WEDNESDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2026

ALWAYS FREE

Inside Desk

MORNING EPAPER

AVAILABLE 06:30 CEST · BERLIN

LEAD · GEO-ECONOMICS

Three accounts of one strait, and the one that keeps a ledger

Tehran says Hormuz stays shut until Washington accepts its terms. Washington says traffic is 80 to 100% of normal. The Revolutionary Guards say their mines stopped three tankers. Only one of these is a count.

> Tehran says Hormuz is shut, Washington says traffic is near normal, the Guards say their mines stopped three tankers. The weekly count says open but thin. Quarterly reports, not forecasts, moved the market, and Berlin's €220 billion came with a footnote. Eleven desks, every number sourced.

Three capitals described one strait three ways while the ship count said open but thin, companies settled the market with their quarterly reports, and a €220 billion figure in Berlin turned out to have a footnote.

Read the lead →

Go to page 3 →

ALSO INSIDE · 30 PIECES

7 POLITICS & INSTITUTIONS
The €220 billion had a footnote

8 PSYCHOLOGY & BEHAVIOUR
Fear of the machine shows up at the desk, not in the headlines

10 MONEY, FX & COMMITTEES
Lagarde let the bond market carry some of the weight

11 ORDINARY & INHERITED LIFE
Ordinary Ledger: a monthly cap for the occasional rider

MARKETS & MACRO · P. 6
Tuesday was settled by income statements

ENERGY & INDUSTRY · P. 9
Podium vs Print: the fuel bill arrived before the recovery

CLIMATE & WEATHER · P. 15
One orange left, and it is a river

THE DAY IN ONE SENTENCE

Three capitals described one strait three ways while the ship count said open but thin, companies settled the market with their quarterly reports, and a €220 billion figure in Berlin turned out to have a footnote.

Read this edition in reading view →

In this issue

3 LEAD
Three accounts of one strait, and the one that keeps a ledger

5 GEO-ECONOMICS · 3 PIECES
Three accounts of one strait, and the one that keeps a ledger

6 MARKETS & MACRO · 3 PIECES
Tuesday was settled by income statements

7 POLITICS & INSTITUTIONS · 3 PIECES
The €220 billion had a footnote

8 PSYCHOLOGY & BEHAVIOUR · 2 PIECES
Fear of the machine shows up at the desk, not in the headlines

9 ENERGY & INDUSTRY · 3 PIECES
Podium vs Print: the fuel bill arrived before the recovery

10 MONEY, FX & COMMITTEES · 3 PIECES
Lagarde let the bond market carry some of the weight

11 ORDINARY & INHERITED LIFE · 2 PIECES
Ordinary Ledger: a monthly cap for the occasional rider

12 TECH & COMPUTE · 3 PIECES
The founder is not in the room, and that is the point

13 HEALTH & CARE · 3 PIECES
Two official death counts for one province

14 SECURITY & ORDER · 3 PIECES
The curfews were renewed, and the quiet held a second night

15 CLIMATE & WEATHER · 2 PIECES
One orange left, and it is a river

16 BACK PAGE
Before you close the tab

THIS ISSUE

Tehran says Hormuz is shut, Washington says traffic is near normal, the Guards say their mines stopped three tankers. The weekly count says open but thin. Quarterly reports, not forecasts, moved the market, and Berlin's €220 billion came with a footnote. Eleven desks, every number sourced.

11 edition pieces · 11 desks · Available 06:30 CEST, 21 October 2026

19 ePaper extras, added 06:30 CEST, 21 October. They appear only in the ePaper and carry their own time.

The website edition

THE EPAPER RHYTHM

06:30 Morning ePaper (website edition at 08:30)

17:30 Evening ePaper, updated live until 22:30 with an “Updated” time and a Latest page

Sun 10:00 The Sunday Magazine

Berlin time. Every issue is free.

HOW TO READ IT

Swipe, use the arrow keys or the page strip. Tap any headline for the reading view. Press `/` to search, `t` for contents, `+`/`-` to zoom. Download the PDF.

GEO-ECONOMICS · LEAD · 4 MIN

Three accounts of one strait, and the one that keeps a ledger

Tehran says Hormuz stays shut until Washington accepts its terms. Washington says traffic is 80 to 100% of normal. The Revolutionary Guards say their mines stopped three tankers. Only one of these is a count.

On Tuesday, three official voices described the Strait of Hormuz. Each was confident, and they did not agree with one another. The lesson is not that one of them is lying. It is that a statement and a count are different instruments, and only one of them is built to be checked.

Tehran's version. Foreign minister Abbas Araghchi told Iraqi television that indirect talks with the United States continue through Pakistan and Qatar, and that the strait will stay closed unless Washington accepts Iran's conditions[1]. Iran has offered a seven-day plan under which the waterway would fully reopen on the sixth day. Araghchi said Washington had accepted the conditions but wanted "additional provisions"[1]. "The negotiating table is still there," he said[1].

Washington's version. In an interview with Network18, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that at any given time the traffic and energy moving through the strait are "80 to 100 per cent equal" to what they were before the conflict[2]. He also said US forces destroy the "overwhelming majority" of drones and missiles fired at ships each night, but that "every now and then" one gets through[2]. He said the onus is on Iran to stop, and that economic pressure will continue until it does[2].

The Guards' version. The same day, the Revolutionary Guards said their naval mines had "halted" two tankers at what they call an illegal crossing point in the southern part of the strait, and that a third tanker carrying more than two million barrels of crude had exploded and caught fire after hitting a mine[3]. AFP reported the claims from the Guards' own statements; on Tuesday there was no independent confirmation in that report[3].

