



NIAS Area Studies

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THE BATTLE FOR BAKHMUT



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About NIAS Global Politics

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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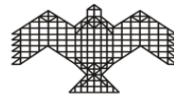
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About NIAS

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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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.

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Image Source: LIBKOS/AP

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Source: LOUIZA VRADI/REUTERS, JEFF PACHOUD / AFP, md.usembassy.gov, Kremlin.ru, EPA-EFE/ANTON BRINK HANSEN, AFP

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WAR IN UKRAINE: DAILY UPDATES



Source: president.gov.ua, AFP, Vladimir Astapkovich, RIA Novosti, Lynsey Addario/The New York Times, president.gov.ua, ARKnews.net

War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from Day 430 to Day 461 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, Rishika Yadav, Sreeja JS, Nithyashree RB, and Melvin George

EM SHORT NOTES



Source: Lewis Joly / Ap / SIPA, AIRBUS, Pontus Lundahl/AP Photo/ picture alliance, Andrei Stasevich/AP/Picture Alliance, abcnews, AFP/Frankfurt Allgemeine

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

By Padmashree Anandhan, Rishika Yadav, Sreeja JS, Nithyashree RB, and Melvin George

COVER STORY

The Battle for Bakhmut: Significance, Objectives, Course, and What Next

By Rishika Yadav, Sreeja JS, Nityashree RB, and Melvin George

The Kremlin seeks a symbolic victory to maintain domestic support and prove the superiority of private armies like Wagner.

Ukraine's setback in Bakhmut is crucial in the ongoing war in Ukraine. After Moscow began its assault on the city, it witnessed the war's bloodiest and most prolonged urban combat in Europe since World War II, with thousands dead and the city in ruins. The city holds little strategic value for the West and the military analysts. For Ukraine and Russia, it holds both strategic and symbolic significance. Russia and Ukraine were firm in their justifications throughout the course of the battle of Bakhmut, as each viewed it as crucial to weaken the other. Bakhmut is a city in the eastern industrial region of Donbas and was home to around 70,000 people before the war.

I Geographic Significance

Bakhmut is a city located in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk Oblast, about 80 kilometers northeast of the regional capital, Donetsk. Situated along the banks of the Bakhmutka River, just 20 kilometers west of the administrative border with the Luhansk region, the city is surrounded by hilly terrain. It lies within the steppe zone, characterized by flat grasslands and a continental climate featuring hot summers and cold winters, making it vulnerable to mortar and rocket fire and is crucial for moving soldiers and supplies to nearby positions. Bakhmut's historical journey dates back to ancient times, witnessing the influence of the Scythians, Sarmatians, and Slavic tribes.

The city's population, estimated to be around 77,500, has likely fluctuated due to factors like migration and the impact of the conflict. Its strategic location near the

Russian border holds geopolitical implications, making it a focal point in the regional conflict. While the city lacks major economic or geographic importance, Russia's determination to capture it stems from both political and military considerations.

The Kremlin seeks a symbolic victory to maintain domestic support and prove the superiority of private armies like Wagner. For Russian commanders, gaining control of Bakhmut could serve as a launching pad for further territorial advancements, threatening larger urban areas of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, due to its strategic importance as a regional transport hub. Controlling the Kharkiv-Rostov and Donetsk-Kiev highways that pass through Bakhmut offers great strategic advantages. The M03 highway is a major Ukrainian international road linking Kyiv to Dovzhansky on the Russian border. It would provide control over vital highways and serve as a launching pad for further advances towards Kramatorsk and Slovyansk.

Bakhmut, located just west of the M03 highway, serves as a crucial supply route for Ukrainian troops. To realize the goal of "liberating the Donbas" and make further advancements into Ukraine, it is imperative for Russia to seize control of Bakhmut. The capture would disrupt Ukrainian logistics and enable proximity for artillery strikes. Tragically, Russian forces, through their invasion, have systematically demolished significant cultural sites in Bakhmut, like the fire-bombing of Palace of Culture. This deliberate destruction will undoubtedly hinder Ukraine's recovery efforts in the post-

war era. The ongoing battle has inflicted heavy casualties on both sides, with Ukraine utilizing the opportunity to weaken the Russian military. By defending Bakhmut, Ukraine not only aims to grind down Russian forces but also ties up Russian troops that could be deployed elsewhere. Like Russia, Ukraine has also given Bakhmut political significance, symbolizing resistance and independence. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has made the city an emblem of resistance. When he visited Washington in December, he called it "the fortress of our morale" and gave a Bakhmut flag to the US Congress. He said, "The fight for Bakhmut will change the trajectory of our war for independence and for freedom."

Overall, Bakhmut has become a symbol of heroic resistance for Ukraine, as prolonged fighting near the city has pinned down many Russian troops, preventing Moscow from conducting offensive operations elsewhere while inflicting heavy losses in manpower and equipment on Russian forces.

II

Objectives of Ukraine in Bakhmut

First, the strategic and economic significance. The city is in Donetsk, part of the majority Russian-speaking industrialized Donbas region. It has a strategic road leading to Lysychansk, which is logistically advantageous to the Ukrainian troops. It is an open point to move to the bigger cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, rich in mining reserves and equipment. In March 2023, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he feared Russian forces would have an "open road" if they took Bakhmut and that it was a tactical decision to strengthen the fight. Sloviansk is connected to Kyiv and Kharkiv through Highway M03, which runs close to the Russian border.

The economic significance of the city lies in the fact that it is an industrial region rich in salt and gypsum mining reserves and a massive winery. Therefore, the loss of the city also meant economic ramifications for Ukraine.

Second, a battle to weaken the Russian army. For Kyiv, a firm fight in Bakhmut meant

wasting the Russian troops from advancing deeper into eastern Ukraine, as the city is an open point to any future combat in Donetsk. According to Zelenskyy's aide Mykhailo Podolyak, Ukraine was fighting in Bakhmut because the battle debilitated Russia's best units and degraded them ahead of a strong counter-offensive. For Kyiv, the prolonged fighting in the city could prevent Moscow from conducting operations elsewhere. It also bought time for Ukraine to amass more ammunition and weapons from its Western allies for launching a strong counter-offensive.

III

Objectives of Russia in Bakhmut

First, a much-needed victory for Moscow. Initially, for Russia, Bakhmut offered a way to encircle the Ukrainian troops in the regions nearby such as Kramatorsk and Sloviansk in the summer of 2022. Russian troops attacking Popasana in May 2022 to capture Bakhmut qualifies Russian interests. Russia had several setbacks in the North and also lost previously captured territories. While the Ukrainian troops' resistance in defending the Eastern city intensified, Russia saw a conquest in Bakhmut would provide morale to its soldiers. For Kyiv, "Bakhmut stands" became a war cry, and the interests turned out to be political. Moscow's interests turned out to be the same. Intense war has destroyed most of the infrastructure and 90 per cent of the population have fled. Despite the devastating loss of soldiers on both sides, for Russia, acquiring Bakhmut became more of a symbol of Russia's supposed liberation of the region. Also, Moscow capturing Bakhmut will be a significant development for the Russian troops.

Second, Bakhmut an entry to strengthen its military base in Donbas. Beginning in August 2022, Moscow's aim expanded to capture the whole of the Donbas region. Bakhmut's roads are used by Ukrainian troops for replenishment purposes and to key regions such as Donetsk and Luhansk. Hence, Russia's sole focus was on Bakhmut and it intensified the engagement. Bakhmut's immediate populated neighbourhood cities such as Slovianska and Kramatorsk have been subjected to several missile attacks.

Bakhmut's strategic positioning offers Moscow, easier access to key places in Ukraine. Bakhmut's capture by Russia also provides a base that the Russian troops can utilise for replenishment.

Third, Wagner Group's leader's aspirations for a political edge. Along with the Russian troops, the Wagner Group played a crucial role in the capture of Bakhmut. Wagner Group's leader Yevgeny Prigozhin aims of extending his political influence as a major objective for his engagement in the war. Prigozhin commented that he will capture the city and accused Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu of implementing poor manoeuvring tactics. Prigozhin despite saying that he will withdraw his troops several times, captured Bakhmut, giving himself a political edge.

IV The Course of the Battle

Initial attacks

In May 2022, the first report on Bakhmut was by the Ukrainian Defence Ministry informing that the Russian troops tried to capture Bakhmut through Popasna which would risk putting the whole of Luhansk under Russian control. In June Bakhmut was subjected to shelling and it continued in July as the Russian troops entered Bakhmut. The focus was on capturing the highway that connects Luhansk and Donetsk.

Prolonged fight

On 05 October, UAF launched more than 10 airstrikes targeting Russia's ammunition and weapon stocks moving from defending Bakhmut to offensive strategies. In November 2022, the Ukrainian Ground Forces resisted Russian offensives as they tried to cut the movement of the Ukrainian troops. Ukrainian forces attacked Russian positions at ground zero reported the Wagner Group. On 29 November, the Ukrainian forces reported a reduction in the intensity of attacks by the Russians as they had not had any significant gains. The Wagner group along with the Russian group had the north and northeast of Bakhmut under control. In December 2022, the industrial area in the north and the east of Bakhmut was also under their control. In mid-January 2023, Ukrainian forces deterred

Russian attacks in Bakhmut resulting in the death of around 40,000 Wagner Group mercenaries in both Bakhmut and Soledar.

Encirclement

On 03 February, Zelenskyy said that Ukraine will continue to fight and called Bakhmut "our fortress." The situation worsened in Bakhmut for Ukrainian troops as Russian attacks intensified on their main remaining supply route Highway M06. On 24 February, in the northern part of Bakhmut, the capture of Berkhovka forced Ukrainian troops to retreat from Stupky. On 25 February, Prigozhin claimed the fall of Yahdine in eastern Bakhmut. In March, the Wagner group started advancing deeper in the east and south. On 08 March, Prigozhin claimed taking control of eastern Bakhmut and the Ukrainians were pushed to the western bank of the Bakhmuta River. On the same day, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg cautioned that Bakhmut might fall but it would not decide the larger outcome of the war. On 17 March, the UK Defence Ministry remarked that Russian forces made substantial progress and gained west of the Bakhmuta River making it the new front line.

The fall

During April, Russians aimed to capture the last fortified area in the west of Bakhmut and they advanced significantly in the north, the south and east of the city. On 02 April, Prigozhin claimed that "Bakhmut was fully captured," and hoisted the Russian flag over the city's administration building. Ukrainian military denied all claims of the supposed fall of Bakhmut. On 19 April, leaked Pentagon documents confirmed the Russian encirclement of Bakhmut except for the west, the only supply route for UAF. In early May, Prigozhin repeatedly threatened to withdraw from Bakhmut due to inadequate support from Russia. Two days later, he retracted by saying that Russia promised him the ammunition. On 18 May, the Wagner group gained control over three remaining fortified areas in the west. On 21 May, Prigozhin claimed that the city was fully under Wagner's control. The same day, Russia's Defence Ministry announced that "the liberation of Artyomovsk (Bakhmut) has been completed.

V What Next?

First, preparations for Ukraine's counter offensive. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is meeting world leaders to supply weapons, equipment and other supplies to prepare for its counter offensive against Russia. The assurance of Denmark and the Netherlands to Ukraine regarding the training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16 may lead to the delivery of the American aircrafts. For Ukraine, it is important as its leaders know about the Russian Air Force's capability. Ukraine's membership requests into NATO and EU, if approved, would change the way in which the members of the alliances would look at the war. This is what Ukraine wants too. When some of the countries advocate for dialogues and peaceful resolutions to end conflict, neither Ukraine nor Russia see that they would be in favour of each other.

Second, next phase of the war. Russia must defend the towns and villages inside the Russian territory from the attacks by pro-Ukrainian groups. The Russian forces who are in control of the Bakhmut are more likely to have a defensive approach. The satellite

images show sophisticated primary and secondary trenches and minefields dug by Russian forces to repel the Ukrainian advances in the south. They have built fortifications and stretched its forces to get back the lost northern and southern flanks. The Wagner group is not designed for defence. Their withdrawal from Bakhmut and the tensions between Prigozhin and the Russian leadership can be utilised by the Ukrainians for their advancement. Ukraine is aware of Russia's larger Air Force that could easily thwart the advancements of the Ukrainians Forces into Bakhmut. This should be read together with the Netherlands and Denmark's assurance for training the Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 that would eventually lead to the delivery of the American fighter jets to Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky, seeking aid in terms of weapons, ammunition and equipment, emphasizes that Ukraine is preparing for a counter offensive operation.

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COVER STORY

Turkey's Elections 2023: Major Issues & Responses

By Rishika Yadav and Nithyashree RB

Despite the economic crisis and tragic losses of lives and infrastructure during the earthquakes, voters preferred Erdogan in both rounds of elections.

The Rise of Erdogan: A Brief Note Since 2002

On 03 November 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a conservative party led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won the general election and emerged as a successor to previous Islamist parties that were barred from running for parliament. In March 2003, he was elected prime minister, leading the first single-party government since 1987. This also marked the first time a two-party parliament had been formed since 1961.

On 28 August 2014, Erdogan became the 12th President of Turkey. He appointed his former foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, as the new prime minister.

On 14 May 2023, Turkey witnessed highly contested general and presidential elections. Erdogan, who represented the AKP-Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) coalition, competed against his primary rival Kilicdaroglu of the Nation Alliance, which included the IYI, SP, and DEVA parties. The first round of elections concluded with Erdogan securing 49.5 per cent and Kilicdaroglu securing 44.9 per cent.

On 24 May 2023, Victory Party leader Umit Ozdag endorsed the opposition, Republican People's Party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu. Throughout the campaigns, Erdogan accused Kilicdaroglu of colluding with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), while Kilicdaroglu was anti-migrant and pro-LGBTQ and expressed pro-European interests. The Kilicdaroglu-led opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP), won 169 seats in the first round of elections. Initially, AKP's alliance with the Islamist New Welfare Party and the Kurdish HUDA-PAR jeopardized his win.

On 28 May 2023, Erdogan won the run-off elections securing 52.16 per cent. The

opposition leader Kilicdaroglu secured 47.84 per cent. Despite the inflation, which surged 86 per cent in 2022, the devastating earthquake and growing opposition, Erdogan secured a third term. Erdogan has said that this will be his last term. Following his victory, Erdogan said: "I thank our nation, which gave us the responsibility of governing again for the next five years." He reaffirmed his party's pro-family objectives and called the opposition "LGBTQ sympathizers." Kilicdaroglu, after the election, said that they were "unfair" and added that the ruling party controlled the media. The Erdogan-led Justice and Development Party (AKP) party won 267 seats out of 600 in the Parliament.

Major Issues in the Elections: Economic Crisis, Earthquake, Gender Questions, Opposition and Ratings

Turkey experienced a deepening economic crisis following the Covid pandemic in 2020, with inflation at its highest level since 2002, reaching 36 per cent in December. Despite the central bank's interest rate hikes the Turkish lira's value against the US dollar dropped by over 40 per cent. The February earthquake in Turkey impacted the elections. It exposed the government's inability to implement safety regulations and emergency planning, resulting in fatalities and criticisms directed towards President Erdogan's party. The electoral process was also disrupted, with calls to postpone the elections due to damaged polling stations and campaign activities being limited. The earthquake also shifted public attention, with people more concerned about survival and recovery than their political preferences, potentially affecting voting behaviour. The withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention provoked outrage among women's rights groups and sparked a gender debate in the elections. Only 17.4 per cent of

the candidates for parliament are women, and the Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) is the only party with a female presidential candidate. The AKP's campaign highlighted traditional gender roles and family values, while the opposition advocated for women's rights and challenged Erdogan's decision on the Istanbul Convention. On 11 May, Homeland Party's presidential candidate, Muharrem Ince, withdrew his candidacy.

The withdrawal of Ince was advantageous for the National Alliance coalition under Kemal Kilicdaroglu as it helped him win in the first round. According to Metropoll, 49 per cent of Ince's support shifted towards Kilicdaroglu while 22 per cent shifted towards Erdogan. On the same lines, AKP's alliance with the Islamist New Welfare Party and the Kurdish HUDA-PAR (an extension of Kurdish Hizbullah) jeopardized his win. Erdogan also faced nationalist allies' pressure for a more hardline stance against the Kurdish issue and military intervention in regional conflicts such as Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Eastern Mediterranean. According to Metropoll's "The Pulse of Turkey" survey, President Erdogan's approval rating declined in July despite efforts to improve his popularity. Erdogan's disapproval rating rose to 53.7 per cent, while his approval rating fell to 41.5 per cent, 2.7 per cent less than June.

The incumbency provided Erdogan control over 90 per cent of the media. According to BBC News, Erdogan was featured in Media for 32 hours and 42 minutes while the opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu got only 32 minutes in April. Erdogan accused Kilicdaroglu of colluding with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). At the height of the campaigning, Muharrem Ince withdrew from the elections as a purported sex tape emerged in the media. He accused AKP of tarnishing his reputation by releasing a deep fake video. Throughout the campaigning AKP and the media undermined the opposition which turned out to be advantageous for Erdogan.

The second round of Elections and the return of Erdogan

On 11 May, Homeland Party's presidential candidate Muharrem Ince withdrew from the elections. On 14 May, the first round of presidential elections in Turkey concluded. The Kilicdaroglu-led opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP) won 169 seats in the first round of elections. As no party secured more than 50 per cent, on 16 May the supreme election council announced that the top two contenders will go for a second round of election. Despite the economic crisis and tragic losses of lives and infrastructure during the earthquakes, voters preferred Erdogan in both rounds of elections. With the unexpected endorsement from Ogan, support for Erdogan increased, leading to his return.

Responses from across the world

Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Erdogan over a call. He said: "The election victory was a natural result of your selfless work as the head of the Republic of Turkey, clear evidence of the support of the Turkish people for your efforts to strengthen state sovereignty and conduct an independent foreign policy."

US President Joe Biden tweeted: "I look forward to continuing to work together as NATO Allies on bilateral issues and shared global challenges."

The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, tweeted: "Congratulations to President Erdogan on re-election and to Türkiye's voters on high turnout, reflecting a long democratic tradition. Türkiye is a valued NATO Ally and partner. I look forward to our continued work together with the government chosen by the Turkish people."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg tweeted: "Congratulations President (Erdogan) on your re-election. I look forward to continuing our work together and preparing for the NATO summit in July."

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani tweeted: "My dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan, congratulations on your victory. I wish you success in your new term, and that you achieve through it what the

Turkish people aspire to in terms of progress and prosperity, and progress and growth for our strong bilateral relations."

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz tweeted: "My dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan, congratulations on your victory. I wish you success in your new term, and that you achieve through it what the Turkish people aspire to in terms of progress and prosperity, and progress and growth for our strong bilateral relations."

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted: "France and Turkey have huge challenges to face together. Return of peace to Europe, future of our Euro-Atlantic Alliance, Mediterranean Sea. With President Erdogan, whom I congratulate on his re-election, we will continue to move forward."

EU Council President Charles Michel tweeted: "France and Turkey have huge challenges to face together. Return of peace to Europe, future of our Euro-Atlantic Alliance, Mediterranean Sea. With President Erdogan, whom I congratulate on his re-election, we will continue to move forward."

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak tweeted: "France and Turkey have huge challenges to face together. Return of peace to Europe, future of our Euro-Atlantic Alliance, Mediterranean Sea. With President Erdogan, whom I congratulate on his re-election, we will continue to move forward."

Israeli President Issac Herzog tweeted: "Congratulations to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey on his election victory. I am convinced that we will continue to work together to strengthen and expand the good ties between Turkey and Israel."

Pakistan Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, tweeted: "Heartiest congratulations to my dear brother H.E. President Erdogan on his historic re-election as President, Republic of Turkiye. He is one of few world leaders whose politics has been anchored in public service. He has been a pillar of strength for the oppressed Muslims & a fervent voice for their inalienable rights."

What next for Erdogan and Turkey?

The elections have indicated three things. First, the growing need for democracy and democratic institutions among people. Second, despite Erdogan's authoritative leadership, and decreasing vote share compared to the 2018 election, he won. Third, the major influence of incumbency in Erdogan's wins. Under Erdogan, Turkey has forged a path for itself. Turkey's role as a regional and international player is growing. For the region, Erdogan's stance against the Kurds, being a hotspot for refugees, his interest in leading the Muslim coalition and reconciling with neighbouring countries will continue to surge. The constitutional referendum of 2017 gave Erdogan unilateral decision-making powers as his party has always been the majority in the parliament except for a brief period in 2015. Freedom of the press and speech is decreasing while the detainment of journalists is prevalent. Turkey, which was once seen as a sick man of Europe, now holds the key to Euro-Atlantic integration.

Although Erdogan's win was not preferred by the West, through his assertive foreign policies he proved himself as an ally of both the West and the East. Ankara's role as a mediator in the Black Sea Grain deal and good relations with both Russia and Ukraine qualifies it as a possible mediator in the Ukraine war itself. For the West, however, Erdogan's win is likely to stall Sweden's accession to NATO.

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NIAS EUROPE STUDIES BRIEF

Russia's Position in the Arctic: New challenges

By Indrani Talukdar

The shifting of the tension from Europe to the Arctic in the near future is very likely with discreet and subtle bloc formations such as the West (NATO and EU countries excluding Turkey) and Eurasia (Russia and China).

In 2015,* then Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin called the Arctic the “Mecca” for Russia,¹ which is one of the biggest stakeholders in the region. With its Northern Sea Route (NSR), Russia has the edge over other Arctic countries as this historical sea route dating back to the 18th century, connected European Russia to the Far East.² Global interest in the region has caught the attention of the Kremlin and the Russian strategic community. The region's potential to emerge as the next geopolitical theatre of competition and a deteriorating relationship with the West is driving Russia to upgrade its militarisation and accelerate its energy activities. The Ukraine crisis since 2014 has helped the Kremlin to put its plan for the region into action, marked by an increasingly assertive policy for the Arctic. The Arctic has been significant for Russia since the 11th century. During the Cold War, militarisation was accelerated to dangerous levels, and the Soviet Union developed its Arctic regions building full-scale industrial facilities, infrastructure, and large permanent settlements.³ Russia's engagement in its Arctic zone has witnessed phases of concentration and negligence during the Soviet Union and immediate post-Soviet periods. During the Soviet era, Moscow established a strong industrial presence in the Arctic zone, and its scale of economic activity surpassed the activities of other circumpolar countries. The

Arctic gained significance during that period; however, due to other domestic and external problems, the Kremlin could no longer sustain its focus on the region strategically, militarily, or economically. Under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet Union radically reduced the level of military confrontation in the area. He said, “Let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace. Let the North Pole be a pole of peace.” During the Murmansk speech in 1987, he suggested that all the states interested in the region should initiate talks on the limitation and scaling down of military activity in the North as a whole and in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.⁴ He declared during the Murmansk meeting that if a nuclear free-zone in the Northern Europe proposal was adopted, including by the US, the Soviet Union was ready to become the guarantor. He was ready to “go so far as to remove submarines equipped with ballistic missiles from the Soviet Baltic Fleet.”⁵ Soviet Union had already “unilaterally dismantled launchers of medium-range missiles in the Kola Peninsula and the greater part of launchers of such missiles on the remaining territory of the Leningrad and Baltic military areas. A considerable number of shorter-range missiles were removed from those districts. The holding of military exercises was restricted in areas close to the borders of Scandinavian

* The essay is based on a presentation made at the first “NIAS-KAS Annual Conclave on Europe,” organised by NIAS Europe Studies in collaboration with the Delhi office of KAS. Views expressed in the brief are author's own and do not represent any institute.

¹ Douglas C. Nord, “The Challenges of Arctic Governance,” <https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/into-the-arctic/the-challenge-of-arctic-governance/>.

² “Inexplicable and absurd’ – Russia blasts Norway's overreaction on official Svalbard visit”, *RT*, April 20, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/russia/251209-russia-rogozin-svalbard-ministry>.

³ Barbora Padrtová, “Russian Military Build-up in the Arctic: Strategic Shift in the Balance of Power or Bellicose Rhetoric Only?” *Arctic Yearbook*, 2014, pg. 2. https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2014/Scholarly_Papers/22.Padrtova.pdf.

⁴ Mikhail Gorbachev's Speech in Murmansk at the Ceremonial Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star to the city of Murmansk, 1 October 1987. https://www.barentsinfo.fi/docs/gorbachev_speech.pdf, pg.4.

⁵ Ibid.

countries.”⁶ Therefore, Gorbachev was optimistic that additional opportunities for military detente in the region could open up after the conclusion of the agreement on "global double zero.”⁷ On the naval front, Gorbachev proposed consultations between the Warsaw Treaty Organization and NATO on restricting military activity and scaling down naval and air force activities in the Baltic, Northern, Norwegian and Greenland Seas and on the extension of confidence-building measures to these areas.⁸ His vision towards creating a peaceful Arctic potentially stemmed from his awareness of the security concerns of Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, which did not possess nuclear weapons. He also knew of their concern over the Russian nuclear testing site in Novaya Zemlya. Though he wanted to resolve these issues, he was constrained by the massive amount of money invested in these projects and the lack of guarantee from the US to stop their nuclear tests or even reduce their number and yield to the minimum.⁹

His speech signalled the peaceful and cooperative foreign policy view of the Soviet Union (now Russia), for the Arctic and the world, including the opening of the Northern Sea Route to connect Europe to the Far East to the Pacific Ocean. These pacifist policies might have been due to the imminent dissolution of the Soviet Union, which kept both defence and economic activities in the region on hold. The arms treaties between Soviet Union and the US at that time, including the one on the Arctic, helped reduce the tension. However, under President Vladimir Putin, there has been renewed interest in the region. The region represents 20 per cent of the Russian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 22 per cent of its national exports.

Rationale behind Russia's refocus

The reasons behind Russia's re-focus and renewed interest in the region can be attributed to many geo-political developments such as the Russian failure to 'reset' its relationship with the US, the sidelining of Russia by the US during the Iraq and Libyan wars, the applications of Georgia and Ukraine for NATO membership

precipitating the Georgian and Ukrainian crises in 2008, the Crimean war in 2014, and the Syrian crisis. The undercurrent that defines the complication between Russia and the West led by the US and the trust deficit is the non- inclusion of Russia in the European security architecture and the equal partner treatment to Moscow. These challenges have made Russia rethink its relationship with the West and realise that the West would never respect Russia (that it deserved) as a major power and an equal partner in ending the Cold War. These issues and US hegemony resulted in Russia developing a strong dislike for the Western liberal world order. It has also aggravated security concerns in the Kremlin. The US security doctrine, where Russia is seen as an adversary, has not helped in diffusing tensions and instead increased the tension between the two, which is reflected in the Arctic.

In addition to the US, Russia also faces problems from other Arctic members. The five members of the Arctic Council are also members of NATO, whose charter commits member states to collective self-defence. Finland and Sweden becoming NATO members has added to Russia's discomfort. Finland, Norway, and Sweden had good relationships with Russia; however, the Ukrainian crisis has added to the baggage of Soviet history that has deteriorated their relationship in the current times. In addition to the worsening of the tension between Russia and the US, along with other Arctic states, China's growing interests and rising influence in the region (Polar Silk Road), Japan (an ally of the West and an adversary of Russia with territorial disputes), and other issues do not give the Kremlin a reason to not focus on the Arctic. The Kremlin's thoughts are reflected in the country's official doctrines, including security and military documents. However, the language in these documents has not been openly confrontational, and the tone has been comparatively soft compared to the 2022 statements.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Traditional Challenges

In 2020, Russia released its second 'Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Zone Until 2035' (Basic Principles 2035). The document identifies the Arctic as vital to Russia's economic and strategic interests, including developing the NSR as a globally competitive and viable transport corridor and promoting the prosperity and well-being of people living there. It also talks about maintaining the operational capability and readiness of the armed forces to deter aggression against Russia in the Arctic and further developing its Border Guard and Coast Guard forces in the Arctic.

Russia mentions more than just upgrading its military equipment in the region. However, at the same time, it has attempted to assuage the fears of other member countries of the Arctic Council and signal interested countries, particularly China. In 2019, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov clarified that Russia was rebuilding its military capabilities to ensure sufficient defence capabilities given the political and military situation at its borders and not to pose a threat to anyone. He further said that the country will always be ready to defend its security interests and territorial integrity; Russia's readiness to defend its territory is not new, even though it had not been militarising the region till 2014. Still, it has been working on expanding its territorial claims and signalling its military capabilities by stationing sophisticated defence systems and conducting military exercises; in 2019, Russia conducted its strategic command staff exercises code named Tsentr-2019 in the Arctic.

Over the last decade and a half, Russia's activities in the Arctic have sparked responses from other regional states with a corresponding increase in military presence in the region. To understand the future of

geo-strategic dynamics in the Arctic region, one must understand the prevailing dynamics between Russia and the West/NATO along its borders in Europe.

The Ukrainian war and the involvement of the European states, willingly or reluctantly, have dragged the tension of war to the borders of the Arctic. However, in 2021, when Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden met in Geneva, they both spoke of the Arctic as a region where the two countries might cooperate, despite their profound differences elsewhere. In his press conference, Biden also shared what Putin said earlier during his press conference about the Arctic, that there was a "need for us to be able to have some kind of modus operandi where we dealt with making sure the Arctic was, in fact, a free zone."¹⁰ The Ukrainian war has further complicated things between the two countries, including in the Arctic. However, if one carefully reviews the strategic and military reports from both sides, they reveal that both sides have been upgrading their defence capabilities (due to a mutual trust deficit) despite the heads of the states expressing the need to keep the Arctic a free zone.

In its 2021 Arctic strategy, *Regaining Arctic Dominance*, the US talks about securing its national interests, maintaining regional stability, projecting global power, and a possible avenue of attack in conflict.¹¹ The US sees Russia's Arctic strategies as geopolitical goals contrary to US interests. It understands that Russia seeks to consolidate its sovereign claims and control access to the region. As indicated in the US strategy, Russian military capabilities in "the region are by far the most advanced driver of great power competition".¹² In the same document, the US acknowledges that "as the country with the largest amount of land above the Arctic Circle, Russia's first priority

¹⁰ "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference", *The White House*, June 16, 2021.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/06/16/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-4/>

¹¹ "Army announces release of Arctic Strategy", *U.S. Army Public Affairs*, March 16, 2021.

https://www.army.mil/article/244261/army_announces_release_of_arctic_strategy.

¹² *Regaining Arctic Dominance: The U.S. Army in the Arctic*, *Headquarters, Department of the Army 19 January 2021*, pp.15-16. <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/03/15/9944046e/regaining-arctic-dominance-us-army-in-the-arctic-19-january-2021-unclassified.pdf>.

is defending its historic right to rule over the Far North, securing its territorial interests against those of NATO-aligned states". The Americans understand Russian keenness to build a 'protective dome' area within this context. The US also recognises that Russian advanced defence capabilities "in the Barents Sea highlight its ability to deny aerial, maritime, or land access to NATO or US forces".¹³ Against this backdrop, cooperation remains elusive in absolute terms from both sides. One can argue that with defence capabilities alone, tensions between adversaries could de-escalate; however, in reality, it is the other way around. On October 2022, the US released the second edition of its Arctic Strategy, *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, reiterating its goals and objectives laid down in the other Arctic strategy by the US Army. Meanwhile, the EU's multifaceted policy in the Arctic is likely to shift from cooperation with Russia to non-cooperation. In its 2021 Joint Communication, the EU recognized the military build-up across the Arctic. For the EU, in addition to the increase in the security threat perception due to the militarization in the region, the impact of climate change in and from the region is of major concern. The Northern Dimension is a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway, and Iceland. The EU is working with Russia and other members on four specific areas under the policy, including the Nuclear Window of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP). The Nuclear Window is a multilateral funding mechanism that addresses risks associated with the Soviet-era nuclear legacy in North-West Russia. The Barents Sea area has one of the world's largest accumulations of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

Contributors have provided 166.3 million euros to the Nuclear Window since 2002,

and the EU has contributed EUR 40 million. The NDEP projects have dramatically improved the environmental condition of the Baltic Sea and reduced the danger of radiological contamination in Arctic waters.¹⁴ Against this backdrop, the Russian threat to use nuclear weapons during the Ukrainian war created an atmosphere of mistrust among members of the Northern Dimension common policy. Further, Norway's complex relationship with Russia is unlikely to make things easier in the future due to the fallout from the Ukrainian war.

Sweden and Finland were the neutral countries in the region that have recently applied for NATO membership. In April 2022, both countries took part, for the first time, in a scheduled NATO exercise in Arctic Norway known as "Cold Response."¹⁵ Their membership will mean surrounding Russia with NATO, even in the Arctic. NATO follows the old adage "Don't just do something. Stand there!" which is also used in the region. They had a hands-off approach; however, the recent formation of NATO's Arctic Command (ARCCOM) is a signal to Russia and the world how the North Pole is being prepared for the battle between Russia and the West. ARCCOM was set up to foster discussion and deterrence in the High North. Another purpose of ARCCOM is to ensure that the region does not become a flashpoint for international conflict.¹⁶ From Russia's perspective, the non-dismantling of NATO, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, makes the future bleak and dangerous in the Arctic. This is reflected in its doctrines and Putin's speeches since 2007. Russia has given the Arctic much attention in its military and strategic doctrines, including the naval doctrines in 2015, 2017, and 2022. The 2022 doctrine is of particular interest as it was published in July 2022 at the height of the war with Ukraine; the

¹³ Ibid, pp17-18

¹⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic" *EUR-Lex*, October 13, 2021. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN:2021:27:FIN>

¹⁵ Robin Emmott, Essi Lehto and Simon Johnson, "Why Putin faces 'more NATO' in the Arctic after Ukraine invasion", *Reuters*, April 4, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/why-putin-faces-more-nato-arctic-after-ukraine-invasion-2022-04-04/>.

¹⁶ Lee Mottola, "NATO's Arctic Command: A Case for the Expansion of NATO's Mission in the High North", *The Arctic Institute*, January 17, 2023. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/nato-arctic-command-case-expansion-nato-mission-high-north/>.

US doctrine was released in October 2022 and highlighted the spillover effect of the Ukraine war in the Arctic. The Russian doctrine focuses on Russia's overall confrontation with the US and NATO. It emphasizes a more central place for using force to defend Russian global interests and seek economic and strategic alternatives for the West in the developing world. The doctrine seems to project Russia as a country which tries to turn the international waters into a space for strategic competition and confrontation between the great powers. It reflects a re-orientation of Russian foreign policy towards the Global South, specifically, because of the war with Ukraine and the Arctic becoming the new profitable venture for the Russian economy.¹⁷

Given the dynamics in play, Russia's future in the Arctic will be challenging in the coming days. Russia's contentious relationship with the US and other Arctic members is evident. In addition, China's growing ambition in the Arctic will add to Russia's fear though both recognise each other as a close and comprehensive strategic partner. Due to the sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014, Russia was pushed to re-orient its vision towards Asia, including China. In international relations, one does not have permanent friends or foes, which is proven in the case of these two countries' growing relationship. Russia and China undoubtedly have come a long way from their historical adversarial relationship (which both sides regret), especially after the Crimean crisis in 2014. Before that, the two countries were closely working together on an equal footing. However, with the sanctions imposed on Russia by the US and the EU, including the recent ones, Russia has not only been pushed firmly into the arms of Beijing but also towards becoming a junior partner of China. It would take some time for Russia to regain the same footing as China, mainly because of the non-negotiable complications between Russia and the West.

The entry of China into the Arctic could have opened a platform for Russia and the US to cooperate afresh, especially over the Arctic as they used to in the past. However, with the Ukrainian crisis, that chance looks remote, and the Kremlin is unlikely to defy China openly, given their marriage of convenience.

For Russia, China has become the source of long-term financing and technology to aid the energy and infrastructure development in the Arctic. In addition, China is also helping Russia in areas ranging from multi-use ports and airfields to energy extraction. The two countries are also partnering in scientific research and sharing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance data which are important and sensitive in some areas. Beijing's interest in the Arctic is more economical through its Polar Silk Road and less military.¹⁸ However, learning from the Chinese presence in Central Asia, it is evident that China initially brings in the economic angle, and the military aspect is slowly introduced under the guise of protecting Chinese strategic interests in the place of investment. One can foresee a similar model replicated in the Arctic through its Polar Silk Road.¹⁹

Non-traditional Challenges

Apart from these geostrategic threats from the US, China, and other Arctic members who are also NATO members, Russia also faces several non-traditional challenges. The melting of the Russian Arctic permafrost has significant consequences for Russia's Arctic cities. It is larger than Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and the Scandinavian countries. The Russian side of the Arctic has a significantly larger population, home to almost 2.5 million people.²⁰ Heavy industrial facilities are also located in the region, including some of the world's largest metallurgical works, quarries, mining and processing enterprises, coalmines, nuclear weapons test sites, radioactive waste storages,

¹⁷ Daniel Rakov, "Russia's New Naval Doctrine: A 'Pivot to Asia'?" *The Diplomat*, August 19, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/russias-new-naval-doctrine-a-pivot-to-asia/>

¹⁸ John Grady, "China, Russia Quietly Expanding Arctic Partnership, Says Panel", *USNI News*, October 11, 2022. <https://news.usni.org/2022/10/11/china-russia-quietly-expanding-arctic-partnership-says-panel#:~:text=China%20is%20subtly%20installing%20a,Arctic%20security%20experts%20said%20Tuesday.>

¹⁹ China has not yet scheduled any commercial transit through the NSR for the time being. *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Russia", *The Arctic Institute*, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/country-backgrounders/russia/>

and other environmentally hazardous facilities.²¹

The melting of the permafrost in these remote areas would cause significant damage to buildings and crucial infrastructure, including thousands of kilometres of oil and gas pipelines. Russia is one of the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases impacting its contribution to climate change goals. It was slow in adopting climate change mitigation measures and published its first relevant document, the *Climate Doctrine*, only in 2009. In 2013, a presidential decree was called to drastically cut greenhouse gases to 75% of 1990 levels; in 2020, another 30% cut on this level was announced through the decree.²² The warming of the Arctic will have far-reaching consequences on Russia's other parts of the province, such as on the 'bread-basket' of Stavropol and Rostov. This could impact food security and threaten Russia's primary export, wheat. The effect of climate change on the Russian economy will be significant. The 2019 fire in southern Siberia and the Republic of Sakha-Yakutiya, industrial pollution, and nuclear and military pollution are other challenges Russia faces and will increasingly face in the region with further developments. In turn, it would impact the health of the people residing there. Air pollution due to heavy industries and from the accumulated stable organic compounds and other substances like toxic components from chemical and radioactive waste storage sites is set to emerge as a big challenge. The study, *Climate Change Impact on Public Health in the Russian Arctic*, conducted by the UN Russian team, found that people in the region suffered predominantly from malignant tumours and immune system disorders, and women faced high reproductive mortality rates. Mental health would be another area that would

require attention due to the environmental hazards people face.²³

In addition, Russia might also face other challenges, such as climate refugees, due to the damage to housing. Already, the US and Canada have experienced climate change refugees. Russia already faces coastal degradation affecting the residents of Inupiat and the island of Sarichev.²⁴ Challenges in electricity transmission systems would be another area that Russia might have to address. Once the permafrost melts and thermokarst and other unstable soil conditions emerge subsequently, it would heighten the risk of transmitting power. High-voltage power lines would be susceptible to damage as upper soil layers thaw and re-freeze. In particular, the lines serving the Bilibino nuclear power plant on the Arctic coast and running from Chersk to Pevek would be significantly vulnerable.²⁵ There will be other challenges due to climate change. How much the government is equipped to handle is something that time will reveal. With sanctions on sophisticated technology, the immediate future looks bleak. Also, the understanding within Russia is that though these are environmental challenges, they are seen more from the prism of "the Western powers deliberately sought to undermine Russian interests in the region."²⁶ The Kremlin believes that the imposition of environmental standards by the West is intentional and is designed to limit Russia's economic activities. Therefore, this is viewed as a national security threat.²⁷ Dialogue and cooperation on climate change could have been an area of working together between Russia and the other Arctic Council members; however, things do not look positive on this front due to the Ukrainian war.

²¹ "Climate Change Impact on Public Health in the Russian Arctic", *The United Nations in the Russian Federation*, pg. 4.

²² Richard Sakwa, "Russia's "Green Shift" and What It Means for Neighbouring Countries" in Aldo Ferrari and Eleonora Tafuro Ambrosetti (ed) *Environment in Times of War: Climate and Energy Challenges in the Post-Soviet Region*, ISPI, pg.29. <https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/environment-in-times-of-war-climate-energy-challenges-post-soviet-region.pdf>.

²³ "Climate Change Impact on Public Health in the Russian Arctic", *The United Nations in the Russian Federation*, pg. 5 and pg.7.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pg.7.

²⁵ *Russia: The Impact of Climate Change to 2030 A Commissioned Research Report*, Joint Global Change Research Institute and Battelle Memorial Institute, Pacific Northwest Division, 2009, pg.20. https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/climate2030_russia.pdf

²⁶ *Ibid*, pg.34

²⁷ *Ibid*, pg.34

Other Challenges

Another challenge Russia faces is the legal framework of the Arctic region, which is not that strong. They have the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008 among Russia, the US, Canada, Norway, and Denmark. In addition, there is the UNCLOS, to which the US is not a party. Russia supports the UNCLOS, but the US not being a party to it makes it difficult for Russia, especially the US' non-fulfilment of the obligations set out in Article 76 of the Convention concerning delineating its own Arctic shelf creates discomfort for Russia and its interests in the region. Under President Putin, in 2001, Russia submitted the proposed outer limits of the continental shelf of the Russian Federation beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). However, it is still under review. Russia flagged its rights during Arktika 2007, but there was tension between Russia and the other members. In 2021, it submitted another set of documents to the United Nations claiming far more of the vast Arctic Ocean seafloor.²⁸ Putin, in December 2020, signed laws that take precedence of the Russian constitution over international agreements and decisions over international bodies.²⁹ The non-compliance of the US to the UNCLOS and Russia making national laws that take precedence over international laws complicates the emerging tensions in the Arctic. Russia has been discreet about its actions regarding its obligations to international laws in the Arctic. This became apparent in 2021 when it submitted further claims on the sea floor in the Arctic to the UN. However, the suspension of dialogue and cooperation with Russia by the Arctic Council members since 2022 does not auger well for the region. One can foresee legal and non-legal battles amongst the members over their claims on the Arctic. To further complicate the matters, a particular clause under the UNCLOS declares that all states, coastal or not, possess legitimate rights and interests regarding the

high seas and the deep seabed in the Arctic and other oceans and are, therefore, able to participate in decision-making. This ensures that the thirteen observer members have an equal say in the matters that relate to the Arctic. Turkey is the latest country to apply to the Council to become an observer. The shifting of the tension from Europe to the Arctic in the near future is very likely with discreet and subtle bloc formations such as the West (NATO and EU countries excluding Turkey) and Eurasia (Russia and China).³⁰ Countries like India, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey may balance both sides as they are still trying to tread lightly in the region. Overall, for the time being, the Arctic presents Russia with challenges rather than opportunities because of its relationship with the West. It remains to be seen how Russia can manoeuvre itself in the changing dynamics of world order impacting not only geo-strategies or geo-economic but global climate change. Russia's strategies would likely be assertive and confrontational, especially with the impact of the Ukrainian war on the region; Russia had already tried its coercive diplomacy in the region.³¹ Currently, apart from the US and China, from where Moscow faces its most significant threat, Russia is more powerful than the rest of the countries in the region, both economically and militarily. But a QUAD/AUKUS-like arrangement (without including India as it would not be interested in getting involved) might become a reality in the region, threatening Russian strategic and security interests.

