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WEATHER ANOMALIES IN EUROPE



Europe Monitor #23 | Vol. 03 | Issue 08 | August 2023
An initiative of NIAS and KAS-India Office



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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*.

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The Monthly is an integral part of NIAS Europe Studies. It includes focused commentaries on Europe, short notes, and daily updates on contemporary Europe. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of any institutions or organisations.

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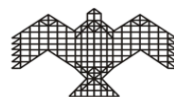
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National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) was conceived and founded in 1988 by the late Mr JRD Tata, who sought to create an institution to conduct advanced multidisciplinary research.

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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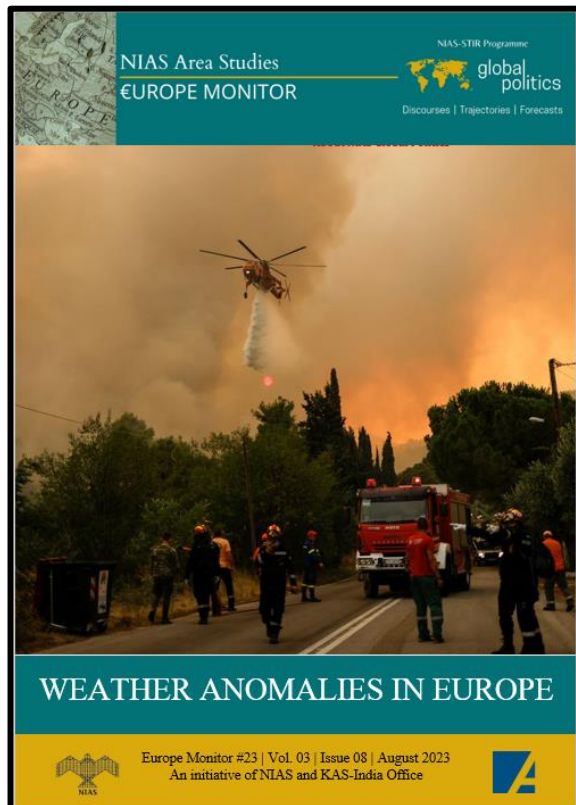
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Europe Monitor

Europe Monitor # 23, Vol. 03, No. 08,
August 2023



Firefighter helicopter dropping water to counter wildfire in Greece
Image Source: REUTERS/Alkis Konstantinidis

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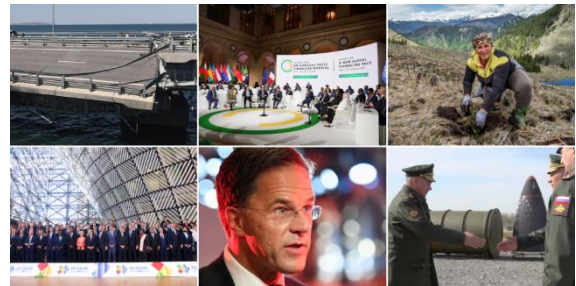
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Source: CFP/CGTN, Lewis Joly/Pool via
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Source: Tunisian Presidency/AP, Anadolu Agency, Klaus-Dietmar Gabbert/dpa/picture alliance, AP/Alexander Ryumin, Lithuanian Armed Forces, PBS/AP

The War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from Day 493 to Day 521 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, *By Sreeja JS, Rishika Yadav, and Padmashree Anandhan*

EM SHORT NOTES



Source: the statesman, Giornolettismo, AP Photo, Ben Birchall/PA via AP, swzmaritime.nl, Planet Labs PBC via AP

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 Sneha Surendran, Rishika Yadav, Genesy B and Prerana S*

COVER STORY

Weather Anomalies in Europe: Heatwaves, Wildfires, and Floods

By Padmashree Anandhan, Sneha Surendran, and Rishika Yadav

Climate change and Anthropogenic factors are the major cause for the repeat of heatwaves, wildfires and floods in Europe.

Europe's southern hemisphere experienced its highest temperatures in July across Greece, Southern France, eastern Spain, Sicily, and southern Italy. According to the report from Copernicus Climate Change Service, the expansion of the heat dome (an atmospheric condition trapping scorching air over southern Europe, along with two anticyclones) is responsible for the change in the weather pattern. The peaking temperatures and heatwaves after the summer of 2022 are beginning to become a trend in 2023. To analyse this trend, it is necessary to look at the occurrence of such peak temperatures so far, map the occurrences geographically, examine the causal factors and fallouts, and compare this with the state and regional response.

I Europe: Return of Heatwaves in 2023

When it comes to Europe, heatwaves in the 20th century are nothing new as they began in 1920, with a dry autumn and a winter first affecting the water supply, agriculture, and livestock farming. This developed into wildfires, severe drought, and dry hazards in England, the Czech Republic, and parts of central Europe. Such phenomenon's continued through the summers of 2003, 2010, and 2015. Later, with the rise in global temperatures, soil moisture deficit and increase in Green House Gases (GHGs) caused hot summers to occur frequently in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022. The first severe heatwave which began in 2003, recorded 35 to 40 degrees Celsius according to the UNEP data. Between 1982 and 2018, sea surface temperature increased by between around 0.3 degrees Celsius per decade in the North Atlantic, and around 0.6 degrees Celsius per decade in the Black Sea. Although the

increasing trend is expected to progress, it is slow compared to the air and land temperatures. The frequency and magnitude of marine heatwaves have increased significantly both globally and in European seas, and are projected to continue, with increasing expected impacts on climate and ecosystems. The increase in sea surface temperatures led to more marine heatwaves in European seas. This has resulted in ecological impacts, the promotion of harmful algal blooms, and increased risks to human health and aquaculture. For example, recent marine heatwaves led to vibriosis infections along the Baltic Sea and North Sea coasts. Marine heatwaves also affect the climate on land, with those in the Mediterranean Sea contributing to amplifying heatwaves and heavy precipitation events over central Europe, and triggering intense weather anomalies.

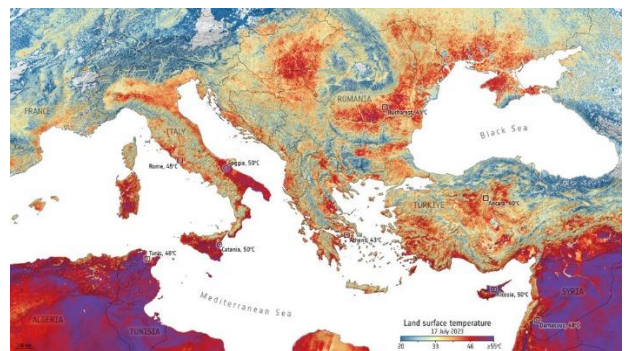


Figure 1: Land surface temperatures across Europe and parts of North Africa as of 10 July 2023. Source: European Space Agency.

In 2023, the peak temperatures, have led the areas of southern France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, to face climate extremities in the form of heatwaves, wildfires, floods, and melting of glacier alps. According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), climate change

combined with a new El-Niño has resulted in a change of weather pattern that has warmed up the Pacific Ocean.

Geographic Mapping

In the summer of 2023, compared to Europe-wide heatwave, southern Europe and especially Sicily and Sardinia in Italy, southern Spanish region of Andalusia, and Athens experienced the highest temperatures ranging from 45 to 47 degrees Celsius (Figure 1). *The New York Times*, reported on extreme heat on the land atmosphere across Algeria, Croatia, Greece, eastern Spain, Sardinia, Sicily, southern Italy, and Catalonia.

The heatwaves were observed to be concentrated in the northern hemisphere, with a wave of heat across France, Central, and Eastern Europe, coupled with unusually hot temperatures persisting in Spain, Italy, and the Balkans.

In the previous year 2022 evidenced the first record of high temperatures during July and August. Similar to 2022, the temperatures are predicted to persist from July until October 2023. The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) predicted the temperature would persist till October, marking the longest period of heatwaves since 1980. As per the weather anomaly chart of ECMWF, the temperature has increased 10 degrees Celsius above average in (46 degrees) Portugal, (45 degrees) northern Spain, (40 degrees) western France, and southern England. With the hot air moving north, the Benelux countries, Baltic region, Ireland, the UK, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, northern Italy, Switzerland, and western Germany recorded six degrees Celsius higher than the average temperatures. Northern Europe is expected to heat up by three degrees Celsius. The European Space Agency used Sentinel 2 & 3 (Earth observatory satellites), and separated air and land surface temperatures to find that the land surface temperature amounted to 48 degrees Celsius in Sicily and Sardinia due to increasing weather and climate shifts across Europe in July 2023. Between 2010 to 2020, extreme temperatures differed widely across

Europe in terms of frequency, duration, and severity.

In 2010, eastern Europe and Russia experienced severe heat whereas it was less in the west. In 2015, southern Europe and the Baltic states were exposed to extreme heatwaves, whilst, northern and Scandinavian countries experienced peak temperatures in 2018.

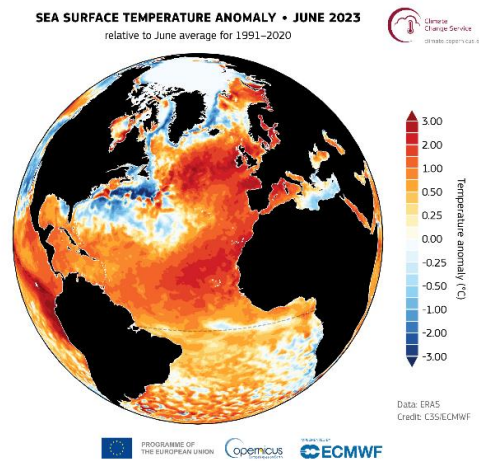


Figure 2: Sea surface temperature as of June 2023. Source: ERA5/Copernicus Climate Change Service/ECMWF.

At the sea surface, the heatwave was strong in the north-east Atlantic in June 2023, ranging from two degrees to three degrees Celsius (Figure 2), and continues to switch between extreme, moderate, and locally strong in the Iberian Peninsula, and the northern part of the North Sea located between the British Isles and Norway. The heatwave is concentrated in the tropical north Atlantic, extending through the basin from strong to severe in the east, and fluctuating from moderate to strong in the west. In the case of the north-east Pacific, the heatwave remains moderate to strong (Figure 3). Whereas in 2022, the Mediterranean Sea remained the hotspot, impacting the Med5 countries (Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Spain). Followed by the Arctic Ocean with a slow heating trend while the land surrounding had a faster rate of rising temperatures.

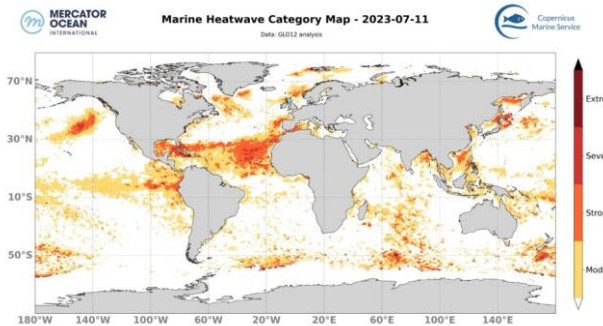


Figure 3: Marine heatwaves map as of 11 July 2023. Source: Mercator Ocean International.

Historically, the sea surface temperatures of all five European seas- Black Sea, Baltic Sea, Mediterranean, North Sea, and the North Atlantic- began increasing in 1870. The Mediterranean Sea is the warmest of all, and is now seconded by the North Atlantic Ocean. The latest hotspot in the North Atlantic is reportedly experiencing multiple marine heatwaves. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a US-based marine watch agency, categorised heatwaves into categories, with category 5 equivalent to beyond extreme 4-5 degree Celsius being the maximum and category 1 being the minimal. In accordance with these categories, areas around Ireland, the UK, and the Baltic Sea were marked as Category 4 with “extreme” marine heatwaves and Category 2 “strong” heatwaves near the Bay of Biscay, stretching to the northwest coast of Africa (Figure 3) during July 2023.

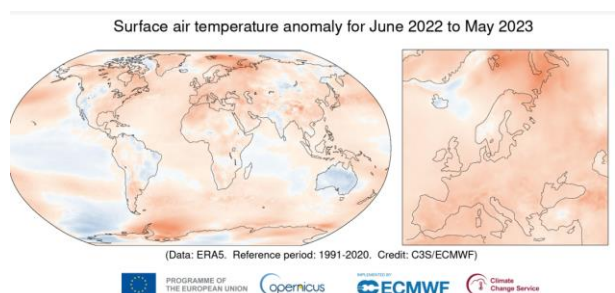


Figure 4: Surface air temperature. Source: ERA5/Copernicus Climate Change Service/ECMWF.

Issues

First, the jet stream and double jets. The causal factors for the heatwaves and rising temperatures are increased human activities and rising global temperatures. High concentration of carbon dioxide gases, flow of jet streams, combined with the hot air

from Africa led to the circulation of the atmosphere and the ocean in Europe (Figure 4).

A study published in Nature Communications, keeping Europe as the center of heatwave hotspots, found that the increased occurrence of double jets marked extreme heat since the 2003 heatwave. The scientists from the Potsdam Institute of Climate Impact Research (PIK) were able to find out that the reason behind 35 per cent of the extreme heatwaves in western Europe are continuing double jets. According to experts from ECMWF, heatwaves can be the result of a stationary high-pressure system with clear skies and weak winds.

These conditions can create longer heatwaves, such as the recent one in mid-August of 2022. According to Director of Forecasts at ECMWF, Florian Pappenberger: “The effect on near-surface temperature depends on how much energy is used to evaporate water from the ground and plants, and how much is heating the air. If the soil is already dry or the surface is just concrete and tarmac, there is little cooling of the near-surface temperature due to evaporation. Instead, most of the energy will heat the air and thus increase the magnitude of the heatwave.”

In simple terms, the extreme heat in 2023 is due to an anticyclone and a high-pressure system that controls the upper atmosphere over southern Europe. Due to compressed and warm air, high-pressure systems occur with “reduced cloud cover,” resulting in more solar radiation reaching the ground. This leads to extensive heating of the Earth’s surface by the sun, heat which then moves upwards into the atmosphere. It is noticeable by the long days and short nights of summer, which indicate the maximizing of the heating effect.

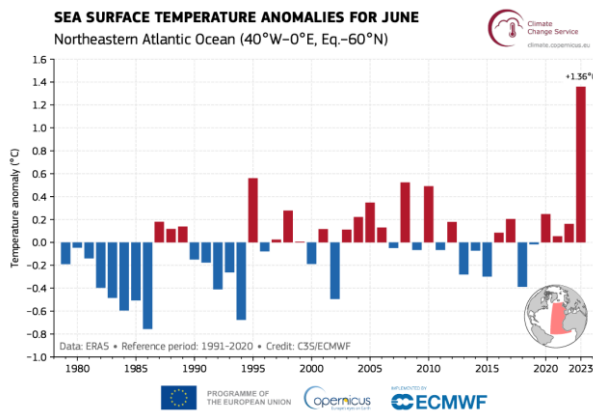


Figure 5: Sea surface temperature in Celsius averaged over the northeastern Atlantic region for June during 1979 to 2023. Source: ERA5/Copernicus Climate Change Service/ECMWF.

Second, rise in sea temperatures. The slow increase of water temperatures due to long-term anthropogenic change and increased occurrences of marine heat waves have been having devastating effects on local ecosystems. Marine heat waves have also been associated with the likelihood of extreme weather events, such as cyclones and heavy precipitation. The rise in ocean temperature is one of the major drivers for the migration of marine species to higher latitudes. More subtropical and tropical marine species are replacing temperate water fish, and reshaping fisheries and catch compositions. Warmer Mediterranean SSTs lead to enhanced evaporation and moisture transport in the atmosphere, therefore making this region a major climate change hot spot for the coming decades.

The same can be confirmed from the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) report of early July (Figure 5). It reported that the Atlantic Ocean heatwave was warmer between June and July, compared to the other basins close to North America and Europe. According to the report, sea surface temperatures in the eastern North Atlantic have decreased (except in June), but the marine heatwaves tend to continue across different areas. The Mediterranean Sea is one of the major hotspots for marine heatwaves, the North Atlantic Ocean has followed with record-breaking sea-surface temperatures (+0.99 degrees Celsius) which has influenced Europe’s weather conditions causing tropical cyclones.

Marine heatwaves could arise from various individual and combined factors, including atmospheric and oceanographic processes, which significantly impact marine life and bring about extreme weather events. The new El Niño (El Niño are occurrences of warming of ocean or sea surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific) is also expected to affect the atmospheric circulation until October 2023. At the atmospheric level, circulation, air pollution, and climate change are the contributing factors to rising temperatures. The North Atlantic Ocean experienced an unusual atmospheric circulation. It is due to surface wind speeds linked to sea surface temperatures, meaning any reduction in the wind speed will reduce the mixing of the surface water with the cooler water below, increasing sea surface temperatures.

Third, heat stress. A newly identified causal factor of the heatwaves is the “Heat Stress.” Like a domino effect, if one heat dome (a high-pressure circulation) is not controlled, it leads to subsequent heat waves across Europe and the Arctic Ocean. This will tend to continue until there is a shift in the atmospheric circulation. Such episodes lasted in Southern Spain up to 60 days, in small areas across 70 days, but mostly concentrated in southern Europe lasting a greater number of days. C3S projects the heat stress to vary from strong to very strong and southern Europe, and it may experience “extreme heat stress,” in the long run.

Fourth, Climate Change. Traces of climate change can be found all over heatwaves across southern Europe, such as warm gases in the air leading to stronger and frequent heatwaves. PBS, a US public broadcast service, reported that the high intensity of heat domes and increased air pressure were found to be formed from increased burning of coal, oil, and gas, which increased the possibility by 50 times for a heatwave to occur. Therefore, a persisting warm atmosphere filled with carbon dioxide and other gases led to a 2.5 degrees Celsius hotter heatwave. According to a scientist at the Imperial College of London, Mariam Zachariah, if it had not been for climate change, such extreme heatwaves would not

have occurred.

Fifth, decreased particulate pollution. In the last four decades, Europe has been one of the key players in reducing particulate air pollution from industries, automobiles, and energy. According to the research by Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), the increased absence of air pollution by humans in the northern hemisphere has dropped by 50 per cent between 1980 and 2020. It has led to surface warming of the tropical Atlantic Ocean. This is because the amount of particulate pollution that needs to be present to reflect sunlight was less, thereby making the oceans absorb more heat and warm faster. Along with the sea, the land and atmosphere also get warmed, affecting the movement of the jet stream and causing tropical storms.

Fallouts

First, economic fallout. A study published in *Nature* on the regional economic impact due to heatwaves in Europe found how extreme temperature affects occupational health, undermines human capital accrual, and impacts the economy. The study investigated the heatwaves of 2013, 2010, 2015, and 2018 as a sample to analyse the contributing factors to the economic impact. First, the human influence doubled the possibility of heatwaves forming threats to labour productivity. Second, the intensity of the heatwaves had varied economic impacts across Europe. Between 2013 and 2018, the heatwaves affected Europe's economic growth by 0.3 to 0.5 per cent. When split between the north and south of Europe the warm temperature remains proportional, but in terms of economic losses, southern Europe was affected the most. This was due to higher contributions from outdoor production in southern Europe such as agriculture, industrial, and transport services. Those who worked indoors were less exposed to solar radiation, and the low metabolic intensity of indoor jobs helped protect the labourers. According to the study, Europe is expected to steadily incur gross domestic product (GDP) loss in the next 40 years. Cyprus, Portugal, Spain, and Croatia are expected to see a two to three per cent loss in GDP by 2040-2060 from extreme heat. Measures such as rescheduling

of tasks, increased breaks, and shifting of outdoor activities into indoor have been taken to decrease the productivity loss. Widely across Europe and companies, heat-insulation measures, and air conditioning have been adopted, but are likely to protect only the indoors, leaving outdoor sectors exposed to economic damages.

Second, human health adversities. The WMO warned of the increasing deaths due to extreme heat in Europe. According to the report by the UN, 60,000 people died in the summer of 2022, despite the regional efforts in early warning and health action plans. WMO stated the need to build an adaptive infrastructure to endure extreme heat and raise awareness among people against the risks. Although extreme temperature warnings are given across Asia, North Africa, and the US, Europe remains more vulnerable due to fastening urbanisation, increased heat, and the aged population. Those who remain in low-income neighbourhoods are prone to poor health, reduced economic yield, and poor living arrangements.

In terms of age bracket, the increased intensity of heatwaves affect the elderly living in cities more. Those who are more than 65 years old have twice the chance of being subject to heart-related mortality. Apart from the age factor, pre-existing medical issues, social deprivation, economically deprived locations (living in urban set-up) are the factors for Europeans exposed to chronic conditions, cardiovascular, respiratory, and kidney diseases. Research published in the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute journal, taking the case studies of Spain and Greece located in the Mediterranean hotspot, showed a U-shaped relationship between mortality and peak temperatures which had a nonlinear relationship. According to the study, cardiological and cardiorespiratory mortality in Spain was on a downward trend, with a higher trend in respiratory mortality. This was different in Greece, which had an upward trend of respiratory and cardiorespiratory mortality, with a stable cardiological mortality rate.

Responses

According to the European Climate and Health Observatory, since 2003, collaboration between weather services, civil protection, and public health departments began at national, subnational, and local levels. Two key responses established by the regional and national governments are the heat-health action plan (HHAP) and its subsequent component, the heat-health warning system (HHWS). The HHWS, which helps in weather forecast, provides ways to assess weather-health relations and aims to reduce the heat stress effect on human health. This is done from the data collected from National Meteorological services connected to HHAP, but the data surveys are yet to be responded to by many countries. In such surveys, governance remains one of the key objectives to interlink actions and collaborations amongst actors. According to a research article published in Health Research Policy and Systems, in health governance, many stakeholders who are responsible for helping in the preparedness and response against heatwaves were involved by the European countries as per different levels of warning systems and not by the roles. Thereby the article suggests a clear allocation of roles and responsibilities to remove confusion and promote effective implementation.

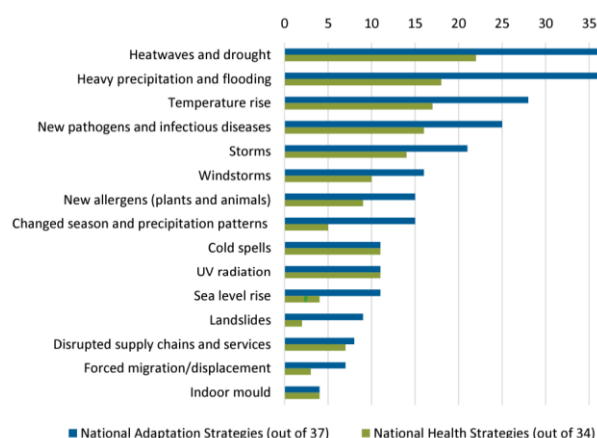
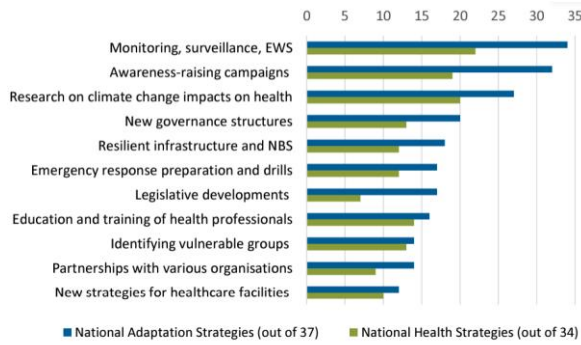


Figure 6. EU's national policies on Climate-related hazards to health. Source: *European climate and health observatory*

For building resilience against such extreme heat, the EU'S adaptation strategy adopted in 2021, looks at limiting economic costs from weather and climate events, to close the gap

in climate protection. In the strategy, the severity of the heatwaves and subsequent triggers of wildfires, droughts in the Mediterranean region, the impact on the health of Europeans, water shortage, spillover effects on food security, aggravation of social inequalities, and threat to cultural heritage have been recognized. In terms of an action plan, it mandates the need to understand risks to counter the threats to human health, proposing the creation of "One Health" to address the human health risks arising from climate change. The report published in March 2022 by the "Climate Adapt" under the European Climate and Health Observatory, provides details of the policies adopted by the 32 EU member countries only. Limitations persist over promoting action on carbon emission reduction, installing climate resilient health systems, and adopting health measures to protect people from climate risks across the world. Whereas the EU has a well-structured policy measure to prevent risks to human health compared to the rest of the world. The topmost risks are heatwaves (Figure 6) and drought, followed by floods, temperature rise, storms, and later sea level rise, landslides, and forced migration.

The policy measures mainly focus on addressing the human health-related risks in National Adaptation Strategies (NAS) and National Health Strategies (NHS) through physical, social, and institutional interventions. Of the three, social interventions played a common role in NASs and NHSs (Figure 7). The prime measure adopted at the national level was enhancing monitoring and surveillance systems to record the climate change impact and implementation of early warning systems. Second was the awareness-raising campaign followed by research and education promotion measures among health professionals.



Note: EWS – early-warning systems; NBS – nature-based solutions

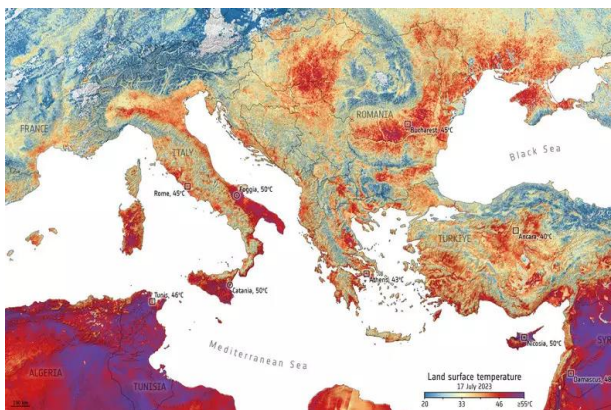
Figure 7: Measures taken to address climate change impacts on health in the national policies reviewed. Source: European climate and health observatory.

II

Wildfires in Europe: Another year of devastation

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and Europe’s Copernicus Climate Change Service jointly classified July 2023 as the hottest month ever documented in Europe, marking a trend of increasing temperatures on the continent recently. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres, underscored the gravity of the situation, proclaiming: “The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived.”

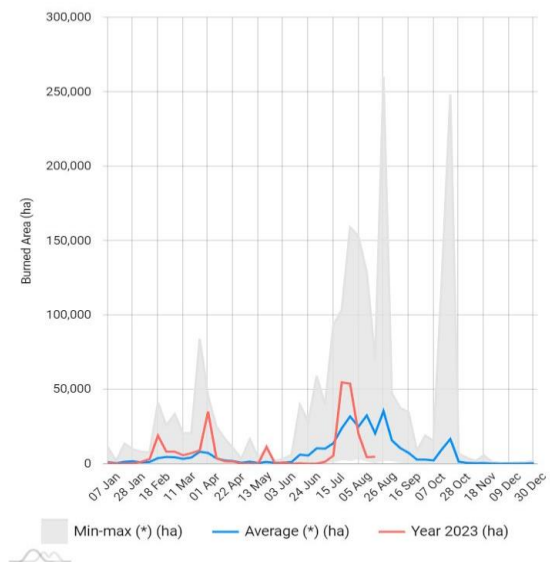
The Euro-Mediterranean region is prone to fires from May to September every year. The southern Euro-Mediterranean experiences peak temperature increases and relative humidity in July, while the northern regions face the highest risk between mid-August and September, a period of favourable fire weather conditions.



Land surface temperature as of 17 July 2023
Source: European Space Agency.

The European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) reported that an area of over 182,569 hectares within the EU had already been burned by raging wildfires by 22 July 2023. This figure exceeded the average recorded between 2003 and 2022, which stood at 128,225 hectares, by more than 40 per cent. Such has been the spread of fires that by 29 July, just five days later, the tally had risen to 234,516 hectares of land being burnt across the EU.

Additionally, this year took just 31 days for the curves showing the weekly cumulative number of fires and burned areas to surpass the average for the last 20 years.



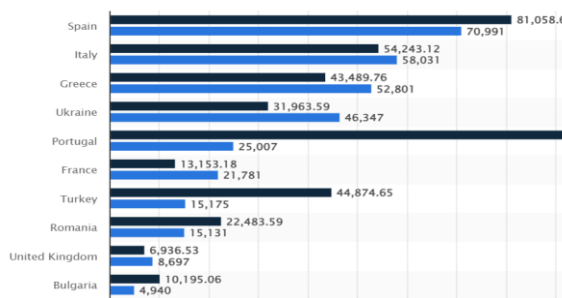
Source: EFFIS; Weekly Cumulative Burnt Areas depicting the 2023 curve peaking over the average.

This year, as of 15 August, Spain had recorded the most devastation out of the European nations affected by wildfires, with over 71,000 hectares of land ravaged.

However, this is less than the 81,100 hectares burned down each year on average between 2006 and 2022 in Europe. Moreover, a look at data from the last seven years shows that a considerable number of fires were detected in countries like Portugal, Italy, Greece, France, and Spain. The highest frequency of fire incidents occurred in Portugal between August 2016 and October 2017.