What has actually been counted. A shut strait, a strait at 80 to 100% and a strait mined at its southern exit cannot all be true at once. The most recent independent measure in the record is less dramatic than any of them. The UK Maritime Trade Operations centre, a Royal Navy office that logs ships and incidents, counted 254 transits in the week to 14 October, 125 outbound and 129 inbound[4]. The Guardian put that at roughly 70% below pre-conflict levels[4]. UKMTO also recorded 12 attacks in the seven days to 16 October[4]. The shiptracker Kpler counted at least 18 vessels reportedly attacked over two weeks[5].

So the strait is neither shut nor normal. It is open, thin and dangerous. That is a boring answer, and it is the only one with a method behind it.

What the price did with all this. The oil market heard all three versions on one day and reacted as you would expect. Brent touched $111.99, a five-month high, then settled at $108.79, down 76 cents on the day[5]. The swing was more than $6 within the session[6]. An unconfirmed report that a deal was close knocked prices down as much as 3.3%, and a diplomat involved in the talks then said no agreement was near[6]. By early Wednesday in Asia, Brent was back around $109.52[6]. In other words, the price moved on the speeches and came back to rest on the risk. Analysts at ING called it a market "pricing in a significant risk premium"[5].

Why the dull count matters more. Each statement on Tuesday served its speaker. Tehran needs the strait to look closed so that reopening it is worth something in the talks. Washington needs it to look open so that pressure on Iran looks cheap. The Guards need their mines to look effective. None of this makes the statements worthless. They tell you what each side wants to trade. But none of them tells you how many ships went through yesterday.

The transit count does. It is published by an office with no seat at the table. It comes out at a regular interval, and if it moves you can see by how much. The same is true of the insurance quotes shipowners pay and the queues of tankers at anchor. These are the invoices of the conflict, and they change more slowly and more honestly than the statements do.

The constructive reading. There is a real negotiation, with real intermediaries and a written plan with a numbered day for reopening[1]. Intermediaries, a written plan and a date are the dull scaffolding that agreements are built on. A deal, if it comes, will show up first in the weekly count, then in the price. If it does not come, the count will show that too. Either way, you will not need to take anyone's word for it.

Until then, the useful habit is to treat every confident sentence about Hormuz as a bid in a negotiation, and the weekly count of ships as the receipt.

Whole piece in reading view →

WHAT TO WATCH

- The UK Maritime Trade Operations centre's next weekly transit count; the last one cited was 254 transits in the week to 14 October.
- Whether any shipowner or flag state confirms the three tankers the Revolutionary Guards say were hit; on Tuesday the claim came only from the Guards.
- What the 'additional provisions' are that, according to Araghchi, Washington wants added to Iran's seven-day plan.

DESK COMMENT

When three capitals describe one stretch of water, believe the one that counts the ships.

This desk's lead is on page 3: Three accounts of one strait, and the one that keeps a ledger.

GEO-ECONOMICS · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

A summit that no one has yet proposed

Trump says he is open to meeting Xi and Putin. The Kremlin says no concrete proposal or agenda exists. Beijing says it has no information. Kyiv says it would encourage the war.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meets in Shenzhen on 18 and 19 November, and the United States, China and Russia are all members[1]. That is the whole factual basis of the three-way summit now being discussed.

President Donald Trump has said he is open to such a meeting[2]. The Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the topic of a "hypothetical meeting" had been mentioned, but that "no substantive proposals or agreements" on the meeting or its agenda had been put forward by anyone[1]. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he did not know "if anything has been finalised"[1]. China's foreign ministry said it had no information[1].

Ukraine's foreign minister Andriy Sybiga objected that a Russia–China–US meeting "would do only the opposite" of ending the war[1]. Peskov, for his part, said a final settlement is impossible without someone from Kyiv prepared to take responsibility[1].

So there is a venue and a date, but no invitation, no agenda and no confirmation from Beijing. If an agenda is ever published, that is when to start reading it.

GEO-ECONOMICS · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Egypt's parliament postponed its vote

Egypt's parliament on Monday delayed a vote to authorise the military to support Saudi Arabia against Yemen's Houthis[1]. Britain said on Tuesday it would send Typhoon jets to help defend Saudi Arabia, in a "defensive role" only[1]. Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said any Egyptian intervention would "further complicate the situation", and that neither Riyadh nor the Houthis had answered Tehran's offer to mediate[2]. A postponed vote is not a refusal. It is a parliament taking its time, which is what parliaments are for.

MARKETS & MACRO · 2 MIN

Tuesday was settled by income statements

The Dow rose 1% on 3M and a row of steady quarterly reports while the AI names drifted. After the bell, SpaceX printed its first quarterly profit and Seoul rose 3.6% on it. Earnings did what forecasts could not.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed at 52,495.88 on Tuesday, up 529.85 points or 1.02%. The S&P 500 rose 0.28% to 7,712.57, and the Nasdaq Composite slipped 0.02% to 26,424.82[1]. Healthcare led with a gain of 2.34%; only communication services and technology fell[1]. The VIX, the options market's gauge of expected swings, dropped 6.13% to 17.31[1].

Who did the lifting. It was not the AI giants. Among companies worth more than $1 trillion, only Amazon and Tesla rose, by about 1%[1]. The work was done by older businesses reporting their quarters: 3M rose 5.8% after sales and profit beat expectations and it raised guidance, Northrop Grumman gained 4.57%, and Hasbro rose more than 11% on a 34% jump in sales of its Magic: The Gathering line[1,2]. A toy maker's card game moved more than a chip index on Tuesday. That is what a rotation into receipts looks like.

After the bell. SpaceX reported its first quarterly profit, $4.4 billion, on revenue up 161% to $14.58 billion[1,2]. Its capital spending rose to $19.59 billion from $6.9 billion in the second quarter[2]. Netflix went the other way, falling nearly 5% after hours as it cut its advertising revenue forecast to $2.7 billion from $3 billion[2].

Asia read the reports, not the worries. On Wednesday morning the Kospi rose 3.62% and the Nikkei 225 1.76%, and Nasdaq 100 futures were up 0.7%[3]. CNBC TV18 tied the move to the overnight earnings from the biggest beneficiaries of AI spending[3].

