

TRADIUM Market Report

The United States and Japan Ramp up the Race for Critical Raw Materials

Export restrictions, record prices, new resource alliances: in the first quarter of 2026, last year's trends continued seamlessly. In our market report, we examine the key developments in rare earths, technology metals, and precious metals and provide context and analysis.



Q1/26

2025 was shaped by China's resource policy and the responses of Western industrialized nations, as well as emerging players such as India and Brazil. This strategic competition has further intensified in the first months of the current year. Rising tensions between China and Japan culminated on January 6 in new export controls; the impact on Japan's industrial sector became apparent within just a few weeks, placing the country under increasing pressure to act. Meanwhile, other countries have also been seeking responses to what are likely to be ongoing supply constraints. In this context, the establishment of strategic raw material reserves is gaining importance. At present, the United States is taking a leading role in these and other measures.

Explore the key events that have shaped the markets in our quarterly report. In addition, we provide price trends for all metals in chart form.

Critical Raw Materials: The West Is Searching for a New Normal

The competition for critical raw materials and metals has intensified further in 2026. The trigger is a new geopolitical "normal": China's export restrictions on strategic resources such as technology metals or rare earths are increasing pressure on Western industrial nations to reorganize and politically secure their supply chains.

The United States, in particular, is driving this development. With [Project Vault](#), Washington plans to build a strategic raw material reserve for metals such as rhenium, technology metals, and rare earths, totaling around \$12 billion. In addition, the U.S. Department of Energy has allocated up to \$500 million for projects related to critical mineral processing, battery supply chains, and recycling.

State market interventions are also on the rise. The U.S. Department of Defense has signed a four-year [supply agreement](#) with the Australian producer Lynas. Around \$96 million will be invested in rare earth purchases, combined with minimum prices for neodymium-praseodymium to make production outside China economically viable. This so-called price floor is based on agreements the Department made with the U.S. company MP Materials in summer 2025.

There has been no shortage of stark wake-up calls in recent months. With each passing quarter, it is becoming increasingly clear that the physical availability of raw materials can no longer be taken for granted. As a result, 2026 will be another year in which building up strategic stockpiles gains importance, provided the material can still be sourced at all.



Matthias R uth
Managing Director TRADIUM

At the same time, Canada is expanding its international raw materials policy. Ottawa is increasingly positioning itself as an [independent resource partner](#) for Western industrial nations and is deliberately expanding its partnerships and cooperation along the entire value chain.

In Europe, pressure to act is growing. The [European Court of Auditors](#) recently warned that the targets set out in the Critical Raw Materials Act to achieve partial resource sovereignty by 2030 could be at risk. The main reason is the slow progress in expanding domestic mining and processing capacities. At the same time, the EU is trying to counteract this by pursuing new free trade agreements with resource-rich countries; for instance, in March, negotiations with [Australia were concluded](#). From May, the agreement with the South American bloc Mercosur will also [take effect provisionally](#).

Japan and China: Rising Tensions in Asia

Another issue that occupied the markets for critical industrial metals in the first quarter of the year was the simmering conflict between the resource powerhouse China and the high-tech hub Japan. With the election of the new Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, who assumed office with a large majority and pursues a clearly pro-American foreign policy line, tensions have further escalated. Particularly with regard to the Taiwan conflict, Tokyo is increasingly positioning itself openly against Beijing, placing additional strain on raw material policy relations.