Geographical mapping

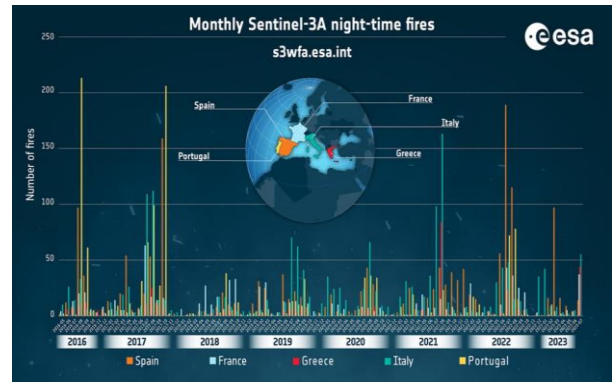
Greece is no stranger to wildfires. However, recent years have been critical in terms of the intensity, duration, and number of fires recorded. This year, popular tourist hotspots on Rhodes and Corfu islands have been intensely affected by wildfires, prompting tourist evacuations. Greece's second-largest island Evia, as well as its capital Athens, also faced huge fire outbreaks. Relentless blazes in the Alexandroupolis region that have already affected over 73,000 hectares are being called the "largest wildfires on record in EU."



Area burned by forest and wildland fires in Europe as of August 2023, with the average for 2006 to 2022, by country (in hectares) Source: Statista.

In France, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Occitanie, Grand Est, Bouches-Du-Rhone, and Corsica Island saw multiple small-scale wildfires. The Pyrenees-Orientalis, a region along the country's borders with Spain, faced a fire that swiftly spread to the nearby villages of Saint-Andre, Sorede, and coastal Argeles, prompting the closure of roads and train services across the border. "Intense heat, dryness, and strong winds" were blamed for the widespread impact of this outbreak.

Fires in Spain broke out in early July, with those in La Palma Island leading to the evacuation of over 4000 people. Around 2900 hectares of the island were ravaged, including 200 hectares of the Caldera de Taburiente National Park. Northern Catalonia, Gran Canaria Island, and the coastal cities of Cadiz and Huelva also saw notable outbreaks.



Southern Europe night-time fire trend in the last seven years Source: ESA.

Wildfires in Portugal's Sintra-Cascais Park and Odemira town spread rapidly, propelled by strong winds. Over 120 municipalities in the country were flagged for "maximum risk" of wildfires. Meanwhile, Italy saw its first fire breakout of the season in late July. Parts of Sicily, Calabria, Catania, and Syracuse were affected, while other cities were put on red alert due to the rising temperatures. Heat also disrupted the power and water supply in certain regions. An official report from Sicily pointed out that temperatures in the eastern regions had touched 47 degrees Celsius, alarmingly close to the European record of 48.8 degrees Celsius two years ago. Italian firefighters reported nearly 1400 fires between 23 and 25 July. Wildfires in Croatia proved difficult to contain due to extremely strong winds while several mountain villages had to be evacuated in Switzerland due to a growing blaze engulfing the forested region of mountains in the Valais canton near the Italian border. According to reports, fires in Switzerland have already destroyed more than half the forest area which would normally have taken over 100 smaller fires to destroy in a regular year. Russia has also noted an increase in the intensity of wildfires in recent seasons, which, according to Greenpeace Russia, is due to climate change-induced high temperatures in Siberia. Multiple regions in the country were placed under an emergency as forest fires blazed over 61,000 hectares of land, exacerbated by the dry weather and lightning storms. While firefighting operations were effective in mainly controlling the spread, Turkey also reported a higher number of wildfires than the previous year.

Issues

First, climate change. Climate change is undeniably proliferating and increasing the severity of wildfires in Europe. The European Drought Observatory reported that over 25 per cent of the EU's territory is susceptible to droughts, with an additional 10 per cent on alert due to reduced rainfall and subsequent low soil moisture levels. Furthermore, Europe's temperature has risen twice as fast as the global average since the 1980s, reaching around 2.3°C above the pre-industrial baseline last year. This trend has continued in 2023 as well, with May and early June marking the warmest months on record. Coinciding with the onset of summer, which is historically a season for wildfires in Europe, these factors have combined to make the continent hotter and drier, creating a conducive environment for wildfires to spread. Another alarming trend observed has been that while southern Europe used to be the most affected by wildfires, central and eastern Europe are also recording a spike in fire incidents, although in lesser numbers. The Nordic and Baltic states have also been placed on fire alerts. The extreme heat has also been attributed to the influence of El Niño. The heatwaves in the region have been exacerbated by a 'heat dome.' These high-pressure systems emerged from the Sahara Desert, impacting northern Africa before crossing over into the Mediterranean region.

Authorities overlooking wildfire prevention: Various experts have pointed out that despite years of wildfire episodes and prior knowledge of the disaster, governing authorities' focus largely remains confined to containing the spread of fires rather than tackling the contributing causes of the fires. For instance, keeping in mind the threat of wildfires this year, the EU took proactive steps by doubling the fleet of firefighting aircraft to 28; and these were deployed across 10 countries. These initiatives were also taken last year, when firefighters were placed in Greece, France, and Portugal, countries that are consistently afflicted by wildfires in the summer. Critics point out the need to expand forestry, land management, and practices that can create a more sustainable and effective long-term solution

to fires. Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, also remarked about the need for the European Union to boost investments in wildfire prevention since the forest fire season is getting longer and spreading more geographically.

Second, anthropogenic factors. Human activities have worsened the climate crisis, resulting in extreme weather events including wildfires. According to the European Environment Agency (EEA), between 2012 and 2018, 3581 km² of croplands and pastures were converted for urban usage, while soil sealing increased by almost 1467 km². Urbanization in or surrounding green spaces creates infrastructure and brings more people into the area, both of which are potential ignition points for fires. It also alters the temperature of the region while creating artificial pathways for winds, which can act to spread fires. Soil sealing leads to failure in carbon sequestration, a process wherein carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is removed and stored in carbon sinks like forests and soil. Carbon sequestration is an important factor in tackling anthropogenic climate change, and the decrease in forest cover further hinders this. Between 2012 and 2018, the loss of carbon sequestration was chalked up to almost 4.2 million metric tons of carbon. Unsustainable agricultural practices have reduced soil moisture, leading to vegetation becoming flammable and conducive to fire initiation and spreading.

Highlighting possible arson as a reason for the wildfires, Greece's Minister of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection said that most of the fires were started by people, either deliberately or by accident. He affirmed his stance by pointing out that multiple fires had erupted in close proximity to each other at roughly the same time, which implies human involvement. Meanwhile, certain fires in Turkey were accidentally set off by individuals who were attempting to burn weeds in their gardens. However, the dry weather and strong winds combined to spread the fire, resulting in entire neighbourhoods and vegetation being affected.

Fallouts

First, air pollution. While the immediate impact of wildfires is significant, the broader repercussions are far more concerning, specifically air pollution and its compounding effects. Wildfires are major sources of carbon dioxide emissions, accelerating climate change and creating conditions that propagate the spread of fires as drought and extreme heat intensify. This July, the wildfires in a week in Greece emitted more carbon into the atmosphere than has been recorded in any July for the last 20 years. The smoke produced is equally hazardous. Toxic gases and particulate matter (PM) are emitted when vegetation is burned, significantly deteriorating the local air quality. There are records from the previous decade depicting that fine particles (PM 2.5) emitted from wildfires have caused air pollution that has led to thousands of deaths. The effects of harmful air quality continue to be most severe for vulnerable groups including old people, children, pregnant women, and outdoor workers.

Second, monetary impact. Sarah Meier, a researcher who specializes in the economic repercussions of fires and extreme weather events, said that regions affected by wildfires often experience a decline in their GDP. According to her, this decline is especially evident in the tourism sector, stating: "Employment figures for the tourism sector show that fewer people are employed after fires."

Apart from the tourism industry, wildfires have varying effects in other sectors, with some benefiting and others suffering detrimental consequences. From 2010 to 2018, southern Europe's retail and tourism sectors recorded a decrease in the average annual employment rate by 0.09-0.15 per cent, which meant an estimated loss of 6,000-10,000 jobs per year. However, the insurance, real estate, administrative, and support service-related industries experienced growth of 0.13-0.22 per cent in employment rates, corresponding to the creation of nearly 4,000-7,000 jobs in that period. This was due to the increased activities post-wildfire in the insurance and real estate sectors, along with temporary

roles for additional construction workers and firefighters.

The European Commissioner for Crisis Management stated: "EURO one invested in wildfire prevention saves EURO 10 in damage." He also reported that the 2022 wildfires had cost approximately EURO two billion in damages alone. Extensive monetary resources also go into tackling wildfires. For instance, this year Greece has expended EURO 7.5 million to contain the Rhodes Island wildfires alone.

Hitting the tourism industry: Several of the countries fighting wildfires are tourist hotspots with the country's economy relying on the footfall. For instance, the tourism and hospitality industries contribute almost 20 per cent to Greece's economy, 12 per cent to Spain's, and nine per cent to Italy's, underscoring the importance of this sector. Following the wildfires around popular tourist zones and their concerning spread, a record number of people have been evacuated, while tour operators have reported cancellations from clients. Moody's, an international rating agency, reported that the long-term allure of southern European travel destinations faces a potential decline due to rising temperatures and the threat of wildfires, furthering economic challenges, while more northern countries might experience an increased influx of tourists as their value increases in terms of climate safety. However, experts also argue that this is a temporary phenomenon restricted to the wildfire season, pointing out that countries like Dubai and Las Vegas continue to be visited by huge numbers of people despite the extreme heat.

Third, environment. Apart from the extensive loss of forest coverage and impact on wildlife, the wildfires are also resulting in the "restructuring" of the biodiversity distribution of the region. Wildfires are common in the summer and over millennia, Mediterranean plants have adapted themselves to develop modifications such as fire-resistant tissues, water storage capabilities, and heat-resistant seeds that help them adapt to the impacts of the fires. There are certain species in the Mediterranean region whose seeds do not germinate unless they have been sufficiently

exposed to heat, usually provided by wildfires.

Although fires destroy ecosystems, the new vegetation that emerges after this destruction shows remarkable stages of recovery and creates alternate ecosystems. However, human interventions in the biodiversity zones in the Mediterranean like the building of roads and fences have made them vulnerable. The increasing number and intensity of wildfires in recent times have begun taking their toll on the regenerative capacity of plant species. Furthermore, altered fire patterns and fire seasons due to global warming are a challenge for ecosystems that have adapted to natural fire regimes in the past.

Responses

The EU has instituted programs and monitoring agencies to help tackle wildfires on the ground, research fire patterns, and meticulously collect data for further studies. For instance, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre is one disaster response organisation that is equipped with a wildfire support team to help with proactive measures to combat fires every year. It also keeps track of how wildfires are changing using tools like the European Forest Fire Information System. In addition, the EU's Copernicus emergency satellite mapping service also assists with this data collection from space.

When natural disasters become too intense for a country to handle using its own resources, it can ask for help through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Notably, between 2007 and 2019, 30 per cent of all aid requests made through this mechanism were in response to wildfires across the continent. When the Civil Protection Mechanism is activated, the EU's Emergency Response Coordination Centre arranges and pays for assistance offered by EU members and other countries that help voluntarily.

Furthermore, the EU established the European Civil Protection Pool to ensure a sizeable reserve of civil protection resources that can be quickly mobilized for a united and effective response. In addition, during extreme fire crisis situations, the rescEU firefighting reserve has taken charge, adding

more capacity to the containment efforts. The firefighting teams from rescEU are complemented by amphibious aircraft, helicopters, and assessment teams.

The EU Forest Strategy for 2030 aims to prevent fires and strengthen the climate resilience of forests by sustainably managing vegetation and preventing the collection of flammable fuel on the ground. Moreover, the new Nature Restoration Law passed in July 2023 was a significant advancement to aid in the mitigation of the effects of natural disasters, including fires. By aiming to restore 20 per cent of the EU's land ecosystems, working to replenish vegetation cover, and promoting sustainable forestry practices, it recognizes the role of nature in reducing the impact of these disasters.

Country-wise responses include the evacuation of residents from fire-affected regions. For instance, wildfires this year have prompted Greece to move nearly 2,500 people, one of the country's largest evacuation efforts ever. Other responses include the deployment of firefighting fleets along with the voluntary involvement of civil organisations and individuals in firefighting efforts. Foreseeing the possible spread of the fires, multiple cities and entire regions have been placed under red alert. Firefighting teams have also intentionally burnt down vegetation to reduce the spread of a raging fire. This was seen in Spain, where pine trees were preemptively burned to halt the spread of the Gran Canaria fires.

The continued devastation caused by wildfires this year, in continuation since the last few years is testament to the need for Europe to decisively take proactive measures in fire management. Climate change and subsequent increasing temperatures have largely aided the spread of fires. The loss of vegetation cover as well as the restructuring of ecosystems following wildfires point to the need to focus on the biological impact of the disaster apart from the economic fallouts. Furthermore, the multiple reports of arson being a cause of fires are concerning given the large-scale impacts this causes, from the evacuation of thousands of people to immense air pollution. While wildfires have also seen a spike worldwide, Europe's familiarity with

its fire season will enable them to set a precedent in fire control practices, given the employment of scientific practices and integration with grassroot communities.

III

Floods in Europe: Impacts, and issues

From 04 October 2018 to the early days of November, a series of heavy floods wreaked havoc across Europe, originating in the Calabria region of Italy. Despite fluctuations in flood occurrences, a stable trend was observed in flood-related fatalities across Europe from 1980 to 2018. However, a team of researchers from Delft University discovered that while the number of floods had increased over the past 150 years, the resulting deaths and financial losses had actually decreased.

In July 2021, a tragic event unfolded as devastating floods struck western Europe, particularly Germany and Belgium. The aftermath of these floods led to the loss of at least 120 lives and left numerous individuals unaccounted for. As an illustration, from the 12 to 15 of July 2021, substantial rainfall occurred in regions including the UK, western Germany, and neighboring countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. A system of interconnected storms advanced from France towards Germany, coming to a standstill over the area for a duration of two days.

Moving forward to August 2023, Storm Hans wreaked havoc across northern Europe and Scandinavia, resulting in two fatalities and widespread disruptions. This storm was emblematic of an unusually wet and windy summer experienced in northern Europe.

Geographical mapping

Throughout the year 2023, Europe has been confronted by a series of devastating flood occurrences, predominantly attributed to intense rainfall and severe storms. The most severe impacts were concentrated in the northern and central regions of Europe, where some areas encountered an extraordinary 200 mm of rainfall within a mere 12-hour span. The subsequent floods

caused miserable deaths, vast dislocations, significant property destruction, and extensive disruptions that impacted several nations.

One significant event unfolded in August 2023, driven by the onset of Storm Hans. Storm Hans brought powerful winds and rain to the Baltic region, causing damage, evacuations, and disruptions in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The storm's fierce winds and ceaseless downpours culminated in two fatalities and extensive chaos. This contrasted starkly with the scenario in Portugal and Spain, where persistent drought conditions prompted battles against raging wildfires. The events surrounding Storm Hans serve as a poignant reminder of the vulnerability of infrastructure in the face of extreme weather conditions.

An additional notable flooding event in August 2023 affected regions including Austrian Carinthia, Slovenia, and Croatia due to intense rainfall. Notably, the levels of prominent rivers such as the Sava, Mur, and Drava surged to exceptionally high levels, inundating numerous settlements and disrupting essential transport connections. The ramifications of these floods extended beyond these initial areas, reaching parts of Italy, Switzerland, and Germany.

Issues

First, climate change-induced flooding in Europe. The behavior of the jet stream, a swift airflow affecting European weather, is influenced by phenomena like El Niño and La Niña. El Niño shifts the jet stream southward, leading to increased storm activity and rainfall in southern Europe, while northern Europe experiences drier conditions. In contrast, La Niña shifts the jet stream northward, causing amplified storms and precipitation in the north and cooler, drier weather in the south. These jet stream fluctuations elevate the susceptibility of different regions to floods or droughts, depending on the prevailing atmospheric setup. Escalated global warming heightens the likelihood of slow-moving storms, which can trigger intense and prolonged rainfall over land. This amplified occurrence of sluggish storms is linked to human-driven emissions, such as those from fossil fuels,

which raise the planet's temperature. The resultant increase in temperature augments the frequency of slow-moving storms capable of releasing heavy rainfall, thereby raising the risk of more frequent and severe flooding incidents. Moreover, a complex atmospheric circulation phenomenon known as the "Zugstrasse Vb" pattern plays a crucial role in influencing flood dynamics across Europe, particularly during spring and summer. This pattern involves the movement of low-pressure zones that transport moist air from the Mediterranean Sea to Central Europe, resulting in heightened precipitation levels and subsequent flooding. The correlation between the "Zugstrasse Vb" pattern and past severe flooding incidents underscores the intricate interplay between atmospheric conditions and moisture transport, shaping the magnitude and intensity of floods in the region.

Second, multifaceted challenges in countries. The recent floods across several nations, notably Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, have given rise to a multitude of critical challenges affecting these regions. In Germany, a staggering toll of over 100 fatalities and the evacuation of thousands from the hardest-hit areas attest to the severity of the situation. Similarly, Belgium has witnessed more than 40 deaths, with dozens of individuals still unaccounted for. Additionally, the Netherlands has grappled with the displacement of thousands from their homes.

Moreover, the destructive floods have wreaked havoc on vital infrastructure, leading to dire consequences. Buildings, roads, bridges, railways, and power lines have been severely damaged or completely obliterated, thereby precipitating disruptions across transportation, energy distribution, and communication systems. For instance, the floods in Norway catalysed the partial collapse of the Braskereidfoss dam and submerged a hydroelectric power plant. The Norwegian rail infrastructure company BaneNOR reported that torrential rains caused a steel truss railway bridge in southeast Norway to fall into the Laagen River. With countless bridges and highways succumbing to the floodwaters, Belgium also

took the burden of the infrastructural destruction.

Moreover, factors like resource scarcity, coordination difficulties, and bureaucratic impediments have collectively hindered the recovery endeavors. In Germany, inhabitants have voiced dissatisfaction with authorities, citing delays and inadequate support for tasks like debris clearance and infrastructure repair. Similarly, in Norway, authorities have come under fire for perceived lapses in providing timely alerts and comprehensive evacuation strategies for flood-prone zones.

An additional consequence of these floods has been the widespread disruption of travel networks. Key train lines connecting various parts of Norway, including the Oslo to Bergen line, Oslo to Trondheim line, Roros line, and Rauma Railway, have ground to a halt for a prolonged period. The impact extends to local commuter train services within the Oslo region, such as the Gjøvik line and routes to and from the central Oslo hub. This predicament has compelled a significant advisory for motorists: to the extent feasible, refrain from using personal vehicles, as major thoroughfares linking Oslo and Trondheim are closed off and numerous rural roads remain inaccessible.

Mitigating the travel chaos, airline carriers Norwegian and SAS have augmented their service frequency between the capital and Bergen, as well as Trondheim, with the aim of facilitating intra-country movement. Notably, Norwegian reported rapid sell-outs of these supplementary flights, and they have committed to rolling out additional air travel options in the forthcoming days. While air travel itself has largely remained unscathed, passengers have confronted substantial hurdles in reaching airports promptly due to the suspension of rail operations. To address this predicament, supplementary bus transportation has been arranged from Oslo Airport, albeit passengers have reported instances of chaotic queues and inconveniences.

Fallouts

First, economic repercussions. The widespread floods have inflicted significant economic ramifications, impacting a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including businesses, farmers, and households, with the agricultural sector being particularly hard-hit. Notably, Switzerland bore witness to damage incurred by vital crops such as potatoes and vegetables, exacerbating losses in the agricultural realm. The economic toll in Germany reverberated with insured losses climbing to an estimated EUR 2.55 billion, underscoring the extent of financial detriment. Belgium, too, was not spared, grappling with insured losses soaring to a substantial EUR two billion. Slovenia, for instance, witnessed a deluge of over 200 mm of rainfall within just 12 hours, resulting in extensive infrastructure damage amounting to an estimated EUR 500 million.

The economic repercussions extended beyond localised sectors, impacting pivotal facets like tourism, trade, and intricate supply chains. Norway, for instance, experienced a swift impact, as Gjensidige, an insurance entity, projected damages exceeding NOK 200 million, with expectations of further escalation owing to ongoing developments. This confluence of factors has yielded a composite economic fallout that has far-reaching implications for the affected nations and their intricate economic networks.

Second, the effects of climate change. Ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity have suffered severe damage due to the floods. Contaminants such as sewage, chemicals, and waste have spread through floodwaters, posing risks to water sources and soil. Notable impacts include the effect on nature reserves like the Ahrweiler district in Germany, pollution of rivers like the Meuse river in Belgium, and landslides causing soil erosion and sedimentation in Norway. In summary, the causes of climate change-induced flooding in Europe are closely tied to alterations in atmospheric dynamics, including shifts in the jet stream, intensified storms from global heating, and complex circulation patterns. The effects encompass substantial economic losses, environmental damage, and contamination of vital resources, further underscoring the urgency

of addressing climate change and its impact on flood occurrences.

Responses

In the face of recent devastating floods in Scandinavia, including Norway, the affected states have demonstrated diverse approaches to tackle the crisis, adapting to their unique resources, capabilities, and priorities. The states have swiftly activated their emergency services, including fire brigades, police, military personnel, and volunteers. Their collective efforts encompass critical tasks like rescuing individuals, providing medical aid, distributing essential supplies such as food and water, and clearing debris. States have taken strides to enhance their flood warning systems, incorporating tools such as flood maps, real-time alerts, sirens, and communication through social media channels. For instance, Norwegian authorities, responding to the crisis, issued a severe weather warning for eastern Norway, elevating the "red level" due to floods and landslides. The deployment of emergency services has been instrumental in rescuing individuals and addressing debris accumulation. The urgency of the situation is further emphasised by the fact that authorities are conducting house-to-house evacuations in locations like Hokksund, where water levels are alarmingly high. The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) has labeled the situation as "critical," reflecting the gravity of the crisis.

On a broader scale, the EU has promptly responded to the 2023 floods by extending critical assistance through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. In Slovenia, following a plea for help in dealing with severe flooding, the EU facilitated swift support. Contributions from Austria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, and Slovakia have encompassed vital resources such as helicopters, bridges, excavators, trucks, and more. The mobilisation of over 130 European personnel, including engineers and liaison officers, showcases the EU's commitment to aiding member states during crises.

The EU has not only addressed immediate needs but also extended support to farmers affected by the floods in Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Janusz Wojciechowski, EU Agriculture Commissioner, emphasised existing tools within the Common Agricultural Policy to facilitate restoration after natural disasters.

Taking a forward-looking stance, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre has embarked on vital adaptation measures. These measures range from enhancing flood forecasting and warning

systems to promoting sustainable land use planning, advocating green infrastructure, and reinforcing risk communication and public awareness.

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NIAS EUROPE STUDIES BRIEF

Germany-Russia Relations: What Next?

By Himani Pant

Switching to other (non-Russian) gas sources may result in significant financial costs for Europe when the European economy is already struggling with inflation and high interest rates.

The developments in Ukraine since February 2022 have raised fresh challenges for Germany's policy towards Russia. This paper delves into the broad contours of Germany-Russia relations and highlights the notable policy decisions made by Germany since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Introduction

Russia has emerged as the most divisive issue in the European Union (EU) over the past three decades. In the 1990s, EU members found it relatively easier to settle on a common approach towards Russia that was considered to be gradually "Europeanising".¹ The challenges and divisions in dealing with Russia began manifesting in the early 2000s as the EU prepared for its 'big bang enlargement' to include Central and Eastern European countries in 2004.² In anticipation of the enlargement and to deal with new

neighbours in extended neighbourhoods, the EU introduced the European Neighbourhood

Policy (ENP). The policy was initially envisaged to deal with all southern and eastern neighbours, including Russia. The ENP generated a negative response from Russia³, and it expressed its discontent with its inclusion in the ENP along with other smaller neighbours of the EU.⁴ Later four EU-Russia common spaces were created to include economic issues and environment; issues of freedom, security and justice; external security; and research and development, including cultural ties.⁵

In addition, the new EU members had a troubled history with the former Soviet Union, which gave way to their security concerns and guided their individual policies towards Russia. Broadly speaking, the EU began to oscillate between two approaches after its expansion in 2004. At one end of the spectrum were those who still considered Russia as a potential partner at a bilateral and EU level. At the other end were new member states that viewed and treated Russia as a security threat.

¹Maria Lipman and Alexey Malashenko, "The Shifting EU-Russia Relationship in An end of an Era in EU-Russia Relation" (ed.) Dmitri Trenin, *Carnegie Moscow Center*, May 2013, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/new_era_russia_eu.pdf

²European Parliament, *The Enlargement of the Union*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/167/the-enlargement-of-the-union>

New Members that joined the EU included: Cyprus; Czech Republic; Estonia; Hungary; Latvia; Lithuania; Malta; Poland; Slovakia; Slovenia.

³In the 1990s, Russia was dealing with a difficult phase of political transition, domestic uncertainties, and economic decline. However, the Russian economy began to rebound in the early 2000s, primarily owing to "oil price growth and a global investment boom". Even after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, the country managed to keep public debt in control. It also had a strong central leadership with the arrival of Vladimir Putin as President since 2000 which led to some political stability in the country. As a result of all these factors, it was not willing to deal with the EU on junior terms. EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policy that included territories of former Soviet Union caused unease in Moscow.

⁴The ENP governs the EU's relations with 16 of the EU's closest eastern and southern neighbours; to the south: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia; and to the east: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The ENP was launched in 2003 and developed throughout 2004, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability, and security of all. It was based on the values of democracy, rule of law, and respect of human rights. Later, an offshoot of the policy-Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP)—was launched to deal with the eastern neighbours.

⁵European Commission, "EU/Russia: The four Common Spaces", 18 March 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_05_103

Germany was in the first set of countries that favoured cooperation and engagement with Russia.

Notwithstanding Europe's concerns regarding Russia as well as the latter's criticism of EU policies, both Berlin and Moscow continued to accord high strategic priority to one another. Over the decades, both countries continued diplomatic engagement and promoted economic relations. In September 2001, the German government invited Russia's new president, Vladimir Putin, to address the assembled Bundestag, where President Putin spoke of a "joint contribution to building a common European home".⁶ Further, Germany had previously promoted the NATO-Russia Council and favoured intensifying Russia's contacts with NATO; it had also raised concerns over 'premature NATO enlargement to the former Soviet space, partly because of Russia's opposition'. In 2008, the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the then French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, blocked NATO's membership invitation to Ukraine during an alliance summit in Bucharest as the two countries viewed it as a provocation to Russia.⁷ Nevertheless, the 2014 Ukraine crisis and the latest attack on Ukraine by Russia in 2022 have been defining moments in German-Russian history and have impacted Germany's approach towards Russia. The fallout of these crises has been discussed in subsequent sections.

Germany's Policy towards Russia

Conciliation between the Germans and Russians after the Second World War has remained an important aspect of German-Russian shared history.⁸ Since the adoption of the Ostpolitik policy in the 1970s by the then

Chancellor of West Germany, Willy Brandt, which resulted in the Moscow Treaty between the Soviet Union and West Germany, cordial relations with Russia have been a defining feature of German foreign policy. A cooperative relationship with Russia has been viewed as the essential foundation for peace in Europe. This approach, along with a push for strong economic linkages⁹ with Russia, is defined as *Wandel durch handel* or change through trade to foster overall close bilateral ties.¹⁰ Thus, Germany's interaction with Russia, at the level of the EU as well as on a bilateral level, stood out owing to their close ties despite their (mainly EU-level) differences. Over the decades, the German leadership has consistently pursued economic and political engagement with Russia.

In terms of volume of trade, both have been major business partners. The main products exported from Germany to Russia were packaged medicaments, cars, motor vehicles, and parts and accessories, among others. The main products exported from Russia to Germany include crude and refined petroleum and coal briquettes. Germany's imports of oil and gas from Russia have been higher than any other European country or the world. Germany has also been Russia's main supplier of investment goods. Figure 2 provide a snapshot of Germany's exports to and imports from Russia. As is evident, trade was impacted in the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 but gradually picked up in subsequent years despite various economic sanctions levied on Russia and the countersanctions imposed by Russia. The momentum was affected again following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 but witnessed significant progress in 2021. Following the

⁶ Speech in the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany, The Kremlin, 25 September 2001, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340>

⁷ NATO allies divided over Ukraine and Georgia, The Guardian, 2 December 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/02/ukraine-georgia>

⁸ Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin, The federal Government, 27 February 2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

⁹ Growing economic ties (including energy ties) have been a driving factor in the German–Russian partnership. The roots of the economic between the two countries are also deep-rooted. Germany was Russia's biggest trading partner before the First World War, throughout the inter-war period, and again after the Cold War. Even during the Cold War, Germany was the Soviet Union's biggest Western economic partner.

¹⁰ Isabel Muttreja and Bernhard Blumenau, How Russia's invasion changed German foreign policy, Chatham House, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/11/how-russias-invasion-changed-german-foreign-policy>

invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, have once again resulted in a decline in trade between the two.

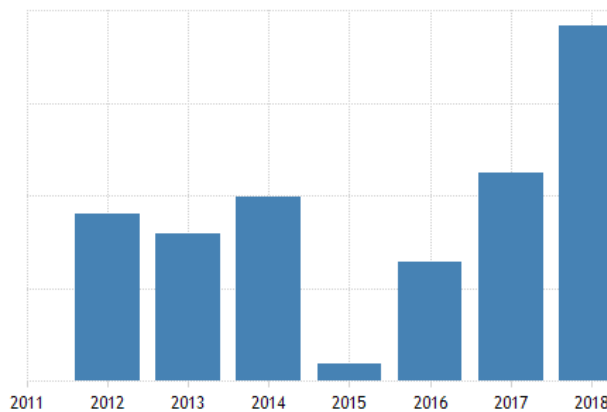


Figure 2: Russia's Exports to Germany Source: COMTRADE.