Last week the AI story was told in fears about financing. This week it is being told in quarterly accounts, line by line. You do not have to like the valuations to prefer the second kind of evidence.

WHAT TO WATCH

- Tesla's third-quarter results on Wednesday, the next large test of whether AI spending shows up as profit.
- CoreWeave, which rose 1.65% on Tuesday after falling 25% last week.
- Whether the Kospi holds its gain after one of the country's worst IPO debuts on record.

DESK COMMENT

A forecast is an opinion with a decimal point. A quarterly report is a signed invoice.

MARKETS & MACRO · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Salesforce paid $5.66 billion, and Braze jumped 52%

The day's biggest single-stock move came from a takeover price, not a forecast. Salesforce's own shares did not move.

Shares of Braze, a company that sells software for sending real-time messages to customers, rose by nearly 52% on Tuesday after Salesforce agreed to buy it for $5.66 billion[1]. Cboe's market note describes the purchase as the latest in a series of deals Salesforce has made to step up its move into AI[1]. Salesforce's own shares ended flat[1].

The day's other large moves also came from documents rather than moods. Equifax was the S&P 500's best performer, up 11.33%[2]. Hasbro rose 11.20% to a five-year high after its results[2]. General Motors was the worst, down 6.84%[2].

A takeover price is the purest kind of market information. Someone has signed a document saying what they will pay for the whole company. You can still argue about whether it is a good price, but at least there is a number to argue about.

MARKETS & MACRO · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Jio Platforms opens its order book

Subscription for the initial public offering of Jio Platforms opens on Wednesday[1]. Market experts quoted by CNBC TV18 call it the "mother of all IPOs", expected to be the largest in India's history[1]. The same report says the Kospi's 3.62% rise came as Seoul recovered from one of its worst IPO debuts on record[1]. An order book tells you how many people want shares at the offer price. Only the first trade tells you what they are worth to everyone else.

POLITICS & INSTITUTIONS · 2 MIN

The €220 billion had a footnote

At the government's investment summit, the economy minister spoke of more than €220 billion in commitments. Her ministry later said the figure covers all projects since January, not pledges made at the summit. The correction is the useful part.

On Tuesday the federal government held an investment summit in Berlin for about 200 chief executives from Germany and abroad[1]. The chancellor, Friedrich Merz, praised German punctuality and early rising[1], and on the same day warned against Berlin plans to socialise housing[2]. Finance minister Lars Klingbeil was blunter with the guests: “I want your money”[1].

The number. Economy minister Katherina Reiche spoke of investment commitments of more than €220 billion for this year[1]. It was the figure most likely to make the evening news.

The footnote. According to Der Spiegel, a spokesman for Reiche’s ministry later clarified that the sum had no direct connection to the summit. It is the general total of investment projects since the start of the year[1]. Which investments will result from the summit itself cannot yet be told[1].

Why this is good news, quietly. Governments like large round numbers, and summits are built to produce them. What matters is that the ministry corrected the record the same day, on the record, when asked. A total since January is still a real figure; it is just a different one. The institution did its job: it said what the number was.

For you, the practical reading is simple. When a summit announces a total, ask what period it covers and whether a list exists. If there is no list, it is a mood. If there is one, it is a plan.

WHAT TO WATCH

- Whether the economy ministry publishes a list of projects behind the €220 billion figure.
- Which investments are later attributed to the summit itself; Der Spiegel says that cannot yet be told.

DESK COMMENT

A total is not a pledge until someone writes down the projects next to it.

POLITICS & INSTITUTIONS · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Brussels agreed on cars before the deal was official

The three centre groups in the European Parliament reached a compromise on 2035 car CO2 rules. Renew's leader said she was 'not entirely sure how official it is'. That honesty is worth noting.

The European People’s Party, the Socialists and Renew Europe, the three groups that form the pro-European majority in the European Parliament, reached an agreement on the automotive package, Renew’s leader Valérie Hayer announced in Strasbourg[1].

According to first reports, manufacturers would have to cut tailpipe CO2 emissions of new cars by 87.5% from 2021 levels by 2035, instead of 100%[1]. The remaining 12.5 points would be covered by a 7.5% allowance for green steel made in Europe and a 5% unconditional margin[1]. Combustion-engine and hybrid cars would remain allowed after 2035[2].

Hayer was candid about the status: “I’m not entirely sure how official it is, but an agreement was reached last night”[1]. That is the right way to describe it. A deal between group leaders still has to pass the groups, the committees and the plenary, and then be negotiated with the member states.

Supporters such as Forza Italia MEP Salvatore De Meo call it the end of “ideological bans”[1]. Whatever you think of that, the number that matters is 87.5, and it will be in the text.

POLITICS & INSTITUTIONS · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

The AfD confirms an attack on its email accounts

Unknown persons have published hundreds of thousands of emails said to come from accounts of the AfD, according to Der Spiegel[1]. The party confirms an attack but plays down its importance[1]. Whatever is in the files, the useful questions are procedural ones: who verifies that the material is authentic, which authority investigates the intrusion, and whether the data-protection rules for third parties named in the emails are followed. A hack of a party is a crime against a democratic institution, whichever party it is.

PSYCHOLOGY & BEHAVIOUR · 2 MIN

Fear of the machine shows up at the desk, not in the headlines

A six-year study of more than 600 US workers found that people who fear AI will make their whole occupation obsolete are more likely to excuse small misconduct at work. The lead author's advice is aimed at employers, not workers.

A study led by researchers at Washington State University followed more than 600 workers across US industries, including finance and construction, over six years[1]. It was published in the journal Occupational Health Science[1].

What it measured. Not ordinary job insecurity, the worry of losing one job at one firm, but what the lead author, psychology professor Tahira Probst, calls occupation insecurity: the fear that technology will transform or erase a whole line of work[1]. A bartender who loses a job can find another bar. A medical coder whose occupation is automated cannot simply move to another employer[1].

