



# NIAS Area Studies EUROPE MONITOR

NIAS-STIR Programme



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Europe Monitor # 18 | Vol. 03, No. 03 | March 2023  
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Image source: CYRIL CHIGOT/DIVERGENCE/LE MONDE, Dan Kitwood/Pool via REUTERS, BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP, Daniel Berehulak/The New York Times

## Comment

**Belarus's endgame in Russia-Ukraine Conflict**  
**Chancellor Olaf Scholz's India visit: Taking bilateral relations to the next level**  
**Ukraine: Battle for Bakhmut**

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Global Politics is a primary focus of the NIAS Programme on Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR). The primary focus is on contemporary world affairs. The Programme publishes *The World This Week*, and *NIAS Fortnightly on Science Technology and International Relations*.

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As a part of pursuing global politics, the programme has started area studies. Europe is a part of the NIAS area studies initiative. With an aim to nurture a pool of scholars working on issues related to Europe, the scope of the studies would range from regional/sub-regional cooperation to new technology and innovations and include gender studies, migration issues, and climate change.

NIAS Europe Studies will focus on capacity building amongst the young scholars, expert lectures by prominent academicians and diplomats, monthly discussions on Europe, and a Monthly Dispatch – *Europe Monitor*.

### **About Europe Monitor**

Europe Monitor is an academic initiative by NIAS Global Politics and the KAS India Office.

The Monthly is an integral part of NIAS Europe Studies. It includes focused commentaries on Europe, short notes, and daily updates on contemporary Europe.

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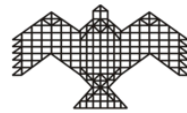
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### **About NIAS**

National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) was conceived and founded in 1988 by the late Mr JRD Tata, who sought to create an institution to conduct advanced multidisciplinary research.

The objective is to nurture a broad base of scholars, managers and leaders who would respond to the complex challenges that face contemporary India and global society, with insight, sensitivity, confidence and dedication.



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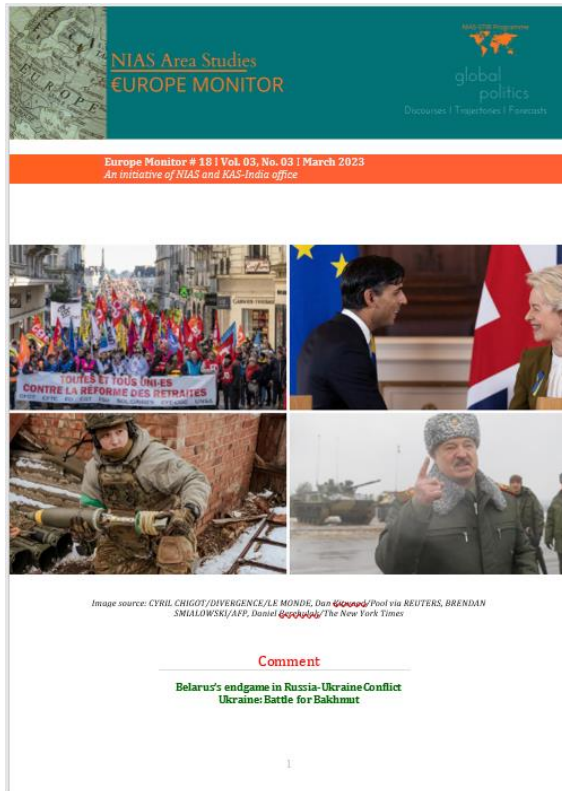
### **About KAS India Office**

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

## Europe Monitor

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## EM COMMENT

### Belarus's endgame in Russia-Ukraine Conflict

By Indrani Talukdar

### Chancellor Olaf Scholz's India visit: Taking bilateral relations to the next level

By Himani Pant

### Ukraine: Battle for Bakhmut

By Padmashree Anandhan

## EM DAILY FOCUS



Source: CYRIL CHIGOT/DIVERGENCE/LE MONDE, Dan Kitwood/Pool via REUTERS, BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP, Daniel Berehulak/The New York Times

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Continued protests against pension reform

### ITALY

Migrant boat crash on the Calabrian coast

### THE NORTHERN IRELAND

New BREXIT deal on Northern Ireland: Some Answers, Tough Questions Ahead

## WAR IN UKRAINE: DAILY UPDATES



Source: AP/Ukrainian Presidential Press Office/ Euronews, securityconference.org, Kremlin.ru, Bloomberg, president.gov.ua, The Guardian Graph/ISW

War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from Day 369 to Day 342 in four dimensions. First, The War on the Ground. Second, The Moscow View: Claims by Russia. Third, The West View: Responses from the US and Europe. Fourth, The Global Fallouts: Implications of the Ukraine war.

By Padmashree Anandhan, and Madhura S Mahesh

## EM SHORT NOTES



Source: Website of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan/Euractiv, Bernd Wuestneck/AP/Euronews, nato.int, Sputnik/"Yuzhniy"/Roscosmos, PA MEDIA, Deutsche Welle

EM Short Notes provide a brief overview of the latest developments in Europe in political, economic, security, climate, maritime, and science and technology aspects. The daily developments cover from the UK, western Europe, Nordic, Baltic, Balkans to the far east Russia.

*By Padmashree Anandhan, Madhura S Mahesh, and Femy Francis*

### BELGIUM

Government plans to extend the life of nuclear reactors due to be down by 2025

### CYPRUS

Appoints new president Nikos Christodoulides

### FINLAND

Finnish Minerals Group finds rare earth metals deposits found in Sokli

### FRANCE

Defence companies in France see a boost in share since the Ukraine war

The largest energy importer after four decades

### IRELAND

Thousands take to the streets in an anti-racism march

### MOLDOVA

Anti-government protest held in Chisinau

### POLAND

Poland suggests a compromise to strict Wind Turbine legislation

### RUSSIA

Putin address in the African Union summit reflect scope for closer ties

### THE UK

Nearly half a million teachers to take part in 'Walkout Wednesday' protests

### TURKEY

New set of earthquake causes panic

### REGIONAL

EU and UK Nitrogen dioxide emission cross the WHO standards

EU launches pilot projects in Romania and Bulgaria to curb irregular migration

Eight EU countries demand to strengthen of reforms to the EU asylum system and curb migration

ECHR fines Hungary for violation of right of refugee

### CLIMATE

Swedish forest ecosystem in danger; EU to regulate restoration law

### ENERGY

Energy price cap raises concern over hike in household bills

Norwegian offshore wind projects to kickstart with fresh partnerships with Denmark

### INTERNATIONAL

South Africa, Russia and China to launch joint naval exercise raises concern among diplomats in Africa

Belarus, UAE and Zimbabwe: strengthening long term relationship  
NATO and Japan discuss strengthening of transatlantic and Indo-Pacific relations

## COMMENT

### Belarus's endgame in Russia-Ukraine Conflict

By Indrani Talukdar

*President Lukashenko's interest lies in protecting his power within his own country and blaming the West and its propaganda for the domestic unrest.*

In Russia's 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine, apart from the two conflicting parties, other neighboring states, whether a member of NATO or not, are also involved. Belarus is a case of a non-NATO member supporting Russia in the ongoing conflict. Until 2021, Belarus had not recognized Crimea as a part of Russia, but in November 2021, it recognized Crimea as 'de facto Russian.'

#### **Belarus-Russia: A growing bonhomie**

The relations between the Presidents of Belarus and Russia has been strengthening especially after the 2020 presidential election in Minsk. Back in 2020, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko showed certain openness towards the West, while maintaining proximity to Russia. But, the rigged elections of 2020 and the violent suppression of demonstrations was the turning point.

The closeness between Belarus and Russia has culminated in the form of active military exercises. One of the major exercise called "Union Shield 2023" was held in September 2022 and another one in January 2023. Russia using Belarus as the launching pad to attack Ukraine and the formation of a regional group of forces mostly consisting of Belarusian military personnel cements this alliance. Minsk justifies the regional group as a culmination of a treaty signed between two states in 1999.

**“Belarus getting integrated to Russia, which is a part of the ‘Great Russia’ ambition of the Kremlin, appears to be a reality.”**

#### **Ukraine's threat perception**

Ukraine perceives this grouping as a reservoir of Russian troops to help Moscow

against Kiev, as it opens another way to invade Ukraine. The threat is not only directed towards Ukraine, but also to the West. With the culmination of this 1999 treaty Poland's border becomes exposed to Russian defense system that has the possibility of permanently getting stationed in the Belarusian-Russian border. In December 2022, President Lukashenko announced the start of the combat duty of Iskander-M (the short-range ballistic missile system capable of carrying nuclear weapons) and of the S-400 air defense missile system received from Russia. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed that Russia would provide training for Belarusian pilots of jets capable of carrying nuclear weapons (Belarus claims that its jets have been modified to be able to carry out this task, although Belarus does not have nuclear weapons). With the nuclear weapons getting mentioned time and again by the Russians the level of threat rhetoric for Ukraine and for the Central European countries security has increased.

Meanwhile, apart from using of Belarusian territory and Belarusian-Russian defense activities, Belarusian supply of military equipment to Russia such as tanks and ammunition, military training to the mobilized Russians, and health care, logistics and other services (e.g. accommodation, fuel-processing and military equipment repairs etc.) which are a part of the 1999 treaty, could also be seen as a tactic from Russia's side to divert Kiev's resources from the front line where it is most needed. Apart from diversion of Kiev's resources, the direction of the offensive might also be shifted to the west of the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. If that happens then it would mean a cut off from the main logistical arteries of arms and military equipment supplies to Ukraine from its partner

countries. The development in this western side has resulted in the increase in tension between Belarus and Ukraine. President Lukashenko last month said that Belarus would join the offensives against Ukraine if Ukraine's army attacks the country first. Minsk has claimed that there has been a significant grouping of Ukrainian troops near Belarus's border and warned that this posed a threat to its security. Kiev on the other hand is claiming about invasion from Belarus side. In this whole conundrum, Russia seems to have gained an upper hand strategically.

Belarus getting integrated to Russia, which is a part of the 'Great Russia' ambition of the Kremlin, appears to be a reality. The close relationship between the two can be traced back to the Tsarist Empire's time. Unlike Ukraine, they both are a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In 2022, Belarus was part of CSTO operation in Kazakhstan.

### **What does it mean for Belarus?**

Nevertheless, for Belarus the internal conditions and the sanctions imposed by the West since 2020 have complicated the situation for President Lukashenko. The country seems to be divided between the Kremlin and the West. President Lukashenko and some of the defense officials are in the Kremlin camp whereas the Belarusian opposition and the majority of the citizens favors the West. For President Lukashenko to get openly involved in the war would mean mobilization of the Belarusians themselves (the number of

defense personnel is not high) which might not go down well. There is tension between the president and the citizens because of his repressive ways of ruling. Hence, ordering his army to join Russia's in Ukraine could renew the Belarusian pro-democracy protests like in the lines of the Orange Revolution and Maidan Square. If his security forces are involved in fighting in Ukraine then they might not be able to maintain order inside Belarus.

The Ukraine war has put President Lukashenko in a three-pronged dilemma- firstly, the domestic conditions that could get out of control, getting completely integrated to Russia (which Belarus might not want to) and moving further away from the West. If Belarus becomes integrated in Russia then the country's future under President Lukashenko would be of the similar fate that of Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov. Belarus's fate depends on President Lukashenko decisions.

At present, President Lukashenko's interest lies in protecting his power within his own country and blaming the West and its propaganda for the domestic unrest. Russia's win over Ukraine, with or without his involvement is important for his survival. An overall 'genuine' stability within Belarus seems a distant dream with the war still going on and President Lukashenko still being in power.

*Indrani Talukdar is a Faculty at Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, Delhi.*

## COMMENT

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# Chancellor Olaf Scholz's India visit: Taking bilateral relations to the next level

By Himani Pant

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz paid his first state visit to India on 25-26 February 2023 and visited New Delhi and Bengaluru. He had earlier visited India in his capacity as the mayor of Hamburg in 2012.

He held extensive talks with PM Modi on the bilateral, regional and international issues. The scope was wide ranging aimed at boosting cooperation on multiple domains including clean energy, trade, science and new technologies, among others. The official statement states that talks led to G2G outcomes such as the India-Germany Vision to Enhance Cooperation in Innovation and Technology, and the Letter of Intent between Department of Science & Technology and Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems for Cooperation in Green Hydrogen and Clean Energy Technologies.

The outcomes included- announcement on organization of the Asia Pacific Conference (APK) in India in 2024; a memorandum of understanding between Skill Council of Green Jobs and Bundesverband Solarwirtschaft; SFC Energy AG and FC TecNrgy Pvt Ltd: Incorporation of SFC's Indian subsidiary and cross-shareholding with Indian partner. While the two did not issue a joint statement, they released a common paper titled "India-Germany Vision to Enhance Cooperation in Innovation and Technology" mentioned in G2G outcome above.

### **Economic significance**

The economic agenda of the visit was clear. Chancellor Scholz was accompanied by a business delegation that included CEOs major German companies such as Siemens and SAP, along with the heads of Germany's small and medium-sized business associations. A business roundtable was held to take suggestions from industry leaders of both countries, on topics such as digital

transformation, FinTech, IT, telecom, and diversification of supply chains, so on.

Robust economic linkages form an important pillar of India-Germany ties, both bilaterally and within the European Union (EU). On a bilateral level, Germany is among its top ten trading partners of India. It also occupies the largest share of India's trade with the EU. The total bilateral trade between the two countries stood at USD 24.8 billion (EUR 23.4 billion) in 2021-22. Germany is the ninth largest foreign investor in India, with cumulative foreign direct investment inflows of USD 13.8 billion from April 2000 to September 2022. There are about 1800 German companies active in India, primarily in the transportation and automobile sector, electrical apparatus, chemical, and metallurgical industry, insurance services and construction projects.

**“Chancellor Scholz's visit to India was wide in scope and addressed targeted some key areas like climate action and sustainable development goals.”**

### **Political and strategic significance**

During their interaction, Chancellor Scholz and PM Modi also discussed ways to make security and defence cooperation an important pillar of the India-Germany strategic partnership given Germany's interest in building conventional submarines for India.

Chancellor's visit comes at a crucial time, a day after the one-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine. Since the commencement of the war and the resultant supply chain disruptions amid West-Russia isolation, India has insisted on resolving the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. During Chancellor Scholz's visit too, India

reaffirmed its commitment to contribute to any peace process on the issue.

The visit is also a reflection of the enhancing dialogue between the two countries in the last few years despite global uncertainty. In December 2022, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock also visited India and signed a mobility partnership pact to make it easier for people to study and work in each other's country. Apart from the bilateral aspect of engagement, the increased exchanges have also been facilitated by the resumption of the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between the EU and India following the leaders' summit in 2021.

In addition, India and Germany have been strategic partners for the last two decades and have engaged in regular intergovernmental consultations every two years since 2011. It was the first standalone by any German Chancellor since the commencement of such consultations.

### **People to people ties**

During his visit, Chancellor Scholz also met young Indian scholars studying international relations in New Delhi, prospective students going to Germany and other skilled professionals in Bengaluru.

In the last few years, the People-to-people relations between India and Germany have also strengthened, an aspect which has benefitted further by the signing of the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement in December last year. Given Indian students' preference for pursuing higher education in Germany, especially in the disciplines related to science and technology, the agreement is beneficial for prospective students. At the same time, it is

also beneficial for Germany as it needs more IT specialists and other skilled workers to work in Germany.

### **Taking bilateral relations to the next level**

Chancellor's visit to India must be understood in the context of the current geopolitical flux the current backdrop of a global geopolitical flux which has been exacerbated by the aftereffects of COVID-19 and the ongoing war in Ukraine. The supply chain disruptions, coupled with reservations regarding economic dependence on an assertive China have strengthened the need for reliable partnerships. In this context, a budding India-Germany partnership which is underpinned by shared values, trust, and mutual understanding of each other's interests, carries great potential and is a win-win situation for both countries. Chancellor Scholz's visit to India was wide in scope and addressed targeted some key areas like climate action and sustainable development goals, renewable energy, green hydrogen, and bio-fuels, so on, while focusing on ways to enhance economic and business ties.

The mutual political will to enhance cooperation, coupled with promising areas of cooperation in new and emerging technologies carries bright prospects for a strong India-Germany partnership. This in turn, could enable a reliable partnership between the two countries to deal with future challenges.

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## COMMENT

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### Ukraine: Battle for Bakhmut

By Padmashree Anandhan

*If Russia's goal is strategic, the losses and exhaustion experienced in the battle for Bakhmut will slow down or reduce the attacking capacity of the Russian military.*

On 24 February, Russia's Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed victory over Berkhivka, a village situated in the Northwest of Bakhmut. Prigozhin said: "Berkhivka is fully under our control. Units of Wagner Private Military Company are in full control of Berkhivka." On 25 February, Prigozhin claimed the capturing of Yahidne village located in the north of Bakhmut. In response, Ukraine's armed forces denied the claims but reported on the continuing offensives around Bakhmut.

On 28 February, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said: "Bakhmut direction – the situation is getting more and more difficult. The enemy is constantly destroying everything that can be used to protect our positions, gain a foothold, and ensure defense."

The UK Ministry of Defence initially reported on defences held by Ukraine in the logistical routes despite the offensive launched by Russia. On 20 February, it reported on increased casualties in the Russian army, especially in the 155th elite forces and 40th naval infantry brigades due to its pursuit in Bakhmut and Vuhledar. In a statement: "It is likely that Russia will claim that Bakhmut has been captured to align with the anniversary, regardless of the reality on the ground." On 16 February, US Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council, John Kirby said: "...the most vicious fighting is happening around Bakhmut."

#### What are the three issues?

First, the geographic significance of Bakhmut. Russia was the first to claim an advance in the area in February. An important city located on the highway toward Lysychansk is considered a strategic route for Ukrainian troops to replenish stocks. The area gains attention for its economic significance and indirect strategic

advantage. Other than the major producers of sparkling wine and table salt, the city connects to Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Although Kramatorsk is similarly advanced in the production of mining equipment, Sloviansk contains a strategic highway M03 which directly connects Kyiv, and Kharkiv, extending to Russia's border close to "Rostov-on-Don." Apart from the geography, ethnically the city is dominated by 70 per cent of Ukrainians and less than 30 per cent by Russians.

Second, the claim game. In the prolonged fight between Ukraine and Russia, the claim over the areas surrounding and the damage incurred have not provided any clear image of the on-ground situation. While the Wagner Group claimed to capture the villages in the North and Northwest of Bakhmut, Ukraine has not accepted its claims but confirmed that the fight is becoming intense and challenging to defend. Meanwhile, the US National Security Council and the UK's Ministry of Defence have added details on Russia incurring personnel loss and have remarked on the brutal nature of the war in Bakhmut. However, none of the statements given by the actors give clarity on the state of Bakhmut. From the differentiating claims, the intensity of the battle and the resource loss is the only takeaway.

Third, Ukraine's push for more offensive. The persistent defence held by Ukraine against Russia with the support provided by Europe and the US has been the persuading factor to demand more weapon systems. Since the battle continues to incur major losses, with Russia observed to be deploying a mass number of troops, the US, the EU as well as NATO members are pressured to fulfil the promises over advanced weapons and battle tank delivery. For Ukraine, the support given so far in the form of

intelligence, advanced ground weapon systems, air defence capability, and battle tanks has been sufficient to withstand Russian attacks in Bakhmut. However, as it aims to put an end to the enduring loss of its resources, Ukraine has pushed up demands for modern aviation to halt Russia in the region. This means Ukraine's military strategy is slightly diverging in countering Russia from defensive to offensive mode.

**“From the differentiating claims, the intensity of the battle and the resource loss is the only takeaway.”**

**What does it mean?**

First, an expensive war with no significant outcome so far. Russia's drive to continue the war for six months despite the logistical challenges and personal loss at the military and paramilitary levels might not reap the benefit. If Russia's goal is strategic and aims

to take control of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk eventually, the losses and exhaustion experienced in the battle for Bakhmut will slow down or reduce the attacking capacity of the Russian military. Thereby, barring it from going forward or adding a limitation to its larger posture in the eastern Donbass. Ukraine and its supporting countries would have to stretch its military expenditure to be on par with Russia. This would only result in increasing the war cost and damages.