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²⁸ "Putin discusses Russia's claim to giant chunk of Arctic Ocean seabed", *The Print*, January 27, 2023. <https://theprint.in/world/putin-discusses-russias-claim-to-giant-chunk-of-arctic-ocean-seabed/1338860/>

²⁹ "Putin signs laws giving Russian constitution precedence over international law", *TASS*, December 08, 2020. <https://tass.com/politics/1232603>

³⁰ China benefits the most with this kind of situation in the Arctic.

³¹ Though Moscow is subtle with China because of the 'no limits' comprehensive strategic partnership.

NIAS EUROPE STUDIES BRIEF

The Ground Reality of Feminist Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Analysis of the European Framework

By Debangana Chatterjee

Introduction

The core concept of feminist foreign policy (FFP) is premised on achieving gender equality through diplomatic relations.* Though the diplomatic corps is regarded as male-dominated, FFP calls for infusing the policy arena with feminist ideals. The intersection of feminist IR theories and foreign policy analysis embodies the theory and policy praxis of FFP. Feminist foreign policy is the outcome of twentieth-century movements and developments worldwide in the problem-solving domain of gender rights; however, in IR and foreign policy, its entry was considerably late in the 1980s. It provides a gendered lens in explaining IR and positions women at the centre of analysis. Carol Gilligan, one of the earliest feminist contributors to IR, argues that women think differently primarily as a result of socialization. She also adds that women tend to see reality as a set of interconnected experiences and interrelationships leading towards a holistic worldview.¹ It corresponds with the belief that due to existing androcentric social-political structures, men and women experience realities differently. According to Betty A. Reardon, "over the past several years, research into women's ways of knowing, reasoning and decision-making has demonstrated that, at least in Western

countries, women's thinking is different from that of men...These feminine modes of thinking and problem-solving can be learned and applied by both women and men..."²

Broadly, there are three existing typologies in IR feminism namely, feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and feminist postmodernism. Sandra Harding first proposed these typologies.³ Whereas feminist empiricism problematises the fundamentally gendered structure of the inter-state system and instead focuses on social attitudes and structures, the feminist standpoint argues in favour of framing world politics by foregrounding the lived experiences of women who are politically marginalized and historically silenced. Feminist postmodernism goes beyond these two typologies and rejects the falsely universalizing ideas of IR and instead argues that there is basically no 'one true story.' Epistemologically speaking, gendered experiences in foreign policy become the primary unit of analysis in FFP. Therefore, the demands for gender equality in FP gain salience both normatively and pragmatically with realistic evidence corroborating gender parity with holistic prosperity.

* The essay is based on a presentation made at the first "NIAS-KAS Annual Conclave on Europe," organised by NIAS Europe Studies in collaboration with the Delhi office of KAS. Views expressed in the brief are author's own and do not represent any institute.

¹ Carol Gilligan. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

² Betty Reardon. *Women and Peace*. (New York: Sage Publication, 1993), 141.

³ Robert Keohane. "International Relations Theory: Contributions of a Feminist Standpoint", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 18(2): 245.

Since FFP is currently collocated in certain foreign policy initiatives, especially from the West, this paper focuses on analysing the European framework surrounding FFP. It begins by challenging the conventional theoretical wisdom in foreign policy analysis, followed by a feminist critique of it. This paper responds to five key questions pertaining to FFP. First, what does the framework entail? Second, why is it historically important? Third, which European countries have currently adopted FFP? Fourth, how is it being implemented in these countries? Fifth, what are the challenges to FFP? The paper concludes by assessing whether FFP is a tenable framework for foreign policy analysis and its future potential as an academic construct. This paper is based on secondary literature and therefore focused more on the conceptual analysis of the theoretical engagement between feminism and foreign policy.

Foreign Policy and Theoretical Framework: A Critical Engagement

Traditionally, international politics exercises a monopoly over the game of binaries. Therefore, often one element is hierarchically privileged over the other. According to Booth, “emancipation should logically be given precedence in our thinking about security over the mainstream themes of power and order. The trouble with privileging power and order is that they are at somebody else’s expense.”⁴

It is, thus, the function of state sovereignty in the discourse of power politics that effectively demarcates the domestic from the international. The canonical knowledge in IR makes these discursive banalities possible. For instance, the Foucauldian concept of the power-knowledge nexus where knowledge propagated through a specific lens works as the power to produce the ‘truth effect’ over the rest of the

knowledge domain. As Foucault puts it, “...there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice.”⁵ The discourse of power politics substantially controls knowledge. These conventional masculine definitions of power are all the modernist assumptions of control, domination, and surveillance that premise security on either violence or spatial control. Since the celebration of power serves the powerful, the discipline of mainstream IR has also bolstered that particular narrative. In addition, this very perception of power has been intertwined with the prevalence of order and maintenance of the status quo rather than changing it.

The Gramscian perspective suggests that the consensual aspect of power appears to be the central pillar for the prevalence of hegemony. Intellectuals perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies, and organisations which bind together the members of a class. Similarly, the intellectuals from mainstream academia in tandem with the policy makers create a hegemonic space of power-politics and thus, hierarchy is constantly being created and reaffirmed in the dominant discourse of international relations. According to Robert Cox:

...there is no theory for itself; theory is always for someone, for some purpose. There is no neutral theory concerning human affairs, no theory of universal validity. Theory derives from practice and experience, and experience is related to time and place. Theory is a part of history. It addresses the problematic of the world of its time and place. An inquirer has to aim to place himself above the historical circumstances in which a theory is propounded. One has to ask about the aims and purposes of those who construct theories in specific historical situations.⁶

⁴ Ken Booth. “Security and Emancipation”. *Review of International Studies*. 17(4): 319.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*. (Bristol: Routledge Publications, 1972), 183.

⁶ P. Schouten. “Theory Talk #37: Robert Cox on World Orders, Historical Change, and the Purpose of Theory in International Relations”, *Theory Talks*, 2009. Accessed 18 November 2015, URL: <http://www.theorytalks.org/2010/03/theory-talk-37.html>

Conventionally, security is considered as the absence of threats. Although historically this notion formed the basis of the concept of security, it limits the scope of security perceiving it from a negative point of view. Regardless, the study of security has strived to establish itself as an objective scientific discipline, where, according to Stephen Walt, the discipline has focused on “the study of the threat, use, and control of military force.”⁷

The state, therefore, was prioritised and became the key referent of security, authority, and obligation, infringing on the potential of the self-fulfilment of people. People became the means and states became the end. The security of the citizens was identified with that of the state. The state’s national interest, defined in terms of power, overshadowed people’s interests. The unease of the critical scholars of international relations often resulted in a constant demand for extending the horizon of security. But, broadening the concept of security came with its own shortcomings as it resulted in increasing securitization.⁸ Moreover, it merely reflected some of the problematic aspects of security which might be of great concern but could not be considered as a conceptual base for security. Meanwhile, the Welsh School of Critical Theory advocated the deepening of security by exploring the ontological and epistemological debates which could deepen the understanding of security. Booth defined this security as emancipation. According to him, “Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them

from carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin...Emancipation, theoretically, is security.”⁹

Taking this argument further, Cox asserted, “Structures are prior to individuals; there are already certain established and accepted social practices. These social practices are the creation of collective human activity.”¹⁰ Echoing Cox’s definition of structure Steans argued from a feminist perspective that “...gender can be seen as constituted by the structure of various social institutions and practices that tie gender into intricate patterns of domination.”¹¹

Agathangelou and Ling metaphorically called this mainstream discourse of IR an ordered “house” where “power” is countered with “more power” “by appropriating the knowledge, resources, and labor of racialized, sexualized Others for its own benefit and pleasure while announcing itself the sole producer.”¹² As this discourse turned hegemonic, the structuring of its meaning made way for practical policy implementation as “intelligible and legitimate.”¹³ As it became “the play of practice,” it made an effort towards the fixity of meanings as well as silencing of the subjugated knowledge systems. As a consequence, foreign policy and

⁷ Stephen Walt. “The Renaissance of Security Studies”. *International Studies Quarterly*. 35 (2): 212–13.

⁸ Barry Buzan et. al. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

⁹ Booth. “Security and Emancipation”, 319

¹⁰ Robert Cox. *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, Volume 1, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1987), 4.

¹¹ Jill Steans. *Gender and International Relations: Theory, Practice and Policy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 35.

¹² Anna M. Agathangelou and Ling L. H. M. “The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the *Poiesies* of Worldism”, *International Studies Review*. 2004, 6 (4): 21.

¹³ Jennifer Milliken. “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 1999, 5(2): 240.

diplomacy replicated the mainstream IR discourses by reiterating the existing hegemonic knowledge through their elite practitioners. Policy implementation, therefore, became the "...actions directed towards those objectified as targets of international practices."¹⁴ Doty saw foreign policy as a social construction as she juxtaposed the Cognitive Decision-making Approach and the Social Performance Approach with the Discursive Practices Approach. Whereas the former two emphasised the cognitive aspects of individuals as well as the "collective" of the social order in the realm of policy implementation, the latter stressed the "linguistic construction of reality."¹⁵ In this way, the horizons of foreign policy expanded and were neither "limited to the actual making of specific decisions nor the analysis of temporally and spatially bounded 'events'". On the contrary, the discourses shaped through various foreign policy documents "produce meanings and in doing so actively construct the 'reality' upon which foreign policy is based."¹⁶

Power politics has always been a central theme in mainstream international relations. However, foreign policy (FP) has predominantly remained a domain for policymakers with limited theoretical exposure. The domain has been deliberately kept outside the purview of critical academic engagement and thus, driven primarily by the parsimonious understanding of realpolitik. The dearth of human-centrism and the surging post-normative order in contemporary conventional foreign policy analysis makes it wary of adopting adequate critical angles. Whereas in the former, human subjects are sought to be the primary focus, the latter indicates a normative dilution in policy

approach. Norms as legitimate standardized behaviour of recurring patterns reclaim the behavioural aspect. Norms, therefore, can be defined as "...a set of intersubjective understandings readily apparent to actors that makes behavioral claims on those actors."¹⁷ The overbearing thrust on the structural aspects like military prowess as well as economic capabilities, fails to take into account the prime factors of social cohesion. Thus, FP has been relegated to being 'disciplined' in a manner that homologizes policy implementation. Homologization refers to the usage of homology which is often used in the biological sciences. It describes relationships, relative positions, and structures in a set of elements in order to prescribe how relationships ought to be ordered and how elements and their aims should be weighed.¹⁸ The framing of policy language tends to prioritize the structural aspects of states, their interest-driven interrelationships as well as the matters of hard power in terms of the facets of military and economic capabilities. Whereas it is impossible to transcend the state in matters of FP, its predominance can be diluted by considering humans as the point of reference. Thus, FFP may be seen as providing a revised alternative framework to the conventional FP approaches.

Feminist Challenges to Mainstream Foreign Policy Assumptions

The predominant FP thinking revolves around five-key assumptions: objective theoretical grounding, the preponderance of systemic explanations, the primacy of political structures, the security maximizing behaviour of states, and the cycles of repetition and recurrence. An

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Roxanne Lynn Doty. "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in Philippines", *International Studies Quarterly*, 1993, 37 (3): 302.

¹⁶ Ibid., 303.

¹⁷ Martha Finnemore. "Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Washington, D.C. 1994, 2.

¹⁸ Cynthia. Weber. "Why is there no Queer International Theory?," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2015. 21 (1): 29-30.

attempt has been made in this paper to refute each of these non-reflectivist assumptions using feminist lenses.

In this context, the domain of theorization is better demonstrated through Cynthia Enloe's responses to the question, "What would a student need to become a specialist in IR?" She responded by saying "Pick something that you care about—something you just find wonderfully intriguing."¹⁹ This leads to Butler's argument on the 'subject position' which is created artificially by the gendered discourse of the world.²⁰ In other words, it is important to consider the 'self' to see where the theorizer actually belongs to. Here, feminism clearly converges with critical theory, vouching for more focus on the unheard voices of women. Therefore, it directly challenges the very notion of separating the theorizer from the theory by creating a subject-object divide. Thus, rather than talking simply about the objective reality as it is, feminism calls for a change in the masculine international structure. Feminism asks: whose reality, is it? This, as feminism contends, is essentially a masculine reality that refuses to take into consideration a feminine reality. In Tickner's words, "A feminist perspective believes that objectivity, as it is culturally defined, is associated with masculinity...Dynamic objectivity offers us a more connected view of objectivity with less potential for domination."²¹

Cynthia Enloe further points out, "patriarchy is the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity. All kinds of social systems and institutions can become patriarchal...Patriarchal systems are notable for marginalizing the

feminine...One of the reasons that feminists have been so astute in exposing patriarchy as a principal cause for so many of the world's processes—empire-building, globalization, modernization—is that feminists have been curious about women. By taking women seriously in their myriad locations, feminists have been able to see patriarchy when everyone else has seen only capitalism or militarism or racism or imperialism."²²

Thus, the societal-patriarchal structure becomes one of the key factors shaping the international system. If at all feminists were to identify themselves with any of these images, they would have identified themselves more to the first image of analysis at the individual level, keeping in mind the diverse experiences of feminised individuals. The unwarranted assumption of identical units across the international system overlooks every possibility of localised diversities. Cynthia Enloe even more explicitly asserts the fact that "Personal is international, international in personal," thereby, challenging the fundamental dichotomy between the domestic and the international. Additionally, for feminists, the anarchic international system is a competitive environment where states flex their masculine power confined mostly to material gains for gaining security. Enloe writes, "To investigate the gendered workings of international politics we will have to make power visible—power in all its myriad forms...Power, taste, attraction, and desire are not mutually exclusive."²³ Tickner

¹⁹ P. Schouten and H. Dunham. "Cynthia Enloe on Militarization, Feminism and the International Politics of Banana Boats", *Theory Talk* #48. 2012. Accessed on 1 May 2023. URL: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155109/Theory%20Talk48_Enloe.pdf

²⁰ Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²¹ J. Ann Tickner. "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation", *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 1988, 17 (3): 437.

²² Cynthia Enloe. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*, (Berkeley: University California Press, 2004), 6-7.

²³ Cynthia Enloe. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley: University California Press, 2014), 8.

adds, "Power as domination and control privileges masculinity and ignores the possibility of collective empowerment, another aspect of power often associated with femininity."²⁴

According to Tickner, states can create a bridge between the individual and the international and work as mediators.²⁵ On the other hand, for V. Spike Peterson, the very foundation of the modern Western state is a perpetual source of women's insecurity and domesticity.²⁶ The autonomous sovereign states' capacity, essentially projecting masculinity can be seen as possessing the rational character of states.²⁷ Therefore, feminism denies the very primacy of state security and looks for expanding the horizon of security. As Jan J. Pettman argued, "Feminist understandings and re-visions of security are by no means monolithic, but they do reveal war and peace as gendered processes and suggest strategies for a more secure world."²⁸ Therefore, feminists ask these fundamental questions such as whose security are we talking about? Can we feel secure being insecure at the interpersonal level? Tickner writes, "Speaking from the margins, feminists are sensitive to the various ways in which social hierarchies manifest themselves across societies and history. Striving for security involves exposing these different social hierarchies, understanding how they construct and are constructed by the international order, and working to

denaturalize and dismantle them."²⁹

For feminism, the system preserves the status quo being shaped by the patriarchal structure. Tickner explains, "feminism is also committed to progressive or emancipatory goals, particularly the goal of achieving equality for women through the elimination of unequal gender relations."³⁰ According to her, "Women's subordinate status means that women, unlike men (or unlike some men), do not have an interest in mystifying reality in order to reinforce the status quo; therefore, they are likely to develop a clearer, less biased understanding of the world."³¹

Denying any agency to change reifies the existing order of the system. On the contrary, feminists are always affirmative and optimistic about the potential of change, where changes in interpersonal power relations by empowering women can effectively bring about structural changes. In short, feminism calls for an expansion in the circle of sensibility by being sensitive particularly to history, context, and contingency.³²

FFP: Definitions and Objectives

Only in recent times, attempts have been made to comprehensively define FFP. Broadly, FFP "defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity, enshrines the human rights of all, seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power

²⁴ Tickner. "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism", 438.

²⁵ J. Ann Tickner. *Gender in International Relations: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era*, (New York: Columbia University, 2001).

²⁶ V. Spike Peterson. *Gendered States: Feminist (Re) Visions of International Relations Theory*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 4.

²⁷ Joshua, Goldstein and Jon. V. Pevehouse. *Innternational Relations*. (India: Pearson Education, 2009), 108.

²⁸ Jan J. Petterman. *Worlding Women: A Feminist International Politics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)), 67.

²⁹ J. Ann Tickner. "You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements between Feminists and IR Theorists", *International Studies Quarterly*, 1997, 41 (4): 624.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 616

³¹ Tickner. *Gender in International Relations*, 17.

³² Tickner. "You Just Don't Understand", 624.

structures, and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision.”³³ FFP, thus, seeks adaptability and reflexivity “rooted in an intersectional approach, informed by the diversity of local knowledge, strategies and language and fully owned by the communities it seeks to support.”³⁴ The strategies of FFP include five Rs encompassing Rights, Resources, Representation, Research and Reporting, and Reach.³⁵ There are at least five-core identifiable values ushering incremental change in FFP namely, intersectionality, empathetic reflexivity, substantive representation and participation, accountability, and peace commitment.³⁶

Thus, FFP prioritises certain areas of policy advocacy including demilitarisation, peace, inclusivity, the dignity of individuals, mediation, solidarity, cooperation, and environmental protection. Based on these issues, FFP is an ongoing process of culling out concrete policy positions and problem-solving strategies in FP. Aggestam and True (2020) identified ways of comparative FFP analysis including reckoning with the transnational variations in implementation and analysing the discourses surrounding the pro-gender norms in diverse contexts.³⁷

Genealogical Background- Forming the International Framework

Genealogically, the gender focus of foreign policy corresponds with the global gender awareness manifested through international organisational platforms. Originating from the United Nations Decade for Women between 1975 and 1985, the gender agenda attained global momentum. Consequently, in 1979, the UNGA adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

(CEDAW), and in 1995 the fourth World Conference on Women culminated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Gender equality also found its place in the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The WPS agenda was further expanded with the inclusion of sexual violence in conflicts in 2019 with UNSC Resolution 2467. In 2015, the UN established a gender-specific goal (SDG-5) on Gender Equality within the SDGs making it a global agenda with a renewed emphasis on gender mainstreaming. While gender mainstreaming as a policy approach has long sought to address the differential needs between men and women, contemporary times seek greater engagement with the notions of inclusivity and intersectionality.

Against the backdrop of this international framework, multiple National Actions Plans were implemented by the European states to expand their WPS purview in foreign policy. Within European Union too, there has been growing gender consciousness with the Council of Europe highlighting the significance of gender mainstreaming through the EU’s Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016-2019) followed by the gender equality Strategy (2020-2025). The commission’s 2020 Gender Action Plan promotes a gender perspective in the EU’s external relations. On 01 July 2021, the Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign

³³ L. Thompson et. al. *Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States*, (Washington, D. C.: ICRW, 2020), 4.

³⁴ L. Thompson, *Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework*. (Washington, D. C.: ICRW, 2020), 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ J. Cheung et. al. *Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday: A Toolkit*, (Berlin: Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit Deutschland, November 2021).

³⁷ Karin Aggestam and Jacquie True. “Gendering Foreign Policy: A Comparative Framework for Analysis”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2020, 16 (2):143–162.

Policy was launched at the behest of FFP enthusiast governments together with civil society organisations.³⁸

The European FFP Framework: Implementation and Lacuna

Until now, the European FFP framework includes countries such as Sweden (2014), Luxemburg (2018), France (2019), and Germany (2021). In 2022, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its interest in developing an FFP framework for the country, though it is at a nascent stage of the policy framework. Within Europe, Sweden pioneered FFP developing its framework in 2014 under Foreign Minister Margot Wallström. The Swedish government aimed to integrate the gender perspective into its foreign policy agenda within the contours of its FFP framework which is intersectional and transformative.

Its FFP primarily emphasises Rights, Representation, and Resources and these are characterised by the explicit objectives of human rights, peacebuilding, and political participation which are reflected in the country's "strong institutionalisation, manifested in various organisational entities and objectives."²⁹ Compared to Sweden, FFP in other European countries is at best in its gestation stage, less developed, and feebly institutionalised.

However, in November 2022, the newly elected far-right government of Ulf Kristersson in Sweden announced revoking FFP under the pretext of the 'feminist' labelling potentially jeopardising the Swedish 'international' agenda.⁴⁰ While this poses a greater threat to the policy

amalgamation between the 'feminist' and 'foreign policy' streams, the Swedish FFP framework can serve as an interpretative reference point for the germination and dissemination of ideas in this field. However, it is hoped that as long as the core of promoting gender equality remains unhitched, the groundwork of Swedish FP cannot be easily undone.⁴¹

Notwithstanding these latest developments, the effectiveness of the Swedish FFP framework can be assessed based on three essential parameters, namely context sensitivity, transformative potential, and horizontal incongruence. Even whilst the fundamental question remains on what kind of FFP we envisage, other equally important questions are whether it is feasible or even desirable to implement a comprehensive universally applicable FFP framework.

Despite its strong institutional characteristic, Sweden's research-reporting and impact analysis mechanisms are comparatively weak. There is a clear disconnect between domain expertise and socially motivated local knowledge discourses. In fact, the Swedish gender approach is predominantly characterised to be binary and cis-centred and hence, lesser inclusive when it comes to a multidimensional understanding of gender. Luxembourg and Germany, on the other hand, have a broader concept of gender from an inclusivity perspective.⁴² For instance, the German Foreign Office has expanded the concept by

³⁸ L. Thompson et. al. *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: A 2021 Update*, (Washington, D. C.: ICRW, 2021).

³⁹ Claudia Zilla. "Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, Core Components, and Controversies", *SWP Comment*, C 48, 2022 Accessed 25 November 2022, URL: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/feminist-foreign-policy#:~:text=A%20succession%20of%20states%20in,Germany%20followed%20suit%20in%202021.>

⁴⁰ *The Guardian*. "Swedish government scraps country's pioneering 'feminist foreign policy'", 18 October 2022. Accessed on 22 December 2022. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/18/swedish-government-scrap-country-pioneering-feminist-foreign-policy> (Accessed on 22 December 2022)

⁴¹ Rachel A. George. "Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy Can't Be Undone", *Foreign Policy*, 18 November 2022, Accessed on 22 December 2022. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/18/sweden-feminist-foreign-policy-billstrom-gender-equality/>

⁴² Zilla. "Feminist Foreign Policy."

introducing a D (for diversity) alongside Rights, Representation, and Resources. The Netherlands has also proposed to implement an FFP that is inclusive of other genders and sensitive to LGBTQIA+. In this regard, recent social discourses surrounding the queer movement overlap the FFP framework with feminism being considered a natural ally to the LGBTQIA+ movement.

At the same time, the existing FFP initiatives notwithstanding their repeated iteration fail to comprehensively operationalise intersectionality. Despite taking cognizance of the experiential realities, the divergent gender interests fail to deliver policy coherence. From the postcolonial feminist perspective, the usage of FFP as a strategic narrative enhancing the global power hierarchies among the states in the guise of Western feminist values is also noteworthy.^{43 44} Thus, FFP's explicit strive to impose homogenous gender equality may herald the perils of context obliviousness. This may often become a misplaced universalisation of gender equality exerting feminist imperialistic traits.

Despite transformative aspirations, the inadequacy of the existing FFP framework is captured in its reformist approach enamoured within the neoliberal economic order.⁴⁵ The discursive dimensions of the Swedish FFP swing between an essentialist Western discourse and a transformative intersectional discourse.⁴⁶ It operates on two prime matrices - the positionality of the

policy maker and the perspective on gender.⁴⁷ In a dominant bureaucratic set-up like Sweden's, a strict gender mainstreaming paradigm entails more subject expertise and delimiting gender into the category of women. Thus, this may tilt more towards essentialisation than advocating transformation for which FFP needs to be seen both as working with local knowledge and catering to intersectionality. If FFP fails to capture these two succinctly, the policy implications for the same may at best be translated as cursory and superficial. While the values pertaining to FFP cater to the high ideals of gender equality, at best FFP remains limited in being relegated to a norm-based policy framework.⁴⁸

Keeping the 3Rs in mind, Sweden maintains internal implementation coherence in terms of peacebuilding approaches, rights discourses, political participation, and budgeting,⁴⁹ while the country's horizontal incoherence is glaring, especially when it comes to arms export policy.⁵⁰ For example, Sweden continues to supply arms to Saudi Arabia which end up being used in the Yemen civil war, as evidenced by the controversy surrounding it in 2015. On the other hand, in 2018, Sweden became a major peace broker between foreign minister Khaled al-Yamani of the Hadi government in Yemen and the Houthis' senior representative Mohammed Abdelsalam, eventually culminating in the Stockholm Agreement. This Swedish

⁴³ Columba Achilleos-Sarll. "Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2018, 19 (1): 34- 49.

⁴⁴ Ekatherina Zhukova. "Postcolonial Logic and Silences in Strategic Narratives: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy in Conflict-Affected States", *Global Society*, 2021, 37 (1): 1-22.

⁴⁵ J. Thomson. "What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden's and Canada's Foreign Policy Agendas," *International Studies Perspectives*, 2020, 21 (4): 424-437.

⁴⁶ Mia-Lie Nylund et. al. "The Transformative Potential of Feminist Foreign Policy: The Case of Sweden", *Journal of Women, Politics, and Policy*, 2022. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2022.2113662>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Malena Rosén Sundström et. al. "Spreading a norm-based policy? Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy in international media", *Comparative Politics*, 2021, 27 (4): 439-460.

⁴⁹ Thompson et. al. *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy*.

⁵⁰ Karin Aggestam et. al. Theorising feminist foreign policy. *International Relations*, 2019, 33 (1), 23-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818811892>

policy commitment to peace falls short in the face of incidents such as in 2017 when the biggest Swedish arms manufacturer Saab opened its office in Abu Dhabi with UAE also being caught in the Yemeni civil war. Saab’s annual arms sales have, in fact, gone up (to rank 34 in 2021 from rank 38 in 2020).⁵¹ While the Swedish figure is nowhere comparable to other Western countries like the US or the UK, they, unlike Sweden, do not make a “feminist” commitment. Sweden and Germany are the only countries with an FFP framework to have featured in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) top 100 arms sales list for the last decade.

Another incongruence is in the country’s anti-immigration sentiments, especially in the face of rising right-wing, which cannot be discussed in a silo. With ‘the rise of illiberalism’ becoming a reality in many Western countries,⁵² this essentially formulates a significant part of the Swedish social identity. It is derived from a brand of Western feminism that is hostile towards the ‘other’ including non-whites, Muslims, and other immigrants. While feminist values would require to be more receptive and human-centric in their approach towards immigration policies, those values are incongruent with Swedish social values. While Sweden has maintained an efficient social welfare mechanism, currently immigrants are being blamed for putting it at stake by financially straining Sweden.⁵³ Hence, it makes perfect sense for the current Swedish right-wing government to scrap ‘feminist’ from its foreign policy to give air to this argument.

Studies suggest that “a policy promotion effort has to be perceived as legitimate, coherent and salient by target populations in order to be effective.”⁵⁴ Unfortunately, some of the biggest challenges that FFP faces today reside in this incongruity of the policy approach, an incongruity that stems from the deep-seated prejudices against feminism and its connotations, especially prominent through the media reportage.⁵⁵ This incongruity also comes from a neo-liberal commercial order that feeds on the traditional notions of security.

Conclusion

This article engages conceptually with the idea of ‘feminism’ and its connotations in foreign policy analysis through a European secondary literature-based case study. It examines the existing critique against dominant foreign policy inclinations followed by a feminist theoretical analysis in IR and engages in understanding and analysing the tenets of FFP in the context of Europe. While feminism needs to be celebrated on its own merits, FFP seeks a holistic approach to making it multi-dimensional and context-sensitive.

Often questions are evoked over the feasibility of the FFP framework. In other words, are not ‘feminist’ and ‘foreign policy’ oxymorons? It seems more so because both are grounded at different levels of analysis. While foreign policy analysis would often acknowledge the arguments for gender equality, it would aim at remaining sanitised and immune to gender

⁵¹ SIPRI (n. d), SIPRI Arms Industry Database, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Accessed on 22 December 2022, URL: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armsindustry> (Accessed on 22 December 2022)

⁵² Thomas J. Main. *The Rise of Illiberalism*, (Massachusetts: The Brookings Institution, 2021).

⁵³ *The Economist*. Immigration is changing the Swedish welfare state, 8 June 2017, Accessed on 22 December 2022, URL: [https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/06/08/immigration-is-changing-the-swedish-welfare-state?gclid=Cj0KCQjA-oqdBhDfARIsAO0TrGG2YtSqo6HXAfNaeoZBwWlxcpbV7XhrDEJBD9blu8tHTIckKIF5LXwaApvHEALw_wcB&gclid=Cj0KCQjA-oqdBhDfARIsAO0TrGG2YtSqo6HXAfNaeoZBwWlxcpbV7XhrDEJBD9blu8tHTIckKIF5LXwaApvHEALw_wcB](https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/06/08/immigration-is-changing-the-swedish-welfare-state?gclid=Cj0KCQjA-oqdBhDfARIsAO0TrGG2YtSqo6HXAfNaeoZBwWlxcpbV7XhrDEJBD9blu8tHTIckKIF5LXwaApvHEALw_wcB&gclid=Cj0KCQjA-oqdBhDfARIsAO0TrGG2YtSqo6HXAfNaeoZBwWlxcpbV7XhrDEJBD9blu8tHTIckKIF5LXwaApvHEALw_wcB&gclid=Cj0KCQjA-oqdBhDfARIsAO0TrGG2YtSqo6HXAfNaeoZBwWlxcpbV7XhrDEJBD9blu8tHTIckKIF5LXwaApvHEALw_wcB)

⁵⁴ Sundström et. al. “Spreading a norm-based policy?”.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

considerations when it comes to national interests. Even if not the best, FFP at least encourages dialogues between these two domains, traditionally known to be at loggerheads with each other. Thus, while discussing the inherent challenges that the framework faces, one needs to highlight their potential too. Especially, when the world is witnessing multiple ongoing wars, human rights violations, the rise of right-wing extremism and most importantly, the ongoing climate crises, it is imperative that countries take cognizance of the civil society demands in order to attain sustainable solutions in these areas.



In order to escape a structurally homologized and stringent discourse on

FP, the paper, therefore, proposes a critical theoretical engagement of FP with the elements of human-centrism and post-normativism. And this critical FP engagement is only realisable with a policy implementation approach towards an adequate idea-interest marriage.⁵⁶ So far as ideas are concerned, they can be theoretically derived and normatively explored and similarly, interests can be driven and defined in a human-centric and gender-sensitive manner by prioritising humans. Notwithstanding the state-centric interests, an adequate bend of it with even that of ideas requires considerable inter-subjective understanding both at the level of individual and domestic as well as international. Finally, the paper advocates the inclusion of the notion of empathy as a political component in order to truly advocate for 'feminism' in 'foreign policy.'

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COMMENT

Belgorod drone attacks: Who, What and Why?

By Padmashree Anandhan

During 22-23 May, Russia reported drone attacks in the Belgorod region, a few kilometres away from the Ukrainian border. Blaming the “Ukrainian Nationalists,” it announced a counterterrorism operation to push them back into Ukraine.

There are claims and counterclaims by Russia, Ukraine and the US. This commentary looks at the significance of the region, providing a short note on the likely perpetrators, claims by different actors, and what they mean.

About the region: Geography and Demography

Belgorod is located in the western part of Russia, adjacent to the Luhansk region of Ukraine. Located 600 kilometres from Moscow, it plays a key role in keeping up the supply line of Russia in its military operation in Ukraine. In the 1700s, Belgorod was a part of Ukraine, consisted a majority of Ukrainians followed by Russians. Post 1900s this began to change, and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russians accounted for 94 per cent, and Ukrainians two per cent followed by the Slavs, Belarussians, and Poles.

According to a report by Carnegie on polls conducted by the Khroniki, the support for Russia’s military operation in Ukraine was 69 per cent in Belgorod. Unlike Moscow and St Petersburg, the location of Belgorod makes it vulnerable to attacks in Ukraine, provoking fear and hatred amongst the civilians. This can also be observed in the April polls held by “ExtremeScan” which found only 29 per cent to be supporting Russia’s withdrawal from Ukraine. This can be associated with the past, as Belgorod, Kursk, and Bryansk, known as the “red belt,” evolved from the values of conservatism.

About the perpetrators

According to reports from Associated Press and the New York Times, two groups have

claimed for the attacks, the Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK) and (the Freedom of Russia Legion) LSR. The Russian Volunteer Corps, known as a “right-wing conservation, military, and semi-political organization,” its military equipment is self-sourced and claims to be operating in cooperation with Ukraine’s Armed Forces, while Ukraine has denied any involvement. In a statement released by the RDK group in August 2022, RDK has been working with Ukraine’s comrades to fight against Putin.

“The motive of the members and supporters of these groups is yet to be known, while the hate against Putin and Russia is evident.”

The next is the Freedom of Russia Legion (LSR) formed in August 2022. The LSR members were identified as Russian volunteers who aimed to free the people in the border settlements in Russia. Such volunteers are seen as those who crossed into Ukraine with no work experience and later changed their minds to fight. Ilya Ponomarev, an exiled former member of the Russian Parliament, stated that the incursions were an effort to force Moscow’s military to divert troops fighting in Ukraine and to destabilize Putin’s government by showing its inability to defend its long border with Ukraine.

Few members of LSR and claim the incursion was aimed at creating a “demilitarized zone” between Ukraine and Russia and freeing the people from the border regions. While others claim on creating a dent in Russia’s President Vladimir Putin’s popularity, proving the existence of a gap in Russia’s security and its vulnerability to such attacks. The motive of the members and supporters

of these groups is yet to be known, while the hate against Putin and Russia is evident.

About the claims and counter-claims

Russia

According to Russia's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, the attack was seen as a diversion or a response to Ukraine's failure in Bakhmut. He claimed to have pushed back those who intruded back into Ukraine, killing 70 and destroying US-made weapon systems in the counteroperation. On the concerns of Russia's security, it claimed on spending USD 125 million in installing "mines, trenches, and barriers" earlier to defence the border of Belgorod. Although the people were evacuated with no massive injuries reported, such a breach does question the security measures present inside Russia.



Ukraine

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has denied the allegations of Russia on the attacks inside Belgorod. The same was confirmed on 23 May by Ukraine's Deputy Defence

Minister, Hanna Maliar said: "People who actually rebelled against Putin's regime" be behind the attack. President's adviser Mykhailo Podolyak the perpetrator groups to be "composed of Russian citizens."

Despite reports from the US intelligence on the militia groups to be operating under Ukraine's military command or intelligence, they have been no claims so far from Ukraine's forces.

The US

On 22 May, the Institute for the Study of War, a US-based think tank reported on Russia's claims on the raids by the "Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK) and Freedom of Russia Legion (LSR)" in Belgorod and capturing of Kozinka (Grayvoron region), Glotovo and Gora Podol (three to five kilometers from Ukraine border), later reclaimed by Russia. On 23 May, the New York Times reported on the US State Department Matthew Miller comments. He said: "We're skeptical at this time of the veracity of these reports...the US does not encourage or enable strikes inside of Russia." On the same, Pentagon spokesperson Patrick Ryder mentioned that the US had not approved nor received a request from Ukraine on sending equipment to the militia groups.

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COMMENT

Serbia: Mass shootings, protests and instability

By Rishika Yadav

The recent incidents have brought to light the deeply ingrained issue of violence within Serbian society.

On 04 May, a gunman, in a random target, killed eight and injured 14 in three Serbian villages. The shooting occurred near Mladenovac, south of the capital. The country was already grieving for the previous school shooting on 03 May. After an overnight manhunt, the police apprehended a suspect.

During 07-19 May, the "Serbia against violence" demonstration brought together people from different political backgrounds, demanding improved security, a ban on violent media content, and the resignations of President Aleksandar Vucic, Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic, and the head of Serbia's security agency. Thousands marched in Belgrade and blocked a key bridge in the second major protest following two mass shootings. The rallies came after calls for change and stricter gun control measures, with citizens surrendering over 9,000 weapons during a one-month amnesty. Protesters blamed the government for allowing a culture of violence to persist unchecked. Teachers' unions staged protests to demand changes in the education system. On 26 May, a large gathering of elites took place in the centre of Belgrade, with tens of thousands supporting Vucic. This rally was held to counter anti-government protests taking place in various cities and it was the fourth protest in May. Speakers at the "Serbia of Hope" rally included Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto and Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik. The rally featured Serbian flags and expressions of support for Vucic. Supporters attended from various regions, endorsing Vucic's pursuit of peace in Serbia. The President of the Bosnian Serb Republic told the crowd: "They attack us because we want peace in Ukraine, they attack us because we believe in family values and because we refuse to be told what to do. Serbia led by Vucic we trust and we support.

Long live Serbia, long live Republika Srpska, long live Russia."

On 27 May, following these events, Vucic announced his resignation as party leader and emphasized his role as President of all citizens. On 07 May, following two deadly mass shootings in Mladenovac and Smederevo, Education Minister Branko Ruzic resigned.

Three Issues: Gun Control, Discontent and Government Response

First, back-to-back shootings in Serbia have shocked the country and brought international attention to the gun control issue. Serbia has one of the highest rates of gun ownership globally. Serbia currently ranks third in the world for gun ownership, primarily due to leftover firearms from the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Men, particularly middle-aged and older individuals, constitute nearly 95 per cent of gun owners, with self-protection and hunting being the main reasons cited for ownership. The exact number of guns in circulation remains uncertain, as many firearms are unregistered. To address this issue, Serbia has implemented gun amnesty programs in the past, which have resulted in the voluntary surrender of over 171,000 firearms since 2012. Current Serbian gun laws require applicants to be at least eighteen years old, undergo training, pass background checks, and have justifiable reasons for gun ownership. It is noteworthy that one of the recent shootings in Serbia involved a fourteen year old, highlighting the importance of addressing the enforcement of existing laws and ensuring the appropriate handling of firearms by juveniles.

Second, in recent times, there has been a growing discontent towards the Serbian Progressive Party-led government under

President Aleksandar Vucic. This is due to concerns about his excessive concentration of power, media restrictions, corruption, and the degradation of democratic principles.. Protests and boycotts against Vucic's rule have been met with repression and intimidation, by opposition and some right wing groups. Opposition parties accuse Vucic's government of fueling intolerance. They also called for an urgent parliamentary session to discuss the country's security situation. Vucic dismissed the demonstrations as a political ploy, despite vowing to disarm Serbia after the shootings. His stance on Kosovo has also drawn criticism due to his contradictory statements, expressing willingness to compromise while maintaining nationalist rhetoric. Calls were made for Vucic and certain ministers to resign, prompting the ruling elite to organize the rally. Vucic announced his resignation as party leader and emphasized his role as President of all citizens. There is a demand for the resignation of officials, revocation of licences for TV channels airing violent content and fake news, and increased accountability and transparency in the security sector and judiciary. The protests reflect a broader call for change and reform in Serbian society.

“Serbia has a significant prevalence of gun ownership, which raises concerns about the potential for violence..”

Third, Vucic accused protesters of attempting to compel his resignation and create instability in Serbia. He expressed his willingness to assess his party's support through an early election but did not provide a specific date. Vucic labelled the protest as "violence in politics" and accused opposition leaders of exploiting the tragedy. During a televised address, he affirmed his determination to continue working and not yield to public pressure. The government

denies the allegations and accuses the opposition of exploiting the tragedies for political gain. In a separate counter-rally, Vucic accused the opposition of using the shootings for self-promotion. Vucic has pledged significant changes to tighten gun regulations and achieve "almost complete disarmament." As part of these efforts, he has announced a one-month amnesty for gun owners to voluntarily surrender illegal weapons without penalty, preceding the implementation of stricter measures. The government's proposed response to the recent shootings includes stricter gun laws, increased fines for illegal arms, enhanced police presence in schools, and comprehensive audits and tests for existing gun owners. The Interior Ministry has announced a voluntary surrender period for illegally possessed weapons, urging individuals to hand them over without facing charges. Those who refuse to comply may face prosecution and potential imprisonment. The government's actions also involve intensified surveillance of shooting ranges, a moratorium on new licenses, and stricter storage regulations for firearms.

What next?

The recent incidents have brought to light the deeply ingrained issue of violence within Serbian society. These tragic events have not only led to funerals for the victims but have also raised concerns about the high number of registered firearms per capita in the country. Serbia has a significant prevalence of gun ownership, which raises concerns about the potential for violence, particularly in a society marked by societal divisions and the glorification of war criminals. While stricter gun laws have been implemented in several countries following mass shootings, the US stands out as an exception due to constitutional protections for gun rights.