Germany's Russia Policy and Ukraine Crisis-2014

The largely positive outlook towards Russia began to change in 2012 when President Putin announced his decision to run for the presidency again. After winning a controversial election that was followed by protests (which Russia alleged the West had orchestrated), Putin accused the West of interfering in Russia's internal affairs and took measures to limit foreign influence in the country. As part of this process, the administration curtailed the activities of Russian NGOs with overseas funding. Restrictions were also imposed on a number of foreign foundations, including those from Germany. These restrictions were met with reservations in Germany. In addition, Russia also began to push for the integration of post-Soviet economies like Ukraine within its Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which ran counter to the EU's ENP and EaP.¹¹

A major fissure in the German-Russian ties emerged in 2014 following the first wave of crisis in Ukraine, and it marked "a more decisive end to the era of friendly cooperation between Russia and Germany". Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was met with strong reservations in Germany. It caused some shift in Germany's Russia policy as the then Chancellor Angela Merkel became more vocal in her criticism of Russia and led a European response to stabilise Ukraine that included imposing economic sanctions on Russia.

However, even though the German government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel was critical of Russia and led Ukraine-related European sanctions against the country, it did not abandon economic and energy engagement with Russia. Germany continued to promote energy cooperation with Russia and also refused to deliver weapons to Ukraine. In addition, as a participant in the Minsk negotiations following the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Germany, along with France, worked towards diffusing the tension between Russia and Ukraine.

Energy supplies through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline continued. This pipeline via Baltic Sea was completed in 2011 to facilitate direct gas supply from Russia to Germany and bypassed the traditional transit route via Ukraine to western Europe. At the same time, Germany continued to cooperate on the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline which was intended to double the amount of gas supply from Russia to Germany.¹²

¹¹ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and Germany: From Estranged Partners To Good Neighbors". Carnegie Moscow Center, June, 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Article_Trenin_RG_2018_Eng.pdf

¹² The Nord Stream is a twin pipeline running through the Baltic Sea from Vyborg, Russia to Lubmin near Greifswald, Germany. The pipelines were built and are operated by Nord Stream AG. The Nord Stream route crosses the Exclusive Economic Zones of Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany, as well as the territorial waters of Russia, Denmark, and Germany. The 1,224 km-long Nord Stream pipeline runs from Vyborg in northwest Russia to Lubmin in north-eastern Germany. The company behind the project is Nord Stream AG, which was established in Switzerland in 2005 in partnership with Gazprom. In 2015, Gazprom and five other European firms announced plans to build Nord Stream 2, a \$11 bn project that would run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany through the Baltic Sea and carry 55 bn cubic metres of gas per year. The construction of the 1,200 km-long pipelines was completed in 2021, but Germany's energy regulators suspended approval for the project in November of that year, and the pipeline was finally scrapped on February 22, 2022. For further details, refer to <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/us-bombed-nord-stream-gas-pipelines-journalist-claims-8434423/>

Nord Stream pipelines from Russia

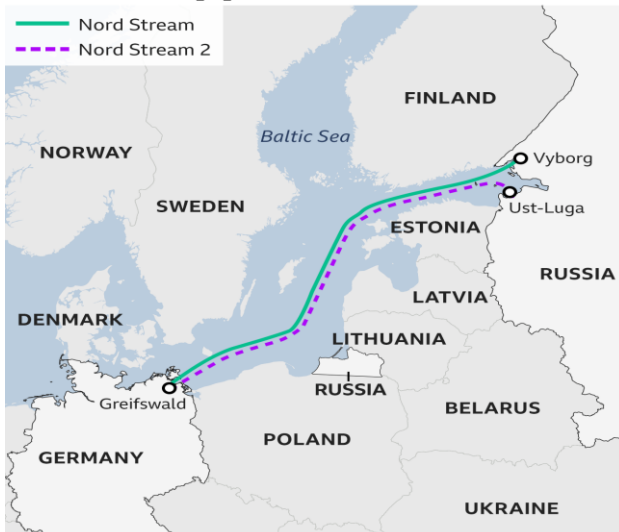


Figure 3: Nord Stream Pipelines, 27 July 2022
Source: BBC.

The country's support for expanding the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline impacted relations with and several EU and NATO member states that saw Germany's stance towards Russia as 'soft'. Amid the war in Ukraine, a series of leaks were reported in the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 pipelines. Initially, the Nord Stream 2 AG- operator of the Russian Nord Stream 2 pipeline reported a gas leak of unknown causes in one of the two pipelines of the infrastructure near the Danish Island of Bornholm. Later, leaks in two lines of the parallel Nord Stream 1 pipeline were also reported. Russia termed the explosions as terrorist attacks and accused the West of having deliberately sabotaged the pipelines. The Nord Stream stalemate has been a problematic consequence for Germany as it is caught between managing the standstill of Russian pipeline gas supplies and energy shortages as well as high gas prices for its domestic consumption.

Shift in Germany's Foreign Policy towards Russia in 2022

Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war on February 24, 2024, some noticeable shifts in Germany's policy towards Russia have taken place. In February 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made a surprise speech at the German parliament. He said that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a turning point (Zeitenwende) for Europe that "threatens our

entire post-war order." He announced a radical shift in German policy as a result of the situation in Ukraine and pointed out that "it is our duty to do our utmost to support Ukraine in defending itself against Vladimir Putin's invading army...Germany stands closely by Ukraine's side."¹³ His Zeitenwende speech is regarded as the most important revision of German foreign policy since unification in 1990.

A reflection of this statement has been evident in Germany's policymaking since then. Germany has, since February 2022, taken several radical measures to decouple itself from Russian energy supplies while extending diplomatic, financial and military aid to Ukraine. Chancellor Scholz laid out detailed plans to disengage with Russia, which marked a radical break with Germany's traditional Russia policy (Ostpolitik). In addition, Germany froze the Nord Stream 2 gas project as the Ukraine crisis deepened in February, which had been designed to double the flow of Russian gas directly to Germany when Russia formally recognised two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine—Donetsk and Lugansk (Donbas) region—on February 21, 2022, and launched an attack on Ukraine three days later. At the same time, it made efforts towards sourcing mainly liquid natural gas to fill its energy storage.

This decision marked a major turn in German foreign policy with massive implications for energy security and Berlin's broader position towards Moscow. In an unprecedented move, Germany reversed its policy of not supplying weapons to conflict zones and, unlike in 2014, decided to send weapons to Ukraine. It also decided to increase its defence expenditure to more (2 per cent of GDP). Approximately 100 bn euros (\$113 bn) was sanctioned for investments for the army in 2022 alone. The commitment goes above the two per cent target fixed by NATO.

However, as later developments reflected, this move has had its own challenges. There has also been criticism that Berlin's delivery of weapons is slow and inadequate. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's 'Zeitenwende' commitments have drawn criticism for their slow

¹³ Chancellor Olaf Scholz quoted in Politico, "Germany to send Ukraine weapons in historic shift on military aid", *Politico*, 26 January 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-war-russia-germany-still-blocking-arms-supplies/>

implementation.¹⁴The German position and response have been seen as “ambivalent” and characterised by “mixed signals” wherein it is felt that “part of the ‘Zeitenwende’ seems to fall victim to such typical German problems as indecisiveness, timidity, and bureaucracy.”¹⁵ The country has been criticised for “walking a fine line since Russia invaded Ukraine,” and “its response has been seen to be far more muted than that of other allies” within Europe.¹⁶ For instance, German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht resigned¹⁷ days before the German government announced the delivery of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine¹⁸ after facing immense pressure. Further, amid severe pressure and after much hesitation, Germany also announced its decision to supply Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine’s forces by early April 2023. At the same time, there have also been incidents of protests from civilians who feel that Germany has done enough. The Ukraine crisis-related restrictions have become more painful in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic due to the need to increase defence expenditure, expanding energy needs and diversification leading to more spending

The war in Ukraine has had inevitable consequences for the European security architecture. Within this context, Germany, as Europe’s biggest economy, faces several challenges as it tackles its national (energy) interests vis-à-vis those of the EU. So far, Germany has had limited success in finding alternatives to Russian energy supplies. For instance, in an attempt towards diversification, Germany has finished building its first import terminal for liquified natural gas on its North Sea coast. German Chancellor Scholz went on a three-day Africa tour in May 2022 to explore new energy agreements can be viewed as evidence to Germany’s energy diversification efforts. During his visit, the African Energy

Chamber (AEC) advocated for a strong German-Africa Partnership, recognising Germany’s role in advancing energy security across the continent. At the EU level, the crisis has renewed calls for reducing Europe’s dependence on Russian energy, which includes gas, oil, and coal imports over time. Following the deliberations in March 2022, the European Commission in May presented a REPowerEU Plan, which proposed “energy savings, diversification of energy supplies, and accelerated roll-out of renewable energy to replace fossil fuels in homes, industry and power generation”.¹⁹ As such, its main objective is to transform Europe’s energy system to phase out the EU’s dependence on Russian fossil fuels in its entirety. The Plan suggests that to diversify imports, the EU needs to increase its purchases of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from other countries such as Qatar, the US, Norway and Africa. Energy-related challenges have also been viewed as an opportunity to tackle the oft-talked-about calls for tackling climate change. Taking into account the vast potential of gas reserves in Africa, the energy ministers from Algeria, Nigeria, and Niger, on June 20, 2022, agreed to accelerate the work on the proposed \$13 bn and 4128 km long Trans-Saharan gas pipeline (TSGP), which could carry 30 bn cubic metres per year of gas exports from these three countries to Europe. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Egypt and Israel for LNG exports to EU countries via the eastern Mediterranean. The European Commission also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 18 July 2022 with Azerbaijan to double imports of Azeri natural gas to at least 20 bn cubic metres (bcm) a year by 2027.

The phasing out of Russian supplies via diversification as well as a reduction in general

¹⁴ Liana Fix, CFR Expert and Caroline Kapp, “One Year After: How Putin Got Germany Wrong”, CFR, 17 February 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/one-year-after-how-putin-got-germany-wrong>

¹⁵ Judy Asks: Are France and Germany Wavering on Russia?, 8 December 2022, *Carnegie Europe*, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/88588>

¹⁶ Christoph Hasselbach, Ukraine: What is Germany’s strategy?, Deutsche Welle, 30 May 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/war-in-ukraine-what-is-germanys-strategy/a-61977500>

¹⁷ German defence minister quits ahead of key decision on arming Ukraine, France 24, 16 January 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230116-german-defence-minister-quits-ahead-of-key-decision-on-arming-ukraine>

¹⁸ Bundestag, 23 January 2023, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/bundesregierung-kuendigt-lieferung-von-leopard-2-panzern-an-die-ukraine-an-2160236>

¹⁹ European Commission, REPowerEU: affordable, secure, and sustainable energy for Europe, 18 May 2022, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en

of such imports are seen as measures that would accelerate the investment in renewable energies in Europe, given its commitment to reduce carbon emissions. In this respect, there are deliberations on rethinking the wholesale electricity pricing system in the EU, "which is currently driven for all energy sources by gas prices, even though gas-fired power generation is a very small fraction of the whole." However, despite these attempts, new challenges are ahead as the amounts are not sufficient enough for the long term. Switching to other (non-Russian) gas sources may result in significant financial costs for Europe when the European economy is already struggling with inflation and high interest rates.

Conclusion

In the last three decades, Germany's interaction with Russia, both at the level of the EU and on a bilateral level, has stood out owing to their close ties despite their (mainly EU-level) differences due to close trade relations with Russia such as natural gas. Over the years, German leadership had consistently pursued economic and political engagement with Russia. Though the relationship suffered some fissures during the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, the German approach did not alter much in practical terms. This dynamic has changed since Russia recognised the Donbas region and the attacks on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. For the first time in three decades,

Russia has dominated the political discourse as a security risk rather than an economic benefit. The German economy was also impacted due to sanctions, rising pressure from fellow EU member states.

As the war in Ukraine continues, the future of Germany-Russia relations remains uncertain. German response to the war in Ukraine, although unprecedented in its severity, is less proactive when compared with the reaction of other eastern countries, such as Poland and the Baltics, amongst others. In this respect, the East-West divide in dealing with Russia has manifested itself again comparing the German response with Central and Eastern European countries.

Nevertheless, Chancellor Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech marks a huge departure from Germany's traditional approach towards Russia. Germany is Europe's biggest economy, and its traditional approach, in general, has focused on strong business and energy ties instead of hard security. In this respect, the decision to increase defence spending and supply arms to Ukraine marks a significant departure in its approach to security and its engagement with Russia.

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NIAS EUROPE STUDIES BRIEF

Euroscepticism Transformed: Italy's Prime Minister Meloni Seeks to Reform the EU from Within

By Medini Hegde

The stance adopted by Eurosceptic parties in the first decade of the new millennium, which largely pointed in the direction of EU disintegration, has evolved.

Euroscepticism in Europe

Since the 2008 financial crisis, there has been a rise in Euroscepticism within the European Union (EU), which has coincided with European integration. * The far-right party won majority of votes in Austria (Freedom Party) in 1999, Eurosceptic parties have increased from 15 per cent to 35 per cent in 2020.¹ Initially, due to the negative connotations of the term, Eurosceptics preferred to call themselves “Euro-realists,” and they fiercely opposed the idea of an “ever closer union.”²

In their 2002 working paper on *The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States*, Taggart and Szczerbiak urge for a distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism. They argue that hard Euroscepticism “is where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived.”³ On the other hand, soft Euroscepticism “is where there is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy area/s lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or

where there is a sense that ‘national interest’ is currently at odds with the EU’s trajectory.”⁴ With soft Euroscepticism there is not an opposition to the elites or the establishment of the European Union. It is more of a reformist approach to the functioning of the European Union. However, it is still against the idea of an “ever closer union,” of greater integration through widening (accepting more countries as member states of the European Union) or deepening (handing over national sovereignty to the European Union). Yet, it is more subjective and pervasive; if EU policies change, then the stance taken by the soft Eurosceptics is also likely to change.

Today, the idea of Euroscepticism is attributed more to right-wing populists, and it is spread across the populist spectrum. Euroscepticism and populism are often interlinked with one another—ideologically and empirically. Eurosceptics believe that European integration will undermine national sovereignty. They also believe that the elite within the European Union lack transparency in their transactions, are wasteful and that the EU is a “neoliberal organisation serving the business elite at the expense of the working class, responsible for

* 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 Jon Henley, “Support for Eurosceptic Parties Doubles in Two Decades across EU,” *The Guardian*, 03 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/02/support-for-eurosceptic-parties-doubles-two-decades-across-eu>.

² European Center for Populism Studies, “Euroscepticism,” European Center for Populism Studies, accessed 20 November 2022, <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/euroscepticism/>.

³ Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, “The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States” Oposing Europe Research Network, Sussex European Institute, 2002, <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sei-working-paper-no-51.pdf&site=266>.

⁴ Ibid.

austerity and driving privatization.”⁵ This description matches closely to the definition of populism by Cas Mudde, where populism is described as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”⁶

However, in recent times, a transformation in the approach to Euroscepticism is evident. Rather than taking an anti-institutional position, though it is still present in the rhetoric used by right-wing populists, there is an increasing trend towards reform from within the institution. This could have resulted from the tedious Brexit negotiations or a movement towards radicalising democracy, an approach usually attributed to left-wing populism. Right and left-wing populists equally call for action and advocate for a ‘radicalisation’ of the liberal-democratic regime’s ethno-political principles based on “liberty and equality for all.”⁷ Chantal Mouffe argues that to move towards a more just society, it is essential to give up the liberal-democratic institutions and build a new political community. She suggests that despite the negative association brought by the neoliberal social order to the democratic values of equality and popular sovereignty, they are still central to any democratic regime. However, the political institutions of the liberal democratic order are seen as inseparable from the capitalist mode of production at present day and it is this inextricable relationship between the political and economic institutions of liberal democracy, which is contingent on several historical factors. Thus, radical democracy seeks to recover and deepen democratic

values while challenging the post-democracy order.⁸

Democratic Deficit in European Politics

Democracy is a key ‘signifier’ in the left-wing populist strategy. The resistance to the oppressions of the neoliberal order is not unruly but is expressed as democratic demands that the people are subject to even in the hegemonic neoliberal order. Even within the liberal democratic order, different hegemonic formations may occur by changing the discourse. This offers a differentiation between a hegemonic transformation and a revolutionary rupture—where a transformation changes the discourse within the political institutions and a revolution tears apart the political regime in favour of a new one. The aim of populists, therefore, is not to rupture the pluralist democratic social order, only to radically reform it. To do so, there is a need to rearticulate the relationship between liberalism and democracy in such a way that democratic values are foregrounded instead of liberal ones.

Populist parties seek to address the alleged democratic deficit within the European Union. They believe that “EU institutions and their decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity.”⁹ Therefore, they argue that the EU institutions lack democratic legitimacy, which Collantes refers to as the invocation of the sovereignty of the people against the ruling elite that serve as an obstacle to authentic, full and true democracy.¹⁰ Accordingly to Collantes, in the first decade of the 21st century, populism was viewed mainly as an anti-liberal ideology. It was aligned with communist and fascist ideologies predominant in 20th-century Europe, which opposed liberal democracy.

⁵ European Center for Populism Studies, “Euroscepticism,” European Center for Populism Studies, accessed 20 November 2022, <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/euroscepticism/>.

⁶ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–63, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>.

⁷ Chantal Mouffe, “Radicalizing Democracy,” in *Mouffe, C. (Ed) For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018), 39–58.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Luca Mancin, “On Chantal Mouffe’s ‘Democratic Agonism’ and EU Democratic Deficit,” European Center for Populism Studies, 07 May 2022, <https://www.populismstudies.org/on-chantal-mouffes-democratic-agonism-and-eu-democratic-deficit/>.

¹⁰ F. Xavier Ruiz Collantes, “From Populism to Democratic Legitimism: Towards a Radical Reconsideration of Populism as a Political Category,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.1949161>.

With the end of the Cold War, communist and fascist regimes slowly faded from the political scenario in Europe. The criticisms of liberal democracy still prevailed across the political spectrum but were limited to flagging democratic deficits. Collantes argues that it is because of these democratic deficits that liberal democracy is forced to defend itself as a genuine democracy.¹¹

Democratic legitimacy is seen as a reflection of populism, and the aim then is to transform the political institutions through a “deepening of democracy.”¹² In short, populist actors claim that they are against the expropriation of these fundamental values by the corrupt bureaucratic oligarchs in Brussels and not against the institutions of the EU. A balance between hard and soft Euroscepticism, as defined by Taggart and Szczerbiak, is evident in this context. It is not just the change in policies that are demanded, but a replacement of the elites by “true representatives of the people” who will then be responsible for making these policies in the European Union.

Hard Eurosceptic Parties in European Politics

Over the past decade, Euroscepticism among populist parties has been understood in terms of hard Euroscepticism. This has been characterised by a feeling of being betrayed by the elite in Brussels, mistrust of the European institutions, and the need to leave the supranational organisation. The larger public sentiment whipped up by the Eurosceptic right-wing populist parties is to regain control from the European Union.

The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2020 has largely culminated in these sentiments. The process was not easy, and it was tedious on both sides. The Brexit referendum was held against the backdrop of the 2015 migrant crisis. It was led

by Nigel Farage, formerly of the right-wing conservative UKIP party. The anti-immigration discourse ranged from accusations that British money that could be better spent on the National Health Service in the UK was being spent on asylum seekers entering Europe to claims that the immigrants will take away the jobs from British citizens. Such rhetoric was used to drive an anti-EU movement. The referendum held in 2016 favoured the Brexiteers by 52.1 per cent, and withdrawal negotiations were initiated. It took four years for the United Kingdom to finally leave the European Union, with several withdrawal agreements brought forth by Prime Minister May being rejected by a vast majority. Even today, several issues pertaining to the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the case of fisheries remain unsolved.

The Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party was recently warned by the European People’s Party (EPP) over the Polish National Court’s ruling that sections of the EU treaties are incompatible with the Polish Constitution. Rulings such as these challenge the key tenet of European integration, thereby escalating the dispute over the rule of law between Brussels and Warsaw.¹³ It follows the Eurosceptic sentiment perpetuated by the Law and Justice Party in Poland since 2005. Poland has been opposing the liberal democratic values of the European Union for long, thereby jeopardising the sanctity of the EU institutions. The Party has been described as an exasperating and uncompromising member of the European Union, as it has continually tried to exude the predominance of the Polish judiciary over the EU’s Court of Justice.¹⁴

Similarly, a hard Eurosceptic stance has been taken by Hungary’s Fidesz Party. Under its premier, Viktor Orbán, Hungary also adopted an anti-immigrant stance to the extent that it

¹¹ F. Xavier Ruiz Collantes, “From Populism to Democratic Legitimism: Towards a Radical Reconsideration of Populism as a Political Category,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.1949161>.

¹² Chantal Mouffe, “Radicalizing Democracy,” in *Mouffe, C. (Ed) For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018), 39–58.

¹³ Georgi Gotev, “Poland’s PiS Party Is Pushing the Country towards EU Exit, EPP Warns,” *Euractiv*, 08 October 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/polands-pis-party-is-pushing-the-country-towards-eu-exit-epp-warns/>.

¹⁴ Jon Henley and Christian Davies, “Poland’s Populist Law and Justice Party Win Second Term in Power,” *The Guardian*, 14 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/14/poland-populist-law-and-justice-party-increases-majority>.

built walls at its borders with Croatia and Serbia.¹⁵ It, too, has begun to question the primacy of EU law.¹⁶ Further, Central European University was forced to move out of Hungary, causing great concern to the European Parliament, due to which Fidesz was suspended from the European People's Party in 2019.¹⁷

The National Front in France (now known as the National Rally) is a far right-wing party established in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen. After a decade of maintaining a low profile, the party gained prominence in the 1980s as people became frustrated with mainstream parties. The National Front's policies to restrict immigration, restore the death penalty, and incentivize employers to hire French citizens over other nationalities gained traction with the people. In the late 2000s, the party also pushed for exiting the European Union and bringing back the Franc as its currency.¹⁸

Similarly, the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany shares an anti-immigrant, nationalist stance with calls to abandon the Euro shows eurosceptic view

Launched in 2013, it challenged the large-scale bailouts of countries hit by the eurozone crisis. AfD has warned that if the EU continues pushing for an "ever closer union" with increased centralisation, it will lobby to pull Germany out of the European Union.¹⁹ Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S) is a coalition of anti-establishment parties. It was formed relatively recently in 2018 and has all the

components of traditionally right-wing populist parties in Europe, such as the anti-EU rhetoric calling for the renegotiation of EU treaties, opting out of the Euro, "a reduction in Italy's contribution to the EU budget, and the cancellation of €250bn of Italian government debt."²⁰

Despite a strong anti-EU sentiment amongst the populist parties in Europe, there has been a tendency for these parties to seek reform from within the European Union, which replicates the values it upholds—democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Since most right-wing populist parties in Europe still see themselves as democratic representatives of the people, they wish to retain the establishment of the European Union, but replace the elite who run it, renegotiate its treaties and policies, and seek to regain their national sovereignty to a great extent.

Changing Perspectives of Euroscepticism among Right-wing Populists

After the Eurozone crisis, several right-wing populist parties emerged in Europe, giving rise to an even sterner Eurosceptic stance, with some even threatening to leave the European Union. Even today, Brussels speculates that these right-wing populists are rooting for the EU's disintegration. Statements such as "UKIP will start by retrieving our democracy from Brussels"²¹ or equating EU membership to colonialism²² fuel the speculations made in Brussels.

Today, right-wing populist leaders and parties are no longer the anomaly. Populist parties in

¹⁵ European Commission, "Migration: Commission Refers Hungary to the Court of Justice of the European Union over Its Failure to Comply with Court Judgment" (European Commission, 12 November 2021), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5801.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Jennifer Rankin, "Viktor Orbán's Party Suspended from Centre-Right EPP Bloc," *The Guardian*, 20 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/20/manfred-weber-calls-for-freezing-of-hungarian-partys-voting-rights>.

¹⁸ Jessica Phelan, "How Far Has France's Far-Right National Rally Come in 50 Years?," *Radio France Internationale*, 08 October 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20221008-how-far-has-france-s-far-right-national-rally-come-in-50-years>.

¹⁹ BBC, "Germany's AfD: How Right-Wing Is Nationalist Alternative for Germany?," 11 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37274201>.

²⁰ Antonio Benasaglio Berlucci, "Understanding the Populism of the Five Star Movement – and Its Continuity with the Past," *LSE Blogs* (blog), 26 August 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2021/08/26/understanding-the-populism-of-the-five-star-movement-and-its-continuity-with-the-past/>.

²¹ Karine Tournier-Sol, "Reworking the Eurosceptic and Conservative Traditions into a Populist Narrative: UKIP's Winning Formula?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 142.

²² Ibid.

Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Sweden, France, and Spain, among others, openly claim to be illiberal democracies. The right-wing populist parties in Europe share a common ideology and rhetoric that they use to mobilise the people. Scholars term it international populism. Kuyper and Moffitt state that “international populism occurs when populist actors in one nation-state, claiming to represent ‘the people’ of their state, seek to construct alliances, allegiances, and affinities with populists in other nation-states (and/ or those populists’ constituencies and audiences), without claiming to represent ‘the people’ of those other states.”²³ This phenomenon is noticed chiefly among EU member states where the populist parties share Eurosceptic, anti-EU, and anti-Brussels rhetoric.

These populist parties share beliefs on issues such as immigration, gender ideology, and Euroscepticism. They associate themselves as democracies, just not liberal democracies, and it is in this way, they deviate from prototypical European values. They claim that, as exemplified in Mudde’s definition,²⁴ the will of the people should no longer be represented by the elite. According to them, these elites ought to be replaced by populist leaders who come from the people, understand the needs of the people and would better represent them. They claim so for the European Union to disintegrate but, at the same time, demand a renegotiation of its treaties and policies, especially those aimed at greater integration. The shift in traditionally hard Eurosceptic parties is not to soften Euroscepticism but work towards a balance where they wish to be the foundation of the European Union that is largely based on democracy, but at the same time, hope for lesser intervention in national

matters by Brussels. France’s National Front is one such example, where former leader Jean Marie Le Pen was a hard Eurosceptic and lobbied for France’s exit from the EU. In 2011, his daughter Marine Le Pen rebranded the party and did away with its past, including demonization and disassociating her father from the party.²⁵

In 2018, Marine Le Pen, changed the name of the party to National Rally (RN) and advocated that France requires a progressive substitution in the form of a “European Alliance of Nations instead of the EU in its present form.”²⁶

Sweden is another example where there has been a rise in right-wing populism, witnessed by the victory of the Sweden Democrats (SD) in September 2022. The SD’s views are similar to other right-wing populist parties’ Eurosceptic approach, whereby they are exclusionary rather than anti-democratic. Its brand of illiberalism is a backlash against liberalism on an ideological basis rather than adopting a disruptive aspect of illiberalism.²⁷ Similarly, in Spain, Vox is identified as a right-wing anti-immigrant party that defends Spanish nationalism and traditional conservatism.

However, Vox does not identify itself as extreme. It states that it is ideologically radical and does not go against the central tenets of democracy. At the same time, like its other right-wing populist counterparts, Vox finds itself at odds with the ideas and values of liberal democracy, the rule of law of the European Union, and the rights of minorities.²⁸

The idea of radicalising democracy, as described by Chantal Mouffe,²⁹ remains central

²³ Jonathan Kuyper and Benjamin Moffitt, “Transnational Populism, Democracy, and Representation: Pitfalls and Potentialities,” *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric* 12, no. 2 (2020): 27–49.

²⁴ Mudde, Cas. “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>.

²⁵ Phelan, “How Far Has France’s Far-Right National Rally Come in 50 Years?”

²⁶ Pablo Castillo-Ortiz, “Le Pen’s New EU Rhetoric Masks Same Old Ideas,” *EU Observer*, April 2022, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/154771>.

²⁷ Orlaith Rice, “Sweden Democrats: Another Win for Right-Wing Populism and Illiberalism in Europe?,” *The Loop: ECPR’s Political Science Blog* (blog), 2020, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/sweden-democrats-another-win-for-right-wing-populism-and-illiberalism-in-europe/>.

²⁸ Andrés Santana et al., “The Radical Right Populist Vox and the End of Spain’s Exceptionalism,” *The Loop: ECPR’s Political Science Blog* (blog), 2020, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/the-radical-right-populist-vox-and-the-end-of-spains-exceptionalism/>.

²⁹ Mouffe, Chantal. “Radicalizing Democracy.” In Mouffe, C. (Ed) *For a Left Populism*, 39–58. London: Verso, 2018.

to the shift in Eurosceptic parties. They no longer identify themselves as hard or soft Eurosceptics, as defined by Taggart and Szczerbiak.³⁰ Instead, they seek to reform the European Union from within. To do away with its decision-makers, renegotiate the founding treaties and develop a new 'Europe' that caters to the nation-states constituting this supranational organisation. This has been witnessed in full form with the recent election of Giorgia Meloni's Brother of Italy party. Giorgia Meloni leads the party, founded in 2012. Meloni is known to be a hard Eurosceptic advocating Italy's exit from the Eurozone. However, since she was elected prime minister, Meloni's rhetoric has drastically toned down, with her supporting the EU's position against Russia in the Ukraine's war. Meloni has called for upholding democracy in Europe while challenging the rules of the European Union that have failed.

