks and significant purchases of U.S. securities.” The Senator’s [press release](#) further noted,

Making the case for the imposition of parallel sanctions to those levied by our European allies and partners, Menendez reiterated the importance of cutting off all access to the U.S. financial system for Russian elites who are currently still able to keep sizeable assets safe in the U.S. market.”

Also on 3 March, largely in response to Russia’s disinformation activities, SFRC Chairman Menendez and Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-Tennessee) unveiled the [Internet Freedom and Operations \(INFO\) Act of 2022](#). According to [a press release](#), the legislation seeks to bolster the US Government’s “ability to combat authoritarian and repressive governments using Internet access as a means of suppressing information sharing and communications among everyday people, civil society organizations, and journalists.”

In his [State of the Union address](#), President Biden also sought to pivot away from referencing his “Build Back Better” agenda to instead addressing smaller components of the agenda that he said would help get “prices under control,” amid high inflation. The President further sought to bridge the divide in America by proposing a “Unity Agenda” that he suggested could focus on ending the opioid epidemic; addressing mental health; supporting US veterans with job training and other initiatives; and ending cancer.

President Biden did not spotlight any trade-specific engagements with trading partners overseas in his address, instead focusing on “building a better America.” In other words, the Biden Administration’s trade focus remains inward looking, with a focus on addressing inflation via strengthening American supply chains. He stated,

One way to fight inflation is to drive down wages and make Americans poorer. I think I have a better idea to fight inflation: Lower your costs, not your wages. And, folks, that means make more cars and semiconductors in America, more infrastructure and innovation in America, more goods moving faster and cheaper in America, more jobs where you can earn a good living in America. Instead of relying on foreign supply chains, let’s make it in America.”

On 4 March, the White House released a [fact sheet](#) on the Administration’s efforts with respect to its “Made in America” commitments.

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## **Notable UK Developments**



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On 4 March, the UK Government [put forward a series of amendments](#) to the *Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill* in an effort to “crack down on corrupt elites and ramp up pressure on Putin’s regime.” In sum, the new amendments would allow the British Government to move harder and faster with sanctions; shorten to six months the deadline to register overseas entities; and provide new powers to more rapidly sanction those who have already been sanctioned by EU or US; among other things. The Bill is to be expedited through all its Commons stages on Monday, 7 March, and the Government is looking for swift passage in the Lords in order to get Royal Assent as soon as possible.

On 28 February, the UK and New Zealand [signed](#) a free trade agreement, following the negotiations launched in June 2020. The Agreement must next be ratified respectively by the UK and New Zealand to enter into force. It will remove all tariffs on trade in goods between the UK and New Zealand, subject to ‘rules of origin’, which determine where goods are deemed to come from. Once the Agreement enters into force, New Zealand will remove all tariffs on imports from the UK and in turn, the UK will eliminate around 97 percent of tariffs. Transitional measures on certain sensitive agricultural products imported into the UK from New Zealand will be maintained.

On 3 March, Prime Minister Johnson [appointed](#) two new Trade Envoys – David Duguid MP, as Trade Envoy to Angola and Zambia; and Yvonne Fovargue MP, as Trade Envoy to Tunisia and Libya.

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## **Notable EU Developments**

The European Parliament and the Council discussed the trade impact of the Russia-Ukraine war this week, with Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis [warning](#) before the INTA Committee of the implications the EU sanctions would have to the European economy, as it could result to higher inflation, lower growth and disruption of financial markets. However, he stressed “[I]t is a price worth paying for defending democracy and peace.” EU [agriculture](#) and finance ministers also assessed the impacts that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will have on the EU economy. French Minister for Economic Affairs, Finance and Recovery Bruno Le Maire [noted](#) the unity of the 27 Member States in the economic and financial response to Russia, and he underlined the effectiveness of the EU sanctions. He stated,

We have decided to work on complementary measures, in order to avoid the bypassing of our sanctions. Concerning the protection of our economies, we want close coordination at a European level, as we did during the covid crisis.”