What it found. Workers who worried that automation would make their occupation obsolete were more likely to justify behaviour they would normally call inappropriate, such as turning up late or taking a colleague's lunch[1].

What the author does not claim. The study was not designed to estimate how many jobs AI will replace[1]. Probst also told Spokane Public Radio that "a single study doesn't prove anything" and asked for replication in places with different labour protections and AI rules[1]. That caution is part of the result.

The constructive point. Her main takeaway is about management: "how organizations roll out these AI tools matters enormously"[1]. If employees are left to make sense of the change alone, the fear does its own damage, whether or not it is justified[1]. A clear plan for the rollout, written down and explained to staff, is routine office work. It may also be the best protection against the fear doing harm.

WHAT TO WATCH

- Replications in countries with stronger labour-market protections, which the lead author herself calls for.
- Whether employers publish how they plan to introduce AI tools, the factor the study's author says matters most.

DESK COMMENT

Anxiety left unexplained turns into small rule-breaking. Explanation is cheaper than either.

PSYCHOLOGY & BEHAVIOUR · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

The convenient estimate is the one that spreads

In nine experiments with 8,769 adults, both selfish and generous people bent their guesses about how their choices affected others. Only the selfish version was contagious.

Marius Vollberg and Jörg Gross of the University of Zurich gave participants a choice between 7 points for themselves or 5, knowing only a range for what another person would get: 1 to 3 points or 3 to 5[1]. Then they asked them to guess the other person's actual payout, and paid them for accuracy[1].

People who took the 7 tended to report the two options as more similar for the other person than they were. People who took the 5 tended to inflate the good their choice did[1]. The distortions appeared even when the guesses were made before the choice, and even when the choice was forced, which points to preferences rather than after-the-fact excuses[1].

The finding with consequences came last. When participants were shown a previous player's estimates first, only the estimate that made selfishness look harmless changed what they did: they became more selfish[1]. The generous distortion did not spread[1]. The authors note limits: abstract tasks, mainly US participants, and large differences between individuals; fewer than 10% produced the full selfish pattern[1].

The paper was published on 1 October; it appears here because its point sharpens the edition's other stories about convenient numbers. When the consequences of a choice are vague, ask for the range, not someone's reading of it.

ENERGY & INDUSTRY · PODIUM VS PRINT · 2 MIN

Podium vs Print: the fuel bill arrived before the recovery

In August United's chief executive expected to recover all of the higher fuel cost in the fourth quarter. Tuesday's filing assumes jet fuel at $4.80 a gallon for that quarter and cuts the year's profit outlook.

PODIUM

“I think we'll recover 100% in fourth quarter.”

Scott Kirby, chief executive of United Airlines, speaking to reporters, August 2026

PRINT

$4.80

United now assumes jet fuel at $4.80 a gallon on average in the fourth quarter, against $3.90 in the third, and guides to adjusted fourth-quarter earnings of 50 cents to $1.50 a share.

United Airlines third-quarter 2026 results and outlook, 20 October 2026

The podium. In August, with jet fuel near $4 a gallon, United’s chief executive Scott Kirby told reporters: “I think we’ll recover 100% in fourth quarter,” though he stopped short of a firm commitment[1]. In July the company had said it expected to recover 80% to 90% of higher fuel costs in the third quarter and all of them in the fourth[1].

The print. Tuesday’s results tell a different story about the same quarter. United now assumes jet fuel will cost $4.80 a gallon on average in the final three months of the year, against $3.90 in the third quarter and $2.43 a year earlier[1,2]. Third-quarter fuel expense rose 61.6% to $4.84 billion, $1.8 billion more than a year before[1]. The company guides to adjusted fourth-quarter earnings of 50 cents to $1.50 a share[1]. With $5.72 earned in the first nine months, even the top of that range gives $7.22 for the year, against July’s guidance of $9 to $11[1]. The shares fell 1.5% after hours[3].

The gap. Revenue is doing what the podium promised: it rose 17.4% to $17.9 billion, and United expects fourth-quarter revenue growth above 20%[1]. Fares are rising. The trouble is that fuel rose faster. A recovery measured in revenue is not a recovery measured in profit.

Verdict. The podium was not dishonest; it described a plan made at $4 fuel. The filing describes the world at $4.80. When a company talks about passing on costs, check the fuel line in its next report. It shows what actually happened.

WHAT TO WATCH

- The Gulf Coast jet fuel price, which the $4.80 assumption follows.
- Whether other airlines reporting this month make the same change to their fuel assumptions.

DESK COMMENT

A fare can be repriced in a week. A fuel bill gets paid on the day.

ENERGY & INDUSTRY · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Russian diesel is sailing to its old customers again

After Washington suspended sanctions and secured the lifting of an export ban, at least two tankers signalled voyages to Turkey and Brazil. US officials say they want more crude through domestic refineries.

Russian diesel cargoes are returning to their traditional destinations, Reuters reported, citing shipping data from Kpler and LSEG[1]. At least two tankers have signalled voyages to Turkey and Brazil in recent days[1]. This follows the US suspension of sanctions and the lifting of a Russian export ban that Washington secured[1].

Continue in reading view →

ENERGY & INDUSTRY · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

The November contract left at $101.79

The November contract for US West Texas Intermediate crude expired on Tuesday at $101.79, down $1.87, after touching $110.48, its highest since April for a nearby contract[1]. The more active December contract settled 72 cents lower at $97.82[1]. Eight analysts polled by Reuters expect US crude inventories to have fallen by about 800,000 barrels in the week to 16 October[1]. The official weekly count comes from the Energy Information Administration. Wait for it before drawing conclusions from the poll.

MONEY, FX & COMMITTEES · 2 MIN

Lagarde let the bond market carry some of the weight

In her statement to the IMF's steering committee, the ECB president said the energy shock is too large to look through, but that rising long-term rates will slow growth and dampen pass-through. That is a reason for patience, written down.