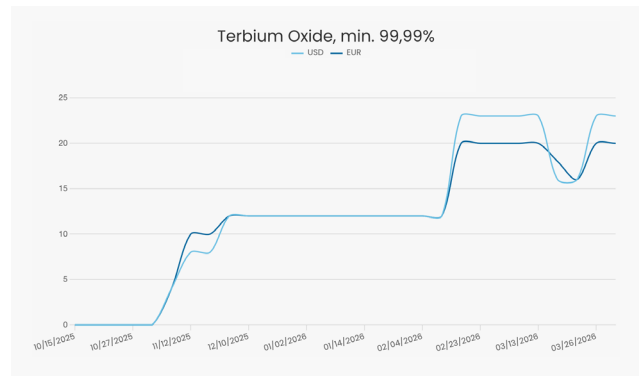
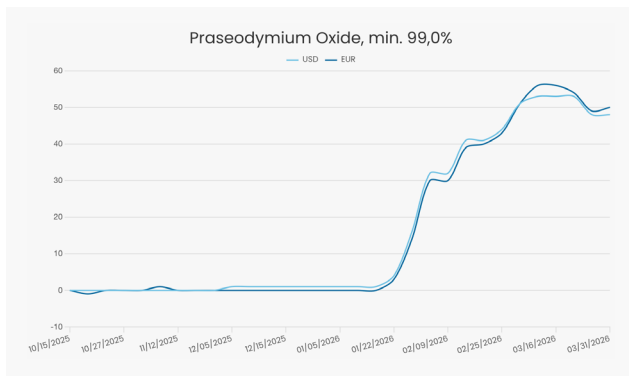
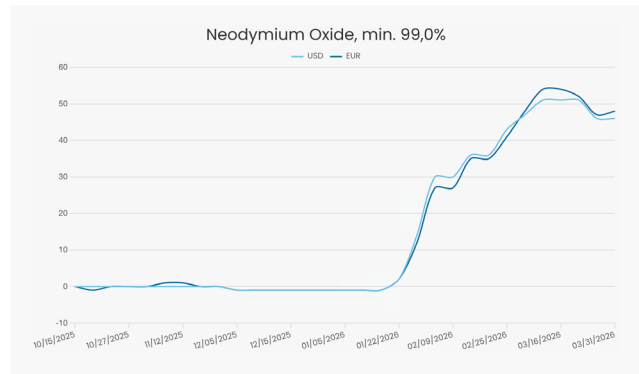
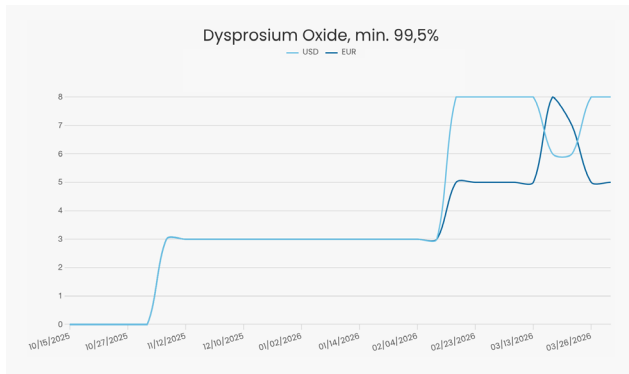
[China responded in early January with new export restrictions on so-called dual-use goods](#), materials and resources that can be used for both civilian and military purposes. Officially, the measures apply only to military end-users in Japan. However, the [latest export data](#) show that deliveries of a range of critical raw materials have declined sharply or even come to a complete halt, which, in practice, amounts to a broader restriction. Until now, Japan was the main importer of Chinese gallium and dysprosium and also ranked highly for other critical materials.

This increases the pressure on Japan to secure its own supply of strategic metals and other key raw materials. High-tech industries are particularly affected, including electronics, automotive manufacturing, and semiconductor production, all of which depend heavily on stable supply chains for critical raw materials. The government is therefore now [forced to accelerate the diversification of supply chains](#) and to develop new sources outside of China.

A central role is played by the state resource organization JOGMEC (Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security), whose mandate is to ensure the long-term supply of metals, energy, and other critical raw materials for Japanese industry. Its tools include the creation and management of strategic reserves, financial participation in international mining projects, and the targeted expansion of partnerships with resource-rich countries.

Rare Earths: Market Dynamics Become Increasingly Complex

Overall, the rare earths market presents a mixed picture: while [China's total exports](#) have recently picked up again, with magnet exports particularly rising at the beginning of the year, there have simultaneously been significant declines in certain strategically important elements. Dysprosium and terbium were especially affected, with exports in some cases falling sharply.



The export data for rare earths once again show that Beijing is firmly in control and deliberately manages how much material leaves the country and who gains access to these resources. Supply and planning security remain uncertain in the new year. It is therefore logical that some countries stepped up efforts to develop alternative supply chains in the first quarter. However, finding a meaningful counterbalance to the quasi-monopoly in the short to medium term is likely to remain challenging.

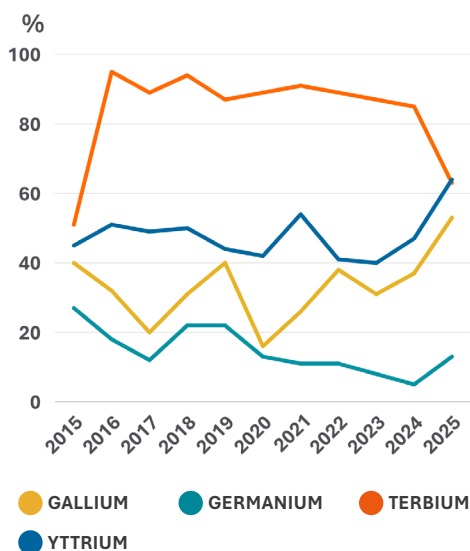


Jan Giese
Head of Sales & Trading

The background to this development is the export controls on key heavy rare earths, including yttrium, which have been in effect since spring 2025. These measures require export approvals and significantly increase uncertainty along global supply chains. The consequences are reflected not only in fluctuating export volumes but increasingly also in price trends. Beyond dysprosium and terbium, this is particularly evident with yttrium, whose price temporarily surged by a factor of 140.

China's intention to defend its dominant position in rare earths against Western competitors is also enshrined in the current Five-Year Plan (2026–2030), adopted on March 12 by the National People's Congress, which envisions tighter control over production, export, and value creation.