In a surprising turn of events, the European Parliament’s International Trade (INTA) Committee [voted down](#) the Committee’s Opinion on the proposal for a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, a decision that will significantly change the dynamics in the future negotiations. With this decision, the INTA Committee loses the power to negotiate with the Environment, Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee, who leads on the file. As such, the ENVI Committee will be also leading on the trade-related components of the CBAM proposal going forward.

On 1 March 2022, the European Commission [launched](#) a [public consultation](#) on the draft revised rules on horizontal cooperation agreements between companies. The revised R&D and Specialisation Block Exemption Regulations (together ‘HBERs’) and Horizontal Guidelines, would

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for a public consultation. The revised rules foresee to include more flexibility with regard to data sharing between competitors, an element that have been thus far restricted due to antitrust laws.

Late last week, the Swiss Federal Council announced its [approach](#) for trade negotiations with the EU. Despite earlier talks held on a horizontal level, the Swiss have decided to now focus on a vertical approach, where agreements can be reached per sector, rather than a broader overarching agreement. According to the statement, negotiation pillars will include ‘the dynamic updating of Swiss-EU bilateral agreements, dispute settlement, exceptions and safeguard clauses.’

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron formally [announced](#) his candidacy for the French presidential elections on 3 March. The local election is set to be held in two rounds on 10 and 24 April 2022. President Macron will be running against two far right candidates – Marine Le Pen (National Rally) and Eric Zemmour (under a newly created party, Reconquête) – along with centre-right candidate Valérie Pécresse and the leftist candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

## **UK-EU Trade Deal Update**

Technical discussions on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol continued this week. A cross-party group of parliamentarians and industry representatives [met](#) on 3 March to gather evidence on trade under the Northern Ireland Protocol, with the aim of contributing data to the ongoing UK and EU negotiations and to ensure there is not any misinformation used in the election campaigns, ahead of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections.

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## **COVID-19 Updates**

With the COVID-19 pandemic now in year three, and over 6 million dead globally, the influx of Ukrainian refugees largely into Eastern Europe brings additional challenges to region that still has a high death rate due to the Omicron COVID-19 variant. European health officials have been offering the refugees free COVID-19 vaccines, especially since Ukraine had a low vaccination rate and high infection rate prior to Russia's invasion.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has been [delayed](#) its decision for MSD/Ridgeback's molnupiravir antiviral pills for use against COVID-19, currently in rolling review process. The Agency apparently is seeking further information before it can approve the drug.

On 3 March, US Health and Human Service Secretary Xavier Becerra and White House Chief Medical Adviser Anthony Fauci [confirmed](#) the Biden Administration is looking into licensing COVID-19 medical technologies owned by the National Institute of Health (NIH) to the World Health Organization's COVID-19 Technology Access pool (C-TAP). While specifics on the Biden Administration's new policy remain unclear, the technologies reportedly will be sub-licensed through the Medicines Patent Pool, a Switzerland-based international organization aimed at enhancing access to medicines for low and middle-income countries. It remains unclear whether this will include Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, as the US Federal Government is currently engaged in a dispute with Moderna over who can name themselves as the inventors of the vaccine on the patent application. Moderna's vaccine was produced at an expedited pace with help and collaboration from NIH researchers; Moderna is arguing its own researchers independently developed the sequence.

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[1] Republic of Albania, Commonwealth of Australia, Republic of Austria, Kingdom of Belgium, Republic of Bulgaria, Canada, Republic of Colombia, Republic of Costa Rica, Republic of Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Kingdom of Denmark, Republic of Estonia, Republic of Finland,

Republic of France, Georgia, Federal Republic of Germany, Hellenic Republic, Hungary, Republic of Iceland, Ireland, Republic of Italy, Republic of Latvia, Principality of Liechtenstein, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Republic of Malta, Kingdom of Norway, Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Republic of Poland, Republic of Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia, Kingdom of Spain, Kingdom of Sweden, Swiss Confederation, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Lithuania has also made a coordinated referral.

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