The statement was delivered in Bangkok on 17 October and posted by the Bank for International Settlements on 20 October[1]. It is a formal text, which makes it more useful than an interview.

The numbers it rests on. Euro-area headline inflation rose to 3.8% in September, mostly on energy; core inflation rose slightly to 2.5%[1]. Wages "have so far shown no material response to the energy shock"[1]. The ECB raised rates by 25 basis points in June and again in September[1].

The sentence that matters. "The energy shock is too large to 'look through' but a measured response remains appropriate"[1]. The reason given is specific: financing conditions have tightened, with long-term rates "rising notably" since the last meeting, which "will slow growth and reduce pass-through by more than projected" in September[1]. In plain words: the bond market has already done part of the ECB's work.

How the reaction function is written. Lagarde lists three criteria: the inflation outlook, underlying inflation, and the strength of transmission[1]. You can check each one against published data. That is a better way to run a central bank than a speech about resolve.

Across the Atlantic. The US 10-year yield fell to 5.11% on Tuesday and futures priced about an 83% chance that the Fed holds next week, with about 73.7% for a December rate rise[2]. Two central banks, the same energy shock, and both are letting the long end of the curve do part of the work.

WHAT TO WATCH

- The ECB's October policy meeting; the statement keeps every option open and names three criteria.
- The Federal Reserve's meeting next week; futures put a hold at about 83%.
- Euro-area wage data, which so far show 'no material response' to the energy shock.

DESK COMMENT

A central bank that names its three tests is easier to argue with, and that is a compliment.

MONEY, FX & COMMITTEES · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

The ECB built a pipe that 30 central banks want to use

Lagarde's statement also contained plumbing: a repo facility for foreign central banks, a settlement system for tokenised assets, and a deadline for the digital-euro law.

Most of the attention on Lagarde's statement to the IMF's steering committee will go to rates. The rest of it describes plumbing, which tends to last longer.

The first item is EUREP, the Eurosystem's repo facility for central banks outside the euro area. The Governing Council set its operational features in July, and "more than 30 central banks have expressed interest" in the past six months[1]. A repo line lends euros against collateral. It is a dull tool and an important one, because it means that in a crisis a foreign central bank can get euros without selling in a hurry.

The second is Pontes, the Eurosystem's system for settling tokenised assets in central-bank money, which went live on 21 September[1]. The third is the digital euro: the ECB plans a 12-month internal pilot in the second half of 2027, and says adopting the regulation by the end of 2026 is "key" to that timetable[1].

None of this will move a market this morning. But the international role of a currency is built on pipes like these, not on speeches about it.

MONEY, FX & COMMITTEES · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

The yen sat at 158 while Tokyo rose

In early Wednesday trading the yen was little changed at 158.29 per dollar and the offshore yuan held at 6.6746[1]. Long-dated US Treasuries outperformed in New York on Tuesday, which weighed on the dollar[1]. CNBC TV18 notes that oil has driven Treasury yields for much of the year, but that bond investors largely ignored crude last week as AI-linked stocks sold off[1]. A currency that does not move on a 1.76% equity rally is telling you that the rate gap, not the mood, is setting its price.

ORDINARY & INHERITED LIFE · 2 MIN

Ordinary Ledger: a monthly cap for the occasional rider

The Länder transport ministers meet today and tomorrow to discuss a smartphone tariff that charges each trip and stops charging at the Deutschlandticket price. The host minister says there is no money for it. Both points belong in the ledger.

The transport ministers of Germany's sixteen Länder meet on Wednesday and Thursday in Schwangau, in Bavaria[1]. A draft resolution quoted by the Rheinische Post proposes an offer "for occasional users with nationwide validity, analogous to the Deutschlandticket"[1].

How it would work. North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg propose a smartphone check-in and check-out tariff[1]. Each trip is recorded, the cheapest fare is worked out automatically, and over a month you would never pay more than a Deutschlandticket costs[2,3]. NRW already runs a similar scheme[3]. "Whoever only occasionally travels by bus and train must be able to do so just as simply and on fair terms as frequent riders with the Deutschlandticket," said NRW transport minister Oliver Krischer[1].

The ledger. The Deutschlandticket costs €63 a month and rises to €66.80 in January[1]. A single fare in Berlin is now €4, according to Der Spiegel, about 90% more than the €2.10 it cost almost twenty years ago[3]. Desk arithmetic: at €4 a trip, sixteen trips in a month cost €64 and the seventeenth takes you past the January ticket price of €66.80.

The objection. The host, Bavaria's transport minister Christian Bernreiter, rejects the proposal; there is a shortage of money everywhere, he says[2]. That is not a speech. It is a budget line, and it deserves an answer in euros.

The constructive reading. A monthly cap is a dull idea. It needs a fare database, an app and a clearing system between transport associations. It would also help the people who are least well served today: those who ride the bus now and then.

WHAT TO WATCH

- The conference's resolution on Thursday; according to tagesschau, North Rhine-Westphalia would work out the design.
- Whether the Länder that oppose it, starting with Bavaria, name the funding gap in euros.

DESK COMMENT

The fairest tariff is the one that remembers what you already paid this month.

ORDINARY & INHERITED LIFE · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

The pump at a quarter past five

At 05:14 on Wednesday a litre of E10 averaged €2.087 across 8,119 German stations and diesel €2.239. Berlin was cheapest for E10, Hessen dearest.

At 05:14 on Wednesday, the national average at open stations was €2.144 for Super E5, €2.087 for Super E10 and €2.239 for diesel, based on reports to the official fuel-price transparency office[1]. The E10 average covered 8,119 stations[1].