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COMMENT

The Nordic-Ukraine Summit: Four Takeaways

By Sreeja JS

The statement enunciated that in addition to their national contributions, Nordics are channeling military assistance to Kyiv through European Peace Facility and training Ukrainian soldiers under EU Military Assistance Mission.

On 03 May, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy attended the Nordic-Ukrainian Summit in Helsinki. The President of Finland and the Prime Ministers of Norway, Denmark and Iceland attended the summit. The summit discussed Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Nordics' continuing military and civilian assistance and Ukraine's relationship with NATO and EU, both membership bid and support. The joint statement read: "Russia must immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders." Later during a press conference with his Finnish counterpart Sauli Niinistö, Zelenskyy said: "I believe that this year will be decisive for us, for Europe, for Ukraine, decisive for victory." Finland's President Sauli Niinistö spoke about how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised global issues that impact nations and opinions. He said: "In a way, it seems that there is a worldwide competition of nations' souls going on."



Since the war began, the Nordic region has undergone a paradigm shift as the war started in its neighbourhood, affecting the stability of the region. The transformation from the supply of equipment to weapons, the increase in military assistance and the

joining of Finland into NATO manifests this shift. Within the first week of the war, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway increased their support. They started sending assault rifles, bulletproof vests, helmets, stretchers and a minimal amount of anti-tank weapon systems. Later, the Nordics increased their military and defence assistance and started sending weapons to Ukraine, which has significantly increased over time. The war in the background has prompted Finland to join NATO.

Following are the four takeaways of the summit.

1.Nordic countries' unwavering support to Ukraine

The Nordic countries have been staunchly supporting Ukraine since the launch of a full-scale invasion in February 2022. The joint statement read: "The Nordic countries remain unwavering in their commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders." They condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and repeatedly urged withdrawing forces and stopping all military operations within Ukrainian borders. At the summit, they underlined their stance to bring to justice those responsible for violence and war crimes committed in connection with the ongoing Russian invasion. The Nordic-Ukrainian summit and its fallouts present a united front in the Nordic against Russia.

2. Bolstering international cooperation to assist Ukraine in its war efforts

The Nordics promised to coordinate with international forums such as the EU, NATO, UN and other platforms to extend military and financial support to Ukraine. The

statement enunciated that in addition to their national contributions, Nordics are channeling military assistance to Kyiv through European Peace Facility and training Ukrainian soldiers under EU Military Assistance Mission. They have also extended their support for establishing a special tribunal for prosecuting the “crime of aggression.” It also added that the international register of damage would be presented at the Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe (16 to 17 May), which will be an “important milestone” to compensate for all the losses and damages caused by the Russian aggression.

“They have donated various weapon systems consisting of high-value air defence systems, Leopard main battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles and artillery systems and munitions.”

3. The promise of further military and financial assistance to Ukraine and the commitment to engage in its recovery and reconstruction post-war

According to the joint statement, the Nordics reaffirmed that they would continue their political, financial, humanitarian and military support to Ukraine, together and individually, as long as it takes. This also bolsters international cooperation with the

EU, NATO, UN and other international organizations. The Nordic countries have made significant military contributions to Ukraine. They have donated various weapon systems consisting of high-value air defence systems, Leopard main battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles and artillery systems and munitions. Since February 2022, the national Nordic military assistance packages delivered to Ukraine extend up to approximately EUR 4.4 billion. The civilian assistance comprising financial, humanitarian and emergency support has already exceeded EUR 1.5 billion and is expected to grow. The Nordics also pledged their commitment to contribute to the post-war recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine.

4. Zelenskyy’s diplomatic offensive for the long-awaited counteroffensive

Russia’s success in Soledar and its progress in Bakhmut impelled Kyiv to garner support regionally and internationally. Zelenskyy’s recent visits to the Nordic countries, UK, Germany, Italy, Arab League and G7 summits come in this background, aiming to procure both financial and military support. Nordic countries have supported Ukraine militarily and financially since the beginning of the invasion. The support of Nordic countries to Ukraine would mean increased military and financial support to Kyiv, adding weight to its upcoming offensive.

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COMMENT

Poland approves Russian Influence Law: Three Implications

By Nithyashree RB

The relationship between Poland and Russia started deteriorating following the conflict in Ukraine.

On 26 May, the Sejm, the lower house of Poland's parliament, approved the Russian Influence Bill formulated by the Law and Justice Party (PiS). The legislation aims to establish a commission that will work towards identifying and removing individuals who have been influenced by Russian interference. On 29 May, Poland's President Andrzej Duda signed the bill and asserted that Russian influences need to be curbed and scrutinised. Duda said: "Those who chose to participate in public life should have the courage to stand before the commission and say what role they played in those times." He urged the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawieck to take up the issue of Russian influence in the European Council. Duda added that the Constitutional Tribunal dominated by PiS would review the law after facing criticisms of the law violating the Constitution.

On 29 May, the US Department of State's spokesperson commented: "The US government is concerned by the Polish government's passage of new legislation that could be misused to interfere with Poland's free and fair elections." On 30 May, the EU's Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders said: "This new law raises concerns that it could be used to affect the possibility of individuals to run for public office, without a fair trial." Reynders added that the EU will take action against the law if necessary.

According to the law, a commission called "State Commission for the Study of Russian Influences on the Internal Security of the Republic of Poland in the Years 2007-2022," will be formed. The commission will comprise nine members who the Sejm will select. The nine members of the commission cannot be held on any criminal charges. All Polish official departments such as the intelligence and police must cooperate with the commission. The commission is to ban people in public office whom they deem to

be under Russian influence from 2007-2022 and its decisions are final. If the accused's job involves the spending of public funds, they will be banned for ten years and cannot run for office, and eventually be disqualified from holding office in the future.

One could identify the following three implications.

1. Objections from the opposition parties

The opposition parties objected to the law; they are apprehensive that the legislation would become a tool to expel opposition ahead of the elections. The opposition, Civic Platform (PO) opposed the law stating that the law solely tries to eliminate its leader, Donald Tusk who was the president of Poland from 2007-2014. Hence, the opposition has designated the law as Lex Tusk (Tusk law in Latin).

The head of an opposition Party Poland 2050 Szymon Holownia said: "President Andrzej Duda has seriously weakened our country today, internally and externally; he has decided to set off a Polish civil war." One of the leaders of PO Borys Budka asserted: "This commission is not supposed to explain anything, decide anything, judge anything, it is only supposed to be a hammer against the opposition."

"The Russian Influence Law has exacerbated the resentment towards the government."

The government substantiated the law by declaring that Poland has become dependent on Russia under Tusk. PiS declared that the deal signed between Tusk and Gazprom in 2010 is one of the primary reasons for the investigation. Nevertheless, the opposition parties denounced his anti-democratic move

and called out the unconstitutional nature of the commission.

2. Rising discontent towards the government

Since 2015, there has been a growing dissent towards the government. The oppression of the opposition, the State's control over the media, anti-LGBTQIA policies and unilaterally advantageous judicial reforms are the primary reasons. The Russian Influence Law has exacerbated the resentment towards the government. Despite Poland offering unwavering support for Ukraine and economic growth, the Poles demand democracy. With the pro-democratic PO offering to establish the rule of law and curb authoritarianism, the year-end election will be tough for PiS.

3. Deepening antagonism between Warsaw and Moscow

The relationship between Poland and Russia started deteriorating following the conflict in Ukraine. Poland is increasing its support to Ukraine and welcoming Ukrainian migrants as a precaution against potential intrusion

by Russia. In 2022, Poland took the lead in urging the EU member countries to stop importing energy supplies from Russia despite being one of the top Russian coal, gas and oil buyers. Poland was the largest importer of LPG from Russia in the first quarter of 2023. Its energy dependency on Russia was stated as one of the reasons for establishing the Russian Influence Law by Duda.

Regardless, Warsaw has indulged in activities that could provoke Moscow. The seizing of a Russian embassy-controlled school, changing the name of the Russian exclave, Kaliningrad to Krolewiec and expelling Russian diplomats have infuriated Moscow. As a response to Poland's acts, in May 2023, the Russian parliament urged the government to ban Polish trucks from entering Russia. Duma speaker Vyasechlev Volodin commented that 20,000 truck drivers are to lose their jobs because of the Russophobic policies of Warsaw. Although Russia is yet to respond to the new law, it will further fan the antagonism between the two countries.

EM Daily Focus*



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FRANCE

Protests in France over pension bill: Three Issues

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 01 May, France's Interior Minister reported on clashes between the protestors and the police officers due to tensions over pension reform. As per the government reports, 782,000 were reported to have taken part in the protests, with a large number in Paris. The CGT union leader said: "The page is not going to be turned as long as there is no withdrawal of this pension reform. The determination to win is intact." Violent clashes were also observed in Lyons, Toulouse and Nantes. The government has accused far-left groups of instigating violence during the protests and has issued a warning that they may face consequences.

First, non-acceptance of the pension reform by labour unions. The government's proposal to pass the pension reform as a bill has caused widespread outrage among labor unions due to its controversial nature. Although it is unlikely that the bill will be reversed or altered, French labor unions are using May Day as an opportunity to express

their strong objection. May Day saw the most violent and massive participation in the protests against the bill compared to earlier stages. The protestors aimed to apply maximum pressure on the government to withdraw the bill. It was possible for the unions to unite because of the strong will and rage among the workers against the reform. While they project an aggressive image, they still claim to be open to talks with the government.

Second, the rigid response of the government and a fragile opposition. President Emmanuel Macron, who is the primary target for passing the controversial bill, has granted a 100-day period to resolve the matter. The bill, which is expected to come into force in September, no efforts towards talking with the labour unions nor a signal to modify the pension bill, being taken by the government. It has opted to side towards support of the police to counteract the violent protests. Whereas the opposition which initially failed to pass two referendums against the bill due to the divide within, waits uncertainly for the constitutional council to allow to call another referendum.

* EM Daily Focus is published every evening by the NIAS Europe Monitor team on the day-to-day contemporary developments. Visit <https://globalpolitics.in/europe/> to read it every day.

Third, continuing civil unrest. Foundation Jean-Jaures research institute found in a survey that close to 60 per cent population was against the reform. The protests and worker strikes were expected to continue after the passing of the bill, but the nature and intensity has created more tensions. Increased participation and protests occurring in expanded areas is showcasing the unwillingness amongst the people to accept the bill. This has resulted in increased rallies, and strikes with continued impact on basic public services.

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GREECE

Elections in Greece: New Democracy party wins with a majority

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 21 May, Greece's New Democracy (ND) party, led by the conservative Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis won the elections with 146 seats out of 300. The centre-left party, Syriza, reduced by 11.5 per cent from the 2019 elections, winning only 71 seats. The socialist party, Pasok, which is the likely partner for a coalition for the ND, secured 41 seats with a two per cent increase from the previous elections. Under the upgraded electoral system, a party with the majority votes is not granted the bonus votes and requires 151 seats to form the government without a coalition. The ND is expected not to form a coalition, neither with the Centre-Left Syriza nor the Socialist party. It aims to form a single-party government through a second round of elections, which allows bonus votes.

Three issues

First, the elections under Greece's new electoral law. In 2019 elections, where the voter turnout was 57 per cent, the ND party

won the elections by a thin margin securing 158 seats, followed by Syriza and the Movement for Change coalition. ND was able to win due to the 2016 law, which allowed the party with majority votes to have 50 more bonus votes, under the new electoral system of proportional representation, the bonus votes were removed and to increase the turnout, the voting age was reduced to 17. The new law will also allow overseas voting. Due to the removal of the bonus votes from the first round, ND was not able to secure the majority to form the government. Therefore making the second round of elections likely as it allows the bonus votes to secure ND's position to form the single-party government.

Second, major issues in the elections. In the elections campaign, the ND party's key focus and strength was the increased investment and digitalized economy which has brought the GDP to close to six per cent. The party has supported the digitalisation of niche sectors such fishery industry to increase revenue, gathering the support of the traders. Increasing the defence capabilities of Greece against Turkey, and addressing the migration were also some of key concerns amongst the people which ND gained confidence to win the elections. In the case of the opposition party, Syriza focused on the "wiretap scandal," and rail tragedy, cost of living crisis to hinder the support of ND. This was superseded as the investment driven economic recovery and privatisation effort of ND helped it to gain support.

Third, the ND party and Mitsotakis. ND party has positioned well by attracting investments to recover the economy from the crisis situation. Greece was close to getting removed from Eurozone in 2015; the party's continuity for the last four years has helped it to double from the Eurozone average. The new rule of including those in the age of 17 to vote also added an advantage as those between 17 to 24 backed ND with 31.5 per cent of votes. Mitsotakis, who comes from a politically powered up family, has also stood up against migration which has reduced by 90 per cent since 2015. Such long-standing factors in past four years have proved the party's image appealing to the people.

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RUSSIA

Putin's Victory Day Speech: Three Takeaways

By Nithyashree RB and Sreeja JS

The Victory Day Speech is making headlines as Putin's assertiveness solidifies again despite the declining prowess of Russia in Ukraine. His eight-minute-long speech clearly shows that he does not regret going to war with Ukraine ([Click here for the speech](#)). He defends the invasion and hopes for victory. He often reflects on the past glory of the USSR and links the present with the war of 1941 to 1945 for defending his decisions and the ongoing conflict.

The following are the three takeaways.

1. Blame the West for the War in Ukraine:

Putin strongly condemns the Western narrative of maintaining superiority to perpetuate the Ukraine war. He asserts that the West kindles conflicts by pitting people and splitting societies. In the context of the Ukraine war, this statement blames the West for exacerbating the conflict through interventions. For him, the West spreads hate propaganda against Russia by spreading Russophobia and destroying Soviet war monuments and memorials. He adds that the West aims to cancel out the contributions of the Soviets by doing so. He accused the West of suppressing the people, especially the Ukrainians. He called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, "a hostage of the coup d'etat under the Western regime." Blaming the West and denying Russian aggression shows Putin's desperation to prove the righteousness of his decisions.

2. Revive the past glory of the USSR:

Throughout the speech, Putin glorifies the Great Patriotic War and the sacrifice of the then soldiers and leaders. He proclaims the legacy of the importance of having solidarity and partnership against a "common threat." He links the War of 1941 to 1945 to that of the ongoing war in Ukraine and gives a justification for it which shows his unwavering decision to fight despite an impending failure that could fall on Russia. This is also in line with the fact that he had to scale back the Victory Day celebrations in 23 regions which could mean that he is facing problems within the boundaries regarding the ongoing war.

3. Not war, but "special military operation":

Even after 439 days of war and both sides fighting and retaliating strongly Putin addresses this conflict as "special military operation." He uses this phrase thrice and admires the valour of the military men by denoting them as, "participants of special military operation." This shows his determination and clever interplay of words to justify his actions and this war to the Russian public and the world, especially the West. It can also be seen as a means to attract people to fight by infusing and invoking the nationalistic spirit to fight for the cause Russian cause in Ukraine.

UKRAINE

Kyiv Day: Drone attacks

By Rishika Yadav

On 28 May, Kyiv Day was celebrated to mark the anniversary of the city's founding in Ukraine. This year, the day was marred by a massive Russian drone attack on the city. The attack came on the eve of Kyiv Day and was part of a new Russian air campaign targeting Ukrainian counter-offensive capabilities. The head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said on Telegram: "The history of Ukraine is a long-standing irritant for complex Russians."

This note looks into three issues.

1. The drone attacks.

Ukrainian officials reported the largest drone attack on Kyiv since the war with

Russia began, ahead of the city's founding anniversary. Ukraine's general staff reported downing 58 out of 59 Iranian-made "Shahed" drones launched by Russia. The attack targeted military facilities and critical infrastructure, causing casualties and fires. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky commended the air defence troops for their response. Despite the increasing intensity of Russian airstrikes, Ukraine's robust air defence systems, including US-made Patriot and Nasams, have provided confidence in countering the attacks.

2. Damaging the historical relics

According to Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitchko, buildings caught fire in the historic neighbourhood of Perchersk in the city center, which is famous for its monastery containing the relics of saints. However, Ukraine has successfully thwarted Russian air attacks with the help of sophisticated Western-supplied systems. In May, Ukraine prevented an intense Russian air attack on Kyiv by shooting down all missiles aimed at the capital.

3. Lack of time to train troops

Ukraine has been diligently preparing for a counter-offensive against Russia, investing months in planning and receiving military support from Western allies while training its troops. In an interview, the Ukrainian secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, revealed to the *BBC* that they are fully prepared to seize the historic opportunity of becoming an independent, prominent European nation. Although he didn't provide a specific date, Danilov emphasized the significance of this moment and expressed determination not to let it slip away, even so, there is not much time to train troops. He acknowledged the withdrawal of some Wagner mercenaries from Bakhmut but warned that they are regrouping in other areas and will continue their fight. Regarding Russia's deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus, Danilov remained composed, considering it as expected.

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REGIONAL

Russia to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus

By Melvin George

On 25 May, Russia's Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu and Belarus's Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin signed a deal on deployment and storage of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus. Sergey said that it was in response to NATO's joint nuclear missions in Europe. The agreement involves "non-strategic nuclear weapons" and in accordance with "all international legal obligations currently in force." The control over the weapons remains with Russia. Khrenin said that the deployment would make western powers reconsider their activities in the region.

On 25 May, Belarusian President Aleksandr G Lukashenko said: "We had to prepare storage areas and the like. We have done this, so the movement of nuclear weapons has already begun."

On 26 May, Tokyo imposed additional sanctions on Russia as a response to the Russian deal to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus. It involves export ban to Russian military-related organizations and assets of individuals and organizations. Hirokazu said: "Japan's government demands Russia and Belarus stop actions that further escalate tensions as we continue to watch the

development with strong concern.”

The following are the three issues:

1. Triggers for Russia to formalize the deal:

The increase in the attacks inside Russian borders which Moscow called “terrorist activities” by Ukraine is background in which Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu signed the deal with Khrenin. UK and Netherland’s signing of coalition to provide fighter jet training to Ukrainian is also another factor for Russia to step up. This could have resulted in signing agreement with Belarus. The US upgradation of its nuclear weapons in Europe, recent staging of nuclear capable bomber drills near Russia’s borders over the Black and Baltic Seas is seen as NATO’s nuclear provocations by Russia.

2. Russia’s strategy behind tactical nuclear weapons:

Tactical nuclear weapons are short range and less destructive than long-range strategic missiles fitted with nuclear warheads. It is intended to destroy the enemy troops and weapons in the battleground. When Russians say that the deployment is in accordance with “all international legal obligations currently in force,” that means unlike strategic weapons that are under arms control agreements, there is no limitation on these tactical weapons. Uncertainty remains as no clear information on the number or characteristics of the weapons to be deployed in Belarus is unknown.

3. The Belarusian ties with Russia:

Polish Deputy Prime Minister Waldemar Skrzypczak’s announcement of support for the ‘Pro- Ukrainian army’ in Belarus became a threat for Aleksandr Lukashenko. Similar to the once attempted Colour revolution or any other Maidan type insurgency to overthrow the Belarusian government, dependency for loans and subsidized oil and gas from Russia makes Minsk to come closer to Moscow. According to Aliaksandr Alesin, an independent Belarusian military analyst, there are dozens of soviet-era facilities in Belarus that stored about two-thirds of Russia’s medium-range nuclear-tipped missiles that are still functional. Last March,

Putin announced that the construction of storage facilities will be completed by 01 July. Apart from existing storage facilities, the construction would increase the capability of Belarus to carry more weapons.

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Second Eurasian Economic Forum: Five Takeaways

By Sreeja JS

On 24 May, the second plenary session of the Eurasian Economic Forum was held in Moscow. The session was attended by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Kazakhstan’s President Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyzstan’s President Sadyr Japarov, Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan and Eurasian Economic Commission Board Chairman Mikhail Myasnikov. Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a video address to the attendees ([Click here for the speech.](#))

The following are the five takeaways:

1. Eurasian economic integration:

One of the key themes highlighted in the session was Eurasian economic integration, reiterating the purpose of forming the EAEU. President of the RSPP (Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs), Alexander Shokin, commented that Eurasian Economic Commission should have greater powers to accomplish the Strategic Development

Guidelines for Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025. It includes strategies for scientific and technical cooperation, education, healthcare, technical regulations, and digitalization. He also underlined the role of businesses in exacerbating integration. The leaders reaffirmed that integration should be achieved through strengthening regional and continental alliances, industrial and technological cooperation, energy security, food security, environmental security and infrastructure connectivity. Further, integration should be for purposes and not confrontation.

2. Decentralized global financial system:

In his address, Putin stressed the importance of creating a new and decentralized global financial system less dependent on countries that enjoy an advantage in the form of world reserve currencies. He also said that Russia is pursuing a policy of reducing the share of "unfriendly countries' currencies" in mutual transactions and planning to expand activities with its partners, including EAEU, to complete the transition to national currencies. According to Putin, this move will "remove politics from the economic sphere."

3. Emphasis on technological sovereignty and "soft" infrastructure:

Belarusian President Lukashenko and Putin used "technological sovereignty" to stress the importance of producing high-quality, high-tech products that can compete in global markets. Putin said: "Ensuring technological independence, lies at the heart of the heart of economic and, therefore, political independence." In the session, Tokayev talked about the need to prioritize digitalization (he used the term "soft infrastructure") as an important agenda to consider.

4. China's role in Eurasian integration:

The leaders have spoken a great deal about aligning the Republic of China to the integration processes within EAEU through the Belt and Road Initiative. According to Tokayev, BRI is one of the largest and most prominent initiatives in the field of continental strategic connectivity in the region. Further, Shokin also pointed out that consultations are going on establishing

EAEU-China business dialogue in the EAEU Business Council.

5. Accelerating partnerships and joining efforts:

Lukashenko said: "One of the priorities for our country and our entire Eurasian Union is to strengthen regional and continental alliances." On the one hand, the leaders affirmed the need for partnerships to deepen integration within the five-member states. On the other hand, they asserted the need to engage in alliances and partnerships with countries near and abroad that represent the majority of the world's population and global growth like India, China, Egypt and Iran.

Moldova and the US: Four takeaways from the Open Skies Agreement

By Nithyashree RB

On 18 May, US Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard R Verma and the Moldovan Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development Lilia Dabija signed the Open Skies Agreement in Chisinau. The Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean was also present. The agreement allows both countries to access each other's air space. It gives the parties open routes and enables code sharing.

According to Article 7 of the agreement, the countries are obliged to ensure civil aviation security. Upon signing, Verma said, "This establishes modern aviation links between the Republic of Moldova and the United States, and this Agreement will help airlines provide more convenient, affordable and efficient services to users." According to Dajiba: "We were backed in the energy, sanitary, ecological, economic, cultural and other sectors and now the aviation's turn has come" from the US.

A brief background

In 2018, the US government initiated the idea of signing an Open Skies Agreement with Moldova in one of the cabinet meetings. In 2020, the bilateral air travel agreement was signed; cargo aeroplanes have moved from Moldova to the US and vice versa. Due to the setbacks and closing of airports from

COVID-19, the signing of the inclusion of civil aviation flights was delayed. The newly signed Open Skies agreement extends it up to civil aviation flights.

The following are the highlights of the agreement.

1. Liberalization of air transport between the US and Moldova:

The agreement paves the way for the liberalization of air transport between the US and Moldova. It enables direct flights from Moldova to various destinations in the US. It also offers increased travel and trade between the countries. It leads to the liberalization of airlines through less government interference.

2. Revamping the trade slowdown:

The agreement can revamp the slowed trade due to COVID-19 and the Ukrainian war, promoting economic growth. According to the US Travel Association, flights cost 32 per cent lower on routes covered under the Open Skies Agreement.

3. Enhancing the tourism sector:

The agreement will enable the tourism sector and enhances people-to-people connections as travelling is made convenient, cheap and comfortable through the liberalization of airlines. It will eventually lead to the modernization of airports and trade via air.

4. Moving away from the Russian influence:

Although the agreement was the US's initiative, it shows that Moldova is slowly moving away from Russia under the pro-European president. There have been allegations from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, before signing the agreement, that the West is trying to make the country "anti-Russia."

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Council of Europe and the 'Register of Damage'

By Rishika Yadav

On 17 May, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, announced the establishment of a "Register of Damage," under Resolution 2482 (2023), following a Council of Europe (CoE) summit held in Reykjavik, Iceland. The register aims to document the destruction caused by Russian forces in Ukraine. 40 countries, the EU and G7 countries have signed onto the initiative, with more expected to finalize their internal procedures to join. The EU provided substantial funding for the Register, headquartered in the Hague, with a satellite office in Ukraine. The Register will operate for an initial period of three years, serving as a record of evidence and claims related to damage caused by Russian aggression.

The formation of the Register highlight the following two issues.

1. Efforts to make Russia accountable

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers decided to exclude the Russian Federation from the organization. This marked the first and only instance of Russia being expelled from an international organization. Prior to the exclusion, Russia's voting rights had already been suspended on 25 February, 2022, following the outbreak of the war. Since 16 September 2022, Russia is no longer a party to the European Convention on Human Rights, thereby depriving individuals under its jurisdiction of the Convention's protection. However, the European Court of Human Rights retains jurisdiction over violations that occurred before that date. The Court currently has four inter-state applications and around 8,500 individual applications related to Russia's military operations in Ukraine. The CoE is utilizing all available means to ensure Russia's accountability for human rights violations and serious breaches of

international law, as well as to provide compensation to the victims of Russian aggression. The organization has been actively assisting Ukraine through legal and policy advice, training experts, and supporting the country's recovery and reconstruction.

2. Positive responses

The register is seen as a first step towards an international mechanism of compensation for victims of Russian aggression. Burić described the creation of the Register as a historic decision and emphasized its significance in supporting victims and laying the groundwork for compensation mechanisms. Iceland's Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir highlighted the importance of the Council of Europe's role in ensuring accountability and expressed solidarity with Ukraine. German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, highlighted the importance of the registry in holding Russian occupiers accountable for war crimes and seeking reparations for the extensive harm. The register received support from other leaders within the CoE, including British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said: "The register is just one of a number of international initiatives set up to ensure accountability for the crimes inflicted in Ukraine." Also, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasized: "When we think in terms of reconstruction, it's an enormously important judicial element to have this register of damages to give justice to the victims." The United States, Canada, and Japan also expressed their endorsement. On the same lines, German spokesperson for the Federal Government, Christine Hoffmann said: "We welcome the creation of such a Registry. The damage inflicted on Ukraine by Russian aggression needs to be documented. This will be an important basis for the further reconstruction of Ukraine or for discussions on compensation." Prime Minister Denys

Shmyhal welcomed the establishment of the Register and invited other countries to join. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal regarded the register as a significant milestone towards justice and reparations for Ukraine, urging the prompt operationalization of the register for victims to submit their claims.

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War in Ukraine: Daily Updates*

By Padmashree Anandhan, Rishika Yadav, Sreeja JS, Nithyashree RB, and Melvin George



Source: president.gov.ua, AFP, Vladimir Astapkovich, RIA Novosti, Lynsey Addario/The New York Times, president.gov.ua, ARKnews.net

War in Ukraine: Day 461

War on the Ground:

On 30 May, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reported on Telegram about his first ever telephonic conversation with Cape Verde's President Jose Maria Neves, discussing the Ukrainian peace formula and global food security. Zelensky invited Cape Verde to participate in implementing the Ukrainian Peace Formula and discussed the Grain from Ukraine humanitarian initiative, emphasizing the topic of global food security.

On 30 May, Zelenskyy tweeted about his substantial phone call with Germany's Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz. He mentions discussing the implementation of previous agreements, strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities, particularly in air defence, and aligning positions for upcoming international events. Zelensky expressed gratitude for Germany's EUR three billion defence package. This conversation follows Zelensky's recent visit to Germany, his first

since Russia's invasion.

On 30 May, Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Defence Hanna Malyar, reported on Telegram that the Russian army is undergoing replacements and regrouping in the Bakhmut sector. She stated: "Ukrainian defence forces have temporarily halted their movement for other military tasks while maintaining control of the southwestern outskirts of Bakhmut. The Russian continues shelling and conducting air strikes in the area."

On 30 May, Ukraine's spokesperson Yaroslav Zhelezniak announced on Telegram that the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, has approved a law that lowers the maximum conscription age from 27 to 25 years. The law aims to reduce the duration of citizens' stay on the military register of conscripts during times of martial law in Ukraine.

On 30 May, *Ukrinform* reported on the drone attack on Russian territory, Ukraine refrains

* 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.

from commenting. Ukrainian spokesperson for the Armed Forces, Yuriy Ihnat, stated that the Kremlin regime is resorting to strikes and attempts to create nightmares due to its lack of obvious successes. Multiple drones reportedly targeted Moscow, with most being intercepted and a few causing damage.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On May 30, *Sputnik* reported that Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu, said that Ukraine continues to carry out attacks against peaceful Russian citizens and the social facilities. Shoigu emphasized that Ukraine lost more than 16,000 soldiers in May, 16 aircrafts, five helicopters, 466 UAVs, more than 400 tanks and armored fighting vehicles, 238 field artillery pieces and mortars. He claimed that about 200 HIMARS long-range guided missiles, 29 UK Storm Shadow cruise missiles were intercepted and destroyed by Russian air defence systems in May.

On 30 May, *Sputnik* reported that Russian Press Secretary of the President, Dmitry Peskov said that the 30 May drone attack on Moscow was the response to Russia's successful attack on 28 May. The Russian officials briefed about the incident to Putin and he had no "special plans" to address the Russian citizens after the attack on Moscow. Several drones were shot down and several buildings were slightly damaged by the attack.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 30 May, *Sky News* reported on UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly comments on Russia's influence. He stated: "Ukraine has the lawful authority to protect itself and can exert military force beyond its borders to counter Russia's influence." The report says he cleverly refrained from speculating on the recent drone attack in Moscow, but affirmed Ukraine's right to self-defence.

On 30 May, according to the Ukrainian ministry's press service, Ukraine and Portugal signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance cooperation in social policy on 29 May. The memorandum

includes exchanging knowledge and experience in social protection for vulnerable groups, providing social assistance, early childhood intervention, and reforming the social action system. Portugal expressed readiness to assist in various areas, and both parties agreed to coordinate future cooperation.

On 30 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on an interview of Ukraine's Defence Minister, Oleksii Reznikov. He stated that there is a potential for Ukraine to receive Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jets from Germany. Reznikov highlighted the possibility of forming a "coalition of fighter jets" with the American F-16, Eurofighter, and Swedish Gripen. Reznikov expressed interest in Germany's involvement in training Ukrainian pilots on Eurofighters, while Denmark and the Netherlands are already engaged in training Ukrainian pilots on F-16s.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 30 May, IAEA Director General Rafaela Mariano Grossi, said neither Russia nor Ukraine are committed to respect five principles laid down by the IAEA to safeguard Ukraine's Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. He said that as the military activities continue in the region and it may escalate in the future, the situation at the plant is "extremely fragile and dangerous." IAEA would reinforce its staff at Zaporizhzhia to track whether the principles are obeyed. Russia and Ukraine blamed each other in the UN assembly for shelling that reduced the power supply required for the cooling of the reactor. The US ambassador said the decision to avert the nuclear catastrophe is within the control of Moscow.

On 30 May, IMF staff and Ukrainian authorities reached a staff-level agreement that would be subjected to approval of the IMF executive board which would enable disbursement of about USD 900 million. The agreement consists of an updated set of economic and financial policies for the first review under the four year Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Arrangement. The remarkable resilience and recent economic

developments points towards gradual economic recovery in 2023. But the outlook of the country remains uncertain because of the war.

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War in Ukraine: Day 460

War on the Ground:

On 29 May, the Ukrainian General Staff of the Armed Forces reported on Facebook that during 28 May, the Ukrainian Air Force conducted 15 strikes on Russian military concentrations, targeting both personnel and heavy equipment. They specifically focused on air defense launchers, successfully hitting them six times. He highlighted the destruction of a Russian reconnaissance UAV and the neutralization of multiple Russian clusters, missile defence systems, control points, and other military assets. Ongoing Russian attempts to occupy Luhansk and Donetsk regions were repelled, while stable situations were maintained in

the Volyn, Polissia, Sivershchyna, and Slobozhanshchyna areas.

On 29 May, *The Washington Post* reported that Kyiv experienced its 16th air attack this month and the second in 12 hours, resulting in explosions throughout the capital. The Ukrainian air force labelled it a ballistic missile assault and reported that their air defenses successfully eliminated all threats. Mayor Vitali Klitschko confirmed one injury, while over 41,000 individuals sought shelter in subway stations. Kostiantyn Vashchenko, Ukrainian state secretary for defense, linked the attack to an imminent counteroffensive by Ukraine, signalling their preparedness for offensive action. He conveyed this message during a security forum in Bratislava, Slovakia.

On 29 May, Ukrainian General Staff of the Armed Forces confirmed on Facebook that during the night, Ukraine's air defence units successfully intercepted and destroyed 36 out of 40 Russian Kh-101/Kh-555 cruise missiles and 30 out of 38 Shahed-136/131 suicide drones. Furthermore, in the afternoon of 29 May, Russian forces launched Iskander cruise and ballistic missiles targeting civilian and critical infrastructure in Kyiv. However, all 11 Russian missiles were downed by Ukraine's Air Force. The General Staff emphasized that the threat of Russian missile and air strikes persists throughout Ukraine, with 53 air strikes and multiple rocket system attacks occurring in the past 24 hours, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure.

On 29 May, Ukrainian Dnipropetrovsk Regional Military Administration Head, Serhii Lysak, provided the information on Telegram that after Russia shelled the Pokrovske community in the Synelnykove district of Dnipropetrovsk region, ten civilians were hospitalized, with three in critical condition. Lysak further stated: "The injured individuals suffered gunshot wounds, fractures, lacerations, and brain injuries. Most of the victims were transferred to hospitals in the Zaporizhzhia region."

On 29 May, Ukrainian Chief of Defence Intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, published a

statement assuring Russia's attempts to intimidate Ukraine would not succeed. The statement came on Telegram by the press service of Ukraine's Defence Intelligence following Russia's failed attempt to launch ballistic missiles. Budanov emphasized that Ukraine remains resilient and focused on its work, promising a forthcoming response. The capital experienced powerful explosions, resulting in one person being hospitalized.

On 29 May, Ukrainian spokesperson, Yaroslav Zhelezniak, posted on Telegram that the Ukrainian Parliament, Verkhovna Rada, has passed Resolution No. 9333, endorsing the National Defense and Security Council's decision to impose long-term sectoral sanctions on Iran. The resolution received support from 328 parliamentarians. The sanctions, lasting 50 years, include a complete trade ban, cessation of resource transit, flight and transportation restrictions, and asset freezing for Iranian residents. Investments, technology transfers, and intellectual property rights transfers to Iran by residents are also prohibited. President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the approval of these measures, which were implemented through Presidential Decree No. 308/2023. The defence forces of New Zealand have been helping turn motivated Armed Forces of Ukraine recruits into capable soldiers, providing them with skills they'll need to survive and be effective in frontline combat.

On 29 May, the Ukrainian General staff of the Armed Forces posted on Facebook that Ukrainian military personnel, under the guidance of New Zealand instructors, practice overcoming a special obstacle lane by simulating battle conditions. The New Zealand government approved a decision to send 120 military instructors to train the Ukrainian personnel in Great Britain. 66 more Defense Forces of New Zealand service members would be sent to the UK to introduce the Ukrainian military.

On 29 May, the Ukraine's CEO of Naftogaz, Oleksiy Chernyshov, told Naftogaz's press service that he believes Ukraine will be able to get through the 2023 to 2024 heating season without importing gas. The company

plans to produce 13.5 billion cubic meters of gas in 2023 and has certain expectations from private producers. War risks remain, so Naftogaz acceded to the aggregate EU joint gas purchasing mechanism. He stated: "If there is not enough fuel in case of negative developments, the company will be able to quickly order the necessary volumes."

On 29 May, Ukrainian head of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Council Mykola Lukashuk told a briefing at the Media Center that a woman born in 1972 was killed as a result of a Russian attack on Pokrovske community in Synelnykove district, Dnipropetrovsk region. Nine people, including an 11-year-old child, were injured. Two settlements came under fire, and one house was destroyed while 19 were damaged in one of them, and one house was destroyed while 11 were damaged in another. The State Emergency Service teams worked there, putting the fire out. Moreover, all the injured were given medical assistance.

On 29 May, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky informed on Telegram that he had a telephone conversation with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and expressed hope that the country would continue to train Ukrainian demining specialists. Zelensky reported that he thanked Hun Sen for his principled position in support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ukrainian sappers mastered new ALIS mine detectors in Cambodia. Zelensky also informed the Prime Minister about the Ukrainian formula for peace and invited Cambodia to join the concrete steps to implement it.

On 29 May, the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs reported on Telegram that Ukraine destroyed a Russian depot in the Lyman direction. The statement came as "Border guards' aerial reconnaissance and the artillery of the Armed Forces of Ukraine worked perfectly." As reported earlier, the Defence Forces in the Tavria direction had destroyed a company of Russian personnel, eight military equipment and three ammunition depots over the past 24 hours. On 29 May, Ukraine's Donetsk regional prosecutor's office reported on Facebook

that in Toretsk, Donetsk region, invaders dropped aerial bombs on a gas station and an administrative building, killing one person and injuring nine more. The Russian troops shelled the town of Toretsk using FAB-250 bombs. In addition to the gas station and administrative building, a bank, an educational institution, and vehicles were damaged. Rescuers and law enforcement officers work on the ground. A pre-trial investigation was opened under Part 02 of Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (violation of the laws and customs of war). The Russian army attacked the Kyiv region with land-based ballistic and cruise missiles from Iskander ballistic missile system. The Ukrainian air defence forces destroyed all targets and means.

On 29 May, the Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces reported on Telegram that the Russians fired 11 Iskander ballistic and cruise missiles at the Kyiv region. The Ukrainian air defence forces downed all the targets. Several explosions were heard in Kyiv during an air raid alert. Six fragments of downed missiles fell on the territory of the city's districts. In Kyiv's Podilskyi district, medics hospitalized one injured person.

On 29 May, the Ukrainian Navy of the Armed Forces reported on Facebook that six Russian warships were on combat duty in the Black Sea, including two carriers of Kalibr cruise missiles. In the Sea of Azov, there is one Russian warship. In the Mediterranean Sea, up to seven Russian warships are currently on combat duty, including one Kalibr carrier. As of 10:00 on 29 May, Russia kept three missile carriers in the Black Sea, with a total salvo of up to 20 Kalibrs.

On 29 May, *Reuters* reported that a Ukrainian top aide to President Volodymyr Zelenskiy stated that Kyiv's peace plan is the only solution to end the war in Ukraine, emphasizing that the time for mediation efforts has passed. Ukrainian Chief diplomatic adviser Ihor Zhovkva also expressed Ukraine's disinterest in a ceasefire and instead emphasized the implementation of their peace plan. Zhovkva dismissed various peace initiatives from

countries like China, Brazil, the Vatican, and South Africa, stating that the war in Ukraine requires a specific approach. While Ukraine enjoys strong support from Western nations, it aims to garner support from the Global South, which Russia has cultivated ties with during the conflict. Zhovkva mentioned Ukraine's positive reception of its 10-point peace plan at the G7 summit and expressed the desire for G7 leaders to assist in convening a "Peace Summit" involving leaders from the Global South.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 29 May, Putin congratulated Erdogan on his re-election as head of the state via phone call. The development of Russian-Turkish relations in a constructive and mutually beneficial way during Erdogan's rule were emphasized during the conversation. He said that the election success opens up expansion of bilateral cooperation in various areas. Erdogan expressed gratitude and confirmed his commitment to the joint efforts.

On 29 May, Putin signed amendments to law 'On martial law' that legalized the forced and controlled movement of citizens from a territory where martial law has been imposed to a territory where martial law has not been imposed. The amendment allowed the holding of referendums and elections in the entire occupied territories or some part of it if the Central Election Committee decides.

On 29 May, Zelensky said Russia conducted a massive drone attack on Ukraine to date involving 54 Shaheds drones supplied by Iran. Tehran denied that it supplied the drones. He claimed that almost all the drones were shot down. "Unfortunately, there were some hits in Zhytomir Region" in the central part of the country, he added. Thirty six drones were shot down in the Kyiv region in a powerful strike. The Kyiv military administration said that at least one person died, and two others were injured. Several buildings were damaged, and one warehouse caught on fire. The Khmelnytsky administration in the western part of the country said the attack targeted a military facility, causing a fire at a warehouse, and

five aircraft were disabled. Moscow's defence ministry is yet to comment on this. On 29 May, Lavrov criticized the Pentagon's announcement that said the training would be given to Ukrainian pilots to fly US-made F-16 jets by Denmark and the Netherlands. He warned Washington and its allies in Western Europe by saying that the Russian military has the means to respond to Western fighter jets to Kyiv. Lavrov said: "In European affairs and at European forums, these countries are actively pursuing Washington's line, first and foremost."

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 29 May, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky tweeted to thank the Parliament and the government of Denmark for the decision to increase the financing of the special investment fund for Ukraine by USD 2.6 billion. At the end of May, Denmark launched a special investment fund for Ukraine for DKK 1 billion. Zelensky wrote that this major contribution would further strengthen the combat capabilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the short and medium term. He added: "Our strength is in unity!"

On 29 May, Poland's President Andrzej Duda announced his intention to sign into law a contentious bill establishing a commission to investigate Russian influence in Polish politics, potentially leading to a ten-year ban on individuals holding public office. Duda and the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party claim the commission aims to uncover Kremlin agents. Still, the opposition argues it is a tool to harass political rivals, particularly Donald Tusk, ahead of the crucial parliamentary election. The move is expected to worsen the strained relationship between Warsaw and Brussels, with the European Commission withholding EU pandemic recovery funds due to concerns about Poland's democratic principles. The Polish Parliament narrowly approved the law, and Duda's swift signing dashed hopes of distancing himself from it.

On 28 May, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated during an interview that if any country wanted to join a Russia-Belarus union, there could be "nuclear weapons for everyone." Lukashenko, a strong ally of Russian President Vladimir

Putin, emphasized the unique opportunity for Minsk and Moscow to unite, suggesting that other countries could develop similar close relations by joining the Union State of Belarus and Russia. However, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev dismissed Lukashenko's invitation, stating that Kazakhstan already had membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and did not require further integration. He also emphasized Kazakhstan's commitment to international agreements like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 29 May, *Reuters* reported that Alexander Volfovich said that the Western countries left Belarus with no option but to deploy Russian tactical nuclear weapons. He added: "The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus is therefore one of the steps of strategic deterrence. If there remains any reason in the heads of Western politicians, of course, they will not cross this red line."