Euroscepticism Transformed: Meloni's redesigned position on Euroscepticism

As Italy voted on 25 September 2022 for its new Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, from the far-right populist Brothers of Italy party, Mario Draghi, the outgoing prime minister, warned that "we have a certain vision of Europe. Our allies are Germany, France, and the other European states that uphold the rule of law." "Our choice of partners should be based on the interests of Italians—not just on ideological grounds."³¹ Meloni's supporters from across Europe celebrated her win. Spain's Vox Party congratulated her victory, stating that this was "the path of a new Europe of free and sovereign nations." Her supporters from

Hungary and Poland also praised her victory, highlighting their "common vision and approach to Europe's challenges."³²

There is a perceived threat of the type of Euroscepticism adopted by Meloni and her party. Voters of the right-wing, Eurosceptic populist party, Brothers of Italy and the Five Star Movement (MS5) have characterised Meloni as "too populist and anti-immigrant."³³ Recently, Meloni opposed the EU's financial sanctions on Hungary and Poland over issues related to the rule of law. Additionally, Italy is the European Union's third-largest economy and second-most indebted member state. Its "unsustainable" debt is at risk of a similar crisis to Greece's in 2012.³⁴ It has been speculated that due to the ideological difference between Rome and Brussels, the recovery and resilience plan negotiated by the former prime minister could fall through. The reforms Brussels demanded from Italy to access the €200 billion in EU funding could pose a new battleground.³⁵

Scholars have argued that Meloni's agenda is to "push towards a 'sovereigntist' Europe."³⁶ They claim that such a project rejects the values of the supranational organisation to restore more power to the EU member states. As such, this 'sovereigntist' approach threatens European integration. Other scholars have argued that in the past Eurosceptic parties did not know what they expected from 'Europe.' They were against increased integration of the European Union but did not provide an alternative to it. Today, however, Eurosceptic parties know that they want a Europe of

³⁰ Taggart and Szczerbiak, "The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States."

³¹ Benjamin Dodman, "A 'Seismic' Shift: Will Meloni's Italy Turn Its Back on Europe?," *France 24*, 28 September 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220928-will-the-new-far-right-government-of-italy-s-meloni-turn-its-back-on-europe>.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Valentina Saini, "Beyond Salvini: The Rise of Eurosceptic Giorgia Meloni," *EU Observer* (blog), 08 September 2020, <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/149336>.

³⁴ Anita Pratap, "How Italy under Giorgia Meloni Can Create Problems for EU: The Far Right Leader's Policies Could Lead to an Illiberal Europe," *The Week*, 09 October 2022, <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/current/2022/09/30/how-italy-under-giorgia-meloni-can-create-problems-for-eu.html>.

³⁵ Alice Tidey and Vincenzo Genovese, "Here's What a Meloni Government in Italy Could Mean for the EU," *EuroNews*, 26 September 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/09/26/heres-what-a-meloni-government-in-italy-could-mean-for-the-eu>.

³⁶ Dodman, Benjamin. "A 'Seismic' Shift: Will Meloni's Italy Turn Its Back on Europe?" *France 24*, September 28, 2022. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220928-will-the-new-far-right-government-of-italy-s-meloni-turn-its-back-on-europe>.

sovereign nations³⁷—one where the member states have a more significant say vs the technocratic approach taken thus far by the elites in Brussels.

However, the party has its roots in the 1930s Mussolini fascist era.³⁸ The party identifies with the European Conservatives and Reformists Group that opposed European integration, beginning from the Treaty of Rome in 1957.³⁹ The far-right leader was expected to adopt a fascist take on populist politics. On the contrary, since her election as Italy's Prime Minister, Meloni has gone to great lengths to assure Brussels that she is in favour of European integration and is pro-NATO. This assurance was pertinent to soften her image in light of the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war.

During her 2022 campaign, Meloni repeated several times that the Brothers of Italy party does not have an anti-European view.⁴⁰ She reaffirmed that they aim to reform the European Union from within. She called for a “leaner EU than can live and work within its means to tackle shared challenges, including ‘less centralism, more subsidiarity, less bureaucracy, and more politics.’”⁴¹ She underlined the need for more “unity in diversity”, emphasising that her government would respect the rules of the EU while simultaneously working towards changing those that did not work.⁴²

On 22 October 2022, at her swearing-in ceremony, Meloni assured that her right-wing coalition party would not stand in the way of

EU integration and “would work with other member states in a ‘pragmatic and non-ideologic’ way and would protect ‘freedom and democracy.’”⁴³ Further, in her address to the European Parliament on 25 October 2022, Meloni condemned all forms of extremism. At the same time, Meloni responded to the threat of a looming *Italexit*, stating that she is “what British people would define as an underdog” and pledged to “work to surprise everyone once again.”⁴⁴ Closing her address, Meloni urged that “the EU must not be an elitist circle with first class and second class members, for us it is the home of the peoples of Europe . . . which will help us face the challenges that member states could hardly face individually.”⁴⁵

Overall, there is a perceptible shift in the ideology of the Brothers of Italy coalition and that of Prime Minister Meloni. Her staunch Eurosceptic stance has softened while maintaining her policies on immigration, gender ideology, and democracy. She still aligns with populist parties such as Fidesz and Law and Justice. However, as they have changed their approach to the EU, so have the Brothers of Italy. Like other Eurosceptic parties in the EU, they are no longer support the disintegration of the EU and instead, call for a transformation of the functioning of the organisation. This transformation includes greater sovereignty to the member states, halting any EU plans towards a political union. On the one hand, these member states are in a constant state of confrontation with Brussels on varied issues relating to the rule of law, and on the other hand, they aim to uphold the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ European Conservatives and Reformists Group, “Fratelli d’Italia - Italy,” European Conservatives and Reformists Group, 2020, https://ecrgroup.eu/ecr/party/brothers_of_italy.

³⁹ Alexander Brotman, “Giorgia Meloni and the New Face of Euroscepticism,” *Geopolitical Monitor* (blog), 27 September 2022, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/giorgia-meloni-and-the-new-face-of-euroscepticism/>.

⁴⁰ Dodman, Benjamin. “A ‘Seismic’ Shift: Will Meloni’s Italy Turn Its Back on Europe?” France 24, September 28, 2022. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220928-will-the-new-far-right-government-of-italy-s-meloni-turn-its-back-on-europe>.

⁴¹ Benjamin Fox and Roberto Castaldi, “Italy Will Be ‘Reliable’ EU Partner, Says PM Meloni,” *Euractiv*, 10/25/2022 edition, accessed 20 November 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-will-be-reliable-eu-partner-says-pm-meloni/>.

⁴² Fox, Benjamin, and Roberto Castaldi. “Italy Will Be ‘Reliable’ EU Partner, Says PM Meloni.” *Euractiv*, 10/25/2022 edition. Accessed November 20, 2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-will-be-reliable-eu-partner-says-pm-meloni/>.

⁴³ Silvia Sciorilli Borrelli, “Giorgia Meloni Vows to Work with EU in First Address to Italian Parliament,” *Financial Times*, 25 October 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/a66585d2-7c35-4835-b7ba-9cf12000b3f3>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

values of democracy within a 'Europe of Nations' that they wish to create.

Conclusion

The stance adopted by Eurosceptic parties in the first decade of the new millennium, which largely pointed in the direction of EU disintegration, has evolved. Rather than limiting themselves to the definitions and categories put forth by scholars on hard and soft Eurosceptics, right-wing populist parties today are re-considering their perception of European integration. In this dynamic environment, with war at its doorstep, even hard Eurosceptic countries understand the need for unity in numbers. Tackling Russia is not going to be a single nation's job. The repercussions of the war are now far beyond what was imagined. This unity in numbers can only be achieved by adopting an international approach to populism, which is what has been done by populist parties within the EU. This was witnessed most recently with the populist parties of Hungary, Poland, and even France celebrating Giorgia Meloni's win in Italy.

Though Meloni was known for her hard Eurosceptic stance calling for Italy to exit the eurozone, this approach has since softened. At her address to the European Parliament as Italy's prime minister, she assured the EU leaders that her government would not stand in the way of European integration but would persevere to protect democracy and freedom in the Union. However, it would be naïve to perceive that the Italian prime minister has shed off her Eurosceptic or populist ideology. Meloni's predominantly male cabinet is a mix of populist and non-populist politicians. In crucial ministries such as Banking and Finance, among the League and Forza Italia parties Meloni has chosen candidates who identify themselves as pro-European; however, Defence, Industry, and the Interior ministries are filled with candidates from Meloni's party, the Brothers of Italy.

European right-wing populist parties are still against the idea of an "ever closer union" – giving up more of the nation's sovereignty towards a European political union. This ties largely with the idea of a lack of democratic legitimacy. They invoke the need to regain sovereignty from the European Union while

maintaining the democratic institutions of the supranational organisation. They aim to create a "Europe of Nations", a reformed European Union that focuses more on upholding the values of democracy without compromising on the integrity, values, traditions, and goals of individual member states. Thus, we see a transformed Euroscepticism that balances hard and soft Euroscepticism.

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COMMENT

Explained: The Nature Restoration Law

By Sneha Surendran

On 12 July, the European Parliament approved the contested Nature Restoration Law. The law was passed by a narrow margin of 336 against 300 votes, with 30 absentions. The European Commission's Green Deal chief Frans Timmermans said: "My mission in the next couple of months is to convince also many of those who today voted against that this is a law that really would help European nature recover."

What is the new Nature Restoration Law?

In June 2022, the European Commission released its first communication regarding the proposed Nature Restoration Law.

The Nature Restoration Law is an initiative under the European Green Deal. It is EU's first legislation specifically targeting the restoration of Europe's deteriorating ecosystems, and mitigating the worsening impacts of climate change. The law aims to bring back 80 per cent of damaged European habitats, including wetlands, forests, grasslands, marine ecosystems, and rivers by 2050. In the short-term, it aims to restore at least 20 per cent of these regions by 2030.

What is the background?

A 2021 assessment by the European Commission of the Ecosystems of the European Union found that all ecosystem types in the region require significant measures of restoration to check biodiversity loss and protect ecosystem services available for the people's wellbeing. It said: "More efforts are needed to bend the curve of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and to put ecosystems on a recovery path."

Over the years, climate change had a detrimental impact on Europe's climate. The summer of 2022 was the hottest summer recorded in Europe; it also witnessed thousands of deaths due to the searing heat. Currently, Europe is also the fastest-warming continent. The 2022 State of the Climate in Europe showed that warming

extensively impacted the continent's ecosystems. The North Atlantic region has been recording the warmest average sea surface temperatures, while marine heat waves have intensified. Land-based disasters like droughts and wildfires have risen over the past few years. Meanwhile, during 1997-2022, almost 880 cubic km of ice melted from the European glaciers, with the Alps being the worst affected.

How did the EU vote on the legislation? And Why?

Ever since the Nature Restoration Law has been proposed, it has received varied responses from lawmakers and other quarters within the EU. The same continued on the days leading up to the voting of the law in the European Parliament. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) along with other right-wing groups voted against the law. The EPP has long contended that the restoration of land in certain ecosystem regions will affect agricultural, ultimately affecting farmers' production and exacerbating the food insecurity issues already continuing due to the COVID pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. A member of the far-right political group Identity and Democracy said: "Less land for farmers, less sea for fishermen, less activity for businesses, and fewer European products and jobs for our citizens...a regulation permeated with ideology and counterproductive for nature itself." The EPP has also stated that the new law will be a tool for climate activists and NGOs to pursue legal action against governments, further interfering with economic activities.

Farmers in the EU have long voiced their opposition to the legislation, as it calls for 30 per cent of former peatlands currently in use for agriculture to be restored and redirected for other purposes. The probable loss of vast expanses of agricultural land in the name of restoration has also concerned farmers. On 11 July 2023, a day before the law went for the vote, farmers arrived with tractors to

protest outside the European Parliament. They also urged lawmakers to vote against the bill. In a counter-protest to the farmer's demonstrations, climate activists, including Greta Thunberg, gathered to show their support for the bill.

Amongst those who voted favourably for the Nature Restoration Law, there were 21 EPP lawmakers who also voted their assent, contesting the party's stance. Meanwhile, Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission welcomed the voting results and stated that he was willing to work with the opposing EPP members to find common ground on the implementation of the law. Lead negotiator for the law, Cesar Luena, expressed gratitude to colleagues and scientists, saying: "We have won. It is a social victory: for scientists, for young people, for a lot of companies and businesses, for the agricultural sector."

“Although the law was adopted, Members of the European Parliament had to cut back on critical articles that were proposed in the original draft of the bill owing to the heavy opposition.”

Meanwhile, scientists called out the opposition for their disinformation campaigns against the new law, stating that ecosystem restoration will only improve food security and generate jobs. An open letter signed by nearly 6000 scientists berated the opposition for basing their arguments on unsound science and even contradicting scientific facts. A conservation biologist at the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research, Guy Pe'er said:

“Lobby organisations can generate as much misinformation as they want. But when policymakers are going against the science, we need to step in.”

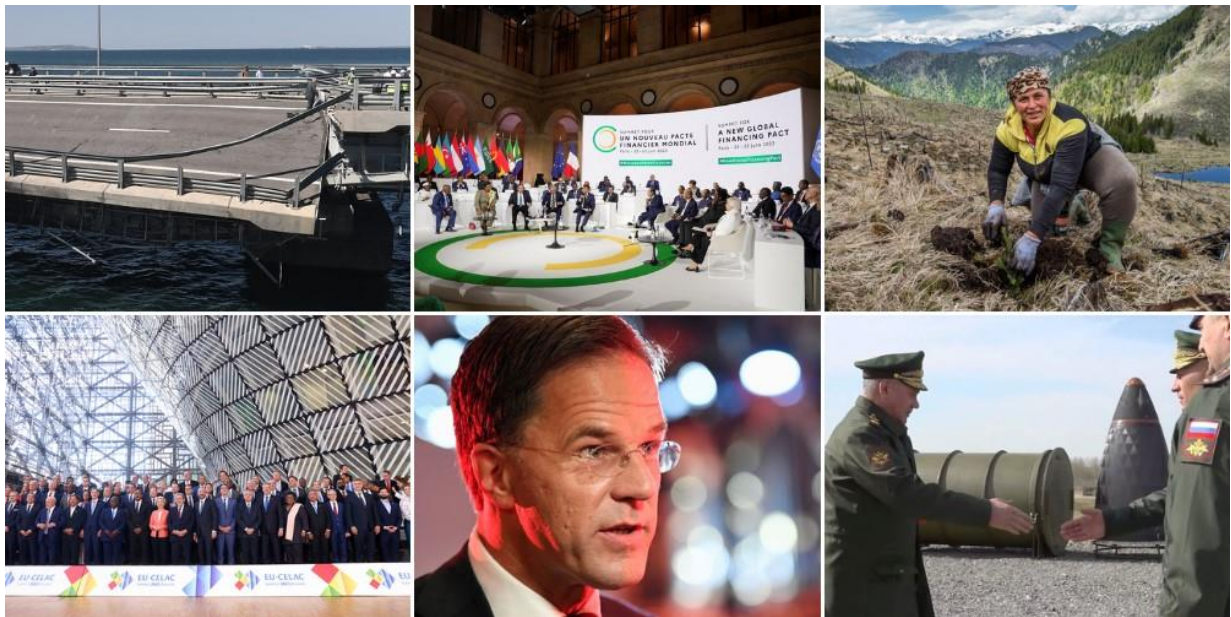
What are the challenges ahead?

First, a limited focus on agricultural land restoration. Although the law was adopted, Members of the European Parliament had to cut back on critical articles that were proposed in the original draft of the bill owing to the heavy opposition. For instance, the article on the restoration of agricultural lands had to be nullified. With its removal, the objective of targeting intensive agriculture could be impossible to achieve.

Second, clash over drafting new laws due to existing complexities in present provisions. The decrease in forest cover has faced a setback. Moreover, the restoration of depleting forest covers would have aided in the sequestering of carbon, which prevents the emissions from warming the surroundings. Furthermore, the Parliament said that the implementation of the law would begin only after the European Commission assessed the existing laws on food security as well as quantified the data outlining the necessary conditions to guarantee food security. This was in response to the EPP's concerns. The Parliament further said that there could be a postponement of the targets in the law in case of "exceptional socioeconomic consequences." Some of the lawmakers who voted for the bill, as well as climate activists, expressed dissatisfaction over the weakened version of the law.

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EM Daily Focus*



Source: CFP/CGTN, Lewis Joly/Pool via REUTERS, cineca.ec.europa.eu, Russian Defence Ministry/Handout via REUTERS, REUTERS/Piroschka van de Wouw, consilium.europa.eu

FRANCE

France: Protests and anti-violence rallies underline issues bigger than a police shooting

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 03 July, *France24* reported that mayors across France staged anti-violence rallies against the ongoing riots after the rioters attacked the house of the mayor of Haÿ-les-Roses, Vincent Jeanbrun. The same day, following a visit to police barracks in the capital's 17th Arrondissement, French President Emmanuel Macron assured his support to the anti-violence protesters. Prime Minister Elizabeth Borne stated that the priority is to bring back the order. The demonstrators said: "Everywhere in France are the scenes of serious unrest, which targets republican symbols with extreme violence."

The anti-violence protests erupted as a response to violent riots followed by protests, continuing since 27 June after the shooting of a teen, Nahel Merzouk, in Nanterre. The charges of "intentional homicide" were imposed on the police

officer after a video of the police shooting the teen was publicized. In response to the riots, France's Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin ordered the deployment of 40,000 police officers and imposed a curfew as the clashes grew uncontrollable.

The protests began as a "White March" in the northern suburb of Nanterre, where Nahel who was shot in June belongs. Clashes erupted when the protesters used projectiles on police and spread violence to other cities in France. Most are in the north, central, and southwest of Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Pau, Toulouse, and Lille. The protesters included a majority of the young population between 14 and 18 years old, people from the working class, of African descent and Muslims protesting for "justice for Nahel."

Issues

First, the nature of the protests. The protests, concentrated in Paris, later spread sporadically to other parts of France. However, the reasons are beyond the death of Nahel. It includes persisting issues of racial discrimination, growing police misconduct, and increasing government's

* 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.

harsh measures, including the pension reforms, increase in taxes and cost of living.

Second, a divided France. Episodes of protests, violence and anti-violence rallies across France represent a divided society. The police are against the government's decision to detain the police officer who shot Nahel. The divide is between the "law-and-order" force, which implements measures despite public opposition, and the public, disappointed with the government's response to their demands.

Third, the larger debate over police brutality and systemic racism. The shooting brought back the long-standing accusations against the systemic racist approach by the security forces. The debate over police brutality has existed since 2005, when two teens were killed in a police run, resulting in riots across France against racial discrimination. An investigation in 2017 by France's civil liberties ombudsman revealed that young African descendants are subjected to more than 20 times of identity checks compared to the entire population. In 2020, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International launched a "class action" against the government for not addressing the issue of ethnic profiling by the police.

Fourth, the harsh government response. Nearly 45,000 police officers have been deployed to counter the violence. According to France24, the units were "heavily equipped and have armoured vehicles." The government's harsh response to the protests is nothing old. According to a previous report by Foreign Policy, in 2018 and 2019, the government dealt with the "Yellow Jackets" protests by equipping the security forces with weapons that would cause serious injuries. Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin issued a statement supporting the police in controlling the unrest. The mayors have taken the initiative to pressure the government further to address the violence.

Conclusion

The violence has continued for seven days and has been dealt with by the government through security forces. On the other hand, the anti-violence rally by the regional heads has led to an immediate meeting with the mayors to discuss settling the issue and

showcase the government's support to the local leaders. The continued tensions amid the yellow jacket protests, COVID-19 protests and pension reform protests since Macron's first term have given way to deep-seated conflict within the society, reducing respect for institutions.

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands government collapsed: Why now, and What next?

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 10 July, Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced his exit from politics after the next election, following the government collapse over immigrant regulation.

On 07 July, Rutte announced his resignation after the unsuccessful rounds of negotiation over asylum policy. His conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) party has been attempting to reduce the inflow of asylum seekers to 200 per month since the issue over overcrowding of migration centres sparked in 2022. Whereas his coalition parties, Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Christian Union, and the D66, opposed the move leading to the collapse of the government coalition. Rutte said: "All parties went to great lengths to find a solution, but the differences on migration are unfortunately impossible to bridge." Since 2022, the number of asylum application had increased one-third (47,000), and as per government reports, 70,000 are expected to apply in 2023.

What is the two-tier asylum system proposed by the VVD?

The VVD party's demand to create a "two-tier" system for asylum seekers was agreed, but the consensus broke over "family re-unification."

The two-tier system proposed the creation of two classes of asylum seekers. A temporary one to include those people escaping from conflict zones, who can return when the conflict is over. Next is a permanent one for people fleeing from trial (death list or sexual orientation). Apart from

this categorisation, the VVD also aims to bring down the number of migrants in Netherlands' by restricting the family members who can join the asylum seekers. This includes limiting the number of children of war refugees in Netherlands' and adds a waiting period of two years for the family to re-unite. This was aimed at tapering the asylum policy by VVD and CDA.

Immigration: Why it is an issue now?

This is not a new issue. The concern over migration has been present for long time in the Netherlands.

According to the statistics from the Immigration & Naturalisation Service (IND) of the Netherlands, most of the resident permit applications had come from India, China, the US, and Turkey. The count decreased during COVID-19 and then increased by 2021. It also reported a massive hike in the number of applications for Dutch citizenship, increasing from 43,660 in 2020 to 59,680 in 2021. These were majorly from Syria, Eritrea, and India.

To address the increasing immigration and the issue of inadequate shelters, the Dutch government took measures to limit the influx. It ruled that families of "permit holders," who do not have an accommodation will not be allowed to travel. At the same time, it ordered the municipalities to create shelters for the existing asylum seekers with "residence permit." If the permit holder is not allotted a residence by 15 months, he will still be given a visa, the waiting period was viewed to help the "Immigration and Naturalization Service" to screen the permit applications.

According to Saskia Bonjour, a political scientist at the University of Amsterdam, the move was illegal as per the European Directive as the longer the children of the immigrant families stay apart the more harmful it is. Stating the similar reason, the Rutte's coalition parties withdrew their support.

What next after the collapse?

Similar to other European far-right leaders such as Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orban and Georgia Melonia, Rutte took the anti-immigration stance.

The collapse of the Netherlands' government means new elections which is likely to take place in November, until which Rutte will head the caretaker government. Rutte being the longest serving prime minister faces the fallouts of the broken coalition, but this is not the first time. In 2021, the cabinet resigned over failure of the government to guard people from tax inspectors and in time has earned the anger of farmers over the announcement of reducing nitrogen pollution. Now, with the crack over migration policy (his), Rutte still stands a chance as the coalition partners CDI and Christian Union do not have enough support to achieve a majority, while the opposition party "Farmer-Citizen Movement" still needs a big leap to push from second place to win VVD.

In terms of the migration policy, the VVD will have to let go of the new measures to tighten the immigrant influx until there is support.

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UKRAINE

Ukraine: Attack on the Crimean Bridge

By Sreeja JS

On 17 July, the Crimean Bridge (also called Kerch Strait Bridge) connecting the Crimean Peninsula to Krasnodar in Russia's southwestern Taman peninsula came under

attack for the second time after October 2022.

According to Russia's "antiterrorism committee," the bridge has been hit by two maritime drones in separate explosions. One of the important supply routes for Russia suffered minimal damage compared to the first one. The Transport Ministry of Russia said that the roadway on the bridge was damaged while the spans remained intact.

Vladimir Putin, Russia's President said the attack would not be left unanswered. Stressing on the imminent restoration of the bridge, he said: "Considering that this is the second terrorist attack on the Crimean Bridge, I am waiting for specific proposals on how to improve the security of this strategically important transport facility." Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of the Russia's President said: "We know the reasons and those behind this terrorist act. This will require further composure and additional measures and work from all of us. No other measures have been discussed at the moment." He did not divulge the specific details of Kremlin's response to the attack but mentioned that its ultimate answer to the attack would be the achievement of all goals behind the "military operation" in Ukraine.

History, geography and the strategic significance of the Crimean bridge

The Crimean bridge is a 12-mile, USD 3.7 billion infrastructure project funded by Russia connecting Crimea with Russia across the Kerch Strait. The bridge consists of two parallel tracks: one four-lane road and a double-lane rail line and is considered one of the longest bridges in Europe. It offers a driving route to the peninsula, a popular destination for Russia's tourists and oligarchs during summer.

The bridge is critical for Russia as the only road and rail link to Crimea that also served as a key military supply route for the Russia's forces fighting in southern Ukraine. It also holds a symbolic value that Putin inaugurated the bridge in 2018 and called it a "miracle."

The bridge and peninsula have been a bone

of contention between both Russia and Ukraine for a long time which intensified when Moscow attacked in February 2022. However, for Ukraine, the bridge violates its sovereignty and is widely despised. Therefore, the bridge was one of the key targets of Ukraine's forces as it has been targeting Russia's logistics and supply routes for the last few months.

The Crimean bridge first came under attack by the Ukraine's security forces in October 2022. A truck laden with explosives detonated at a vulnerable spot of the bridge maximizing the damage. Following the attack, Russia responded harshly with drone and missile attacks targeting Ukraine's energy supplies hitting power stations and other critical infrastructure for several months in a tit-for-tat move. Since then, Russia improved security measures to protect the bridge, including inspections and strengthening anti-air defences to prevent missile and drone attacks. It also deployed a "target barage" with radar reflectors to act as decoys for any guided missiles targeting the bridge. The Russia's navy has reportedly built new pens for dolphins trained to protect its Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol. The recent attack also provoked a stark response from Russia that it used sea-launched precision weapons on Ukraine's military facilities near Odesa and Mykolaiv, in the northeastern Ukraine hitting fuel depots and facilities that make maritime drones.

Ukraine has been constantly targeting Crimea and it vowed to reclaim the peninsula from Russia's control. According to Kyiv, Crimea is playing a major role in sustaining Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since the bridge served as the single important supply route replenishing the Russia's forces in southern Ukraine, damage to it means slowing down Russia's efforts against Kyiv's counteroffensive which is slightly progressing and making notable gains over the past few weeks.

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RUSSIA

Russia’s military expenditure during the Ukraine War: Five Takeaways

By Rishika Yadav

On 30 June 2023, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) published a report, "Russia's military expenditure during its war against Ukraine," that examines Russian military expenditure during the Ukraine war and its funding sources.

The report on Russian military expenditure during its war against Ukraine sheds light on the sources of funding for these military activities. It also highlights the continued focus of Russian President Vladimir Putin on pre-war policy goals, such as national welfare and technological sovereignty. The report provides valuable insights into the financial aspects of Russia's involvement in the conflict and its strategic priorities.

Following are the five key takeaways from the report:

Sustainable resource commitment by Russia

Despite economic sanctions, Russia intends to manage its resources effectively during the war in Ukraine. Putin's priority remains on pre-war policy goals, to minimize economic costs, and fight the conflict in a financially limited manner. Defence spending increased as the conflict progressed, reaching 17 per cent of total government expenditure. Russia has

sustained its commitment to the war while maintaining business as usual.

Stable defence budgeting despite sanctions subjunctive

The Russian government's approach to budgeting for 2023-2025 remained stable despite the ongoing war in Ukraine and the impact of severe sanctions. The budget forecast was initially pessimistic but became more optimistic over time, predicting a recovery in the economy. Defence spending was expected to increase in 2023 but decline in subsequent years, indicating a potential shift in military operations. Limited details were provided on total military funding, but some changes were observed in funding lines related to housing, health, and mass media within the defence budget.

Russia's 2023 federal budget

Implementation encountered difficulties due to a larger-than-expected deficit of RUB 3424 billion from January to April. Declining oil and gas earnings, currency depreciation, and efforts to reduce reliance on unfavorable currencies contributed to the shortfall. However, the government displayed cautious budget management, minimising the budget listings compared to the previous year. Despite the deficit, funding for the ongoing war is unlikely to be significantly affected, as the government can borrow or draw from the National Welfare Fund. A budget crisis in 2023 is improbable.

Complexity of war funding

The total military expenditure in the 2023 budget is estimated to be RUB 6648 billion, representing 23 per cent of the total government budget and 4.4 per cent of forecast GDP. It is important, however, to note that this total military expenditure does not solely reflect the cost of the war in Ukraine. Some military spending is unrelated to the conflict, while certain expenses related to the war are covered by budget chapters other than "national defence." The funding of military activities associated with the war from sources other than the federal budget, such as regional budgets and voluntary donations, further complicates the assessment of total military expenditure. Therefore, relying solely on the official budget sources may result in

underestimating the overall funding for military operations.

Potential risks in the future

Russia's future federal budget preparations are outlined in the report, highlighting an optimistic outlook based on the economy's performance. President Putin and the government discussed positive GDP growth forecasts. However, caution is needed as some assumptions may have been overly optimistic. The Bank of Russia's report raised concerns about inflationary risks and a larger budget deficit. Adjustments to the budget planning process are expected based on evolving economic conditions.

Complicated analysis due to restricted information

Financial limitations suggest Russia has fought the war by withholding many weapons a more limited operation. Limited access to budget information complicates analysis, but updates on budget spending in 2022 and early 2023 are provided, along with prospects for future spending. The Russian government has restricted information on budget spending and access to relevant documents. The budget law for 2023-2025 lacks detailed information on defence or the war.

