

EU agrees three-euro **small parcel tax** to tackle China flood

Last year, 4.6 billion small retail packages entered the European Union

- The levy will be introduced on a temporary basis starting July 1
 - European retailers argue they face unfair competition
- AFP | Brussels, Belgium

EU finance ministers agreed yesterday to impose a three-euro duty on low-value imports into the bloc from July 2026 to help tackle a flood of small parcels ordered via the likes of Shein and Temu. Last year, 4.6 billion small retail packages entered the European Union -- more than 145 per second -- with 91% originating in China and their numbers expected to keep rising. Starting at three euros, the new fee will apply once per item in cases where packages contain different products, but only once if they contain multiples of the same item, a spokesperson for



Stacked parcels are seen up front as a Hongkong Post employee stands at a service counter at a post office in Hong Kong

the European Council told AFP. The move comes a month after the EU agreed to scrap a duty exemption for parcels worth less than 150 euros (\$174) imported directly to consumers in the 27-nation bloc, in many cases via Chinese-founded platforms. The levy will be introduced on a temporary basis starting July 1, staying in place until the bloc can settle on a permanent solution for taxing such imports. “This temporary measure

responds to the fact that such parcels currently enter the EU duty free, leading to unfair competition for EU sellers, health and safety risks for consumers, high levels of fraud and environmental concerns,” the Council,

which represents EU member states, said in a statement.

‘Major victory’

European retailers argue they face unfair competition from overseas platforms, such as AliExpress, Shein and Temu, which they claim do not always comply with the EU’s stringent rules on products.

Key EU power France has made the matter a priority, given the around 800 million such packages shipped to the country last year and strong domestic pressure to take action.

French Finance Minister Roland Lescure welcomed the flat tax as “a major victory for the European Union”.

“Europe is taking concrete steps to protect its single market, its consumers and its sovereignty,” he said.

The move comes as the EU strives to bolster the continent’s competitiveness by making the lives of European businesses easier through slashing red tape.

Alongside ending the duty exemption, the EU executive in May proposed a small package handling fee worth two euros.

EU member states have yet to agree on the level of that fee, but hope it will apply from late 2026.

Fed up with waiting, some states have already moved forward with their own plans, including Romania, which has imposed a five-euro fee on small parcels.

Global parcel shipments have exploded in recent years – the world now sends over 170 billion parcels a year, and this volume is expected to surpass 250 billion parcels annually by 2027, driven largely by e-commerce and same-day delivery services.

Europe agrees recycled plastic targets for cars

Carmakers will have to meet the target in 10 years

- Vehicle manufacturing accounts for 10% of the EU’s overall consumption of plastics
- AFP | Brussels, Belgium

Car manufacturers in Europe will have to include more recycled plastics in new vehicles under new EU rules agreed on by the bloc’s countries and lawmakers yesterday.



Cars for export wait to be shipped at a port in Lianyungang, eastern China’s Jiangsu province

European Union governments and parliament representatives reached an early morning deal to mandate that at least 25 percent of plastics used in cars, trucks and motorcycles has been recycled.

Carmakers will have to meet the mandatory target in 10 years, with an intermediate 15 percent goal in six years, according to the European Council representing member states.

At least 20% of the recycled materials will have to be sourced from old, scrap vehicles.

“This provisional agreement marks a significant step towards a circular economy for the European automotive sec-

tor,” said Magnus Heunicke, environment minister for Denmark, which holds the EU’s rotating presidency.

Vehicle manufacturing accounts for 10% of the EU’s overall consumption of plastics, and is responsible for 19% of demand for the bloc’s steel industry, according to Brussels.

The deal is provisional and needs to be officially endorsed by the European Council representing member states and the parliament before it is formally adopted. It also instructs the European Commission to set future targets for recycled steel, aluminium, magnesium and critical raw materials and bans the export of old vehicles that are no longer roadworthy.

Musk signals plan to launch IPO for SpaceX

AFP | New York, United States

Elon Musk has signaled plans to soon seek a public stock listing of SpaceX, confirming a report that links the strategic shift to a near-term need for more capital.

Musk, who is also the CEO of Tesla among other ventures, described as “accurate” a report in online publication Ars Technica outlining the controversial billionaire’s embrace of a public listing as a way to access capital to finance the building of artificial intelligence data centers in space.

Ars Technica characterized the embrace of an IPO as a “major change in thinking” for Musk, who had previously resisted a public listing for SpaceX.

His comment comes on the heels of recent reports in US media that SpaceX stands poised in 2026 or 2027 for a record-setting initial public offering valuing the company at \$1.5 trillion.

Musk had previously op-



A wax head of Elon Musk is seen on a robot dog as part of an art installation called “Regular Animals” by digital artist Mike Winkelmann, also known as Beeple, during Art Basel 2025 at Miami Beach Convention Center in Miami Beach, Florida

posed an IPO for SpaceX because “he has not enjoyed the public scrutiny of Tesla, and feared that shareholder desires for financial return were not consistent with his ultimate goal of settling Mars,” wrote Ars Technica senior space editor Eric Berger in a December 10 article.

“As usual, Eric is accurate,” Musk posted later Wednesday on X, another part of the tech mogul’s business empire.

SpaceX is moving ahead with an IPO that would seek to raise “significantly more than \$30 billion,” Bloomberg reported on Tuesday, citing unnamed sources.

OpenAI beefs up GPT models in AI race with Google

San Francisco, United States

OpenAI released its latest artificial intelligence models on Thursday, shrugging off worries about how it will cash in on massive spending in its technology race with Google.

The San Francisco-based AI superstar touted GPT-5.2 Pro and GPT-5.2 Thinking as its best models yet for handling math or science work.

“Strong mathematical reasoning is a foundation for reliability in scientific and technical work,” OpenAI said in a blog post. “These capabilities are also closely tied to progress toward general intelligence.”

Artificial general intelligence has become a holy grail of sorts in the tech world, seen as a threshold where machines think the way people do or even better. The release comes on

the heels of OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman urging his team to strive to keep up with Google, the search engine juggernaut that has been relentlessly innovating in AI.

While Google can tap into its massive online ad revenue to invest in AI, OpenAI has been committing tens of billions of dollars to computing infrastructure while having yet to turn a profit.

Modern cars contain 150-200 kilograms of plastic components, making up 10-15% of a vehicle’s total weight. These plastics help reduce overall weight, improving fuel efficiency and lowering emissions compared with older, heavier metal parts.