Second, an emerging break in Russia's inner circle. The extensive role played by the Wagner Group in Bakhmut and the supreme image surrounding its founder Prigozhin has raised questions over Russia's military command. Prigozhin's capacity to withstand the fight and command the group has stirred debate over Russian leadership.

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## EM Daily Focus



Source: CYRIL CHIGOT/DIVERGENCE/LE MONDE, Dan Kitwood/Pool via REUTERS, BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP, Daniel Berehulak/The New York Times

## FRANCE

## Continued protests against pension reform

By Madhura S Mahesh

On 16 February, around 1.3 million protestors took to the streets of France to protest for the fifth day against new pension reforms. This was the lowest turnout since the protests began. According to the Ministry of Interior, 963,000 protesters protested against the pension reforms on the fourth day of protests. The CGT Union said that around 500,000 people alone protested in Paris, higher than the number of protesters on 07 February.

The protests are led by eight main unions who said that if the government remains "deaf" to their demands, a major strike would be called on 07 March which would "bring France to a standstill." CGT Union leader Philippe Martinez, said "the ball is in the court of the president and the government to determine if the movement intensifies and hardens or if they take into account the current mobilisation."

On the same day, Paris Orly Airport air traffic controllers staged an unannounced

strike which led to several flight cancellations. The unions representing Paris RATP public transport system workers called for rolling strikes from 07 March.

### Three issues

First, Macron's proposed pension reform. On 10 January, French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne introduced the new pension reforms to "balance" the pension system. The pension reforms were featured in President Emmanuel Macron presidential election campaign and are based on the September 2022 Pension Advisory Council report. Borne outlined that the new reforms would raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 by 2030, increasing the age by three months per generation. The reforms will also accelerate the Touraine reform implementation which increases the required years of service from 42 to 43 years by 2027. Borne also announced that the government will be increasing the minimum pension wage to EUR 1,200.

Second, the Pension Advisory Council report. In September 2022, France's Pension Advisory Council released a report where it outlined that the pension finances will decrease "significantly" between 2023 and 2027. It added that the pension system will reach a deficit of around four per cent of GDP

or more than EUR 10 billion per year. At the same time, the report outlined that the system recorded a surplus in 2021 and 2022 with the latter amounting to EUR 3.2 billion. It said: "The results of this report do not support the claim that pensions spending is out of control."

Three, previous protests over pension reforms. Since 10 January, there have been three protests with the first protest held on 19 January. On 19 January, the first day of protest took place nationwide with the unions saying that around 2 million people participated in the protests. Subsequent protests took place on 31 January and 07 February where the unions saw an increase in the number of protesters in Paris. Previous attempts to introduce pension reforms in 1993, 2003, 2010 and 2019 also witnessed protests. In 2019, Macron announced plans to reform the pension system which resulted in a protest by 30 unions from 5 December to 25 January 2020 after which it was shelved due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **In perspective**

First, France's ageing population. Since the beginning of the 21 century, France's population has been ageing, thereby increasing the burden on the youth. The protests saw increased participation by the youth. These new reforms will further increase the burden on the youth and also on the aged population who are still in the workforce.

Second, a larger impact on France's social justice system. One of Macron's reforms includes cost-cutting which will aid in "balancing" the pension system. This will also bring in additional revenue which can be used to finance other projects in Macron in line with the EU. Many protesters have questioned the impact of these reforms of Frances's justice system.

## **ITALY**

### **Migrant boat crash on the Calabrian coast**

*By Padmashree Anandhan*

On 26 February, Italy's news agency ANSA reported on a migrant boat crash into one of the rocky reefs on Italy's Calabrian coast that started from Turkey. According to the report, the boat was identified by Frontex aircraft, 40 miles away from the coast. Close to 100 are expected to be dead, and 80 to have survived the total number which is estimated to range from 180 to 250. During the rescue operation by the Port Authority of Crotona, the coast guards found many children to have not survived. Upon the survivors identifying the trafficker, the port authority arrested a Turkish man.

The migrants were found to have come majorly from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria. On the government's position Italy's Prime Minister Georgia Meloni said: "...is committed to preventing the departures and with them the perpetration of these tragedies, and will continue to do so, first of all by demanding maximum collaboration from the States of departure and origin." In response to the incident, European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen said on Twitter: "Member States must step forward and find a solution. Now. The EU needs common and up-to-date rules that will allow us to face the challenges of migration."

### **Three issues**

First, the central Mediterranean a hotspot for migrant drowning. The drowning in Italy's Calabrian coastline is only one of the many as several drownings at small number is reported every day in the central Mediterranean. Since Greece began to take stronger action such as interrupting the migrant boats or pushing them back into international waters, the traffickers from Turkey, Afghanistan, and Syria have begun to take a longer route. This is to avoid entering Greece waters and going longer into Italy's southwestern coastline. Of the total 12000 migrants who entered Italy, 678 were reported to have come through the Calabrian coastline. Similarly, In 2015 close to 600 people drowned due to the rough tides of the sea during a crossing from Libya to Italy, and according to the data from IOM (International Organisation of Migration) 220 have died in the Mediterranean as of 2023.

Second, the government's narrow approach to migrants. The government has taken measures towards restricting the migrant inflow by constructing walls, installing force, and tight surveillance. Unlike Greece, due to the vast nature of Italy's coast, the taken steps have only slowed the boats from reaching the coast than stopping them. Since the new government put its first anti-migration plan into practice, the approach towards such migration can be expected to be more on prevention than providing protection. Although the rescue operations by the coast guards have been rapid, on migration policy of Italy stands differed.

Third, the EU's inability to address the migrant challenge. The problem of migration has existed since 2015 in the EU. It is once again subject to criticism by the regional leaders and international organization to step up the funding and is under pressure to adopt a unified rescue operation for such incidents. In the case of Italy, there is no "evaluation of integration policies," by the EU, it is carried out only when it intervenes, while the rest is left to the national assessment. Till now the attempts taken by the Italian government since 1998 to implement the "Migration Policy Planning" and "National Integration Plan for Persons Entitled to International Protection," were not approved at the regional level resulting in Italy's "multi-level" migration governance framework in the abyss.

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## THE NORTHERN IRELAND

### New BREXIT deal on Northern Ireland: Some Answers, Tough Questions Ahead

By Sourina Bej

On 27 February, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak agreed on a deal with the European Union that set a "decisive breakthrough" over the Northern Ireland Protocol. The new BREXIT deal now has the Windsor Framework, which effectively replaces the old Northern Ireland Protocol, a major bone of contention between the UK and EU. According to the old protocol, brought by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a few goods from Ireland to Northern Ireland were subjected to checks. However, as Sunak hailed, the new framework has "removed any sense of a border (through customs and checks) in the Irish Sea."

On 27 February, the Labour party said they would back the deal, while also reminding Sunak that his party signed the last protocol, which created a political crisis in Northern Ireland. The DUP, one of the major political parties in Northern Ireland, had refused to take part in the power-sharing government in Stormont until the former Protocol had been fixed. With the new framework in place, the DUP said it would review the details of what has been published before deciding on a position.

On 28 February, John Kirby, spokesman for the US National Security Council said the Biden administration was "grateful" that the UK and EU had managed to come up with the deal, which he said would improve prosperity for both parties. Simultaneously, it would safeguard the peace arrangements of the Belfast Agreement, also called the Good Friday Agreement, that sought to solve the deep ethnonationalist divisions between NI and the Republic of Ireland.

### Three issues

First, the Windsor Framework in brief. The new deal puts in place three things: removes "any sense of border in the Irish sea"; availability of more British goods in Northern Ireland including medicines and online shopping; "safeguards sovereignty for Northern Ireland" by allowing the NI Assembly to stop EU goods laws applying in

Northern Ireland using a mechanism called the 'Stormont brake.' But Von der Leyen said the European Court of Justice would have the final say on single market issues but with a softer role. The framework simplifies and removes checks along the green lane and red lane system for goods that will stay in Northern Ireland and those that will go to the EU respectively.

Second, preserving the Good Friday Agreement. Since the BREXIT deal, peace in NI has been relative. Occasional violent conflicts had broken out between the unionists and the remainers. With the 'Stormont Brake' political actors in NI will get to decide on its economy. However, a catch remains. Sunak said the Stormont Brake can only be used when the situation is considered "significant" enough. Yet the 'Stormont Brake' preserves the devolved power sharing arrangements put in place by the Good Friday Agreement.

Third, the reset in the UK-EU relation. The framework signifies a moment of cooperation between the UK and EU where the two, a year back, looked eye to eye on the NI protocol. In Dublin, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said the negotiating teams in the EU and UK operated in "good faith", as well as parties at Stormont. In a change of terms, the EU will accept the UK's public health standards but will need to carry "not for EU" labels. In return, the UK has agreed to share near-real-time customs data with the EU so it can spot evidence of fraud and take remedial action if necessary.

### **In perspective**

First, the task of implementing the framework. As the details remain to be

published, small businesses are still weary of the processes set by the dual lane arrangement. It puts food and medicines back on supermarket shelves yet does not provide a roadmap on the durability of the trade routes.

Second, the moment of truth arrives for the political actors in Northern Ireland. Stormont has been unable to use devolved powers to tackle the cost of living. The stand-off in Stormont also risked tarnishing April's celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. With the new framework, the spotlight falls on the DUP. After looking at the fine print of the Windsor Framework, it remains to be seen whether Stormont breaks or puts a brake on the democratic deficit.

Third, stopgap peace between the UK and Ireland. The revised terms of the protocol will soften the Irish Sea border but will not end it. Checks could still return on certain perishable food items coming from the EU. However, with the framework, the UK could no longer breach international law after the prime minister dropped the Johnson-era bill.

Fourth, the future of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. With the framework, Sunak has delivered his party's first mandates in a long time. In taking a calculated risk, the prime minister desires to better the working relationship with Brussels. The Tory leader would now be able to ensure that his upcoming summit in March with the French president Emmanuel Macron ends with a deal on small boat crossings.

## War in Ukraine: Daily Updates\*

By Padmashree Anandhan, and Madhura S Mahesh



Source: AP/Ukrainian Presidential Press Office/ Euronews, securityconference.org, Kremlin.ru, Bloomberg, president.gov.ua, The Guardian Graph/ISW

### War in Ukraine: Day 369

#### War on the Ground:

On 26 February, on the continuing fight between Ukraine and Russia in Bakhmut, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned over the increasing complexity of the situation in the frontline. He said that the forces are constantly defending despite Russia trying to destroy its protection. Since the fight in Bakhmut has been persisting, Zelenskyy urged for “modern aviation” to counter Russia than only combat aircraft. Zelenskyy removed Donbass Army Commander. The move comes as Ukraine is observed to be targeting to capture back Mariupol. On the same the UK Defence Ministry reported on series of explosions in Mariupol.

#### The Moscow View:

##### Claims by Russia

On 27 February, RT reported on increased oil purchase by China from Russia in reference to the intelligence report from

Kpler. According to the report, China had imported 1.66 million barrels of crude, fuel oil of Russia’s ESPO grade, Arctic grade, and Ural grade in January. Since the Ukraine war, China has been found to be contending with India on buying large amounts of Russian crude. The reason behind the purchase is mainly due to China’s recovery from COVID-19 and Russian oil being available at lower price.

On 27 February, Russia’s Defence Ministry claimed targeting a Ukrainian intelligence center in Kyiv by Russian missiles. It also updated on the continuing offensive in the Donetsk, where 250 Ukrainians are reported to have died and an ammunition depot near Bakhmut destroyed.

#### The West View:

##### Responses from the West and Europe

On 27 February, the EU announced the extension of sanctions on Belarus to another year as it continues its support to Russia. Therefore, the sanction will be extended till

\* War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from four dimensions. First, The War on the Ground: Second, The Moscow View: Third, Claims by Russia. Third, The West View: Responses from the US and Europe. Fourth, The Global Fallouts: Implications of the Ukraine war. Visit <https://globalpolitics.in/europe/> to read them every day.

28 February 2024, targeting 34 companies and will be banned from receiving EU funds.

On 27 February, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan announced the US decision to provide Abraham tanks to Ukraine after pressure from Germany. He stated that Germany agreed to send Leopard tanks only upon the US agreeing to send tanks along. Earlier, the US military did not approve the tanks as it observed to be not fitting, but to align with the interest of the alliance, the US has agreed to send the tanks.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 27 February, on the Ukraine war, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "It has unleashed widespread death, destruction and displacement." He remarked that the war was leading to many human right violations and UNHCR had recorded dozens of "conflict related sexual violence," cases and there have been evidences of war crimes observed in Bucha, and suburb of Kyiv.

On 27 February, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning reiterated China's position in Ukraine war. He said that China's stance has been consistent and maintained talks with both Ukraine and Russia. Ning also stated the possibility of a meeting between Zelenskyy and China's President Xi Jinping. Calling for the promotion of dialogue and political solution, stressed that in communication, it would ensure to involve Ukraine.

On 27 February, Kazakhstan's government announced the liquidation of its "trade representation office" in Russia. According to the Ministry of Trade claimed that the scheduled tasks had been completed and the move would not affect the bilateral cooperation. The agreement between Kazakhstan and Russia came into force in 1992 and was renewed in 2012, the trade office was key to Kazakhstan exporters to access the Russian market and bring in foreign investors. The decision comes in reaction to the sanctions imposed on Russia, Kazakhstan does not adhere to international sanctions nor does it wish to help Russia circumvent it.

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### **War in Ukraine: Day 367 & 368**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 26 February, Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov said that a full-fledged Russian offence into Ukraine could not be predicted due to "several scenarios." Danilov noted that the deployment of troops along the Russia-Ukraine border was initially seen as an intimidation tactic. He further highlighted a "de-escalation" after Russia's dialogues with the US, after which the dates for potential aggression were pushed further until 22 February 2022. He added that Ukraine does not consider 24 February 2022 as the start of the war but considers Russia's attack on Crimea in 2014 as the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war.

On 26 February, Ukraine's Human Rights Parliament Commissioner Dmytro Lubinets claimed that since 26 February 2014, Russia has illegally held 180 political prisoners in Crimea. Lubinets added that out of the 180 prisoners, 116 are Crimean Tatars who had organized a rally outside the Crimean parliament in Simferopol on 26 February 2014. The protest was held in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Lubinets added that Russia conducts severe repression and persecution in Crimea due to the fear of potential Ukrainian resistance.



On 26 February, the Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff Spokesman Oleksandr Shtupun claimed that Russia's offensive in six areas in Donetsk have been unsuccessful. Shtupun said that in Yagidne, Bakhmut, Orihovo-Vasylivka, Ivanivske, Severny Donetsk and Berkhivka.

On 25 February, the Ukrainian Energy Ministry supplied Ukgazvydobuvannya with over 62 tons of energy equipment. The Ministry stated that the electricity accumulators and powerful generators supplied were part of Sweden's aid to help the Ukrainian energy sector. It highlighted that Sweden has transferred over 665 tons of energy equipment and materials to Ukraine since the war began.

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 25 February, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed Switzerland's Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis's claims of "secret" negotiations taking place between Russia and Ukraine. Zakharova referred to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's move to sign a decree which banned any dialogue with Russian President Vladimir Putin. She also dismissed the idea of potential negotiations in Switzerland due to its support of Western sanctions against Russia. She added that this shows that Switzerland is "no longer a neutral state and can't claim any intermediary role in resolving the Ukrainian crisis."

On 26 February, Tinkoff Investments, a Russian bank stated that it will suspend trading in euros from 27 February. It said that this step was taken due to recent EU sanctions on Tinkoff's assets in the EU which will be frozen and any future deals with them banned. It added that the sanctions do not have any impact on trade in dollars and other currencies and said that the bank had prepared for potential sanctions. It also said that it will be transferring all its assets to a new company that is not affected by sanctions.

On 24 February, the Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said that the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF)

decision to suspend Russia's membership is a "dangerous step." Antonov said that this "leads to the erosion of the global architecture to combat money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." He also criticized the FATF and its members for being a party to the US's needs and called the decisions a politically motivated one.

On 25 February, Wagner group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that the group's forces had captured Yahidne near Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine. Prigozhin said that the storm units of the Wagner group had captured Yahidne.

On 26 February, *RT* reported that Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) spokesperson Fabian Maienfisch had said that Swiss banks do not legally have the right to use frozen Russian assets for other purposes. Maienfisch said that the banks can only use the assets for routine administrative purposes which include banking charges on the account and for accounting interest rates. He added: "The management of actual portfolio of frozen assets such as attracting new investments, selling assets or changing revenue is not allowed." The SECO in January amounted to the total amount of frozen Russian Financial assets in Switzerland to CHF 7.5 billion.

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 25 February, thousands protested in Berlin criticizing the German government for its continued supply of military aid to Ukraine and calling for peace talks to stop the war. The protest called "Uprising for Peace" was organized by opposition lawmaker Sahra Wagenknecht, author Alice Schwarzer and many others and mostly reflected left-wing sentiments. The protestors marched with signs reading "Negotiate, not escalate" and "Not our war." The protest was criticised by the German government for undermining Ukraine's right to defend itself from Russian aggression. The organizers also pegged the total number of protestors at 50,000 while the police claimed that it was around 13,000.

On 25 February, Poland's PKN Orlen CEO Daniel Obajtek said that Russia has ceased oil supplies to Poland via the Druzhba pipeline. Obajtek said: "Only 10% of crude oil has been coming from Russia and we will replace it with oil from other sources," and added that oil can reach PKN Orlen's refineries from the sea. He also that this will not impact the supply of diesel and gasoline to customers. The company was receiving oil from Russia's Tatneft, an oil and natural gas company since February 2023 after its contact with Rosneft expired.

On 25 February, the UK Defence Intelligence claimed that Russia has exhausted its stock of Iranian uncrewed aerial vehicles (OWA-UAVs). It highlighted the lack of reports of the OWA-UAVs being used in Ukraine after 15 February. It added that Russia will look for a resupply of the OWA-UAVs. It said that while the OWA-UAVs do not have a good track record of damaging their targets, it has been used by Russia to act as a decoy to divert Ukrainian air defence resources from detecting Russia's cruise missiles.

On 26 February, Belarusian Security Council State Secretary Alexander Volfovich said that Belarus has an additional 1.5 million prospective military personnel other than its Armed Forces. He said that these people can be deployed if martial law is declared and the country goes into "war mode."

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 26 February, Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud announced humanitarian aid worth USD 410 million to Ukraine. Al Saud said: "We are focused on mitigating the consequences of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine." During his visit to Kyiv also signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the supply of oil products to Ukraine. He also reiterated Saudi Arabia's support towards initiatives that would bring the war to an end and establish peace in the region. According to Ukraine's presidential Office, in the USD 410 million aid, USD 100 will be used for humanitarian purposes and USD 300 will be used for oil product purchases.

On 26 February, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that Canada is providing an additional four Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine and is imposing new sanctions related to Russia. He said that the delivery of the tanks and the new sanctions would target 129 individuals and 63 entities including the Russian deputy prime ministers and other officials. Further, he said that Canada would ban the export of "certain chemical elements" used in electronics as well as ban imports, purchases, and acquisition of Russian arms and other weapons from Canada. This comes as Canada announced nearly USD 23.5 million in support to counter chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats to Ukraine on 24 February.

On 25 February, G20 countries' finance chiefs failed to come to a common consensus over the issue of the war in Ukraine with Russia and China refusing to sign a joint statement. India which is chairing the meeting held in Bangalore released a chair summary and outcome document where it outlined the disagreements. It said: "Most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stressed that it is causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy." Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said: "Although there was not what we would call a communique, but only an outcome statement, we still think we've made some progress in having all the ministers on board." Japanese Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki said that the G20 faces a challenge to "engage in constructive discussions" because of the Russia-Ukraine war and that it is an act that "shakes the foundations" of the global order.