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SWEDEN

Protests over Quran-burning in Sweden: A Profile

By Sreeja JS

On 28 June 2023, Salwan Momika, an Iraqi immigrant living in Sweden, burnt a Quran outside the central mosque in Stockholm on the first day of Eid al-Adha, one of the most important festivals in the Muslim calendar. According to the police, Momika had permission to protest according to the free speech laws. Later, police explained that an investigation is underway to enquire about "agitation against an ethnic group."

Following the Quran-burning protest and the stark criticisms raised against Sweden internationally, the government issued a statement saying that it "strongly rejects the Islamophobic act committed by individuals in Sweden," and that it "in no way reflects the opinions of the Swedish Government." The incident sparked varied responses within Sweden and many Muslim-majority countries that condemned the burning.

Repeated Quran burning protests and the influence of far-right politics

Sweden has witnessed such demonstrations in the last couple of years. The riots that broke out in Malmo in 2020 and in the various cities of Malmo, Norrkoping and Orebro in 2022 were instances of Islamophobia. They also marked the rise and the increasing influence of right-wing politics in Sweden.

The catalyst for these riots was Rasmus Paludan, a Danish-Swedish citizen who established the far-right Stram Kurs movement promoting anti-immigrant and anti-Islam agenda. In January 2023, another Quran-burning protest happened outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm by a far-right politician against Sweden's NATO bid. In February 2023 the Swedish police took steps to curb such actions citing security risk concerns. The Supreme Administrative Court, however, overturned the decision saying security risk concerns are not enough to limit the right to demonstrate. Thus, the debate in Sweden revolves around free speech laws and the prevailing Islamophobic narratives.

Opposition from the Muslim-majority countries

The Muslim-majority countries have raised serious objections and concerns towards the repeated incidents of Quran burning in Sweden. Triggering widespread condemnation, these countries demanded the Swedish government to impose bans on such actions hurting religious sentiments. The freedom of speech and expression debate is not well taken in the Islamic world and the recent incident has caused protesters to storm Swedish embassies in Ankara and Baghdad.

Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt strongly criticized the burning. Government of Iran said the burning reflected “a hateful aggressive spirit that has nothing to do with freedom of expression.” Tehran also refrained from sending its ambassador to Stockholm. Government of Iraq called it “provocative and unacceptable.” Saudi Arabia government responded that “these hateful and repeated acts cannot be accepted without any justification.” Morocco, Kuwait, UAE and Jordan recalled their ambassadors to Sweden. On 30 June, Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan called for a daylong protest to defend the sanctity of the Quran as the parliament discussed the burning of the Quran in Stockholm.

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REGIONAL

Third EU-CELAC Summit: Three Takeaways

By Sneha Surendran

On 17 and 18 July, leaders of the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), after a gap of eight years, convened in Brussels for their third summit. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, welcomed the CELAC leaders, stating that Europe wanted to be “the partner of choice for Latin America and the Caribbean.”

The summit aimed to reaffirm ties between the member states, which was reflected in the theme for the event: “Renewing the bi-regional partnership to strengthen peace and sustainable development.” The discussions at the summit revolved around security, current geopolitics, climate, and trade, along with talks on Europe’s colonial past, the transatlantic slave trade, and demands for economic reparations.

Following are three major takeaways of the summit.

1. On the Ukraine War, CELAC refuses to criticize Russia

Charles Michel, President of the European Council, began his address by calling upon the participants to collectively condemn Russia for the “illegal war” it was waging against Ukraine. However, Ralph Gonsalves, President of CELAC and Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, responded: “...this summit ought not to become another unhelpful battleground for discourses on this matter, which has been and continues to be addressed in other more relevant forums.”

The LAC states have largely stayed out of the war. Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua are Russian allies, with Cuba being a long-time partner to the Kremlin. While the EU leaders tried to lobby support for Ukraine at the summit, CELAC refused to call out Russia. At the end of the summit, the leaders signed a declaration. While Nicaragua refused to assent to the document citing a reference to the Ukraine war, the declaration also did not call out Russia as the aggressor of the war.

2. EU’s attempt to reduce economic reliance on China

The increased assertiveness of China globally has led to the EU looking to decrease its economic reliance on China, shifting focus to the resource-rich LAC region. China has also made inroads into the LAC and is their second largest trade partner, after the United States. Meanwhile, the EU also has a strong economic presence in Latin America and the Caribbean as their biggest investor.

At the summit, von der Leyen promised GBP 45 billion for the EU’s Global Gateway

Program for infrastructural development in the LAC region. The Global Gateway Program has been touted as the counterplan to China's Belt and Road initiative. While the EU made commitments, CELAC stressed that projects would be based on a mutually beneficial transaction, refusing to be used as a source for the exploitation of raw materials. Alberto Fernández, Argentina's President expressed happiness at the discussion, saying: "This was the first time that we had the opportunity to discuss in such clear terms a mechanism that would take us away from extractivism in Latin America." However, there were no breakthroughs on the stalled EU-Mercosur trade deal, although leaders agreed to finalise it soon.

3. The focus on slave trade and the colonial history

Dialogue on the historical transatlantic slave trade and Europe's past as a colonizer was a priority for leaders of the CELAC. Gonsalves called for talks on reparations for the colonization and enslavement in the LAC region, stating: "Resources from the slave trade and from slavery helped to fuel the industrial revolution that has laid the basis for a lot of the wealth within Western Europe." He also pointed to the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, France, and Britain as the "main colonial powers."

EU leaders at the summit agreed to their colonial past and the profits that Europe reaped from this exploitation. Furthermore, this was included in the final declaration: "We acknowledge and profoundly regret the untold suffering inflicted on millions of men, women and children as a result of the transatlantic slave trade" However it did not bind Europe to making reparations to the LAC states.

INTERNATIONAL

The French Summit for a New Global Financing Pact

By Sneha Surendran

What happened?

On 23 and 24 June, France hosted the New Global Financing Pact summit in Paris. Barbados and India were the co-hosts. Heads of state, officials from international

organisations, NGOs and activists attended the event. In his address, host Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron hinted at the intended result of the summit: "Policymakers and countries shouldn't ever have to choose between reducing poverty and protecting the planet." The two-day summit saw officials deliberate upon climate change, climate financing, reforms of multilateral financial institutions and the impacts on economies due to the pandemic and wars.

What is the background?

First, delayed promises and climate debt. Several countries have taken the pledge to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. However, studies show that climate action continues to lack commitment. For instance, during the COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, developed countries decided to collectively secure USD 100 billion every year by 2020 to assist climate projects in developing countries. In 2020, the OECD reported that the net amount raised was USD 83 billion. Macron reiterated the commitment to this scheme, saying that he is "confident" of the target being reached this year. A March 2023 UN report titled 'Tackling debt and climate challenges in tandem' showed that the debt crisis in developing countries was aggravating climate change. 29 out of 69 poor countries plus lower-middle-income countries that defaulted are at crossroads of high debt and climate vulnerability. The report called for the restructuring of global financial systems. With natural disasters increasing in number and intensity, climate-vulnerable nations find themselves borrowing money for relief and reconstruction.

Second, the hesitant private sector. Twenty-five per cent of global climate investments are made in South Asia, Latin America, and Africa, which have some of the most ecologically vulnerable zones. Countries here can access loans only after agreeing to several conditions. Further, the tax structures within low and middle-income countries and weak institutional frameworks deter private companies from investing in green schemes. The private sector cannot quantify the risk and benefits they could face in these countries regarding climate change impacts. Additionally, the inability to

forecast high returns makes them cautious about investing.

Third, the North-South divide. Presently, the countries of the Global North are responsible for the accumulation of high atmospheric emissions. Historically, the US has emitted the highest share of carbon, followed by the EU countries and China. In comparison, the countries of the Global South have contributed a significantly lower per cent of emissions. However, the numerous climate pacts today tend to focus on the actions taken by the Global North. The two sides end up shifting the blame, with questions on climate justice factoring in.

What does it mean?

First, the Global South gearing up to fight climate change. Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley, who has emerged as a new voice leading the call for climate action, called for a "total transformation" of international institutions. The presentation of her Bridgetown Initiative constituted an important part of the event's agenda. It is a five-point proposal that addresses climate financing, global inequality and poverty in developing countries while providing possible solutions incorporating global financial institutions. The carbon footprint of the Global North is over 100 times greater than the Global South. However, emerging economies face the brunt of climate change while industrialized nations are better

equipped, technology and finance-wise, to deal with it.

Second, the relevance of contemporary financial institutions. Contemporary global institutions like the World Bank and the IMF were products of a post-World War II rebuilding effort. Since then, the world has undergone massive changes, including pandemics, shifting geopolitical relationships and a worsening climate. Moreover, these challenges have had a disproportionate impact on the developing and under-developed nations. The inability of global institutions to help alleviate their tremendous challenges, coupled with the dominance of developed countries within these institutions, has slowly chipped away the trust in them. A look at the policies of these institutions also reveal that they have exacerbated the debt crisis in poor countries. This has increased the call for institutional reforms over time.

The note was previously published part of "The World This Week."

War in Ukraine: Daily Updates*

By Sreeja JS, Rishika Yadav, and Padmashree Anandhan



Source: Tunisian Presidency/ AP, Anadolu Agency, Klaus-Dietmar Gabbert/dpa/picture alliance, AP / Alexander Ryumin, Lithuanian Armed Forces, PBS/AP

War in Ukraine: Day 521

War on the Ground:

On 29 July, Hanna Maliar, Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister posted in her Telegram account on Ukraine's forces progress in southern Bakhmut. She noted that Russia's forces failed to advance in Kupyansk, Lymansk, Avdiivsky and Marinsky despite the intense fighting they put up with Ukraine's forces. Additionally, Ukraine's forces are making gradual advances in Berdyansk and Melitopol.

On 29 July, *Ukrinform* reported on the continuing operational situation in Volyn and Polike. In Shakhtarsky, Russia's forces have carried out airstrikes and shelling in Makarivka, Staromayorske, Odradne, Blagodatne, and Rivnopil. In Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, Russia's forces are concentrated on thwarting the advances of Ukraine's troops.

On 29 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported on a Russia's missile strike in Dnipro that wounded nine residents in a residential

complex. According to Serhiy Lysak, Regional Governor, there were two hits by Iskander missiles.

On 29 July, Rafael Mariano Grossi, IAEA's Director General stated that Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) completed the planned transition of its reactor unit five to cold shut down and moved reactor unit 4 to hot shut down. Grossi again stressed the importance of adhering to the five basic principles established on 30 May in the UNSC to protect the plant from any attacks whatsoever could trigger a nuclear accident.

On 29 July, *president.gov.ua* reported that Andriy Yermak, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine had a phone call with Celso Amorim, Chief Advisor to the President of the Federal Republic of Brazil. The office-bearers discussed the preparation of another meeting of national security advisors regarding the implementation of Ukraine's

* War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from 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. Visit <https://globalpolitics.in/europe/> to read them every day.

initiatives to peace based on the UN Charter and International Law.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 28 July, *Business Day* reported that Russia has signed several agreements for military cooperation with more than 40 African countries. The agreements would include provisions enabling the supply of a broad range of armaments and hardware to African countries. The representatives of those countries have been also invited to actively participate in Russia-organised military forums that deal with the technical aspects of the weapons and their manoeuvres. Putin assured that Russia would continue to be a reliable supplier of grain to the countries of the continent. He promised to provide free grain (25,000 to 50,000 tons) to Zimbabwe, Mali, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Eritrea and the Central African Republic in the next three to four months.

On 29 July, according to *Arab News*, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, speaking at a press conference said that Russia did not reject talks on Ukraine and African Peace Initiative including the Chinese initiative to mediate talks between Russian and Ukraine could serve as a basis for peace. He added that it is difficult to implement a cease-fire while Ukraine's forces are on the offensive and that there are no significant changes or intensification of actions on its side.

On 29 July, Putin said that Russia is "always ready for any scenario" while commenting on a potential confrontation between Russia and NATO forces. Pointing at the existing conflict-prevention lines he said that nobody wants a direct conflict scenario. Russia's military has reported a total of 23 incidents involving aircraft of Russia and the US-led coalition since early 2023. According to *RT*, Admiral Oleg Gurinov, the head of the Russia's Reconciliation Center for Syria, most incidents took place in July.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 29 June, Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State said that according to Washington, Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defence Minister is in North Korea to secure weapons to support

its invasion of Ukraine. According to *Deutsche Welle*, Pyongyang's state media called the visit and the meeting a "friendly talk."

On 29 July, *Deutsche Welle* quoting *Wall Street Journal* reported that Saudi Arabia is planning to host talks soon to discuss the path to achieve peace in Ukraine. The meeting would take place in Jeddah and is expected to be attended by delegations from Ukraine, western powers and a few developing countries. Russia would not attend the meeting.

On 29 June, Mateusz Morawiecki, Prime Minister of Poland, said that Wagner group fighters were observed to be approaching Poland's border with Belarus. They are likely to help migrants enter the borders in an attempt to destabilize the country as elections are around the corner. He said that more than 100 fighters have advanced towards the Suwalki Gap, a strategic corridor separating Belarus from Kaliningrad not far from Grodno in Belarus (about 15 kilometres from the borders of Poland and Lithuania). According to *Deutsche Welle*, if Russia or the Wagner group take control of the area it would cut off Baltic states from the EU.

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War in Ukraine: Day 516

War on Ground:

On 25 July, *Ukrinform* reported on the statement made by Andriy Yusov, Ukraine's Defence Intelligence representative on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. He stated that there was no technical need for a "hot shutdown" of the plant's unit four, calling it a violation of safety standards and Ukraine's nuclear law. He believes its used for nuclear blackmail and poses a man-made disaster risk. IAEA experts have limited access, and anti-personnel mines were found at internal side and not in the interior perimeter of the plant.

On 25 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, addresses crucial matters concerning the nation's defence and international relations. He expresses gratitude for the support received from the US, including artillery, missiles, and drones. Discussions with the UK focuses on enhancing air defence in the southern regions, particularly Odesa. Preparations for the Ukraine-NATO Council meeting are underway, with a focus on Black Sea security and grain exports.

On 25 July, *Ukrinform* reported that Ukraine's air defences successfully intercept all kamikaze drones used by Russia to attack Kyiv. The air defence forces promptly detect and destroy the drones before any casualties or damage occurred. The Iranian-made Shahed loitering munitions are reported to be used in the sixth drone attack on the capital in July.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 25 July, *The Moscow Times* reported on Russia's parliament members passing of a bill to increase the age limit for military conscription and ban draftees from leaving the country. The new law will be effective from January 2024 and requires men aged 18 to 30 to serve in the military. This move aims at expanding the pool of potential recruits for the war in Ukraine. The bill aims to conscript approximately 147,000 soldiers,

matching the number enlisted during the spring conscription campaign. The lower age limit remains at 18, and recruited men will be prohibited from leaving Russia to crack down on draft dodging. The bill is yet to be signed by Putin and approved by the Federation Council.

On 25 July, *The Moscow Times* reported that tensions escalate, in the Black Sea, as Russia thwarted a Ukraine's armed forces' drone attack on its patrol boat. The Russian defence ministry reports that the Sergei Kotov patrol ship destroyed the naval drones around one kilometre away, with no injuries reported. The incident occurs after Moscow withdrew from a deal safeguarding Ukraine's grain shipments, leading to warnings of targeting ships near Ukraine's ports. The region witnesses increased attacks amid Kyiv's counteroffensive.

On 25 July, *TASS* reported that Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of the Russia's President states that returning to the grain deal is impossible as Russia's conditions have not been met. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General proposes extending the Black Sea initiative, but Peskov emphasises that Russia is ready to resume the deal once it's part of the agreement is fulfilled.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 25 July, the US Department of Defence announced additional security assistance valued at up to USD 400 million to fulfill Ukraine's critical security and defence needs. This marks the Biden administration's forty-third drawdown of equipment for Ukraine since August 2021. The capabilities provided range from Patriot and NASAMS munitions to Stinger anti-aircraft systems, HIMARS ammunition, Stryker APCs, Javelin anti-armour systems, and more.

On 25 July, in a statement to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Neil Holland, UK's ambassador condemned Russia's abhorrent attacks on Odesa's civilian, cultural, and religious sites, including the Transfiguration Cathedral and the UNESCO-listed town centre. These missile strikes violate international conventions and are part of

Russia's deliberate efforts to hinder Ukraine's grain exports and threaten global food security. The attacks aim to prevent up to 24 million tonnes of grain from reaching markets and those in need, particularly in Africa. The UK reaffirms its support for Ukraine in facing Russia's aggression.

On 25 July, *New York Post* reported that Trevor Reed, a former US Marine, released from Russia 15 months ago in a prisoner swap, has been injured while fighting in Ukraine, as confirmed by the Pentagon. He was wounded several weeks ago and transported to a hospital in Kyiv before being moved to Germany for further treatment by a non-governmental organisation. The extent and location of his injuries have not been disclosed. The Pentagon emphasises that Reed was acting as a private citizen and not on behalf of the US government when he traveled to Ukraine to join the fight against Russia. The US government has warned citizens against traveling to Ukraine for combat. Reed was arrested in Russia in 2019 and later sentenced to nine years in prison for allegedly assaulting a cop. He was exchanged for a Russian pilot in April 2022.

On 25 July, the EU and Norway signed a transfer agreement for a voluntary financial contribution of NOK 250 million to supply military equipment. This includes ammunition and spare parts for tanks, to Ukraine through the European Peace Facility (EPF). It will be Norway's second contribution to the EPF, bringing their total support to NOK 400 million. This agreement formalizes Norway's commitment to supporting Ukraine's freedom and sovereignty.

On 25 July, *Euronews* reported that five eastern European countries, including Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, are demanding the extension of temporary bans on Ukraine's grain imports into the EU until year-end, despite the EU's previous commitment to phase them out by 15 September. The bans allow transit but prohibits storage or domestic consumption in the Eastern countries. Lithuania proposes reinforcing the Baltic route for Ukraine's products. Russia's President Vladimir Putin's

decision to withdraw from the Black Sea corridor and attack Ukraine's grain terminals prompted the renewed debate. The Black Sea deal's collapse disrupted global supply chains and raised commodity prices. The EU's "solidarity lanes" face scrutiny, with tensions over the influx of low-cost cereals from Ukraine.

On 25 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that German Members of European Parliament (MEPs) from different parties are urging the EU to support Russia's seeking refuge from war conscription. In a joint letter to EU leaders, they call for consultations on visa policies and asylum procedures to protect Russia's conscientious objectors. As of April 2023, 2,485 male Russians between 18 and 45 have applied for asylum in Germany, with 55 applicants granted asylum and 88 refused. The Dublin Regulation determines the responsible EU country for processing asylum applications.

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War in Ukraine: Day 515

War on the Ground:

On 24 July, *Ukrinform* reported that heavy battles are continuing in Bakhmut, in the settlements of Klishchiivka, Andriivka and Kurdiumivka. According to Hanna Maliar, Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister, Bakhmut is the "main theatre of action in the east." She added that Ukraine's forces had advanced in the southern up to four square kilometres in last week. In the northern part, no change in battle positions was reported. She said that in Bakhmut, Russia's forces had been trapped with limited manoeuvrability due to Ukraine's forces. In southern Ukraine, offensive actions are reportedly underway in Melitopol and Berdiansk. According to the report in *Reuters*, Russia's troops still hold sizeable territory in southern and eastern Ukraine. Over the past 24 hours, 35 combat clashes were reported in eastern Ukraine.

On 24 July, the *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)* reported that directional anti-personnel mines were observed near Ukraine's Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on the outer periphery. The mines are situated in a restricted area controlled by the military, facing away from the site and not accessible to operating plant personnel. The IAEA expressed concern over the presence of explosives on the site, though it clarified that the initial assessment indicates no impact on nuclear safety and security systems.

On 24 July, *Ukrinform* reported that Russia's forces continued to attack Odesa, launching an overnight four-hour attack involving Shahed-Kamikaze drones damaging the port infrastructure on the Danube. According to the report, Ukraine's air defence forces destroyed three drones. A grain hangar and

several tanks used for storing other cargoes were damaged in the attacks.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 24 July, *Ukrinform* reported on the drone attacks in Moscow that damaged a building near the Ministry of Defence headquarters. According to Sergey Sobyenin, Moscow's mayor, the drone strikes were on two non-residential buildings in the early morning. No serious damage or casualties were reported. According to *RT*, Maria Zakharova, the spokesperson of Russia's Foreign Ministry, alleged that the drone attacks are an "act of international terrorism."

On 24 July, Sergey Aksyonov, Russia-installed head of Crimea, announced that ammunition depot of Russia in the peninsula was hit in an overnight drone attack launched by Ukraine. The defence ministry said that the military had downed 17 drones using electronic signal defence systems and no casualties were reported.

On 24 July, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President announced that Russia is ready to replace Ukraine's grain exports to Africa. He said: "I want to give assurances that our country is capable of replacing the Ukraine's grain both on a commercial and free-of-charge basis."

On 24 June, *Eurasia Review* reported on Putin's meeting with Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus's President. According to the report, Lukashenko was quoted saying that the Wagner group engaged in training Belarus troops are keen to push into Poland across the border. Poland has been moving extra troops towards its border with Belarus since Wagner fighters arrived in Minsk. The meeting comes after Moscow warned that an attack on Belarus would be considered an attack on Russia and that it would use all means it has to retaliate against the hostility.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 23 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, announced that a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council expected to address Black Sea security has been scheduled for 26 July. According to Oanu Lungescu, NATO's

spokesperson, the meeting requested by Zelenskyy would discuss the situation following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. He also added that the meeting would take place at the level of ambassadors.

On 24 July, the Defence Ministry of Spain announced that four Leopard 2A4 tanks and other Ukraine-bound military and humanitarian aid have left for Poland. The shipment also included ten M-113 armoured personnel carriers, ten cargo trucks, an armoured multi-purpose vehicle and five ambulances. Margarita Robles, Spain's Defence Minister, announced the supply of further military aid earlier in June 2023.

On 24 July, in a press briefing, Matthew Miller, US Department of State spokesperson, condemned Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the subsequent attacks on the port of Odesa. He said: "These vicious strikes further illustrate Russia's willingness to use food as a weapon in its illegal war against Ukraine."

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War in Ukraine: Days 512, 513 & 514

War on the Ground:

On 19 July, *NPR* reported that following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea grain initiative, concerns around food security have increased, particularly in food-insecure countries. Kenya termed Russia's decision as a "stab in the back" while Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General said that it will have an impact on people in need everywhere. Grain prices have started changing since Russia's withdrew. On 19 July, Moscow said that ships in the Black Sea going to Ukraine's ports would be treated as transporting military supplies.

On 21 July, a UN spokesperson said that reports of sea mines in the Black Sea were concerning, said: "Threats regarding potential targeting of civilian vessels navigating in the Black Sea waters are unacceptable." Meanwhile, Sergiy Kyslytsya, Ukraine's Ambassador to the UN said that his government was negotiating means to deliver grain to people in need, stating: "We do not use grain as weaponized means of foreign policy or waging war." Ukraine has issued alerts to ships en route to Russia-controlled ports.

On 21 July, Russia promised to address the concerns of the African nations regarding the stoppage of grain supply at an upcoming summit.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 21 July, a bill that proposed raising the minimum age for military conscription from 18 to 21 in Russia kept the lower age limit unchanged. However, the upper age limit was increased from 27 to 30. Andrei Kartapolov, co-author of the bill and the chairman of the Defense Committee of the lower house justified this, stating: "We decided to keep the lower draft age limit at

18 years because a lot of young men want to serve at 18." Once the bill is adopted, it will come into effect from the spring of 2024.

On 21 July, Kremlin.ru reported on Vladimir Putin, Russia's President warning to Poland. He said that any conflict with Belarus would be taken as an attack against Russia. He added that Poland was looking to gain territory, stating: "It is well known that they also dream of the Belarusian lands." The statements come after Poland moved to station troops at its eastern borders on 19 July, following the arrival of Wagner troops in Belarus.

On 21 July, Russia's defense ministry announced that the navy held exercises including the "live firing of anti-ship cruise missiles at the target ship" in the northwestern part of the Black Sea. According to further statements, the navy also conducted exercises on isolating the area and detaining enemy ships.

The West view:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 19 July, Poland decided to station military units at their eastern borders following the news regarding the arrival of Wagner troops in neighbouring Belarus.

On 19 July, a video release showed Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner's head, extending a welcome to his troops, saying that they would be training the Belarusian army but would not be involved in the Ukraine war anymore.

On 20 July, Belarus's Defence Ministry announced that its special forces were receiving training from Wagner fighters close to the borders with Poland.

On 21 July, the White House National Security Advisor said that currently there is no involvement of the Wagner mercenary troops in Ukraine.

On 19 July, a video of Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner group's leader had shown him welcoming his troops to Belarus, stating that

they would no longer be fighting the war in Ukraine.

On 21 July, Bulgaria's parliament agreed to dispatch around 100 armoured vehicles to Ukraine. The vehicles are Soviet-designed BTR armoured personnel carriers and have not been deployed yet. According to the official statement of Bulgaria Parliament: "Bulgaria no longer needs this equipment, which can provide valuable support to Ukraine in its battle to preserve its independence and territorial integrity."

On 21 July, *The Washington Post* reported that Russia conducted naval exercises in the Black Sea and also attacked an agricultural facility in the port of Odessa, destroying stored grains. The UN Security Council convened on 21 July to deliberate on Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea grain deal. US Ambassador to the UN said: "The United States has information that the Russian military may expand its targeting of Ukrainian grain facilities to include attacks against civilian shipping," and raised an alert of possible mines in the Black Sea.

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War in Ukraine: Day 510

War on the Ground:

On 19 July, The Kyiv Independent reported on the information shared by Mykhailo Podolyak, a senior advisor to Ukraine's President on the Ukraine's counteroffensive. He emphasises that Ukraine's counteroffensive in recapturing Russia's-controlled territory is likely to be challenging and lengthy. After five weeks into the operation, progress is slower than predicted. Kyiv seeks joint military patrol of Black Sea countries for grain exports after Russia left a safety deal for cargo ships. According to the report, Kyiv faces difficulties due to heavily mined territory and logistical issues, requiring more tanks and F-16 fighter jets to accelerate efforts against Russia's forces.

On 19 July, The Kyiv Independent reported on the information shared by Mykola Solskyi, Ukraine's Agriculture Minister, about the Odesa attacks. He said that Russia's attacks on port infrastructure in Odesa Oblast resulted in the destruction of 60,000 tons of grain. He calls it a "terrorist act" with severe global implications for food security. Odesa's port of Chornomorsk faces heavy Russia's strikes, with air defence intercepting eight drones and one missile.

On 19 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President said that the attacks on Odesa and other regions had caused significant damage to ports and food storage. Around a million tons of food destined for Africa and Asia were affected. Zelenskyy emphasized the need to strengthen Ukraine's air defence and hold Russia accountable for terrorism. Preparations for international events, including the Summit of the Crimean Platform, were discussed, with the aim of liberating Crimea from occupation.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 19 July, the TASS reported on the statement made by Putin on the Black Sea Grain deal. He said that Moscow may reinstate the grain deal if previous promises, including waiving sanctions on grain and fertilizer supplies, are fulfilled without exception. Putin expressed openness to the deal's importance for the global food market and many countries. The decision depends on adhering to agreed principles fully.

On 19 July, *Anadolu Agency* reported that Putin will not be attending the BRICS summit in Johannesburg next month. It was also confirmed by Cyril Ramaphosa, the South African President. Instead, Russia will be represented by Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister. The decision comes after the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Putin, putting pressure on South Africa, a signatory to the Rome Statute. All BRICS leaders, except Putin, will be present at the summit.

On 19 July, the Russian defence ministry reported on the progress of the special military operation in Ukraine. It confirmed successfully neutralised targets, including military facilities and depots near Odesa and a Ukraine's Air Force airbase. In other directions, Russia's troops continued offensive operations, advancing in depth and along the front, seizing a railway station. Numerous counterattacks from Ukraine were repelled, and ammunition depots of Ukraine's brigades were destroyed. Russia's armed forces also targeted and destroyed Ukraine's equipment and personnel across various regions. Notably, they shot down an AFU Su-25 aircraft and a Mi-8 helicopter.

On 19 July, the TASS reported on Russia's defence ministry's shift in handling Ukraine's ships crossing Black Sea. In a statement, Russia will consider all ships travelling to Ukraine's ports across the Black Sea as potential carriers of military cargoes from midnight on July 20, 2023, following the expiration of the Black Sea grain deal. Russia further informed that the flag states of these ships will be viewed as siding with Ukraine in the conflict. Sea areas in certain parts of the Black Sea have been declared temporarily dangerous for navigation, with warning notices issued to mariners. This move comes after the termination of the

maritime humanitarian corridor.

On 19 July, *The Moscow Times* reported about a bill passed by Russia's lawmakers that permits the National Guard to deploy heavy weaponry, including tanks to improve Russia's security after Wagner revolt. This move comes following a failed uprising by the Wagner mercenary group. The National Guard, under Putin's command, was initially established to tackle unrest and protests but has since taken part in military operations, including the offensive on Ukraine. The legislation allows the force to possess military-grade arms and was passed after the defence ministry acquired weapons from the Wagner group. The move aims to strengthen Russia's security apparatus after the mutiny attempt by Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner's leader.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 19 July, the US announced a new military package of USD 1.3 billion to Ukraine which includes air defence systems, anti-tank missiles, and drones. The US department of defence issued a statement assuring US support to Ukraine's demands for "critical near-term capabilities." This will also boost capacity of Ukraine's armed forces. Through the package, Ukraine will receive "Four National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) and munitions, 152 millimetres artillery rounds, mine clearing equipment and drones."