Where. For E10, Berlin was cheapest at €2.017 and Hessen dearest at €2.143; Hamburg, at €2.051, and Baden-Württemberg, at €2.056, were also near the bottom[1]. Diesel ran from €2.185 in Berlin to €2.264 in Hessen[1]. Desk arithmetic: the 12.6-cent E10 gap between Berlin and Hessen comes to €6.30 on a 50-litre tank.

Which brand. Among the larger chains, HEM averaged €2.046 for E10 and AGIP ENI €2.155[1]. Desk arithmetic: that is almost 11 cents a litre, or about €5.45 on 50 litres, for the same fuel standard.

Compared with yesterday. Tuesday's snapshot at 05:12 put E10 at €2.089[2]. Two-tenths of a cent is not a trend. It is a price holding near €2.09 while Brent hovers near $110.

These are early-morning figures, and prices change through the day. The point of the snapshot is not to tell you where to fill up. It is that the data exist, are public, and are fresh every few minutes.

TECH & COMPUTE · 2 MIN

The founder is not in the room, and that is the point

SpaceX and Tesla have each set up a committee of independent directors to look at a merger. Elon Musk backs the idea but, as a conflicted party, cannot take part. Corporate law's oldest safeguard just got its biggest test.

On SpaceX's third-quarter earnings call on Tuesday, Elon Musk said the boards of SpaceX and Tesla had each formed special committees of independent directors to review a possible merger, at the request of shareholders[1]. CNBC TV18 called it a preliminary step towards what would be the largest corporate tie-up ever[2].

Why he is not in it. "Because I'm a conflicted party, I can't actually be in the discussions of the special committees," Musk said, calling it "an odd kabuki dance where two groups of people are talking, and I can't be in the conversation"[1]. He is chief executive and the largest individual shareholder of both companies[1].

Who could be. Tesla's October 19 proxy filing lists seven independent directors under Nasdaq standards, including chair Robyn Denholm[1]. SpaceX lists six[1]. One name, Ira Ehrenpreis, appears on both lists[1]. That overlap is worth watching: an independent director who sits on both sides of a deal is the sort of detail a committee is supposed to deal with in writing.

What is not decided. Musk said he supports the idea but called a merger far from certain: "At the end of the day, the shareholders have to be supportive of this"[1]. At SpaceX he holds more than 50% of the voting power[1]. At Tesla, he noted, a deal would need the votes of 50% of all shares outstanding, not just of those who vote[1].

The constructive reading. Special committees are slow and procedural, and they are often mocked. They exist so that the person with the most to gain on both sides does not set the price. Tuesday's call showed the rule working as intended: the most powerful person in the story described himself as being outside the room.

WHAT TO WATCH

- The names of the committee members; Musk said only that they are independent directors.
- Any terms; Musk said the committees have not agreed any.
- Tesla's own results on Wednesday, and whether its board says anything about the process.

DESK COMMENT

A good governance rule is one that a powerful man has to describe as a kabuki dance.

TECH & COMPUTE · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Netflix cut its ad forecast because the tools arrived late

Advertising revenue for 2026 is now expected at about $2.7 billion, not $3 billion. The reason given is not demand but software: ad features reaching the market more slowly than planned.

In its third-quarter shareholder letter, Netflix lowered its 2026 advertising revenue forecast to about $2.7 billion from about $3 billion, pointing to ad features reaching the market more slowly than expected[1]. The shares fell about 4% after hours, and the fall narrowed as investors read the full results[1].

The rest of the letter was steadier. Third-quarter revenue rose 12% to $12.87 billion, and net income was $3.66 billion, or 87 cents a share[1]. Netflix expects 2026 revenue of $51.1 billion, 0.2% below the midpoint of its earlier range, and says subscription revenue has done better than expected[1]. The advertising tier will reach 15 more markets during 2027, starting in March[1].

The letter also addresses a weak point directly: "We know there's some investor concern about our view hours growth"[1]. Last week the company cut about 6% of its workforce, around 1,000 jobs[1].

The lesson is a familiar one in software: a feature on a roadmap is not revenue. Revenue starts when the product ships and customers use it.

TECH & COMPUTE · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

3M sells the cables behind the chips

3M said it is issuing a warrant for 3.2 million shares to an Amazon subsidiary, after Amazon spent $6 billion on "optical connectivity and other data center products"[1]. 3M's shares rose 5.8% on Tuesday after its sales and profit beat expectations and it raised guidance[1]. The AI build-out is mostly written about in chips. A lot of the money goes on cables, connectors and cooling, sold by companies that have been making such things for decades.

HEALTH & CARE · 2 MIN

Two official death counts for one province

North Kivu's governor says 1,252 people have died of Ebola. The national bulletin says 1,176. The gap probably comes from counting probable deaths, but nobody has said so. A one-line clarification would help the response more than a press conference would.

On Monday the governor of North Kivu, General Évariste Somo Kakule, declared a “Stop Ebola” day that shut down Beni, Butembo, Oïcha, Lubero-centre and Kasindi-Lubiriha[1]. He said that by 17 October the province had 1,252 Ebola deaths and an estimated case-fatality rate of 60%, according to Radio Okapi[1].

The other count. The national situation report number 157, for 18 October, gives North Kivu 2,084 confirmed cases and 1,176 confirmed deaths, a fatality rate of 56.4%[2]. Nationally it counts 9,552 confirmed cases, 4,602 confirmed deaths, 937 patients in isolation and 2,550 recoveries[2,3]. The ECDC, the EU’s disease agency, uses the same national figures[3].

The likely reason. CongoNews points out that the national bulletin counts only laboratory-confirmed cases and deaths, and says so[1]. A provincial count can add probable deaths: people who died with typical symptoms but whose sample was never validated[1]. With 30 community deaths reported in a single day, the gap between the two series would grow mechanically over time[1,2]. The outlet is careful to call this a hypothesis, because neither office has explained its method[1].

Why it matters. A 60% fatality rate and a 56.4% rate describe different epidemics, and they lead to different decisions about beds, teams and which zones come first[1]. Donors work from the national bulletin; provincial decisions, such as Monday’s shutdown, rest on the local count[1].