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## War in Ukraine: Day 362

### War on the Ground:

On 20 February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a press conference with US President Joe Biden said that the rules-based international order is being decided by the events in Ukraine. He said that 2023 should be the year of victory and added that Ukraine along with the US and its partners and allies will "ensure that the

democratic world wins this historic battle." Zelenskyy said that the two discussed the issue of weapons that can be supplied to Ukraine, especially long-range weapons. Zelenskyy also invited the US to join the implementation of the Ukrainian Peace Formula.

On 20 February, Ukrainian's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said that Ukraine is looking forward to the launch of an IMF recovery programme worth over USD 15 billion. This comes as Shmyhal met with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in Kyiv. He said that the two discussed financial support for Ukraine and the IMF monitoring programme. The proposed IMF programme will be provided in two parts which will immediately provide structural reform support and financial support which aid in Ukraine's recovery.

### The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 20 February, Rosenergoatom adviser Renat Karchaa said that there is no combat taking place along the route used by IAEA officials to reach the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP). This comes as UN Department of Safety and Security officials and IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi claimed that the route was unsafe and that the condition around the ZNPP is "volatile and unpredictable." Karchaa reiterated that Russia has guaranteed the security of the UN officials and IAEA experts along the route. He added: "There has been no fierce fighting in this area in recent days."

### The West View: Responses from the West and Europe

On 20 February, US President Joe Biden visited Ukraine where he met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In a press conference with Zelenskyy, Biden said that Kyiv has "captured his heart" from his previous visits to the city when he was the Vice President. Biden highlighted the role that the US has played in rallying support for Ukraine across the world in the form of military, economic and humanitarian aid. Biden also announced USD 500 million aid package which includes HIMARS artillery ammunition, howitzers, anti-armour systems, air surveillance radars and Javelins.

He also announced that the US will be introducing additional sanctions against Russia and added that it will also be providing direct budgetary support to Ukraine.

On 20 February, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu denied that Turkey has not exported products which could be used by Russia in its defence industry. This comes as the US issued warnings that Turkish exports to Russia have been used to aid in its aggression in Ukraine. Cavusoglu said: "We asked the United States to notify (us) if there are any violations on this issue." He also assured that Turkey will ensure that it will not violate EU and US sanctions on Russia and will take steps to prevent it too.

On the same day, US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken announced fresh military aid to Ukraine worth USD 450 million. The aid package includes HIMARS artillery ammunition, howitzers, anti-armour systems, air surveillance radars and Javelins. Blinken also announced an additional USD 10 million in emergency assistance to the damaged Ukrainian energy infrastructure and aid in its repair efforts.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 20 February, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said that he would be inviting Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the online G7 summit being hosted by Japan on 24 February. Kishida also announced an additional USD 5.5 billion in financial aid to Ukraine to aid in infrastructure reconstruction.

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### **War in Ukraine: Day 360 & 361**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 18 February, Ukraine's spokesperson Andriy Yermak reported on Russia using "tactical aircraft" to attack the missiles from the occupied areas. He said that attacks continue across Ukraine excluding Kharkiv, Poltava and Odesa.

On 18 February, *Ukrinform* reported on CIA Director Bill Burns comments on how US intelligence sharing with NATO members has been useful in supporting Ukraine. He said that the intelligence service was taking all efforts to work with NATO allies, and Europe for clarity and carry out systematic information sharing.

On 18 February, *Ukrinform* reported on US Secretary of the State Antony Blinken's conversation with Elon Musk on making use of Starlink satellite capacity to support Ukraine. Although Musk denied disclosing the details of the conversation, earlier SpaceX had restricted Ukraine from using its internet to "operate drones." According to Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister there has been no issue in operation of Starlink terminal in Ukraine. He added that they have been critical for Ukrainians.

#### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 18 February, *The Guardian* reported on Russian Defence Ministry confirmation of replacing of Col Gen Alexandr Lapin with Lt Gen Andrey Mordvichev to head the central military district.

On 19 February, *RT* reported on a survey taken amongst the Russian to check on the preferability towards "western brands." The survey was held by NielsenIQ research company, which found that 47 per cent of

Russians had shifted to domestic brands and preferred to buy local produced goods. Of the total, one-third still bought West made products and 17 per cent had switched to newer brands. The reasons behind the switch were supporting domestic producers, unavailability of foreign products and a 10 per cent switched over quality compromise. According to Putin, the exit of Western brands has provided opportunity for domestic manufactures resulting in growth.

On 19 February, *RT* reported on Hungary Prime Minister Victor Orban comments on economic effect on Hungary due to the war. According to Orban, the war had costed EUR 10 billion. He blamed the anti-Russia measures taken by the EU had resulted in high energy prices, and increasing cost. Orban said: “..were supposed to hit Russia, but hit Europe.”

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 18 February, in the Munich Security Conference, the French President Emmanuel Macron stressed on increasing the “military support” to Ukraine and highlighted that peace could not be achieved if Russia goes undefeated. The UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak asked for “lasting peace” along with creation of a new NATO charter for Ukraine. This is to help it defend in future and demanded the international to “double down” their military aid. The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen said that EU plans to improve its defence industry and speed its ammunition production. On the same lines, Poland’s President Andrzej Duda and Estonia’s Prime Minister called on increasing the spending to strengthen Europe’s security structures.

Apart from this in the conference, Orban stated that Hungary would continue to have economic relations with Russia and said that it does not see Russia as a security threat. Hungary which is dependent on Russia over oil, gas and nuclear fuel has been the storm in the EU’s decision making process.

On 19 February, in an interview to *CNN*, US Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield drew a caution line on China to not provide any

“lethal support” to Russia. She said that the US continues to have diplomatic talks with China to ensure the red lines are not crossed. On the question over what would be the response of the US in case China lends support to Russia, she said: “We’re not going to advance and announce what we’re planning to do. But we made clear to the Chinese that there will be consequences should they make that unfortunate decision.” On the same, the US secretary of state Antony Blinken, warned China of consequences if any material support is given to Russia. The warning comes as the US is concerned of possible supply.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 18 February, *RT* reported on China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi comments in the Munich Security Conference. According to Yi, China intends to resort the Ukraine conflict through peaceful means and warned those who support continued fighting. He said: “We will put forth China’s position on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.” In terms of the war, he re-iterated China’s respect towards “territorial integrity and sovereignty” and condemned the attacks near nuclear plants. He said that China is in a good position to act as a mediator to vouch for peace.

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## **War in Ukraine: Day 359**

### **War on the Ground:**

On 17 February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that there is no “alternative” to Ukraine’s victory in the Russia-Ukraine war. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Zelenskyy highlighted Ukraine’s achievements in countering Russian missile strikes and liberating areas from Russian occupation. He also claimed that there is no “alternative” to Ukraine’s accession to the EU and NATO. He said that Ukraine has received candidate status and is looking to start accession talks and added: “We are already integrated into the European economy in the logistics and energy areas.”

On 17 February, Zelenskyy disclosed the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany decision to provide 100 Leopard main battle tanks. In a press conference with Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Zelenskyy said: “This is really powerful support for Ukraine.” He also urged Ukrainian partners to fast-track aid supplies to Ukrainian personnel.

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 17 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and the two discussed the future development of Russia-Belarus relations and interaction within the Union State. Putin highlighted that trade between Russia and Belarus increased to USD 43 billion in 2022. He also touched upon the 28 programmes launched to “strengthen” the Union State where Lukashenko added that 80 per cent of it has been completed. Putin outlined the need to create a “synergy” between the two countries to benefit both Russian and Belarusian industries.

On 17 February, Putin claimed that demand for gas will increase as it is the most valuable and real asset for a long time. Speaking at the press conference celebrating the 30th

anniversary of Gazprom, said that in the next 20 years, consumption of gas will increase by 20 per cent mainly in China and the Asia-Pacific region. Putin added that Gazprom projects which have always met national interests and goals are being planned to keep in mind global oil market trends, and expert analysis and forecasts on changes. Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller said: Our consumers can be assured that there will be plenty of gas in Russia for many, many decades to come. The key to this is a huge, the world’s largest resource base. Putin said that due to Western sanctions, Gazprom faces the challenge to introduce new logistics routes.

On 17 February, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Russia will issue a “tit-for-tat” response if the EU aims to transfer seized Russian assets to Ukraine. Zakharova alleges that EU nations have made significant investments in Russia in past years which has led to a large amount of European-owned assets in Russia and added that the amount of EU seized assets is greater than Russian assets seized by other nations. She added that Russia is looking to work with Western allies lawfully to rework any plans to seize Russian property. She referred to the US’s changed position on Venezuela and said: “So everything they say now about Russia, their accusations, threats, and blackmail... can flip-flop in a moment. Mark my words.”

### **The West View:**

#### **Responses from the West and Europe**

On 17 February, the UK Defence Intelligence claimed that Russia has suffered 175-200,000 casualties since 24 February 2022. It said that both the Russian Defence Ministry and private military contractors (PMC) have lost around 40-60,000 personnel. The report said that since September 2022 Russian casualty rate increased due to the introduction of “partial mobilization.” It also said that the ratio of the number of people killed to injured is high due to extremely basic medical care provided across the Russian armed forces. The convict recruits deployed by Wagner PMC have suffered a casualty rate of around 50 per cent. The Defence Intelligence said that the majority of Russian casualties were

caused by artillery.

On 17 February, the European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders said that a new investigation centre will be launched to look into crimes of aggression against Ukraine committed by Russia. Reynders said that the new international centre will be based in Hague, Netherlands and will be the first step in the launch of a special tribunal. He added: "The centre will have the objective to preserve and store evidence for future trials."

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 17 February, Shell Global released its LNG Outlook 2023 where it stated that Europe increased its LNG imports by 60 per cent in 2022 due to the decrease in Russian gas imports. It said that Europe introduced several policies and regulations to ensure energy security and protect people from high energy costs. It added that LNG has become a key energy source for Europe which led to structural changes in the global markets. According to the report, the Global LNG trade in 2022 increased by 16 million to 396 million tonnes when compared to 2021 figures. It also said that the increased demand for LNG has led to high LNG prices which have forced many countries to switch to other forms of energy sources like coal which have a negative impact on global emissions.

On 17 February, the IMF mission for Ukraine head Gavin Gray said that it has reached a Staff Level agreement with Ukraine under the review of the Program Monitoring with Board Involvement (PMB). Gray said that agreement is the first step in the initiation of discussions for a full-fledged IMF support programme fund. Gray added that Ukraine has met all quantitative and indicative targets due to the efforts of the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian National Bank. He added: "A fully-fledged IMF program would be supportive of the Ukrainian government's efforts toward EU accession."

On 17 February, the WHO European Regional Director Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge said that WHO is working with 200 partners

to provide health care services to around 13.6 million in 2023. Kluge said that they have increased its appeal to USD 240 million in 2023 out of which USD 160 million will be for Ukraine. He added that the Ukrainian people are also facing challenges to avail mental health and rehabilitation services. He urged the Ukrainian people to not let the fatigue win and reiterated the WHO's commitment to delivering health care services to Ukraine as long as it takes.

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### **War in Ukraine: Day 358**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 16 February, Ukraine's Permanent Representative to international organisations in Vienna, Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk, in his address to OSCE meeting highlighted the infrastructural damage and the limitations faced by military in deterring missiles targeted towards infrastructure.

This has caused partial damage to Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant resulting in reduced water supply for Ukrainians. He also stated how Russia has been causing delay in vessel inspection increasing the food security risk for export to Asia and Africa. Tsymbaliuk also raised concerns over Russia's usage of seaports in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea for military goods.

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 16 February, Russia's Governor reported on Russia's air defence success in countering Ukraine's drones launched on Sevastopol in Crimea. He claimed that the Russian forces had shot down such drones, and UAV's close to 10.

On 16 February, Russia's government commission sanctioned the sale of IKEA factories of Sweden to two local Russian buyers. This will be bought by "Russian kitchen worktop manufacturer Slotex and lumber producer Luzales." Although the operations will continue, will be sold by domestic stores. According to IKEA brand owner: "This process is between the authorities and applying companies. We have agreed with the potential buyers not to share any details with respect to them and the integrity of the sales process."

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 16 February, Norway's parliament agreed to provide an aid package of NOK 75 billion for Ukraine in five year's period. Under the package, NOK 15 billion would be allocated to civilian and military aid between 2023 and 2027.

On 16 February, the Parliament of Slovakia signed a resolution against Russia for shelling on civilians, energy infra, and to support Ukraine's territorial integrity. In the resolution, Russia was termed as terrorist and was condemned by Slovakia for posing nuclear threat.

On 16 February, the German training association Commander reported on the progress of the Ukrainian forces in training on Patriot air defences in Germany. Close to 70 soldiers have been training for last two weeks, he added: "Ukrainians are very

motivated and often already have some experience, so everything is happening quicker than expected."

On 16 February, Belarus's President Alexander Lukashenko expressed the position of Belarus in Ukraine war. Against all the doubts on involving Belarus indirectly in war, he stressed that Belarus will join with Russia only when it is under attack. On Belarus Lukashenko added: "Always committed to the peaceful resolution of any international problems" and that it was "doing everything to stop the bloodshed.

On 15 February, ISW observed that Russia lacks in repairing military hardware against the damages. It states that two-third of Russia's tanks had been damaged in the war. It predicts that Ukraine still had chances to carry out counter offensive depending on the support from the West.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 16 February, a research organisation Mediendienst Integration published its findings of study on integration of Ukrainian refugees into Germany. It found from a survey in October 2022 that off the 11,000 refugees surveyed, 72 per cent were receiving high level education, 17 per cent employed, and 37 per cent wanted to stay back in Germany.

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## War in Ukraine: Day 355

### War on the Ground:

On 13 February, in an interview with Kyiv Post, Ukrainian Internal Affairs Ministry spokesperson Marjana Reva outlined the new "Offensive Gaurd" initiative launched by the Ministry. Under the initiative eight new assault brigades of professionals under the National Guard, the National Police and the State Border Service will be appointed. According to Reva, the new initiative is an "all-Ukrainian" recruiting initiative. The recruited personnel will include active military personnel, active policeman and volunteers. She said: "Each brigade is actually a team of people who understands what they are doing and why. This is a kind of elite, so to speak." Reva added that the recruited personnel will have the choice to choose their brigade and will be selected after one passes through all the steps of the application process. Additionally, she said that the initiative will last until 11 April but due to the increasing influx of applications, there can be more brigades formed and continue the recruitment process.

### The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 13 February, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said that production of Russian gas had decreased by 11.66 per cent in 2022. Novak said that Russia produced 673.8 billion cubic meters of gas in 2022 compared to 762.8 billion cubic meters produced in 2021. He added that exports of Russian gas had also reduced by 25.1 per cent to 184.4 billion cubic meters. Novak attributed to this decrease to the reduced supply of Russian gas to Europe and the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline leaks. He said that Russian oil exports to China had increased by 48 per cent and added that liquefied natural gas (LNG) production increased by 7.9 per cent due to growing global demand. Novak said that in 2023 Russia plans to boost the technological development of LNG equipment. He also said that Russia will not be supplying oil or oil products to countries that are party to Western price caps on Russian oil. He said: "This year, more than 80% of oil exports and 75% of oil products

are expected to be supplied to friendly countries."

On 13 February, Russia's Foreign Deputy Minister Sergey Vershinin claimed that the extension of the Black Sea grain deal is "unreasonable" without concrete results. Vershinin in an interview with RTVI said that the deal cannot be extended: "Without tangible results on the implementation of the Russia-UN memorandum." He also criticised the lack of progress on the Russia-UN memorandum and said that the new sanction on insurance, bank payments and access to ports are hampering any progress made so far. He added: "The whole concept of the package interconnected Istanbul agreements aimed at overcoming the food crisis, is in danger of becoming meaningless."

### The West View: Responses from the West and Europe

On 13 February, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO will be increasing its ammunition stockpile targets due to the rapid decline of ammunition in its inventory. Stoltenberg said: "The war in Ukraine is consuming an enormous amount of ammunition," and added that the increased supply of ammunition to Ukraine has put a strain on NATO defence industries. He said that NATO would be looking to increase investment in defence production capabilities to ramp up the production of defence equipment. He added that NATO will support Ukraine "for as long as it takes." Reuters reported that before the Ukraine war, many of the NATO members had not met the targets set by NATO. It added that the rapid depletion in ammunition stockpiles has highlighted the "holes" in defence supply chains and the lack of production capacity in western defence industries. NATO defence ministers are said to meet on 14 February to discuss the issue of raising the targets and Stoltenberg said that the matter of supplying Ukraine with aircraft and jets will also be discussed.

On 13 February, Austrian Defence Minister Klaudia Tanner said that they will not be training Ukrainian soldiers on Leopard 2 main battle tanks. Tanner said that this decision was taken under the framework of Austrian laws. Austria has previously denied

the request to supply Ukraine with Leopard 2 tanks due to its neutral status. Austria has a single tank battalion which consists of 48 Leopard 2 tanks and currently trains Hungary and Czech Republic soldiers on the Leopard 2 tanks. Austria has politically supported Ukraine and is a party to Western sanctions on Russia but has maintained military neutrality in the conflict.

On 13 February, Moldovan President Maia Sandu accused Russia of plotting to overthrow the Moldovan government using an “external saboteur.” Sandu said that the aim of the plot is: “To overthrow the constitutional order, to change the legitimate power from Chisinau to an illegitimate one.” She said that this would derail Moldova’s ambitions to integrate into the EU and restore Russian influence in the country. Sandu highlighted Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s claims that Ukraine had “intercepted” plans to create political instability in Moldova and said that Moldovan intelligence had found the same. This comes as Moldova’s Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita and her government resigned on 10 February.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 13 February, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk said that the new restrictions on the use of Starlink satellites in Ukraine were to prevent the escalation to a potential World War 3. Additionally, Musk said: “We’re trying hard to do the right thing, where the ‘right thing’ is an extremely difficult moral question.” This comes as criticism emerged after SpaceX announced that it will be limiting the use of satellites in Ukraine claiming that the satellites were being used for military purposes to control drones.

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### **War in Ukraine: Day 353 & 354**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 11 February, Ukraine’s Defence Ministry Main Intelligence Directorate Spokesman Andrii Cherniak claimed that Russia does not have the resources to launch a “large-scale” attack on 24 February. Cherniak said that Russia looks to intensify its offensive and achieve success in eastern Ukraine. He added: “The Russians have already utilized more than 80 per cent of their high-precision missiles,” and said that it is “facing a shortage of high-precision weapons.” He said that Russia is looking to restore production but has not been successful.

On 12 February, Ukraine’s border guards reported a continued counteroffensive in Bakhmut where 11 Russian personnel were killed. In a statement: “In Luhansk region, our mortars destroyed several dugouts of the Russian occupying forces along with enemy manpower.” They also reported that the guard’s artillery had downed four infantry groups in Bakhmut, a Russian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and engaged in positional counter-offensives to push the Russian forces out of the suburban areas.

On 12 February, Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko commented on Ukraine's capacity of energy sources. Galushchenko said: "We started to diversify nuclear fuel supplies for our nuclear generation even before Russia unleashed full-scale aggression." He said that by 24 February 2022, Ukraine was receiving half of its fuel from the US and the other half from Russia. He said that Ukraine has ceased all exports of nuclear fuel to Russia.

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 11 February, Russia's Foreign Deputy Minister Sergey Vershinin accused the EU for declining Russia-EU relations. According to Vershinin, Russia-EU relations is at the lowest: "It is bad in terms of world international relations and international stability." He claimed that the lack of political dialogue between the EU and Russia on the EU side for many years was the reason for the declining relationship.

On 12 February, Russia's Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko said that Russia does not "believe" in the successful outcomes of any peace talks with Ukraine. Botsan-Kharchenko said: "Because of what has happened, because of the lies about the Minsk agreements, about NATO's expansion."