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War in Ukraine: Day 458 & 459

War on the Ground:

On 27 May, according to a report by the Ukrainian State Border Service, in Bakhmut, Ukrainian border guards successfully targeted and neutralized two enemy intruders, while three others were injured. After detecting enemy infantry movement, the border unit launched a mortar attack on a dilapidated building where the enemy had taken shelter. The strike destroyed their hiding place and resulted in casualties. In the broader context, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have eliminated approximately 206,200 Russian invaders since 24 February 2022, including 480 individuals in the past day.

On 27 May, Ukrainian secretary of the

National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, revealed to the BBC, in an interview, that Ukraine is prepared to launch a prolonged anticipated counter-offensive against Russia. While he did not provide a specific date, he stated: "We have to understand that that historic opportunity that is given to us - by God - to our country, we cannot lose, so we can truly become an independent, big European country." He confirmed that some Wagner mercenaries withdrew from Bakhmut, but noted that they were regrouping in other locations and would continue fighting. Danilov expressed calmness regarding Russia's deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus, stating it is not surprising.

On 28 May, Ukrainian officials reported the largest drone attack on Kyiv since the war with Russia began, ahead of the city's founding anniversary. Ukraine's general staff reported downing 58 out of 59 Iranian-made "Shahed" drones launched by Russia. The attack targeted military facilities and critical infrastructure, causing casualties and fires. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky commended the air defence troops for their response. Despite the increasing intensity of Russian airstrikes, Ukraine's robust air defence systems, including US-made Patriot and Nasams, have provided confidence in countering the attacks.

On 27 May, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry announced on Telegram that the Archer FH77 BW L52 155mm self-propelled artillery system, manufactured in Sweden, would be delivered to Ukraine during the summer. The ministry stated that the Archer, known for its legendary status, would be used to counter Russian occupation forces. With its crew and engine protected by bulletproof armor, the system has a firing range of 30 km, extendable to 40 km with active-reactive shells and up to 60 km with guided Excalibur shells. It boasts a maximum rate of fire of nine shots per minute, and its mobility and speed will enhance Ukraine's defence capabilities and safeguard lives.

On 27 May, according to Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov on Telegram, Ukrainian soldiers successfully destroyed Russia's Grad multiple launch

rocket system (MLRS) using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from the Army of Drones near Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. The statement came as: "After firing at the positions of our military, the Russians tried to quickly escape from the scene of the crime and hide. But this is difficult to do when Pegasi is working."

On 27 May, the Ukrainian General Staff of the Armed Forces provided updated information on the losses inflicted on Russian troops in the ongoing war. The revised figures, posted on the General Staff's Facebook page, stated: "Ukraine's defence forces destroyed 3,794 enemy tanks, 7,449 armored combat vehicles, 3,414 artillery systems, 574 multiple launch rocket systems, 313 warplanes, 298 helicopters, 2,990 tactical unmanned aerial systems, 1,036 cruise missiles, and 6,183 trucks and fuel tankers of the Russian army." The General Staff emphasized that these numbers are subject to adjustments based on ongoing intelligence data.

On 28 May, according to a statement by Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, one civilian died in the Ukrainian capital after a significant drone attack. Over 20 drones heading towards the city were reportedly shot down by air defences. The mayor urged residents to seek shelter as the attack was described as massive. Additionally, a fire broke out in the Holiivskyi district. Russian forces have targeted Kyiv throughout May, while reports of drone attacks in Russia's border regions have also increased. Moscow has blamed Kyiv and its Western supporters, but Ukraine has denied involvement.

On 27 May, *Kyiv Post* reported that a Kyiv-based air defence team commander, Atlas, understands the gravity of his role in intercepting missiles and drones. With the potential consequences of missed targets, his team's mission is to ensure people can sleep peacefully at night. Equipped with Western-provided air defence systems, Ukraine's forces have successfully shot down most of the aerial threats from Russia. Atlas, who witnessed the vulnerability of older systems during the initial invasion, experienced a transformation after receiving accelerated

training on the Crotale air defence system. While they have destroyed multiple targets, misses are painful reminders of the ongoing barrages. The enemy adapts, requiring constant vigilance and adaptability.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 28 May, Prigozhin said that the Kremlin had banned reports about him on state media. He said that it didn't mention his name in the thirty-six word statement congratulating Wagner and the forces which came ten hours after the city's capture. He warned that such a misleading approach of shutting the mouths and ears of the people would receive a backlash from Russian people within months. He perceived that his victory speech after the capture of the city of Artyomovsk was not aired on the media for twenty hours. He mentioned that 72000 Ukrainian soldiers were killed, 10000 to 140000 were injured in the 'Meat grinder' operation.

On 28 May, Putin ordered to secure the border to ensure the fast movement of military and civilians to Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk, which are under Moscow now. It includes moving military and civilian vehicles, food, humanitarian aid, and building materials to Russia's new subjects.

On 28 May, Krasnodar region's officials said that the Russian air defence system thwarted the attempt of several drone attacks on the Ilsky oil refinery at the Black Sea port. No damage was reported. Ukraine did not claim responsibility for the attack.

On 27 May, the Russian Defence Ministry said they intercepted two long-range Shadow cruise missiles to Ukraine from the UK. It also said that they intercepted short-range US-built HIMARS-launched and HARM missiles. Twelve drones were shot down, which attacked oil pipeline installations inside Russian territory, the ministry stated. Ukraine didn't make any statements acknowledging responsibility for the attack.

On 27 May, Russian officials and media reported a series of Ukrainian drone attacks targeting pipelines deep inside Russia and

on a station serving at Druzhba pipelines station in Tver region. Drones crashed near the Erokhino village, 500 km from the Ukraine border. Gladkov said that the Ukrainian shelling at Belgorod region killed at least one and injured a girl of fifteen and a boy of seventeen. The local governor of the Kursh region said that a construction worker was killed in Ukrainian shelling. There was no public acknowledgement from the Ukrainian defence ministry.

On 27 May, Russia dismissed US criticism of deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. Moscow countered by pointing towards Washington's decades-long nuclear weapon deployments in Europe. The Russian embassy in the US said: "It is the sovereign right of Russia and Belarus to ensure their security by means we deem necessary amidst a large-scale hybrid war unleashed by Washington against us. The measures we undertake are fully consistent with our international legal obligations."

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 28 May, the UK Defence Intelligence updated that in recent weeks, public discourse in Russia has shifted from punishing critics to urging citizens to support the war effort through personal sacrifices actively. State-backed media and business groups have requested a six-day workweek without extra pay, while propagandist Margarita Simonyan suggested adding two extra hours in munitions factories after regular jobs. This reflects a Soviet-style sense of societal obligation and emphasizes the leadership's belief in the importance of economic performance in winning the war.

On 27 May, *BBC* reported that according to the German foreign ministry, Russia would expel hundreds of Germans working in education and cultural sectors next month, including teachers at the German school in Moscow and staff at the Goethe Institute. The decision comes amid deteriorating relations between Russia and Germany following tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats. The move reflects the strained ties between the two countries since Russia invaded Ukraine. Germany has responded by ensuring a

minimal presence in Russia while maintaining diplomatic relations. Other EU countries have also expelled Russian diplomats, further straining the relationship between Russia and Germany.

On 28 May, *The Guardian* gave an analysis of US President Joe Biden's cautious and indecisive approach to Ukraine. It is reported in contrast to the bold leadership of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, which raises concerns about the durability of US support. Biden's recent reversal on supplying F-16 combat jets exemplifies this issue. While Zelenskyy requested the planes to bolster Ukraine's defence against Russian aggression, Biden and his advisors hesitated due to fear of escalating tensions. However, experienced former US generals proposed humanitarian no-fly zones, which were rejected. Biden's chronic indecision has delayed crucial military supplies in the past, prolonging the conflict. Zelenskyy's perseverance and lobbying have ultimately driven Western support for Ukraine, highlighting his influential role in shaping the strategic conversation.

On 27 May, *Ukrinform* reported that according to Budapest's social psychologist and executive director of Political Capital, Péter Krekó, opinion polls in Hungary revealed a significant pro-Ukrainian segment. Political Capital, with support from the European Commission, is countering disinformation through fact-checking and truthful information dissemination. Their media platform has reached over a million people, and they conduct surveys and social media monitoring to study Hungarian sentiment. Media influence, stemming from the Orbán government's effective control over more than 500 organizations, has shifted public opinion, with the "peace" narrative dominating after the recent election. Krekó emphasizes the need to empower people with media literacy tools to combat disinformation effectively.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 28 May, Kuleba denied reports saying Li Hui proposed handing over Ukrainian territories to Russia. He said Ukraine would continue dialogues with China according to

three principles: "The first is respect for territorial integrity. The second is no initiatives that involve any territorial concessions by Ukraine. And the third is no frozen conflict."

On 27 May, the International Bar Association supported the resolution for establishing a special court to address the crime of aggression in Ukraine. A tweet by Ukraine's prosecutor General's office expressing gratitude said: "Justice should not be limited to punishing ordinary performers. Their leaders, who used their power to unleash this flywheel of evil, should be brought before the court. The Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression is the best possible tool to put an end to the impunity of the top of this criminal regime."

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War in Ukraine: Day 457

War on the Ground:

On 26 May, a medical clinic in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro was hit by a Russian missile, resulting in two deaths and over 30 injuries. The attack occurred after intense shelling across central Ukraine. The strike hit Dnipropetrovsk City hospital and a veterinary clinic, causing fires and extensive damage. Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelensky condemned the attack as a "pure atrocity." In the overnight attack, Ukraine reported shooting down 17 missiles and 31 drones launched from Russia, with targets including Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Kyiv. In response, Russia claimed that Ukrainian drones caused damage in the southern city of Krasnodar. Ukraine's Defence Ministry labeled the attack a serious war crime, while Russia claimed to have targeted Ukrainian ammunition depots.

On 26 May, Ukraine's defense ministry alleged that Russia intends to simulate a major nuclear accident at the Zaporizhzhia power station to impede Ukraine's planned counteroffensive. The ministry claimed Russia would shell the plant and fake a radiation leak, triggering an international investigation and halting hostilities. However, no evidence was provided, and the International Atomic Energy Agency has not reported any disruption. Both sides have accused each other of planning provocative actions involving nuclear incidents in the past.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 26 May, *Der Spiegel* reported new evidence showing the links between the Ukrainian nationals and Nord Stream pipelines explosion. Ukrainian nationals rented a yacht reportedly used by the team of divers for the sabotage as per the metadata collected from the emails. The traces of explosives and fake documents used for hiring the yacht were also cited in the report. The involvement of Kyiv could be seen if the sabotage were carried out by Ukrainian commandos, the report said.

On 26 May, the Russian Foreign Ministry warned that Moscow would cut diplomatic ties with the UK. The action is a response to British involvement in "operational-tactical planning by the [Ukrainian] military, including sabotage, other operations, direct provision of cyber-security, [and] deployment of mercenaries" in Russia, the ministry stated.

On 26 May, *Financial Times* reported that Gas consumption will decrease by sixty billion cubic meters this year compared to the average for the last five years. "More

than the gas volumes we still foresee to import from Russia in 2023, both pipeline and [liquefied natural gas]," reads the document seen by the FT. This resulted from a series of emergency laws adopted by the fourteen EU countries last year in a bid to decrease the reliance on Russian supplies.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 26 May, the *CNN news* reported that the attack on central Ukraine by Russia has sparked strong condemnation from Kyiv and its Western allies. According to a statement from the French Foreign Ministry: "France denounces the strikes as "war crimes" that must not go unpunished," emphasizing the deliberate targeting of civilian areas in violation of international humanitarian law. Ukrainian President Zelensky expressed outrage at the actions of Russian attacks and assured ongoing efforts to mitigate the aftermath and aid the victims.

On 26 May, *BBC news* reported that the US had imposed sanctions on the local leader of the Wagner private military group in Mali, Ivan Maslov, citing concerns that the Russian mercenary group is attempting to acquire military equipment for the conflict in Ukraine through its activities in Mali and other African nations. The US treasury department has alleged that Wagner employees may be involved in procuring mines, drones, and radar equipment. Wagner has been providing support to Mali's military government in combating Islamist insurgents. The US claims that the group may exploit Mali's surplus of arms, acquired after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

On 26 May, *Euronews* reported that several European countries, including Slovenia, France, Belgium, and the UK, have recognized the Holodomor, a devastating famine in Ukraine during the Soviet era, as a genocide. This acknowledgment holds significance because it highlights the magnitude of the tragedy and the crimes committed against humanity. A member of Slovenia's Social Democrat party, Jani Prednik, described the Holodomor as one of the most significant humanitarian catastrophes and crimes of the 20th century. The UK's Conservative MP, Pauline Latham,

drew parallels between the forced confiscation of crops during the famine and Russia's current seizure of Ukrainian grain on occupied Ukrainian soil, emphasizing the need to address war crimes and crimes against humanity. The interest in Soviet crimes targeting Ukrainians has grown since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as it brings attention to historical moments where Ukrainians were specifically targeted. However, legal experts caution that parliamentary declarations of genocide may not carry the same weight as court rulings.

On 25 May, *the Guardian* reported on British officials' confirmation about Russian state assets likely to remain immobilized even after the war in Ukraine ends, until Russia agrees to pay compensation for the damage caused. The Council of Europe summit established a digital register of damage as a first step towards an international compensation mechanism for victims of Russian aggression. While the UK has been cautious about seizing Russian assets outright, an alternative strategy is emerging where assets are retained as leverage until Russia agrees to compensation. This approach aims to achieve the objective of funding Ukraine's reconstruction without breaching international law. Seizing rather than freezing assets is considered a violation of international law, but freezing them as a countermeasure to induce compliance and as leverage for negotiations is deemed permissible. Ukraine, however, argues for direct seizure of assets to prioritize justice over state immunity.

On 26 May, the EU strongly criticized the agreement between Russia and Belarus that allows for the deployment of Russian nuclear warheads in Belarus. EU's High Representative of the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, condemned the move, stating it would lead to a dangerous escalation. Borrell emphasized that this decision violated several international agreements and called on Russia to uphold its commitments. He also accused the Belarusian regime of supporting Russia's illegal aggression against Ukraine and urged Belarus to reverse its decisions and uphold sovereignty.

The Global Fallout: Responses from the US and Europe

On 26 May, Tokyo imposed additional sanctions on Russia as a response to the Russian deal to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus. It involves export ban to Russian military-related organizations and assets of individuals and organizations. Hirokazu said: "Japan's government demands Russia and Belarus stop actions that further escalate tensions as we continue to watch the development with strong concern."

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War in Ukraine: Day 456

War on the Ground:

On 24 May, Ukraine's Ministry of Community Development announced the signing of a memorandum with South Korea's Ministry

of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. The MOU is aimed at strengthening cooperation in reconstruction efforts. The five-year memorandum focuses on integrated territorial planning, urban planning, transportation and social infrastructure development, decentralized energy, enterprise collaboration, job creation, and more. Ukraine seeks to benefit from Korea's expertise and involvement in reconstruction projects starting in 2023, offering transparent procedures, global management standards, digital tools, and state support. Discussions also covered key recovery priorities for 2023, including the Chornomorsk port concession, Danube cluster development, and Grain Initiative support.

On 25 May, the Ukrainian head of the Office of the President, Andriy Yermak, posted on Telegram that 106 groups of soldiers were brought back to the countryside, consisting of eight officers and 98 soldiers and sergeants who were deployed in the Bakhmut direction. The statement came as: "They displayed extraordinary bravery, preventing the enemy from advancing further into our Eastern territory. The coordination headquarters, following President Volodymyr Zelenskyi's directive, is dedicated to swiftly bringing everyone back home."

On 26 May, *Ukrinform* reported that Lithuania had announced a fresh military aid package for Ukraine's Armed Forces, aiming to support their Euro-Atlantic perspective and contribute to peace and stability in the region. Lithuania's Minister of National Defense, Arvydas Anušauskas, highlighted Lithuania's commitment as a steadfast friend to Ukraine during an online meeting. The aid package will consist of anti-drone equipment, ammunition, dry rations, and other assistance, with a total value of approximately EUR 465 million. Lithuania has also increased training and the number of instructors for the Ukrainian military. Finland has similarly pledged a military aid package exceeding EUR 100 million to Ukraine.

On 26 May, *The Washington Post* reported as the arrival of spring southern Ukraine, raising hopes of a long-awaited

counteroffensive against Russian forces. Recent dry weather conditions have improved the prospects for the much-anticipated operation, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and others consider crucial to demonstrate Ukraine's ability to reclaim its land. Although no dramatic troop movements have been observed yet, the counteroffensive may already be quietly underway. The Zaporizhzhia region, with its agricultural landscape and the key city of Melitopol, is a significant focus for Ukrainian forces seeking to sever supply lines to Crimea and regain territory.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 25 May, Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu and Belarus's Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin signed agreements on the procedure for storing Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons in Belarus, causing concerns about de-escalation, according to European Commission Spokesperson Peter Stano. Stano emphasized that this step increases tensions, escalates the situation, and provokes further aggression by Russia and Belarus. Shoigu clarified that while the weapons are stored in Belarus, Russia retains control and authority over their use.

On 25 May, Sergey Shoigu claimed at the CSTO meeting that Western countries are trying to prolong the conflict by supplying weapons and fighters regardless of the human casualties. The Kyiv tactics have evolved into terrorist activities, including sabotage and high profile-killings. Moscow and Minsk signed a deal allowing the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons on Belarus territory with the control over the weapons remaining with Russia.

On 25 May, Russia's spokesperson Razvozhayev said that Black Sea Fleet forces shot down two Ukrainian drones and "several more" were neutralized that tried attacking Sevastopol in Crimea. No damages were reported.

On 25 May, Peskov said Russian forces knew how to protect the head of the state as a response to Skibitsky's threat to assassinate

Putin. He called Ukraine: "A terrorist regime talks about its terrorist aspirations."

On 25 May, the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting was held in the Great Kremlin Palace. Putin talked about Industrial cooperation through the 'Made in Eurazes' initiative, and branding with 'Eurasian Quality Mark' to meet the high standards. Strengthening technological, digital, financial sovereignty of the five member nations were given emphasis. Freedom of movement of goods, services, finance, human capital and newly added knowledge for raising the standards of education, health and public administration.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 24 May, Norwegian Defence Minister Bjoern Arild Gram announced that Norway would provide support for training Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets. This follows US President Joe Biden's endorsement of such training programs and assurances from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy that the aircraft will not be used to enter Russian territory. Gram stated that the Norwegian government is considering how Norway, in collaboration with allies and partners, can contribute to this initiative. However, no decision has been made regarding whether Norway will transfer any of its F-16 jets to Ukraine. Russia has expressed opposition to such transfers, questioning NATO's role in the conflict.

On 24 May, *Bloomberg News* reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin had taken significant measures to mobilize Russia's economy for war since the invasion of Ukraine. The central bank has been enlisted in the effort, with decorated military officer Sergey Belov appointed as a deputy governor to oversee "field institutions" that allocate funds from the state budget to combat troops. This role, responsible for banking transactions that bypass commercial lenders and safeguard state secrets, is unprecedented for a central bank official with military functions. The Bank of Russia operates nearly 90 field offices, which cater to the banking needs of frontline units, including cash handling, money transfers, and issuing payment cards. While the Bank

of Russia aims to project itself as a technocratic institution focused on monetary policy, it has become an integral part of the war economy, offering financial incentives and benefits to encourage Russian volunteers to join the fight. The central bank's increasing involvement in military affairs signifies the current career opportunities for individuals from military and security backgrounds in various civilian sectors in Russia.

On 24 May, the US State Department approved a potential Foreign Military Sale of the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS) and related equipment to Ukraine for an estimated USD 285 million. The sale aims to enhance Ukraine's defence capabilities against Russian missile strikes and aircraft, without disrupting the regional military balance. Raytheon Missiles and Defence will be the primary contractor. The US Defence Security Cooperation Agency reported: "No additional US personnel will be required for implementation, and it will not impact US defense readiness."

On 25 May, the Council of EU approved the extension of trade concessions for Ukrainian exports to the EU for another year until June 2024, including the suspension of customs duties, quotas, and trade defense measures. The measures aim to maintain stable trade relations and support Ukraine's economy during challenging circumstances. The extension aligns with the Association Agreement's commitment to promoting sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. The regulation covers outstanding customs duties, anti-dumping duties, and safeguards for imports from Ukraine. The European Parliament's approval and subsequent signing will precede the regulation's entry into force on 06 June.

On 24 May, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that South Korea, initially hesitant to provide lethal assistance due to concerns about violating its policy of offering only nonlethal support to Ukraine, has reversed its decision and is now proceeding with the transfer of hundreds of thousands of artillery rounds, a move that US officials believe will enhance Kyiv's planned offensive against Russian forces. This

decision allows the White House to postpone a difficult choice regarding the supply of cluster munitions, which are banned by many countries. The shells will be transferred from South Korea to the US, which will then arrange for their delivery to Ukraine. South Korea's contribution of ammunition has relieved some pressure on the U.S., as its own artillery supplies have been dwindling. The breakthrough in South Korea's ammunition supply follows a joint security declaration between Washington and Seoul, strengthening their ties and granting Seoul greater influence in consultations regarding a potential nuclear response to a North Korean attack.

On 25 May, *Sweden Post English* reported that according to TV4 Nyheterna, Ukrainian pilots will have the opportunity to practice flying the Swedish fighter aircraft Jas 39 Gripen, along with simulator training. Sweden's Defence Minister Pål Jonsson stated: "This will provide Ukraine with a basis for future decisions regarding its defense capabilities." The training involves a select group of experienced individuals who have already undergone Ukrainian pilot training. However, specific details regarding the orientation training, such as the location and timing, remain undisclosed. Minister of Defence and Minister for Civil Defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin are currently in Ukraine, visiting military units that utilize Swedish defence equipment. It is emphasized that, at present, it is not relevant to lend any planes to Ukraine due to Sweden's own national defence requirements. Ukraine is exploring other options for the long term, including American F16 and European Tornado planes, although the Jas Gripen is considered more affordable and easier to learn to fly than the F16.

On 25 May, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, speaking at the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting, expressed the belief that the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) should emerge as a significant decision-making hub in the world. Lukashenko highlighted the need to replace the current unipolar world order with new centers that consider the interests of all international participants. He emphasized that the attention given to

events in Moscow signifies the EAEU's potential as one of these centers. Lukashenko also mentioned progress made in securing financial support for joint manufacturing projects within the EAEU, describing it as a pivotal document with anticipated practical outcomes.

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War in Ukraine: Day 455

War on the Ground

On 24 May, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, during his visit to Ethiopia, called Africa to end its “neutrality” in the Ukraine war. He said: “By being neutral towards the Russian aggression against Ukraine, you project your neutrality to the violation of borders and mass crimes that may occur very close to you, if not happen to you.” Highlighting the Ukraine-Africa ties, he referred to how Kyiv has prioritised grain export.

On 24 May, following the announcement of forming of marine corps, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that adding “new marine brigades, modern weapons and equipment,” to the marine corps would be the prime task. This is aimed at boosting the defence capabilities.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 24 May, Belgorod Governor, Vyacheslav Gladkov reported on a drone attack in Grayvoron city and Borisovka districts. He said: “Air defenses have shot down a drone above the Belgorod Region. According to preliminary information, there were no deaths or injuries.” Although no injuries were reported, a gas pipeline was damaged. On 23 May, a similar attack was reported in Belgorod, staged by Ukraine’s reconnaissance and sabotage group. According to Russia’s Ministry of Defence, those involved in the attack are identified as “Ukrainian nationalists” and were blocked through a “counterterrorist operation” by Russian forces.

On 24 May, the Wagner group head, Yevgeny Prigozhin disclosed the number of casualties to be 20,000 in the Bakhmut battle. In an interview by Wagner’s press service, Prigozhin said that close to 50,000 prisoners had been recruited, of which 20 per cent had died and 50,000 to 70,000 to have injured.

On 24 May, Russia’s Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on the deployment of Russia’s military units and border forces to counter Ukraine’s attacks in Belgorod. The attacks inside Russia have raised concerns on the continuity of the attacks. Peskov said: “Our military units, our border guards and corresponding agencies are doing their job.”

On 24 May, Russia’s Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu claimed on 120,000 “military specialists” to have been trained since the beginning of the war. Of which close to 5000 were trained to handle hi-tech weapons such as “T-90M Proryv tanks, BMP-2M infantry fighting vehicles with the Berezhek combat module, BMP-3 IFVs,” and 21,000 were trained for battlegroups.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 24 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Russia’s warning over future attacks inside. The move follows the attack after shelling in Belgorod area. According to Russia’s Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu: “We will continue to respond promptly and extremely harshly to such actions by Ukrainian militants.” So far, Ukraine has denied the claims of attacks.

On 24 May, in its intelligence update, the UK Ministry of Defence reported on Russia’s difficulty in implementing discipline. According to the report, the number of “Russian deserters” had increased. This was confirmed as close to 1,053 cases had been trialed since 2023 in Russia’s military court. In a statement: “Russia’s efforts to improve discipline have focused on making examples of defaulters, and promoting patriotic zeal, rather than addressing the root causes of soldiers’ disillusionment.”

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the war

On 24 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on WHO’s resolution to condemn Russia for targeting healthcare facilities in Ukraine. The resolution was favoured by 80, while 52 countries abstained from voting.

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War in Ukraine: Day 451 & 452

War on the Ground:

On 20 May, the Ukrainian General Staff of armed forces provided operational information regarding the Russian invasion, through a post on Facebook. Russian forces conducted an airstrike with "shaheds." The Ukraine forces also claimed on numerous missile and air strikes, targeting both military positions and civilian areas in the Dnipropetrovsk region. The frontlines experienced intense clashes, particularly in specific directions, while other areas remained relatively stable.

On 21 May, Ukrinform reported on Ukrainian Armed Forces remarks on the situation in Bakhmut. According to Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Defense, Hanna Maliar, the Ukrainian Armed Forces held defence in the Litak district. On the same day, Defence Minister Oleksii reported on the upcoming Ramstein format meeting that will address Ukraine's air and missile defense. He emphasized that the decisions made regarding aircraft are significant.

On 21 May, Ukrinform reported on Zelenskyy's meeting with the US President Joe Biden in Japan. They discussed on collaboration to strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities and implement the Ukrainian Peace Formula. They also exchanged views on projects for Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 21 May, according to Kremlin President Putin congratulated the Wagner private military and the regular army servicemen on the battle for Artyomovsk. On 20 May, Wagner group head said: "We've taken the whole city – every building – so that nobody could say that we didn't capture some small part of it." The operation called 'the Bakhmut meat grinder' went on for 224 days. The regular troops supported the

Wagner fighters with their artillery and air support. However, Ukraine claims that the fighting for the city was not over yet. The city has been largely destroyed because of the battle in which the Ukrainian forces were pushed back to the western suburbs by the Russian forces.

On 21 May, Russia's spokesperson Alexander Gordeyev, said that the Russian troop thwarted the munition supply by Ukrainian army brigade in the Donetsk area. According to him Russian forces had stopped the rotation of Ukrainian troops near the village of Vodyanoye. He said: "The Lantset cruise missile hit an enemy howitzer near Stepnogorka. Air defense and electronic warfare systems downed two plane-type drones and one kamikaze drone." The forces destroyed a Ukrainian mortar and an all-terrain car near Novodanilovka, a mortar near Dorozhnyanka, cars with militants near Malinovka and Shcherbaki, a munitions depot near Poltavka, and enemy manpower in the village of Kamenskoye.

On 21 May, Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman Lieutenant General Igor Konashenkov said that Russian troops had destroyed an ammunition depot near the village of Stanislav in the Kherson Region. According to him, six vehicles and an Akatsiya self-propelled artillery destroyed along with 15 Ukrainian servicemen in the region over the day.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 20 May, during the summit, the G7 leaders presented a Communique, where they condemned Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine, which violates international law, including the UN Charter. They further called it an act of aggression that poses a global threat, violating fundamental norms and principles of the international community. They confirmed their commitment to support Ukraine until a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace is achieved. In a statement: "Through our G7 Leaders' Statement, we pledge to enhance diplomatic, financial, humanitarian, and military assistance to Ukraine, increase pressure on Russia and its supporters, and mitigate the negative impacts of the war on

vulnerable populations worldwide.”

On 20 May, the White House released the conversation between US press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on the US President’s trip to Japan, during a press briefing. Sullivan said: “The G7 summit showcased unity among democratic nations on critical issues such as supporting Ukraine, holding Russia accountable, addressing the PRC, ensuring economic security, and promoting clean energy transition.” He further emphasized that the US has imposed numerous (around 300) sanctions on Russia, and expanded sanctions to key sectors. Economic security tools will be developed to address concerns related to coercion and technology-national security intersection. In terms of military support, the US will provide training to Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter aircraft and has been delivering various capabilities to Ukraine based on military consultations. The focus is on equipping Ukraine for a future force to deter and defend against Russian aggression.

On 21 May, following Biden's meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy in Japan, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced additional security assistance of up to USD 375 million to meet Ukraine's critical defense needs. This includes ammunition for HIMARS, artillery rounds, anti-armor systems, laser-guided rockets, armored vehicles, logistics equipment, and spare parts.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the war

On 21 May, *Bloomberg* reported on recent ship-tracking data from Kpler revealing a surge in Asian imports of Russian energy used for electricity generation, driven by high demand amid unusually warm weather. Coal imports in April reached 7.46 million tons, a nearly 30 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2022. Both China and India were the largest buyers, accounting for over two-thirds of Russia's coal exports to Asia. Fuel oil deliveries in April and March hit record highs, with countries like South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE increasing their purchases. Analysts expect further increases

in energy shipments to Asia due to the anticipated strong El Nino climate pattern, with countries prioritizing energy security over political interests, as noted by Singapore’s head of JTD Energy Services Pte, John Driscoll.

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War in Ukraine: Day 450

War on the Ground:

On 19 May, Ukraine’s Armed Forces Eastern group spokesperson reported on the situation in Bakhmut. According to the report, the area remains a hotspot, while Ukraine forces have advanced to 500 meters

defending the southwest front. In the fight Ukraine is reported to have destroyed Russia's tank, armoured vehicle, four UAV's and three ammunition depots. According to the spokesperson: "...carry out a combat mission as long as the command considers it appropriate, as long as it inflicts the utmost damage to the enemy and allows us to preserve our forces and means and prevent large casualties."

On 19 May, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman and representatives from UAE, Oman, and Kuwait during the Arab League Summit. During the meeting, both discussed on peace initiative and elements of the peace formula to end war and bring back peace. They also discussed on Saudi Arabia mediating the next exchange of prisoners, energy security, bilateral relations and protection of the Muslims in Ukraine.

On 19 May, *Ukrinform* reported on the ICC inspection team headed by Brenda Hollis report on Russia's war crime. During the ICC visit, close to 10 sites were found to be documented confirming war crimes incurred against the civilians. It included the acts of "indiscriminate shelling, targeting medical facilities and residential buildings." According to the report: "Everyone guilty of these crimes must be held accountable, including high-ranking officials."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 19 May, *RT* reported on Saudi Arabia's stance in the Ukraine war following the meeting with Zelenskyy. According to the report it stated the Foreign Minister statement on how Saudi Arabia takes "positive neutrality," as its position despite other Arab states being impartial. According to the minister: "we welcome hearing the viewpoints of both sides of [the] Russia-Ukrainian conflict."

On 19 May, Russia announced a ban on 500 US individuals which include former president Barack Obama. The move comes in response to latest US sanctions in G7 summit. The list also extends to heads of the

companies dealing in military support to Ukraine.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 19 May, following the discussion over the UK and Netherlands supporting a coalition to provide fighter jet training for the Ukrainian soldiers and Germany denying it. US President Joe Biden at the G7 summit, assured to support Ukraine with "advanced aircraft, and F-16s." Biden said: "As the training takes place over the coming months, our coalition of countries participating in this effort will decide when to actually provide jets, how many we will provide, and who will provide them." On the same, during the ministerial meet Portugal government announced its decision to join the coalition in training Ukrainians pilots.

On 19 May, in its intelligence update, UK Ministry of Defence reported on a damage in the Crimean rail line. Due to the damage, it predicts a disruption in the weapon delivery for Russia's Black Sea Fleet. The rail line which leads into Sevastopol being blocked has resulted in a quick move by Russia to fix and such infrastructural damage raises concerns on Russia's ability to keep its logistics in place.

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War in Ukraine: Day 448

Fighter jet coalition to train Ukraine's pilots European leaders establish 'Register of Damage' for Ukraine

War on the Ground:

On 16 May, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry announced in its Twitter on joining NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Ukraine will come under the cyber protection, training, education, and countermeasures from the NATO cyber defence specialists.

On 17 May, *Ukrinform* reported on Ukraine's Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal statement from the Council of Europe Summit. At the summit, he discussed how the agenda aims to hold Russia accountable for the damage caused in Ukraine. He also mentioned that the formation of an international tribunal will aid in exposing Russia's political and military crimes. Shmyhal confirmed the creation of the register to keep record of the damage inflicted by Russia. He said: "Our goal is to create a comprehensive compensation mechanism that will ensure that Russia pays full compensation to Ukraine in accordance with international law."

On 17 May, *Ukrinform* reported on Ukraine's Armed Forces spokesperson's report on the Bakhmut situation. The UAF has noticed that Russian forces are gathering in the regions of Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Marinka. The areas of Bakhmut and Marinka seem to be the primary points of focus. The area was struck by S-300 air defence, 40 attacks from multiple rocket launchers, resulting in civilian and infrastructural damage.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 17 May, *RT* reported on Russia's first successful trial of self-propelled howitzer, 2S43 Malva. This was confirmed by the Director of Uralvagonzavod. According to the report, the weapon is seen as a substitute for the French-made Caesar howitzers. It has a 152-mm gun that can target a wide range of areas. Earlier, T-14 Armata tanks were deployed in the front line which prompted

Ukraine to demand for more weapons from the West.

On 17 May, *RT* reported on South Africa's ground forces Commander visit to Moscow amid US's accusation of it supporting Russia through arms. The visit was seen as a "goodwill visit" by the Russian army and the Commander added that it was planned to discuss on bilateral arrangement.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 17 May, the Federal Ministry of Defence in Germany has announced that they will not be joining the coalition formed by the UK and the Netherlands. It welcomed the move to help boosting Ukraine's defence; however, since Germany does not have the technology or can provide training on fighter jets, it will not be able to be part of the coalition. This follows after the UK and the Netherlands agreed to form an international coalition to provide training to the Ukraine pilots to handle the fighter jets. On the other hand, Poland's President Andrzej Duda expressed Poland's support to join UK's coalition in training Ukrainian crew for F-16 fighter jets.

On 17 May, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan tweeted on the extension of the grain deal. The deal is extended for two months till 18 July and Erdogan assured take efforts to carry out the next extension. He also confirmed that Russia would not bar Turkey's ships from entering Mykolaiv and Olvia. Erdogan said: "I wish that this decision, which is vital for the smooth operation of global food supply chains and especially for facilitating access to grain for countries in need, will be beneficial to all parties."

The Global Fallouts:

Implications of the war

On 17 May, *RT* reported on South Africa's Foreign Ministry announcement on the scheduled visit of six Presidents from Africa to Moscow and Ukraine in June. The visit is aimed at promoting negotiation between the two to attain consent for a ceasefire. South Africa's Cooperation Director-General Zane Dangor said: "We have also engaged with other actors, including the US. There is general support for this initiative that

President Ramaphosa announced.”

On 15 May, Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan raised concerns over the break in its shipment and logistics due to efforts to vent from sanctions imposed from the Ukraine war. He states that due to the sanctions imposed by the West, Armenia has been obligated to create newer channels for trade. He claimed that despite being transparent and cooperative with the US, the EU, and Russia, Armenia has not been able to afford to follow the sanctions.

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War in Ukraine: Day 447

US delivers 31 Abrams to Germany to train Ukraine soldiers

War on the Ground:

On 16 May, Ukraine’s commander of land forces Oleksandr Syrskyi commented on how Bakhmut has become a trap for Russian forces. He described Wagner Groups as rats walking into the Bakhmut trap. Syrskyi appreciated Ukraine’s ability in counterattacks in areas near Bakhmut despite Russia’s abundant resources. Earlier Ukraine claimed on pushing back Russian forces back into north and south-west by “several kilometres.”

On 16 May, Ukraine’s Military Intelligence reported on the number of Russian deployed in Ukraine. In the report it revealed that close to 400,000 Russians had been installed in Ukraine, of which 370,000 were soldiers and 20,000 belonged to Russia’s elite paramilitary unit. It observed that Russia had never involved foreigner fighters but have used convicts as replacement.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 16 May, Russian defence ministry claimed on carrying out a precision strike using Russia’s hypersonic Kinzhal missile to destroy Ukraine’s Patriot defence system. No further details on attack were revealed. In also confirmed on hitting on Ukraine’s staged munitions, weapon, military hardware received from the West.

On 16 May, *RT* reported on Russia’s defence ministry claim on intercepting UK’s storm shadow missiles and 22 drones. This includes HIMARS multiple rocket launchers and anti-radar missiles. It is the first time Russia reported on striking down storm shadow missiles. UK confirmed the supply of the cruise missile in the previous week which has a range capacity of 300 kilometres.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 16 May, aligning with the pledges made to Ukraine, the US delivered 31 tanks to Germany’s military training centre. This will be used by Germany in training the Ukraine

crews. According to a spokesperson from Pentagon: "I can confirm that the 31 M1 Abrams training tanks have arrived at Grafenwöhr, Germany in preparation for subsequent training of Ukrainian tank crews."

On 16 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the upcoming Council of Europe Summit in Iceland which will focus on Ukraine war. Important European leaders from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, France's President Emmanuel Macron, Italy's President Giorgio Napolitano, European Commission and Council President are expected to participate. Although the Council of Europe does not have a "high-stake profile" as the EU, it stands as a protector of human rights and rule of law in Europe.

On 16 May, the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte jointly promised to form an "international coalition" to give fighter jet support to Ukraine. According to the spokesperson from Sunak's office stated that under the coalition, Ukraine will be boosted with combat air capabilities, and training capacity to procure F-16 jets. The move comes after Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met Sunak on 15 May.

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War in Ukraine: Day 442

UK delivers long range Storm Shadow cruise missiles to Ukraine

War on the Ground:

On 11 May, in an interview with Eurovision News and the BBC, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy commented on the spring counteroffensive. He stated that if Ukraine launched the offensive now, it would be successful, but it might result in

more casualties. Therefore, Ukraine will wait for the delivery of armoured vehicles and weapon system from the West, until which the counteroffensive will be on hold. On the impact of sanctions on Russia, Zelenskyy highlighted that despite the sanction impact on Russia's defence industry, it has manoeuvred to circumvent with help of other countries.

On 11 May, Ukraine's Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko stated that Ukraine had received USD 16.7 billion in total as financial aid as of 2023. In a meeting with the G7 finance ministers and central bankers, he appreciated their efforts for the aid. He highlighted the current budget deficit of Ukraine to stand at USD 38 billion as of 2023 and demanded for USD 14 billion more assistance for reconstructing the energy sector and critical infrastructure.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 11 May, RT reported on Russia's defence ministry statement on Ukraine's counteroffensive. On the recent report on Ukraine counteroffensive already underway, the Ministry denied such claims and confirmed on certain breaches in the defence line but the ground situation was under control. It confirmed on the Ukrainian attacks in Bakhmut, Donetsk, Marynka, Kremennaya and Kupyansk, but according to the Ministry, all such were countered or defeated by the Russian forces.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 11 May, in its intelligent update, the UK Ministry of Defence reported on the speeding up of the Russian military in recruiting prisoners for the war, totalling to 10,000 in April. It observed that prisoners comprised the major part of the Wagner group recruitment. This was mainly seen to avoid another round of mobilisation which earlier trigger domestic dissent.

On 10 May, Institute for Study of War, a US based think tank in its risk assessment reported on the challenges faced by Russian forces in Bakhmut. It found that due to continued shelling, it experienced limitations in combat capability to counter Ukraine's

counterattacks. According to the report: “Pervasive issues with Russian combat capability, exacerbated by continued attritional assaults in the Bakhmut area, are likely considerably constraining the ability of Russian forces in this area to defend against localized Ukrainian counterattacks.”

On 11 May, the UK government confirmed the delivery of “long-range Storm Shadow” cruise missiles to help Ukraine in the counteroffensive. The Storm Shadow is a jointly development system by France and the UK, with a range of 250 kilometres. Its operational range and striking capacity makes it distinct from other systems. The UK became the first to agree to send modern tanks to Ukraine followed by the US to send M-1 Abrams.

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War in Ukraine Day: 441

War on the Ground:

On 10 May, Ukraine Armed Forces confirmed the fleeing of a Russian military unit from the frontline of Bakhmut. In line with the earlier claim of the Wagner group leader, the Ukraine military claimed Russia’s 72nd Independent Motorized Rifle Brigade and “500 corpses” had left Bakhmut. Russia is yet to confirm the position of the Brigade.

On 10 May, in his daily address, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated the

intention to drive away the Russian forces using the West support who are inside Ukraine. He said: “We will not leave a single piece of our land to the enemy — tyranny will rule nowhere.” He also confirmed the ongoing preparation for post-war reconstruction economically, industrial, education and health care.

On 10 May, on the confusing claims over the effectiveness of the spring counteroffensive, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba claimed that Ukraine would not stop with one. He stated that it would launch more counteroffensives until it recaptures its territories. He reiterated the demand for more weapons from the West and proposed to Germany to convince the US to hand over F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 10 May, Russia’s Wagner group head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, claimed his concerns over the possibility of being circled in Bakhmut. He said: “In view of the lack of ammunition, the ‘meat grinder’ is now threatening to turn in the opposite direction.” Prigozhin warned over the threat of encirclement due to a break in the flanks.