The fix is clerical. It would take one line from either office to say whether the provincial figure includes probable deaths[1]. That is the kind of small, boring correction that makes a response easier to run.

WHAT TO WATCH

- Whether the governorate or the national public-health institute says if the provincial figure includes probable deaths.
- The next SitRep's North Kivu column: 48 new confirmed cases on 18 October.

DESK COMMENT

Two honest counts that do not match are a method problem, not a scandal. Publish the method.

HEALTH & CARE · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

North Kivu's health workers gave fourteen days' notice

The health unions of Beni, Butembo and Lubero want protective equipment in every facility in the Ebola zones and a risk bonus for all exposed staff. The notice runs out around the end of the month.

In a letter to North Kivu’s governor dated Thursday 15 October, the joint health unions of the Beni–Butembo–Lubero region gave the provincial authorities 14 days to respond to their demands, or face a strike[1].

The demands are practical. The unions want urgent supplies of personal protective equipment in health facilities in the Ebola-affected zones, and a risk bonus for every health worker exposed to the disease, not only those in specialised treatment centres[1]. “Other agents working in health facilities are also confronted with this risk, and some have already been contaminated,” said Mongerwa Nzoli, the unions’ deputy co-ordinator in the region[1]. They also ask for better pay and conditions for nurses, hygienists, technicians and laboratory staff in transit and treatment centres[1].

By Sunday 18 October the governor had not responded, according to Radio Okapi[1].

An epidemic response runs on gloves, gowns and payrolls as much as on vaccines. A strike notice with a date and a list is a negotiation, and a list like this one can be answered with invoices.

HEALTH & CARE · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Nord-Ubangi became the eighth province

Nord-Ubangi has reported two confirmed Ebola cases, including one death, in one of its 11 health zones, the ECDC says[1]. Spain’s health ministry names the zone as Wapinda[2]. That makes eight affected provinces and 66 of 178 health zones nationally[1]. Ituri remains the most affected province, with 6,960 cases[1]. A new province with two cases is a warning to act early, while the numbers are still small enough to trace every contact.

SECURITY & ORDER · 2 MIN

The curfews were renewed, and the quiet held a second night

Paris, Marseille and Lyon kept their targeted night-time restrictions after a calm Monday. Soldiers from Operation Sentinelle will support police for Saturday's marches, and 200 investigators are working through the weekend's damage.

Paris police ordered a new curfew from 23:00 on Tuesday to 06:00 on Wednesday around Place de la République and the Les Halles shopping district, after the first such night was calm[4]. From 20:00 gatherings were banned near the Élysée, Parliament and the Senate, on the Champs-Élysées, around Place Vendôme and near railway stations[2].

Other cities. In Marseille a curfew runs from 22:00 to 05:00 nightly until Friday, according to BFM TV as cited by Xinhua, and Lyon has a similar measure[1]. Marseille's mayor Benoît Payan said curfews for minors would apply around the commercial areas hit hardest at the weekend[2]. In Lille the curfew applies only to minors, and officers checked identities in the city centre[2].

The counting. Justice minister Gérald Darmanin said more than 2,500 people had been taken into police custody by Monday evening[3]. Authorities have assigned 200 investigators to identify those involved in the violence[2]. Parliament is setting up a commission of inquiry into the causes[2].

Saturday. Prime minister Sébastien Lecornu told the National Assembly that the police deployment for the demonstrations planned for 24 October would be "massive"[1]. Interior minister Laurent Nuñez said soldiers from Operation Sentinelle, the army's domestic security mission, would help prevent violence[1].

The constructive reading. The measures are narrow in place and time, renewed night by night, and published in advance. The protesters' demands, better schools and relief from living costs, are separate from the rioting and have to be answered with a budget[3]. Order on the streets buys time for that work. It does not replace it.

WHAT TO WATCH

- The Paris prefecture's order for Wednesday night, and whether it is renewed again.
- The marches announced for Saturday 24 October and the size of the deployment.
- The National Assembly's commission of inquiry into the causes of the unrest.

DESK COMMENT

A curfew that is renewed one night at a time is a tool, not a mood.

SECURITY & ORDER · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Taiz: the only supply road is closed

The UN's human rights chief says the Houthis' closure of the road linking Taiz to Aden puts civilians at grave risk. The WFP says 800,000 people are cut off from aid, most of them in Taiz.

The Houthis have surrounded Taiz again after capturing a major road linking the city to southern Yemen[1]. On Tuesday the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, said: "The Houthis' closure of the only supply route linking Taiz to Aden is placing civilians at grave risk, blocking humanitarian aid and cutting off essential supplies"[1]. He asked that civilians who want to leave be allowed to do so freely and safely[1].

The numbers behind the warning: fighting in Taiz governorate killed at least 32 civilians between 1 August and 19 October, including 14 children[1]. The World Food Programme says shifting front lines and road closures have cut off 800,000 people from life-saving aid, most of them in Taiz, and more than 18 million Yemenis face severe food insecurity[1]. Prices of basic goods in the city have multiplied[1].

Continue in reading view →

SECURITY & ORDER · BRIEF · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Shabwa: 73 dead, 14 missing, and a request to the UN

Local authorities raised the death toll from Monday's Houthi missile strike on the al-Alam camp in Shabwa to 73, with 14 people missing[1,2]. Rashad al-Alimi, head of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council, formally asked the UN to designate the Houthis a terrorist organisation[1]. Britain said its Typhoon jets would help protect Saudi Arabia in a "defensive role" and would not strike Yemen[1]. The Saudi-led coalition said it intercepted a ballistic missile fired towards Riyadh on Tuesday[1].

CLIMATE & WEATHER · 2 MIN

One orange left, and it is a river

Météo-France's 03:04 bulletin has no red anywhere and only Gard in orange, for flooding. The rain has moved on. The water it left behind has not finished moving.