On 12 February, the Russia's cabinet submitted a proposal to the State Duma that "limits the discounts for the Urals oil blend on the international market." This will also be used by the government when leaving taxes on oil producers. Currently, Russia uses oil price estimates by Argus for levying taxes. The bill proposes to levy an oil extraction tax on Urals oil sold at a price with a discount compared to a barrel of Brent oil blend. This bill was introduced to set up independent indigenous oil-price estimation companies.

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 11 February, *SPIEGEL*, a German news outlet reported that the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) will begin Leopard 2 main battle tanks training Ukrainian personnel next week. It said that the training

will take place at the Munster military training ground in Germany. The training period will last from six to eight weeks and will only cover the basics due to the short period. The Ukrainian soldiers will be trained to operate the weapons system of the tanks and how they work alongside the Marder infantry fighting vehicle. The trained personnel and the tanks will reportedly be deployed at the end of March at the frontlines of the conflict.

On 12 February, the UK Defence Intelligence claimed that Russia has suffered the highest amount of casualties in the last two weeks since the beginning of the conflict. The report referred to the Ukrainian General Staff's daily statistics on Russian casualties where the mean average for the past week was 824 casualties per day. This is four times the number of casualties reported in June-July 2022. The Defence Intelligence attributed the increase in casualties to factors such as a lack of trained Russian soldiers, coordination and resources at the frontlines which can be seen in Bakhmut and Vuhledar.

On 10 February, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) spokesman Fabian Maienfisch said that it had rejected the request made by Spain for the re-export of anti-aircraft guns to Ukraine. The Spanish authorities had filed a request on 16 January 2023 for the re-export of two 35-millimetre anti-aircraft guns of Swiss origin to Ukraine. Maienfisch said: "With reference to the principle of equal treatment under the law of neutrality and... the War Material Act, the requests were answered negatively by Switzerland." Switzerland has previously rejected two other requests to transfer Swiss-origin military equipment to Ukraine.

### **The Global Fallout: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 11 February, the *Associated Press* reported that a proposed resolution titled "Principles underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" has been circulated in the UNGA. The draft resolution underlines the need for peace and looks to ensure Ukraine's "sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity." The draft is broader and less

detailed when compared to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's 10-point-peace plan. The report said that the draft proposal was circulated to all the UNGA members except Russia and Belarus. The draft proposal reiterates an immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of Russian troops, and urges member states to consider any territory annexed by force as illegal. The proposal also pushes for a "complete exchange" of prisoners of war (POWs), treatment of all POWs, internees and detainees as per the Geneva convention and the release of all the people detained. Additionally, it also calls for the return of all civilians and internees transferred and deported. The draft also calls for international solidarity to address the global impact of the war on various sectors and condemn the human rights abuses and humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine. The UNGA is said to meet on 22 February for an emergency session.

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## War in Ukraine: Day 352

### War on the Ground:

On 10 February, Kyiv's military administration Head, Serhiy Popko upon the threat of a missile attack urged the people to take shelter. The order was given after Tu-95 strategic bombers were launched by Russia. Ukraine's spokesperson added: "Enemy aviation is in the air and ships which can carry Kaliber missiles are in the sea. The enemy launched the missiles. The air alert will be long." The same was confirmed by The Kyiv Independent, which reported explosions in the Dnipropetrovsk region.

On 10 February, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tweeted on the meet with Poland's President Andrzej Duda. The discussion focused on security issues, joint action, and military support. On the same day, Zaporizhzhia was observed to have hit by 17 missiles, majorly on the energy infrastructure cutting off the power supplies.

### The Moscow View:

#### Claims by Russia

On 10 February, TASS reported on Ukraine troops using of US manufactured rocket systems to attacks. It highlighted: "...require coordinates provided or confirmed by the United States and its allies for the vast majority of strikes using its advanced US-provided rocket systems." Therefore, the accuracy to assist in targeting and also to ensure the protection of limited ammunitions has been the strategy of the US according to Ukraine's spokesperson.

On 10 February, TASS reported on Russia's claims on facility damage in the Khmel'nitsky region. In the reports, targeting of energy infrastructure was recorded, along with shelling in Dnepropetrovsk.

### The West View:

#### Responses from the West and Europe

On 10 February, Moldova's Foreign Minister stated that Russian missile had breached its air space. It said that it would be summoning Russian Ambassador in opposition of the move. The same was confirmed by Ukraine's armed forces Commander-in-Chief observed that the missiles had been launched from the

Black Sea which crossed into Moldova and Romania before Ukraine. According to the Romanian Defence Ministry released a statement: "The closest the target trajectory got to Romania's airspace was recorded by the radar at roughly 35 kilometers northeast of the border." There has been no response from Russia yet.

On 10 February, the US Assistant Secretary of Defense commented that of the total "main battle tanks" of Russia, half of them are likely to have been ruined or taken by Ukraine. The White-House announced US President Joe Biden schedule to visit Poland in support of Ukraine.

On 10 February, Switzerland denied Spain's request to grant the export of "Swiss-made anti-aircraft guns" to Ukraine. One of the key rules of Swiss law maintains to restrict export of war materials to a country when it is involved in conflict.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 10 February, the World Bank announced a restoration package for Ukraine worth USD 50 million. It is also expecting to announced an additional funding of USD 535 million. According to World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia: "Ukraine needs urgent investments to repair damaged essential transport routes."

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## **War in Ukraine: Day 351**

### **War on the Ground:**

On 09 February, Ukroboronprom a Ukrainian state defence conglomerate launched a joint project with a NATO country to produce 120mm mines. In a statement: "A contract was concluded with the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine for the supply of these weapons, so the Ukrainian

military will soon receive them." It said that these mines will be produced using modern technology and added that its manufacturing facilities will be spread out including some facilities in Europe. The 120mm mine can hit infantry in a radius of 25-60 meters and is capable of damaging lightly armoured vehicles and engineering structures.

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 09 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged the Agency for Strategic Initiatives to introduce projects which will select and support domestic brands for them to grow and become successful businesses on a federal scale. Putin highlighted that domestic brands can take advantage of the system left behind by Western companies who withdrew their businesses from Russia. He also emphasised the Agency's involvement in the development of the unmanned aviation systems sector in Russia for its indigenous production and increasing its scope for wider use. Putin also outlined that they should implement key solutions in developing and implementing socioeconomic programmes for the development of the four newly annexed regions.

On 09 February, Rosatom corporation CEO Alexey Likhachev met with the IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi. Likhachev outlined the steps Russia is currently taking for the creation of a security zone around the Zaporizhzhia NPP. Likhachev also highlighted the measures being implemented to ensure safe social and living conditions for the ZNPP workers and their families. Rosatom in a statement added: "In addition, current and future cooperation between Russia and the IAEA in other areas was touched upon."

On 09 February, Russia's Statistics Service Rosstat said that Russia's stocks of grain and leguminous crops increased by 51.8 per cent and wheat stocks increased by 59.6 per cent in 2022. Wheat stocks in procurement and processing organisations have increased by 71.4 per cent to a total of 13.9 million tons which is 2.8 times more than the stocks in 2021. The grain stocks also increased by 47 per cent to a total of 19.4 million. In 2022,

Russia harvested a total of 153.83 million tonnes of grain which includes 10.4 million tonnes of wheat. It also saw a record harvest of sunflower, rapeseed and soybeans amounting to 24.8 million.

### **The West View:**

#### **Responses from the West and Europe**

On 08 February, SpaceX President and COO Gwynne Shotwell said that they have introduced measures to prevent the Ukrainian military from using Starlink satellite's internet for the operation of drones. Shotwell said that Starlink was provided to Ukraine for humanitarian purposes which included the provision of internet services to families, hospitals and banks and later expanded the contract to include military communications. She added: "But our intent was never to have them use it for offensive purposes." Shotwell did not outline the measures taken by SpaceX.

On 09 February, Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin said that they will be halting their prisoner recruitment programme. Prigozhin did not elaborate on why the group decided to halt the programme. This comes as the group has recently clashed with the Russian army and faced pushback from the Russian security services. Wagner group introduced the recruitment programme and increased its personnel to around 50,000 where 40,000 were convicts.

On 09 February, Slovakia and Poland express their support to provide Ukraine with fighter jets. Slovakia's Prime Minister Eduard Heger said: "You can count on our help because you are important to us and we want you to succeed." This was also echoed by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. Both Slovakia and Poland currently have MiG-29 jets but have emphasised that NATO support is required before any deliveries can be made. Other European countries have expressed hesitation over providing Ukraine with jets. The Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte said: "You have to make absolutely sure you are not getting into an Article 5 direct confrontation between Nato and Russia."

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 09 February, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach called on Ukraine to cease threats of boycott over the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the 2024 Paris Olympics. Bach called the threats "extremely regrettable" and "premature" as the IOC has not confirmed the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes under a neutral flag. He claimed that Ukraine is "pressuring" IOC members, international federations and future Olympic hosts to support the ban and "publically influence their decision-making." He also added that any such boycott will be against the principles and fundamentals of the Olympic movement and a violation of the Olympic charter.

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### **War in Ukraine: Day 349**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 07 February, Ukrenergo stated that scheduled blackouts would resume in the Odesa region by the weekend given that there are no fresh attacks by Russia. Ukrenergo said that the current emergency shutdowns are aiding the workers in fixing the damaged electricity grids. It said: "Seven teams from Ukrenergo and one of our

colleagues from JSC DTEK Odesa Electrical Grids are working around the clock to fix the damage.”

On 07 February, Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Secretary Oleksiy Danilov said that indigenously produced weapons can be used to attack targets within Russia. Danilov said: “Regarding Russian territory, nobody prohibits us to destroy targets with weapons produced in Ukraine. Do we have such weapons? Yes, we do.” Additionally, Danilov said that Ukraine will not be another Korea. He said: “There will be no 38s or other parallels, the stories of others and scenarios imposed from the outside.”

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 06 February, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin said that the price of Urals crude oil is no longer dictated by the EU. Sechin said: “If Russian oil does not enter the European market, then there is no reference price. Reference prices will be formed where oil volumes actually go.” This comes as the majority of Russian oil is being exported to Asia with India receiving over 70 per cent of the total exports in January. He also added that any future contracts and settlements with European buyers should be dropped to regulate the oil market indicators.

On 07 February, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said that the Russian Armed Forces are succeeding in Ugledar and Artemovsk. Shoigu added that the Russian Forces had freed additional settlements in Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions which include Soledar, Kleshcheevka, Podgornoye, Krasnopolye, Blagodatnoye, Lobkovoe and Nikolaevka. He claimed that the US and its allies are extending the conflict by providing Ukraine with “heavy offensive weapons.” He added: “The Armed Forces of Ukraine strike residential areas, hospitals, places of concentration of civilians, commit terrorist acts at state and social facilities.”

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 07 February, the UK Defence Intelligence claimed that Russia in the past month has been trying to restart extensive offensive

operations in Ukraine. It also said that one of the goals of this new offence is to take over the rest of Ukraine-controlled territories in the Donetsk Oblast. According to the agency, Russia has only taken control of “several hundred metres of territory per week” due to the lack of ammunition and military units needed for successful assaults. With increased pressure by Russian leaders, it claims that military commanders will chart out offensives which include “undermanned and inexperienced units” to achieve the goals.

On 07 February, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands Defence Ministries launched a joint initiative to supply Ukraine with Leopard 1 A5 battle tanks. Through the initiative, the three countries will provide Ukraine with 100 refurbished Leopard 1 A5 battle tanks from their industrial stocks. The joint initiative will also include ammunition, spare parts and training the Ukrainian personnel. In a joint statement: “This initiative will contribute to substantially and sustainably strengthening the Ukrainian armed forces.” It also said that the initiative aims to complement the Leopard 2 main battle tanks being supplied to Ukraine.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 07 February, global south countries participating in the India Energy Week urged rich countries to stop introducing roadblocks for poorer countries looking to secure energy supplies. Bangladeshi officials said Bangladesh’s energy security was hampered by Western sanctions on Russia had led to increased gas prices. Bangladesh Prime Minister’s energy advisor Bir Bikram Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said: “There were ships floating around Western Europe carrying gas, and other countries were not able to buy because of the price.” With the increased sanctions on Russian gas, many countries including India have turned to coal to prevent electricity shortages.

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## **War in Ukraine: Day 346 & 347**

### **War on the Ground:**

On 05 February, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and German Chancellor published their remarks on usage of weapons supplied by the West. According to Scholz: "There is a consensus on this point. This joint approach prevents an escalation of the war." Since Germany agreeing to provide Ukraine battle tanks, the response from Russia has been critical on controlling the west aggression. Scholz reiterated that military and humanitarian support to Ukraine has been given only upon Russia violating "European peace framework."

On 05 February, Ukraine's spokesperson David Arakhamia announced the replacement of Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov due to a corruption scandal. The Head of the Military Intelligence Chief Kyrylo Budanov would be the new replacement.

On 05 February, Luhansk region Governor Serhiy Haidai reported on the ground situation in Bilohorivka village. He said that Ukraine forces maintains control and denied the Russian claims of capturing the area. Haidai added that, the attack in the zone had increased but have been countered by Ukraine. In response Russia news agency TASS said that Russia has killed 18 Ukrainian soldiers in Kherson area. The Ukraine military has also claimed victory against an offensive launched by Russia in Bakhmut.

### **The Moscow View:**

#### **Claims by Russia**

On 04 February, RT reported on the US transfer of the "seized Russian assets" to Ukraine. It stated that the seized assets during the first set of sanctions would be sent to Ukraine to help in reconstruction. The assets amount to USD 5.4 million belongs to a Russian businessman Konstantin Malofeyev.

On 04 February, RT reported on Germany's Public Prosecutor General Peter Frank comments on Nord Stream 1 and 2 leaks. Frank stated that there has been no evidence proving Russia to have involved in damage to the pipeline in the investigation done till now. He said: "...that there had been a foreign sabotage act [in this case], has so far not been substantiated."

On 04 February, RT reported on a Wall Street Journal post on how China's defence industry continues to provide necessary components for Russia's military use. According to the report, the US has been successful in cutting down such shipments to Russia through Turkey and UAE. In a report by C4ADS (US based think-tank) found that 84,000 shipments had been sent to Russia since the war began. China's defence supply is likely to be discussed during the Secretary of State Antony Blinken visit to China.

### **The West View:**

#### **Responses from the West and Europe**

On 05 February, the UK Ministry of Defence in its intelligence update reported that Russia continues to make small progress to surround Bakhmut town and capture it. On the same UK's Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said: "Giving the Ukrainians the tools they need" would be the quickest way to achieve peace.

On 04 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Germany's hold on evidence over war crimes in Ukraine. The report includes the "mass killing in Bucha," and attacks on Ukraine's civil infrastructure. According to Federal Prosecutor General Peter Frank, the German prosecutors seem to have evidence in the "three-digit range" of the committed crimes which began collecting from March 2022.



## **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 05 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported on International Energy Agency (IEA) chief Fatih Birol statement on the impact on EU's price cap on Russia. IEA predicted the Russian exports to have reduced by 30 per cent or USD eight billion since last January.

On 03 February, Reuters reported on Indian refiners shift from US dollars to UAE dirhams. Due to the western sanctions, Indian refiners have decided to escape the EU's energy price cap and as an alternative the efforts towards de-dollarisation has been taken. One of India's top performing banks, the State Bank of India is currently clearing the dirham payments and have asked the refiners who pay in dollars to "provide a breakdown" of different cost such as oil, freight, and insurance to push it as vet trade and escape price cap.

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## **War in Ukraine: Day 345**

### **War on the Ground:**

On 03 February, Ukraine's Joint Forces Commander Lieutenant General Serhiy Naiev said that protection and defence key infrastructure in Northern Ukraine has been bolstered. Naiev said that this was done to prevent potential attacks by Russia. He added: "...fire control points have been set up on the likely routes of advance, as well as interaction channels among units of all Defense Forces involved." He said that the air space is being constantly monitored and

border patrols are being held regularly.

### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 03 February, Russian Federation Council's First Deputy Chairman Vladimir Dzhubarov confirmed that Russia will be taking part in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session in Austria. Dzhubarov said that the matter of Russia's removal from the OSCE will be brought up again and added that Russia is ready for discussion. He also said: "We will not become hysterical but will be informing those present about our position clearly and firmly." He acknowledged that the delegation is aware of the security risks and said: "We are sure that the Austrian side will spare no effort to ensure the security of this event."

On 03 February, Russia's Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied the claims that the US had presented a peace plan where Ukraine will forfeit 20 per cent of their territory in exchange for peace. Peskov called the claims a "canard." This comes as *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, a Swiss newspaper, said that Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns had visited Russia and presented this plan to Russia on the orders of US President Joe Biden.

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 03 February, German government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit said that the government has permitted the export of older Leopard 1 main battle tanks to Ukraine. The government had granted an export licence to military manufacturers who currently have around 29 Leopard 1s in storage. Two of the manufacturers were ready to deliver the tanks once they are refurbished.

On 03 February, the UK Defence Intelligence said the number of people recruited through Wagner Group's convict recruitment programme has reduced significantly compared to the summer and autumn of 2022. It said that the Russian Federal Penal Service (FSIN) data published on 31 January 2023 showed that the national penal population was 433,000 and reported a decrease of 6000 inmates compared to

November 2022. This decrease is comparatively less when compared to the decrease from September 2022 to November 2022 where it was 23,000. Additionally, the UK Defence Intelligence said in the last 10 days assaults by Wagner convicts have decreased. This can be attributed to the rising tensions between the Russian Ministry of Defence and the Wagner Group.

On 02 February, Czech Republic's President Petr Pavel said that conventional military aid to Ukraine should have "no limits." Pavel said that Ukraine should be supplied with all types of weapons barring nuclear arms. He said: "Ukraine cannot fight a tough opponent like this without armoured technologies, unmanned aerial vehicles, artillery and longer-range rockets, but maybe also supersonic aircraft." Pavel also iterated his support for Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO and added that Ukraine's accession to NATO was "a matter of political will." He also said that the war will end when Russia withdraws from Ukraine, peace talks begin, reconstruction of Ukraine and investigation of war crimes.

### **The Global Fallouts:**

#### **Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 02 February, *Daily NK* reported that the North Korean government has allegedly asked its trading companies in Russia to send select personnel to eastern Ukraine to aid in reconstruction. The report references an order issued on 20 February to the trading companies in Russia which include Cholhyon Construction and Kumrung Construction which are affiliated with the North Korean defence ministry. The report claims that North Korea will be deploying soldiers or police personnel due to the ease of providing safety measures to security personnel than civilians. The Daily NK claims that the selected personnel will be sent to Eastern Ukraine from mid-February to March and will help in reconstruction efforts and repair destroyed buildings and roads.

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["N. Korea orders trading companies in Russia to select personnel to send to Ukraine,"](#) *Daily NK*, 02 February 2023

### **War in Ukraine: Day 344**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 02 February, Ukraine's Defence Minister Hanna Malyar reported on continued shelling in the eastern Ukraine, especially in the hub of Lyman. The same was confirmed by Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy: "A definite increase has been noted in the offensive operations of the occupiers on the front in the east of our country. The situation has become tougher."

On 02 February, Zelenskyy called for talks over Ukraine membership into the EU ahead of the summit. He said: "I believe that Ukraine deserves to reach the beginning of negotiations on EU membership this year already." On the same day, the Energy Minister reported on the restoration of the damaged power plants from the Russian shelling. This has resulted in reducing the deficit from 25 per cent to 19 per cent.

#### **The Moscow View:**

##### **Claims by Russia**

On 02 February, in an address in the 80th anniversary of victory at the Battle of Stalingrad, Russia's President Vladimir Putin highlighted Germany's changed stance to supply "modern Armour" to Ukraine and said that the West should stop loading modern weapons into Ukraine.