On 10 May, RT reported on an attack on Russia’s Druzhba pipeline in the Bryansk region. Transneft oil company claimed the attacks, which confirmed the shelling in three empty fuel tanks. The pipeline is a key oil transport network connecting Russia with Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Hungary and many EU countries. As per the report, Russia’s Bryansk, Belgorod and Kursk, placed in the border with Ukraine, have experienced frequent attacks since the war.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 10 May, NATO military committee chairman reported that Russia was facing challenges due to “old military hardware.” According to the chairman, Russia was found to be using T-54 tanks from a 1954 design. This was due to the lack of focus as Russia prioritises quantity, large number of recruits and older material.

On 10 May, the EU member states discussed

imposing sanctions on Russia. The discussion did not promise the immediate signing of the new set of sanctions. China and Iran's companies are specifically expected to come under sanctions for helping Russia to escape sanctions.

On 10 May, in its intelligence update, the UK Ministry of Defence reported on Russia's Victory Day parade. The report observed close to 8,000 personnel participating, including auxiliary, paramilitary, and cadets under training. According to the Ministry: "The make-up of Russia's annual Victory Day Parade in Red Square highlighted the materiel and strategic communications challenges the military is facing 15 months into the war in Ukraine." From the parade, it stated how only vintage T-34 tank was displayed, while Russia could display other tanks despite the losses in Ukraine.

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War in Ukraine: Day 440

Putin's Victory Day Speech

War on the Ground:

On 09 May, the head of Ukraine's military administration, Serhiy Popko, reported that 23 out of the 25 cruise missiles launched by Russia had been successfully intercepted. The missiles were observed to have launched across Ukraine, especially towards Kyiv.

On 08 May, the UN stated that close to 30

million metric tons of food grain had been exported from Ukraine under the negotiated deal. This includes 600,000 metric tons of grain sent through WFP ships as part of their operations in "Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Yemen."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 09 May, in the Victory Day speech, Russia's President Vladimir Putin claimed that Russia's future would depend on the forces fighting in Ukraine. Referring back to the Soviet Union period, Putin stated how the West aims to destroy Russia, break from international law and "strangle sovereign centres." He pointed out how Ukraine had become a bait for the West to carry out its plans. Putin called for solidarity among the CIS and partnership to fight the "common threat." Lastly, he appreciated the soldiers participating in the special military operation.

On 09 May, the Wagner group head, claimed on one of the Russian military flank to have fled from the frontlines in Bakhmut. He criticised the Russian defence ministry for "Scheming all the time," and accused the Russian commanders for giving such orders. He added: "Soldiers should not die because of the absolute stupidity of their leadership."

On 09 May, Russia's forces claimed to target down Ukraine army's reserved and ammunition depots through precision-guided weapon systems. Russian defense ministry claimed on preventing Ukraine's advance in the combat operation zone due to the strikes.

On 09 May, Russia's temporary charge d'affaires to Japan claimed over fragile relation between Japan and Russia in bilateral cooperation due to Ukraine war. According to the spokesperson, Japan was found to be restricting exports of "wide range of goods" to Russia, reducing by 41 per cent as of March 2023.

On 09 May, in the Victory Day speech, Russia's President Vladimir Putin claimed that Russia's future would depend on the forces fighting in Ukraine.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 09 May, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, during his address in the parliament, called for the EU member states to engage its defence industries faster. He said: "Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown us how essential this realization is."

On 09 May, on the occasion of Europe Day, which commemorates peace and unity, Kyiv received Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission. She welcomed Ukraine's move to make 09 May as the "Day of Europe." Ukraine changed its commemoration from May 8th to May 9th after World War II, following the lead of other European countries. This was done to distinguish their celebration from Russia's focus on victory.

On 09 May, the US announced a new set of military aid worth USD 1.2 billion focusing on upgrading air defences and artillery ammunition of Ukraine. According to Pentagon, the package will include weapon systems that provide "critical near-term capabilities, counter-drone system ammunition, commercial satellite imagery service," and arm the Ukraine forces to defence against Russian aggression. This will be carried out using the help of defence industries and partners of the US than using its own provision.

On 09 May, Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock after the meeting with China's Foreign Minister stated the need to deter Russia's defence companies from getting access to war related goods. She said: "...sanctioned dual-use goods don't fall into the wrong hands." In response to the allegations of China providing material and political support to Russia, Baerbock stated EU's plans to sanction China's companies. China's Foreign Minister objected the move of individual sanction on China's companies.

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War in Ukraine: Day 439

Europe's defence modernisation process slows; Russia launches drone and missile strikes; Russian jet intercepts Polish patrol

War on the Ground:

On 08 May, Ukraine's Commander of ground forces, Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy reported on the increasing tensions in Bakhmut. Assuring to take all efforts to prevent the capture, he stated that Russia plans to take over the city by 09 May. Owing to this, it is observed to be shelling heavily with more weapons and forces. According to the report in *Deutsche Welle*, Russia sees Bakhmut as a strategic point to capture subsequent cities of Ukraine.

On 08 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the rapid evacuation of people from the Zaporizhzhia area. As per the report, 1,679 people, along with children, were moved away from the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia. The move comes after a warning was issued over Ukraine's counteroffensive and a radiation leak threat. On 08 May, a Ukraine Armed Forces spokesperson claimed over the destruction of 35 Shahed drones that were targeted across Ukraine. Russia was also reported to have launched 16 missiles in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odessa districts causing minimum casualty. Apart from this, explosions were also observed in the southeast of Zaporizhzhia.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 08 May, Wagner group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin confirmed the receiving of ammunition from Russia. He claimed on a fierce battle with Ukraine forces in the controlled areas.

On 08 May, RT reported on the agenda of the Victory Day celebrations. Presidents and Prime Ministers of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are expected to attend. Russia's President Vladimir Putin is expected to join, followed by the military parade and his speech. The Victory Day, which marks the traditional military parade, is expected to showcase the units engaged in the special military operation in Ukraine.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 08 May, a European Commission spokesperson announced the visit of President Ursula von der Leyen to Kyiv. The agenda is expected to establish ways to improve relations with Ukraine.

On 08 May, Ukrinform reported on Canada's Prime Minister conversation with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on continuing the support to Ukraine. According to the report, the discussion focused on ways to secure Ukraine's "sovereignty and territorial integrity," and growing concern due to Russian action in the global south.

On 08 May, in its intelligence update, the UK Ministry of Defence reported on the Russian military's efforts to recruit "Asian migrant workers" to fight against Ukraine. It found that the immigration officers who spoke Tajik and Uzbek had been trying continuously to recruit migrants with an offer of a USD 2,390 bonus along with salary. In the report: "Radio Free Europe reported recruiters offering sign-up bonuses of USD \$2,390 and salaries of up to USD \$4,160 a month. Migrants have also been offered a fast-track Russian citizenship path of six months to one year, instead of the usual five years. It expects such migrant workers to be sent to the frontlines. Such recruitment is viewed as way to keep the "domestic dissent" as low as possible.

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War in Ukraine: Day 437 & 438

Wagner Group back in the Bakhmut game

War on the Ground:

On 07 May, Ukraine's prosecutor general reported the death of six members from the emergency services group of Ukraine. The claim comes after Russia's continued shelling using a drone in the most populated area in Kherson.

On the casualty figures, Ukraine's military reported Russia suffering 193,430 deaths since the war began.

On 07 May, Ukraine claimed striking Russia's hypersonic missile through US supplied patriot defence system. Ukraine's Air Force Commander, Mykola Oleshchuk confirmed the interception of Russia's "Kinzhal-type ballistic missile." The patriot is known for its precision targeting and combat and the US has pledged to send more in October.

On 07 May, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi reported on the endangering situation in Zaporizhzhia. He warned that the area was becoming "potentially dangerous." Earlier 16 zones in the area were hit by 75 strikes as per report of local administration.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 07 May, Wagner group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin stated about Russia's promise to support with ammunition. Earlier, he threatened to withdraw his forces from Bakhmut. Since the battle began, both Ukraine and Russia have faced severe casualties and the also differences between the Wagner and Russia.

On 07 May, Russia appointed Governor, Mikhail Razvozhayev reported on successful countering of Ukraine's drone strike in

Crimea. He said: "Anti-aircraft defense and electronic warfare units repelled a new attack." No infrastructural damage was reported, but Sevastopol city is reported to be the key point for Russia's Black Sea fleet since 2014. Till now Ukraine has not accepted the claims.

On 07 May, the Defence Ministry of Russia reported on a prisoner exchange with Ukraine. In the report three Russian pilots were returned, while 45 Ukraine's fighter from the Azov regiment were sent back.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 06 May, Poland's representative to the EU stated his country's request to the latter to impose sanctions on Russia's farm products. This was mainly due to surpluses and to settle the increased import of such products from Ukraine.

On 06 May, Switzerland's government approved Ukraine's request to remove the ban on the weapons' exports to conflict zones. The decision comes following Ukraine's continued pressure.

On 06 May, Agence France-Presse reported on increased attacks on Russia's infrastructure such as refineries, train. According to the report, it is viewed as Ukraine's "preparations" for its spring counteroffensive, while Ukraine has not claimed. The attacks are observed to be targeting Russia's supply chains and military bases.

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War in Ukraine: Day 435

War on the Ground:

On 04 May, Ukraine's Air Force reported on bringing down its drone after continued explosions. In the report, close to 15 to 20 minutes, a Bayraktar TB2 aerial device was observed to have lost control after Russia's attack. It was later taken away by Ukraine forces due to technical malfunction. According to Kyiv's Mayor, Vitali Klitschko: "...firefighters put out a fire on the ground floor of a four-storey shopping center."

On 04 May, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his visit to ICC in Hague provided address on "peace and justice in the war." He stated that the visit was "symbolic" and welcomed ICC's warrant on deporting of Ukrainian children. In response, Russia stated that ICC had no jurisdiction and denied to accept the charges.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 04 May, Russia announced security measures in Moscow on the occasion of the Victory Day Military Parade. The same was confirmed by Russia's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on strengthening of the security. On the drone attack, Russia accused Ukraine for trying to assassinate Putin and issued a ban on use of drones in Moscow.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 04 May, *Deutsche Welle*, reported on the increasing death toll in Kherson. Due to continuing artillery attacks in Kherson, the death toll is reported to be 23, with 46 injured. According to Ukraine's Governor: "The enemy's targets are the places where we live. Their targets are our lives and the lives of our children." On the same day a drone attack was reported in Russia's oil refinery. A fire broke in the Black Sea port in

Novorossiysk after a drone attack in Crimea. Despite no casualties reported, the emergency services found it difficult to carry out the operation.

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War in Ukraine Day: 434

Nordic-Ukrainian Summit focuses on security and reconstruction

War on the Ground:

On 03 May, Ukraine's Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets reported on Russian shelling in the Kherson region resulting in the death of 17 people and 26 injured civilians. Lubinets accused Russia of deliberately targeting residential buildings, shops, and public transport stops with precision missile strikes, which he deemed terrorism against civilians. On the same Ukraine's head of the Kherson City Military Administration, Roman Mrochko, expressed his condolences for the victims and their families, calling the aggressors "racists-inhumans."

On 03 May, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy clarified that Ukraine is defending its independence and territorial integrity, not attacking Russia or President Putin. The statement came during a press conference from the Presidential Office of Ukraine, following the Nordic-Ukrainian Summit in Helsinki, where he further added that Ukraine's army uses weapons only on the battlefield. Zelenskyy said: "Putin is making accusations to justify his continued aggression in Ukraine, as Russia has no victories on the battlefield and also Russia could solve the situation by withdrawing its troops from Ukrainian territory."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 03 May, *Kremlin.ru* reported on the statement of Russia's President, Vladimir Putin. According to Putin, the Kyiv regime attempted to strike the Kremlin with two unmanned aerial vehicles, but the Russian military and special services used radar warfare systems to put them out of action. No one was injured, and there was no material damage. The Russian side considers this a planned terrorist act and an attempt on the President's life, and reserves the right to take retaliatory measures.

On 04 May, the *RT* reported on the statement made by Moscow's mayor, Sergey Sobyenin, on the ban of unauthorized drone use in the city following a failed Ukrainian drone attack on the Kremlin residence of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Kiev has employed drones to attack Russian civilian and military infrastructure for over a year and the ban, effective immediately, allows exceptions for approved drone use. Sobyenin said: "the measure aims to prevent unauthorized use of drones, which may disrupt law enforcement, and violators may face legal consequences." The Kremlin press service reported that Putin was unharmed and that the drones were neutralized by electronic warfare measures.

On 02 May, the *RT* reported on a published interview by a top adviser to Zelenskyy, admitting that Ukraine had modified its long-inactive Western weapons received from its backers, after reports surfaced that

all 20 self-propelled howitzers sent by Italy turned out to be defective. He attempted to downplay the issue, stating that the guns required an operational upgrade and that it's common for Ukrainian technicians to modify weapons. This follows similar reports of difficulties faced by German-made howitzers and a faulty air-defense system supplied by a European nation.

On 02 May, *the East Lothian Courier* reported that Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, has called for doubling of missile production as the threat of a possible Ukrainian counter-offensive looms. Both sides are experiencing ammunition shortages, with Russia possibly running low on high-precision ammunition. Also, the UK's Ministry of Defense attributed Russia's struggles to logistics problems and lack of munitions. The White House estimates that Russia has suffered 100,000 casualties, including 20,000 deaths, since December, as Ukraine repelled Russian forces. However, Russian forces launched attacks on 02 May, causing civilian casualties and infrastructure damage, thereby Ukraine is stockpiling ammunition along potential supply lines for its own counter-offensive. To be noted, Ukraine is firing up to 7,000 artillery shells per day, one-third of the amount used by Russia. Nonetheless, Denmark has pledged GBP 201 million in aid to Ukraine, including munitions, mine clearance vehicles, field bridges, and air defense assets.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 03 May, according to the statement published by Government Offices of Sweden by Sweden's Prime Minister, Ulf Kristersson, after the joint Nordic-Ukrainian Summit with leaders from Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Ukraine issued a joint statement condemning Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. The leaders called for the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of Russian military forces from Ukraine's territory within its internationally recognized borders. They are also committed to participating in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction after the war, as well as its integration into the Euro-Atlantic countries. The leaders emphasized the need for

accountability for war crimes and atrocity crimes committed in connection with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and called for increased collective pressure on Russia through further sanctions to weaken its ability to continue the illegal war. They also agreed to work together with others to develop mechanisms to provide compensation for losses, injuries, and damages caused by the Russian aggression, including through the use of frozen and immobilized Russian assets.

On 03 May, the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken made an announcement to provide Ukraine with a new military aid package worth USD 300 million, including Hydra-70 rockets taken from excess US stocks, funded through the Presidential Drawdown Authority. This marks the 37th US-approved security assistance package since Russia's invasion in February 2022, totalling USD 35.7 billion, it also reaffirmed the US's commitment to standing with Ukraine. The package includes munitions, anti-tank weapons, HIMARS, demolition equipment, and trucks, to support Kyiv's upcoming spring offensive against Russian ground positions.

On 03 May, following the move by the US that it will send USD 300 million in military aid to Ukraine, the EU has unveiled plans to increase large-scale ammunition production, called the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), with a budget of at least one billion euros, to replenish depleted stocks in member states and provide Ukraine with much-needed ammunition. The EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, stressed the urgency of delivering what Ukraine needs immediately. The initiative aims to improve the EU's geopolitical credentials and secure peace on the continent, marking a shift away from a longstanding lack of military stockpiles and limited production capacity. NATO allies and partner countries have also delivered combat vehicles, tanks, and vast amounts of ammunition, along with training and equipping new Ukrainian brigades.

On 03 May, *Sky News* and *BBC News* reported on a new lead in the investigation into the Nord Stream gas pipeline explosions in

September 2022, that points to Russia's involvement. An investigative documentary by Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland broadcasters reveals that Russian navy vessels, including the research vessel Sibiriyakov, were present near the explosion site before the blasts occurred. The ships had their transmitters turned off, but their movements were tracked through intercepted radio communications sent to Russian naval bases. The Sibiriyakov, with its crew and underwater equipment, is suspected of having placed charges on the pipelines to cause the explosions. The documentary does not provide conclusive evidence, but raises questions about the suspicious ship movements. Russia has denied involvement, and called for the investigation to be speeded up and results to be published. Denmark's armed forces have confirmed taking 26 photos of a Russian vessel near the explosion site just four days before the blasts. Sweden, Denmark, and Germany are still continuing the investigation to inquire into the destruction.

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War in Ukraine: Day 433

Zelenskyy demands for more air defence for the upcoming counteroffensive

War on the Ground:

On 02 May, after the attacks on its military production and munitions, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for boosting its air defence. He said: "We are working with our partners as actively as possible to make the protection of our skies even more reliable." Highlighting the previous counter of 15 Russian missile out of 18, he stated how Ukraine was unable to bring down all.

On 02 May, Ukraine's spokesperson Mykhailo Podolyak stated that Russia had changed its war tactics by particularly targeting the residential areas. He said: "There's no doubt that they are conducting direct attacks on civil residential houses or locations with many houses belonging to the civilian population." According to Podolyak, Russia had initially targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure and now its shifting to test Ukraine's air defence capability.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 02 May, Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu reported how Russia has been successful in inflicting heavy damages to Ukraine in the frontline. Despite such blows, the weapon supply and steps towards arms production in the war is considered critical for Russia. He said: "The country's leadership has set defense enterprises the task of increasing the pace and volume of production in a short time."

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 02 May, Denmark's intelligence service predicted that Russia was likely to use its civilians, journalist and business personnel in spying. Following the observation from Danish Security and Intelligence Service, Russia had amplified its efforts in "intelligence gathering." This led to the expelling of Russian diplomats in 2022 by Denmark.

On 02 May, in its intelligence update, the UK Ministry of Defence reported on shortage of ammunition for Russia that may not help it to counter Ukraine's offensive. According to the report, Russia still prioritises strengthening its defence industry. Despite the efforts it seems to lag in meeting the "wartime demands."

On 02 May, Deutsche Welle reported on the discussion held between NATO members on Ukraine and Georgia's membership. In the closed meeting, the US, Germany along with other members are reported to have assured Ukraine's membership as necessary without giving a specific time.

War in Ukraine: Day 432

Russia claims destroying Ukraine's 46th airborne brigade

War on the Ground:

On 01 May, *Ukrinform* reported on Russian attacks on Kherson using 163 projectiles. The same was confirmed by the regional military administration, which observed the Russian troops to have used MLRS, UAVs, and heavy artillery towards the residential settlements in Kherson.

On 01 May, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi reported on the cruise missile strike by Russia in Murmansk region. The attack was observed to be carried out through Tu-95 bombers, Tu-160 bombers. Zaluzhnyi confirmed that of the 18 such missiles launched, 15 were taken down by Ukraine's air force.

On 01 May, a spokesperson of Ukraine's air force stated that all supplied air defence systems to Ukraine were deployed for combat duty and to safeguard the airspace. According to the spokesperson, the received missile systems such as IRIS-T, and Patriot have been helpful for Ukraine, but not enough to guard all directions.

On 01 May, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins discussed on the need for cooperation in defence, humanitarian aid to help Ukraine. Zelenskyy stated that it would be possible only through combining countries from the "Pacific region." Zelenskyy has a similar conversation with

French President Emmanuel Macron on delivery of new weapons and ammunition. They were reported to have discussed on a new weapons package to Ukraine for the counteroffensive.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 01 May, Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin once again raised concerns over the shortage of ammunition. He claimed that close to 300 tonnes of material support was needed while only one-third was being given to its forces. Prigozhin said: "...at the hands of the Ukrainian army or NATO but because of our domestic bastard-bureaucrats."

On 01 May, *RT* reported on Russia's Ministry of Defence claim on the launch of massive missile attack across Ukraine. In the report, the attacks are claimed to have targeted the weapon production, military industry, and munitions of Ukraine. Although the details of the locations were not disclosed, the strikes were reported in Kyiv, Sumy, and Dnepropetrovsk areas. According to a Russian spokesperson, the attack had destroyed Ukraine's "46th airborne brigade" that was expected to be used in counteroffensive.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 01 May, CPH post reported on Denmark's Defence Ministry statement on the delivery of weapons to Ukraine. According to the report, owing to the earlier pledges, Denmark delivered the second largest Caesar howitzer, which is a 6X6 military truck equipped with "autonomous propulsion system," to move forward to the firing position. In response, Russia strongly condemned for transfer.

On 01 May, the White House released a statement on the mass casualties in Ukraine since the war. According to the White House National Security Advisor John Kirby, 100,000 Russia are reported to have died since the war began and close to 20,000 dead since December 2022.

On 01 May, in its intelligence update, the UK Military of Defence reported that Russia was observed to be forming defence structures

across the frontline in Ukraine and in some parts inside Russia. This was observed especially in the northern border of Crimea and the village of Medvedivka. Such defences are viewed as an attempt by Russia to counter the upcoming counteroffensive of Ukraine.

The Global Fallouts: Implication of the war

On 01 May, Nexus, a collaborative initiative between Ukraine and Israel sent 130 tonnes of humanitarian aid since the war started. The aid consists of first aid kits, bandages, hygiene items, radio communication device, equipment for hospital and rescue teams. This comes after the Ukraine's Deputy Chairman visit to Israel.

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War in Ukraine: Day 430 & 431

War on the Ground:

On 30 April, a Ukraine military spokesperson reported on the situation in Bakhmut. According to the report, despite continued shelling by Russia in the west of Bakhmut targeting its main supply route, it has been unsuccessful in disrupting the logistical

supply to Ukraine troops. In a statement, Eastern Group of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Serhiy Cherevaty said: “The Russians have been talking for several weeks about conquering the 'road of life' as well as keeping fire control over it. In reality, everything is different.”

On 29 April, Ukraine's spokesperson demanded that Germany deliver air defence systems, tanks, and ammunition, so Ukraine's military can prepare for the counteroffensive. According to the spokesperson: “For the planned counteroffensive, we need more armored vehicles, tanks and artillery systems, long-range ammunition in the shortest possible time.”

On 29 April, Ukraine's Defence Minister affirmed the completion of the preparations towards the “counterassault” against Russia. The equipment delivery has been “partially delivered,” according to the Minister and expects Ukraine to launch a ground offensive soon.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 30 April, Russia's Ministry of Defence announced replacing deputy minister with Colonel General Alexei Kuzmenkov. His role will be to monitor the logistical support for the armed forces. On Ukraine's counteroffensive, the Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin stated it would be a “tragedy” for Russia. He also complained about the shortage of ammunition: “We (Wagner) have only 10-15 per cent of the shells that we need.”

On 29 April, Prigozhin warned on withdrawing the Wagner Group forces from Bakhmut city due to the high casualty rate. He reported the loss rate to be five times more than the required artillery replacement. He added: “If the ammunition deficit is not replenished, we are forced, in order not to run like cowardly rats afterwards, to either withdraw or die.” Earlier as per the reports from the UK intelligence, the number of deaths have been high for both Ukraine and Russia. The recent claims from Prigozhin over withheld ammunition and well-equipped Ukrainian

troops has created confusing image on Russia's stake in Bakhmut.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 29 April, the European Commission announced the signing of the grain deal with eastern European countries for agricultural imports from Ukraine. Previously tensions arose due to Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Poland imposing restrictions to Ukraine's grain imports. According to the report, wheat, maize, rapeseed, and sunflower seeds would come under safeguard measures.

On 29 April, Deutsche Welle reported that South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol stated that the government is deciding on if it should provide lethal aid to Ukraine. The government is reported to be closely tracking the battlefield scenario to take measures as per international law.

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EM Short Notes*

By Padmashree Anandhan, Rishika Yadav, Sreeja JS, Nithyashree RB, and Melvin George



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ALBANIA

Government confirms return of Albanian prisoners sent by the UK

On 17 May, according to *BBC News*, the Albanian government confirmed that the UK paid the Albanian prisoners 1500 EUR to go back to Albania. Some returned to Albania voluntarily while some were forcibly sent. The prisoners were released under the UK's Early Release Scheme (ERS) which provides a financial incentive to those who agree to be deported and would not appeal. In December 2022, the UK and the Albanian government signed an agreement to stop illegal migration. Ever since the deportation flights to Albania have increased. According to the UK government's Home Office, more than 1000 people returned to Albania. Albanian police said most of the deported Albanians were foreign offenders in the UK prisons and were forcibly sent. (Lucy Williamson, "[Albanian prisoners paid by UK government to return home](#)," *BBC News*, 17

May 2023)

BELARUS

Minsk substantiates Russia's nuclear weapon deployment

On 29 May, according to the Belarusian Defence Ministry, the second unit of the S-400 system arrived in Belarus. Russia decided to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus on 25 May. In 1991, Belarus returned its nuclear weapon as the US offered security and promised to avoid Western sanctions. On 29 May, according to Belarus's Security Council's secretary Alexander Volfovich, the West's inefficiency to protect Belarus has pushed them to encourage the deployment. Russia substantiated the move by accusing the West of initiating a proxy war against Moscow. Volfovich said: "The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus is, therefore, one of the steps of strategic deterrence. If there remains any reason in the heads of Western politicians,

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of course, they will not cross this red line." On 28 May, according to Belarusian President Alexandr Lukashenko, deploying Russian nukes allowed a unique relationship between Minsk and Moscow. He added that concerned countries should join the Russia-Belarus Union so that there would be nuclear weapons for everyone. (Lidia Kelly, "[Belarus's Lukashenko says there can be 'nuclear weapons for everyone'](#)," *Reuters*, 29 May 2023; Ron Popeski, "[Belarus official: West left us no choice but to deploy nuclear arms](#)," *Reuters*, 29 May 2023)

Rumors of a coup

On 24 May, Russian State media *RIA Novosti* reported that "Information about the preparation of a coup in Belarus by the West has been confirmed in Poland." Various Russian and Belarusian newspapers reported on the same issue. The media said that Polish General Waldemar Skrzypczak was behind the coup. Belarusian President Alexandr Lukashenko called the General, "sick." Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov designated Poland, "an enemy state." In reality, the retired General Skrzypczak referred to the Belarusians fighting along with the Ukrainian troops in an interview with *Polsat News*. He said that if Kyiv's counteroffensive in Belgorod achieves its objectives, the Belarusian soldiers who fled after a crackdown on protests against Lukashenko will drag the war into Belarus. He added that Poland has to be prepared for the uprising in Belarus which will result in the immigration of Belarusians. (Tetyana Klug, "[Fact check: False claims about plans for coup in Belarus](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 May 2023)

DENMARK

Denmark-Greenland relations take a deteriorating turn

On 12 May, Denmark-Greenland relations deteriorated as a Greenlandic MP refused to speak in Danish during a debate in the Danish parliament. Instead, she used Inuit, her native language, frustrating the Danish lawmakers. Relations started declining because of the untoward approach of Denmark towards Greenland and its people,

especially in the 1960s and 1970s. In 2009, the island was granted self-governing autonomy, including the right to declare independence. Further, Greenland's government presented its first draft constitution to its parliament in early May 2023. (Nikolaj Skydsgaard and Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, "[Awkward moment in Denmark's parliament as Greenlandic MP refuses to speak Danish](#)," *Reuters*, 12 May 2023)

ESTONIA

Exercise Spring Storm 23 moves to its active phase

On 18 May, the division commander of Estonia's defence forces Major General Veiko-Vello Palm said that the most active phase of Spring Storm 23 would begin on 19 May. Spring Storm 23 is the largest Defence Forces exercise of the year conducted by Estonia, involving allied units from the US, UK and France. The focus of the exercise is on practicing planning and implementation of military operations and enhancing cooperation between Estonian and allied units. It will also focus on defeating the enemy in depth to inflict losses in close combat to prevent them from winning the battle. ("[Exercise Spring Storm 23 enters its most active phase](#)," *Republic of Estonia Defence Forces*, 18 May 2023)

FINLAND

Parties arrive at a consensus as coalition talks progress

On 26 May, the National Coalition Party leader Petteri Orpo affirmed that all four parties are mutually supporting immigration and climate policies. Orpo won most seats in the elections in April 2023 and desired to establish a four-party coalition government. The Finns Party leader Riika Purra's initiative to conclude the talks on immigration and climate policies this week has resulted in the new development. (Essi Lehto, "[Finnish coalition talks edge forward with progress on migration, climate](#)," *Reuters*, 26 May 2023)

Increase in immigrant numbers in 2022

On 25 May, Statistics Finland reported that a record-breaking 49,998 people

immigrated to Finland in 2022. According to the Director of Development at the Finnish Immigration Service Johannes Hirvela, the removal of the entry restriction due to COVID-19 has contributed to the stark rise in the number of immigrants numbers. He added that more work permits have been acquired and students have also arrived in great numbers because of Finland's low tuition fee. The number of asylum seekers has been the same. A large number of immigrants hail from Russia followed by Sweden, India, Estonia, and the Philippines. Ukrainians are given temporary protection only. According to Statistics Finland, the population of six regions have increased because of the immigrant inflow. (Aleksi Teivainen, "[Record-breaking 50,000 people immigrated to Finland in 2022](#)," *Helsinki Times*, 25 May 2023)

Debates on immigration in the coalition formation talks

On 25 May, one of the parties involved in the coalition talks, the Finns Party, demanded agreements on Climate and Immigration must be concluded by the end of this week. Else, the party will walk away from the coalition. Chairperson of the Finns Party, Riika Purra said that work-based immigration is to be provided to immigrants outside of the EU who can earn over EUR 2500 per month. She quoted the Ministry of Finance's calculation and said that it will contribute to the public economy. In response, a financial advisor in the Ministry of Finance Jukka Mattila said even if an immigrant earns over EUR 2000 they can contribute to the public economy. Mattila added that setting a limit of EUR 2500 for both work-based immigrants and other immigrants fails to consider other factors such as their age. Reaching agreements on climate and immigration has been the priority for the four parties. Diverging interests exist such as the Swedish People's Party's call for a restriction on humanitarian and work-based immigration and the National Coalition Party wants to speed up climate action. (Aleksi Teivainen, "[Orpo believes in breakthrough but admits talks on immigrant are difficult](#)," *Helsinki Times*, 26 May 2023; Aleksi Teivainen, "[Finns Party's demand for €2,500 income limit for](#)

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FRANCE

Trade unions on upbeat despite the controversial pension reforms

On 25 May, *Economist* observed that France's trade unions are upbeat despite the passing of the controversial pension reforms that became law in early 2023. It cites several reasons for this phenomenon which involves a change in leadership. In March, CGT, with close links to the communist party, elected Sophie Binet as its first woman leader in its 128 years. A green, feminist and from a white-collar union branch, she believes she can get the government to annul the new pension rules. Unions have called for the fourteenth one-day strike on 6 June. Feminization of leadership is underway in CFDT, France's biggest union also, as the leader Laurent Berger is going to be replaced by his deputy Marylise Leon. Rumours spread that Berger might enter politics. He, however, insists on not wanting to enter politics, but is keen on creating a political space between the radical left and Macron's "hyper-centre." If Berger enters politics, he could be a formidable challenger to any centrist successor of Immanuel Macron, says *The Economist*. ("[Women take over France's powerful trade unions](#)," *The Economist*, 25 May 2023)

Credit rating agency Fitch announces reduction in rating amid protests

On 01 May, *Le Monde* reported that France is set to face more nationwide protests as it tries to move past the divisive pension law that caused widespread anger and social unrest. Moreover, France's Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire announced that France's long-term foreign currency issuer default rating (IDR) had been reduced. He affirmed the French government's firm commitment to consolidate public finances, despite credit ratings agency Fitch downgrading the country's debt worthiness. The agency cited weak fiscal metrics, high government debt, expenditure rigidities and social and political pressures, as reflected in the protests the pension reform bill, as high drivers for the rating. In response, Maire

insisted that the decision was not a fair reflection of the facts and pledged to continue to pass structural reforms for the country. However, Fitch warned that these protests would complicate fiscal consolidation in France in future and could further strengthen radical and anti-establishment forces. Despite this, France's retirement age will remain among the lowest in the developed countries, even after the pension reform raises it from 62 to 64. ("[Macron faces Labor Day protests](#) *Le Monde*, 01 May 2023; "[France pledges 'structural reforms' after Fitch downgrade](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 29 April 2023)

GEORGIA

In a contradictory stance, the President accuses Russia of 'provocation'

On May 10, *RT* reported Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili's displeasure with Russia's decision to abolish the flight ban and restore visa-free travel for Georgians and called it "another provocation," primarily because of Russia's war with Ukraine. Contradicting the President's pro-Ukrainian stance, the Foreign Minister welcomed the move, and the government has repeatedly refused to join Western sanctions and efforts by Kyiv to have a hostile approach towards Russia. Moscow placed a flight ban in the summer of 2019 as a response to a series of violent anti-Russian protests in Tbilisi, where a few demonstrators attempted to storm the parliament building, disrupt the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO), and insult its President Sergey Gavrilov, who was also the head of the Russian delegation. According to the new decree, Georgian citizens will require visas only if they plan to stay in Russia for more than three months to work or study. ("[Georgian president accuses Russia of 'provocation'](#)," *RT*, 10 May 2023)

GERMANY

Patriot system to Lithuania ahead of the NATO summit

On 26 May, the German Defence Ministry, in its statement, said that it would move its Slovakia-based Patriot system to Lithuania to safeguard a NATO summit scheduled in

July in Vilnius ending its deployment. The Ministry also mentioned that it would remove supporting elements from Poland. Germany has been stationing two Patriot units in Slovakia and three in Poland. (Sabine Siebold and Cristoph Steitz, "[Germany to move Slovakia-based Patriot system to Lithuania to protect NATO summit](#)," *Reuters*, 26 May 2023)

Inflation pushes Germany into recession

On 25 May, *Politico.eu* reported that the economic output of Germany for the first quarter of the year 2023 has fallen 0.3 per cent due to the inflation rate of 7.2 per cent. According to *BBC News*, Germany is being pushed into recession due to inflation between January and March 2023. The coalition government have diverging interest to deal with inflation. The Greens want to tax the rich and invest in climate protection plans, and the Free Democrats demand deregulation. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats Party want to bring in skilled foreign labour and invest in green industries. According to Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action of Robert Habeck, Germany might have to cut its budget up to EUR 22 billion next year. The Bundesbank, the German central bank however expects the economy to grow modestly in the April to June quarter with a rebound in industry to revive consumer spending. According to Federal Minister of Finance Christian Lindner, the government can expect a shortfall of EUR 30 billion in tax incomes. (Hans Von Der Burchard and Peter Wilke, "[Germany in recession: Berlin braces for budget cut battle](#)," *Politico.eu*, 25 May 2023; Lucy Hooker, "[Germany falls into recession as inflation hits economy](#)," *BBC News*, 25 May 2023)

Defence Minister declines role in fighter jet coalition for Ukraine

On 17 May, German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius remarked during a joint press conference with UK Defence Minister Ben Wallace in Berlin: "Germany lacks the necessary planes, capabilities, and expertise to participate in a coalition for supplying fighter jets to Ukraine." The UK, along with the Netherlands, announced their efforts to

establish an international coalition for Ukraine to acquire F-16 fighter jets from allies. Previously, Berlin, Washington, and London had declined to provide their own fighter jets to Kyiv. ([“Germany doesn’t have capabilities to be in coalition to supply jets to Kiev — minister,” TASS](#), 17 May 2023)

DAX stock index hits a record high on Friday

On 19 May, Germany's leading trading benchmark, the DAX stock market index, hit a record high of 16,331 points amid expanding market optimism. The upswing occurred in hopes of consensus in US Congress to lift the US debt ceiling to raise its credit limit and borrow more. The last record high at 16,290 points was recorded before Russia invaded Ukraine. Despite the turbulence in the global economy caused by COVID and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the DAX index is faring better since its expansion from 30 blue-chip companies to 40 in 2021. Beijing's decision to drop draconian COVID-19 restrictions also significantly contributed to the recovery of the Index. ([“Germany's DAX stock index hits record high,” Deutsche Welle](#), 19 May 2023)

Foreign Minister calls for UN's role in achieving peace in Yemen

On 16 May, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock highlighted the UN's Role in achieving lasting peace in Yemen amidst positive regional developments. Baerbock emphasized that the United Nations must play a crucial role in securing long-term peace in war-torn Yemen. During her visit to Saudi Arabia, Baerbock called for all parties involved in the civil war to engage in negotiations for a ceasefire. Baerbock also met with Yemeni officials and the UN Coordinator for Yemen to discuss the dire humanitarian situation in the country, with approximately 21 million people, including 11 million children, in need of aid. Baerbock later traveled to Qatar to address the situation of foreign migrant workers. ([“Germany's Baerbock says UN must broker Yemen peace,” Deutsche Welle](#), 16 May 2023)

Targeted attack near Dusseldorf

On 11 May, in Ratingen, while on a regular patrol police were attacked by a 57-year-old

suspect with a burning liquid made of petrol. Police arrived to check on a woman who hadn't emptied her post box. The suspect threw a container full of that liquid after setting it ablaze on the police and the firefighters. An older woman's body, likely dead a week ago, was found. The intentions of the suspect are still unclear. ([“Germany: Apartment blast near Dusseldorf ‘targeted attack,’” Deutsche Welle](#), 12 May 2023)

Debate for funding refugees underway

On 09 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported a debate in Germany between the federal and the state governments on increasing financial support for asylum seekers and refugees. This year alone, Germany reported a 78 per cent increase in the influx of asylum seekers as the war in Ukraine persists. Finance Minister Christian Linder calculated that the federal government contributed EUR 29.84 billion last year (2022), and EUR 26.65 billion has been earmarked for this year. It is also paying EUR five billion in social benefits for people who have fled from other countries. The 16 states demand that the federal government increase its contributions as the number of refugees increases, which has decreased in recent years. The federal government does not appear keen on increasing funds; rather, it wants the state governments to take the initiative, as they receive huge shares of federal tax, and some of them have surpluses. The government is also planning to reduce the number of incoming refugees. Chancellor Olaf Scholz has suggested pushing refugees back to Moldova and Georgia by declaring them safe countries of origin. (Olive Pieper, [“Germany debates funding for refugees,” Deutsche Welle](#), 09 May 2023)

GREECE

President appoints a caretaker prime minister as talks for a coalition government fails

On 24 May, President Katerina Sakellariopoulou appointed Ioannis Sarmas, president of the Hellenic Court of Audit, as the caretaker Prime Minister ahead of election on 25 June. The incumbent Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis won the elections securing 40.1 per cent of the votes

but fell short of an outright majority. The two parties that followed the New Democracy party also refused to form the coalition. According to the Greek constitution, the president appoints a caretaker Prime Ministers if coalition talks fail. The newly elected Parliament will convene and will be dissolved a day later before the caretaker government takes over. (Lefteris Papadimas, "[Greece appoints caretaker PM ahead of June repeat election](#)," *Reuters*, 24 May 2023)

Asylum seekers' mistreatment confirmed as a new video emerges

On 19 May, *Euronews* reported on a video where asylum seekers were seen being left out in the middle of the sea by Greece's border patrol near the Lesbos island on 11 May. The video was shared by an anonymous activist to *The New York Times*. The video showed 12 asylum seekers arriving in a van and then transferred to a speedboat. They were seen boarding a Greek Coast Guard vessel and later abandoned in the Aegean Sea on an inflatable raft. The asylum seekers were rescued by Turkish Coast Guard. Greece has denied mistreating asylum seekers. The new evidence proves otherwise. (Giulia Carbonaro, "[Evidence emerger of asylum seekers' mistreatment in Greece, despite government's denial](#)," *Euronews*, 19 May 2023)

HUNGARY

Armed forces celebrate National Defence Day

On 21 May, the armed forces celebrated National Defence Day to commemorate its inception 175 years ago. Hungary has been celebrating National Defence Day on 21 May since 1993. A family day was also held for the five thousand soldiers and their families at the Capital Zoo and Botanical Garden. The Ministry of Defence also adopted two Persian leopards to support the cause of national defence at the initiative of social organizations. ("[Today's Hungarian Armed Forces + gallery, in the modern sense, was founded 175 years ago](#)," *Hungarian Nation*, 21 May 2023)

Protests against Status Law

On 19 May, thousands of Hungarians rallied against the Status Law which will eliminate the public servant status of teachers and teargassing of teenagers by the police in Budapest. The police teargassed the teenagers who according to them have pelted the police in a similar protest in early May 2023. The protesters called out the government's inefficiency to offer teachers, better working conditions and higher salaries. Critics called out the Status Law as Revenge Law against teachers' year-long protests. Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government said that the law will enhance the quality of education. (Boldizsar Gyori, "[Hungarians protest against new teachers' law, police violence](#)," *Reuters*, 20 May 2023)

Foreign Minister threatens to block EU military support over blacklisting of its bank

On 17 May, Hungary's Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto stated: "Hungary will veto the next tranche of EU military aid for Ukraine and any new sanctions against Russia unless Ukraine removes Hungarian bank OTP from its list of war sponsors." The allocation of 500 million euros from the European Peace Facility for military aid to Ukraine has been delayed by Hungary. While the initial demand was for funding guarantees for other regions, the primary reason for the delay is Ukraine's decision to blacklist OTP bank. (Boldizsar Gyori, "[Hungary to block EU military aid fund for Ukraine unless Kyiv takes OTP bank off blacklist](#)," *Reuters*, 17 May 2023)

Pope Francis' visit to Hungary

On 30 April, Hungary saw thousands of people gathering on the Danube banks to pray with Ukrainian refugees in Budapest for Pope Francis' final Mass, who is known for advocating compassion towards migrants. His visit to Hungary was primarily aimed at embracing the country's large Catholic population, but he also spoke about the importance of building a united Europe. The visual highlight of his visit was the Mass held in Kossuth Lajos Square, attended by an estimated 50,000 people, including Hungary's President and Prime Minister. In his speech, Pope spoke out against rising

nationalism and urged Hungarians to fight against individualism, indifference towards the underprivileged and foreign, and closed doors towards migrants and the poor.

([“Pope Francis urges unity in final Mass in Hungary,” Deutsche Welle, 01 May 2023](#))

ICELAND

Iceland joins NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence

On 16 May, Iceland became a member of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDOE) in Tallinn, Estonia.

CCDOE was established in 2008 to strengthen its members' capacity to face cyber defence and cybersecurity challenges. It consists of 39 members, including NATO countries and partner nations. Membership in the organisation was one of the objectives of the government's action plan on cyber security, published in 2022.