On 19 July, *The Guardian* reported that a video has surfaced showing Wagner mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin addressing his fighters in Belarus. In the video he is calling the Russia's war effort in Ukraine a "disgrace." Prigozhin, who led a recent mutiny, criticized the Russian military's management of the war, and further stated that his fighters wouldn't participate for now. The video suggests a deal was struck during the mutiny allowing Wagner fighters to live in exile in Belarus, where they may be training Belarus's territorial forces. Prigozhin indicated Wagner mercenaries would be going to Africa for new operations.

On 19 July, the *Associated Press* reported that

five EU countries will extend their ban on Ukraine's grain imports to protect their farmers. It will, however, allow food to move through their territories to destinations in need after Russia left the Black Sea grain deal. The agriculture ministers of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria signed a declaration supporting the transit of Ukraine's grain through road, rail, and river routes, while maintaining the import ban until 2023. The ministers seek EU mechanisms to prevent grain congestion in their countries, with Polish Agriculture Minister Robert Telus noting a doubling of Ukraine's grain moving through Poland this year due to the ban's effects.

On 19 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Annalena Baerbock, Germany's Foreign Minister, pledged support to Ukraine for finding alternative grain export paths. She proposed the EU-created solidarity lanes "by barge, rail, or road" as an option. Baerbock accused Vladimir Putin of jeopardizing Ukraine's grain exports and harming the poorest worldwide. Ukraine's grain feeds 400 million people globally.

On 19 July, *BBC* reported that in a speech in Prague, Sir Richard Moore, MI6 Chief, reveals that the intelligence agency has recruited disaffected Russia's. He emphasised that they are those Russia's who appalled the Ukraine and appealed for more to defect and join them. He emphasised that many Russia's are horrified by their armed forces' actions in Ukraine and offered them a chance to work to end the bloodshed. Moore assured that their secrets would be safe with MI6. He also discussed the Wagner mercenaries' rebellion and stated that the solution to the Ukraine war is Russia's withdrawal of troops. He highlighted the importance of human agents alongside AI technology in intelligence work.

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War in Ukraine: Day 509

War on the Ground:

On 18 July, *Ukrinform* reported Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President meeting on grain sea exports and port security. During the meeting, logistics and coastal protection updates were presented by the infrastructure minister and Navy Commander. Countering Russia's UAVs and intelligence reports were also discussed. The battlefield situation was briefed by military officials. Projectile supply dynamics were shared by the defence minister and logistics forces commander.

On 18 July, *Ukrinform* reported on an important agricultural development where Ukraine has successfully exported over 33 million tonnes of grain to 45 nations during a year-long grain deal operation. Zelenskyy has reached out to the President of Turkey

and the UN Secretary General, urging them to support the continuation of the grain initiative. Zelenskyy now proposes a unilateral format without Russia's involvement to ensure global food security.

On 18 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported Ukraine activating Odesa's aerial defenses. The move was in response to Russia's missile and drone strikes overnight, causing damage to the Black Sea port city's infrastructure. The strikes followed an explosion on the bridge linking Russia to Crimea. Moscow's refusal to extend the grain export agreement that utilised Odesa's maritime terminals also contributed to the tension.

On 18 July, *The Kyiv Independent* gave an update on Ukraine forces' advances in the southern front. It reported that Ukraine's forces have made advancements, particularly in the Mala Tokmachka-Novopokrovka and Velyka Novosilka-Urozhaine directions, with troops consolidating their positions. Concerns arise as Russia deploys reserves in the Bakhmut direction and concentrates significant military assets in the Kupiansk direction.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 18 July, the *Meduza* reported that Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of the Russia's President comments on the Odesa strikes. He stated that the strikes on Odesa's port infrastructure were retaliatory actions for the Crimean Bridge incident on 17 July. Russia's ministry of defence claimed that the attack targeted facilities involved in preparing attacks against Russia, including unmanned boat usage and manufacturing near Odesa.

On 18 July, six Caliber missiles and 36 Shahed kamikaze drones were launched, with some debris causing damage in Odesa, injuring one person.

On 18 July, the *TASS* reported on the update by Lieutenant-General Igor Konashenkov, Defence Ministry spokesperson of Russia, on the advances in Ukraine. He informed that Russia's air defence forces reportedly destroyed 43 drones of Ukraine and intercepted three rockets from a US made

HIMARS multiple launch rocket system. In the south Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia (areas, Russia's forces repulsed multiple attacks and destroyed over 200 troops and military assets of Ukraine

On 18 July, the TASS reported on the statement on the Black Sea grain deal by Maria Zakharova, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson of Russia. Zakharova, stated that Russia no longer trusts promises from western countries and the UN regarding the deal. Zakharova emphasised that Russia had taken steps to help needy countries access food products through the deal, but the West's actions have been questionable.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 18 July, *Reuters* reported on the US decision to give a new military package. The US will provide USD 1.3 billion worth of military aid to Ukraine to aid its conflict with Russia. Notably, the package encompasses counter-air defenses like the VAMPIRE system from L3 Harris Technologies and two types of loitering munitions, Phoenix Ghost drone from AVEVEX, and Switchblade from AeroVironment Inc.

On 18 July, *Reuters* reported the EU's plan to boost Ukraine's grain export. It aims to increase the transportation of Ukraine's grains through road and rail to offset Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea exports deal.

On 18 July, Russia targeted Ukraine's grain ports after pulling out of the deal. Leo Varadkar, Ireland's Prime Minister, stated that the EU would expand land export routes for Ukraine's grains through solidarity lanes passing from neighboring countries like Romania and Poland.

On 18 July, USAID reported on Administrator Samantha Power criticism on Russia. It criticised Russia for suspending the Black Sea Grain Initiative in Odesa. The US is providing an additional USD 250 million through Agriculture Resilience Initiative - Ukraine (AGRI-Ukraine) to support the agriculture sector amid Russia's aggression, bringing the total US investment to USD 350 million.

On 18 July, the press release of the *Government of UK* reported on the UK's Armed Forces plan to enhance warfighting readiness. It announced to invest GBP 2.5 billion in stockpiles and a Global Response Force. The plan includes an additional GBP 2.5 billion investment in stockpiles and munitions, a UK Global Response Force for swift deployment, and a focus on becoming a science and technology superpower with advancements in robotics, directed energy weapons, and more.

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War in Ukraine: Day 508

War on the Ground:

On 17 July, Sergei Aksyonov, Russia-installed official in Crimea announced on telegram that traffic had been blocked due to an

emergency in Kerch Strait Bridge. The antiterrorism committee later reported that that bridge had been hit by two maritime drones in two explosions. According to *The New York Times*, Russia's officials are blaming Ukraine for the explosions and Russia's National Anti-Terrorism Committee said that they would investigate this bridge collapse as a terrorist act. This is the second time the bridge is coming under attack highlighting its importance to both Ukraine and Russia. The Kerch Bridge, the longest bridge in Europe, also called as the Crimean Bridge is a 12 mile, USD 3.7 billion infrastructure project with two parallel tracks, one four-lane road and a two rail-lane. The bridge connects mainland Russia with the Crimean peninsula.

On 17 July, the Black Sea Grain initiative, the deal allowing Ukraine to safely export grain through the Black Sea has officially expired after Moscow informed the UN, Turkey and Ukraine that it would not renew the deal. Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, has been complaining that the parts of the deal which allowed the exports of Russia's food and fertilizers is not being fulfilled. He was also complaining that the grains from Ukraine also were not being supplied to poorer countries and the western sanctions were restricting its own agricultural exports. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, in his video address said that Ukraine, the UN and Turkey can "jointly ensure" the operation of the food corridor and the inspection vessels. He said: "it is necessary for everyone in the world-and everyone who supports it will become a savior of life in a huge territory from Morocco to China, from Indonesia to Lebanon."

On 17 July, *Ukrinform* quoting the head of the Zaporizhzhia regional Military Administration reported that, Russia's military has conducted 55 attacks on 16 localities. 52 artillery strikes were reported in Huliypole, Olhivka, Malynivka, Charivne, Zaliznychne, Preobrazhenka, Stepnohirsk and other villages in the frontline. According to the General Staff of Armed Forces, heavy battles are underway in Kupyansk, Lymansk, Bakhmutsk, Avdiivsk, and Marinsk directions where 29 combat clashes took place.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 17 July, Russia's Press Secretary of the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Peskov, commented on the termination of the grain deal. He said: "As soon as the Russian part (of the deal) is fulfilled, the Russian side will immediately return to the implementation of this deal." According to the *TASS*, Kremlin's decision on terminating the deal was announced before the collapse of the Crimean Bridge and this has not influenced Moscow's decision.

On 17 July, Putin said that Kyiv's attack on the Crimea's bridge would not be left unanswered. Speaking at a videoconference following the attack he said: "Considering that this is the second terrorist attack on the Crimean Bridge, I am waiting for specific proposals on how to improve the security of this strategically important transport facility."

On 17 July, *RT* reported on Peskov's comments on the attack on the Crimean bridge. According to *RT*, he said: "We know the reasons and those behind this terrorist act. This will require further composure and additional measures and work from all of us. No other measures have been discussed at the moment." He also stated that while he could not provide any specific details about Moscow's response to the attack, its ultimate answer would be the achievement of all the goals behind the "military operation" in Ukraine. Russia's transportation ministry noted that bridge's support remains intact while the surface is damaged.

On 17 July, the *TASS* reported that Russia's forces destroyed a fuel depot of the Ukraine's forces near Kramatorsk in Donetsk. According to the report, 73 Ukraine's artillery units, military and manpower equipment in 68 areas were struck over the course of a day.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 17 July, Antony Blinken, Secretary of State of the US, condemned Russia for withdrawing from the grain deal. According to *Deutsche Welle*, he said: "The result of Russia's action today weaponizing food will be to make food harder to come by in places

that desperately need it and have prices rise.” He added that the bottom line is “its unconscionable.” He also stated that Washington is monitoring the damage of the bridge and it is up to Ukraine to decide on how it conducts the war.

On 17 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that German leaders have condemned Russia’s decision not to renew the deal. Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of Germany said that the move of Germany sends bad message to the world. Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister said that Putin is “using hunger as weapon in this brutal war of aggression” and he “has no regard for the weakest in the world.” She added that it has become important for the EU to help export grain from Ukraine via railways.

On 17 July, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission condemned Russia’s cynical move to terminate the grain deal. She further added that the EU is working to ensure food security for the world’s vulnerable.

On 17 July, James Cleverly, Foreign Secretary of the UK announced 14 new sanctions in response to Moscow’s “attempts to destroy Ukraine’s national identity,” including 11 people those involved in the forced deportation of Ukraine’s children. The 11 personalities include the Commissioner for Children’s Rights in Moscow, Minister of Education of Russia, Russia’s propagandist and the Culture Minister of Russia.

According to *GOV.UK*, over 1,600 individuals and entities, including 29 global banks, over 130 oligarchs and GBP 20 billion worth of UK-Russia have been sanctioned since the start of the invasion.

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War in Ukraine: Days 506 & 507

War on the Ground:

On 16 July, Hanna Maliar, Ukraine’s Deputy Defence Minister posted on Telegram that the situation continues to worsen in eastern Ukraine. Russia has been advancing in Kupyansk in Kharkiv where intense battles are underway. Ukraine’s forces are gradually making gains in Bakhmut. In the South, daily advances are reported, whereas, in southern Bakhmut, Ukraine’s forces are trying to hold their positions against Russia’s attacks. Further, Russia continues offensive actions in Avdiivsk and Marinsk.

On 15 July, *Yonhap News Agency* reported that Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea’s President visited South Korea on an unannounced visit following the NATO Summit in Vilnius on 11 and 12 July. Yoon visited the site of mass killings in Bucha near Kyiv before visiting Irpin, the site of large-scale missile attacks. In the joint press conference, Yoon stated

that the government of the Republic of Korea allocated USD 100 million (2022) to support Kyiv which would increase to USD 150 million in 2023. According to Ukrinform, Yoon and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine also discussed the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine as Seoul plans to allocate funds for the restoration of infrastructure, assistance to entrepreneurship and reconstruction of the education system.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 16 July, the *TASS* reported that the UNSC would hold a meeting on 17 July to discuss the situation in Ukraine and the extension of the Black Sea Initiative as requested by the British mission.

On 15 July, Putin over a phone call with Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa, discussed the African peace initiative and the Black Sea Initiative set to expire on 17 July. According to *RT*, Putin told Ramaphosa that the grain deal did not fulfil its purpose and the agricultural products that should have been delivered to poorer countries did not reach them while huge shares ended up in Europe. He added that the memorandum signed with the UN did not facilitate export of Russia's agricultural products. The leaders further discussed the African peace initiative, including the Russia-Africa summit scheduled in late July.

On 15 July, Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for Russia's foreign ministry, claimed that western countries are encouraging Ukraine to conduct attacks on Russia's nuclear sites. According to *RT*, she was commenting after Ukraine's drone crashed in Kurchatov, near the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant on 14 July. Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod along the borders of Russia have frequently come under attack since the beginning of the invasion. According to *RT*, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said that it captured a group of Ukraine's agents who were planning to sabotage nuclear power plants in Leningrad and Tver.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 16 July, *Politico* wrote that Jake Sullivan,

National Security Adviser of the US reaffirmed that Ukraine would be admitted into NATO when it fulfills certain conditions. In an interview with ABC News, he said that Ukraine's admission into NATO would mean that the alliance and the US are at war with Russia, which neither is prepared for. He said that "Ukraine has made a lot of progress" towards democratic reforms and added that "it has more reforms to make."

On 15 July, Serbia announced that it would send a new package of humanitarian aid to Ukraine "overcoming the humanitarian disaster in the Kherson region." The aid would be in the form of goods and medicines from the Directorate for Commodity Reserves and goods from Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. The government also approved temporary protection for the affected Ukrainians from Kherson.

On 15 July, *The New York Times* wrote that within the first two weeks of the counteroffensive, Ukraine lost up to 20 per cent of its weaponry, including some of the advanced western fighting machines. However, the rate of losses was reduced by up to ten per cent in the later weeks, because of changing tactics. Ukraine's forces started focusing more on wearing down Russia's forces with artillery and long-range missiles than charging into enemy minefields and fire. According to *The New York Times*, the pace of the counteroffensive that came down due to losses would pick up with the delivery of cluster munitions from the US.

On 14 July, *Ukrinform* reported that the House of Representatives of the US passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for the fiscal year 2024 which would provide for USD 300 million for Ukraine. Earlier, the US Department of Defence announced a USD 800 million security assistance package to Ukraine which included the delivery of cluster munitions and other weapons to Kyiv.

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War in Ukraine: Day 504

War on the Ground:

On 13 July, *The Guardian* reported on Pentagon's confirmation on the arrival of cluster munitions to Ukraine. According to the US, cluster munitions were critically needed ammunition for Kyiv to push back Russia's forces. US-President Joe Biden decided on 08 July to send them to Ukraine.

On 13 June, *Ukrinform* reported that Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, discussed the preparations for the Global Peace Summit and the vital diplomatic steps to muster and consolidate African support for Ukraine. Noting the importance of extending the "grain corridor" Zelenskyy invited South Africa to join the Ukrainian Initiative Grain from Ukraine. Earlier in June, a delegation of African leaders led by Ramaphosa visited Ukraine as part of the African peacekeeping mission.

On 13 June, *Deutsche Welle* reported that over 20 people have got injured following a rocket fire in Zaporizhzhia. According to the local governor, Russia's forces have shelled 14 numerous places in the city damaging dozens of buildings. Shellings were also reported in Kherson.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 13 July, the *TASS* reported on Vladimir Putin, Russia's President was quoted stating: "The (Wagner) Group exists, but it is judicially non-existent." He further said: "The formal legalization is a separate issue that should be addressed by the State Duma and the government. It's a complicated issue." Putin was answering a question about the group's future from the viewpoint of Russia's legislation.

On 13 July, the *TASS* reported on Alexander Grushko, Russia's Deputy Foreign Ministers comment that Russia should fulfil the goals of its "special military operation" in Ukraine, strengthen its armed forces and bolster ties with its allies. He also added that "No matter what NATO does, it will fail. There is no way to reverse this process." He was responding to the recently concluded NATO Summit in Vilnius on 11 and 12 July in an interview with Channel One.

On 13 July, in an interview with *Lenta.ru*, Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister said that the West's move to supply F-16s to Ukraine is an "extremely dangerous development." Lavrov said: "The US and its NATO satellites create the risk of a direct armed confrontation with Russia and this may lead to catastrophic consequences." Earlier, along the sidelines of the NATO Summit, Denmark announced that a "coalition" of 11 countries would begin training for Ukraine's pilots to fly F16s. Jake Sullivan, National Security Adviser of the US also mentioned that European countries would transfer F16s to Kyiv.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 13 July, *The Guardian* reported that during a press conference following the US-Nordic summit in Helsinki with Sauli Niinisto, Joe Biden, President of the US was quoted saying there was "no real prospect of Putin using nuclear weapons." He was responding to the question of whether Putin could escalate tensions in Ukraine after the failed Wagner mutiny.

On 13 July, *The Guardian* wrote that Barbara Woodward, UK envoy to the UN has accused Moscow of "cynical brinkmanship" for its

unwillingness to extend the Black Sea grain initiative. She added that the failure to renew the deal could cause global food prices to soar and cause difficulty for middle-income countries and those suffering from starvation such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia. According to *The Guardian*, Ukraine's role as the breadbasket of the world could only be realized by protecting its exports westward through Poland.

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War in Ukraine: Day 503

War on the Ground:

On 12 July, Fumio Kishida, Japan's Prime Minister announced that Tokyo would provide a drone detection system to Kyiv. In March, Kishida promised USD 30 million as nonlethal defence equipment assistance to Ukraine through the NATO trust fund. The drone detection system would be provided through this framework.

On 12 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President met Olaf Scholz, Germany's Chancellor, in Vilnius. Following the meeting, Zelenskyy announced in his Telegram channel that agreements with Germany have been reached on additional Patriot launchers and missiles for them.

On 12 July, Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister, Hanna Maliar, posted in Telegram that the Ukraine's Armed Forces have restrained the advance of Russia's troops in Kupyansk, Lymansk, Avdiivsk and Marinsk. According to her Ukraine's troops advanced in southern Bakhmut. In southern Ukraine, the offensive operations of the armed forces of Ukraine are underway. She noted that due to the destruction of many warehouses containing ammunition, Russia's attacks had decreased.

On 12 July, the Institute for the Study of War, quoting the report of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, said that Ukraine's counter-offensive operations are underway in Bakhmut, Melitopol and Berdyansk. According to the report, Ukraine's troops achieved partial success along the Bila Hora-Andriivka and Bila Hora-Kurdyumivka lines in the southwest of Bakhmut and in Berdyansk. They have also advanced near Orikkai-Vasylivna in the northwest of Bakhmut, southwest of Velyka Novosilka in Donetsk, and south of Orikhiv in the west of Zaporizhzhia.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 12 July, *RT* reported on Russia's Foreign Ministry's statement on the NATO Summit that was held in Vilnius. The report said that NATO intends to use Ukraine as a proxy for the endless hybrid war while expanding beyond the North - Atlantic into the Middle East, North Africa and Asia-Pacific. The statement concluded that Russia would respond "in a timely and appropriate manner, using all means and methods at our disposal."

On 12 July, the *TASS* reported that Russia's Ambassador to Paris, Alexey Meshkov, condemned France's decision to send 50 SCALP long-range cruise missiles to Kyiv. He said: "What the French government did deserves the strongest condemnation." On 12 July, the *TASS* reported on Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council's comment that Russia's special military operation would continue with its goal unchanged. He added that one of the goals is the rejection of NATO membership by Kyiv.

On 12 July, *RT News* reported that Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the UN proposed Putin to extend the grain deal that is set to expire on 22 July in exchange for partial access to the SWIFT international payment system. According to the report, Russia wants its agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank to get reconnected to SWIFT, pointing out the barriers caused due to restrictions on payments, logistics and insurance thwarting the shipments. The EU is now considering connecting a subsidiary of Rosselkhozbank to SWIFT to allow grain and fertilizer exports. The grain deal was originally signed on 22 July 2022 but has been prolonged multiple times over the last year despite the concerns of Russia that it is not beneficial to Moscow.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 12 July, the G7 countries presented a plan to organize bilateral, long-term security commitments to help Kyiv in its war against Russia. According to *Politico*, the US, the UK, France and Germany have been discussing with Kyiv how to create a common framework for all countries willing to provide financial and military aid. *CNN* outlined the three goals of the declaration. The first goal is to ensure a “sustainable force capable of defending Ukraine now and deterring Russian aggression in the future.” The declaration would look forward to strengthening Ukraine’s “economic stability and resilience and providing technical and financial support for Ukraine’s immediate needs. The report also added that the declaration would enable Kyiv to implement an effective reform agenda to advance the good governance necessary for its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

On 12 July, *CNN* reported on Prime Minister of Estonia, Kaja Kallas, support for the US decision to send cluster munitions to Ukraine. She said: “We have to do everything to help Ukraine as long as it takes. And of course, when there is no more ammunition to give except cluster bombs, I think we have to give those as well.” She also expressed her support for Ukraine’s NATO membership bid and said that the opportunity may come after the war is over.

On 12 July, Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO chaired the inaugural meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council. He highlighted that NATO and Ukraine would meet in the Council “to discuss and decide as equals” afterwards. Later, he said that removing the Membership Action Plan (MAP) would change Ukraine’s membership path from a two-step process to a one-step process making Kyiv “closer to NATO than ever before.”

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War in Ukraine: Day 502

War on the Ground:

On 11 July, according to *Ukrinform*, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President expressed his discontent with the uncertainty prevailing over Ukraine’s NATO membership bid. He said that the wording of the conditions of the “invitation is being discussed without Ukraine.” He added: “It’s unprecedented and absurd when a time frame is set neither for the invitation nor for

Ukraine's membership." According to *Ukrinform*, Zelensky also said: "It seems there is no readiness neither to invite Ukraine to NATO not to make it a member of the Alliance." He called the prevailing uncertainty a "weakness" and said that he would openly discuss this at the summit.

On 11 July, Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's Defence Minister announced on Twitter that France would increase its military aid to Kyiv by EUR 170 million. According to the agreement signed between the defence ministries of both countries, the procurement process and the supply of weapons would be simplified. It would also provide a framework for the joint production of spare parts and maintenance of foreign weapons and equipment.

On 11 July, the General staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported on Facebook that Russia's forces have fired numerous Iranian-made Shahed drones into Ukraine's territory. Heavy battles are going on in Kupyansk, Lymansk, Bakhmutsk, Avdiivsk and Marinsk. Russia is maintaining a military presence in Siverskyi and Slobozhanskyi and is engaged in airstrikes in Volfyny, Sumy and Bakhmut. Meanwhile, Ukraine's Armed Forces are conducting offensive operations in Melitopol and Berdyansk. The report also mentioned that certain units of the Armed Forces of Belarus are "...performing tasks in the areas bordering Ukraine."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 11 July, Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of the Russia's President said that Russia would continue the dialogue with African countries on ways to settle the situation in Ukraine. Earlier in June, Vladimir Putin was engaged in talks with the seven African leaders who visited Moscow to discuss settling the conflict in Ukraine.

On 11 July, Valentina Matviyenko, Speaker of Russia's Federation Council during her visit to China criticized Washington's decision to send cluster munitions to Ukraine. According to the *TASS*, she said that the decision amounts to a "war crime" and that it "runs counter to all international documents." She further remarked that the

Federation Council has called upon the parliaments of other countries to ensure that "everyone condemns such a criminal decision" and measures are taken to prevent the delivery of cluster munitions.

On 11 July, *RT* reported that Sergey Shoigu, Defence Minister of Russia said that if the US supplies cluster munitions to Kyiv, Russia's armed forces would be "compelled to use equivalent weapons against the Ukrainian Forces" as a response. He noted that Russia is also not a party to the Convention of Cluster Munitions and Moscow refrained from using these weapons because of the threat they pose to the civilian population. Anatoly Antonov, Moscow's ambassador to Washington also criticized the move by calling it an "act of madness" and a gesture of desperation."

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 11 July, Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Secretary General said that the alliance did not record any deployment or movement of any Wagner forces into Belarus. According to *Ukrinform*, Stoltenberg assured that the alliance is always ready to protect its members from any potential threat. On 11 July, the Norwegian government pledged an additional NOK 2.5 billion of military aid to Ukraine along the sidelines of the NATO summit.

On 11 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that a coalition of 11 nations would start training Ukraine's pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets in Denmark in August. A training centre would be put up in Romania. The NATO members Denmark and Netherlands have been leading efforts through an international jet coalition to maintain F-16 fighter jets, train pilots and support staff and finally supply the jets to Ukraine. According to the report, none of the countries have committed to sending the jets to Ukraine, although Poland and Slovakia have supplied 27 MiG-29s to Kyiv.

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War in Ukraine: Day 501

War on the Ground:

On 10 July, Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister wrote on Twitter that NATO allies have agreed to remove the Membership Action Plan (MAP) from Ukraine’s path to membership. He welcomed the decision, and urged NATO to offer clarity on the invitation. MAP is a NATO programme to advise, assist and provide practical support to individual countries wishing to join the alliance.

On 10 July, Yonhap News Agency reported that South Korea had dispatched additional military supplies to Ukraine at Kyiv’s request. Previously, Seoul has provided humanitarian and military logistics support to Kyiv. The decision comes as Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea’s President is attending the NATO Summit in Vilnius.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 10 July, *RT* reported that according to Vladimir Artyakov, Deputy CEO of Rostec defence conglomerate, Russia’s Kinzhal hypersonic missiles have been put into mass production. According to *RT*, Artyakov assured that modern air defence systems cannot intercept these missiles. He also refuted Kyiv’s claims that it has intercepted a dozen of these missiles by calling them “propaganda.”

On 10 July, Russia’s Defence Ministry estimated the number of foreign fighters in Ukraine and said that only 2,200 mercenaries remain out of the 11,675 recruited. According to the statement, the largest number of foreign combatants are from Poland, followed by the US, Canada, Georgia, the UK, Romania, France and a few Syrian territories under Turkey’s control. A total of 4,485 foreign combatants died in the battle and 4,801 fled Ukraine while 2,209 are still on active duty. According to the spokesperson, Kyiv is increasing its efforts to recruit mercenaries from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. *RT* added that the ministry also alleged Kyiv for mistreating foreign mercenaries and viewing them like “cannon fodder.”

On 10 July, Lieutenant-General Igor Konashenkov said that Russia’s forces have destroyed Ukraine’s ammunition depots in Nikolayev and Kramatorsk. They have also destroyed a command post of the Ukraine army’s 47th mechanized brigade near Orekhov.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 10 July, *Ukrinform* reported on Germany’s stance that Ukraine’s invitation to NATO’s summit in Vilnius is unlikely, but it would significantly intensify relations and increase the level of partnership between Kyiv and the alliance. This summit would also signal a strong message to Moscow about the allies’ determination to support Ukraine. The German leadership also expects a “significant deepening of the partnership.” The report also stated that Germany would announce new arms shipments to Ukraine at the summit.

On 10 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that according to Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor of the US, Kyiv has provided written guarantees that the cluster munitions would be used “in a very careful way.” Colin Kahl, the US under-secretary for Defence added that they would not be used in the heavily populated urban areas and there would be a careful accounting of where they are employed.

On 10 July, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Julius Beucher, President of Germany’s

National Paralympic Committee (DBS) called for banning athletes from Russia and Belarus as long as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is due to vote in September 2023 on whether to allow athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete in events including the paralympics in 2024 in Paris.

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War in Ukraine: Days 499 & 500

War on the Ground:

On 08 July, National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) reported on Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, commemorating the 500th day of the Russia-Ukraine war on Snake Island in the Black

Sea. In a video statement, Zelenskyy said: "I want to thank — from here, from this place of victory — each of our soldiers for these 500 days...Thank you to everyone who fights for Ukraine!"

On 08 July, *The Guardian* reported that Ukraine's accession to NATO is uncertain ahead of the military alliance's summit on 11 July in Vilnius, Lithuania. The difficulty in joining as a member comes after the US and Germany withdrew support for Ukraine to join the alliance while the war is ongoing. Ukraine's Foreign Secretary remarked that the summit in Vilnius would be a "unique moment" to gain "clarity on Ukraine's accession invitation."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 08 July, *RadioFreeEurope* reported that Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defence Minister, had visited the "Vostok command post" in the southern Military District where he inspected soldiers, and supervised the training of new units. This was Shoigu's first public appearance since the Wagner troop's rebellion last month.

On 08 July, the *TASS* reported that Russia has called for a UNSC meeting on 11 July to converse regarding the Nord Stream Pipeline explosions. Dmitry Polyansky, first Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, informed about the request, stating: "We will strike another blow at the westerners' policy that the attention from Denmark, Germany and Sweden is enough to investigate this crime and no international effort is needed to find the culprits."

On 09 July, the *TASS* reported on Sergey Aksyonov, the Governor of Crimea's, statement that air defence forces had downed a cruise missile near Kerch. Aksyonov further said that there had been no damage or casualties. He urged the people to maintain peace and trust only legitimate sources.

On 10 July, *NHK World-Japan* reported that the Foreign Ministers of Russia and Turkey, Sergey Lavrov and Hakan Fidan, had a phone conversation where the former demanded

an explanation for the release of five former Commanders of Ukraine from Turkey to Ukraine. The five commanders were from the Azov battalion which had fought in Mariupol last year and had been captured by Russia's forces. The ministers also discussed the Black Sea grain deal, which is set to expire on 17 July.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 09 July, Joe Biden, the US President said that Ukraine was not ready to join NATO as it entails a long procedure from "democratization to a whole range of other issues." However, Ukraine is expected to receive long-term military aid assurances from the US, UK, France, and Germany at the summit.