On 02 February, *RT* reported on Russia's industrial production. According to the recent data the production has been stable equal to the 2021 levels despite the sanctions of the West. The Federal Statistics

Service reported reduction to be only 0.6 per cent for 2022, while industrial production is expected to increase by two per cent. In the report, electricity generation increased by 0.6 per cent, coal output was 0.4 per cent and LNG has risen by 8.1 per cent.

On 02 February, *RT* reported on Bulgaria government announcement to send refined oil products produced by Russia to Ukraine. Bulgaria being one of the country to be excepted from the EU to import crude oil and petrol from Russia, it is also been granted to export it to third countries. The fuel production is done in Burgas, a private firm of Russia (Lukoil) which operates with the tanker imported through the Black Sea. According to Russia, close to 500 Bulgarian companies has been selling Russian fuel without involving Ukraine.

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 02 February, European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen assured to counter Russia through new set of sanctions as Ukraine war nears one year. Zelenskyy added stating Europe's sanctions had slowed Russia a bit down but has also seem to have quick adaptability to sanctions imposed. Along with the other EU representatives, in the EU-Kyiv Summit, a spokesperson highlighted the need for a progress assessment of Ukraine to gain the membership status, which is complex.

On 02 February, *The Guardian* reported on a former commander who escaped from the Wagner group seeking safety in Norway. He disclosed his experiences in seeing how Russian captured prisoners were being mistreated and pushed to fight for the Wagner group. UK's Shell company reported a record of USD 40 billion profits after the hike in "wholesale gas prices" due to the war, while consumer was strained to take the hit of the energy bills.

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### **War in Ukraine: Day 342**

#### **War on the Ground:**

On 31 January, *Kyiv Post* reported that the new conscription rules for Ukraine's Armed Forces (AFU) look to reduce the loopholes present and provided the reinforcements required for the AFU. The new rules highlight that an employer in sectors such as energy, arms, health and local government can exempt a worker from conscription if he is deemed to be working for a "war-critical job." It also added that in an event of a person getting dismissed from a job in a critical sector, they will now be a potential draftee for the AFU.

On 31 January, Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba stressed that the main issue at the Ukraine-EU summit will be Ukraine's accession to the EU at the earliest. Additionally, Kuleba highlighted that the summit will also focus on, the implementation of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace formula and post-war reconstruction. It will also look into fresh EU sanctions on the missile, drone and nuclear industries, holding Russia accountable for its crimes, and the security situation in Ukraine. The Summit will be held on 03 February in Kyiv.

On the same day, Kuleba said that Ukraine will be receiving 120 to 140 tanks consisting of Leopard 2, Challenger 2 and M1 Abrams in the first wave of supplies. Kuleba said that an international tank coalition of 12 participants has been formed to strengthen Ukraine. He added: "It is too early to name all the coalition countries and their practical contributions because some of them have yet to make formal decisions in line with their internal procedures."

#### **The Moscow View: Claims by Russia**

On 31 January, the Bank of Russia said that Western financial institutions had around USD 81 billion belonging to Russian

investors. The Bank's investment department head Olga Shishlyannikova said that the frozen assets will continue to negatively impact investors. The Bank added that the chances of recovering the frozen assets are "extremely low" even though they were not legally confiscated.

On 31 January, Russia's President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with Russia's Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov. During the meeting Krasnov presented a report on the partial mobilization. He said that Russia faces challenge in giving body armour and uniforms to the mobilised servicemen. Close to nine thousand citizens have been sent back home due to bad health and despite the challenges Russia has succeeded in giving winter uniforms and in ensuring the safety of warehouses.

On 30 January, *RT* reported on protesters took to the streets of Nuremberg, Germany to protest against Germany's decision to supply Ukraine with Leopard 2 tanks. The protesters expressed concerns that Germany's involvement in the conflict can lead to a massive war with Russia. The protest was peaceful with no clashes or arrests being reported by the police.

### **The West View: Responses from the West and Europe**

On 31 January. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said that Greece will not be supplying Ukraine with Leopard-2 tanks. Mitsotakis said: "We will not provide Leopard 2 tanks for the simple reason that they are absolutely necessary for our defence posture." He added that Greece was willing to provide Ukraine with military equipment but not at the cost of its defence capabilities. Greece has previously sent military aid to Ukraine which included armoured personnel carriers.

On 31 January, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesman said that the UK believes that it will not be practical to send UK's Typhoon and F-35 fighter jet. The spokesperson said that the fighter jets are sophisticated and it will take months for the Ukrainian Armed personnel to learn how to fly them. This comes as the US and Germany have refused Ukraine's request for F-16

fighter jets. French President Emmanuel Macron said that while France is not opposed to providing the fighter jets added that it should not reduce France's defence capabilities and increase the intensity of the war. Polish Prime Minister also said that Poland is open to sending the jets but added that any decision on this matter will be in coordination with other NATO countries.

On 31 January, the UK Defence Intelligence said that Russia's attacks on Pavlivka and Vuhledar have escalated to a definitive assault in the past three days. Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade has been involved in this assault and has reportedly been successful in crossing the Kashlach River frontlines. It is suspected that by this new push, Russia hopes to redirect Ukrainian forces from the Bakhmut sector. It added that while Russia will achieve local gains in the region, it will not be able to activate a significant breakthrough. Pavlivka and Vuhledar are located southwest of Donetsk city.

On 31 January, the Belarus Defence Ministry said that training in regional grouping has begun in Belarus. The Ministry said that the joint training of Belarusian and Russian troops under a united command will begin later this week. It outlined that both the militaries will conduct a joint security action of the Union States taking into account previous experience of armed conflict. The Ministry added that this joint training will lead to a joint operation exercise called "Shield of the Union- 2023" which will be held in September in Russia.

### **The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War in Ukraine**

On 31 January, an International Olympic Committee (IOC) Spokesperson reiterated that the sanctions placed on Russian and Belarusian officials are non-negotiable. This comes as Russian Olympic Committee Head Stanislav Pozdnyakov claimed that Russian athletes should not be subjected to different rules compared to other participants in the 2024 Paris Olympics. The main contested sanction levied by the IOC is that of Russian and Belarusian athletes competing under a neutral flag.

On 31 January, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report outlining the alleged use of antipersonnel landmines by Ukraine which is leading to many civilians being injured. The report said that Ukraine had used several rocket-fired antipersonnel landmines near Iziom which was occupied by Russia. This comes as Ukraine is a signatory to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty which bans the use of such mines. The report highlighted that these mines had been deployed in nine different areas and had caused around 11 civilian casualties and injured 50 civilians including five children. The HRW stated that they had verified that the mines were used by Ukrainian forces through civilian interviews who highlighted that the Russian forces in Iziom had helped the injured and warned the civilians of the landmine danger. The report also outlined the continued use of antipersonnel and other similar types of mines in Ukraine.

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## EM Short Notes\*

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Source: Website of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan/Euractiv, Bernd Wuestneck/AP/Euronews, nato.int, Sputnik/"Yuzhniy"/Roscosmos, PA MEDIA, Deutsche Welle

### ALBANIA

#### **Opposition disrupts parliamentary session demanding resignation of Edi Rama**

On 13 February, Albanian opposition lawmakers disrupted parliamentary sessions to put pressure on their demand for the government's resignation for alleged corruption, hundreds tried to push into the building amid protests. The demonstrations threw smoke bombs and fireworks but no arrest was made. The protest was organized by the Centre-right democratic party and left-wing freedom party inside the hall of Berisha. Where they started blowing whistles to drown down the sounds if anyone was trying to speak. The opposition held Socialist party Prime Minister Edi Rama for corruption and links to organized crime. (Llazar Semini "[Albanian opposition disrupts parliament as supporters rally](#)," *ABC News*, 14 February 2023)

### AUSTRIA

#### **Austria court rules four guilty to the Vienna terror attack**

On 01 February, The Vienna court rules four defendants guilty of being accessories to the terror attack on the Austrian capital on 02 November 2020. The primary convict killed four civilians and wounded 23 before he got gunned down by the police. The Gunman was a history sheeter in 2019 convicted of travelling to Syria to join IS, he was sentenced to 22 months got paroled in eight months. The attack criticized the Austrian government and intelligence service for overlooking the monitored extremists. ("[Vienna: Court finds 4 guilty over role in 2020 terror attack](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 02 February 2023)

### BELGIUM

#### **Government plans to extend the life of nuclear reactors due to be down by 2025**

On 03 February, *Deutsche Welle* reports Belgium's government plans to increase the life of three of its nuclear reactors needing

\* EM Short Notes are notes published along with Daily Focus on Europe, every evening by the NIAS Europe Monitor team. The short notes provide a brief overview of the latest developments in Europe, and provides the sources from which they are compiled. Visit <https://globalpolitics.in/europe/> to read them every day.

to reduce the risks in energy supply due to the Ukraine war, initially timed to be halted by 2025. On 02 February Belgium took Tihange 2 off its power after 40 years as part of their nuclear phase-out plan. These reactors were known for safety issues and were found with cracks in vessels. In 2019 Belgium infringed the European Union Law by failing to test out the required environmental assessment. ([“Belgium looks to extend lives of oldest nuclear reactors,” Deutsche Welle](#), 03 February 2023)

### **Government announces the closure of Tihange 2**

On 31 January, Belgium announced its decision to close down its nuclear reactor Tihange 2 in four months. The reactor which is located 50 kilometers from Germany, was under constant pressure from the government to shut it down due to cracks observed in the pressure vessels, while Belgium has kept postponing the closure due to the supply of nuclear power. Belgium reliance on nuclear power has extended to half of the country's energy requirements and now has passed the decision as move to cut down its nuclear power dependency. ([“Belgium shuts down nuclear reactor on German border,” Deutsche Welle](#), 31 January 2023)

## **BULGARIA**

### **Rosita Velkova announced the delay in joining of Eurozone**

On 17 February, Finance Minister Rosita Velkova said that Bulgaria will not join the Eurozone on 01 January 2024 but would further delay it to one year on 01 January 2025. As Bulgaria faces a political crisis with the parliament dissolved. The parliamentary session was sabotaged to adopt the changes proposed to join the Eurozone. The pro-Russian and anti-European party “Vazrazhdane” was collecting referendum for the preservation of Bulgarian lev. Postponing joining will get them more time to collect signatories as also the Bulgarian society is skeptical of European currency due to high inflation. ([“Bulgaria gives up its goal to join eurozone in 2024,” Euractiv](#), 17 February 2023)

### **Bulgarian politicians deny government sanctions by Global Magnitsky Act**

On 12 February, the office of foreign assets control (OFAC) of the US treasury and the British government sanctioned Bulgarian politicians with Global Magnitsky Act. The Bulgarian politician opposed these sanctions or boasted about them. They said to be appalled by the statements made by the US and denied any form of colluding with Russia. Russophile movement leader Nickolay Malinov baste on being part of the list and said, “felt flatter” that the US blacklisted him. The UK plans to block financial transfers and deny entry to sanctioned individuals. In January Bulgaria was also outed for showing a lack of transparency by GRECO. (Svetoslav Todorov, [“Bulgarian Politicians Reject US/UK Sanctions, Deny Corruption,” Balkan Insight](#), 13 February 2023)

### **Galab Donev to act as Prime Minister until April snap elections**

On 02 February, Bulgaria announced another snap election in April 2023 and till then the interim government chosen by President Rumen Radev headed by his Advisor Galab Donev as Prime Minister would continue. President's Continued influence has been in light of criticism by most parties for forming a presidential republic with caretaker cabinets. ([“As Bulgaria Schedules Another Election, President's Interim Govt Assumes Power,” Balkan Insight](#), 02 February 2023)

## **CYPRUS**

### **Appoints new president Nikos Christodoulides**

On 12 February, Nikos Christodoulides was elected president of Cyprus, he was the former foreign minister who won 51 per cent defeating a fellow diplomat. Nikos defected from DISY conservative ruling party and ran independently. The voter turnout was 72.4 per cent, the new government would be under pressure to work on corruption issues, energy bills, the economy, and labour disputes. While the main agenda would be the divided island which has internally split the nation to be part of the new leader's goal. ([“Cyprus ex-foreign minister Christodoulides elected](#)

youngest president," *France 24*, 12 February 2023)

### **Run-off elections to be held after presidential candidates fail to get majority**

On 05 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Cyprus will be voting in the run-off elections on 12 February after candidates fail to get a 50 per cent majority in the first round of presidential elections. The first round concluded with former Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides in the lead with 32 per cent of the total votes followed by Andreas Mavroyiannis with 29.6 per cent votes. The Presidential elections are being held in the Greek Cypriot part of Cyprus. ("Cyprus: Presidential election headed to a run-off," *Deutsche Welle*, 05 February 2023)

## **FINLAND**

### **Finnish Minerals Group finds rare earth metals deposits found in Sokli**

On 16 February, the Finnish Minerals Group announced that it has found a significant amount of rare earth metals deposits in Sokli. According to the Minerals Group, the deposit can supply "10 per cent of all rare earth metals required annually for permanent magnet production in Europe." This was revealed in a scoping study launched by the Group in 2021 to determine the number of phosphate deposits in Sokli. The study also aimed to see if mining operations in Sokli can be "economically feasible and environmentally sustainable." Finnish Minerals Group mining project manager Pasi Heino said: "There are a few hundred in the world that are similar geologically, but they're much smaller. And Sokli has unusually large amounts of different metals." The deposit also contains iron, hafnium, tantalum, manganese, zircon, copper, silver, uranium, vermiculite, and niobium. ("Significant deposit of rare earth metals discovered in Finnish Lapland," *Helsinki Times*, 17 February 2023)

### **Finland wants to be part of NATO by July and wants the US to urge Turkey**

On 11 February, *the associated press* reported that the Finnish president wants Finland and Sweden to be part of

NATO by July and indirectly hinted at the US to put pressure on Turkey. If the issue is dragged then it would be hard to join the alliance. NATO needs unanimous approval from all existing members to admit a new one. Hungary and Turkey are the nations that haven't approved this membership, while Hungary plans to pledge by February. Turkey has shown no interest in ratifying the accession. This hold-off come in sight of the Quran burning that happened in Sweden and the series of demonstration by activist outside the Turkish embassy. ("Finnish president wants Finland, Sweden in NATO by summer," *Associated Press*, 11 February 2023)

### **Government plans to permanently eradicate homelessness by 2027**

On 11 February, *Nord news* reported that Finland is looking to totally eradicate homelessness, and they are looking into a national action plan that would help them achieve this goal by 2027. Finland is the only country in the EU which has been successful in reducing the amount of homelessness. Housing Finance and Development Centre reported that between 2008- 2022 there has been a 54 per cent decrease in homelessness in Finland. Prime Minister Sanna Marin believes that eradicating homelessness is possible to plan with a specialized mechanism to aid the process with decentralized measures like providing them with phones, provision of removal of eviction and providing them with long term support with round clock support can help with eradication. ("Homelessness can be eradicated by close cooperation by 2027: Report," *Nord News*, 11 February 2023)

## **FRANCE**

### **Defence companies in France see a boost in share since the Ukraine war**

On 26 February, *FT* reported on Thales (France Defence Group) announcement on increasing its workforce by 12000 or 15 per cent in 2023. The group recruited 11,500 in 2022 which is higher compared to the previous years of 5000 and 8000. According to its Chief Executive Patrice Caine: "Thales proves there is an exciting future for our industry ... not in low cost, low tech but in



cutting-edge innovation.” The move comes after French President Emmanuel Macron's decision to increase the defence investment by a third (EUR 413 billion). Upon the Ukraine war, the share value of the defence companies peaked at 60 per cent. Previously the company was asked to deliver GM200 radars to Ukraine by the government. (“[Thales steps up hiring as defence spending booms](#),” *FT*, 26 February 2023)

### **EDF French Electricity Company at an all-time loss of EUR 17.9 billion**

On 17 February, French electricity company EDF reported a record loss of EUR 17.9 billion in 2022 which pushed their debts to EUR 64.5 billion. France being one of the biggest nuclear-dependent countries due to maintenance need and repair led to decline in electricity output and loss. The repair was delayed due to COVID-19 emergencies which worsened the problem. It led France for the first time in four decades to become an importer in 2022 and along with the summer drought pushed the condition to worsen due to low water level to cool down the nuclear reactors. To revive, 43 of EDF nuclear reactors are back to full functioning. (“[French power giant EDF posts record loss](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 17 February 2023)

### **The largest energy importer after four decades**

On 16 February, France's electricity network manager RTE stated that after Four decades of France being an energy exporter, it became an Importer in 2022. The shift is worrisome for the country and has major consequences for the country's energy bill. There are several reasons affecting France to reach this level, where the Ukraine war caused France's energy prices to soar as the supplies fell from Russia. There was an unavailability of the nuclear fleet which provides for 50 to 70 per cent of electricity. As many were delayed for maintenance due to Covid and were eroded. With that, there was over half a year of restriction on hydrogen power production due to summer drought while wind and solar power made up for it. This led to them being dependent on EU neighbours, which is happening for the first

time since 1980. This might result in France's energy bill rising to EUR115 billion. (Paul Messad, “[Electricity exporter for 42 years, France became a net importer in 2022](#),” *Euractiv*, 16 February 2023)

### **Pension reform protest, Union states to ramp the strike**

On 11 February, in France, thousands of protesters took to the street to protest against the Pension reform plans. The protest saw another huge gathering while there was no call for a nationwide strike, the air traffic controllers in Paris walked out resulting in the cancellation of flights. Emmanuel Macron aims to increase the age of retirement from 62- 64, CGT union stated that 500,000 people protested led by France's eight main unions. The union stated that it would bring France to a standstill on March 7 if the government were deaf to popular mobilization. Macron requested the union to be responsible and not block the life of the rest of the country. (“[Hundreds of thousands protest across France against pension reform, unions vow to ramp up strikes](#),” *France 24*, 11 February 2023)

### **Protests in Paris to list IRGC as a terrorist organization**

On 12 February, Iran's ruling authorities rallied in Paris to list Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) as a terrorist organization. Iran has been engaged in a violent crackdown on protestors by executing and detaining them. The ties were shunned between the EU and Tehran when they supplied drones to Russia to aid the war against Ukraine. This erupted last September when a young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini died after being detained by the morality police. While some are pushing for IRGC to be listed, many may see this as a way to break ties with Iran affecting any negotiations on nuclear talks. (Michaela Cabrera and Noemie Olive, “[Opposition groups rally in France demanding EU list Iran's Guards as terrorist group](#),” *Reuters*, 12 February 2023)

### **France's dependency on frozen food imports increased**

On 10 February, *Les Echos* reported that

France is highly dependent on imports of frozen vegetables from EU nations. The frozen food imports reached an all-time peak of 74 per cent benefiting Belgium, Spain, and Italy while reducing the self-sufficiency quotient of the French food market to only 40 per cent. French exports have reduced to half since 2010 and 14 per cent for frozen food. This is further aggravated by climate change for example, peas production has been largely affected by drought where the harvest fell by 16 per cent in 2022. To bring back sustainability the French government have proposed that production increase by 15 per cent which would mean the consumption of self-sustaining needs to be increased as well. Investments need to be made in modernized industries to make a move towards decarbonization. (Dominique Chapuis, "[Vegetables: France's dependence on imports is getting worse](#)," *Les Echos*, 10 February 2023)

## GERMANY

### **Olaf Scholz proposes to accelerate wind turbine production**

On 05 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced the plans to accelerate the construction of wind turbines in Germany. Environmentalists had criticized the German government for falling behind in the emission target goal of two per cent by 2030 as part of their climate goal. This is further added by the "Onshore Wind energy act" where every state would set aside land to present plans to the government. The states can also decide the spacing between the wind turbines and ensure to keep 1.4 per cent of land for the wind projects by 2027. (Rebecca Staudenmaier, "[Germany's Scholz pledges rapid onshore wind power expansion](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 05 February 2023)