JAPANESE SHARES OF CHINESE EXPORTS



Research: RAWMATERIALS.net,
Source: Chinese Customs Administration

Tight Supply Chains and Record Prices: Technology Metals Under Pressure

All technology metals saw strong price increases in the first quarter of the year, with many reaching multi-year highs. The main drivers are rising demand in both civilian and military high-tech sectors, combined with increasingly limited availability due to the high concentration of production in a few countries. Production is also difficult to scale, as these metals are primarily obtained as by-products. Added to this are the effects of export restrictions that the main producer, China, has introduced over recent years for numerous technology metals such as gallium, germanium, and antimony.

Gallium exports were relatively stable at the start of the year. However, this should not obscure the fact that China continues to control which countries receive how much material. Currently, Japan is cut off from the supply chain due to increasing tensions with China and the resulting tightened export controls. In 2025, the country still received Chinese gallium reliably. This development highlights once again the need to diversify supply chains to reduce dependence on a single producer. Initiatives such as the raw materials alliance launched in the U.S. have made this clear in the first quarter. The market remains tight, and planning uncertainty continues.



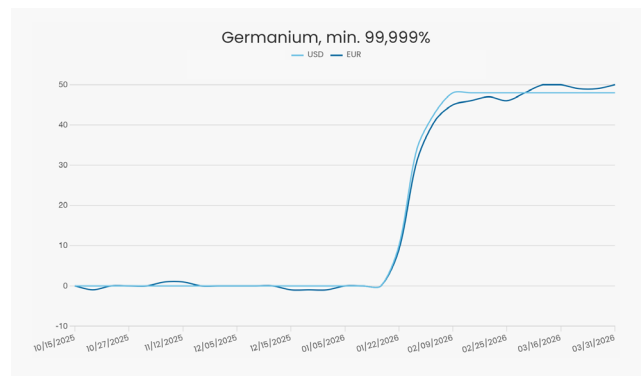
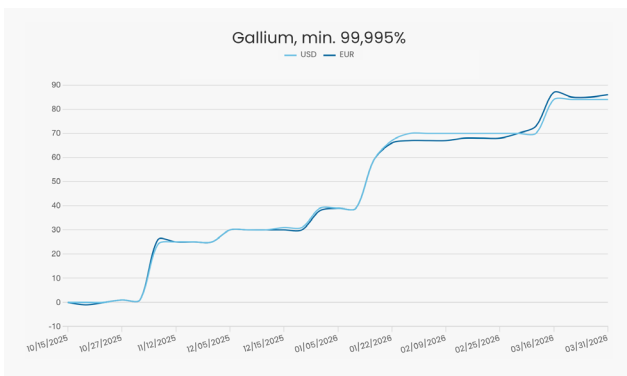
Jan Giese
Head of Sales & Trading

Gallium

The export controls imposed by China in summer 2023 continue to have a noticeable impact on gallium. Since the introduction of the licensing system, there have been repeated delivery delays, and the annual export volume has not returned to pre-regulation levels. Since the beginning of 2026, there has also been a significant shift in recipient countries. Due to the export restrictions in effect since January—which officially target military end-users in Japan—the country is now effectively [receiving no material](#). While Japan was still the main destination for Chinese gallium in 2025, all exports in January and February went to Germany. The impact on Japan’s high-tech industry is likely to be substantial.

Germanium

While the supply situation for gallium remains tight, the situation in the germanium market has further intensified. Compared with January 2025, exports had fallen by as much as 95 percent. Only in February did shipments largely recover. Like gallium, no germanium has been delivered to Japan since the beginning of the year, as export controls on dual-use goods also apply here. Both metals are essential for semiconductor production and other key technologies that can be used for both civilian and military purposes.



In the first quarter, the germanium market remained tense, and the situation has even worsened compared with 2025. Despite already low export levels, shipments continued to decline at the start of the year. Russia remains the only country reliably supplied, while the rest of the world is desperately seeking material. The market is overall heavily overheated, with shortages of germanium evident everywhere, while demand is amplified by global crises. That Japan is increasingly being cut off from trade flows is a new development. As a result, the country is likely seeking new partnerships. I assess the chances of a rapid market easing as rather low.