At 03:04 Paris time on Wednesday, Météo-France listed no département in red[1]. One was in orange: Gard, for floods[1]. Twenty-six were in yellow[1].

From sky to river. The yellow list shows how the episode has changed shape. Haute-Corse and Corse-du-Sud are now yellow for wind, rain, storms and floods[1]. Ardèche, Bouches-du-Rhône, Drôme, Hérault, Var and Vaucluse are yellow for floods only[1]. That is the normal sequence after a Mediterranean downpour: the rain warning comes down first, the river warning stays up, because water takes days to drain through a catchment.

A second weather. On the Atlantic and Channel side, a different system has put the coast from Finistère to Nord in yellow for wind, with storms flagged in Calvados, Manche, Seine-Maritime, Charente-Maritime, Gironde, Landes and Vendée[1].

The context that makes floods odd. This rain fell on a dry country. Copernicus reports that September 2026 was France's third-driest since 1958, with a national rainfall deficit of about 70%, and that record-low September flows were measured on sections of the Garonne-Dordogne, among other rivers[2]. Dry, hard ground sheds heavy rain quickly. A drought and a flood warning in the same autumn are not a contradiction; they are the same soil.

The constructive reading. The warning system did its job in both directions. It went up in time, and it is coming down step by step as the measurements allow. For anyone in Gard, the orange is about rivers and low roads, not the sky.

WHAT TO WATCH

- Météo-France's 16:00 bulletin; warnings are updated at least twice a day, at 06:00 and 16:00.
- River levels in Gard, Hérault and the Rhône valley, all still flagged for floods.
- Wind in the north-west, where Brittany, Normandy and the Channel coast are yellow.

DESK COMMENT

Rain stops when the cloud leaves. Rivers keep their own timetable.

CLIMATE & WEATHER · SHORT ITEM · EPAPER EXTRA, ADDED 06:30 CEST

Europe's rivers were at record lows before the rain came

Copernicus says September flows were the lowest on record for the month along stretches of the Rhine, Danube, Vistula, Ebro and Garonne-Dordogne. The Vistula at Warsaw fell to its lowest level in more than 70 years.

The Copernicus Climate Change Service's hydrology summary for September is a useful backdrop to this week's flood warnings in southern France. Below-average river flows were widespread across much of Europe, and record-low September flows in the EFAS dataset, which runs from 1992, were measured along sections of the Ebro, Garonne-Dordogne, Rhine, Vistula and Danube[1].

The consequences were practical. Low water on the Rhine kept disrupting commercial and passenger shipping in Germany[1]. The Vistula at Warsaw fell to its lowest level in more than 70 years of measurements[1]. Inflows to the Dniester reservoir were around 11% of normal, raising supply worries in Moldova and Ukraine[1]. In England, temporary water-use restrictions covered about 30 million people[1]. EU wildfires of at least 30 hectares had burnt around 689,000 hectares by the end of September[1].

Copernicus also notes the limits of its own data: soil moisture figures are "of qualitative rather than quantitative value"[1]. That kind of caveat is worth reading too.

For a barge operator, a water utility or a farmer, a summer like this is a cost before it is a statistic. One week of heavy rain does not fill a dry river system.

Before you close the tab

THE DAY IN ONE SENTENCE

Three capitals described one strait three ways while the ship count said open but thin, companies settled the market with their quarterly reports, and a €220 billion figure in Berlin turned out to have a footnote.

ONE THING YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

This week, pick one public count you rely on, such as a weather warning map, a fuel-price site or a weekly shipping tally, and note when it is next updated. Météo-France, for example, updates its warnings at least at 06:00 and 16:00 [1]. Knowing when the next number arrives makes the statements in between easier to set aside.

A habit, not advice. Nothing here tells you what to buy, sign or switch.

IN EUROS AT HOME

The Deutschlandticket costs €63 a month and rises to €66.80 in January [3]. Desk arithmetic: that is €3.80 more a month, or €45.60 more a year for someone who keeps it all twelve months. A single fare in Berlin is €4 [4], so sixteen single trips a month cost €64, and the seventeenth takes you past the new ticket price. The Länder transport ministers are discussing a tariff that would charge occasional riders by the trip and stop at the ticket price [3].

Desk arithmetic on the cited fares. Local fares differ by region and transport association. Nothing here is advice.

WHAT WENT RIGHT

In Congo's Ebola response, the laboratories are getting faster. Situation report 157 records 500 samples analysed in a day, against 423 on 11 October, an increase of 18.2%, while the share testing positive fell from 20.8% to 19.4% [2]. Twenty more people recovered that day, bringing the total to 2,550 [2]. More tests and a slightly lower positive rate are what a response gaining ground looks like in the early stages.

SMALL WORDS

Special committee

When a company's leader or largest owner stands on both sides of a deal, the board can hand the decision to a special committee made up only of independent directors, people with no stake in the outcome beyond their duty to shareholders. The conflicted person stays out of the room. SpaceX and Tesla each set one up on Tuesday to look at a merger, and Elon Musk said he cannot take part because he is "a conflicted party" [5].

1. Vigilance accessible — Météo-France, 21 Oct 2026, 03:04 Paris
2. Rapport de situation, SitRep N°157, 18 octobre 2026 — Ministère de la Santé Publique, RDC, published 19 Oct 2026
3. Deutschlandticket nach Bedarf? Verkehrsminister planen Ticket für Gelegenheitsfahrer — tagesschau.de, 20 Oct 2026, 12:52
4. Die Lage am Abend (Deutschlandticket light) — Der Spiegel, 20 Oct 2026, 18:25
5. SpaceX and Tesla boards form special committees to review merger — TechCrunch, 20 Oct 2026

Commentary for information only. Not investment, legal, tax, medical or political advice. Inside Desk is free and reader-supported. Every number is sourced in the piece it appears in.