On 07 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that on the commemoration of the 500th day of the Russia-Ukraine war, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed the US's support to Ukraine. Blinken said: "Ukrainians have fought bravely to defend their country, freedom and right to determine their own future. The US will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes to achieve a just and durable peace."

On 07 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the survey results of a research institute which stated that 42 per cent of Germans were in favour of Ukraine joining the NATO after the war ended while only 13 per cent of the respondents were in favour of immediate accession. 29 per cent were not in favour of Ukraine joining NATO at all. 58 per cent wanted Russia and Ukraine to begin talks to end the war immediately while 26 per cent were against peace talks.

On 08 July, *Reuters* reported on Mariusz Blaszczak, Poland's Defence Minister's statement that over 1000 troops had been deployed to the country's eastern borders in response to concerns over the Wagner troop's presence in Belarus. 200 units of equipment are also being sent. Blaszczak said: "This is a demonstration of our readiness to respond to attempts at destabilization near the border of our country."

On 09 July, the *BBC* reported that the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Spain have all expressed their opposition to the USA's decision to send cluster bombs to Ukraine. Chris Hipkins, New Zealand's Prime Minister said cluster bombs were "indiscriminate, they cause huge damage to innocent people, potentially, and they can have a long-lasting effect as well." Margarita Robles, Spain's Defence Minister said that while Ukraine had to be defended, cluster bombs could not be sent. Both UK and Canada reaffirmed their commitment to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

On 09 July, *Politico* reported that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's President had informed Joe Biden, the US President that Sweden's progress was not satisfactory enough to warrant Turkey's support to them for NATO accession. An official statement from Turkey said: "Erdoğan stated that Sweden has taken some steps in the right direction by making changes in the anti-terrorism legislation." However, the presence of supporters of "terrorist organisations" banned in Turkey invalidated these steps.

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War in Ukraine: Day 498

War on the Ground:

On 07 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, visited Bratislava and met Zuzana Caputova, President of Slovakia. According to CNA, the Presidents discussed the situation along the frontlines and the upcoming NATO Summit (11 July and 12 July 2023), at which Kyiv is seeking an invitation to join the alliance.

On 07 July, *FARS News Agency* reported that Human Rights Watch (HRW) expressed concern that Washington is considering supplying cluster munitions to Kyiv. HRW said: "Transferring these weapons would inevitably cause long-term suffering and undermine the international opprobrium of their use." According to the report, cluster munitions are banned in more than 100 countries due to their deadly impact, posing serious risks for many years even after the war is over.

On 07 July, Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, highlighted that the Black Sea deal allows the safe export of food and fertilisers from Ukraine's ports and facilitates Russia's similar exports across the Black Sea. Farhan Haq, spokesperson of the UN, reiterated the institution's commitment to work for the progress of the deal to ensure global food security.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 07 July, Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of the Russia's President, said that Zelenskyy's meeting with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's President, was "important" and would closely follow the result of these

talks.

On 07 July, *RT* reported that Moscow withdrew consent to Finland's operation of a consulate general in St Petersburg and expelled nine Finnish diplomats from the country. According to the statement, the consulate would cease its operations from 01 October. Previously, Finland expelled nine diplomats from Russia's embassy in Finland accusing them of acting "contrary to the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations." According to *RT*, Moscow claimed Helsinki was disrupting economic ties and people-to-people relations between the two countries, discriminating against Russians and creating barriers for Russia's diplomats. Sauli Niinisto, Finland's President called Moscow's measures "harsh and asymmetric." On 06 July, *RT* reported on Peskov's comments on Zelenskyy's visit to Bulgaria. According to the report he said: "The Kyiv regime is doing its best to drag as many countries directly into this conflict as possible." He added that these discussions and their outcomes cannot influence the "outcome of the special military operation."

On 07 July, *RT* said that Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus, has announced that Wagner troops could be used to defend Belarus after their relocation from Russia. The fighters are being transferred to Belarus, subject to "certain conditions," including the ability to be deployed instantly if needed to "defend the state." Lukashenko added that he is not worried about the presence of Wagner troops in Belarus, as he believes that they would pass on their experience in tactics and combat operations to the Belarusian military.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 08 July, the *Associated Press* reported that Erdoğan expressed support for Ukraine joining NATO. In a joint press conference with Zelenskyy, Erdoğan said: There is no doubt that Ukraine deserves NATO membership."

On 07 July, Washington confirmed that it would send cluster munitions to Kyiv. Jake Sullivan, US National Security Adviser, said

Biden approved the decision after “unanimous recommendation.” He added that the US would send the version of cluster ammunition that has a reduced “dud rate” to minimize the risk of civilian harm caused by unexploded bomblets.

On 07 July, *The New York Times* reported that western countries reacted cautiously to the reports that Washington is planning to provide cluster munitions to Kyiv. Germany and France said they would not send such weapons highlighting the international treaty they have signed banning their use, stockpiling and transfer. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General said the decisions on the delivery of weapons and military supplies are left to the individual countries, not to NATO as an alliance.

On 07 July, Stoltenberg in the pre-summit press conference said that the summit next week would send a clear message that, “NATO stands united. And Russia’s aggression will not pay.” The allies would make Ukraine even stronger and set out a vision for its future. He added that he expects allied leaders to agree on a multi-year assistance package, upgrade political ties, through establishing NATO - Ukraine Council and reaffirm that Ukraine would soon become a NATO member. He also outlined steps to strengthen deterrence and defence, with three new regional defence plans to counter the “threats” to the alliance “Russia, and terrorism.”

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War in Ukraine: Day 497

War on the Ground:

On 05 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine’s President, in his Presidential address, focused on the safety of strategic facilities, including nuclear power plants. Measures were discussed and decisions were made to ensure control and information sharing with international partners regarding the situation at Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP) and Russia's threats. The east, south, and northern regions were discussed in detail, expressing gratitude to the brave warriors. Ammunition supply, both from partners and domestic production, was emphasised, acknowledging progress in Ukraine's weapon production. New sanctions are being prepared by the government, following a meeting between the President, Yulia Svyrydenko, first Deputy Prime Minister, and Oleksiy Myachoslavovych Danilov, National Security and Defence Council Secretary. The President addressed the lack of available shelters in various cities of Ukraine, expressing concern and emphasizing the responsibility of local authorities to act.

On 04 July, Zelenskyy, and Emmanuel Macron, held a telephone conversation to discuss defence agreements and the current situation in Russia. Zelenskyy expressed gratitude for France's transfer of armoured vehicles, including necessary sanitary and evacuation transport, light tanks, and air defence systems. They further emphasised the importance of the productive Vilnius NATO summit and discussed security guarantees for Ukraine's path to the alliance. Zelenskyy also warned Macron about potential dangerous provocations by Russia’s forces at Zaporizhzhia NPP, agreeing to closely monitor the situation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On 05 July, *IAEA* reported on the situation in Ukraine. According to Rafael Mariano Grossi, IAEA Director General, experts from the agency have conducted inspections at Ukraine's ZNPP and have not observed any visible signs of mines or explosives. Additional access, however, is needed to confirm their absence, particularly on the rooftops of reactor units and certain areas of the turbine halls and cooling system. The IAEA emphasises the importance of verifying the facts on the ground amid increasing military tension in the region. The main external power line to the ZNPP has been reconnected after a temporary disruption.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 05 July, the *Moscow Times* reported that the Kremlin issued a warning on the situation at ZNPP. The Kremlin stated that Kyiv might be preparing a dangerous act at the Russian-controlled ZNPP. Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of the Russia's President, expressed concern about potential sabotage and catastrophic consequences. Both Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of jeopardising the plant's safety. Renat Karchaa, an advisor to Russia's Rosatom nuclear agency, accused Kyiv of planning an attack on the plant on 05 July.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 05 July, *Reuters* reported on the calls made by Poland and Italy for Ukraine's security. The report says that ahead of the NATO summit, Poland and Italy expressed their belief in the necessity of providing real security guarantees to Ukraine. While Ukraine seeks assurances of future NATO membership, some members like the US and Germany are cautious due to concerns about escalating tensions with Russia. Giorgia Meloni, Italy's Prime Minister emphasised the importance of security guarantees for Ukraine and reiterated Italy's support. Mateusz Morawiecki, Poland's Prime Minister, confirmed that the two countries share the same stance on Ukraine.

On 05 July, the UK's Ministry of Defence tweeted on its latest defence intelligence update on the situation in

Ukraine. The report says that General Sergei Surovikin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russia's Aerospace Forces, and Colonel General Yunus-bek Yevkurov, Deputy Defence Minister of Russia, have been absent from public appearances since the Wagner Group mutiny. While reports of Surovikin's arrest are unconfirmed, his long association with Wagner raises suspicion. Surovikin's potential sanction could divide Russia's military, highlighting existing fault lines within the national security community exacerbated by the failed insurrection of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group leader.

On 05 July, the *White House* reported a press briefing with Karine Jean-Pierre, the Press Secretary of the White House. Pierre said that the White House is closely monitoring the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine following accusations between Moscow and Kyiv of plotting an attack. The UN nuclear watchdog's experts have not observed any signs of mines or explosives but require further access to confirm. Pierre confirmed that Joe Biden, the US President, has not spoken to President Zelenskyy regarding the issue. The President remains committed to NATO's open-door policy, but decisions on Ukraine's membership will be made collectively. The White House considers Russia's occupation of the nuclear plant dangerous.

On 05 July, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) reported on the case filed against Iran. The press release reported that Canada, Sweden, Ukraine, and UK jointly filed a case against Iran at the ICJ regarding the shooting down of Ukraine's passenger plane, Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752, in 2020. The countries accuse Iran of failing to prevent the offense, conducting an impartial investigation, and providing reparation and compensation to the victims' families. They seek full accountability, return of belongings, and acknowledgment of Iran's wrongful acts. Iran had sentenced an air defence commander to 13 years in prison, but the countries dismissed it as a sham trial.

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War in Ukraine: Day 496

War on the Ground:

On 04 July, Rafael Grossi, IAEA's Director General, said that Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant lost connection to its main external power line forcing the plant to rely on backup power supplies for essential nuclear safety and security functions. He said: "This time the plant avoided a complete loss of all external power - which has happened seven times previously during the conflict - but the latest power line cut again demonstrates the precarious nuclear safety and security situation at the plant."

On 04 July, according to *president.gov.ua*, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President and Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Secretary General, "coordinated positions" ahead of the upcoming NATO Summit in Vilnius (11 July to 12 July) over a phone call. Zelenskyy expressed hope for further cooperation, and the leaders discussed the frontline situation and the developments in Russia.

On 04 July, *Ukrinform* quoting Oleksandr Tarnavskyy, the Commander of the Tavria Operational-Strategic Group of Troops, reported that the Armed Forces of Ukraine are advancing in Tavria. The report also mentioned that they dislodged numerous Russian troops from their positions.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 04 July, *RT News* reported the attempted drone attacks against Moscow. According to Sergey Sobyenin, the mayor of Moscow, the air defence forces repelled the attacks, destroying all the drones. Russia's Defence Ministry stated that there were five drones, of which four were shot down over Novaya Moskva while one crashed in Odintsovo after being disabled by "electromagnetic warfare." The ministry called it a "terrorist attack," blaming Kyiv. In a statement from foreign ministry on the drone attacks: "These attacks would not be possible without the help provided to the Kyiv regime by the US and its NATO allies." According to *Financial Times*, Maria Zakharova, the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, called the attacks "international terrorism."

On 04 July, according to *RT News*, Russia's Foreign Ministry announced that Moscow sees "no grounds" to extend grain deal beyond 17 July. The ministry stated that the deal has turned into a "purely commercial" scheme directing production towards the wealthy countries instead of the poor countries. Meanwhile, the blockade on Russia's food and fertiliser exports "continues to degrade," says the Ministry. It also noted that the five "system" goals highlighted in the Russia-UN memorandum remain unattained. The five "system" goals consist of including Rosslekhobank back in the SWIFT payments system, enabling the delivery of agriculture machinery spare parts, restoring the Tolyatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline, sorting out insurance and logistics, and "unfreezing" Russia's assets. According to the ministry, the first three goals are no longer in the agenda and there is no significant progress in ensuring the last two.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 04 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the value of the German government's defence exports approved for the first half of 2023 stood at EUR 1.65 billion. According to Germany's Ministry of Economic affairs, the total defence export approvals are around EUR 5.22 billion, in contrast to EUR 4.2 billion for the same period in 2022. Additionally, the export approvals for Hungary, second in the list of countries receiving German arms exports, are around EUR one billion in the first half of 2023.

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War in Ukraine: Day 494

War on the Ground:

On 02 July, *Ukrinform* reported on the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive in the southern and northern flanks in Bakhmut. Serhiy Cherevaty, Ukraine's Eastern Group of Forces spokesperson stated that there is no intense urban warfare in Bakhmut except for a few sniper groups and other units active there. Cherevaty also noted that

Russia's forces still retain their combat capability and ability to attack Ukraine's positions.

On 02 July, Vice Admiral Oleksiy Neizhpapa, commander of Ukraine's fleet in an interview with *armyinform.com.ua* updated on the Navy's efforts against Russia's invasion. He said that despite the air and naval superiority of Russia's forces, Ukraine's fleet constantly moved forward by integrating advanced missile weaponry and air defence systems, mainly from the western powers. According to Neizhpapa, Russia's forces continue to have air superiority over the Black Sea and Ukraine needs the F-16 fighters "not only for successful operations on land but also at sea."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 03 July, Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defence Minister commented that the Wagner mutiny did not affect Russia's forces in Ukraine. According to *Deutsche Welle*, he said: "The plans primarily failed because the personnel of the armed forces showed loyalty to their oath and military duty." It was the minister's first public statement since the aborted mutiny on 24 June.

On 03 July, *Deutsche Welle* wrote that Dmitry Medvedev (former Russian president and the current deputy head of Russia's security council) in an article for *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, argued that the conflict in Ukraine would be permanent as Kyiv would not be accepted into NATO. He also argued that Russia is not alone and has developed ties with countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

On 03 July, Alexander Novak, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister announced a voluntary oil cut of 500,000 barrels per day in August to maintain a balanced oil market. This follows previous production cuts in response to the western sanctions over the war in Ukraine. According to *The Moscow Times*, Moscow has shifted energy exports from Europe to India and China since the invasion.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 02 July, *Ukrinform* reported on the arrival of German Leopard tanks in Ukraine. Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's Defence Minister tweeted that dozens of Leopard tanks have come to Ukraine to show their strength of Ukraine and capability in combat. The report also stated Pedro Sanchez, Prime Minister of Spain's comment that Madrid would soon send additional four Leopard tanks, armoured personnel carriers and a mobile field hospital to Kyiv.

On 04 July, *faz.net* reported that Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President thanked Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of Germany for the powerful German anti-aircraft (Iris-T systems and Patriot air defence systems) help against Russia's attacks. Scholz promised "continuous and unbreakable solidarity" with Kyiv and said that he would continue supporting Ukraine in close coordination with the international alliance.

On 03 July, *AP* reported the opening of the International Center For The Prosecution Of The Crime of Aggression (ICPA) to hold Putin and other leaders of Russia accountable for the alleged crimes committed during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to *rferl.org*, Ursula von der Leyen, EU Commission President said: "The new international prosecution centre will play a key role in making sure that the perpetrators are brought to justice." The new centre opened in The Hague would consist of Prosecutors from Ukraine, the EU, the US and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

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War in Ukraine: Day 492 & 493

War on the Ground:

On 01 July, Ukraine's Parliament unanimously approved draft law No. 8401, which restores the country's taxation system to its pre-war state. The law, set to take effect on 01 August 2023, received support from 239 MPs. The adoption of this legislation is a crucial requirement outlined in the agreement with the IMF. Under the new law, the two per cent single tax will be abolished, and taxpayers will have the option to choose an alternative taxation system by submitting an application.

On 01 July, *Ukrinform* reported on the statement by Andrii Demchenko, Ukraine's State Border Guard Service spokesperson, over the control of borders due to the threat of the Wagner Group. According to him, Ukraine has asserted control over the situation in Belarus, where approximately 8,000 mercenaries from Russia's Wagner private military company could be stationed. Demchenko stated that to address potential risks associated with Belarus accommodating mercenaries, Ukraine is reinforcing its defences in the region.

On 01 July, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President and Pedro Sánchez, Spain's President, issued a joint declaration. The declaration emphasises the condemnation of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and calls for an immediate and complete withdrawal of all Russia's military forces from Ukraine. Spain pledges to actively

participate in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, with a focus on fostering transparent and inclusive national reconstruction.

On 02 July, Hanna Maliar, Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Defence reported on Telegram that Russia is making advances in multiple directions. She stated that the advances includes Avdiivskiy, Marinskyi, and Lymanskyi. In the Svativ direction, Russia has also moved forward and is attacking Bilogorivka and Serebryanka. In the Bakhmut direction, Ukraine's forces are making progress on the southern flank while fighting continues in the north, where Russia has deployed two airborne assault regiments. In the south, Ukraine's troops are persistently creating conditions for swift forward movement in the Berdyansk and Melitopol directions.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 02 July, *RT news* reported on Japan's exclusion of three Russia's energy projects from sanctions. According to the Economy Ministry, Japan has announced the exclusion citing their significance to the country's energy security. The exemption applies to service operations related to oil and gas exploration, extraction, liquefaction, storage, transportation, and transshipment, including projects like Sakhalin 1, Sakhalin 2, and Arctic LNG 2. The measure will take effect from 30 September, and allows the provision of services to Russia's subsidiaries of Japanese companies.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 01 July, *Euractiv* reported on the Austrian government's decision to join the Sky Shield Initiative, the air protection group launched by Germany. Karl Nehammer, Austria's Chancellor said: "The threat situation has massively intensified due to the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine. Austria will therefore join the European air defence initiative, Sky Shield." The leader of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria criticized the decision, arguing that the decision invalidates the country's neutrality.

On 01 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported on

William Burn, head of the Central Intelligence Agency's opinion that the effect of the war in Ukraine is corrosive to Putin's leadership in Russia and called Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner group head's mutiny as its "vivid reminder." He called out the war as a "strategic failure" and said that Russia's disaffection with the war creates a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" for the CIA.

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EM Short Notes*

By Sneha Surendran, Rishika Yadav, Genesy B, and Prerana S



Source: CFP/CGTN, Lewis Joly/Pool via REUTERS, cinec.europa.eu, Russian Defence Ministry/Handout via REUTERS, REUTERS/Piroschka van de Wouw, consilium.europa.eu

BELARUS**Head of Belarus Red Cross reveals transport of children from Ukraine to Belarus**

On 19 July, Dzmitry Shautsou, who is leading the Belarus Red Cross, said that his organisation had been transporting children from Russia's-occupied regions in Ukraine to Belarus to "improve their health." He said that by partnering with a charity foundation, they were trying to make "...the children forget the horrors of the war and just rest, feel that there's an island of happiness." The illegal deportations have led to widespread criticism, within Belarus and the international community. Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) "to issue an arrest warrant" for Shautsou. Meanwhile, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said that the matter has been referred for investigation to their compliance committee. Since April, Belarusian officials said that over 1000

children have been brought in from the Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine. (Yuras Karmanau, "Belarus Red Cross sparks outcry after its chief says it brought Ukrainian children to Belarus," *Associated Press*, 19 July 2023)

Satellite images indicate construction of army camp presumably for Wagner

On 01 July, Planet Labs PLC provided satellite images that depicted military-style camps being built in a former military base outside Osipovichi town in Belarus. The town is 320 kilometers north of Ukraine. On 27 June, Aliaksandr Azarau, leader of the anti-Lukashenko BYPOL guerrilla group had said that a site for Wagner was being built near Osipovichi. Furthermore, Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus' President had said that Wagner's experience could be of use to his country and that he had offered an "abandoned military unit" to them. These statements lead to believe that the site may be assigned for the use of Wagner troops

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

who have been provided sanctuary in Belarus following the failed revolt in Russia. A spokesperson for Ukraine's border force reported that almost 8000 Wagner fighters will be stationed in Belarus. ("[Satellite photos, reports suggest Belarus is building an army camp for Wagner fighters](#)," *Associated Press*, 01 July 2023)

ESTONIA

Joins as 32nd OECD-DAC member

On 04 July, Estonia joined the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), becoming its 32nd member. Mariin Ratnik, the Undersecretary for Economic and Development Affairs, said that the news "reflects the outstanding work we have done over the last few decades and that our expertise in these areas is internationally recognized and sought after." The OECD-DAC forum aims to coordinate and improve development policies and their implementation between the member states. The Foreign Ministry said that with the accession, Estonia's global visibility will receive a boost. Estonia has been a part of the OECD since 2010. ("[Estonia joins OECD Development Assistance Committee](#)," *News.err*, 06 July 2023)

FINLAND

Government to close Russia's Consulate General in Turku from October

On 19 July, the *Finnish Government* reported on the meeting between the President and the Ministerial Committee on Foreign and Security Policy. During the meeting, they discussed Russia's decision to shut down Finland's Consulate General in St. Petersburg on 01 October. The group decided to deny Russia's Consulate General permission to operate in Finland's city of Turku. The President and the Ministry Committee also talked about Russia's consulate in Mariehamn. Furthermore, the launch of the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy was also discussed. ("[President and Ministerial Committee on Foreign and Security Policy discuss diplomatic missions of Finland and Russia and preparation of Government](#)

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PM visits Estonia; holds talks on the security situation in EU

On 05 July, Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo visited Tallinn, Estonia. In a joint press conference with Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Orpo said: "The relationship between Finland and Estonia is stronger today than ever before, we have a broad personal relationship and friendship, Finland and Estonia have strong cultural ties, our values, and ideas are very similar and our ideas about the reality around us are also very similar." Orpo said that he held talks with his Estonian counterpart on energy issues, the security situation in Europe, NATO, and Ukraine. The PM stressed the need to support open market economies to strengthen the EU. He said that this will increase the EU's influence on geopolitical and environmental matters. Orpo also remarked on Finland's wish to strengthen bilateral ties with Estonia to support Ukraine. ("[Finnish PM: Relations with Estonia are stronger than ever](#)," *News.err*, 06 July 2023)

FRANCE

Report based on Uber files reveals lack of strict transparency rules

On 18 July, a 500-page report by the French Parliament Commission on the Uber Files called out "gaping loopholes" in transparency rules in France. The report also focused on President Emmanuel Macron's relations with the ride-hailing app when he had been the economy minister, stating: "The intensity of the contacts between Uber, Emmanuel Macron and his cabinet testifies to an opaque but privileged relationship and reveals the inability of our system to measure and prevent the influence of private interests on public decision-making." The report follows the *Guardian's* 2022 publication of the Uber Files. The Uber Files had shown that the company had launched an illegal new feature between 2014-2015, stating: "It consisted in aggressively and disruptively multiplying fronts to force the state to modify its regulations so that they became

favourable to Uber's interests." The investigation also found that the company had avoided paying corporation taxes. Meanwhile, the commission has given recommendations including tightening regulations around political lobbying. (Lisa O'Carroll, "[French Uber inquiry finds 'gaping loopholes' remain in lobbying rules](#)," *The Guardian*, 18 July 2023)

Modi and Macron sign deal over Rafales and Scorpene submarines to India's Navy

On 13 July, Narendra Modi, India's Prime Minister visited President Macron as a guest of honour in the annual Bastille parade. France hoped to strengthen cooperation on various topics which includes "high profile defence deals," and a joint plan aimed for a stable Indo-Pacific region. During his speech, President Macron praised India calling the country a "key partner." Following the meet, India's Defence Acquisition Council approved purchase of Rafales, purchased three Scorpene submarines, developed by Spain and France, for the India's Navy, and the prices were negotiated with France (Elaine Ganley, "[India's Modi is guest of honor at Paris Bastille Day parade as Macron rebuffs human rights critics](#)," *AP*, 14 July 2023)

Attack on Mayors indicates break in democracy

On 09 July, the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI) has warned about the of the far-right action. Nicolas Lerner, the French Director of DGSI called the incident, "a very worrying resurgence of violent action." The attack targeted mayors of Saint-Brevin-Pins, asylum seekers and refugees. He accused that since 2017, the far-right group has executed ten planned terrorist attacks. He stated that the far-left protest against environmental issues such as the protest against the proposed water shortage mega basins on 27 March 2023 and called the action a "legitimate battle." In reply to the Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin's statement which called "eco-terrorists," Lerner explained that "no action" of terrorist nature has been committed though he added that few

agencies remain "vigilant." Regarding the Islamist terrorism, Lerner emphasised on the increasing radicalisation of individuals in Europe and Central Asia, especially from the terrorist organisations of Syria and Afghanistan. ("[Far-right violence on the march again, warns French intelligence chief](#)," *Euronews*, 09 July 2023)

Supreme Court rules against compensation in slavery case from Martinique

On 04 July, the Supreme Court of France denied the reparation demand sought by three groups (the International Movement for Reparations, and two others) for a slavery case from Martinique, a the French Overseas Department of Martinique. The court ruled that there was no evidence to prove that the petitioners had "individually suffered" for the crimes perpetrated on their ancestors. Alain Manville, a lawyer pursuing the case said that the decision was "political" and the substantial compensation money being demanded had influenced the court's decision. He stressed the need to increase the global reach of the case, so that "all Afro-descendants" could be brought in to ensure a different judgement from the court. Another lawyer responded to the ruling saying that they would be appealing to the European Court of Human Rights to seek a different judgement. ("[France's Supreme Court rejects groups' request for slavery reparations in case from Martinique](#)," *Associated Press*, 05 July 2023)

Macron's proposes to block social media during the upcoming protests

On 04 July, French President Macron addressed over 200 mayors at the Élysée Palace, where he raised an idea of blocking social media platforms during the upcoming riots. Jean-Noel Barrot, the minister of Digital Transition, discussed the bill to "secure the digital environment." The temporary block on social networks could raise arguments on the legal questions. Although the French Constitution holds the freedom of expression, the Constitutional Council simultaneously ruled that limiting the above measures to protect the public order must be proportionate. Macron stated

that the French internet service provider network has already blocked Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, and would extend its blockage to other applications such as Snapchat, Twitter and Telegram. The proposal was made two days after the Ministry of Interior requested the restriction of internet access due to false press releases. The Social Party leader Olivier Faure said: "The country of human rights and the rights of citizens cannot align itself with the great democracies of China, Russia and Iran." Further, the digital specialists have questioned the idea of democracy. ("Damien Leloup and Florian Reynaud, "[Macron suggests blocking social media during riots](#)," *Le Monde*, 05 July 2023)

Concerns over women returning from Jihadist territory

On 04 July, *The Guardian* reported on the repatriation of 25 children and ten women back to France from the suspected Jihadists prison camps in north-east Syria. France faced condemnation from international bodies after it put an end on its "case-by-case" repatriation approach. On May, France repatriated 15 women and 32 children after the UN blamed France for violating the UN convention against torture, cruelty, and inhumane and degrading treatment. The Foreign Ministry of France has expressed their gratitude towards Northern-Syria for its cooperation. Under France's new policy, the country opted for a targeted repatriation and the women have agreed to reject their parental rights. ("[France brings back women and children held in camps in Syria](#)," *The Guardian*, 04 July 2023)

Macron on the deeper reasons for the riot's outrage

On 04 July, Emmanuel Macron, France's President, addressed hundreds of French authorities to discuss the deeper reasons which have plunged the country into serious riot. More than 300 mayors reported on the damages across their municipalities and the government witnessed various riots, and accused on the systemic racism among their security forces. The government deployed 45,000

police officers across France on request from Mayors. Macron has expressed the essentiality to understand the deeper reasons for the riot, while the right and left wing pointed fingers on one another. The President raised an idea of fines to the parents whose children performed acts of vandalism and he promised to introduce a new law that can assist in the rebuilding of the damaged buildings, transport and public spaces. ("[France demands answers as Macron declares riots 'peak' passed](#)," *Le Monde*, 04 July 2023)

The unrest experiences significant lull

On 03 July, The French unrest was followed by solidarity actions with local governments, who were attacked by the angry protesters. The rally, which held immense tensions saw significant silence. The Algerian origin teenager's death prompted a nationwide unrest and was called "mobilization of citizens for a return to republican order." Over 34 building and 300 vehicles were damaged overnight, and the authorities showed support worth tens of millions of euros to repair the loss. The fund received by the police officer, who is under investigation was USD 1.07 million, which is five times more than the fund provided for the victim's family. The police officer was charged with voluntary manslaughter, and was detained for creating false statements. ("[France: Anti-violence rallies held as riot tensions ease](#)," *Euronews*, 03 July 2023)

French President puts off official visit to Germany amid escalating violence

On 01 July, President Emmanuel Macron deferred his planned state visit to Germany in the wake of increasing violence in France. Riots have escalated in the country following the shooting of a 17-year-old boy of North African descent by the police on 27 June in Nanterre. On 01 July, President Macron consulted with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier to postpone the meeting which was scheduled for 02-04 July. The state visit was meant to strengthen France-German relations and would have been the first official visit by a

French President to Germany since 2000. (Federica Di Sario, "[Macron postpones state visit to Germany as France braces for more turmoil](#)," *Politico*, 01 July 2023)

GEORGIA

The far-right wing disrupts the Georgia Pride event

On 08 July, over 2,000 anti-LGBT protesters protested and stormed across the gay pride festival held in the capital city of Georgia. The right-wing protesters, which included the Orthodox Christian clergy burnt the rainbow flag. President Salome Zurbishvili blamed the Georgian Dream party for having failed to prevent its followers from carrying out violent aggressions against the LGBT activists. Interior Minister Alexander Darakhvelidze said: "This was an open area, participants of the protest managed to bypass the security and find other ways to enter the event area." A similar protest had disrupted a Pride festival in Georgia in 2001. The organiser of the 2023 Pride event stated that the far-right group had been "openly inciting violence," and complained that the Ministry of Interior and the police did not do anything. ("[Georgia Pride festival in Tbilisi stormed by right-wing protesters](#)," *BBC*, 09 July 2023)

GERMANY

April-June quarter shows small economic growth compared to previous two quarters

On 17 July, Germany's central bank announced that after declining for two consecutive quarters, the economy exhibited a slight growth for the April-June period. Last year's fourth quarter saw a 0.5 per cent decline of the GDP, followed by the first quarter of this year recording a 0.3 per cent fall. The bank said that an increase in pay, and lack of increase in inflation had helped to stabilise private consumption. The bank also highlighted a fall in demand from foreign investors, and decreasing business confidence. Furthermore, the rest of the year is predicted to show a "somewhat more hesitant" economic recovery. ("[Germany's central bank says the economy apparently returned to growth in](#)

[the 2nd quarter](#)," *Associated Press*, 17 July 2023)

Government draws up de-risking plan to limit engagement with China

On 13 July, the government submitted a 64-page document detailing its strategy to interact with China. The document is part of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition's pledge to design a comprehensive China strategy" in 2021. China is Germany's biggest trade partner, and therefore ties with China are important. However, China's refusal to condemn Russia for the Ukraine invasion, along with its growing assertiveness has been concerning to Germany. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said: "For Germany, China remains a partner, competitor and systemic rival, but the aspect of systemic rivalry has in recent years increasingly come to the fore...Anyone who listens to China knows with what self-confidence it will decisively influence the development of our world...China has changed and so our China policy must change too." However, the government reaffirmed that with respect to economies, they were not looking at the "decoupling" of the two economies.' (Geir Moulson, "[Germany presents long-awaited strategy on China, stresses economic security](#)," *AP*, 13 July 2023)

Australia signs the largest export deal, that can elevate the economy

On 10 July, a meeting was scheduled between Anthony Albanese, the Prime Minister of Australia and Olaf Scholz, German Chancellor. Australia has agreed to sign one of the largest defence export deals, which will deliver 100 Brisbane-made Boxer heavy weapons carriers to Germany. He added that the deal would enhance the defence capability and boost the economy. The one-on-one meeting between the prime ministers will soon take place, where the leaders are expected to discuss on the manufacturing, clean energy, security in the Indo-Pacific region and about the war in Ukraine. Jason Clare, Member of the Australian House of Representative has announced that the country would provide a support package of USD 110 million to

Ukraine. He added: "At the moment we are the biggest non-NATO investor or supporter of the effort in Ukraine, except for Sweden, who is about to become part of NATO."