([“Iceland becomes a member of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence,” Government of Iceland, 19 May 2023](#))

ITALY

SpaceX and Unipol Gruppo to help rescue efforts in flood-hit region

On 20 May, SpaceX and Italy's Unipol Gruppo decided to rescue people affected by the floods. SpaceX will position its Starlink satellite to provide coverage of flood-hit Emilia-Romagna and Unipol Gruppo will make it accessible to rescuers, hospitals and the public. The floods caused due to a torrential downpour have killed 14 people and displaced 36,000 people. Rescue operations are being obstructed by the weather and phone lines are hindered. The new initiative will make rescuing easier.

(Gianluca Semararo, [“Elon Musk's SpaceX and Italy's Unipol join forces to help Italians hit by flooding,” Reuters, 21 May 2023](#))

Central Bank criticizes the new tax bill

On 18 May, Italy's central bank said that reducing the tax bands and reducing the tax burden while providing an extensive welfare system is unrealistic. In March 2023, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni approved a bill which will reduce the income tax bands from four to three and

eventually launch a flat tax model. The bill will supposedly increase investment and hiring rates and avoid tax evasion. While trade unions and opposition parties criticized the bill as advantageous to the rich, the government assured that the budget deficit will be lower. (Giuseppe Fonte, [“Italian government's flat tax plan may be unrealistic, central bank says,” Reuters, 18 May 2023](#))

Floods in the Emilia-Romagna region kills eight people

On 17 May, according to Vice President Irene Piola, eight people died due to the floods in the Emilia-Romagna region due to a torrential downpour. Thousands were evacuated. The Italian Civil Protection Minister Nello Musumeci said that the rainfall was twice the amount of the average rainfall in 36 hours. The Formula One race which was to be held in Imola is cancelled due to the floods. (Crispian Balmer, [“Eight dead and thousands evacuated as floods batter northern Italy,” Reuters, 17 May 2023](#))

Stellantis urges the government to renegotiate Brexit rules

On 17 May, *The Guardian* reported that Stellantis urged the government to renegotiate rules in the Brexit deal that otherwise could force it to shut its UK operations, putting thousands of jobs at risk. The company said they can no longer comply with the rule that 45 per cent of the parts by value should be sourced in the UK or EU by 2024. This means that the electric vans from the Ellesmere Port site will face tariffs of 10 per cent on their export to mainland Europe from 2024 because of the reduced supply of locally sourced parts. (Jasper Jolly and Mark Sweney, [“Vauxhall maker says Brexit deal must be renegotiated or it could shut UK plant,” The Guardian, 17 May 2023](#))

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni aims to reform the constitution

On 09 May, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni commenced meetings to reform the constitution to bring political stability. The 1948 Italian constitution was made to prevent dictators like Benito Mussolini from

acquiring power, but this has led to coalitions. Meloni aims to adopt a presidential system. She assured that reforms would be made regardless of the unanimous consensus from the opposition, the 5-Star Movement. Post the talks, opposition leader and former Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte said that a common position has not been reached regarding the reforms. (Angelo Amante, [“Meloni open talks on constitutional reform, long a mirage in Italy,” Reuters, 09 May 2023](#))

Demand for a more explicit apology from France over migration comments

On 07 May, in an interview with *RAI*, an Italian state-owned television, Italian Foreign Minister, Antonio Tajani stated that France’s apology for their comments over Rome’s poor handling of the migration crisis is unclear and inadequate. On 04 May, French Interior Minister, Gerald Darmanin accused Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni incapable to handle the migration crisis. Over this, Tajani called off his visit to Paris the same day. On 05 May, in an interview with *CNews* French government spokesperson, Olivier Veran said that Darmanian had no intentions to shun Italy. (Giselda Vagnoni, [“Italy calls for clearer apology from France over migration ‘insult’,” Reuters, 07 May 2023](#))

Police across Europe carry out raids against the ‘Ndrangheta mafia

On 03 May, as a part of Operation Eureka, 10 countries carried out raids against the Italian mafia, ‘Ndrangheta. This raid is said to be one of the largest against the drug mafia. According to *BBC* 25 million euros were seized. In Italy, 108 suspects were arrested, and thousands of tonnes of cocaine, heroin, and hashish were seized where 1000 officers were deployed. In Belgium, 13 arrests took place, and money laundering fronts were exposed. In Germany, 24 arrests took place. Belgian investigators were invited to San Luca, Calabria by some of the suspects who had helped them to infiltrate the most powerful mafia in the country. According to Europol, as a part of Operation Eureka, three-year long investigations in Italy, Germany,

Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Romania, Brazil, and Panama provided basic information on the operations of the mafia even during the COVID-19, said Europol. Sophisticated message decryption systems were used to understand the coded messages of the ‘Ndrangheta. According to an Italian prosecutor, Giovanni Melillo, drugs from South America were docked at European ports such as Antwerp, Rotterdam, Gioia Tauro, and dispensed across Europe. They worked with Chinese criminals to launder money. (Sofia Bettiza, [“Italy’s ‘Ndrangheta targeted in police raids across Europe,” BBC, 03 May 2023](#))

Government faces backlash from the opposition and unions over new labour decree

On 01 May, labour unions and the opposition criticized the government for introducing a new labor decree that increases tax cuts. The opposition claims that this move will exacerbate job insecurity. The government’s decision to debate the new decree has further angered unions who claimed they did not have enough time to propose any changes. Meloni defended the new decree, highlighting the effect of the tax cuts on labour, which will result in an increase of EUR 100 per month on average from July to December, with those earning up to EUR 25,000 benefiting from a seven per cent reduction and those earning up to EUR 35,000 benefiting from a six percent reduction. The government also plans to introduce the inclusion allowance for households with minors, disabled, or elderly individuals above 60, up to EUR 500 per month for 18 months. The opposition and labor unions have promised to protest against the new decree, calling for the introduction of a minimum wage and to end risky jobs. (Federica Pascale, [“Italy’s new labor decree promises less taxes but more precarity,” Euractiv, 02 May 2023](#))

Demographic Crisis: Italy's declining birth rate and emptying classrooms

On 01 May, *The Guardian* reported on Italy's declining birth rate resulting in fewer children attending schools, leading to concern about the future of communities.

Champorcher's infant school, which has been a vital part of the community for centuries, is now facing empty classrooms. According to Tuttoscuola, a news outlet specializing in education, infant schools in Italy have lost 30 percent of pupils over the last decade. Government figures forecast 1.4 million fewer students aged between three and 18 by 2034, and the birth rate has been declining since the 2008 financial crisis. Factors contributing to the decline include difficulty in finding stable jobs, insufficient childcare support, and a decline in the number of women of reproductive age. Various financial incentives have been offered to encourage people to start a family, but they have failed to yield results. Immigration is a sore point for the government, and they are trying to come up with ways to counter shrinking class sizes and keep schools open for as long as possible. (Angela Giuffrida, "[Vanishing like glaciers': plunging birthrate threatens Italian schools](#)," *The Guardian*, 01 May 2023)

KOSOVO

NATO to deploy 700 more troops in Kosovo to curb violence

On 30 May, *Reuters* reported that NATO will send 700 more troops in Kosovo and put another battalion on high alert. The unrest has intensified since ethnic Albanian mayors took office in the Serb-majority town of Zvecan after elections in April 2023. NATO already has around 4,000 soldiers currently deployed in Kosovo. Around 30 NATO peacekeeping soldiers defending three town halls in Zvecan were injured on 29 May and 52 protesters were wounded. EU Foreign Policy Chief urged Kosovo and Serbian leaders to find a way to de-escalate tensions by saying that Europe "cannot afford another conflict." (Ivana Sekularac, "[NATO to deploy more troops to Kosovo to curb violence](#)," *Reuters*, 30 May 2023)

NETHERLANDS

More than 1500 arrested in a protest organized by Extinction Rebellion

On 27 May, *BBC News* reported that about 1579 climate protesters were arrested by police for blocking A12, a major motorway

in Hague. Extinction Rebellion organized the protest and demanded an end to fossil fuel subsidies. According to the police, most protestors were released except 40 people, who would be prosecuted. Extinction Rebellion accused police of using water cannons, but the police refuted by saying that the protestors were allowed to move before firing water cannons. It is the seventh time Extinction Rebellion protestors were blocking A12, which is prohibited for protests under the new rules by the mayor. ("[Extinction Rebellion protest in Netherlands ends with 1,500 arrested](#)," *BBC News*, 27 May 2023)

NORTHERN IRELAND

DUP condemns Joe Biden over comments on Northern Ireland peace commitments

On 12 May, *The Guardian* reported that Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Member of Parliament Sammy Wilson criticized US President Joe Biden for his remarks about his recent visit to Northern Ireland, where Biden had expressed his intention to ensure that the UK keeps its Good Friday commitments. Wilson condemned Biden's comments, calling him "anti-British" and demanded that he show some respect to the UK. The DUP, which advocates Northern Ireland's inclusion in the UK, is boycotting the region's power-sharing government over disagreements on post-Brexit trade. The UK's Prime Minister spokesperson defended the trade protocol and said that protecting the Good Friday agreement was the UK's priority. ("[Unionists angry as Joe Biden says he visited Northern Ireland to 'make sure the Brits didn't screw around'](#)," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2023)

NORWAY

Taking lead in switching to emission-free cars

On 08 May 2023, *Euronews* reported that the usage of electric vehicles is surging in Europe. According to the European Automobile Manufacturer's Association, only 2 per 10,000 cars were fully electric in 2013, but in 2022, 76 per 10,000 cars were fully electric. According to *Euronews*, in 2022, there was a 58 per

cent increase in the usage of electric passenger cars compared to 2021. In 2022, there were three million fully electric cars as opposed to 52,000 in 2013. In 2022, the number of fully electric cars in Germany, the UK, France, and Norway exceeded 500,000 in each country. In 2021, Norway's 15.5 per cent of cars were fully electric while the EU's was only 0.8 per cent. In 2022, 79 per cent of car shares were fully electric out of the newly registered passenger cars in Norway, while it was 18, 17 and 13 per cent in Germany, UK, and France respectively. Norway's policies of strict pollution limits, and the sale of emission-free cars by 2025 push this swift change. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Norway offers tax incentives for motorists with electric vehicles and exempts them from paying registration tax, value-added, and motor fuel taxes.. ("[Norway, Germany, UK: Which European countries have the biggest share of electric cars?](#)", *Euronews*, 08 May 2023)

Norwegian government accused of delaying action on illegal wind turbines

On 01 May, *NewsinEnglish* reported that the Norwegian government caused frustration among the Sami population by failing to implement a plan to remove wind turbines on their grazing land as the Supreme Court ruled over two years ago that these turbines were illegal. Sami demonstrators occupied the ministry's lobby after 500 days had passed with no action against the turbines. Talks between the ministry and the Sami Parliament have broken down, as the state demanded more studies instead of concrete action to address ongoing violations of Sami's human rights. The disagreement concerns a new report that the state wants to compile over how wind turbines disturb reindeer grazing, and whether wind power generation and grazing can coexist. However, the Sami argue that this report is unnecessary, and accuse the ministry of engaging in delay tactics. The government is being accused of mounting a new effort to keep the turbines operating, instead of respecting the Supreme Court decision. Sami demonstrators occupied the ministry's lobby after 500 days had passed with no

action against the turbines. (Nina Berglund, "[State snubs Sami again, protests loom](#)," *NewsinEnglish*, 01 May 2023)

POLAND

Government to launch submarine purchase programme soon

On 24 May, Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak announced the government's plan to launch a submarine purchase programme in 2023 at the Defence24Day conference. According to the minister, the 'Orka' program will outline the procedure to purchase submarines and the transfer of necessary technologies. (Karol Badochal and Pawel Florckiewicz, "[Poland to launch submarine purchase programme soon - minister](#)," *Reuters*, 24 May 2023)

Delay in adopting the judicial reform bill

On 19 May, *Politico.eu* exposed Poland's divided Constitutional Tribunal which was supposed to adopt the judicial reform bill. Poland is yet to receive the COVID-19 recovery fund of EUR 36 billion from the EU. In order to receive that Poland has to adopt the judicial reform bill. In February 2023, Polish President Andrzej Duda sent the bill to Constitutional Tribunal to be reviewed. 11 judges are supposed to present at the meeting called by the tribunal's President Julia Przyłębska whose term has expired. Hence, six of the judges refuse to attend the meeting called by her. MPs have put forth a bill that reduces the number of judges from 11 to nine to review the judicial reforms bill. The parliament will decide on it from 24 to 26 May 2023. (Wojciech Kosci, "[A civil war in Poland's top court upends efforts to reconcile with Brussels](#)," *Politico.eu*, 19 May 2023)

Recommendation to rename Kaliningrad infuriates Russia

On 09 May, Poland's Committee on Standardisation of Geographical Names Outside the Republic of Poland suggested renaming Kaliningrad into Królewiec and the wider area of the exclave as Obwód Królewiecki in Poland. Kaliningrad is the strategically important exclave between Poland and Lithuania that houses the Russian Baltic Fleet and its only ice-free European ports. According to the

committee, the decision to discard the use of the "imposed name" is partly a result of Russia's Ukrainian invasion and its finding that Kaliningrad is unrelated to either the city or the region that instigated "emotional and negative" resonance in Poland. Kremlin has reacted furiously and called the decision "bordering on madness and "a hostile act," says *BBC News*. The committee's recommendation is not binding, but the committee expects the country to follow the decision. Poland's foreign ministry is positive about the name change. (Adam Easton and Tom Spender, "[Kaliningrad: Russia fury as Poland body recommends renaming exclave](#)," *BBC News*, 10 May 2023)

Russian jet intercepts Polish patrol over Black Sea

On 05 May, a Russian jet intercepted a Polish aircraft that was patrolling over the Black Sea for the EU border protection agency Frontex, according to the Poland Border Guard. The border authority released a statement saying that the Russian Su-35 made three attempts towards the Polish Turbolet L-410 at close aerial proximity. The resultant turbulence caused the crew of five Polish border guards to lose control of the plane and lose altitude. It was Romania's Ministry of National Defence that first reported the incident and the following day it condemned the aggressive and dangerous behaviour of the Russian Plane and added that it was totally unacceptable. The Ministry also said that this incident gives further evidence to the proactive approach of Russia in the Black Sea. ("[Poland Border Guard says patrol intercepted by Russian jet](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2023)

PORTUGAL

Parliament legalises euthanasia

On 12 May, Portugal legalized euthanasia for nationals and legal residents over the age of 18 who have incurable diseases and undergo lasting and unbearable pain. The Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa opposed the euthanasia bill four times and sent it back for constitutional review. He vetoed the bill as the definition of terminal condition was unclear. The new version authorizes euthanasia when

medically assisted suicide is impossible. The president has a week to promulgate the law. ("[Portuguese parliament legalises euthanasia after long battle](#)," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2023)

Officials seek help from Brussels as a severe drought spreads

On 10 May, *Reuters* reported that the drought had spread almost across almost all of mainland Portugal during April, quoting the Portuguese Institute of the Sea and the Atmosphere (IPMA). The officials sought help from the EU as the drought continues to threaten the farming sector, water reservoirs, and the country at large. According to the agency, April 2023 was the third-driest and fourth-warmest in the last 92 years in mainland Portugal, as 90 per cent of its territory is suffering from extreme drought, with the northeast and southern regions badly hit. It is predicted that the dry weather could continue for some time. (Patricia Vincente Rua, "[Severe drought spreads in Portugal, officials seek EU help](#)," *Reuters*, 10 May 2023)

RUSSIA

Wagner group is using social media for recruitment, claims Politico

On 30 May, *Politico*, claimed that, according to its research, the Wagner group has been using Twitter and Facebook to recruit "fresh blood" to aid its operations including in Ukraine. According to Logically, a UK-based research group focused on disinformation, job ads for Wagner have reached 120,000 views on both social media platforms over the last ten months. The job ads were in dozens of languages having details on fighting, IT, driving and medical positions, promising monthly salaries of RUB 240,000 with benefits including healthcare. Despite the uncertainty looming over the nature of their recruitment campaigns, incitement to violence and promotion of Russian aggression in Ukraine violates the terms of service of both Facebook and Twitter. Head of Research for Logically, Kyle Walter acknowledged that it is concerning that the job posts are circulating more and more despite designating the Wagner group as dangerous and terrifying. (Clothilde Goujard, "[Russia's](#)

[Wagner Group uses Twitter and Facebook to hunt new recruits](#)," *Politico.eu*, 30 May 2023)

Dmitry Medvedev sparks controversy on the Baltic States and Poland

On 16 May, Russia's former Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev sparked controversy by referring to the Baltic states as "our" provinces and labeling Poland as "temporarily occupied." Medvedev's comments came in response to French President Emmanuel Macron's statement that Russia had lost its geopolitical standing. He criticized NATO's presence in Poland and accused Europe of being subservient to the "perverted whims of Americans." The Ukraine conflict has increased inflation across Europe, impacting food and energy prices. However, a Eurobarometer poll has shown that most citizens of the EU still endorse the bloc's aid to Ukraine. (Joshua Askew, "[Russia's Dmitry Medvedev claims Baltic countries belong to Russia](#)," *Euronews*, 17 May 2023)

Black Sea Fleet tightens its defence at Sevastopol

On May 12, in an interview with *Reuters*, the Russian commander said that the Black Sea Fleet has been tightening its defences at Sevastopol in Crimea against the Ukrainian drone attacks since February 2022. (Kevin Liffey, "[Russia's Black Sea Fleet beefs up defences amid drone strikes - commander](#)," *Reuters*, 12 May 2023)

Russia denies meddling in Turkey's elections

On 13 May, *BBC News* reported that Russian Spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied Russia's interference in Turkey's presidential elections. According to *BBC News*, Turkey's opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu commented earlier that the Turkish government colluded with foreign hackers paid in Bitcoins. Kilicdaroglu in a tweet accused Russia of releasing fake content in Turkey. Peskov added that Russia values its relationship with Turkey and that Ankara's foreign policy decisions have been responsible. Kilicdaroglu in an interview with *BBC News* told that if he wins he will establish closer relations with the West rather than Russia. (Laura Gozzi, "[Turkey](#)

[election: Kremlin rejects accusations of interference](#)," *BBC News*, 13 May 2023)

Kremlin Spokesman dismisses ICC charges against Putin and Lvova-Belova

On 10 May, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, dismissed the International Criminal Court's charges against Russian President Vladimir Putin and children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, by responding: "The International Criminal Court is a puppet of the collective West and Russia finds it hard to imagine any country would dare enforce its writ against a sovereign nuclear power". Peskov also noted that Russia is a large nuclear power and it's unlikely anyone would act on the warrant against Putin. He criticized the ICC for targeting Bosnian Serbs in the past and stated: "Russia does not recognize the court." The ICC accused Putin and Lvova-Belova of overseeing the "unlawful transfer" of children from occupied areas of Ukraine, which Russia denies. ("[Kremlin not worried about ICC warrant for Putin - spokesman](#)," *RT News*, 10 May 2023)

Kremlin spokesman blames the West for Ukraine conflict

On 10 May, Russia's spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated: "The West forced Russia to launch its military operation in Ukraine by expanding NATO, engaging in deception, and refusing to treat Moscow as an equal partner." He further added that the US, EU, and NATO indirectly joined the conflict by supporting Ukraine. Peskov reminded that the West organized the 2014 coup in Ukraine and turned a blind eye to Kyiv's aggression against its own people. ("[West only interested in 'talking down' to Russia - Kremlin](#)," *RT News*, 11 May 2023)

Wagner's Prigozhin accuses Russian army unit of fleeing Bakhmut

On 09 May, in a video, Russia's Wagner group head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, accused a military unit of fleeing positions near Bakhmut in Ukraine, claiming the government was incapable of defending the country. Prigozhin released scathing videos attacking Russia's military leadership, questioning the Kremlin's ability to defend the country as Ukraine prepares for a spring offensive. He also threatened to pull his

fighters out of Bakhmut if he did not receive ammunition. ([“Wagner's Prigozhin says Russian army unit fled Bakhmut,”](#) *Le Monde*, 09 May 2023)

Putin justifies invasion of Ukraine by praising soldiers

On 09 May, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed troops fighting in Ukraine during Moscow's Victory Day parade. He justified his invasion of Ukraine and accused "Western globalist elites" of provoking conflicts. Putin said Russia's future rests on soldiers fighting in Ukraine, calling it a "real war" unleashed against Russia. The parade had 3,000 fewer soldiers and less military hardware. The EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said: "Russia had "dramatically failed" in the war," during a news conference in Kyiv, whereas German Chancellor Olaf Scholz urged support for Ukraine. (George Wright, [“Russia's future rests on Ukraine war, Putin tells Victory Day parade,”](#) *BBC News*, 09 May 2023)

Prigozhin's cryptic comment risks angering Kremlin over lack of ammunition in Ukraine

On 09 May, Wagner group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in an audio, referred to a figure he called "a happy Grandfather" who believed all was well with the military campaign, but failed to supply enough ammunition for his Wagner fighters in eastern Ukraine. The identity of the "Grandfather" was unclear. Analysts suggest that Prigozhin's recent volatile outbursts may be an attempt to deflect blame for lack of swift battlefield success. (Andrew Osborn, [“Mercenary chief makes cryptic but profane remark about Russian war leadership,”](#) *Reuters*, 09 May 2023)

Russian Ambassador calls for US to build respectful relations

On 10 May, TASS reported Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov stating: "The US administration must establish mutually respectful and pragmatic relations with Russia." During a reception dedicated to Victory Day, Antonov reminded the US of the brotherhood of arms with the Soviet Union during World War II,

and expressed hope for a change in Washington's hostile policies towards Moscow. ([“US should build relations with Russia on mutual respect, says Russian ambassador,”](#) TASS, 10 May 2023)

The Wagner group seeks more ammunition

On 07 May, *BBC News* reported that Russia's head of Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, claimed that Moscow had agreed to his demand for more ammunition to continue fighting in the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut. This comes days after he threatened to withdraw his men from the city and attacked his Russian partners in an expletive-filled rant filmed among Wagner troops' corpses. The alliance between Russian troops and Wagner fighters has been uneasy, with Prigozhin regularly criticizing Russian officials for a lack of front-line support. Although Prigozhin did not expressly reverse his pledge to withdraw troops from Bakhmut, he suggested that they would remain and act as they see fit. Ukrainian officials were skeptical about Prigozhin's claim to withdraw forces from Bakhmut, suspecting Wagner was moving mercenaries to capture the city before Russia's Victory Day on 02 May. However, the Kremlin has not commented on Prigozhin's latest statement. (Matt Murphy, [“Yevgeny Prigozhin: Wagner boss 'promised ammunition' after retreat threat,”](#) *BBC News*, 07 May 2023)

Russian men face criminal charges for avoiding war in Ukraine

On 01 May, *The New York Times* reported that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many Russian men have been charged with criminal offenses for refusing to fight in the war. One officer from Russia's Federal Guard Service, Major Mikhail Zhilin, responsible for protecting President Putin, disguised himself as a mushroom picker and sneaked across the southern border into Kazakhstan. He wore camouflage and carried a couple of small bottles of cognac to act drunk and disoriented if he encountered the Russian border patrol. According to the report: "Last year, 1,121 people were convicted of evading mandatory military conscription, compared

to an average of around 600 in other recent years. In addition, criminal cases have been initiated against more than 1,000 soldiers, mostly for abandoning their units." The penalties for being absent without leave were toughened, and the maximum sentence was doubled to 10 years. "Refusing an order to participate in combat carries a sentence of three to 10 years." Russian law theoretically allows for conscientious objectors to perform alternative service, but it is rarely granted. (Neil MacFarquhar, "[They Refused to Fight for Russia. The Law Did Not Treat Them Kindly](#)," *The New York Times*, 01 May 2023)

SERBIA

Thousands gather at the "Serbia of Hope" in support of President Aleksandar Vucic

On 26 May, *Reuters* reported that thousands hailing from Serbia, neighbouring Bosnia and North Macedonia gathered in Belgrade for the "Serbia of Hope" rally in support of President Aleksandar Vucic. The rally comes after anti-government protests fueled against the President over two mass shootings that killed 18 people in early May 2023. The protestors, supported by the opposition parties, blamed the government led by Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party's failure to handle media that promote violence and eliminate criminal elements in the society. This instigated Vucic and his supporters to rally to showcase their power. He called his supporters to observe silence for a minute for the victims of the mass shooting and told them that he would resign as the party head on 27 May. (Ivana Sekularac and Marguerita Choy, "[Tens of thousands gather in Serbia in Vucic's show of power](#)," *Reuters*, 26 May 2023)

Protests against gun violence

On 19 May, thousands of protesters gathered in Belgrade against gun violence. This is the third protest this month following two mass shootings that killed 18 people. Opposition parties accuse President Aleksandar Vucic's government's failure to stop the broadcasting of violent content. The protesters are calling for the resignation of the interior minister and the head of intelligence. On the same day, the opposition members left the parliament's

special session accusing the ruling party of silencing the protesters. Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic admitted that several complaints have been filed against the gun shooter but now actions have not been taken during the session. Vucic in a counter rally in Pancevo called out the opposition for using the protests for their self-promotion. (Ivana Sekularac, "[Tens of thousands gather in Belgrade protest over mass shootings](#)," *Reuters*, 20 May 2023; "[Serbia: Tens of thousands protest against gun violence](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 May 2023)

Nearly, 3000 guns surrendered in an amnesty

On 10 May, Serbian President Aleksander Vucic said that 3000 illegal weapons were surrendered in the first two days of the gun amnesty, which began on 08 May. Under the amnesty, people can surrender legal and illegal weapons, ammunition and ordnance without any questions asked. The amnesty comes following the shooting by a 13-year-old boy who killed nine people and the mass shootings by a man in two villages which killed 14 people. Vucic said additional checks of registered gun owners and shooting ranges will be carried out. The stationing of police outside schools and longer jail terms for illegal possession of weapons will be established. (Aleksander Vasovic, "[Serbians surrender over 3000 pieces of weapons after mass shootings](#)," *Reuters*, 11 May 2023)

Protests against gun violence in Belgrade

On 09 May, *BBC News* reported on Belgrade's protest against gun violence where tens of thousands of Serbs joined. The protesters demanded the resignation of top government officials including the Interior Minister and the head of Serbia's intelligence agency. The protests followed last week's shootings where 17 people killed including eight school children. The Education Minister Branko Ruzic resigned on 07 May following the protests. On 08 May, Serbian President Aleksander Vucic announced an amnesty for 30 days for the public to surrender illegal weapons without any questions asked. The Serbian police reported that 1500 guns were surrendered

on the first day. (Antoinette Radford, [“Serbia shootings: Tens of thousands join protests,”](#) *BBC News*, 09 May 2023)

SLOVAKIA

Pro-Western caretaker PM resigns

On 07 May, Slovakia's pro-western caretaker Prime Minister, Eduard Heger, resigned ahead of an upcoming election likely to favor the Moscow-friendly Smer-SD party. Heger stepped down two days after the Foreign Minister quit his cabinet. Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová has named central bank Deputy Governor Ludovit Odor to lead a technocratic government until the scheduled election in September. Heger, elected in 2021, has been running a caretaker government since September 2022, when the ruling coalition lost its majority over disagreements about energy costs. Polls have indicated that the Smer-SD party, led by former Prime Minister Robert Fico, is favorable to lead Slovakia. Fico has stated that he would end Slovakia's arms supply to Ukraine if elected to lead the next government. (Stuart Lau, [“Slovak caretaker PM quits, adding momentum to pro-Russia rival,”](#) *Politico*, 07 May 2023)

SPAIN

Socialists suffer heavy losses against conservatives in the local elections

On 28 May, in the local elections, Socialists suffered heavy losses against the Conservative People's Party (PP), with around 95 per cent of the votes counted. According to the results, in the 12 regions where elections are held, only three would retain the Socialist dominance in narrow margins, with the rest going to the conservatives. The gains of the PP indicate that the current left-wing ruling coalition led by Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) could be removed if the results are replicated in the national elections in December 2023. The main setback for the Socialists came from their losses in Valencia, Aragon and Balearic Island regions and the Southwestern region of Extremadura, one of the most important Socialist fiefdoms. Leadership in the Canary Islands will be decided by pacts, but PSOE has little chance to retain its hold. The

counting also reflects the return of the two-party system dominated by PSOE and PP after a decade of greater involvement by smaller parties, which have largely lost their seats to the PP. (Jessica Jones, [“Spain's conservative PP elbows Socialists out in regional elections,”](#) *Reuters*, 28 May 2023)

SWEDEN

Turkey condemns the projection of PKK flag in the parliament

On 30 May, Turkey's spokesperson Fahrettin Altun condemned the projection of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) flag in Sweden's parliament. The incident happened parallel to Turkey's elections on 28 May. The video was released by a Swedish-based Rojava Committee, which supports PKK. The video contained a message to release PKK's founder Abdullah Ocalan and displayed a burning puppet of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The spokesperson called for the prosecution of the perpetrators. Turkish deems the PKK a terrorist and the incident comes at a crucial time where Turkey is blocking Stockholm's accession to NATO. ([“Turkey wants action from NATO hopeful Sweden over Kurdish political stunt,”](#) *Euronews*, 30 May 2023)

“Time is now to finalise Sweden's accession” says US Secretary of State

On 31 May, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Turkey to drop its objections and back Sweden's accession to NATO. Sweden and Finland sought NATO membership when Russia began the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Finland joined NATO in April 2023. Sweden's accession is still pending due to objections from Hungary and Turkey. Blinken said: “From the perspective of the United States, the time is now to finalise Sweden's accession.” He also affirmed US's position that Ankara should be provided with upgraded F-16 jets “as soon as possible.” ([“US urges Turkey to back Sweden's NATO bid,”](#) *Euronews*, 31 May 2023)

SWITZERLAND

Silence dominates as Switzerland recovers from the fall of Credit Suisse, reports Politico

On 26 May, *Politico* commented, "the informal code of silence dominates," on the aftermath of the collapse of Credit Suisse in March had UBS did not intervene to take it over. According to *Politico.eu*, there is a reason for this silence. The nation known for its utmost discretion in its role as banker to the rich is still trying to figure out what went wrong and what to do with its customers. Public opinion is against the Swiss politicians, and the elections are around the corner. The Parliament rejected the government's request to approve an emergency credit line following the takeover, exerting its authority. It will decide in June to decide on whether to launch a parliamentary commission to summon those involved for questioning. The Swiss authorities are under tough scrutiny over why they did not step in earlier even though they prevented the bank's collapse. (Hannah Brenton, "[Silence speaks volumes as Switzerland still reels from bank meltdown](#)," *Politico.eu*, 26 May 2023)

UBS announces leadership team for Credit Suisse takeover and plans for business evaluation

On 09 May, the UBS Group announced that CEO of Credit Suisse, Ulrich Koerner, will stay on as part of the new leadership team of the combined group after the takeover. The current finance chief of UBS's core wealth management business, Todd Tuckner, will become the group's new chief financial officer, succeeding Sarah Youngwood, who will step down after the deal closes. Koerner will be responsible for Credit Suisse's operational continuity and client focus while supporting its integration. UBS will evaluate all options for Credit Suisse's Swiss business, including a sale or IPO of Credit Suisse's domestic unit, and will make a decision by the end of the summer. Following the legal closing of the transaction, UBS will manage two separate parent companies throughout the integration process. The bank expects the process to take three to four years. (Oliver

Hirt and Tomasz Janowski, "[UBS replaces CFO, keeps Credit Suisse's Koerner in top team](#)," *Reuters*, 09 May 2023)

Military holds the largest drill in three decades

On 09 May, according to *Reuters*, Switzerland held one of the largest military drills called the LUX 23 which involved 4000 troops across four cantons over nine days. On 04 May, Swiss infantry soldiers were found taking part in an exercise at Les Pradières shooting range with live ammunition and grenades. The LUX 23 drills have been planned since 2021. The timing of the drill has aligned with the Ukrainian war where the political factions think that this will infringe their neutrality. Also, pressure on Bern is growing to end its ban on exports of weapons to the war zones. The drill ensures Switzerland's armed neutrality while establishing its role in the European defence. (Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber and Denis Balibouse, "[Switzerland holds military drills, its role in European defence in focus](#)," *Reuters*, 09 May 2023)

THE UK

Prime Minister to meet US President in Washington

On 30 May, *Reuters* reported that UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will meet US President Joe Biden in Washington on 07 and 08 June 2023 on his first state visit. Sunak will meet with members of Congress, and US business leaders. Sunak will discuss increasing economic and trade cooperation and military support to Ukraine. Both leaders are to discuss the political situation in Northern Ireland. ("Andrew Macaskill, "[Rishi Sunak to visit Washington next week for talks with Biden](#)," *Reuters*, 31 May 2023)

First AUKUS artificial intelligence and autonomy trial held

On 26 May, UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory hosted the first-ever AUKUS artificial intelligence and autonomy trial. The initial joint deployment had a collaboration of Australian, UK and US AI-enabled assets detecting and tracking military targets in a representative environment in real time. It also included

live training of models in flight and the interchange of AI models between AUKUS nations. The collaboration is aimed at rapidly transforming these technologies into military capabilities. The trial was organized under AUKUS Advanced Capabilities Pillar, known as Pillar 2, a trilateral initiative to pursue cutting-edge technologies and capabilities to promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. (Ministry of Defence and Defence Science and Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, "[World first as UK hosts inaugural AUKUS AI and autonomy trial](#)", GOV.UK, 26 May 2023)

Leaving the EU cost GBP 6.95 billion in food cost

On 24 May, *The Guardian* reported that according to the London School of Economics (LSE), the trade barriers due to Brexit has cost GBP 6.95 billion to the households. The trade barriers have increased the food bills by GBP 210. Since 2019, the cost of food has increased 25 per cent, in the absence of Brexit it must have been only 17 per cent, says *The Guardian*. According to the Office for National Statistics, food inflation is 19 per cent since 2022. The WHO urged the UK government to reduce the trade barriers to deal with inflation. (Phillip Inman, "[Brexit food trade barriers have cost UK households £7bn, report finds](#)," *The Guardian*, 24 May 2023)

Government announces EUR 39 million to research antimicrobial resistance

On 22 May, the UK government announced a Global AMR Innovation Fund (GAMRIF) of EUR 39 million for antimicrobial resistance (AMR) research. EUR 25 million will be used to develop antibiotics and vaccines. GARIF aims to establish a Global Health Framework to fight against global health threats. The Framework will ensure global health security, revise global health governance, and strengthen global health systems. The Framework will promulgate the UK's role as a leader in the field of science and technology. Through this funding, EUR 24 million will be provided to CARB-X, a global AMR research initiative over a period of four years. EUR 10 million will be given to Canada's International

Research Centre (IRDC) over a period of four years. The initiative will be launched by UK's Health Minister Will Quince in the World Health Assembly for the year 2023-2025. ("[£39 million for AMR research as UK launches Global Health Framework](#)," GOV.UK, 22 May 2023)

Pressure mounts on the Prime Minister to probe Braverman for breaking ministerial code

On 21 May, *The Guardian* reported that pressure mounts on Rishi Sunak to probe Home Secretary Suella Braverman for breaching the Ministerial code, as she was found asking the Home Office civil servants for special treatment after being caught speeding. Sunak is en route to the UK after the G7 summit in Japan. He will have to decide quickly whether to investigate or not. Meanwhile, a senior Tory MP commented that there is "no appetite" in NO 10 to defend her. Braverman is due to appear before MPs' Home Office questions on Monday, and the MPs are not up for her survival. Rishi Sunak, at the press conference towards the end of the G7 Summit, evaded answering the questions saying he had full confidence in her. The secretary was fired once earlier for breaking the code under Liz Truss's government but was later reappointed by Sunak after six days. ("[Pippa Crerar, 'Sunak under pressure to launch ethics inquiry over Braverman speeding row'](#)," *The Guardian*, 21 May 2023)

Spring Storm 23: Royal Marines demonstrate flexibility and capability in exercise

On 22 May, the UK Ministry of Defence said in its press release that members of 45 Commando maneuvered their HMS Albion in a planned beach raid scenario as part of Exercise Spring Storm 23. Exercise Spring Storm 23 is the largest annual military exercise conducted by Estonia for NATO forces. The commanding officer of HMS Albion commented that the exercise was a great proving ground to demonstrate the ship's flexibility and ability to cooperate with the regional partners in times of need. The exercise allowed Royal Marines to practice an amphibious deployment,

infiltrating hostile territory to secure information, confuse the enemy or strike a high-value target. In addition, more than 1500 UK troops are currently deployed in Estonia for the exercise. ([“Royal Marines conduct beach raid in Estonia during NATO exercise,” Ministry of Defence, 22 May 2023](#))

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly to visit Chile

On 19 May, the government announced that Foreign Secretary James Cleverly will visit Chile on 22 May. He will also meet Chilean Foreign Minister Alberto van Klaveren to commemorate 200 years of diplomatic relations. This visit is part of a Latin America and Caribbean tour. The delegated will discuss bilateral trade relations, climate change and sustainability. The Foreign Secretary will commence a campaign to celebrate Great Britain’s first Consul General in Chile 200 years ago. ([“Foreign Secretary James Cleverly visits Chile,” GOV.UK, 19 May 2023](#))

UK to invest in semiconductor design and research

On 19 May, Britain announced a strategic investment in the semiconductor sector in order to strengthen the domestic industry and supply chains. The newly formed Department of Science, Innovation and Technology will be focusing on semiconductor design and research. One billion pounds were announced, out of which 200 million will be invested in 2023 to 2025, the rest during the next decade. During the G7 meeting, a “semiconductor partnership” was agreed to be launched between Japan and Britain similar to the one Britain has with South Korea. The investment for chip manufacturing will be announced by autumn. Similar to US chip subsidies and European Union investments in the sector, these measures were taken in order to protect the manufacturing sector from supply chain disruptions in case of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. (Alistair Smout and Sachin Ravikumar, [“UK plans 1 bln pounds of semiconductor investment in new strategy”](#), Reuters, 18 May 2023)

Ford, JLR joins Stellantis to demand a renegotiation of the Brexit deal

On 17 May, Ford, Jaguar Land Rover, and Stellantis are urging the UK government to reexamine the regulations regarding the origin of parts in the Brexit agreement. This is necessary to prevent the current risks faced by the British automotive sector. The current post-Brexit rules require 40 per cent of electric vehicle parts to be sourced in the UK or EU if they are to be sold on the other side of the channel without a 10 per cent tariff. The proportion is likely to rise to 45 per cent in 2024 as electric vehicle batteries are still imported from Asia. According to Stellantis, the tariffs would make vehicles manufactured in the country and the EU fall foul of the rules. The company would also be forced to shut down some of its factories in the UK, putting at risk about 800,000 jobs. Ford added that this rule would add unnecessary costs for customers who want to go green. JLR said that the rules are unrealistic and counterproductive and called for hasty action to delay the rules. (Jasper Jolly and Mark Sweney, [“Ford, Vauxhall owner and JLR call for UK to renegotiate Brexit deal,” The Guardian, 17 May 2023](#))

UK faces criticism for removing housing protections for asylum seekers

On 16 May, *The Guardian* reported that the UK has introduced new rules to remove housing protections for asylum seekers, prompting concerns of cramped and unsafe conditions. Proposed changes would exempt landlords from regulations, including safety and room size requirements, raising fears of overcrowding. UK’s home secretary, Suella Braverman, and the housing secretary, Michael Gove, have put forward the plans, which face a parliamentary vote. If approved, landlords in England and Wales would no longer need to register with local authorities, and asylum seekers could be housed for up to two years without a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) license. Critics warn that without houses in multiple occupation (HMO) licenses, already vulnerable individuals may be forced into inadequate living spaces. The move comes as the government seeks to reduce the number of asylum seekers housed in hotels, where unsanitary conditions and disease

outbreaks have occurred. (Kiran Stacey, "[Asylum seekers in England and Wales to lose basic protections in move to cut hotel use.](#)" *The Guardian*, 16 May 2023)

Increase in Bank of England's interest rate affects UK labor market

On 16 May, *The Guardian* reported that hikes in interest rates of Bank of England are influencing businesses' hiring decisions, leading to a decrease in job vacancies. Additionally, the high cost of living is compelling more individuals to reenter the workforce. Recent labor data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveals a drop of 55,000 vacancies and a decrease of 156,000 inactive workers in the three months leading up to April. His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) figures also indicate a reduction of 136,000 PAYE employees between March and April, marking the first decline since February 2021. (Phillip Inman, "[UK interest rate rises are taking the labor market off the boil.](#)" *The Guardian*, 16 May 2023)

Lawmakers to investigate rising food price inflation

On 12 May, *Reuters* reported that food price inflation is rising at alarming rates in the UK since the 1970s in 2023. This has prompted British lawmakers to launch a probe to analyze the country's food supply chain to understand why the inflation is increasing in 2023. The cross-party Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee of the House of Commons said that it would examine how profits are shared from "farm to fork," the level of regulation, and the impact of external actors on the supply chain. (James Davey, "[With UK food price inflation at 46-year high, lawmakers launch probe.](#)" *Reuters*, 12 May 2023)

Government slows the deadline to retain EU laws

On 10 May, the UK government disposed of the December 2023 deadline to replace or remove EU laws. Businesses have complained that the process causes regulatory problems. Conservative Party MPs and the members of the House of Lords called out for an extended timetable for the Retained EU Law Bill. The bill contained a

'sunset clause' put forth by former Business Secretary Jacob Rees-Mogg which was supposed to remove EU laws not reviewed by the government. Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch had amended the bill and only some laws will be put under the sunset clause. According to Badenoch's interview with *Telegraph*, a slowed timetable will prevent the civil service from choosing laws that have to be preserved by the deadline but to reform the laws. (Stefan Boscia, "[UK ditches deadline for Brexit bonfire of EU laws after business backlash.](#)" *Politico.eu*, 10 May 2023)

Pro-Brexit areas swing towards the Labour Party in municipal elections

On 04 May, municipal elections were held across the UK in which the Labour Party won in pro-Brexit areas in Ramsgate Harbour in the Thanet council. The region was the UK Independent Party (UKIP) and its successor, Brexit Party and later, the Conservatives' heartland. The people who voted for 'leave' in Brexit are now supporting the Labour Party. The support for the party has grown 14 per cent compared to 2019. According to *The Economist*, middle-class emigres who arrived in Ramsgate during the pandemic support the Labour Party. The UKIP councillors have lost in all the councils, Reform UK won six councils showing the Tories' support but the swing towards the Labour Party shows otherwise. ("[Labour makes striking gains in the heartland of Brexit.](#)" *The Economist*, 11 May 2023)