Dr. Christian Hell

Senior Manager Germanium and Minor Metals

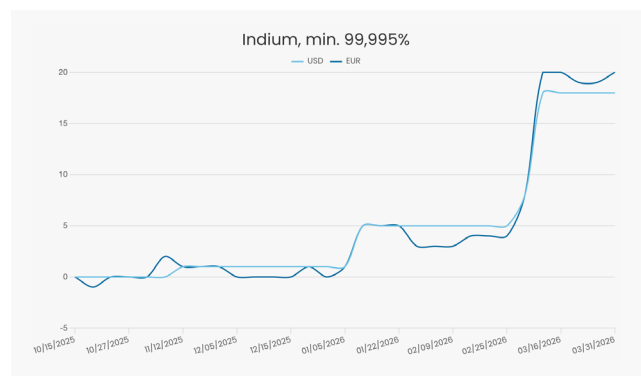
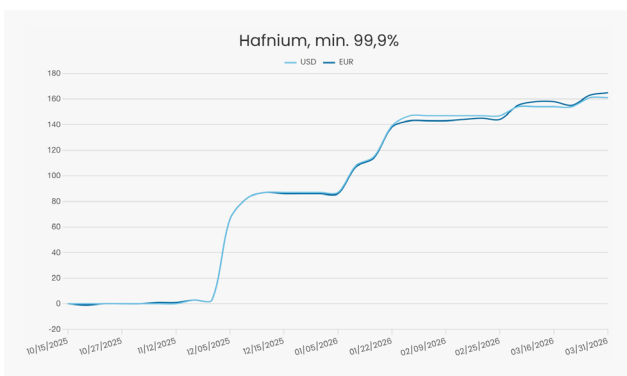
Hafnium

Hafnium prices have been rising steadily since November of last year, reaching a new all-time high by the end of March. While demand in sectors such as aerospace, nuclear energy, and memory chips shows no sign of slowing, the supply situation is becoming increasingly critical. This is further exacerbated by the export policies of the key producer, China: since 2024, certain hafnium compounds have been subject to strict export controls due to their potential military applications.

Indium, Rhenium, Antimony, Bismuth, Tellurium: A Look at Other Technology Metals

In addition to gallium and germanium, other technology metals also showed sustained high dynamics in the first quarter of 2026. With a growing range of applications and increasingly tight supply, these metals are moving further into the spotlight.

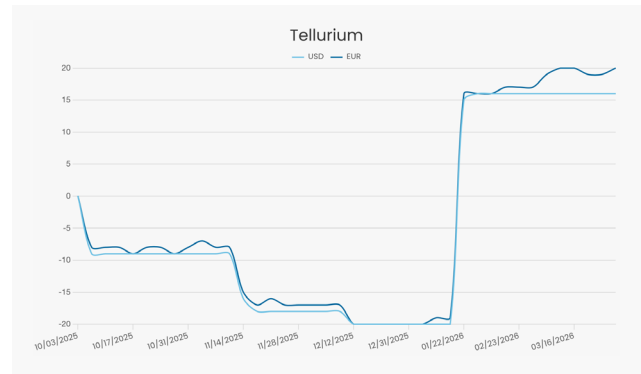
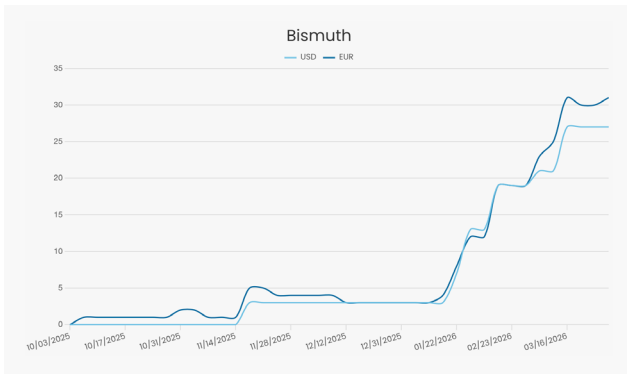
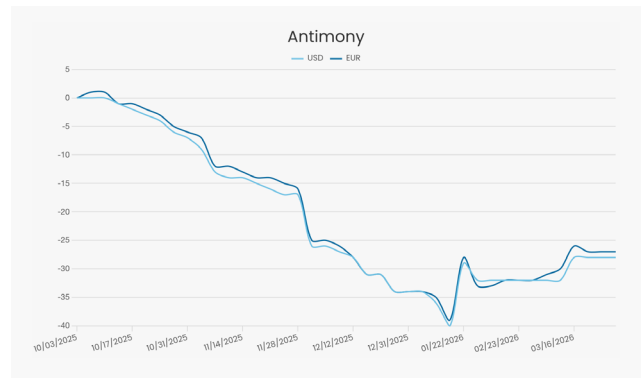
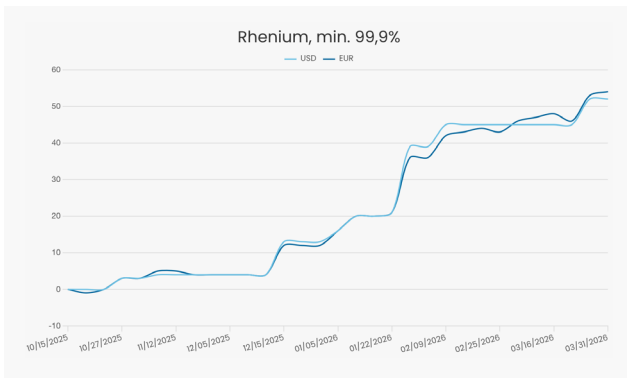
Indium saw particularly dynamic development in the first quarter: prices rose sharply within a few months, reaching a multi-year high, driven primarily by supply bottlenecks and increased demand from the electronics industry. The metal is used, among other things, as solder and in semiconductor technology.