## ICELAND

### **The fishing industry agrees to sign the new agreement for the fishing industry**

On 10 February, the fishing industry agreed to sign a collective agreement with Fisheries in Iceland. The new agreement highlighted the wage hike to be in line with General and Special workers in Iceland. A rise in pension and increased measures

would be taken for the safety and health of the workers. The final vote on the agreement would be done late in the coming week, for now, the public has shown general satisfaction with the agreement. The seafood industry is a vital industry for the Icelandic countries. They employ around 7,500 people which is 3.9 per cent of the workforce and contributes to eight per cent to the GDP. While the indirect contribution can account for 43 per cent of marine products. (Jelena Ćirić, "[Fishing Industry Parties Sign 10-Year Collective Agreement](#)," *Iceland review*, 10 February 2023)

## IRELAND

### **Thousands take to the streets in an anti-racism march**

On 18 February, thousands of people marched in Dublin in support of diversity and migration. The "Ireland for All" march was attended by 50,000 people and was supported by political parties, United Against Racism, MASI, the National Women's Council of Ireland, and TENI. Former MP and Civil rights leader Bernadette McAlliskey attended the protest and said that the way Ireland is organized is the problem not the number of refugees. This comes as anti-refugee and asylum seekers held protests across Ireland. ("[Thousands take part in anti-racism march in Dublin](#)," *BBC*, 18 February 2023; Colman O'Sullivan, "[Tens of thousands attend anti-racism march in Dublin](#)," *RTE*, 18 February 2023)

## ITALY

### **Proposes to follow Germany and France to phase out car emission law**

On 25 February, Industry Minister Adolfo Urso proposed Italy's interest in teaming with France and Germany in slowing down the pace of EU law regulating car and truck emissions. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government have criticized the decision to halt the sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035. Urso called for a more pragmatic step that is non-ideological when it comes to climate change laws and that joining in with France and Germany would put influence European regulations. He proposed Italy adopt a broader revision of

“the stages of modalities of ecological transition” by 2026. ([“Italy seeks alliance with France and Germany to tame EU car emissions laws,” Euractiv](#), 27 February 2023)

### **Eight asylum seekers dead while crossing from Tunisia to Italy**

On 03 February, eight asylum seekers lost their life’s migrating from Tunisia to Italy. The coastguards were only able to rescue 42 people as the vessel had gone adrift. NGOs and lawmakers blamed the harsh policies by right-wing PM Giorgia Meloni prosecuting volunteer rescuers and the boats they used. It is estimated 4,963 immigrated in 2023 and 3,035 immigrated in 2022. ([“Eight asylum seekers killed off Italian island of Lampedusa,” Deutsche Welle](#), 03 February 2023)

## **LATVIA**

### **Central Statistical Bureau shows record high export and imports**

On 17 February, Central Statistical Bureau revealed that Latvia has reached a record high in exports and imports in 2022. It exported around EUR 21.27 billion worth of goods and EUR 26.5 billion in imports in the financial year 2022. This comes in 29.3 per cent higher in exports and 35.8 per cent higher in imports from last year. The main commodity for Latvia was wood and products made of wood, mineral fuel, mineral oils, electrical machinery etc. The wood products were sent to mostly 22 per cent UK, 9.8 per cent to Sweden and 8 per cent to Germany. In 2022 EU was the major consumer with 45.3 per cent of Latvian goods exported to them. While they imported from 168 countries with five major partners being Lithuania, Estonia, Germany, Poland and Russian Federation. ([“Latvia’s exports and imports reached record levels in 2022,” Latvian Public Broadcasting](#), 17 February 2023)

## **MOLDOVA**

### **Anti-government protest held in Chisinau**

On 19 February, thousands of people took to the streets of Chisinau to protest against the ruling pro-western government and

Moldovan President Maia Sandu. The protest was attended by deputies from the opposition and people linked to the Shor Party, a Russian-friendly party. The protestors called for Sandu’s resignation and urged the government to pay for Moldovans rising utility bills for the winter. This comes as Prime Minister Dorin Recean was sworn in as the new leader of the government and amid accusations against Russia for allegedly trying to “destabilize” Moldova. ([“Protesters Rally In Chisinau Against Moldova’s Pro-Western Government,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), 19 February 2023)

### **US-sanctioned Moldovan Oligarch runs anti-western protest ads on Facebook**

On 17 February, the *Independent.co.uk* reported that Facebook ran ads by the exiled Moldovan oligarch sanctioned by the US who had ties with Kremlin promoting protests against the government. The post criticized the inflation and the rising fuel price and targeting Moldova’s President Maia Sandu. This was posted by Ilan Shor an Israeli-born Moldovan oligarch the leader of the Russia-friendly Shor Party. He was convicted of USD one billion theft from a Moldovan bank and bribery, currently under exile in Israel. The ads show the security lapse Russia and its allies used to benefit from to spread propaganda and were not always immediately removed resulting in several million views. Sandu said: “Destabilization attempts are a reality and for our institutions, they represent a real challenge.” (David Klepper and Stephen McGrath, [“Facebook ran ads in Moldova for oligarch sanctioned by US,” Independent.co.uk](#), 17 February 2023)

### **Ruling government resigns amidst numerous crisis**

On 10 February, Moldova’s Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița and her government resigned citing a lack of support from the public. Gavrilița 18-month-old pro-western government faced several protests led by opposition politician Ilan Shor. This comes as Moldova is facing numerous crises including increasing inflation, a rising influx of Ukrainian refugees and the energy crisis.

After the Ukraine war broke out, Moldova has faced power cuts, increasing cyberattacks from Russia and has struggled to reduce its dependency on Russian gas. Gavrilița came to power in August 2021 with an agenda to fight corruption and fast-track Moldova's accession to the EU. Moldova was given EU candidate status in 2022. Moldovan President Maia Sandu accepted the resignation and nominated Dorin Recean for the position of Prime Minister. (Alexandra Brzozowski, ["Moldova's pro-EU government falls amid economic turmoil, Russian pressure," EURACTIV](#), 10 February 2023; ["Moldova: Pro-Western government collapses amid crises," Deutsche Welle](#), 10 February 2023)

## NORWAY

### **Loss of USD 164 billion recorded by Norway Sovereign Wealth fund**

On 31 January, *Deutsche Welle* reported Norway's sovereign wealth fund a record loss of USD 164 billion for the year 2022, breaking the record streak. Norges Bank Investment Management owed this loss to the Ukraine war, high inflation, and the rise in interest rates. Regardless of the loss, the funds levied from the nation's oil and gas industry were profitable as they stood at 12.43 trillion crowns. It aggregated a minus 15 per cent loss where the returns for the fund's share in the year 2022 were outside of the energy sector. ("[Norway sovereign wealth fund reports \\$164 billion loss](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 31 January 2023)

## POLAND

### **Polish president passes crucial bill to tribunal inspection, can cause loss of funds from EU**

On 10 February, Poland President Duda refused to sign the legislation for a crucial bill with judicial reforms and put it back to a constitutional tribunal where they would find out if it abodes by the Polish constitution body. This can be crucial for the Polish economy as this bill would have gotten billions from EU recovery funds, it is an agreement between Brussels and Warsaw that need to release EUR 36 billion in grants and loans. Pis party was looking

for the fund before the coming elections. The tribunal is also very much influenced by the PiS. The European Commission will not release the fund until the bill is a law which would give Brussels some independence from the Polish government and end sanctions against judges who raised questions against fellow judges. (Jan Cienski, "[Duda throws Poland's EU cash plans into turmoil](#)," *Politico*, 13 February 2023)

### **Poland suggests a compromise to strict Wind Turbine legislation**

On 09 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Poland plans to find a medium for wind power development after the period of unregulated production between 2001 and 2013. There wasn't any thought given in regulating the distance between roads and houses when it came to production, to halt this Pis party passed a law in 2016 called the "10H" rule. Where the distance between the turbines and the nearest house should be at least ten times the turbine's height. This legislation is criticized by some stating that it virtually leaves no land for the production of wind turbines, it is an issue as Poland needs lots of wind energy transmission. To reach a consensus in 2023, the amendment was proposed cutting the distance between turbines to house/nature to 500 meters, this would open up 7 per cent of land area. (Aleksandra Fedorska, "[Wind power in Poland: Trying to find a happy medium](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 09 February 2023)

## RUSSIA

### **Putin address in the African Union summit reflect scope for closer ties**

On 18 February, *RT* reported on Russia's President Vladimir Putin address in the African Union (AU) summit. In his address, Putin highlighted his intent to increase the cooperation and appreciated the Union's efforts in resolving local conflicts, and ensuring stability in the region. He said: "For Russia, African states have always been and remain important and reliable partners. We are united by the desire to build a just and multipolar world order." Putin said that the forum helps in increasing the engagement at bilateral and multilateral.

Since the Ukraine war, the cooperation has been close than before and Africa has continued to resist the Western sanctions. (["Putin speaks on partnership with Africa," RT](#), 18 February 2023)

### **VCIOM Poll shows 79.1 per cent approval for Putin**

On 17 February, the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VCIOM) survey showed that 79.1 per cent of 76 per cent of Russians approved of president Putin's political and professional performance. The telephone survey was conducted from 6-12 February with 1,600 Russians. According to the survey, 79.1 per cent of Russians trusted Putin. A similar poll was conducted from 10-12 February among 1,500 adults, where 76 per cent were happy with Putin's professional performance. (["Polls Show Trust in President Putin Stands at Almost 80% in Russia," Sputnik](#), 17 February 2023)

### **Russian cargo ship leaks coolant, no dangerous threat to the crew**

On 12 February, *the associated press* reported that a supply ship docked at the International Space station has leaked coolant the hatch between the station and Progress MS-21 is locked therefore it poses no dangerous threats to the crew ROSCOSMOS. This comes after the announcement was made about the Russian cargo stationing. The crew were supposed to use the Soyuz capsule to come back in March but would be replaced with a new capsule on 20 February in case of emergency. (Vladimir Isachenkov, ["Russian spacecraft leaks coolant, station crew reported safe," Associated Press](#), 12 February 2023)

## **SPAIN**

### **Protests against the regional management of healthcare services**

On 12 February, in Madrid more than thousand people protested against the regional government's management of health care services. Over 250,000 rallied to the city Centre shouting "The right to health is a human right. Defend the health service." Left-wing parties and concerned citizens also backed the health worker union that

joined the protest. The regional chief blames the left political interest for motivating such protests ahead of elections. The healthcare worker stated that the regional chief Diaz Ayuso administration spent the least amount on primary healthcare. (["Hundreds of thousands march in Spain to demand better primary healthcare," Euronews](#), 12 February 2023)

## **SWITZERLAND**

### **FOPH to address the shortage of medicines**

On 03 February, *The Swiss Info* reports there has been a shortage of medicines. The government is being suggested to increase the mandatory reserves for drugs like Anti-epileptic and mental disorder medicines should be included. The shortage of medicines mainly affects children, especially during the flu season. Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) intends to develop a plan for proper medicine procurement. (["Faced with shortages, Switzerland plans to boost drug stocks," Swissinfo](#), 03 February 2023)

## **THE UK**

### **Nearly half a million teachers to take part in 'Walkout Wednesday' protests**

On 01 February, about 200,000 teachers, border force workers, university staff, train drivers, and civil servants took part in a "coordinated day of industrial action" which brought various parts of the country to an effective halt. This comes as part of the "Walkout Wednesday" action against the government, where multiple unions of various sectors of the country ramped up their campaign for better and higher pay rises from the government. The recent strike, however, is the largest shutdown by workers in the last three decades and included nearly 600 military personnel being drafted into train stations and airports to "support public services." The government said that the "level" of strike action would "make it very difficult" for the public "trying to go about their daily lives" and said that the workers would find it "challenging" because of the suspension of health services in the country. (Kate Devlin and Adam Forrest, ["School's out: 200,000](#)

teachers to strike in biggest shutdown for three decades, *The Independent.co.uk*, 01 February 2023)

### **UK Athletics agency bans transgender athletes for women's events**

On 03 February, the UK Athletics agency moved the British government to alter the law stating "sports exemption" allowing the agency to ban transgender athletes from competing in women's events. UKA states the lack of "scientifically robust, independent research showing that all male performance advantage is eliminated following testosterone suppression." ("UK Athletics seeks trans athlete ban," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 February 2023)

### **Shells record profit of USD 40 billion**

On 02 February, *The Guardian* reports Shell's record profit of USD 40 billion in 2022, the largest in UK history calls for the reformation of the windfall tax. Shell also is criticized for overstating its spending on renewable energy where it only invested USD 3.5 billion in 2022. UK climate justice campaigner Elena Polissano said: "World leaders have just set up a new fund to pay for the loss and damage caused by the climate crisis. Now they should force historical mega-polluters like Shell to pay into it." The pressure is put on British PM Rishi Sunak to rework the tax measure and hold big corporations accountable. (Alex Lawson, "Calls for bigger windfall tax after Shell makes 'obscene' \$40bn profit," *The Guardian*, 02 February 2023)

### **Urged to move towards the green industry**

On 31 January, the UK pushed to set out a more ambitious plan to cut back on greenhouse gases and move towards a much cleaner source of energy. It reckons that they would be left behind by North American and European trading blocs. Net zero economies are estimated around GBP 71 billion and the green incentive bill accounting for USD 369 billion. While the UK now generates 38 per cent of its renewable energy it does not want to lose out on the next wave of the green technology industry. Another competition the UK seems to be missing out on is an

electric vehicle and battery making where the UK is failing to subsidize the conversion of scientific research into viable commercial ventures. (Jim Pickard, Camilla Hodgson and Harry Dempsey and Nathalie Thomas, "UK green industries fear threat from US climate incentives bill, *Financial Times*, 31 January 2023")

## **TURKEY**

### **New set of earthquake causes panic**

On 21 February, Turkish Health Minister reported on the death of 294 people in the earthquake in the border between Turkey and Syria. The first quake was recorded at the magnitude of 6.4 in the district of Samandag and second one followed with 5.8 magnitude. According to one of the Syrian activist: "It was strong like the first one but did not last long... it scared people and people rushed to the streets." In terms of the support, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken promised to lend help "as long as it takes." On the same Germany's President vowed to help Syria and Turkey. Till now Germany has sent 82 tonnes of relief and EUR 26 million as humanitarian aid to Syria. ("New earthquake hits Turkey-Syria border region," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 February 2023)

### **Search and rescue operations cease in earthquake-hit provinces**

On 19 February, the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) head Yunis Sezar said that search and rescue operations were ended in many earthquake-hit provinces. Sezar said that rescue operations continue in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces and added: "We believe we will end the search and rescue operations by tomorrow night." This comes as the death toll in Turkey rose to 40,642. ("Turkey earthquake rescue operations to end, government says," *Al Jazeera*, 19 February 2023)

### **UN admits failure to provide relief for Northwest Syria**

On 13 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Turkey and Syrian rescue plan is coming to a culmination where the aim is to drag people out of the rubble stuck for days. The earthquake has reached a death toll of

35,000 while the UN estimates this would rise to 50,000. Criticism is expressed against the failure of providing the same support to northwest Syria, making them feel neglected, UN Relief Chief Martin Griffin said: "We have so far failed the people in north-west Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn't arrived." Syria's President Bashar Assad called for an urgent need for support in all areas in Syria, he allowed UN aid deliveries in the opposition-held area in Syria. The issues stand that the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group covering leading the opposition area refused to receive aid arriving from the government or the Kurdish authority and will only aid from turkey. ("[Turkey-Syria earthquakes: Rescue phase 'coming to close'](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2023; "[Turkey-Syria earthquakes: UN expects death toll above 50,000](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2023)

### **Turkey to hold contractors responsible for their negligence**

On 12 February, *Politico* reported that over the weekend the Turkey government arrested contractors over their neglect and flaw in construction. Vice President Fuat Oktay announced that the government traced down 131 individuals, and 114 were taken in which lead to the death of thousands of people. The Justice Ministry ordered to set up of "Earthquake Crimes Investigation Departments" and appointed prosecutors to investigate the responsible party. The opposition blamed the president for the ill-preparedness for the catastrophe and the mismanagement of funds and taxes which were given after the 1999 major earthquake to make buildings more earthquake-proof. German and Austrian teams have cited security issues caused by clashes between people looting and gunfire incidents. The Greek Foreign minister paid a visit to Turkey to mend the relationship after the earthquake. The current death toll in Turkey is 33,000 with many still under the rubble and the rescue mission still on. (Nektaria Stamouli, "[Turkey cracks down on contractors of quake-struck buildings](#)," *Politico*, 12 February 2023)

## **REGIONAL**

### **DUP and the Tories not in favor of Rishi Sunak's deal to reform the Brexit protocol**

On 27 February *FT* reported on UK's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak meeting with European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen to sign a new deal on reforming the Northern Ireland Protocol. The new deal would mean a new green lane where goods that are not entering the EU would go through minimal customs checks without animal health certification at the border. Instead, the UK will regulate the VAT, and state-aid rules and the EU will discuss the latest single market rules with Northern Ireland. In response to this, the Democratic Unionist party of Northern Ireland has demanded to remove the protocol completely before signing the power-sharing government. Whereas the Tories of the UK remain unhappy with the new deal, as it still allows the intervention of the European Court of Justice and does not give the provision for the producers in Northern Ireland to opt "UK standards" for exports. ("[Rishi Sunak to announce 'fundamental' changes to Northern Ireland trade rules](#)," *FT*, 27 February 2023)

### **Call for migrant return deal and financial support by the EU member states add pressure on the EU**

On 25 November, *EURACTIV* reported on the 15 EU member states call for "stronger borders and migrant return deals" after the conference held in Athens on "border management." The stance on migration has been tightened by the EU since 2015 and has been looking for ways to operate Frontex in third-party states to address the migration. If the agreement is passed, Frontex would be allowed to carry border management and employ border guards. For the same, the member states also called for additional financial support to install "border protection infrastructure." ("[EU states call for stronger borders, migrant return deals](#)," *EURACTIV*, 25 February 2023)

### **Teaching professional face regulatory challenges in shifting within the EU**

On 20 February, *EURACTIV* reported on bureaucratic challenges faced by teachers in

the EU. The education professionals when moved for better pay and job security within the EU faced issues in getting their domestic qualification certified. They were mandated to take additional training and condition of certified translations of their university documents to get through the selection process. According to the EU laws, all the citizens are allowed to work in other EU member states, but as per the 2005 Directive there are procedures to recognize the qualification of the professionals. The same is applicable for those in research who have to go through long process to get certified. In response, the European Commission stated that there are steps being taken to ease the regulatory process for those who look at mobility projects in the teaching profession, but such steps can take longer to come into practice. (Silvia Ellena, "[Teachers face bureaucracy, extra training when relocating within EU](#)," *EURACTIV*, 20 February 2023)

### **Sunak says Northern Ireland protocol deal talks still underway**

On 18 February, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that the Northern Ireland protocol deal with the EU is "by no means done." Sunak said that some challenges need to be addressed and added: "There isn't a deal that has been done - there is an understanding of what needs to be done." This comes as the UK government is said to announce the new post-Brexit agreement regarding Northern Ireland next week. The European Commission Vice President Frans Timmerman said that the talks are going "quite well" and added: "There's a willingness on both sides to find a compromise, to find a way out." The Northern Ireland protocol is a post-Brexit trade deal which protects the free movement of goods across the Irish border. ("[NI Protocol deal by no means done, says Rishi Sunak](#)," *BBC*, 18 February 2023)

### **Charles Michel address in Munich Conference reflects EU's multidimensional approach to global issues**

On 17 February, the European Council President Charles Michel in his address at Munich security conference discussed on

climate change, shifting economic paradigm, ongoing digital transformation, challenges to healthcare systems and the Ukraine war. He highlighted the need for international cooperation and mutual understanding to form new founding pacts. He stated how the war was influenced by history and stressed that countries should maintain their relationships with third tier countries outside the EU, stay close to democratic principles, human dignity and fundamental goals. He urged that a common goal need to be found where all of them work on more security, peace and stability for shared prosperity. EU has been the main sponsor of the UN system, which has been vital to fight against corruption and make sure the countries are able to prosper and attract private sector investments. He further adds the role of development banks to aid developing nations that are not able to access capital due to their loans. ("[Address by President Charles Michel at the Munich Security Conference](#)," *European Council*, 17 February 2023)