Second-time strike of ambulance staff to put further pressure on the government and NHS

On 09 May, a second-time strike erupted in the southeast of England as ambulance staff employed by two ambulance trusts rejected the government's pay offer of a lump sum cash payment for 2022 to 2023 and a below-inflation increase of five per cent for 2023 to 2024. They are part of the Unite trade Union, and its general secretary, Sharon Graham, said that the aim of this strike is to exert greater pressure on the government to reopen negotiations and make a proper wage offer to the NHS workers. Unite is one of the unions that

failed to back the deal, and this strike is happening despite the NHS staff council, covering the other 12 unions that voted to accept the pay deal. (Rachel Hall, "[NHS disruption warning as ambulance staff strike in south-east England](#)," *The Guardian*, 09 May 2023)

Implications of Liz Truss's upcoming visit to Taiwan next week

On 09 May, *The Guardian* reported Liz Truss's upcoming visit to Taiwan next week. She is expected to deliver a speech at an event organized by the think tank Prospect Foundation. The Foundation said the title of the speech would be, "Taiwan: on the frontline of freedom and democracy." According to *The Guardian*, this could potentially upset the UK's careful approach to China relations. Truss said that she is looking forward to showing solidarity with the Taiwanese people against the increasingly aggressive behaviour from Beijing. This follows the uproar and strong opposition from Beijing following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022 and Truss' recent speeches on China in Tokyo and Washington, DC. She is also expected to meet other senior members of the Taiwanese government. The UK Foreign Office is aware of the meeting, and a spokesperson stated that they would not interfere with the travel plans of a private citizen who is not a member of the government. (Benn Quinn, Kiran Stacey, and Helen Davidson, "[Liz Truss to visit Taiwan and give speech that could upset UK's China strategy](#)," *The Guardian*, 09 May 2023)

Police release the anti-monarchist after the coronation

On 07 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported that UK's anti-monarchy group Republic's leader, Graham Smith, who was recently detained by the police ahead of King Charles III's coronation, was released recently. The police believed the activists would try to disrupt the procession, while Smith denied any plans to sabotage the event. The UK government had passed new powers to crack down on direct action groups, allowing the police to detain protesters. ("[UK anti-monarchists released from custody after coronation](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2023)

Prince William pays tribute to King Charles

On 07 May, Prince William paid tribute to his late grandfather, King Charles, the day after the Coronation, saying that Queen Elizabeth II would be proud of him. The Coronation concert at Windsor Castle was attended by the King and Queen Camilla and other members of the Royal Family. The crowd of 20,000 people got their tickets in a public ballot and enjoyed performances from stars such as Katy Perry and Take That. The concert also featured spoken word pieces and video cameos from various celebrities. The Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Ballet, Royal College of Art, Royal College of Music and the Royal Opera also participated in the show. A multi-location drone show was also staged, featuring 1,000 drones in formation. (Lauren Turner & Sean Coughlan, "[Coronation concert: William says he is 'so proud' of his father King Charles](#)," *BBC News*, 08 May 2023)

Over a million NHS staff in England to receive five per cent pay rise

On 03 May, *BBC News* reported that over one million NHS staff in England will receive a five per cent pay increase and a one-time payment of at least GBP 1,655, after 14 health unions agreed to the deal proposed by the government in March. The agreement covers all NHS staff except doctors and dentists. The offer was accepted by a majority of unions, including Unison and the GMB, but the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) rejected the deal and has threatened further strike action. The British Medical Association (BMA) also met with the Health Secretary to discuss junior doctors' pay, but the two sides have not reached an agreement. (Nick Triggle, "[NHS pay deal signed off for one million staff](#)," *BBC News*, 03 May 2023)

NHS staff in England expected to receive five percent pay increase

On 02 May, *BBC News* reported that the National Health Service (NHS) staff in England are expected to receive their five percent pay increase after a meeting between government officials and 14 NHS

unions representing all staff except doctors and dentists, expected to be held on 02 May. The unions will declare whether the majority of the workforce are in favor of the deal or not. Unite is the only major union to reject the deal, while the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) will need to hold another strike ballot of its members after its six-month mandate expired on 01 May. England's Health Secretary Steve Barclay has said the five percent pay offer is the government's "best and final offer," while the British Medical Association (BMA) will also be meeting with Barclay to discuss the junior doctors' pay dispute, seeking an increase of 35 percent to cover up for 15 years of increase in below-inflation wage. (Nick Triggle, "[Government on brink of giving NHS staff 5% pay rise](#)," *BBC News*, 02 May 2023)

TURKEY

Second round of elections on 28 May

On 27 May, the opposition Republican People's Party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu has so far been anti-migrant and has pledged to send back millions of refugees. The ruling Justice and Development Party leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan has accused Kilicdaroglu of colluding with the terrorist, Kurdish Workers' Party. He has affirmed Kilicdaroglu's rule will be equivalent to terrorist rule. As a last measure, Kilicdaroglu took part in a YouTube live session for four hours. Kilicdaroglu is targeting youth who didn't vote in the first round of the election. With the third-place contender Sinan Ogan of ATA Alliance endorsing Erdogan and Victory Party's leader Umit Ozdag endorsing Kilicdaroglu, elections on 28 May will decide the fate of Turkey for the next five years. (Paul Kirby, "[Turkish election: Erdogan and Kemal Kilicdaroglu clash in desperate race for votes](#)," *BBC News*, 27 May 2023)

Victory Party endorses the opposition party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu

On 24 May, Victory Party leader Umit Ozdag endorsed the opposition, Republican People's Party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu. Ozdag said that he would send back 13 million asylum seekers and migrants and hence he supports Kilicdaroglu who is anti-

migrant. Kilicdaroglu's election campaigning was focused on the expulsion of refugees from Turkey. Ozdag's endorsement of CHP comes as a response to Sinan Ogan, the third-place contender's endorsement of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). ("[Turkey election: Anti-migration leader backs Erdogan rival](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 May 2023)

Kilicdaroglu slammed for accusing Russia of meddling in presidential elections

On 22 May, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu slammed Kemal Kilicdaroglu for accusing Russia of meddling in the first phase of the Presidential elections. He gave no proof or details to substantiate his accusation, while Kremlin denied it outright. Cavusoglu said: "Mr Kilicdaroglu has been threatening Russia. It is wrong to undermine our ties with a country like that." He also asked him to "be more serious" and refrain from hurling baseless accusations at other countries based on his intuitions. ("[Top Turkish Diplomat Slams Kilicdaroglu Over Russia Meddling Claims](#)," *Sputnik*, 22 May 2023)

Kemal Kilicdaroglu vows to send back refugees

On 18 May, Turkish opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu said that he will send back all the refugees in Turkey if he becomes the president in an interview. He said ten million refugees are to come and they will indulge in criminal activities such as looting. Earlier Kilicdaroglu's election campaigning focused on political reforms, Turkey's EU membership bid, and closer ties with the West. Ahead of the second round of the election on 21 May, he criticized Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for allowing ten million refugees into Turkey and for jeopardising Turkish citizenship. ("[Erdogan's rival pledges to expel 'all refugees' from Türkiye](#)," *RT*, 18 May 2023)

Last ship leaves Ukraine under the grain deal agreed till May

On 17 May, according to the UN, the last ship, DSM Capella carrying 30,000 tonnes of

corn left the Chornomorsk port to Turkey. The deal ends on 18 May. Russia is still waiting to revive the deal unless its demands are met. Moscow says that it has obstacles in grain and fertilisers and exports but the UN has agreed to help with its agricultural shipments in 2022. The Black Sea Grain deal was signed in July 2022 for a period of 120 days and was extended up to another 120 days. In March 2018, Moscow shortened the extension to 60 days. (Michelle Nichols, "[Last ship leaves Ukraine as fate of Black Sea grain deal in Russia's hands](#)," *Reuters*, 17 May 2023)

Supreme election council announces the contenders for the second round of elections

On 16 May, according to *BBC News*, the supreme election council announced the contenders for the presidential election that is to be held on 28 May. On 14 May, in the first round of elections, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan secured 49.51 per cent. The opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu secured 44.88 per cent. The third opposition leader Sinan Ogan secured 5.17 per cent and his supporters are likely to vote for the opposition. The Erdogan-led Justice and Development Party (AKP) party won 267 seats in the parliament. The Kilicdaroglu-led opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP) won 169 seats in the first round of elections. (Paul Kirby, "[Turkey's presidential race to be decided in run-off](#)," *BBC News*, 16 May 2023)

Turkish presidential runoff emerges as Erdogan faces opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu

On 16 May, *U.S. News* published an analysis on Turkey's elections. It reported that Turkey is set for a presidential runoff election on May 28, as no candidate secured the required majority in the first round. Despite declining popularity, Erdoğan maintains support through his coalition with smaller parties. Factors contributing to his success include prioritizing national security over economic challenges, as well as voter concerns about coalition governments and opposition leadership. Erdoğan's victory would solidify his

authoritarian governance and weaken the opposition further. The outcome will also impact local elections in March 2024, potentially expanding AKP's control over major municipalities. (Salih Yasun, "[How Erdoğan Defied the Polls in Turkey's Presidential Election](#)," *U.S. News*, 16 May 2023)

Black Sea grain deal nears extension

On 12 May, according to *Reuters*, Turkey's Defence minister Hulusi Akar said that the Black Sea grain pact is nearing an extension. In July 2022, the UN and Turkey brokered the pact with Ukraine and Russia amid a global food crisis. On 11 May, the parties to the pact discussed its extensions, while Russia announced that it would quit the pact on 18 May due to obstacles in its grain and fertilizers exports. (Mert Ozkan, "[Turkey says Black Sea grain deal extension nearing](#)," *Reuters*, 12 May 2023)

Homeland Party's presidential candidate withdraws

On 11 May, Homeland Party's presidential candidate, Muharrem Ince, withdrew his candidacy. The withdrawal of Ince is advantageous for the National Alliance coalition under Kemal Kilicdaroglu as Ince was a strong contender. According to *Deutsche Welle*, Kilicdaroglu was leading in polls but was unable to cross the 50 per cent threshold to win the elections in the first round. Ince's withdrawal could help Kilicdaroglu win in the first round. According to Metropoll, 49 per cent of Ince's support will shift towards Kilicdaroglu while 22 per cent will shift towards Erdogan. ("[Turkey election candidate drops out, putting Erdogan at risk](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 11 May 2023)

High voter turnout in Germany

On 27 April, overseas voting began for the presidential elections. On 10 May, overseas ballots were flown back to Turkey. The overseas ballot was introduced by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2014. Turks in Germany turn out in record high numbers to cast vote in the presidential elections. According to the Turkish ambassador to Germany Basar Sen's interview with *BR24*, over 50 per cent have

voted, four per cent higher than in the 2018 elections. According to the Republican People's Party's Chairman of the Berlin branch, there was a 25 per cent increase in voter turnout in Berlin. (Gabriel Rinaldi and Peter Wilke, "[Record number of Turks vote in Germany in 'fateful election' for Erdogan](#)," *Politico.eu*, 10 May 2023)

Reuters interviews Antakya locals: Support for Erdogan rises

On 09 May, *Reuters* interviewed the locals in Antakya and earthquake-hit regions in Southern Turkey, which is Turkish President Tayyip Recep Erdogan's stronghold. Despite the slow response of the government to the earthquake, locals show support for Erdogan. According to Metropoll, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party's (AKP) support levels were 33 per cent during February 2023, but in April 2023 it was 40 per cent. The locals are confident that Erdogan will rebuild quake-hit areas as promised. According to MAK's (Mak Survey and Consultancy) polls, Erdogan has 45.4 per cent support and the opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu has over 50 per cent support. The survey shows that Kilicdaroglu is favourable to winning the first round of elections. According to Seda Demiralp, international relations chair at Isik University, the earthquake will have a minimal impact on the elections unlike an economic crisis, and hence support for Erdogan is significantly rising. (Daren Butler and Bulent Usta, "[Erdogan again? Amid rubble of Turkey's quake, voters demand to be heard](#)," *Reuters*, 10 May 2023)

Campaigning ruckus amid presidential elections

On 07 May, Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu was attacked with stones while he was campaigning for the Republican People Party at Erzurum. Imamoglu said about nine people were injured. He will file a complaint against Erzurum's governor and the police chief for allowing the violence. Imamoglu's office reported that the mayor was forced to retreat for the public's safety. They also released pictures of the shattered windows of the campaign bus. Turkish Interior Minister, Suleyman Soyulu, a senior official of Erdogan's Justice

and Development Party, called Imamoglu, a provocateur and accused him of provoking violence. Meanwhile, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged to succeed against the opposition while campaigning. He ensured that the opposition's pro-LGBT interests will be suppressed. He accused the opposition leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu of colluding with the Kurdistan Worker's Party which Turkey, the US, and the EU named as terrorists. The opposition has denied the claims. ("[Turkey elections: Opposition campaign bus pelted with stones](#)", *DW*, 08 May 2023)

UKRAINE

Russia and Ukraine neglect to protect the Zaporizhzhia plant says IAEA Director General

On 30 May, the Director General of IAEA Rafael Grossi accused Russia and Ukraine of not following the principles to protect the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in the UN Security Council. The principles comprise no attack on or from the plant, and no heavy weapons, artillery systems and munitions, tanks and military personnel should be harboured in the plant. He also announced that off-site power to be provided to the plant. According to the Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia, Russia is following the same. The Ukrainian Ambassador to the UN Sergiy Kyslytsya called for the "demilitarization and deoccupation" of the power plant. (Daphne Psaedakis and Arshad Mohammed, "[Russia, Ukraine fail to embrace IAEA plan to protect nuclear plant](#)," *Reuters*, 31 May 2023)

President introduces bill to sanction Iran

On 28 May, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy introduced a bill to sanction Iran for 50 years in response to Tehran's weapon supplies to Moscow, says Zelenskyy's Chief of Staff. The bill would impose trade, financial and technology sanctions against Iran and its citizens. It would also stop the transit of Iranian goods through Ukraine and the use of its air space. According to Kyiv and its allies, Tehran has been supplying arms to Russia, including hundreds of drones, since the invasion last year. Tehran rejects the allegations. (Max Hunder and Frances Kerry,

["Ukraine's Zelenskiy introduces Iran sanctions bill," Reuters, 28 May 2023\)](#)

Overnight Russian drone attacks damage Odesa port

On 29 May, the Ukrainian military said that the overnight Russian drone attack damaged some key infrastructure in the Black Sea port of Odesa, crucial for its grain exports. It further said that the Russians used Iranian-made Shahed drones for attacks but did not divulge further details of the attack and its impact on grain exports. (Pavel Polityuk and Robert Birsel, "[Russia damages Ukraine's Odesa port in overnight drone attack - military](#)," *Reuters*, 29 May 2023)

Moscow launches its largest drone attacks on Kyiv

On 28 May, Russia launched its largest airstrikes on Kyiv using drones and cruise missiles. The drone attacks took place on the last Sunday of May when Kyiv marked the anniversary of its official founding 1,541 years ago. The attacks came amid the speculation of a looming Ukrainian counter-offensive. Overnight strikes were carried out also in the Kharkiv region, killing two people, according to the regional governor. The Ukrainian military said the defence forces shot down more than 40 targets. (Gregorio Sorgi, "[Kyiv hit by largest drone attack of the war, Ukraine says](#)," *Politico.eu*, 28 May 2023; Lidia Kelly, "[Russia's war on Ukraine latest: Moscow unleashes strings of large air raids on Kyiv](#)," *Reuters*, 29 May 2023)

Wagner's head Prigozhin complains Kremlin's negligence in reporting him on state media

On 28 May, Wagner's head Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that he was convinced senior Kremlin officials had "forbidden" reporting about him on state media. He asserted that such an approach could bring backlash from the Russian people. 61-year-old Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner mercenary group, has been making headlines for his notoriety in the 15-month war in Ukraine. According to *Reuters*, nicknamed "Putin's butcher," he captured Bakhmut earlier this month. Still, the state media downplayed his role in the victory by

ignoring the city's fall for 20 hours and not airing his victory speech. It took the Kremlin 10 hours to release a 36-word statement congratulating Wagner and the armed forces for "liberating" Bakhmut. He also said 72,000 Ukrainian soldiers had died, with another 100,000 to 140,000 injured. However, despite the uncertainty in numbers, Kyiv said Russia's losses in Bakhmut were large as it was the attacking side. Kyiv further insisted that its forces still control a small part of the city. (Guy Falconbridge, "[Prigozhin says Kremlin banned reporting about him on state media](#)," *Reuters*, 28 May 2023)

Insight on pro-Ukrainian Russian militants

On 25 May, *The Economist* reported on the pro-Ukrainian militias who were a part of the cross-border raid into Belgorod on 22 May. The militias are the Russian Volunteer Corps and the Free Russia Legion, based in Ukraine. According to the Russian Government, the militias are a part of the Ukrainian army but for the Ukrainian government, they are Russian dissidents. The Free Russia Legion works close with Ukraine's intelligence and the Russian Volunteer Corps is a far-right group that also works with Ukraine's Intelligence. Both the militias comprise anti-Russians. The spokesman of Ukraine's intelligence Andrei Chernak said that Ukraine will collaborate with everyone for its survival. On 23 May, the Russian Defence Ministry asserted that the militants were killed. ("[Who are the militias raiding Russia's Belgorod region?](#)" *The Economist*, 25 May 2023)

European leaders establish 'Register of Damage' for Ukraine

On 17 May, leaders from European countries approved the establishment of a "Register of Damage" to document the destruction caused by Russian forces in Ukraine, following a Council of Europe (CoE) summit held in Iceland. The register aims to hold Russia accountable for the damages and provide justice for the victims of the conflict. Forty countries have already signed onto the initiative, with three others finalizing their internal procedures to join. Olaf Scholz, the German Chancellor,

highlighted the importance of the registry in holding Russian occupiers accountable for war crimes and seeking reparations for the extensive harm caused to Ukraine. The register received support from other leaders within the CoE, including British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The United States, Canada, and Japan also expressed their endorsement. ([“Council of Europe approves Register of Damage against Russia,” Deutsche Welle, 17 May 2023](#))

UK and Germany leaves decision on supplying fighter jets to Ukraine on the US

On 17 May, Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius stated: “The decision to provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine would be up to the White House,” after a meeting with his British counterpart Ben Wallace. The Ukrainian military desires F-16s due to their destructive power and cost-effectiveness. Pistorius emphasized that Germany lacked the necessary capabilities and would not actively participate in such a coalition. Similarly, the UK does not possess F-16s but is collaborating with the Netherlands to establish an international “jet coalition” to assist Ukraine. ([“Germany and UK say US must decide on fighter jets to Ukraine,” Deutsche Welle, 17 May 2023](#))

Air force denies the destruction of the Patriot missile defence system

On 16 May, Russia claimed that its Kinzhal missile has destroyed the US Patriot missile defence system in Kyiv. On 17 May, Ukrainian Air Force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat denied the Russian claims. The Patriot missile defence system is capable of countering aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles and launchers are aided with radars. Kyiv said that it had shot down six Kinzhal Missiles and Moscow denied the claims. (Olena Harmash, [“Ukraine denies Russia destroyed Patriot missile defence system,” Reuters, 17 May 2023](#))

US's Patriot likely to be damaged by a Russian missile says Reuters

On 16 May, according to *Reuters*, the US-made Patriot defence system was likely to

be damaged by a Russian missile strike but not destroyed and could be repaired. Patriot is one of the sophisticated air defence systems supplied by the West to help Ukraine defend against Russian air strikes. It has launchers, radar, and other support vehicles that can attack aircraft, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles. (Idrees Ali, Phil Stewart and Mike Stone, [“Patriot missile defence system in Ukraine likely damaged - US sources,” Reuters, 16 May 2023](#))

Ukrainian air defences repel Russian missile attack

On 16 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Ukrainian air defences successfully thwarted a significant missile assault from Russia overnight, according to officials in Kyiv. The attack, the eighth in May, targeted the Ukrainian capital with a barrage of drones, cruise missiles, and potentially ballistic missiles. Kyiv reported shooting down objects in multiple districts, while Russian defence officials claimed all targets were hit. The Ukrainian Defence Minister, Oleksiy Reznikov announced that six Russian hypersonic Kinzhal missiles and 12 other missiles were shot down during the attacks. ([“Ukraine updates: Heavy Russian air raid repelled, Kyiv says,” Deutsche Welle, 16 May 2023](#))

Advertising industry faces stricter rules on greenwashing amid climate crisis

On 15 May, *The Guardian* reported that regulators in London and Brussels are set to impose stricter regulations on companies, scrutinizing terms such as “carbon neutral,” “nature positive,” and offsetting claims. Advertising agencies are grappling with their involvement in greenwashing scandals and their support for clients contributing to the climate and nature crises. The Advertising Standards Authority in the UK will subject misleading environmental claims to closer examination. Advertisers are now working closely with legal teams to advise clients on climate claims, facing the risk of fines and ad bans. Despite initiatives like Ad Net Zero aiming to reduce the industry's carbon impact, many agencies are establishing in-house sustainability teams. The recent EU parliament vote to

ban offset-based carbon neutrality claims adds to the pressure for transparent information. The clampdown on greenwashing offers competitive advantages to companies with genuine environmental commitments while complicating matters for those with overstated claims. The industry also faces friction over agencies working with fossil fuel companies, with some organizations advocating for disassociation. (Ellen Ormesher and Patrick Greenfield, [“Greenwashing era is over, say ad agencies, as regulators get tough,”](#) *The Guardian*, 15 May 2023)

UK and Netherlands agreed to build an ‘international coalition’ to help Ukraine

On 16 May, the government announced that Rishi Sunak and Dutch leader Mark Rutte agreed upon building an ‘international coalition’ to assist Ukraine in procuring F-16 jets and supporting it with everything from training to procurement. The leaders also pledged to continue working together, both bilaterally and through forums, to tackle human trafficking on the continent. The statement comes after Zelenskiy’s comment that Kyiv could soon receive F-16 jets after his unannounced visit to the UK on 15 May. ([“UK and Netherlands agree ‘international coalition’ to help Ukraine procure F-16 jets,”](#) *The Guardian*, 16 May 2023)

Wagner troops not facing munitions shortage, says Ukrainian military official

On 11 May, a Ukrainian brigade commander fighting in Bakhmut, in his interview with *Reuters*, said that Wagner troops are not facing any ammunition shortage and that they have stepped up shelling and artillery in recent days. This comes after Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin's public complaint to Moscow regarding the severe weapons shortage his group is facing and his threatening to withdraw his troops. He added that Russians continue to hold their positions despite counterattacks from the Ukrainian army. (Tom Balmforth and Alex Richardson, [“In Bakhmut's ruins, Ukraine says intensity of Wagner attacks growing,”](#) *Reuters*, 11 May 2023)

UK sends Storm Shadow, a long-range missile to Ukraine

On 11 May, *The Guardian* reported UK’s decision to send Storm Shadow missiles to Kyiv to enhance its much-anticipated counteroffensive that is going on. According to Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, this decision is “a calibrated and proportionate response” to the Russian invasion. These missiles will allow Ukraine to push back Russian forces outside its sovereign territory. Some of the missiles are delivered while the rest are en route to Ukraine, told Wallace. The missile was developed by both the UK and France and has a range of about 560 kilometers. According to *Politico*, the missiles have the capability to strike eastern and southern Ukrainian regions under Russian occupation. The US is supportive of the UK’s decision and has substantiated it. In a press briefing in Moscow, the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov exhibited Moscow’s contrariety toward UK’s move and refrained from divulging the details. (Dan Sabbagh and Luke Harding, [“UK sending long-range Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine, says defence minister,”](#) *The Guardian*, 11 May 2023; Cristina Gallardo, [“UK confirms it’s delivered long-range missiles to Ukraine,”](#) *Politico.eu*, 11 May 2023)

Russian forces pull back in Bakhmut after Ukrainian counterattacks

On 10 May, the commander of the Ukrainian ground forces said that the Russian troops had fallen back in some regions in the eastern Donetsk region, up to a mile near Bakhmut, after limited counterattacks by Kyiv. He added that the enemy could not withstand the onslaught of Ukrainian defenders, which forced them to retreat. Russian troops have been battling since the summer of 2022 to capture Bakhmut, but to no avail so far, and it is one of the most devastated regions. This follows Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin’s public complaint to Moscow about the lack of resources to hold positions in Ukraine and his threat to withdraw his forces from the city. ([“Ukraine Says Russian Forces Pulling Back After Bakhmut Attacks,”](#) *The Moscow Times*, 10 May 2023)

US transfer millions seized from the Russian Oligarch to rebuild Ukraine

On 10 May, the Justice Department announced that it would transfer USD 5.4 million seized from Russian tycoon Konstantin Malofeyev to fund rebuilding Ukraine. According to Attorney General Merrick Garland, the funds will be used to remediate the harms of Russia's unjust war in Ukraine. The US said Malofeyev, who built his fortune in banking, telecommunications, and media, was the main source of funding for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. He was indicted in April 2022 for violating sanctions related to the Russian-backed secession war in Donbas and the subsequent Russian takeover of Crimea in 2014. ("[US Sets \\$5.4Mln Seized from Russian Oligarch for Ukraine Reconstruction](#)," *The Moscow Times*, 10 May 2023)

"I want everybody to stop dying," says Trump to CNN on the Ukrainian war

On 10 May, Trump told *CNN* that he don't want to side with either side of the conflict but to settle the conflict, quoted *BCC*. He said that winning or losing in Ukraine doesn't matter as far as nobody dies. Trump stressed that the Ukrainian war wouldn't have occurred if he were the President and that if he gets elected he will negotiate a settlement in 24 hours. He said that Russian President Vladimir Putin has made a mistake but he is not a war criminal. According to *BCC*, Republicans resent the US's support to the Ukrainian war and if ascending the presidency for the second time Trump will alter US's policy towards Ukraine. (Anthony Zurcher, "[Trump talks Ukraine and pardoning Capitol rioters in CNN townhall](#)", *BCC News*, 11 May 2023)

UN Secretary-General says peace talks not possible in Ukraine Conflict

On 09 May, in an interview published by Spanish daily *El Pais*, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: "Peace talks to end the Ukraine conflict were "not possible" at present due to both parties' belief that they can win." This came as Russian and Ukrainian leaders called for victory in WWII commemorations. He hoped to bring them

to the negotiating table in the future. ("[UN Chief Says Ukraine Peace Talks 'Not Possible' Right Now](#)," *The Moscow Times*, 09 May 2023)

European countries seek missile suppliers for Ukraine

On 09 May, *Reuters* reported that European countries led by the UK have invited companies to express their interest in supplying missiles with a range of up to 300 kilometers to Ukraine. The International Fund for Ukraine, which includes Britain, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden, was established to provide weapons to Kyiv. The British Ministry of Defence, which oversees the fund, called for companies that could supply missiles launched from land, air, or sea, with a payload of between 20 and 490kg. The procurement notice also called for a low probability of intercept and air defence penetration methods. The response is expected to come before 05 June 2023. (Andrew Macaskill and Tom Balmforth, "[Britain asks companies to supply long-range missiles for Ukraine](#)," *Reuters*, 09 May 2023)

US and UK urge Russia to stop using hunger as a weapon in Ukraine conflict

On 09 May, *The Guardian* reported that the US and UK have called on Russia to stop using hunger as a weapon in the Ukraine conflict and to resume the Black Sea grain deal. The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken and UK's Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, James Cleverly urged Russia to allow ships to pick up grain from Ukrainian ports, saying that blocking them results in less food reaching global markets and people in need. The UK Prime Minister will visit the US in June to host the Ukraine rebuilding conference to address post-conflict recovery. (Harry Taylor, Tom Ambrose and Hellen Sullivan, "[US and UK tell Russia to stop using hunger as leverage in Ukraine conflict – as it happened](#)," *The Guardian*, 09 May 2023)

Russia launches a fresh wave of drone and missile strikes before Victory Day

On 08 May, Russia launched a fresh wave of

drone and missile strikes. It marks the fourth attack in eight days on Kyiv. It comes just before Russia celebrates Victory Day, a major public holiday commemorating the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. The latest Russian raids lasted more than four hours, and witnessed Iranian-made Shahed kamikaze drones swarm across the country. Elsewhere, in the Black Sea port city of Odessa, a warehouse with humanitarian aid was destroyed, and a security guard's body was pulled from the wreckage. (Pavel Polityuk and Gleb Garanich, "[Russia launches new attack on Ukraine's capital, officials say](#)," Reuters, 09 May 2023; Matt Murphy and Jaroslav Lukiv, "[Ukraine war: Russia launches 'biggest' kamikaze drone attack](#)," BBC News, 09 May 2023)

Russian mercenary group Wagner fails to receive promised ammunition

On 09 May, the Wagner group's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin said: "Russia's Wagner forces have not yet received the ammunition as promised by Moscow." Prigozhin's forces have been attempting to capture the eastern Ukraine city of Bakhmut for months. He had earlier stated that preliminary data showed they had started receiving ammunition but had not seen it in practice. Meanwhile, Ukraine's military has vowed to prevent Russia from making a final push to capture the city. ("[Head of Russia's Wagner group says still no sign of promised ammunition](#)," Reuters, 09 May 2023)

REGIONAL

European political community summit to be held in Moldova

On 30 May, Reuters reported that the European Political Community summit is to be held in Moldova. More than 40 European leaders are expected to attend. The meeting will focus on cyber-security, migration and energy security. The meeting will also showcase Europe's unified support for Ukraine as it readies for the counteroffensive against Russia. The summit was initiated by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2022. According to the Moldovan President's Foreign Policy advisor Olga Rosca, the meeting will help the country's endeavours to join the EU.

(John Irish, "[European leaders head to Moldova for symbolic summit on Ukraine's doorstep](#)," Reuters, 30 May 2023)

ChatGPT expresses interest to set up office in Europe

On 30 May, Politico reported that ChatGPT CEO Sam Altman wants to establish an office in Europe during his visit to the country. In an interview with Politico in Paris, Altman said that France would be a great place if he is looking for research talent but he added that places all across Europe are full of talent and energy. In an interview with Reuters, Altman affirmed that the company will abide by the AI Act, Politico quoted. He added that he will join the EU's first sandbox in Spain to test his company's regulatory compliance. (Gian Volpicelli, "[ChatGPT boss wants HQ in Europe](#)," Politico.eu, 30 May 2023)

Western powers condemn Kosovo violence

On 26 May, Reuters reported that Britain, France, Italy, Germany and the US condemned Kosovo's decision to crack down upon the municipal buildings in the town of Zvecan in northern Kosovo. Protests were going on to prevent the newly elected ethnic Albanian mayor from entering his office following an election Kosovo Serbs boycotted. In a joint statement, they called upon the authorities to step back and de-escalate and coordinate with the EU mission EULEX and NATO mission KFOR. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic placed Serbia's army on full combat alert and ordered army units to move closer to the Kosovo border as tension rose in Zvecan, Serb majority town in Kosovo. (Elizabeth Piper and Frank Jack Daniel, "[UK, France, Italy, Germany and US condemn Kosovo violence](#)," Reuters, 26 May 2023)

EU and Pfizer to renegotiate COVID-19 vaccine contract

On 26 May, the European Commission and Pfizer renegotiated the contract for COVID-19 vaccines that the EU signed at the peak of the pandemic. The Commission announced that Pfizer would deliver the vaccines up to 2027 with a reduction of

doses from 450 million due for delivery this year. The contract was first signed in May 2021, initially for 900 million doses with an option of renewal for another 900 million doses. Eventually, the bloc contracted about 1.1 billion doses worth EUR 21.5 billion, says *Politico.eu*, quoting *Financial Times*. The talks have been going on for over a year following stiff opposition from several Central and Eastern European countries. Poland even went to the extent of sending a letter to Pfizer's shareholders to pressurize the company to renegotiate the deal. According to *Politico.eu*, the extended negotiations raise the question of why such a long contract was signed without a clause to negotiate down the doses when the pandemic conditions changed. (Carlo Martuscelli, "[EU and Pfizer renegotiate controversial vaccine contract](#)," *Politico.eu*, 26 May 2023)

EU condemns Russian decision to station nuclear weapons in Belarus

On 26 May, EU Foreign Policy chief Joseph Borrell, in a statement, condemned an agreement between Russia and Belarus that would allow the deployment of Russian nuclear warheads in Belarus. He said: "This is a step which will lead to further extremely dangerous escalation." The statement comes after Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's announcement that he is signing the documents in Minsk. Putin first announced this plan in March 2023. Borrell further called upon Belarusian authorities to put an immediate end to their support of Russia's war aggression and threatened them with a "coordinated reaction." (Andrew Gray and Kristen Donovan, "[EU condemns Russian deal to station nuclear warheads in Belarus](#)," *Reuters*, 26 May 2023)

A blooming Germany-Romania partnership

On 24 May, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier reached Romania. He is on a three-day visit in which he will meet the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis in Bucharest. Steinmeier's focus will be establishing strategic cooperation with Romania to support Ukraine and Moldova. The trade between Germany and Romania

values up to EUR 33 billion. According to *Deutsche Welle*, 23,000 German companies are in Romania and have created 300,000 jobs. According to Romanian Ambassador to Berlin Adriana Stanescu: "Romania is developing into a secure strategic investment and business location for Germany." The Ukrainian War and Germany's changing foreign and defence policy offer Romania to forge a partnership with Germany which can enhance Romania's presence in the EU and NATO. (Sabina Fati and Keno Verseck, "[President Steinmeier's Romania visit signals closing ties](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 May 2023)

EC adopts WTO's agreement on fisheries subsidies agreement

On 25 May, European Council approved, on behalf of the EU, the World Trade Organization protocol establishing a fisheries subsidies agreement that focuses on environmental sustainability in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14.6. The agreement includes a prohibition on subsidies contributing to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing along with fishing in the unregulated high seas. It also consists of a prohibition on subsidies for fishing overfished stocks to rebuild such stocks to healthy levels. This agreement will come into full force once two-thirds of WTO members complete their domestic ratification process. ("[WTO: Council approves an agreement on fisheries subsidies to boost environmental sustainability](#)," *consilium.europa.eu*, 25 May 2023)

OpenAI CEO faces backlash for threatening to leave if the bloc "overregulated"

On 25 May, *Reuters* reported that OpenAI CEO, Sam Altman is being severely criticized for threatening to leave the EU if the bloc "overregulated" through the new AI Act. He has been meeting top politicians in France, Spain, Poland, Germany and the UK to discuss the matter. Dutch MEP Kim van Sparrentak criticized the threat by saying that she and her colleagues will not let American companies blackmail them and called them unfit for Europe if they cannot comply with the basic data governance

rules. OpenAI first clashed with the Italian regulator Garante, for shutting down ChatGPT for violating European privacy rules. ChatGPT was restored later when the company renewed its privacy policy. Meanwhile, EU lawmakers added new proposals to the Act such as disclosing copyrighted materials used to train generative tools like ChatGPT. EU parliamentarians have agreed on the draft of the act in early May 2023 and the law is likely to be passed later this year. (Matin Coutler and Supantha Mukherjee, "[OpenAI CEO's threat to quit EU draws lawmaker backlash](#)," *Reuters*, 25 May 2023)

EU proposes plans for financial products

On 24 May, the EU set out plans to cut the amount the retail investors pay banks and insurers for financial products to accelerate investment and deepen its capital market. It will include a ban on banks and insurers paying commissions on sales of their products to brokers who give no advice to customers. Further, it proposes a limited ban on commission through tougher tests on the suitability of the product for the buyer and where the advice is being offered. The product will also have its value for money based on new cost and performance benchmarks from regulators. (Huw Jones, "[EU sets out plans to cut the price of financial products](#)," *Reuters*, 25 May 2023)

Defender Europe 2023 drills expand to the Western Balkans

On 21 May, Defender Europe 2023, NATO's largest international military exercise reached Kosovo to expand further into the Western Balkans. Starting in April, it will continue till June 2023 at several other places in Europe. Kosovo's Defence Minister Armend Mehaj expressed his intentions to join NATO following its arrival. The United States European Command (EUROCOM) will lead the exercise, and high-ranking officials, including President Albin Kurti, will attend the opening ceremony. More than 7,000 troops from the US and 17,000 from 20 allied and partner states are expected to participate in the drills, with Kosovo's 1300- contingent the largest one. ("[Western Balkans Phase of NATO Defender Europe 2023 Drills Starts in](#)

[Kosovo](#)," *Sputnik*, 21 May 2023)

Estonia and Latvia to acquire air defence system from Germany

On 21 May, according to the Estonian Defence Ministry, Estonia and Latvia are to commence negotiations with Germany's Diehl Defence to purchase air defence systems. According to Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur, Estonia must possess operational air defence systems by 2025 and so ideally the systems must reach by 2024. The purchase will be headed by Estonia Centre for Defence Investment. The countries aim to buy medium-range air defence systems like Iris-T, a surface-to-land missile. The details regarding price, capabilities, personnel, and training will be discussed during the negotiations. (Andrius Sytas, "[Estonia and Latvia look to purchase mid-range air defence from Germany](#)," *Reuters*, 21 May 2023)

UK and Norway to cooperate against threats to undersea infrastructure

On 18 May, the UK government said that along with Norway, it would increase their collaboration to protect the undersea infrastructure from threats. UK's Defence Minister Ben Wallace said: "The attack on the Nord Stream pipeline has determined even closer collaboration across our collective assets to detect and defend against subsea threats and ensure continued North Atlantic security." (Alistair Smout and Kylie Maclellan "[UK and Norway agree cooperation to counter undersea threats](#)," *Reuters*, 18 May 2023)

EU adopts draft MoU to enhance cooperation with UK

On 17 May, the European Union's executive body officially approved a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at facilitating closer collaboration between financial regulators in the UK and the EU. This agreement, however, falls short of granting market access. The UK's financial sector lost its previous unrestricted entry to the EU market, following Brexit, raising concerns about London's status as a global financial hub. The MoU, once politically endorsed by EU member states, will establish a joint EU-UK

Financial Regulatory Forum, similar to the one already existing with the United States. Importantly, the MoU does not address market access or pre-determine equivalence decisions. (Huw Jones, "[EU pushes forward with post-Brexit forum for EU, UK financial regulators](#)," *Reuters*, 18 May 2023)

Black Sea grain deal extended for another two months

On 17 May, *BBC News* reported that the Black Sea grain deal was extended for another two months through negotiation by both the UN and Turkey, despite concerns that Russia could pull out of the pact. The deal was first agreed upon in July 2022 against the fears of global food shortages due to the war in Ukraine, and it has been renewed several times. Through this deal, more than 30 metric tonnes of grain have left Ukraine to the world's poorest countries. Russia had briefly withdrawn from the deal in November 2022, accusing Ukraine of attacking its fleet in Crimea, but rejoined a few days later. ("[Ukraine conflict: Black Sea grain deal extended for two months](#)," *BBC News*, 17 May 2023)

Russia admits retreat at Bakhmut

On 12 May, *Reuters* reported Russia's admittance of a fallback at Bakhmut. According to the spokesman of the east group of Ukrainian forces Serhiy Cherevatyi, 17.3 square kilometers of area have been liberated by them. Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said that the Ukrainian offensive included 1000 troops with 40 ranks. He added that 26 attacks have been repelled by Russia. According to Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Ukrainian assumed higher ground at Bakhmut and the regrouping of Russian forces was a 'rout.' Prigozhin said that the Russian troops are collapsing at North and South Bakhmut. (Olena Harmash and Ivan Lyubush-Kirdey, "[Russia acknowledges retreat north of Bakhmut, Wagner boss calls is a 'rout'](#)," *Reuters*, 13 May 2023)

IAEA to present an agreement to protect Zaporizhzhia

On 12 May, *Reuters* reported IAEA chief Rafael Grossi is to present an agreement

with Russia and Ukraine to the UNSC to protect the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in May 2023. The Russian and Ukrainian army presence in the area has increased the apprehension of a nuclear catastrophe initiating this agreement. Both countries continue to blame each other for the shelling that obstructs the power lines vital for cooling nuclear reactors. It will include several "principles," such as no firing from the plant, the barring of heavy weapons, and no military personnel. The ambiguity remains, and the position of both parties and "principles" are yet to be clarified. (John Irish, Francois Murphy, "[Exclusive: IAEA chief aims to present Zaporizhzhia deal to UN this month - diplomats](#)," *Reuters*, 12 May 2023)

Moscow denies claims of Ukrainian breakthroughs in Bakhmut

On 11 May, in a statement, Russia's Defence Ministry said that the reports circulating in individual Telegram channels about Ukrainian defence breakthroughs Bakhmut are not reality and claims that the overall situation in Ukraine is under control. According to *Reuters*, this statement reflects the Moscow's acknowledgement that the ongoing conflict is a "very difficult" military operation. This is in contrast to the Ukrainian position that Russian forces are forced back in several places in Bakhmut. The several statements released by the Ukrainian army personnel and Zelenskiy show that it is preparing for an effective counter-offensive and is stepping up its attacks. (Tom Balmforth, Olena Harmash, Pavel Polityuk, David Ljunggren and Ron Popeski, "[Russia denies reports of Ukrainian breakthroughs along front lines](#)," *Reuters*, 11 May 2023; Antoinette Radford, "[Russia denies claims of Ukrainian front-line gain](#)," *BBC News*, 12 May 2023)

New EU sanctions to target entities across the world, reports RT quoting Bloomberg and The Financial Times

On 09 May, *RT* reported that the EU's 11th round of sanctions will target companies that supply goods and technology to Russia's defence and security sector, quoting *Bloomberg*. 35 Companies in China and Hong Kong, and firms in Uzbekistan, Armenia, and the UAE are likely to be

targeted. According to the Financial Times, 3HC semiconductors and King-Pai technology from China and Sinno Electronics, Sigma Technology, Asia Pacific Links, Tordan Industry, and Alpha Trading Investments from Hong Kong are expected to be sanctioned. The 11th round of the sanctions list also includes already sanctioned Iranian companies that supply drones to Russia and more than 100 Russian companies. The 11th round of sanctions will be discussed today at the ("[EU to take anti-Russia sanctions global - media](#)," RT, 09 May 2023)