Very little hafnium is currently reaching the market. The flow of material from China has been significantly reduced. There are occasional offers on the spot market, but many buyers receive no material from China despite having export licenses. This shows that approvals are one thing, actual deliveries are another. In a market with very limited production, this meets stable demand. Additional quantities from Western processing to relieve the market are hardly to be expected, as capacities are largely fully utilized.



Frank Meier
Senior Manager Minor Metals

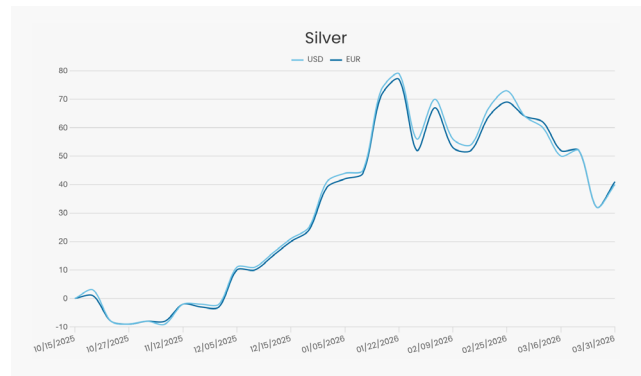
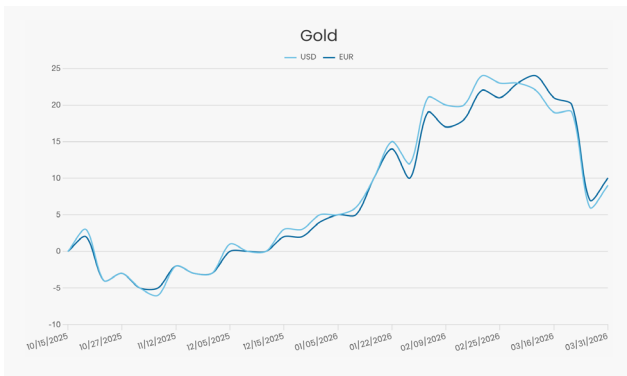


Rhenium also remained in focus due to persistently high prices and tight market conditions, particularly because of its importance for high-performance alloys in the aerospace industry. These alloys are primarily used in turbine blades for aircraft engines, as they retain their strength even under extreme temperatures and mechanical stress. The limited availability of rhenium, which is mostly obtained as a by-product of molybdenum and copper mining, further intensified price pressure.

Indium, rhenium, antimony, bismuth, and tellurium: multiple technology metal markets show a similar picture. Supply remains structurally limited, as many of these metals are primarily obtained as by-products and production can only be expanded to a limited extent. At the same time, demand continues to grow with expanding high-tech applications. Short-term additional quantities temporarily eased the market in the case of antimony and tellurium during the first quarter, but overall supply pressure has changed little. The limiting factor remains the scarcity of raw materials. In particular, indium and rhenium now illustrate how strongly small, highly specialized markets respond to shortages.



Brian Hendrich
Market Analyst



Precious Metals Post a Turbulent Quarter

The rally in gold and silver, which has persisted since last year, reached a temporary peak at the end of January. Both precious metals hit new all-time highs in the first quarter of 2026. The main drivers were ongoing macroeconomic uncertainties, declining real interest rates, and sustained strong demand for safe-haven assets from institutional investors and central banks. Gold, in particular, benefited from continuous inflows into physically backed ETFs and stable demand from Asia.

