

English articles

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Articles of the week



Trump's first day actions loom large as Davos begins



By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) — As the World Economic Forum's annual gabfest gets into full swing Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump gave everybody something to talk about with his actions on his first day back in office.

Energy industry executives will mull Trump's vow to “drill, baby, drill.” Foreign leaders will decipher what he means by his wish to expand U.S. territory. Environmentalists will decry his planned exit from the Paris climate deal. Trade advocates can digest his newly christened “External Revenue Service” to collect tariffs and duties.

From the earliest speeches, panel discussions and back-channel meetings in the Swiss Alpine town of Davos, Trump's executive orders and evocative oratory will loom large.

Here's a look at what's on tap Tuesday in Davos.

Von der Leyen, Scholz take the stage a day after Trump

Right from the start, participants will be able to riff off of, and possibly rip into, Trump's new tack.

One of the earliest sessions serves up “early thoughts” about the U.S. presidency; another focuses on electric vehicles, a Biden administration “mandate” for which Trump vowed to revoke.

Yet another dissects how the European Union will balance its environmental ambitions with a need for economic development — and Trump's vow to declare a “national energy emergency” will certainly weigh on minds in Brussels.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, speaking Tuesday, said the bloc should “definitely stick to the goal” of the European Green Deal for both competitiveness and environmental reasons, as he alluded to Trump's vision and steps.

“The world is full of uncertainty — after yesterday even more, and maybe tomorrow there might be even more uncertainty,” De Croo told a morning panel about Europe's way forward. “Let's please, as Europeans within the European Union, not add uncertainty by creating ambiguity on our goals.”

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gets early billing on the Davos dais. Her morning speech will send an early signal about how the 27-country bloc is interpreting Washington's new line.

She's likely to try fancy footwork — France and her native Germany are riven by political discord and uncertainty, and some recently ascendant leaders like Italy's Giorgia Meloni have cast themselves as more Trump-friendly.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has lashed out at Trump ally Elon Musk's support for the European far-right, will also speak.

Scholz's hold on power in economically sluggish Germany appears tenuous: His Social Democrats are trailing third in polls showing conservative Friedrich Merz is the favorite to become the next chancellor after the Feb. 23 elections. Merz himself is set to take part in a discussion in Davos late Tuesday.

Trump didn't talk Ukraine. Zelenskyy will in Davos

During his presidential campaign, Trump said he could end the Russia-Ukraine war in one day. He didn't mention either country in his inaugural address, even if he did say he wants to be “a peacemaker and a unifier” more generally.

Nearly three years after Russia's full-blown invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will take the stage. Both Moscow and Kyiv have been seeking battlefield gains to strengthen their

negotiating positions ahead of any prospective talks to end the conflict.

Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, and the prime minister of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, are likely to discuss the Gaza ceasefire.

And U.S. corporate chieftains for companies like Coca-Cola, Bank of America and Boston Consulting Group will share thoughts on the direction of the U.S. economy under Trump's new term.

Poland wants the EU focused on security. Its border with Belarus highlights the challenges



By LORNE COOK Associated Press

POLOWCE, Poland (AP) — Poland's six-month presidency of the European Union is firmly focused on security. As Europe's biggest land war in decades rages, fewer places highlight the challenges and contradictions of defending the bloc and its values more starkly than the border with Belarus.

Some 13,000 border guards and soldiers protect around 400 kilometers (250 miles) of border. It's become a buffer zone since Belarus' ally, Russia, invaded neighboring Ukraine three years ago. Similar fortifications farther north line Poland's frontier with the Russian region of Kaliningrad.

Poland is Ukraine's top logistical backer. Most of the Western-supplied arms, ammunition and equipment helping to keep Ukraine's armed forces afloat transit through. Russia, meanwhile, uses Belarus as a staging ground for its invasion.

At the border near the town of Połowce, a 5.5-meter (18-foot) steel barrier strung with razor wire and topped by security cameras separates once-friendly communities that war has turned into wary rivals. Drones, helicopters and armored vehicles keep watch.

The border crossing is closed. Around 40 border guards and troops could be seen on Jan. 16, when the Polish EU presidency invited 60 reporters from international media to witness the security effort.

The road was strewn with layers of concrete obstacles and concertina wire likely to dissuade an advancing army. Border guards peered into Belarus.