SAP and Siemens criticise the Data Act

On 09 May, according to *Reuters*, SAP, a German business software company and Siemens, a German engineering company, criticised the draft Data Act which was proposed by the European Commission last year. The Data Act aims to collect the EU's consumer and corporate data to achieve its digital and green objectives by curbing the influence of US tech giants. While the US tech giants found the act restrictive, the German companies find that their trade secrets will be exposed to non-European third parties. They said that European competitiveness will be undermined. In a letter signed on 04 May to the EU, the Chief Executives of Siemens Healthlineers, and Brainlab wrote that companies must be allowed to withhold sensitive information that risks the exposition of trade secrets. The EU wrote back saying that trade secrets must not be used as a pretext not to share data. (Foo Yun Chee, "[EU draft Data Act puts trade secrets at risk, Siemens and SAP say](#)," *Reuters*, 09 May 2023)

New EU sanctions to target circumventing exports to Russia

On 08 May, according to *Politico*, the 11th package of EU sanctions against Russia will target countries which export the sanctioned items to Russia by circumventing. Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are the first targets. The new trade embargo is expected to target China and Turkey in the future despite the volatility of Turkey's situation due to the elections and the strong opposition by China on 08 May. Although

the proposal doesn't specify which countries or companies or products will be sanctioned, member states can list companies and products that will be sanctioned with unanimous approval. The 11th round of sanctions is said to be released today. (Jakob Hanke Vela and Stuart Lau, "[EU targets Central Asia in drive to stop sanctioned goods reaching Russia](#)," *Politico.eu*, 08 May 2023)

European People's Party leader calls for a fast-track procedure to approve ASAP

On 08 May, according to *Politico*, the European People's Party (EPP) head Manfred Weber proposed a fast-track procedure to speed up the approval of the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP). In a letter dated 03 May to the European Parliament President, Roberta Metsola, Weber wrote that the production of ammunition and weapons must be boosted to help Ukraine. ASAP was debated yesterday in Monday's plenary of the European Parliament along with Weber's fast-track procedure to approve the bill by 09 May. The proposal will be discussed on 11 May, and Weber proposed that approval of ASAP be scheduled for the end of the month. (Jakob Hanke Vela and Nicolas Camut, "[EU Parliament seeks to speed up ammo deal for Ukraine](#)," *Politico.eu*, 08 May 2023)

Europe's defence modernisation process slows, says Economist, quoting a SIPRI study

On 07 May, according to *The Economist*, European countries are spending more on defence, but the modernisation process is slow. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 2022, European defence spending increased by 13 per cent, but two-thirds of it were used up on inflation and the Ukrainian war. In 2022, German President Olaf Scholz declared that 100 billion euros were designated to modernize the armed forces but is left untouched. 50 billion euros was designated to buy 35 F-35 fighter jets, but it will reach Germany by the end of the decade only. Also, defence purchases above 25 million euros are hard to get approved by the German parliament. On the same lines, in

Britain, the military support to Ukraine worth 2.3 billion euros has depleted its stocks. Skewed military spending and costly nuclear-capable missile purchases have further depleted the defence budget. In France, though 413 billion euros was pledged for defence spending from 2024, they still invest more in nuclear deterrents. However, in Italy, high defence spending is unlikely owing to the migration crisis and in Poland, three per cent of GDP is to be spent on defence. ([“Europe is struggling to rebuild its military clout,”](#) *The Economist*, 07 May 2023)

NATO to strengthen military integration and bolster transatlantic security with Finland

On 02 May, the Director General of the NATO International Military, Lieutenant General Janusz Adamczak, visited Finland, following Finland's accession to the Alliance on April 4, 2023. During the trip, he met with military officials to discuss security priorities and opportunities for military integration. The visit began with a meeting with the Finnish Military Representative to NATO, Lieutenant General Kim Jäämeri, where Adamczak emphasized the importance of Finland's membership to NATO. He also expressed the desire to enhance collaboration between Finland and NATO. Adamczak observed exercise ARROW 23 and praised Finland's highly trained and capable armed forces. Finland's Chief of Defence Command, Lieutenant General Vesa Virtanen, highlighted the importance of multi-dimensional military integration to ensure Finland's defense is fully integrated into the Alliance's collective defense. During his visit to the Finnish Air Force Command, Adamczak acknowledged Finland's experience in providing security in the Baltic Sea and Arctic regions, which would significantly enhance NATO's posture in the High North and the ability to reinforce Baltic Allies. ([“The Director General of the NATO International Military Staff visits Finland,”](#) *nato.int*, 05 May 2023)

Evacuation near Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant sparks concern of a severe nuclear accident

On 07 May, *BBC News* reported that Russia

had ordered the evacuation of a town near Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, sparking concerns of a "severe nuclear accident", as warned by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The evacuations come ahead of Kyiv's anticipated offensive, as Russia tells people to leave 18 settlements in the Zaporizhzhia region, including Enerhodar, near the plant. According to Ukraine's mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Fedorov, there were five-hour waits as thousands of cars left. Rafael Grossi, the director of the IAEA, said: "The evacuation of residents near the nuclear plant indicated the possibility of heavy fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces. Although the plant's reactors were not producing electricity, they still contained nuclear material." Operating staff were still at the site but there is deep concern about the increasingly tense, stressful, and challenging conditions for personnel and their families. ([“Ukraine war: 'Mad panic' as Russia evacuates town near Zaporizhzhia plant,”](#) *BBC News*, 07 May 2023)

IOTC members to discuss EU's counterproposal on tuna fishing

On 08 May, *Politico* reported on the divided Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) regarding the proposal of a 72-day moratorium on fishing and a limit on how many devices can be used for fishing. According to the IOTC, the EU vessels catch one-third of tuna fish in the Indian Ocean. The scientists claim that when the vessels use fish aggregating devices made of wood and plastic to attract fish, it leads to overfishing and plastic pollution. 11 IOTC members are supporting the proposal while the EU through various sustainable fisheries partnership agreements with countries such as Seychelles, Madagascar, Kenya, and Tanzania is trying to block the proposal. The EU member states, through the partnerships are allowed to dock and overfish in the partner country's waters by funding millions worth of projects, such as the blue economy project with Kenya. The EU member states are accused of leveraging their interests by influencing the IOTC members to block the proposal. IOTC's EU delegation head, Mario Valletto, denied the claims by stating that the proposal was less

conservational and called out the member countries' commercial interests. In February 2023, Kenya backed out from supporting the proposal came as a surprise as Kenya supported the proposal in the past. This led to a secret ballot on the proposal led by Indonesia and backed by countries like India, Australia, and South Africa. Two-thirds of the countries voted in favor of the proposal while Seychelles, Kenya, Philippines, Oman, and Comoros objected it. The proposal was passed. The IOTC previously said, on the account of the IOTC scientific committee's inability to provide a solution, a 72-day ban will be implemented as a precautionary approach. The EU opposes it by saying it cannot be done so without scientific evidence. On 08 May, the IOTC members will discuss the EU's counterproposal which aims to discard the 72-day moratorium and the limits of the fishing devices. (Antonetta Roussi and Louise Guillot, "[Environmental cash for fish: EU flashes green money to support Indian Ocean tuna grab](#)," *Politico*, 08 May 2023)

Russian secret services staging fake protests in European cities

On 08 May, *Deutsche Welle* referring to joint research by media outlets, reported Russian secret services are staging or infiltrating demonstrations in major European cities for propaganda purposes, according to leaked strategy papers, said to have come from the Kremlin's security apparatus, suggest that small Russian agents simulate fake protests to create an anti-Ukraine sentiment or hamper Sweden's NATO accession. Some Kremlin-directed fake protests have already occurred, including anti-Turkish rallies where agents pretend to be Ukrainians, agitating against Turkish President Erdogan to give the impression of a broad anti-Islamic mood in Europe. The goal is to generate propaganda material for internet platforms, with several cities targeted, including Paris, The Hague, Brussels, and Frankfurt. Photos of the fake demonstrators have circulated on social media, appearing to give the impression of widespread anti-Ukrainian sentiment in western European countries. ("[Russia staging protests for anti-Ukraine propaganda — report](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 08

May 2023)

NATO Secretary General meets industry leaders

On 04 May, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, held a roundtable discussion at NATO Headquarters with industry leaders in energy and communications infrastructure. The discussion focused on understanding the threats to critical undersea infrastructure and sharing best practices on cooperation and coordination. Stoltenberg emphasized that protecting critical undersea infrastructure is essential to NATO's security and defense as it plays a crucial role in protecting societies' security and prosperity. The Secretary General highlighted the importance of collaborating with the industry to better enhance the security of the infrastructure. NATO has already taken steps to protect critical infrastructure, including increasing military presence in the region following the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline. NATO has also created an undersea infrastructure coordination cell and established a new NATO-EU taskforce on resilience and critical infrastructure protection. ("[NATO Secretary General engages industry on critical undersea infrastructure](#)," *nato.int*, 05 May 2023)

EU plans to expand the provision of its criminal laws to counter corruption

On 03 May, the EU proposed a directive to upgrade its criminal laws against corruption to mitigate bribery, abuse of office, and illicit enrichment. The directive aims to bring about a consensus across the bloc to control cross-border crimes. It aims for the member countries to establish a common definition of corruption crimes and for the establishment of an anti-corruption agency. It requires mutual cooperation with the EU anti-corruption network. The law will be applicable to public institutions and private entities. Not all forms of corruption are criminalised across the bloc. The prison sentences vary for different forms of corruption across the bloc. In the future, the EU also has plans to sanction foreign nationals under corruption charges. (Jennifer Rankin, "[EU aims to harmonise criminal laws across bloc to fight](#)

[corruption](#),” *The Guardian*, 03 May 2023)

Switzerland aims to join the PESCO's military projects

On 03 May, *Euractiv* in an interview with a Switzerland's Defence Ministry spokesperson reported on Switzerland's plan to join the defence projects of the EU's Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO). According to the spokesperson, Switzerland aims to participate in a few military projects such as military mobility and cyber defence projects. One such being the Military Mobility project, which aims to remove red tape and to build a network between the members for ease of movement of troops and equipment. Similarly, in August 2022, a Swiss media outlet 'Blick' expressed Switzerland's wish to join PESCO's cyber defence project. Switzerland aims to cooperate with the other/neighbouring EU member states to thwart cyber-attacks from a highly volatile and lethal cyberspace. The collaboration is expected to be 'ad hoc' in nature while ensuring its neutrality. (Aurelie Puugnet, [“Switzerland considers joining EU's military mobility, cyber defence projects”](#), *Euractiv*, 03 May 2023)

Bulgarian government investigated for failure to implement EU sanctions against Russia

On 28 April, according to a statement released by the Bulgarian Prosecutor's Office, Bulgaria's implementation of EU sanctions against Russia is being investigated. Bulgaria has reportedly failed to impose sanctions against Russian citizens and firms included on the EU sanctions list. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU has imposed sanctions on nearly 1,400 Russian citizens and over 170 companies, as well as freezing over EUR 300 billion from Russian banks and EUR 20 billion of assets owned by Russian oligarchs. However, Bulgaria's National Revenue Agency has not issued any act imposing sanctions for eight years. The European Commission has requested that EU countries report their actions to implement sanctions against Russia, which it hopes will enable the identification of assets that could be confiscated and used to rebuild Ukraine. (Krassen Nikolov,

[“Bulgarian government investigated over Russia sanctions implementation”](#), *Euractiv*, 01 May 2023)

Eurostat predicts gradual population decline in the EU from 2026

On 02 May, *Les Echos* reported on Eurostat's prediction of a gradual decline in the population of the EU from 2026, particularly in Southern and Eastern countries like Italy, Portugal, Hungary, and Romania. Eurostat data shows that the EU population will reach its peak of 453.2 million in 2026, before a slow decrease to 447.9 million by 2050 due to an aging population and a decline in the working population. While Ireland and Sweden are expected to see population growth, Germany will have a slight increase, southern and eastern European countries will experience a decline in their population. Italy will have a decline from 59 million inhabitants to 57.5 million by 2050 due to its high proportion of people over 65. The European demographic dynamics differ from the global trend, with Africa's population expected to almost triple in the 21st century. Demographer Laurent Toulemon warns of the sharp decline in the share of the European population in the world population. (Marine Bourrier, [“5 figures to understand the demographic decline in Europe”](#), *Les Echos*, 02 May 2023)

Denmark to help Ukraine rebuild wind energy infrastructure

On 29 April, the *Copenhagen Post* reported on the announcement made by Danish Energy Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen and Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko on Denmark's plan to provide expertise in energy infrastructure, with a focus on onshore and offshore wind energy, in order to offer assistance to Ukraine in rebuilding its nation. Ukraine being Europe's second-largest country with vast agricultural land, has a considerable potential for wind turbines. However, many of its existing turbines have been destroyed, resulting in a decrease in onshore wind energy production from 1.7 GWs, after the Russian invasion. In the short term, Denmark will aid in the restoration and expansion of onshore wind energy resources, while the

long-term aspect of the deal will involve exploring the potential for offshore wind energy. Denmark will also help Ukraine establish legislation aimed at promoting wind energy, as part of a green reimagining of its energy infrastructure. (Shirsha Chakraborty, "[Denmark offers helping energy hand to Ukraine](#)," *Copenhagen Post*, 29 April 2023)

Protests across Europe erupt on May Day

On 01 May, labour unions and social activists marched across Europe marking International Workers Day to highlight their causes, while many expressed concerns about rising inflation. Climate activists in Paris vandalized a Louis Vuitton Museum, and protesters in Germany demonstrated against violence targeting women and LGBTQ+ people. Despite occasional clashes with police, thousands of people took part in mostly peaceful demonstrations. In Germany, leftist groups and labour unions organized hundreds of rallies, and the German Trade Union Confederation reported that 288,000 people participated in 398 events. In France, hundreds of thousands of people protested President Emmanuel Macron's pension reform, and the protests turned violent, with clashes between protesters and security forces. In Italy, the right-wing government approved measures to boost employment and pay rates, while protesters marched against welfare cuts and loosening rules on short-term employment contracts. In Spain, over 70 marches were organized by unions warning of "social conflict" if salaries did not keep pace with inflation. ("[May Day protests: Labor rights demonstrations across Europe](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 01 May 2023)

Ukraine foreign ministry complains on agricultural imports amid war challenges

On 29 April, the Ukraine's Foreign Ministry sent a formal note to the Polish and EU representatives, claiming the restrictions contravened the association agreement between Kyiv and the EU, as well as the EU Single Market norms. Ukraine has lodged a formal complaint against Poland over restrictions on the import of its agricultural

products, as the conflict in the country has affected transportation routes. Recently, Poland and other neighboring countries imposed temporary trade barriers on grains and other goods, following protests by local farmers over a drop in the prices of their produce. Grain exports are vital to Ukraine's economy, accounting for a significant proportion of the world's wheat, corn, and barley markets. The EU has reached a preliminary agreement with Ukraine's neighbors, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, to withdraw any unilateral measures against Ukrainian produce in exchange for a €100m support package for affected farmers. ("[Ukraine protests 'unacceptable' Warsaw agricultural bans](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 29 April 2023)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Southern Europe braces for severe drought and worst agricultural yields

On 18 May, *Reuters* reported that Southern Europe is preparing for a summer plagued by intense drought, as rising temperatures and diminishing rainfall continue to worsen the situation. Spain and other regions are already experiencing water shortages, with farmers expecting their worst harvests in years. Groundwater reserves have been depleted due to consecutive years of drought, resulting in bone-dry soils in Spain and southern France. Low river and reservoir levels also pose a threat to hydropower production. Spain has requested emergency assistance from the EU, highlighting the magnitude of the drought's consequences. Despite long-standing climate change forecasts, preparations to mitigate the impact of drought have been insufficient. (Kate Abnett, "[Southern Europe braces for climate change-fuelled summer of drought](#)," *Reuters*, 18 May 2023)

UK to accomplish its climate adaptation plan against flooding by 2050

On 17 May, the UK government said that it will accelerate the existing climate adaptation plans to improve the defences against the floods. The climate adaptation program was targeted to be completed by 2065 but now the government will

complete it by 2050. The move was a response to a new climate model. The model asserts that flooding from the Thames estuary in London is highly possible due to rising sea levels and a warming climate. The revised plan will be published by today. (William James, "[UK accelerates London flood defence plan to counter rising climate risk](#)," *Reuters*, 17 May 2023)

China's call with Ukraine's President is a positive step, says EU ambassador

On 09 May, the EU ambassador to China, Jorge Toledo Albinana, called the recent call between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as a positive step towards achieving peace in Ukraine. Albinana has urged China to do more to help bring about a just peace, including the withdrawal of Russian troops. He also mentioned expectations of further high-level dialogue, including talks on trade, economy, digital affairs, and climate. Albinana defended EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's recent comments on the Taiwan Strait, stating that they had been exaggerated. ("[EU envoy to China hails Xi's call with Ukraine president as positive step](#)," *Reuters*, 09 May 2023)

EU cancels reception in Israel over far-right politician's attendance

On 08 May, the *Politico* reported that the EU's mission to Israel cancelled a reception in Tel Aviv after Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said he would attend and give a speech. The mission said in a statement that they do not want to provide a platform to someone whose views contradict the EU's values. Ben-Gvir is known for his hard-line stance on security issues and controversial statements about Israel's Arab citizens. Several EU officials had asked the Israeli government to send another representative, but Ben-Gvir insisted on attending the event, where he was expected to speak. The EU spokesperson for foreign affairs stated: "The EU does not endorse Ben-Gvir's political views and was consulting internally on how to handle the situation". Ben-Gvir became a minister last December after his party entered a coalition with

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud, forming Israel's most right-wing government ever. (Nicolas Camut, "[Far-right Israeli minister was going to an EU event — so they canceled it](#)," *Politico.eu*, 08 May 2023)

Public support for climate action in Europe

On 02 May, according to *The Guardian*, a recent YouGov survey was conducted in the UK, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, and Italy to find people's opinion on climate action. The survey found that between 60 to 80 per cent were in support of climate action at individual and at government policy level. The majority of respondents were worried about climate change and agreed that it is caused by human activity. Surprisingly, they were restrained from taking subsequent measures that affect their daily lifestyle. The survey found that measures that do not require significant lifestyle changes, such as tree-planting programs and growing more plants, were more popular. There was also support for banning single-use plastics and limiting meat and dairy consumption. However, measures that would significantly impact daily life, such as giving up driving altogether, were less popular. People were opposed to an increase in fuel duty and a ban on petrol and diesel cars. (Jon Henley, "[Many Europeans want climate action – but less so if it changes their lifestyle, shows poll](#)," *The Guardian*, 02 May 2023)

Baerbock calls for global renewable energy target

On 02 May, the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock urged for a global renewable energy target as electricity demand grows. During the Petersberg Climate Dialogue in Berlin, Baerbock said that countries must work together to tackle the climate crisis, calling it the "greatest security challenge of our century." Baerbock called for a global treaty on renewable energy, like the targets set by the G7 in April, to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels. The discussions also addressed financial support for countries affected by the climate crisis. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change, the UN's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is possible but requires significant changes across all sectors. ([“Germany's Baerbock urges global action on renewable energy,” Deutsche Welle, 02 may 2023](#))

Denmark on track to meet its climate goals says energy agency

On 28 April, the Danish Energy Agency (DEA) published its annual projections suggesting that Denmark is on track to meet its climate goals. Moreover, the country is estimated to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 49.8 percent by 2025, as compared to the levels in 1990, meeting the target reduction of 50-54 percent. Denmark has set a goal of becoming climate neutral by 2045, with negative greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Despite this progress, Denmark's Climate Minister Lars Aagaard emphasizes the need for continued efforts to phase out fossil fuels and reduce CO2 levels. The government plans to achieve the targets by increasing the use of biofuels in petrol for vehicles. However, green advocates, such as the Council on Climate Change (Klimarådet), have expressed skepticism about this strategy, calling it a "patchwork solution". ([Nicolai Kampmann, “Report: Denmark is closing in on political climate targets,” Copenhagen Post, 28 April 2023](#))

Greenpeace activists occupy Belgian LNG terminal

On 29 April, activists from six countries sailed inflatables into the terminal, operated by Fluxys, a Belgium LNG transportation company. They displayed a banner reading “Gas kills” and occupied the quays for six hours before being removed by police. Greenpeace Belgium is working to secure the release of 14 activists who have been detained for more than 48 hours after trespassing and occupying a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Zeebrugge, Belgium. Greenpeace wants to draw attention to the role of gas companies, such as Fluxys, in the increased LNG imports to Europe from the US. According to Greenpeace, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Europe's imports of LNG from the US have increased by 140 percent. The

group is calling for all new gas infrastructure to be stopped and for a European plan to phase out gas by 2035. In response to climate activism, Just Stop Oil sister groups funded by the Climate Emergency Fund now operate in 11 countries, with protesters using roadblock and slow march tactics. (Damien Gayle, [“Greenpeace activists held in Belgium after occupying gas terminal,” The Guardian, 01 May 2023](#))

CYBER SECURITY

EU Lawmakers concerned about misuse of Pegasus Spyware in Hungary and Poland

On 09 May, *AP News* reported that lawmakers in the EU have expressed grave concerns over the use of the Pegasus spyware against opposition politicians and journalists in Hungary and Poland. The spyware, developed by Israeli cyber-intelligence company NSO, has been used globally to infiltrate the phones and computers of political figures, human rights activists, reporters, and religious leaders. However, after a year-long investigation, the lawmakers reported a lack of cooperation, preventing them from uncovering concrete evidence. Dutch Liberal lawmaker Sophie In't Veld, who co- led the inquiry, stated that none of the authorities were willing to cooperate. In their final report, the lawmakers accused Poland's right-wing government of using Pegasus as part of a broader campaign to stifle dissent, while Hungary's use of spyware was deemed a strategic campaign to suppress media freedom and freedom of expression. The lawmakers sent questionnaires to all 27 EU member countries but received very few relevant responses. The abuse of spyware was found to have no connection with national security, and justice has yet to be served to victims of spying. NSO has faced export restrictions and legal action from major technology firms. (Lorne Cook, [“EU lawmakers warn of Hungary, Poland spyware abuses,” AP News, 09 May 2023](#))

ECONOMY

UK can contribute EUR 15 billion by

levying tax on the high-income class quotes *The Guardian*

On 12 May, according to Christian Aid, a charity fighting global poverty, a 0.5 per cent tax on wealthy people in the UK can contribute to its share of the international loss and damage fund, *The Guardian* reported. The international loss and damage fund was established at the COP27 climate summit in Egypt in 2022. According to *The Guardian*, to bolster adaptation efforts in developing countries an estimate of 400 billion dollars is needed by 2030. A tax of five pence for every EUR 10 collected from the top one per cent of UK households can raise 15 billion EUR by 2030, *The Guardian* quoted Christian Aid. The entire sum can be collected by levying a 95 per cent tax on fossil fuel companies' excess profits or through air passenger taxes, emissions trading schemes, and financial transactions taxes. (Damien Gayle, "[Wealth tax of 0.5% could cover UK's share of loss and damage fund, says charity](#)," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2023)

Asian bondholders join international lawsuits against Swiss government

On 04 May, *BBC News* reported that Asian investors are filing lawsuits against the Swiss government over its handling of the takeover of Credit Suisse by larger rival Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS). In March, Credit Suisse was forced to merge amid concerns it could collapse, rendering worthless USD 17 billion of bonds held by investors. Some individual bondholders are taking legal action against Swiss authorities, claiming that the manner in which the merger was conducted deprived them of value. Shareholders were allowed to exchange their Credit Suisse shares for UBS shares, but bondholders received nothing. Despite Credit Suisse's difficulties, presentations by the bank encouraged buying bonds as late as 14 March. Legal experts have expressed doubts over the bondholders' success, but the limited time period allowed for claims has prompted action. (Nick Marsh, "[Credit Suisse: Asia investors sue Switzerland over bank collapse](#)," *BBC News*, 04 May 2023)

UK microchip company proposes to sell shares in the US

On 01 May, *BBC News* reported on the submission of an application by Arm, a UK microchip designing company to sell its shares in the US, which could lead to the largest stock market listing this year, aiming to raise up to USD 10 billion. Arm's designs are used by household brands such as Apple and Samsung, and chip manufacturers like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, to build their own processors. Despite being considered the "crown jewel" of the UK's technology sector, it decided not to pursue a London Stock Exchange listing, raising concerns over the UK market's ability to attract tech company stock offerings. Moreover, Softbank, which suffered losses due to the declining valuations of its investments in technology start-ups, is pushing ahead with the multi-billion dollar sale of Arm, subject to market conditions. (Mariko Oi, "[UK chip giant Arm files for blockbuster US share listing](#)," *BBC News*, 01 May 2023)

ENERGY

Hydroelectric power in the EU: NGOs warn of the devastating environmental fallout

On 04 May, *Euractiv* reported that the European Union has untapped hydroelectric deposits that could increase flexibility in the energy system, equivalent to 20 per cent of France's current hydroelectric production. However, NGOs warn of the devastating environmental effects of exploiting these natural resources. Reservoirs across Europe are currently under-utilized; improving them could increase electricity storage capacity by 80 per cent. Nevertheless, the EU competition policy would likely impede the industry, particularly in France. Conflict over the legal status of hydroelectric plants has fuelled tensions for years, with Paris advocating state management, and Brussels preferring competition. The EU is now trying to reassure investors by proposing long-term electricity sales contracts. However, environmental associations argue that exploiting new deposits would cause environmental damage and not contribute to the EU energy transition and have urged the EU to apply stringent sustainability

criteria and exclude hydropower from "go-to areas." (Paul Messad, "[Hydropower: EU energy transition's other sticking point](#)," *Euractiv*, 04 May 2023)

GENDER

Slovakia to bar transgender people from changing their gender

On 18 May, *Reuters* reported that Slovakia's parliament will vote on legal recognition of transgender people. If the bill is passed, transgender people will not be able to change their gender in official documents. Gender will be assigned according to the number of chromosomes present through a genetic test. According to the Slovak psychiatric society, genetic tests do not always indicate gender correctly. At present, transgender people in Slovakia can change their names, surnames, gender and birth number. The bill will allow transgender people to change their names only. (Jan Lopatka, "[Slovaks near vote on banning legal recognition for transgender people](#)," *Reuters*, 18 May 2023)

Turkish women are less likely to vote for President Tayyip Recep Erdogan

On 10 May, *Politico* reported that women are less likely to vote for Erdogan in the upcoming presidential elections due to his Justice and Development Party's (AKP) coalitions. AKP's alliance with the Islamist New Welfare Party and the Kurdish HUDA-PAR jeopardizes his win. The New Welfare Party's buses show only pictures of the male candidates, while women are sidelined as dark silhouettes. HUDA-PAR is known for its criminal activities such as murder and torture, and is an extension of Kurdish Hizbullah. These parties demand to criminalize adultery, cancel laws on violence against women, restrict their mobility, and change women's eligibility age to marry. Within the party, female candidates such as Ozlem Zengin say that these demands have crossed the red line. 10 million women are to vote this Sunday. Resentment towards Erdogan and his coalitions is rising as women see the coalition parties as a threat to their independence. (Elcin Poyrazlar, "[Turkey's Erdogan risks alienating conservative women voters](#)," *Politico.eu*, 10 May 2023)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Pause AI's protest against artificial intelligence

On 23 May, five members of Pause AI started a protest against the proliferation of AI outside the Microsoft Office in Brussels. This protest comes as the leaders of the largest tech giants such as Google and Open AI are on a visit across Europe to meet legislators of various countries. Pause AI was founded by Joep Meindertsma who believes that there is a chance that AI could mean the end of humankind. The group is not supported by any interest groups or sponsors. They stand for their two demands of halting the further roll-outs of ever-more-powerful AI systems and a mutual AI treaty signed by all governments. Resonating with their demands lawmakers of the European Parliament are working on the bloc's Artificial Intelligence Act and an international conference on AI. EU's law yet to be finalized later this year could set up barriers to developing risky AI applications. (Gian Volpicelli, "[The rag-tag group trying to pause AI in Brussels](#)," *Politico.eu*, 23 May 2023)

EU to establish AI rules

On 11 May, the Internal Market Committee and the Civil Liberties Committee of the EU voted in favour of the Artificial Intelligence Act draft. The AI Act was proposed in 2021. The act will mandate how AI products and services will be utilized. AI applications will be made transparent and accurate according to the four ranks of AI. The AI act doesn't mention chatbots and generative AIs but according to *Deutsche Welle*, they will be considered as high-risk systems. Tools that predict where and who will commit crimes will be banned. Remote facial recognition tools will be used only to counter and prevent terrorist threats. The act will be presented next month in the European Parliament for adoption. The EU will be the first to establish AI rules. ("[EU lawmakers take first steps toward tougher AI rules](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 11 May 2023)

INTERNATIONAL

Prisoner swap between Iran and

Germany

On 26 May, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian thanked Oman for mediating a prisoner swap between Iran and Germany. The Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi and German aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele arrived in Muscat and were returned to their respective countries. In January 2023, Vandecasteele was arrested under espionage charges and was sentenced to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes. According to Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, Vandecasteele spent 455 days in prison. The Belgian government arrested Assadi and sentenced 20 years in prison for planning a bomb attack on a France-based Iranian opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. Belgian intelligence found that Assadi was working with Iran's intelligence. The National Council of Resistance accused Belgium of paying a "shameful ransom." ("[Iran, Belgium conduct prisoner swap freeing aid worker, diplomat](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 26 May 2023)

France expresses concerns over Iran's ballistic missile test

On 25 May, the French Foreign Ministry spokesperson Anne-Claire Legendre said that Iran's test-fire of ballistic missiles is concerning amid its nuclear programme escalation. The comment comes as a response to Iran's test firing of a 2000 kilometres range ballistic missile on 25 May. She accused Iran of violating the UN Security Council's 2231 resolution which limits Iran from pursuing "any activity" relating to ballistic missiles with nuclear capability. Legendre said: "Iran's activities pose serious and increased non-proliferation risks without any credible civilian justification." (John Irish, "[France says Iran ballistic test worrying in light of nuclear escalation](#)," *Reuters*, 25 May 2023)

EU needs to offer an alternative to the global south, says Ursula

On 21 May, Ursula von der Leyen said that the European bloc should offer an alternative to China's ambitious economic projects for the Global South countries. She also spoke about the EU's 90 flagship

projects in different continents as part of its Global Gateway investment scheme. At the G7 summit in Hiroshima, she urged the EU and G7 countries to use this opportunity to provide alternative funding options to the Global South against the economic projects of China pushing those countries into debt and heavy loans. She further claimed that the Belt and Road initiative is losing appeal because many countries had "bad experiences" with China. China refuted these claims and accused G7 members of abusing trade regulations and hurling false allegations against the Belt and Road Initiative. ("[We must make 'better offer' to Global South than China's project - EU Commission chief](#)," *RT News*, 21 May 2023)

Iran calls out Switzerland over anti-execution comments

On 21 May, the Iranian Foreign Ministry ordered Switzerland's ambassador to Iran, Nadine Oliveri Lozano over an anti-execution tweet. On 19 May, the Swiss embassy called out the Iranian government to reduce the execution rate post the execution of three anti-government protesters. Majid Kazemi, Saleh Mirhashemi and Saeed Yaghoubi were part of protests which provoked the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. The three were accused of killing two members of the Basij paramilitary force. The tweet showcased a picture wherein a poster of Jina Mahsa Amini along with Iran's pre-revolutionary flag was present which in turn made Tehran call out the interventionist nature of Switzerland. ("[Iran summons Swiss ambassador over anti-executions tweet](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 May 2023)

US and UK to tighten sanctions on Russia as G7 Summit commences

On 19 May, the G7 leaders are gathering at Hiroshima for the G7 summit, where they will unveil new sanctions and export controls against Russia. The renewed US sanctions package will include severe restrictions on goods key to the battlefield and add 70 Russian entities to the US commerce department's blacklist. It will also announce 300 new sanctions against Russia's "financial facilitators," helping the war. The sanctions are likely to be extended to more sectors of the Russian economy. UK

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he wants to ensure “Russia pays a price” for the war atrocities in Ukraine. He also expects others to follow suit. Import bans on Russian gold, diamond, copper, aluminium and nickel are likely to be implemented by the UK. The government is also planning to target 86 more people and companies connected to Putin “actively undermining the impact of existing sanctions.” (Jeff Mason, Trevor Hunnicutt, Daphne Psaledakis and Susan Heavey, “[U.S., G7 to unveil new sanctions targeting Russia over Ukraine](#),” *Reuters*, 19 May 2023; “[G7: New sanctions will make sure Russia pays a price, Sunak says](#),” *BBC News*, 19 May 2023)

Free trade between India and UK doubtful

On 18 May, *Reuters* reported that the free trade deal between UK and India is doubtful due to mutual differences in some key tariff lines and investment protection rules. India wants to levy import duties on car and liquor imports that the UK denies. India is against Britain’s insistence that its companies be allowed to seek international arbitration without going to Indian courts first should a dispute arise. (Shivangi Acharya, Aditi Shah and Aftab Ahmed, “[Exclusive: India, UK still far apart on free trade deal - sources](#),” *Reuters*, 18 May 2023)

Academics urge European powers to stand for democracy in Tunisia

On 17 May, according to *The Guardian*, 70 academics urged the European leaders to stand by and support pro-democracy Tunisians to revive the declining democracy in Tunisia via a letter in part collated by his daughter, Soumaya Ghannoushi. This letter comes in response to the arrest of Rached Ghannouchi, the opposition leader of Tunisia, on 17 April 2023 and his subsequent sentencing to a year in jail on 15 May. The letter further stressed the precarious condition of the opposition leaders, who are either arrested or constantly threatened for opposing the president and the undemocratic government. At present, the EU is seeking to avoid political and economic collapse in Tunisia, fearing this would increase the number of people leaving the country for Italy. (Patrick Wintour, “[European leaders](#)

[urged to help Tunisians resist assault on democracy](#),” *The Guardian*, 17 May 2023)

Liz Truss visits Taiwan, China calls it a dangerous political show

On 15 May, Liz Truss arrived in Taiwan for a five-day visit. Truss stated that she came to show her support for Taiwan, which is on the frontlines of the global battle for freedom under China’s threat. In her controversial speech at the Prospect Foundation, she called for an “economic Nato” to fight against China. She urged Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to take action against China, shut down UK-based Confucius institutes, and refrain from restarting economic dialogue with China. She is one of the top leaders who visited Taiwan recently. She was heavily criticized by the Chinese Embassy in London, which called her trip a dangerous political show that would only harm the UK. It also called upon Truss to correct her wrongdoing and stop supporting Taiwan and its ‘Taiwan independence’ secessionist forces. (Nadeem Badshah, “[Chinese embassy calls Liz Truss’s trip to Taiwan a ‘dangerous political stunt’](#)” *The Guardian*, 16 May 2023. Helen Davidson, “[Liz Truss in Taiwan calls for ‘economic Nato’ to challenge China](#),” *The Guardian*, 16 May 2023)

“Together we’re supporting Ukraine,” says Joe Biden

On 13 May, in Washington, US President Joe Biden met with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. Biden acknowledged US’s and Spain’s support to Ukraine while Sanchez blamed Russia for the war. Sanchez called the Russian President Vladimir Putin, an aggressor. Biden appreciated Spain’s migration management. (Jeff Mason and Arshad Mohammed, “[Biden meets with Spain’s Sanchez, discusses Ukraine war](#),” *Reuters*, 13 May 2023)

“Moscow had never refused the diplomatic track,” says Vladimir Putin

On 12 May, Russian President Vladimir Putin on a call with the South African President Cyril Ramphosa said that Russia has never refused a diplomatic track to end the conflict. Ramphosa offered to involve African leaders in the mediation process.

The call was made at South Africa's request. Putin also affirmed sending grains and fertilizers to South Africa for free. (["Putin,S.Africa's Ramphosa discussed Ukraine in phone call-Kremlin," Reuters](#), 12 May 2023)

EU contemplates scaling back in relations with China

On May 12, EU ministers discussed scaling down its economic dependence on China. They aim to readjust the policy to place China as a political rival and economic competitor while partnering on global issues. Since its unexpected fallout in relations with Russia, the EU is struggling to recalibrate its relations with China. Lithuanian Foreign Minister said that the EU must prepare for the potential deterioration of its relations with China if conflict erupts over Taiwan. Borrell rescinded that the aim is not to de-couple but to rebalance the relationship. (Andrew Gray, ["EU ministers back plan to reduce economic reliance on China;" Reuters](#), 12 May 2023; Sabine Siebold, ["Lithuania says EU must prepare for risk of 'de-coupling' from China," Reuters](#), 12 May 2023)

EU urge further talks to reinforce data transfer pact with US

On 11 May, EU urged the European Commission to continue negotiations to reinforce a proposed data transfer agreement with the United States. The EU executive had previously deemed U.S. safeguards against American intelligence activities to be strong enough to address EU data privacy concerns. However, the EU has stated that there are still shortcomings in the proposed agreement, and that elements such as judicial independence, transparency, access to justice, and remedies are missing. The resolution voted against the proposed pact is non-binding, and EU countries have yet to adopt an opinion before the executive makes a final decision. (Foo Yun Chee, ["EU lawmakers want more talks to strengthen proposed US data transfer pact," Reuters](#), 11 May 2023)

Russia protesting to Poland as it prevented Russians from laying flowers on Victory Day

On 09 May, the Russian Foreign Ministry accused Polish authorities of failing to prevent the "provocative actions of the protesters", which disrupted the commemoration and violated the country's obligations. The Ministry called it an "affront" to the memory of over 600,000 Soviet soldiers who liberated Poland from the Nazis. The statement said: "The incident highlighted the "duplicity of Warsaw's policy" in evaluating WWII events," adding that Russia would respond accordingly. Russia will lodge a formal protest to Poland over the actions of a crowd that prevented Russian diplomats from laying flowers at a Soviet military cemetery in Warsaw on 09 May. (["Russia to protest to Poland over provocation against Russian diplomats on May 9 - MFA," TASS](#), 09 May 2023)

Turkish election leaves uncertainty for Greece and East Mediterranean relations

On 09 May, *Politico* reported that Greek-Turkish relations remain tense regardless of who wins the Turkish election, according to analysts. Greek hopes for a change of backlashes from a potential Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu government are unlikely to be met, since Ankara's strategic "red lines" are seen as inflexible, with both the ruling and opposition parties committed to the "blue homeland" policy, which aims to project Turkish naval supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The two countries are also unlikely to diverge greatly on their approach to Cyprus. While opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu may prove a more diplomatic partner, he is not expected to offer substantive changes to Turkey's policies on energy resources in the East Mediterranean, Cyprus, and marine boundaries. (Nektaria Stamouli, ["Turkey's election gives Greece a migraine," Politico.eu](#), 09 May 2023)

India and Russia fail to settle bilateral trade in rupees with Russia

On 04 May, *Euractiv* reported on India and Russia's efforts to settle bilateral trade in rupees, which have been suspended after Moscow refused to accumulate rupees, resulting in a major setback for Indian importers of cheap oil and coal from Russia. Russia has redirected all its crude oil

exports affected by Western sanctions over Ukraine to "friendly" countries, and India is the largest buyer. India's share of global exports of goods is just about 2 per cent, and the rupee is not fully convertible. Russia believes it will end up with an annual rupee surplus of over USD 40 billion, which it considers undesirable and therefore Russia is not comfortable holding rupees and prefers to be paid in Chinese yuan or other currencies. India started exploring a rupee settlement mechanism with Russia soon after the invasion of Ukraine in February last year, but no deal has been reported in rupees. ("[India, Russia suspend negotiations to settle trade in rupees](#)," *Euractiv*, 04 May 2023)

Finnish exports to Russia decrease; EU's exports to Central Asia increases

On 03 May, the *Helsinki Times* said that owing to the Russo-Ukrainian war, Finnish exports to Russia have decreased than the exports from the EU to Russia. According to Eurostat, there is a 38 per cent decrease in the exports of the EU to Russia compared to 2022 EUR 34 billion. For the period of January to February 2023, there was a 50 per cent decrease compared to last year. Exports to the Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Armenia and Uzbekistan have increased 88 per cent compared to the last year. From January to February 2023, there was a 98 per cent increase. The Statistics Director, Olli-Pekka Penttila said that while the exports from Slovenia and Latvia increased Finnish exports to Russia have significantly decreased. Finnish exports to Russia from January to February 2023, have decreased by 78 per cent while the exports to Central Asian countries increased by 260 per cent. This is due to the increase in customs clearances which offers wide opportunities for Finland. ("[Finnish exports to Russia drop by 78 per cent, while EU trade with Central Asia grow](#)," *Helsinki Times*, 03 May 2023)

US and Finnish officials discuss on military cooperation

On 02 May, *Helsinki Times* reported on a

bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) deal signed between the US Deputy Director General, Mikael Antell and Finland official. The agreement will provide Finland with a deterrent factor by stationing US defence troops and equipment. He said: "The DCA will enable the entry and stay of troops, the advance storage of material, and possible infrastructure investments through funds granted to Pentagon by the US Congress." The DCA will establish cooperation in a short notice in case of any security situation. (Aleksi Teivainen, "[HS: Finnish and US officials discussing defence deal that's enable US to freely use Finnish soil](#)," *Helsinki Times*, 02 May 2023)

Poland to prioritize strengthening transatlantic ties with US During EU Presidency in 2025

On 01 May, Poland's President Andrzej Duda announced that Poland aims to strengthen the EU's ties with the US during its presidency in the Council of the EU in 2025, with a focus on cooperation in security and the economy. While speaking on the 19th anniversary of Poland's membership in the EU, Duda said the country would focus on reinforcing collaboration with the US and strengthening transatlantic ties, including building a joint security system. President Duda also discussed EU enlargement, including membership for Ukraine and Moldova, and the accession process for western Balkan countries, in order to support the EU's open-door policy Poland joined the EU in 2004 and has held the Council of the EU presidency only once in 2011, since then. Among the priorities during that presidency were completing membership talks with Croatia and the association agreement with Ukraine. (Aleksandra Krzysztoszek, "[Poland to reinforce transatlantic relations during next Council of EU presidency](#)," *Euractiv*, 02 May 2023)

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