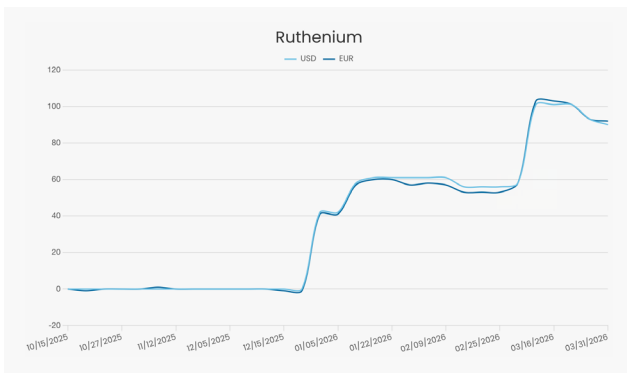
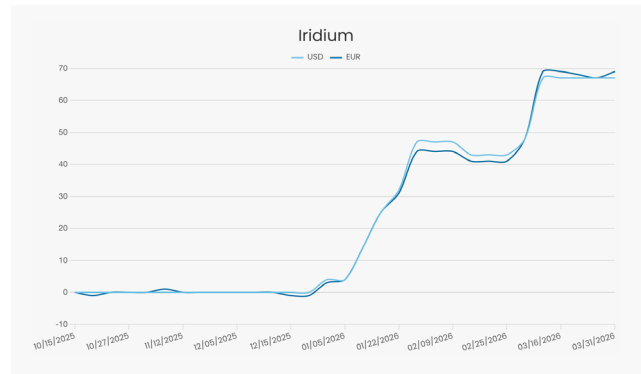
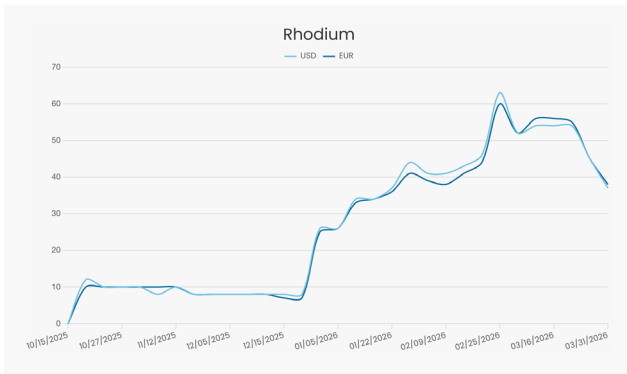
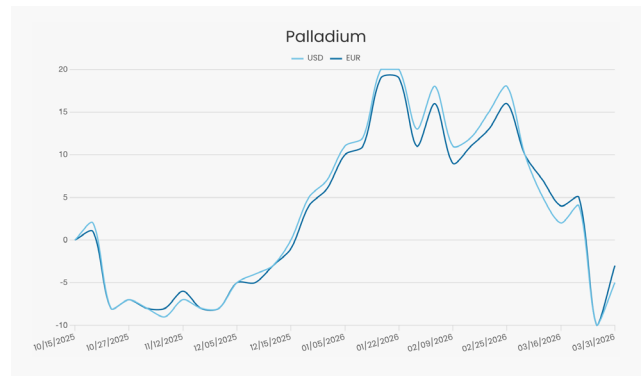
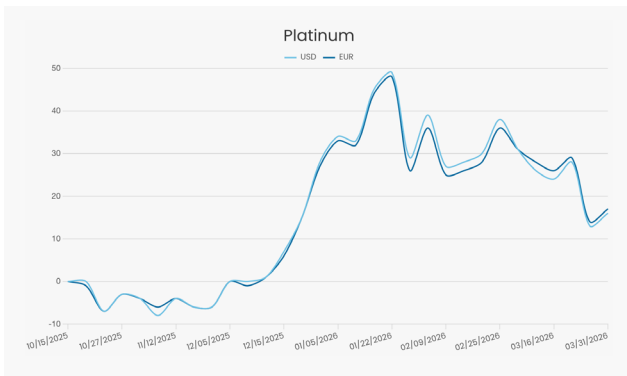
The first quarter of 2026 was one of the most turbulent we have ever experienced in precious metals trading. At times, the markets resembled a rollercoaster: silver reached a peak volatility of around 100 percent and climbed to up to \$120 per ounce—quadruple the level of the previous year. Overall, five out of eight precious metals hit new all-time highs, including gold, silver, platinum, iridium, and ruthenium. The breadth of this movement speaks for itself. This dynamic was immediately reflected in trading. Physical availability was often limited, making sourcing a central pivot point. Rising refinancing rates and sharply increased transport costs due to geopolitical tensions, particularly linked to the Iran conflict, further exacerbated the situation.

Looking back, it is clear that this quarter allowed no calm market phase from the outset. Already in January, it became evident how tense the situation was and how quickly market movements could intensify. Overall, it was a quarter that exposed the structural tensions in precious metals markets as clearly as rarely before. A truly exceptional quarter!



Philipp Götzl-Mamba

Head of Sales & Trading



However, with the escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East—especially due to military actions by Israel and the U.S. against Iran—oil prices surged. The resulting inflationary pressure, along with capital reallocations into the energy sector, led to outflows from the precious metals markets. At the same time, a stronger U.S. dollar exerted additional pressure on prices.

Consequently, gold and silver experienced noticeable corrections, with silver coming under significantly more pressure than gold due to its higher share of industrial demand. Platinum group metals (PGMs) such as platinum and palladium also showed volatility in this environment, reacting sensitively to economic expectations and developments in the automotive sector. March in particular was marked by heightened volatility, short-term position adjustments, and abrupt price movements. The decline in gold, however, underscores its role as a safe haven: during the preceding upward phase, the metal had tied up substantial liquidity, which could be released in times of rising uncertainty and increased capital needs. Gold thus serves not only as a store of value but also as a liquid reserve in global portfolios.