### **AI act under debate**

On 15 February, Members of the European Parliament discussed the AI act focusing on the alignment of the act to US NIST and the AI-based prohibited activities. The German constitutional court called the police use of predictive software unlawful. The AI act puts great interest in human oversight to protect itself from algorithmic errors. The debate brought out the argument to not adopt the data adequacy decision called on by the commission that allows the transfer of EU citizens' data to the US. The high-risk categorization was severely under attack questioning the logicity of the proposed text. Another meeting is expected to happen on 27 February. (Luca Bertuzzi and Molly Killeen, "[Tech Brief: AI Act delayed, digital diplomacy ambitions](#)," *Euractiv*, 17 February 2023)

### **Russia deployed tactical nuclear weapons armed ships says Norwegian intelligence**

On 13 February, the Norwegian intelligence released its annual report where it said that ships from the Russian Northern Fleet had been deployed in the Baltic Sea. The report



said that this is the first such deployment in 30 years adding that the ships were regularly deployed in the sea during the Soviet era. It added: "The key part of the nuclear potential is on the submarines and surface ships of the Northern Fleet." The report also stated that this deployment highlights that Russia will continue to be a nuclear threat to NATO and extension Norway. (Sravasti Dasgupta, "Russia deploys ships armed with tactical nuclear weapons for first time in 30 years, says Norway," *Independent.co.uk*, 16 February 2023)

### **Poland continues to import Russian oil says Frankfurter**

On 16 February, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (F.A.Z)*, a German media outlet claimed that Poland continues to import Russian oil through the Druzhba oil pipeline. The report referred to the statements of European Commission Cabinet Head Björn Seibert who said that an EU member continues to import Russian oil from the northern part of the oil pipeline. The northern strand of the pipeline supplied both Germany and Poland with Russian oil, but according to the German Economics Ministry, it has not ordered any Russian oil from this pipeline since January 2023. Poland has not refuted this claim saying that the PKN Orlen oil company imports only 10 per cent of Russian oil through the pipeline. The Polish government added that due to the long-term supply contract between the two countries, Poland can only terminate the contract if sanctions are placed on the pipelines to evade penalties. (Thomas Gutschker, "Poland continues to obtain oil from Russia," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 February 2023)

### **European Parliament will allow Pfizer back to the premise**

On 16 February, European Parliament to allow access to Representatives of pharmaceutical company Pfizer in the parliamentary premise. This comes after Pfizer was banned from entering the parliament on 11 January because of its inability to provide an explanation for the vaccine purchase contract during the

pandemic. The CEO of Pfizer refused to testify in a European court over the accusations. The committee decided to impose sanctions on the company by barring it from the premise. The committee also found European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in a "Pfizergate" scandal where text messages were leaked with the CEO of Pfizer having negotiated 1.8 billion doses of vaccine. (Clara Bauer-Babef, "Pfizer retains access to EU Parliament despite vaccine purchase controversy," *Euractiv*, 16 February 2023)

### **EU and UK Nitrogen dioxide emission cross the WHO standards**

On 17 February, Euractiv reported EU and UK capital traffic-linked air pollution is over the WHO threshold. While the emission of nitrogen dioxide is decreasing it's still not under the guidelines mentioned by WHO. Nitrogen dioxide is a common emission when inhaled and can cause harmful effects on the respiratory system. It estimated that emission by the road transport sector is accountable for 37 per cent of emissions. This is a major issue as it is majorly located in Urban cities which are packed with dense populations. Over 430,000 European are annually affected by NO<sub>2</sub> concentration and therefore the WHO enlists stricter standards for ambient air quality directive. ("Traffic-linked air pollution exceeds WHO limits across UK, EU capitals: study" *Euractiv*, 17 February 2023)

### **EU off from technical recession shows winter interim forecast**

On 13 February, European Commission reported that the EU economy has entered 2023 on a better stand. The Winter interim forecast shows a growth of 0.8 per cent in the EU and 0.9 per cent in the EU area, narrowly avoiding a technical recession. EU economy avoided the fourth quarter contraction projected for 2022. There has been improved diversification of supply sources and a sharp drop in consumption where gas prices have fallen below pre-war levels. But consumer business continues to face high energy costs and core inflation. The forecast depends on the assumption that Russia's aggression does not escalate but continues throughout, some technical

assumptions relating to exchange rates and government policies. ("[Winter 2023 Economic Forecast: EU economy set to avoid recession, but headwinds persist](#)," *European Commission*, 13 February 2023)

### **Twitter criticised for levying charge for vital API tool**

On 13 February, the *associated press* reported about the outcry against Twitter planning to charge for vital API tool. Application Programming Interface analysis data due to its amount making it impossible to go by hand. The loss of such a tool would bring challenges for thousands of developers who use this tool for emergencies and academic and non-governmental research. During the Turkey and Syria earthquakes, thousands of software developers have been using this vital tool to sort out calls for help and aid to the necessary rescue organizations. Twitter plans to generate revenue from this vital tool which was essentially free while other platforms are making an effort to increase research access and transparency. Takeshi Kawamoto Japanese software developer created a popular earthquake alert in 2007 which uses this tool, where the bots combine the files to make it user-friendly or help the user reach a specific interest. This comes to light after Musk mass-fired workers and is changing the entire structure of Twitter which has come under criticism. (Barbara Ortutay, "[Twitter's plan to charge for crucial tool prompts outcry](#)," *Associated Press*, 13 February 2023)

### **EU member states propose for electricity market reforms**

On 13 February, A joint letter was proposed targeting EU electricity market reforms. It proposed the reforms to be focused on decarbonization and that the security of supply is safeguarded when shifting to a renewable source of energy. It listed down key principles that need to follow which include retaining the benefits of European electricity market integration, safeguarding and improving incentives to invest in the green transition, ensuring efficiency of short-term markets and optimising function

of forward markets, maintaining market incentives and level playing field, strengthening protection of consumers and empowering them to participate in and reap the benefits of the energy transition, improve resilience to external shock, every market reform needs to make the market fitter for renewable energy and ensure effective price signals for flexibility of development and ensure effective cross border trade as one important element of security of supply. ("[Joint letter by DE,DK,EE,EL,LU,LV,NL on priorities for a targeted EU electricity market reform](#)," *Twitter*, 13 February 2023)

### **EU launches pilot projects in Romania and Bulgaria to curb irregular migration**

On 10 February, the European Commission and EU member states leaders launched two pilot projects in Romania and Bulgaria to curb irregular migration. According to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the first project will "offer an integrated package of mobile and stationary infrastructure, from cars to cameras and watchtowers to electronic surveillance." The second project will be launched with the support of Europol police and Frontex. It will focus on improving procedures at the external borders in terms of registration, fast and fair asylum repatriations and practices. These projects will be aimed at protecting EU's external borders and controlling irregular migration and will be financed by national and EU budgets. Along with the two projects the EU countries' leaders also collectively agreed to recognize the decisions taken on deportations which will lead to faster repatriations. (Mark, "[EU strengthens border protection in Romania and Bulgaria](#)," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 10 February 2023)

### **European Parliament agree on a common definition for low-carbon hydrogen**

On 09 February, European Parliament lawmakers adopted a definition for low-carbon hydrogen which puts it at the same level as renewable hydrogen. According to the definition low carbon-hydrogen "is derived from non-renewable sources and meets a greenhouse gas emission reduction

threshold of 70 per cent.” The definition also includes nuclear power-derived hydrogen. French lawmakers viewed this as a win and will be able to push for further integration of low-carbon hydrogen into the EUs decarbonisation goals. For hydrogen to be low-carbon its production should not exceed 3.38 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per kilogram of hydrogen. France can currently produce nuclear-derived hydrogen at 2.77 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per kilogram of hydrogen. (Paul Messad “[EU Parliament backs pro-nuclear definition of ‘low-carbon’ hydrogen](#),” *EURACTIV*, 10 February 2023)

### **ECJ excludes genetic modification technique from the EUs 2001 GMO directive**

On 07 February, the European Court of Justice ruled that in-vitro random mutagenesis, a type of genetic modification, will not come under the EU’s 2001 GMO directive. The Court closed a 2015 case lodged by green campaign groups which urged the court to provide clarification if methods of mutagenesis will be put under the 2001 directive. Random mutagenesis is a method of genetic modification where spontaneous genetic mutations are induced by agents in living organisms. This is done in two ways, first in-vitro where the plant cells are targeted to modify the genes and then artificially produce a whole plant. The second is in-vivo where the modification is done to the whole plant or a part of the plant. A separate 2018 EU court ruling exempted in-vivo random mutagenesis from the directive. The Court said in its ruling that the type of gene modification has “conventionally been used in a number of in-vivo applications and has a long safety record with regard to those applications.” The ruling received praise from the EU farmer’s associations but received criticisms by the green groups who said that this will lead to “unlabelled and un-assessed GMOs in farmers’ fields and on European citizens’ plates.” This ruling comes as the European Commission is debating whether to reduce EU rules for new genetic techniques. The green groups with the support of 420,000 EU citizens and green and socialist MEP’s presented a petition to

the Commission demanding that all GMOs should come under the 2001 directive. (Natasha Foote, “[EU court exempts gene modification technique from stricter rules](#),” *EURACTIV*, 08 February 2023; Paula Andrés, “[EU citizens rally against gene editing deregulation ahead of EU proposal](#),” *EURACTIV*, 08 February 2023)

### **European Contraception Policy Atlas report highlights unequal access to contraceptives in Europe**

On 08 February, the European Contraception Policy Atlas released a report which highlighted the lack of access to birth control and other contraceptives across Europe. European Parliamentary Forum for sexual and reproductive rights (EPF) Executive Director Neil Datta said that the report was a survey of 46 countries where it found that only 57 per cent of women use modern contraceptives. The report outlined that within EU member countries, there are notable differences regarding access to contraceptives, counselling and online information. The report outlines that the use of contraceptives is the highest in Belgium and France and the lowest in Hungary and Poland. It also said that more than half of the surveyed countries do not cover the cost of contraceptives in the national health system. (Isabel da Silva, “[Access to contraception in Europe remains highly unequal, says new report](#),” *Euronews*, 08 February 2023)

### **Eight EU countries demand to strengthen of reforms to the EU asylum system and curb migration**

On 08 February, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Greece, Malta, and Austria leaders demanded stronger reforms to the EU asylum system and curbing “irregular migration.” The eight countries’ leaders outlined their demands to the European Commission and the European council chiefs in a letter. The letter outlined the call for the creation of a harmonized EU asylum framework to look into all key migratory routes. It also called for the introduction of tougher policies for repatriation and agreements with “third countries.” This comes as EU members are said to discuss possible measures to curb irregular

migration in the upcoming EU summit. EU countries have introduced strict measures to secure their external borders to prevent irregular migration through unofficial and deadly routes. Countries such as Poland, Slovenia and Hungary have erected border fences to deter refugees and migrants which has been criticized by the European Commission. The Commission has also denied providing any request for funding the construction of the fences from the EU budget but has offered to fund physical border infrastructure including surveillance equipment. Before the summit, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban called on the EU to finance these border fences to “protect all of Europe.” (Eleonora Vasques, [“Eight EU states demand tougher migration curbs ahead of summit,” EURACTIV](#), 07 February 2023; Gabriela Baczynska and Krisztina Than, [“Fences protect Europe’ Hungary’s Orban says ahead of EU migration summit,” Reuters](#), 07 February 2023)

### **Commission to partially compensate energy-intensive companies over emission costs**

On 07 February, the European Commission said that it will be partially compensating energy-intensive companies over high electricity prices caused by indirect emission costs levied by the EU Emission Trading system. The total compensation of EUR 1.36 billion will come from a Greek scheme compiled to EU State aid rules. Indirect emission costs refer to the carbon prices on the generation of electricity drawn between 2021 and 2030 and were introduced to reduce carbon leakage. The final payment to the companies will be made in 2031 where the maximum amount compensated per company will be around 75 per cent of the emission costs incurred. ([“State aid: Commission approves €1.36 billion Greek scheme to compensate energy-intensive companies for indirect emission costs,” ec.europa.eu](#), 07 February 2023)

### **European Commission proposes a collective withdrawal from the Energy Charter Treaty**

On 07 February, *Euronews* reported that the European Commission proposes a collective

withdrawal of all EU member countries from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). This comes as proposals to reform the controversial ECT failed due to opposition from countries such as Spain, France, the Netherlands and Germany. These four countries along with Poland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Austria have all announced plans to unilaterally withdraw from the treaty. The Commission Spokesperson said that the withdrawal was proposed as “there is no qualified majority in the Council to adopt the modernised Treaty,” and added that the ECT in its current form does not align with the European Green Deal. The ECT was signed in 1994 where it protects investors in the energy sector from discriminatory access, nationalization, expropriation, breaches of contract and other circumstances which have an impact on their profit expectations. The Treaty allows the companies and investors to sue governments over policy changes which hamper their revenues and business ventures. (Jorge Liboreiro, [“In U-turn. Brussels recommends EU-wide exit from controversial Energy Charter Treaty,” Euronews](#), 07 February 2023)

### **EU drafted a regulatory framework for AI**

On 06 February, the *Euronews* reported that EU officials have proposed rules for the regulation of Artificial intelligence (AI) and ChatGPT. The launch of ChatGPT has allowed users to enter prompts and generate material. The rise of ChatGPT has raised concerns over the misuse of the app therefore EU drafted an AI regulatory framework under which they are divided by the level of risks ranging from unacceptable risks, high risk, limited risks and minimal or no risks. EU commissioner Thierry Breton said: “People would need to be informed that they are dealing with a chatbot and not with a human being, transparency is also important with regard to the risk of bias and false information” (Luke Hurst, [“ChatGPT in the spotlight as the EU steps up calls for tougher regulation. Is its new AI Act enough?” Euronews](#), 06 February 2023)

### **EU to give EUR 100 million to meet North Macedonia's financial needs**

On 07 February, the EU is proposing to provide EUR 100 million as part of the Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) fund for North Macedonia. Due to the war, Macedonia's external balance has been affected as it was highly dependent on imports for fuel and electricity from Russia. This aggravated its large external debt repayment; therefore, the assistance fund is set to aid its "fiscal sustainability and structural reforms." This would also be backed by a 24-month support programme by International Monetary Fund (IMF) for EUR 530 million. ("[EU-North Macedonia: Commission proposes up to €100 million in assistance for North Macedonia](#)," *European Commission*, 06 February 2023)

### **EU to block educational grants to Fidesz party trust universities**

On 06 February, *Politico* reported that the EU would block educational grants for Erasmus, exchange students and the Horizon Europe Research Scheme of 21 Universities that are managed by Fidesz related public trust. The trust being vital for Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, criticised the move. According to the EU, the Fidesz party aims to control and nurture ideas aiding to create an ecosystem for Orbán's political ecosystem. His vision to change the education system can be seen in the wave of universities that have been privatized and the creation of public trust for the top universities. Orbán stated this action as the EU taking "Revenge" on students and threatened to take this case to the Court of Justice of the EU quoting Article 13 of EU fundamental rights "...the arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected." (William Nattrass "[Brussels hits Orbán where it really hurts — education](#)," *Politico*, 06 February 2023)

### **The Council of EU, G7 and Australia agree on energy price cap against Russia's crude oil**

On 06 February, the EU council adopted to two energy price caps targeting Russia's crude oil and diesel exports. The first price cap on petroleum products is set at USD 45

per barrel which is further reduced from the previous price cap of USD 60 per barrel. While the second price cap was set on the diesel a traded premium to crude at USD 100 per barrel. Previously those export through maritime transport and those who provided technical and financial assistance were exempted are not applicable to follow the price cap regulation. The rule will come into force from 05 February 2023. ("[EU agrees on level of price caps for Russian petroleum products](#)," *Council of European Union*, 04 February 2023)

### **Eight people were killed due to a series of avalanches in the Alps**

On 05 January, Austrian authorities reported that eight people were killed over the weekend due to the series of avalanches in the Alps. Additionally, on 04 January, Swiss authorities reported two deaths caused by the Alps located in the Graubünden canton. The avalanches were reportedly caused by heavy snowfall and high winds. Alpine regions of Western Austria especially Tyrol are under a level 4 avalanche warning. On 04 January, Tyrol experienced around 30 avalanches which led to several missing. Additionally, rescue missions have been hindered by weather conditions and poor visibility. Swiss and Austrian authorities have issued warnings to tourists, winter sports athletes and skiers urging them to avoid the slopes. ("[Austria and Switzerland: Five dead in avalanches in Alps](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 February 2023; "[More killed by avalanches in Austrian Alps](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 05 February 2023)

### **EU mandates political and economic checklist to proceed with Ukraine's accession**

On 03 February, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel along with 15 other EU commissioners met in Kyiv, Ukraine for the EU-Ukraine Summit. The key topics of discussion is expected to be Ukraine's accession process and responding to Russian attacks. For the accession request placed by Ukraine, EU's response has not been positive as it requires political, economic stability necessities to get through the EU laws. It

said that the accession can take years comparing the case of Croatia. ([“EU, Ukraine hold first summit since Russian invasion,” Deutsche Welle](#), 03 February 2023)

### **EU parliament approves IMCO proposal for regulation in political advertising**

On 02 February, the European parliament approved the internal market committee’s (IMCO) proposal on regulation of political advertising. Originally introduced in 2020 as part of commission’s democracy action plan to increase transparency and tackle foreign interference. Some key changes include enlarging the role of online repositories, foreign entities banned from financially aiding campaigns and the controversial prohibiting microtargeting based on personal data like religion, race and opinions. The proposal will now focus on commission and council negotiations dealing with legality and provisions. ( Molly Killeen, [“EU Parliament adopts position on political advertising regulation,” Euractiv](#), 02 February 2023)

### **EU pressured to halt the usage of FADs upon pressure from M&S**

On 02 February, *The Guardian* reports that Marks and Spencer (M&S) and other environmental groups advise EU Fish aggregating devices (FAD) are responsible for overfishing of yellow tuna in the Indian ocean and pressurize EU to halt their usage. FADs are informed to endanger marine life and causes serious environmental damage. On 03-05 February, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) would discuss measures to restrict the usage of FADs use. Stephen Ndegwa Kenya’s agricultural minister said: “If the stock is depleted here, the EU can go to another ocean. But the coastal states have nowhere else to go.” (Karen McVeigh, [“M&S joins calls for EU to restrict harmful tuna fishing methods in Indian Ocean,” The Guardian](#), 02 February 2023)

### **Transferring of Ukraine refugees between Estonia and Finland**

On 02 February, *The ERR News* reported that by mid-February the relocation of Ukraine refugee between Estonia-Finland

will begin. To accommodate 100 refugees Finland requires that a person should not have a residence permit from another any other EU country. The main objective is to make sure smooth transferring and to clarify with the refugees about their needs and knowledge of what would be offered by Finland. (Mari Peegel, [“Estonia-Finland Ukrainian refugee relocation scheme to start mid-February,” The ERR News](#), 01 February 2023)

### **ECHR fines Hungary for violation of right of refugee**

On 02 February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) imposed EUR 40,000 as penalty for Hungary for violating a refugee right. According to the court evidence a Syrian refugee including an Iraqi family had crossed into Hungary from Serbia in 2016. During the attempt the Hungarian border guards were reported to have initially thrown stones and later fired tear gas, which led to the death of one of the refugees. The ECHR gave a verdict that Hungary had failed to investigate the case and violated the “right to life” of the refugee. ([“Hungary fined almost €40,000 over refugee death,” Deutsche Welle](#), 02 February 2023)