It's needed, the government in Warsaw says, because Russia and Belarus are waging a particular kind of hybrid warfare: helping groups of migrants — mostly from Africa or the Middle East — to break through the border to provoke and destabilize Poland and the rest of Europe.

“We have tightened our visa policy, and above all we have decided to suspend the right to asylum wherever we are dealing with mass border crossings organized by Belarus and Russia,” Prime Minister Donald Tusk told reporters on Friday.

When migrants are equated with danger

Almost 30,000 attempted border crossings were spotted last year. Most are young men, often from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Polish authorities say they arrive in Belarus on tourist or student visas and are helped across for a fee ranging from \$8,000 to \$12,000.

Poland says they're assisted by the Belarus security services and other “organizers.” They're mostly Ukrainians, perhaps fallen on hard times since fleeing the war. They can earn \$500 for each person they help, border officials say.

Border guards claim to be routinely attacked. One guard was killed last year and several injured.

They say that migrants shoot slingshots, throw small explosives or rocks, or use pepper spray on guards. More than 400 incidents were recorded last year in this section of the border, with 307 people hospitalized.

The deputy commander of the Podlaski border guard division, Col. Andrzej Stasiulewicz, said the migrants are hard to discourage. “Warning shots don't work, so force is needed,” he said. Reporters were shown video and photos purported to show migrants assailing the border.

Stasiulewicz said their actions are “very unpredictable, and very precise and coordinated.”

Medical aid group Doctors Without Borders paints a different picture. The charity says it's treated more than 400 people since November 2022, “many of them stranded for weeks in uninhabitable forests and exposed to violent practices at the border.”

People suffered from exhaustion, hypothermia, dehydration and mental health issues. Last year, it noted “a sharp increase in people carrying the scars of physical assaults, including bruises and dog bites.”

It's almost impossible to independently verify such reports. The area is off limits. NGOs and media must apply for a permit to enter. EU and international agencies that work with migrants are not invited either, although migrants are provided with their contact details should they want to complain.

“Turnbacks” not “pushbacks,” Poland insists

Stasiulewicz said those who force their way in “are sent back to Belarus, which is in line with our legal framework.”

The Norwegian Refugee Council, a migrant aid charity, has another take. It said that nearly 9,000 “violent pushbacks” have been reported by NGOs in what it describes as “Europe's death zone” since 2021.

Pushbacks – depriving someone who may be in fear for their safety of their right to apply for asylum – are illegal under international law.

Polish Undersecretary of State Maciej Duszczuk rejects the pushback allegations. He prefers “turnbacks.” The rationale is that migrants are obliged to apply for asylum in good faith at open border points, not force their way in.

The nearest place they can do that is in Terespol, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Połowce.

Halting asylum in the name of security

As far as the Polish authorities are concerned, their methods are working. The number of people arriving in Połowce has dropped significantly. Around 670 people applied for asylum there last year, and none to mid-January. The Office for Foreigners was empty when reporters visited.

To keep numbers down, the government intends to suspend asylum applications in times of crisis.

A draft law winding its way through parliament would see the border shut for 60 days if Warsaw suspects that migrants are being “weaponized” — should they approach the border in large groups, try to intimidate Polish officers or damage border infrastructure.

“If anyone uses violence against the border guards, we close the border,” Duszczyk said.

Doctors Without Borders says this could have “dramatic consequences.” It's urged Poland “to drastically change course of action” and do all it can to protect migrants and refugees.

But EU leaders signed off on Poland's actions at a summit last month. Countries on Europe's eastern flank received a greenlight to suspend the right to protection when they believe that Belarus and Russia are “ weaponizing” migrants.

When security and migration get political

Ultimately, security and migration policies are highly politicized. Tusk has been in power for more than a year but his party's candidate in a presidential election in May faces a strong challenge from a nationalist opponent.

The EU shifted further right in June after elections to the European Parliament, with nationalists and populists shaking Europe's foundations, particularly in major powers France and Germany. Tusk believes that tough migration policy can win back voters.

“If we do not want to hand over these matters to radicals, extremists, populists, we must find the right answers so that no one in the world doubts that democratic states are able to effectively defend themselves against illegal migration,” he said on Friday.

He described the “tough protection” of borders as a “sacred duty.” Poland's borders also make up the 27-nation EU's external frontier. For Tusk, his country's security is Europe's security. It's a similar argument made by Hungary's staunchly nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orbán.

Associated Press writers Monika Scislowska and Vanessa Gera in Warsaw contributed to this report.

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