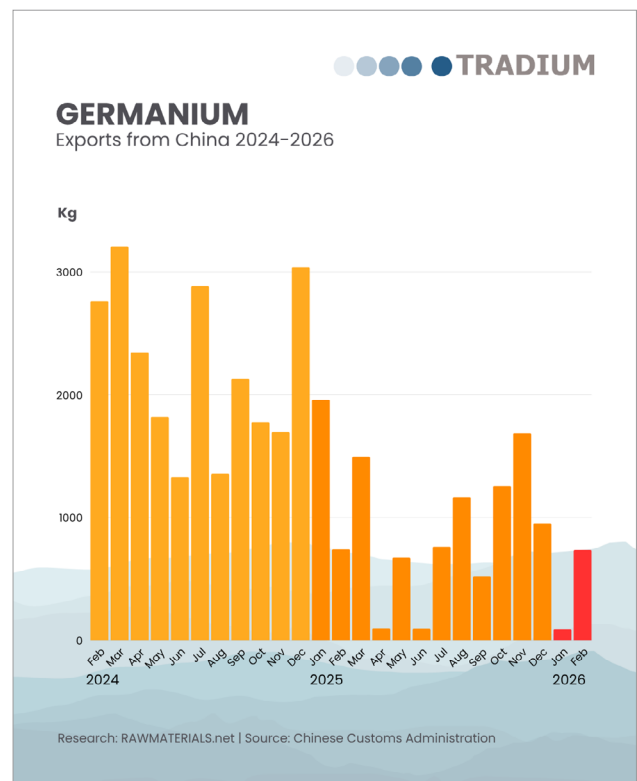
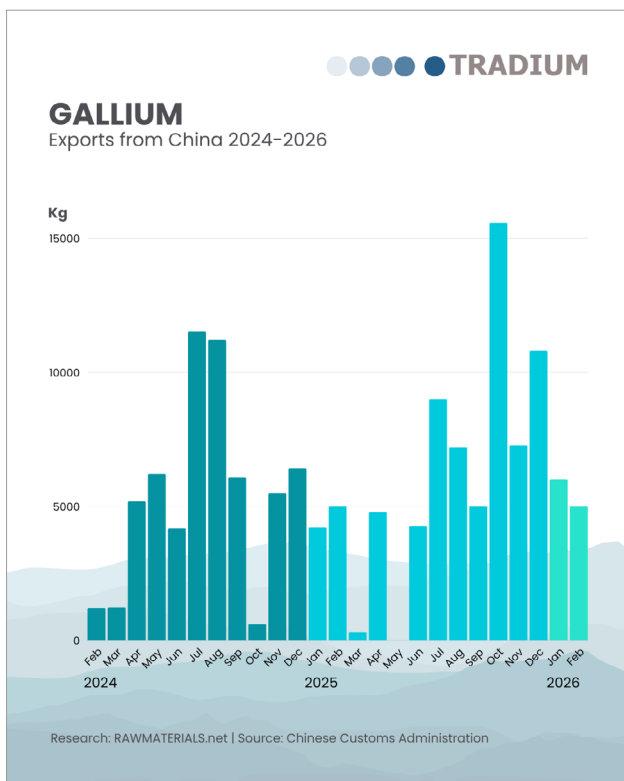
Positive Outlook for Precious Metals Markets and Question Marks for Industrial Raw Materials