## **CLIMATE**

### **Swedish forest ecosystem in danger; EU to regulate restoration law**

On 27 February, *EURACTIV* reported that the Swedish forest ecosystem was in danger even though they look in abundance. The forest industry presents an existential threat to centuries-old Swedish landscapes. Thousands of old forests have been chopped have replaced with planted monocultures and therefore slowly ruining the habitats of sensitive species. Today there are 2000 forest species that come under the red list and tat 400 are affected by the clear-cutting of the forest ecosystem. The deceptive marketing has been called out by several activists and yet there is no local Swedish law that protects these ecosystems. Therefore, the pressure to protect these old ecosystems lies with EU legislation to protect the last remaining and restore the fragments that remain in the Swedish forest. (Gustaf Lind and Johanna

Sandahl, "[EU's Nature Restoration Law: make or break for Swedish forests?](#)" *Euractiv*, 27 February 2023)

### **Dilemma over permitting farming exits as nitrogen emissions peak**

On 26 February, *FT* reported on Netherlands Nature Minister, Christianne van der Wal issued a warning over achieving climate targets. He said that it was necessary to decide between favoring agriculture and infrastructure, as farming offers a cut in nitrogen emissions. Concerning the dispute with the farmers on greenhouse gas (GHG), the Minister highlighted that the Netherlands can no longer afford to build additional infrastructure without a cut of nitrogen emissions in another place. Its pledge to cutdown nitrogen emissions to half by 2030 seems far away with the agricultural sector emitting 46 per cent of GHG. In early February, the government set a target of 38 per cent for the energy and industrial sectors, and 25 per cent for transport, while leaving out agriculture. According to Van der wal, the farmers can relocate and innovate their business to cutdown the emissions, while the Farmer Citizen Movement (BBB) party feels otherwise. ("[Netherlands raises pressure on farmers over nitrogen emissions](#)," *FT*, 26 February 2023)

### **France to head into severe drought as ground water level reduces**

On 20 February, *Les Echos* reported on continuing draught condition in France. According to Meteo France, the ground water level had reduced and there has been no rains since 21 January. It expects some precipitation in the coming week, but only heavy rains is considered beneficial to increase the groundwater which then can support the rivers. The Meteo France expects the February to end with a rainfall shortage of 50 per cent, which is still uncertain since there can be dry winters similar to 2016 and 2018 scenarios. In 2018, there were rains during winter but was followed by draught in summer, therefore, the temperature have been the decider for disasters. In response to this the government plans to hold a meeting on 23

February followed by a few in March and April to look into the hydrographic scenario of France and establish a plan to save water. (Anne Feitz, "[Climate: France faces an unprecedented winter drought](#)," *Les Echos*, 20 February 2023)

## **ENERGY**

### **France to hold meeting to form a pro-nuclear energy alliance**

On 27 February, *Reuters* reported on the upcoming meeting organized by France with other EU member states to form an alliance to consider nuclear power into "EU energy policies." The move comes as Germany, Spain, Austria, and Luxembourg still stand divided over renewable energy, while France, Poland, Sweden, and Hungary favors promoting nuclear as "low-carbon energy source." The set meeting would focus on how nuclear energy can balance with climate goals and meet energy security of Europe. (Kate Abnett, "[France seeks pro-nuclear alliance for EU energy talks](#)," *Reuters*, 27 February 2023)

### **Energy price cap raises concern over hike in household bills**

On 28 February, *BBC* reported that the household bill is set to rise in April to EUR 3,000. While the Ofgem regulator has announced the cost cut faced by the government, there has been a call for the cut of April's hike said: "Energy bills are out of control. The government must cancel April's hike. With the cost of wholesale gas plummeting ministers have no excuse for not stepping in." The falling wholesale price can potentially save the government billions of pounds. The government states that the energy cap does not limit the total bill as it only limits the cost per unit of energy. (Kevin Peachey, "[New energy price cap prompts call for help on bills](#)," *BBC*, 28 February 2023)

### **France, and Nordic countries top in heat pumps installation while Germany ranks low**

On 20 February, *EURACTIV* reported on the increase in the heat pump sale in the EU. The heat pumps known as "reverse fridges" can provide heat even at a negative temperature condition. It has the capacity

to run four times than a gas boiler and as per the EU's REPowerEU plan it aimed to double the installations of the heat pumps to 10 million in next five years and by 30 million in 2030. In 2022, France, Finland followed by Norway, Sweden have recorded highest number of heat pumps bought. Of all the EU member states, Germany which is most reliant on Russian gas was not listed top in the heat pump market. According to a German heat pump maker, Germany aims to cut down pure gas boilers and heaters that are less than 65 per cent of renewable energy and will boost hybrid model of heat pumps. ("Three countries became heat pump forerunners in 2022, Germany did not," *EURACTIV*, 20 February 2023)

### **Germany's economy and businesses affected due to hike in energy prices**

On 20 February, the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) Head, Marcel Fratzscher made remarks on how Ukraine war has impacted Germany's economy. He highlighted that because of the war, energy prices have increased costing the German economy by EUR 100 billion or 2.5 per cent GDP. Fratzscher said: "The German economy has been more affected by the crisis because it was more dependent on Russian energy, has a high proportion of the energy-intensive industry." He predicts the impact to further if the companies fail to adapt to reduced energy consumption environment, as he foresees the energy prices to be unfavourable for Germany in the upcoming decades. ("Ukraine war costs Germany's economy €100 billion," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 February 2023)

### **Norwegian offshore wind projects to kickstart with fresh partnerships with Denmark**

On 05 February, Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP) said that they would collaborate with NorSea and Parkwind in a partnership "dedicated" to progressing offshore wind projects in Norway. This collaboration would entail CIP and the two companies to "further" tighten their Utsira Nord tender and would allow additional knowledge of offshore maritime operations and sustainable energy project development and implementation in

Norway and the rest of the world. This comes as Norway has announced a clear target of reaching net zero carbon by 2050 and has assured the establishment of 30 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2040 and said that the first tender of 2023 would involve the Utsira Nord area which will offer a primary capacity of 1.5 gigawatts of wind power. The Norwegian government said that they would develop a "competitive" Norwegian supplier base, technology network and industry "around floating offshore wind." ("New partnership aims to take Norwegian offshore wind to the next level," *Port News*, 05 February 2023)

## **SPACE**

### **Russia's MS-23 capsule docks into ISS**

On 26 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the docking of the Russian MS-23 capsule with the International Space Station (ISS). The Soyuz MS-23 is missioned to bring back the Russian cosmonauts and US astronaut by September, it also transported 429 kgs of cargo to the ISS to help extend the astronauts mission. According to Roscosmos, the next "space walk" is expected to take place either in April or May. ("Russian Soyuz capsule docks with ISS," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 February 2023)

### **ROSCOSMOS launched Proton-M and plans to launch Luch-5 relay satellites in march.**

On 05 February, The Russian space agency Roscosmos announced the launch of Proton- M rocket from Kazakhstan into orbit carrying the meteorological satellite called Elektro-L. Russia also plans to launch the Luch-5 relay satellite in march. The launch being the first one since the war began, the Proton M vehicle will deliver satellite into the orbit. This is to help in exchange of information between spacecraft, other near vehicles and ground station on earth. The Lurelay currently consists of three satellites called Luch-5A, Luch-5B and Luch 5V deployed in 2011-2014. ("Russia's Proton-M Rocket Carrying Meteorological Satellite Launched Into Orbit: Roscosmos, Sputnik, 05 February 2023; Russia to Launch Luch-5 Relay Satellite in March," *Sputnik*, 05 February



2023)

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Olaf Scholz meet Modi to form trade deal**

On 25 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the strengthening of business and defence ties between the two countries regardless of differences of opinions existing on the Ukraine war. Scholz said that both countries should move towards forming a trade deal between European Union and India which long has been held over a disagreement over tariffs. They also discussed the different positions Germany and India take on the Ukraine war and openly sort opinions and engaged in the assessment of the war. Scholz said: "There is huge potential for intensified cooperation, in sectors such as renewables, hydrogen, mobility, pharma, digital economy, and many more." ("[Germany's Scholz in India to press on EU trade deal](#)," *Euractiv*, 27 February 2023)

### **Macron to visit Africa to recoup the deteriorating support for France**

On 27 February, *EURACTIV* reported on French President Emmanuel Macron scheduled to visit the former French colonies in Africa to revamp the growing anti-French sentiment. The move comes after France was asked to withdraw its troops from Burkina Faso, this was mainly due to the government siding with Russia's Wagner Group to fight the Islamist Insurgents. Macron is also expected to announce an "African policy" before the visit and clarify the details of France's military strategy in Africa. ("[Macron flies to Africa to counter waning French influence](#)," *EURACTIV*, 27 February 2023)

### **French troops exit from Burkina Faso**

On 19 February, the Burkinabe armed forces announced the end of France's military operations. Previously in January, Burkina Faso had asked France to pull out its troops after ending the military accord. It stated that it would defend against the insurgents on its own. The exit of France marks a new turning point as the clash between Burkina Faso and the Islamist groups is expected to continue to displace

million in the south of Sahara. This move comes after increased protests in Burkina Faso over French Military presence and it also means deterioration in the relations. ("[Burkina Faso marks official end of French military operations on its soil](#)," *EURACTIV*, 20 February 2023)

### **European trade union personnel expelled from Tunisia**

On 18 February, Tunisian President Kais Saied ordered the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) general secretary Esther Lynch to leave the country. This comes as Lynch took part in a protest organized by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) on 17 February. Lynch addressed the protesters in Sfax saying: "We say to governments: hands off our trade unions, free our leaders," and called on the Tunisian government to negotiate with the UGTT for a solution. Tunisian government accused Lynch of interfering in Tunisia's internal affairs and asked Lynch to leave the country within 24 hours. The ETUC on 19 February stated that Lynch had left Tunisia and added that this incident "is in line with the campaign of intimidation and harassment being waged against trade unions" in Tunisia. ("[Tunisia expels European Trade Union chief for 'interference'](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 February 2023; "[Tunisia orders top European trade union official expelled](#)," *AP News*, 20 February 2023)

### **US pledges USD 100 million in aid to earthquake-hit Turkey**

On 19 February, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pledged USD 100 million to earthquake-hit regions of Turkey. Blinken visited Turkey where he took a helicopter tour of Hatay one of the worst-hit provinces. This comes as recovery missions are slowing down in the affected provinces. Blinken said: "The search and rescue, unfortunately, is coming to an end. The recovery is on and then there will be a massive rebuilding operation." The USD 100 million aid provides additional emergency refugee and migration funds and humanitarian assistance. ("[Top US diplomat visits Turkey quake zone; pledges \\$100m in aid](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 19 February 2023)

### **Germany pledges an additional EUR 22 million in aid to Syrians affected by earthquakes**

On 19 February, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock announced an additional EUR 22 million in aid to victims of the earthquake in Syria. Baerbock said: "They now lack even the most basic necessities for survival: a roof over their heads, clean drinking water, something to eat and medicine." She also accused the Syrian government of setting up obstacles for aid organizations. This new aid brings Germany's total aid to Syria to around EUR 50 million. This also comes as the UN outlined that around 8.8 million people in Syria were affected by the earthquakes. ("[Germany pledges more aid for Syrian earthquake victims](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 February 2023)

### **Finland grants Afghan women and girls refugee status**

On 16 February, Finland's Immigration Service announced that it will be granting Afghan women and girls refugee status amid the worsening situation of women's rights in Afghanistan. Finnish Asylum Unit Director Antti Lehtinen said that now gender alone will be enough to grant asylum. The Immigration Service has also amended its guidelines for processing applications submitted by Hazaras from Afghanistan to reflect the guidelines of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). While this announcement has widely received positive reactions, many have expressed concerns. *Helsinki Times* claimed that this could lead to the exploitation of women and girls and encourage illegal migration. ("[Finland to grant refugee status to Afghan women and girls](#)," *Helsinki Times*, 16 February 2023)

### **UK announces a new Sahel Humanitarian Fund to support vulnerable communities in the region**

On 16 February, UK Development and Africa Minister Andrew Mitchell launched the new Sahel Regional Fund (SRF) to support vulnerable communities in the region suffering from food insecurity, rising violence and displacement. On a three-day visit to Niger, Mitchell said that this fund

will be launched in collaboration with local and international NGOs to provide vital humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable communities across the Sahel. The SRF will also supply key life-saving aid and lasting solutions to the displaced people in the region. The GBP 33 million funds will be supplied to the region till 2026. ("[UK launches new Sahel Humanitarian Fund](#)," *gov.uk*, 16 February 2023)

### **South Africa, Russia and China to launch joint naval exercise raises concern among diplomats in Africa**

On 17 February, South Africa, Russia and China launched a Joint Naval exercise. The move has seen domestic criticism that the drills and naval joint exercise would endanger the relationships with Western partners. Africa has become a global interest amid the Ukraine war and increasing Chinese aggression. The general African policy is aimed at staying neutral to benefit from the 'Diplomatic tug-of-war' while it's risky to hold a 10-day Mosi II exercise during one year anniversary of a Russian invasion. There are African diplomats who ignore the concerns saying that a similar exercise was held in November with France. The Defence Minister said: "South Africa, like any independent and sovereign state, has a right to conduct its foreign relations in line with its ... national interests." ("[South Africa's naval exercise with Russia, China raises Western alarm](#)," *Euractiv*, 17 February 2023)

### **UN calls for member states to provide USD one billion for Turkey's earthquake relief**

On 16 February, United Nations for the relief efforts in Turkey launched an appeal for USD One billion from the member states. The death toll has now increased to 41,000 and the rescue mission is still going on. The proposal plans to provide humanitarian aid for the coming 3 months to 5.2 million people. The UN spokesperson said, "I urge the international community to step up and fully fund this critical effort in response to one of the biggest natural disasters of our times." Earlier this week UN also urged for USD 400 million to aid Syrian survivors of

the earthquake. The UN spokesperson when asked about the biased support for Turkey over Syria, responded by saying humanitarian communities had been working in Syria before the earthquake therefore the call for Turkey to put forward first. ("[Turkey earthquake: UN launches \\$1 billion aid appeal](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 February 2023)

### **EIB to invest USD 40 million across South Asia and India for climate action**

On 10 February, the European Investment Bank (EIB) Vice President Kris Peeters announced a USD 40 million investment to address climate action and environmental investment across South Asia and India. The fund will be invested in the GEF South Asia Growth Fund III, a venture of GEF Capital Partners. The EIB said that the aim is to increase the investment to USD 300 million with the majority of it being invested in India and around 10 per cent in South and Southeast Asia. ("[EIB increases support for high impact climate action and environmental investment across India and South Asia with \\$40 million for new regional investment fund](#)," *eib.org*, 10 February 2023)

### **Two former Bulgarian ministers sanctioned under the Magnitsky act**

On 10 February, the US Treasury Department sanctioned two former Bulgarian ministers under the Magnitsky act for being involved in corruption. The two former ministers sanctioned are former Finance Minister Vladislav Goranov under former Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and former Energy Minister Rumen Ovcharov under former Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev. The US claimed that Goranov in his term in office supported bribes being given to government officials and helped Bulgarian oligarchs benefit from the tax revenue system. On Ovcharov, they claimed that he revived bribes and was involved in "corrupt" energy contracts with Russian companies. Additionally, the US has also sanctioned three other high-profile Bulgarians includes Nikolay Malinov, and two former heads of the Kozloduy nuclear plant. ("[The US sanctions two former Bulgarian ministers under Magnitsky](#)

[act](#)," *EURACTIV*, 10 February 2023)

### **France and Germany are concerned over US's green technology subsidies**

On 08 February, France and Germany expressed their concerns over US Green technologies subsidies under the Inflation Reduction Act. They state that the act sheltered US companies from inflation and subsidized investment in green tech would undermine EU's competitiveness in the American market. Germany and France agreed that there needs to be some transparency so that the EU can match them is needed. They called for Trade and Technology Council to develop a common standard for green goods and create critical minerals to reduce dependence on China. Economic Minister Le Marie French said: "You cannot have any fair competition if there is not full transparency on the level of public subsidies and public tax credits that are granted to private companies." (Christian Kraemer, David Lawder, ("[France, Germany protest U.S. green subsidies on Washington trip](#)," *Reuters*, 08 February 2023)

### **EU and India form Trade and Technology Council**

On 07 February, EU and India set up Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to strengthen their strategic partnership. This was followed by the two nation heads meeting on 25 April 2022. The TTC aims to ensure security, prosperity and sustainably when it comes to development. There would be three working groups as part of TTC – Strategic technologies, digital governance and digital connectivity; Green and clean energy technologies; Trade, investment and resilient value chains. Every year ministerial meetings would be held for TTC and the first one to be held is in 2023 spring. ("[EU-India: new Trade and Technology Council to lead on digital transformation, green technologies and trade](#)," *European Commission*, 06 February 2023)

### **France, UAE and India launch a trilateral initiative on climate cooperation**

On 04 February, France, India and the UAE launched a trilateral initiative on climate

cooperation where the three countries will focus on projects in the energy sector, climate change and biodiversity. The projects under the initiative will largely focus on the Indian Ocean region and the three countries look to expand cooperation in launching sustainable projects. The three countries also reiterated their commitment to the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and its goals. The three also outlined their commitment to continued cooperation in combating diseases and pandemics and increasing military cooperation as well. ([“France, India, UAE agree on climate cooperation,” Deutsche Welle](#), 04 February 2023)

### **Belarus, UAE and Zimbabwe: strengthening long term relationship**

On 03 February, The Belta reported Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko’s visit to Zimbabwe secured the foundation for cooperation between UAE and Zimbabwe. Eight bilateral agreements were signed in Harare which stated encouragement and mutual protection of investment. They also stated a joint commission for cooperation, avoiding double taxation and prevention of tax invasion and the agreement to twin the cities of Minsk and Harare. A Zimbabwean embassy is to be opened in Belarus in order to enhance cooperation. ([“Long-term agreements. Results of Lukashenko’s visit to UAE, Zimbabwe summarized,” Belta](#), 03 February 2023)

### **EU imports from China at a record high of 34 per cent for 2022**

On 02 February, *Euractiv* reports that according to Chinese customs statistics there has been an increase in exports of 34 per cent from the Xinjiang province of China to EU members in 2022. A contradictory result to the mutual sanctions imposed between EU and China in 2021 over the prosecution of Uyghur Muslims. The exports reached USD 1.1 billion in 2022 as Germany imported 1,750 tons of lithium-ion electric accumulators vital for green transition and electric vehicles. The dilemma the EU encounters are to be sustainable and

conscious of human rights infringement or to ensure material flow for the growth of the industry. (János Allenbach-Ammann, [“EU imports from Xinjiang rose by 34% in 2022,” Euractiv](#), 02 February 2023)

### **Russia denies inspection of military sites seen as violation by the US**

On 31 January, the US warned over Russia violating the “NEW START Treaty.” A US state department spokesperson said that Russia refused to allow inspection which bars the US from implementing the important rights of the treaty. This also endangers the US-Russia nuclear arms control. Earlier the inspection was stopped due to pandemic and the committee meeting between the US and Russia was last held in October 2021. The treaty is viewed as the most significant as it is the last factor holding both in the post cold war period. It limits both the US and Russia to hold 1550 nuclear warheads and 700 ballistic missiles. The US is observed to be keen to re-negotiate the START treaty which is about to expire in 2026. ([“US says Russia violating New START nuclear treaty,” Deutsche Welle](#), 01 February 2023)

### **NATO and Japan discuss strengthening of transatlantic and Indo-Pacific relations**

On 31 January, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg met Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo. Furthering the transatlantic and Indo-Pacific relationship they discussed the ambition on strengthening their relationship. The Secretary-General stated “No NATO partner is closer or more capable than Japan. As they acknowledged the rising threat from China’s aggressive behaviour to North Korea’s military provocations and the shared agreement against the Ukraine war as an international challenge supporting the strict sanctions Japan imposed against Russia in the wake of the Ukraine war.” ([“Secretary General in Tokyo: No NATO partner is closer or more capable than Japan, North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#), 31 January 2023”)

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Image source: The Brookings Times

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