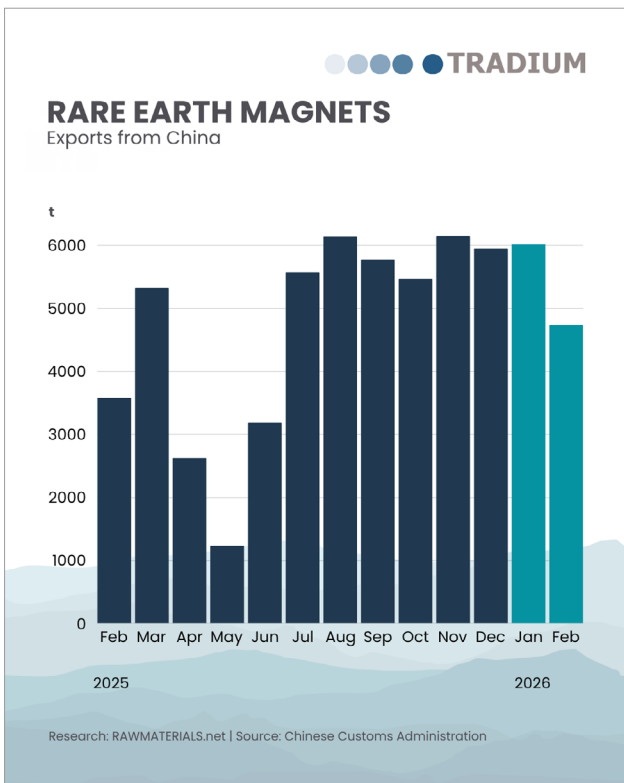
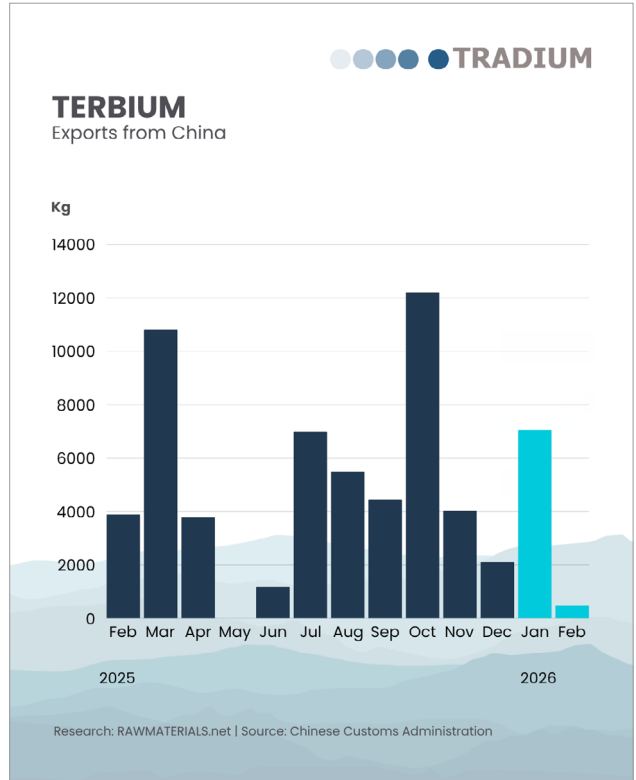
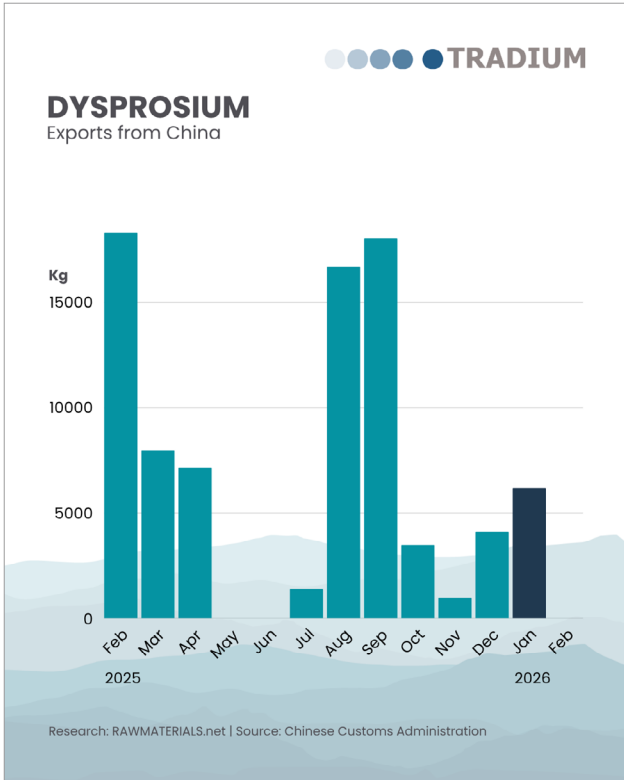
Despite the interim correction, the overall market environment for precious metals remains positive. Structural demand for hedging instruments, ongoing geopolitical risks, and continued uncertainty in monetary policy all point to medium- to long-term support for precious metal prices. In the short term, however, market developments are likely to remain strongly influenced by dynamics in the energy and currency markets, as well as interest rate expectations.

By contrast, the future course of the rare earths and technology metals markets will be determined largely by political and global events. While the U.S. is currently engaged in the Middle East, China continues to exert control over critical raw materials. Its export restrictions on Japan demonstrate that Beijing is still using its sector dominance as a political lever, directly intervening in raw material markets.

The outlook for rare earths and technology metals is therefore increasingly shaped by geopolitical developments. Given current tensions in the Middle East, attention is turning to the role of major players in the global raw materials landscape.

While the U.S. remains constrained by foreign policy commitments, China continues to be a key driver in the critical raw materials sector. Recent export restrictions targeting Japan underscore that Beijing is deliberately leveraging its strong market position. As a result, political decisions are becoming an increasingly decisive factor in the development of raw material markets.





This TRADIUM Market Report was produced in collaboration with the news portal Rawmaterials.net.

TRADIUM/Rawmaterials.net in the Media

The expertise of TRADIUM and rawmaterials.net remained in high demand throughout the first quarter of 2026, providing commentary and clear explanations on current developments in critical raw materials.

In the media overview from TRADIUM and Rohstoff.net, you can find a summary of the most important mentions:

<https://tradium.com/company/media/>

<https://rawmaterials.net/rohstoff-net-rawmaterials-net-in-the-media/>

About TRADIUM

Founded in 1999, TRADIUM GmbH is a privately owned company based in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. We supply a wide range of high-tech industries—including electronics, automotive, glass, ceramics, and dental technology—with technology metals, rare earths, and precious metals. TRADIUM works globally with a trusted network of international producers. Our long-standing partnerships ensure reliable sourcing, market proximity, and up-to-date product availability. Companies can use our high-security bonded warehouse operated by partner METLOCK.

About Rawmaterials.net

Rawmaterials.net is the first news portal dedicated exclusively to rare earths and technology metals. It offers breaking news, in-depth analysis, expert interviews, and historical insights—all in one place. Its content is relevant to both industrial buyers and private individuals interested in physical assets