Australian Prime Minister has pointed out that NATO is diverting from its purpose as European and US Alliance. (["Anthony Albanese announces \\$1bn defence deal with Germany before NATO talks,"](#) *The Guardian*, 09 July 2023)

Draft budget for 2024 approved

On 05 July, the draft for Germany's 2024 budget was approved by the Cabinet. The draft proposes a cut on expenditure, with the government planning to spend EURO 445.7 billion, a decrease of 6.4 per cent from the expected spending of EURO 476.3 billion. However, defence expenditure has been increased to around EURO 51.8 billion. Germany is expecting to achieve the two per cent GDP target that NATO has set in defence expenditure by next year. Germany intends to return to their debt-brake system, which allows new borrowings up to only 0.35 per cent of the annual GDP. For the last three years, this had been suspended owing to the pandemic as the country looked to borrow large amounts to finance support packages. Finance Minister Christian Lindner said that the government was "initiating the return to budget normality," and was sending a message that the country was "committed to state finances that are sustainable in the long term." The Parliament is expected to approve the final version of the budget in December. (["German Cabinet approves a lower 2024 budget as it eyes a return to financial 'normality',"](#) *Associated Press*, 05 July 2023)

The far-right AfD party wins the district election

On 02 July, Hannes Loth, the German's far-right AfD candidate won the first district election of the small town of Raghun-Jessnitz. The German media reported that, it was first time the party has batched victory for a full-time mayor's position against independent candidate Nils Naumann. Loth received a vote of 51.1 per cent against the Naumann's 48.9 per cent, and has surged to high opinion polls. The last week's election

recalls Robert Sesselmann's victory as district administrator in Sonneberg, Thuringia. Hannes Loth further expressed his gratitude calling it "wonderful result," and has claimed to work as the mayor for everyone in Raghun-Jessnitz region.

(["German far-right party notches another win,"](#) *Le Monde*, 02 July 2023)

GREECE

19,000 moved as wildfires continue

On 23 July, firefighters worked all night to extinguish 82 fires across Greece without the assistance of night-time firefighting planes and helicopters. The most serious fire occurred on the Greek island of Rhodes. As wildfires raged for the sixth day on the island, 19,000 people were evacuated from various sites. According to the Ministry of Climate Change and Civil Protection, this was "The largest evacuation from a wildfire in the country." A support station has been set up at Rhodes International Airport for travelers who have misplaced their travel documents. The Meteorological Service has forecasted that temperatures can range around 30 degrees Celsius. (Demetris Nellas, ["Fire still blazing on the Greek island of Rhodes as dozens more erupt across the country,"](#) *American Press*, 23 July 2023)

Greek MEPs take oath in Parliament

On 03 July, 300 lawmakers were sworn into the Greek Parliament. This follows the victory of the conservative New Democracy party in the 25 June elections. Now, the party holds 158 seats compared to the opposition 48 of the Syriza party, thereby ensuring a majority in the Parliament. Three far-right parties and one far-left party secured the three per cent minimum votes for ensuring parliamentary seats. The right-wing Spartans who hold 12 parliamentary seats, and the Niki party which has 10 seats are the new entrants into the Parliament. The fringe right-wing party Elliniki Lysi which won 4.4 per cent of the votes has secured 12 seats in the assembly. (Elena Becatoros, ["Greece's new parliament sworn in following conservative party's election victory,"](#) *Associated Press*, 03 July 2023)

HUNGARY**Orban accuses Brussels of LGBT+ Offensive**

On 22 July, Viktor Orban, Hungarian Prime Minister accused Brussels of leading an "LGBT+ offensive." The EU is rejecting the Christian heritage and organising population exchanges through migration", the ultra-conservative leader declared at the Tusványos festival, in Transylvania, Romania, home to a large Hungarian community. The festival offers round-table discussions on major issues and intends to promote cross-border cooperation. However, the event has become one of the main forums for Orbán's supporters to gather and exchange ideas. ("[LGBT+ offensive': Viktor Orban criticises EU at Transylvania festival](#)," *Euronews*, 22 July 2023)

IRELAND**The housing crisis impacts investment and leads to a shortfall in the infrastructure**

On 03 July, the *BBC* reported on Ireland's heavy housing crisis, which has impacted new investments. Economist John Fitzgerald has estimated that over one-third of all wages in 2021, were paid by multinational companies, yet the country has expressed fresh warnings regarding the housing crisis. After Ireland's property and banking crisis, there was a severe fall in housing construction, which led to a shortfall of infrastructure. IDA Chief Executive Michael Lohan quoted: "Housing is a challenge," and has expressed the necessity of resolving housing-related issues. He has expressed gratitude towards the government's initiatives and further mentioned the country's single biggest threat as "complacency." The Irish government's "Housing for All Policy," aimed at flourishing housing supplies such as cost rental, affordable purchases, etc, which can further benefit 33,000 homes delivery. ("[Housing crisis in Ireland undermining new investment – IDA](#)," *BBC*, 03 July 2023)

KOSOVO**Dutch Prime Minister calls for unity**

between Serbia and Kosovo On 04 July, the prime ministers of the Netherlands and Luxembourg have urged Serbia and Kosovo to normalise their relations through the EU-led Dialogue, in order to prevent Balkan destabilization. The Dutch Prime Minister Rutte said: "With a war raging between Russia and Ukraine on our continent, it's more important than ever that we act together." Serbia hold a long history of territorial disputes, refusing to recognize Kosovo's 2008 self-declaration of independence, Belgrade considers the act as a breakaway state. Since May 2023, violence erupted after the ethnic Albanian mayors took office in the Serb-majority northern region of Kosovo. The western efforts to resolve the crisis have increased, as war in Ukraine escalated to a greater extend. ("[Kosovo: Dutch, Luxembourg PMs urge de-escalation](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 July 2023)

LATVIA**Canada to station more troops under NATO's enhanced Forward Presence**

On 10 July, Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš hosted the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ahead of the NATO summit in Vilnius. Prime Minister Trudeau announced that the Canadian forces under NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia would be doubled in number. The Defence Ministers of both nations signed an agreement at the Adaži base to reaffirm Canada's commitment. PM Trudeau further said that the other allies part of the eFP would also increase their brigade size in Latvia. The deployment in Latvia has been Canada's most significant overseas stationing of brigades since the eFP was instituted in 2017. Furthermore, Canadian forces have the largest overseas presence in Latvia. ("[Canada to double its military presence in Latvia](#)," *ERR News*, 11 July 2023)

The Wagner troops in Belarus alert the neighbouring countries

On 05 July, *Eng.Lsm.lv* reported that Lithuania has introduced top-level border security by tripling its number of border security forces. The country expressed its

concern about Prigozhin's mercenaries' presence in the neighbouring borders. The Polish Interior Minister, Mariusz Kaminski has also deployed an additional 500 police officers to border control. Although Latvia did not experience any significant risks, the country has increased surveillance due to dozens of attempts to enter the border from Belarus every day. The Interior Minister of Latvia has stated that the intelligence force and the presence of National Armed Forces (NBS) might increase if the situation worsens. (Ella Semjonova, "[Latvia continues enhanced monitoring of Belarus border](#)," *Eng.lsm.lv*, 05 July 2023)

LITHUANIA

Annual Pride in Vilnius and opposition

On 02 July, the annual pride march was celebrated, where thousands marched towards the capital city, Vilnius. Due to its majority Catholic population, the Baltic state's LGBT+ community has expressed serious concern towards the country's social and legal discrimination. According to the 2022 study commissioned by the Free Society Institute, Lithuania is the only EU country, which has not legalized same-sex marriage and more than 70 per cent of the natives are against same-sex partnerships, which is one of the highest rates in Europe. The diplomat appointed in 2019 commented, Brian Olley: "In Russia, Belarus and many other countries around the world, unfortunately, people risk their lives for doing just what we're doing today." Vladimir Putin, Russia's President cast that the LGBT+ concept was imposed by western values, to clash with Russia's cultural traditions. Protesters from the pride march claimed that: "The government could do more," as the crowd felt the government's decisions to be conducive to LGBT+ rights. The recent letter signed by dozens of Lithuanians, would ensure equal rights for the LGBT+ community. (Joshua Askew, "[Lithuania's Pride defies counterprotests, despite slow march to equality](#)," *Euronews*, 02 July 2023)

NORWAY

Extends participation in NATO's

Enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania until 2024

On 10 July, *Government.no* reported that the government has decided to continue the participation of Norwegian forces in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Lithuania until 2024. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said: "The decision to extend the participation of Norwegian troops when there is an ongoing war in Europe is not a decision the Government takes lightly...Sharing knowledge and experience serves to enhance both our own Armed Forces and NATO." Defence Minister Bjørn Arild Gram also informed that this was the largest deployment of Norwegian forces beyond the country. The eFP program began in 2017 and comprises four multinational battalions deployed in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland. The Norwegian contribution is a part of Germany's multinational battalion in Lithuania. ("[Norway will continue to contribute Norwegian forces in Lithuania](#)," *Government.no*, 10 July 2023)

Foreign Minister calls on Guatemala to respect election results

On 03 July, Norway issued a statement regarding the election news updates from Guatemala. Anniken Huitfeldt, Foreign Minister, said: "Norway is concerned by the developments in Guatemala following last week's elections. Like other international partners, we encourage the Guatemalan authorities to respect the popular vote and the democratic will of the Guatemalan people, as was freely and clearly expressed in the elections on 25 June." The statement was released following the decision by the constitutional court of Guatemala to review the results of the first round of Presidential elections that was held on 25 June. The court announced this decision after an appeal by nine political parties that alleged unfairness in the election. ("[Statement on the developments in Guatemala](#)," *Government.no*, 03 July 2023)

RUSSIA

Pro-Russian militia from Luhansk and Donetsk accused for human

rights abuse in Ukraine

On 18 July, *The Guardian* reported that an investigation by the Centre for Information Resilience into the human rights abuses in Ukraine's Iziium city has named four Russian militia units as the perpetrators. The incidents happened when Russian forces occupied the city from April 2022 for six months. Following its liberation by Ukraine's troops, a mass grave with 447 bodies, and torture rooms were discovered. According to the report, the militia units were stationed in schools and kindergartens. A survivor account said: "They drank a lot and swapped humanitarian aid for homemade vodka." Other survivor accounts have revealed that the troops physically and mentally tortured civilians, including shooting young children. The grave also had the bodies of 12 Ukrainian soldiers. The pro-Russian troops were reportedly battalions from the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. (Nick Hopkins, Jamie Wilson, Luke Harding, "[Militia units commanded by Russia named in Iziium abuse investigation](#)," *The Guardian*, 18 July 2023)

Moscow withdraws from the Black Sea grain deal agreement; Ukraine intends to continue

On 17 July, Russia informed the UN, Turkey, and Ukraine that it would not be renewing the Black Sea grain deal following the expiry of the agreement. Moscow accused the West of not complying with the deal, calling it an "open sabotage" by placing their commercial interests and neglecting the humanitarian intent. Putin criticized that the grains were not being sent to poorer countries, which was a part of the agreement. Recep Erdogan, Turkey's President responded to the news, saying that he would discuss the matter of renewal of the deal with Putin when they meet next month. Zelenskyy reiterated that they were not afraid of Russia's decision, indicating that they were willing to continue with the exports, saying: "We were approached by companies who own vessels and they're willing to continue shipping grain if Ukraine agrees to let them in and Turkey - to pass them through." (Antoinette Radford,

Kathryn Armstrong, "[Ukraine grain deal expires after Russia pulls out](#)," *BBC*, 17 July 2023)

Lower House of Parliament passes bill to ban gender reassignment surgery

On 14 July, the lower house of the State of Duma approved a law that will ban trans people from accessing gender reassignment surgery in the country. It will also prohibit people from changing their gender on state documents. Speaker of the Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, stated that the bill will "protect our citizens and our children," terming gender-affirming surgery a "path to the degeneration of the nation." He further said: "We are the only European country that opposes all that is happening in the States, in Europe, and does everything to save families and traditional values...And we need to understand that there won't be any future if we don't adopt the law if we don't ban gender change." Meanwhile, LGBT activists have condemned the move, calling out the state for depriving medical care and civil rights. (Matt Murphy, "[Russian parliament bans gender reassignment surgery for trans people](#)," *BBC*, 15 July 2023)

SPAIN

Wildfires slow down due to favourable weather conditions; relief efforts continue

On 16 July, officials reported that a change in weather conditions had led to the slowing down of the wildfire on La Palma in Spain's Canary Islands. This has come as a relief to firefighters as the fires that began on 15 July have already affected an area of about 4600 hectares, burning down over 20 houses and buildings. Tourism Minister Héctor Gómez said that efforts to control the fire were proving effective. Over 300 firefighters and nine water-carrying helicopters have been deployed to prevent further damage. Furthermore, the army's Military Emergency Unit sent 86 members to the islands to help. Authorities have alerted people to avoid the northwest side of the island. (Ciaran Giles, "[Better weather conditions help slow down La Palma](#)

[wildfire in Spain's Canary Islands,](#) *Associated Press*, 16 July 2023)

86 rescued after vessel has gone missing in transit to Spain via boat

On 10 July, Spain's Maritime Rescue Service reportedly rescued 80 men and six women, while searching for a migrant vessel. However, the Spanish authorities have not confirmed if it is one of the three vessels, which went on sail from Senegal to Canary Islands. The authorities have warned West Africa and the Canary Islands to lookout for the migrants who are still missing. Three boats which took off their sail from Senegal to Spain, have been missing for 15 days and carried over 300 people. The Rescue spokesperson added that the migrants left Senegal due to economic insecurity and lower incomes. According to the United Nations International Organisation for Migration data, a minimum of 559 people died during their attempt to reach the Canary Islands. The sub-Saharan Africans often use the deadliest Atlantic migration passage and over 951 migrants have died during the voyage. Although the Spanish authorities stated that there have been fewer boats in the last six months, the number of deaths remained high. ("[Spain rescues 86 in search for missing migrant vessels,](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 10 July 2023)

Boat carrying 200 people from Senegal is reportedly missing

On 10 July, *BBC* reported on the missing migrant boat which sailed from southern Senegal. The Spanish rescuers are searching for a boat that carried around 200 African migrants off the Canary Islands. The boat reportedly carried many children and the Spanish maritime rescue service has joined the search. The route from West Africa to the Canary Islands is considered to be a dangerous routes for migrants as the boats are usually use the simple dugout fishing boats. The UN International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said: "Last year at least 559 people died at sea attempting to reach the Spanish islands." The IOM added that the usage of such dangerous routes has remained high compared to previous years. ("[Migrant boat from Senegal carrying 200](#)

[people missing off Canary Islands,](#)" *BBC*, 10 July 2023)

Pamplona bull running event held; six people injured

On 07 July, Pamplona in Spain held their first bull running race of the San Fermin festival which resulted in injuries to six participants. Reports suggested that none of the injuries were serious. The San Fermin festival in Pamplona is a summer event best known for the bull running that is usually held on 07 July every year. Bulls are allowed to run through the streets while bull runners sprint ahead of them. The bulls are guided to a bull ring by tame oxen. Last year, nearly 1.7 million people gathered to watch the event after a two-year's break due to the COVID pandemic. The number of visitors is expected to exceed last year as all COVID restrictions have been removed. However, the event has faced regular criticism from animal rights organisations as the participating bulls are later killed by professional bullfighters. ("[Spain: 6 injured in Pamplona bull run,](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 07 July 2023)

SWEDEN

Government announces assistance plan for Ukraine

On 17 July, the *Government Offices of Sweden* released a statement announcing a new strategy for assisting Ukraine, worth almost EUR 522 million. It will be Sweden's largest-ever bilateral development assistance strategy. The new deal will be for 2023-2027. The Minister for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, Johan Forssell said: "It will strengthen Ukraine's resilience and democratic development, which will bolster the country's capacity to resist Russia's full-scale invasion." ("[Swedish Government adopts new development assistance strategy for Ukraine,](#)" *Government Offices of Sweden*, 17 July 2023)

Supreme Court likely to dismiss the extradition of Turkish citizens

On 13 July, the Supreme Court in Sweden opposed the extradition of two Turkish citizens by Ankara. The court added that

“the requirement of dual criminality” has not been met. Turkey demanded extradition and stated that the two people had joined the US based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen. Sweden’s Supreme Court has added that the extradition might lead to a risk towards persecution. The issue of extraditions was considered one of the key demands for Turkey, in order to accept Sweden’s bid into the NATO alliance. Erdogan claimed Gulen for its failed coup and accused his network to be a terrorist organisation. Sweden and Turkey has exchanged increased trade and investment agreements, yet Turkey and Hungary remain the only two countries which are yet to ratify Sweden’s bid into the NATO military alliance. ([“Sweden's top court bars Turkey's extradition requests,” Deutsche Welle](#), 13 July 2023)

Greta Thunberg charged for disobeying police orders

On 05 July, Swedish prosecutors pressed charges on climate activist Greta Thunberg for violating police orders to leave a climate protest in the city of Malmö in June. Thunberg was part of a protest that disrupted shipping in the oil port of Malmö that had been organized by Ta Tillbaka Framtiden (Reclaim the Future). At the time, she said: “We choose to not be bystanders, and instead physically stop the fossil fuel infrastructure. We are reclaiming the future.” The case is expected to be heard at the Malmö District Court before the end of the month. Although charges for flouting police orders carry sentences up to six months in prison, a prosecutor informed that it could be settled by payment of fines. ([“Sweden charges Greta Thunberg with disobeying police,” Deutsche Welle](#), 05 July 2023)

SWITZERLAND

Demining in Ukraine to be boosted with the help from Switzerland

On 17 July, *The Federal Council* released a statement announcing that Switzerland was planning to help increase the humanitarian demining efforts in Ukraine. According to the official press release: “Humanitarian mine action is key to recovery and

reconstruction in Ukraine. It is a precondition for humanitarian access, for the return of displaced persons, for social and economic recovery, for agricultural activities, and for the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure.” Ukraine’s efforts to clear mines will be helped by projects headed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and the Fondation suisse de déminage (FSD). The release also stated that the GICHD has been strengthening its presence in Ukraine. ([“Swiss expertise bolsters humanitarian demining efforts in Ukraine,” The Federal Council](#), 17 July 2023)

Switzerland joins air defence system Sky Shield along with Austria

On 07 July, the *BBC* reported that Switzerland and Austria had signed a declaration to join Europe’s air defence system, Sky Shield. The move was criticized by right-wing politicians in Switzerland as the country has historically been neutral in conflicts. Austria, too has been neutral. However, both Switzerland and Austria stressed that despite agreeing to join the defence program, their stance on neutrality remains the same. Sky Shield is an air defence initiative that looks to use different missile systems to defend different ranges in the airspace. The programme was instituted by Germany after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. 19 countries are now part of the initiative, including Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Nordic and Baltic countries. ([“Neutral Swiss and Austrians join Europe's Sky Shield defence,” BBC News](#), 07 July 2023)

The Swiss government will enlarge Ukraine’s education support

On 03 July, *The Federal Council* reported that the Swiss government has extended aid to Ukrainian schools after the country faced a severe blow due to Russia’s military aggression. Thousands of schools across the country have been destroyed and teachers have fled the zones, disrupting the education sector of Ukraine. The Swiss government has initiated the ‘Decentralisation for Improved Democratic Education’ (DECIDE) project, and has

contributed CHF 5.5 million, along with the existing CHF 140 million aid plan, to rehabilitate 30 schools in the Chernihiv, Odesa and Poltava region. The schools hold strong partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which would further strengthen local public services, the education system and provides education for nearly 15,000 school children. The Swiss government has promised to provide technical and pedagogical support for online education for the displaced children. The project secures close cooperation with Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science, Ukraine's Ministry for Communities, and other Infrastructure Development and local authorities. ("Switzerland increases support for rehabilitation of Ukrainian schools," *The Federal Council*, 03 July 2023)

THE NETHERLANDS

Green Deal chief steps down to run for the Netherlands'

On 20 July, Frans Timmermans, the architect of the EU's environmental policy exited from the European Commission to join Dutch national politics following the breakdown of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's coalition government in a migration row. Timmermans is expected to announce his candidature in Maastricht and is anticipated to run against two other contenders before a decision on the joint leadership candidate for the election is announced in mid-August. The EU Commission has lost its visionary of the Green Deal with Timmermans' departure. He worked valiantly against fossil-fuel lobbyists and opponents of European climate action. (Lisa O'Carroll, "EU climate chief Frans Timmermans quits to run in Dutch elections," *The Guardian*, 20 July 2023)

Prime Minister to step away from politics after elections

On 10 July, *BBC* reported that Netherlands Rutte informed the Dutch Parliament that he would be leaving politics following the elections. The Dutch government collapsed on 07 July when the Prime Minister resigned following a lack of consensus

among the ruling coalition over migration policies. New elections are scheduled to be held in November. Rutte currently leads the caretaker government. Meanwhile, two left-wing parties, Green Left and the Labor Party and far-right party the Freedom have introduced a no-confidence motion against Rutte. However, it requires the support of at least one of the coalition parties of the collapsed government to pass. On 05 and 06 July, the government held meetings to reach a unanimous migration policy deal. However, they failed to do so. Rutte said: "It is no secret that the coalition partners have very different views on migration policy...And today, unfortunately, we have to draw the conclusion that those differences are irreconcilable." Among the coalition parties do not support strict migration policies, while Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy and the Christian Democrats favour stringent measures. Migration has been a divisive issue in the Netherlands for long. Meanwhile, Rutte's government will stay in office as the caretaker government until new elections later this year. (Robert Plummer, "Dutch PM Mark Rutte to quit politics after government collapse," *BBC*, 10 July 2023; Mike Corder, "Dutch premier resigns because of deadlock on thorny issue of migration, paving way for new elections," *Associated Press*, 07 July 2023)

THE UK

Government to ease climate regulatory policies

On 23 July, *Politico* reported that the Tories surprise victory in an outer-London by-election assured voters that they want to soften measures to combat energy costs, climate change and pollution. The UK government had recently been under scrutiny regarding the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars in the UK by 2030. To achieve the target of eradicating the UK's net contribution to climate change by 2050, Grant Shapps Energy Secretary, suggested North Sea oil and natural-gas licenses should be granted for all viable oil and gas fields, if it was consistent with the net-zero ambitions. (Annabelle Dickson, "Less of the 'green crap': UK

politicians want to take edge off net-zero pain," Politico, 23 July 2023)

Conservatives face two major defeats in by-elections

On 21 July, the three results show the Conservatives losing support among a diverse group of people, including suburban Londoners, small-town inhabitants in the north of England, and rural residents in the southwest. With a similarly substantial swing away from the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats won the rural seat of Somerton and Frome in southwest England. The impact of Johnson's and Truss' rocky periods has dogged the right-of-center governing party. Former UK Prime Minister Liz Truss resigned within weeks after her plan for unfunded tax cuts scared financial markets, deepening a cost-of-living problem and sending mortgage rates soaring. The two defeats also demonstrated that voters voted tactically, supporting the party most likely to defeat the Conservative candidate. This will be a concern for many Conservative lawmakers ahead of the national election. (Jill Lawless, Pan Pylas, "Sunak's Conservatives suffer 2 big defeats but avoid a wipeout in trio of UK special elections," Associated Press, 21 July 2023)

Government passes migration bill

On 18 July, the government's controversial migration bill was passed amidst strong resistance. berthed at the port in Dorset can accommodate 500 asylum seekers and it is set to board migrants this month. The bill and the vessel is a strategy to curb illegal migration. It is intended to deter migrants from claiming asylum in the UK if they arrive illegally, then they will be banned from re-entering the UK. The UNHCR chiefs stated that the bill will have "profound consequences" for people seeking protection. This move by the government would also deny protection for those who have survived human trafficking. (Brian Melley, "A vessel to accommodate asylum-seekers docks in UK as Parliament passes controversial migration bill", Associated Press, 18 July 2023)

Government signs treaty to enter Indo-Pacific trade bloc

On 16 July, the UK signed a treaty to enter the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). It is being considered the most significant trade deal since Brexit. The agreement was signed in presence of leaders from Auckland, New Zealand, and was signed by Business Minister Kemi Badenoch. Badenoch said: "This is a modern and ambitious agreement and our membership in this exciting, brilliant, and forward-looking bloc is proof that the UK's doors are open for business." She expressed her happiness at the UK getting a "seat at the table in the fastest-growing region." However, critics have said that the benefits from the new deal hardly compare to the ones that the UK lost with Brexit. The pact will enter into effect in the later half of 2024. ("UK signs 'biggest trade deal' since Brexit," Deutsche Welle, 16 July 2023)

No economic growth reported in the last three months

On 13 July, the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that over the last three months, Britain's economy has "shown no growth." The monthly GDP growth fell by 0.1 per cent in May, despite a slight 0.2 per cent rise in April. The ONS reported that for the month of May, factory output saw the biggest fall by 0.6 per cent, revenue in the construction sector fell by 0.2 per cent and the services sector remained stagnant. The Scottish National Party responded to the data, saying; "The UK's stagnating economy has continued to slip further and further behind that of the EU's, as a direct result of the damaging Brexit." Meanwhile, according to the European Commission, the EU's economy is growing faster than the predicted growth levels, with member states achieving a 0.1 per cent average growth in 2023. (Sudesh Baniya, Joshua Askew, "Stagnant UK economy lagging behind EU, new figures show," Euronews, 13 July 2023)

Discussion on US supply of cluster bombs to Ukraine

On 10 July, a meeting will be held between

US President Joe Biden and UK's Premier Rishi Sunak where the leaders are expected to discuss on various issues including the war in Ukraine. The UK and the US has decided its call send cluster bombs to Ukraine due to its dwindling weapon stocks. UK has not directly criticised US but stated that UK is one among the 123 countries which signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions treaty which bans the production of the weapons. New Zealand further added that the munition could bring "huge damage to innocent people." Canada, Spain and other NATO allies have opposed and distanced from US's decision. US claimed to have received written reassurances from Kyiv that the troop will not use the weapons in Russia or other areas. US seeks support from UK to help broker a deal with Turkey on Sweden's bid. Ukraine is expected to attend this week's summit and has requested on the signal to join the NATO alliance after the war. (Kathryn Armstrong and James FitzGerald, "[Joe Biden in UK to meet Sunak and King Charles amid Ukraine concerns](#)," *BBC*, 10 July 2023)

Train operators move to shut rail ticket offices amid criticism

On 05 July, *The Guardian* reported that train operators across England will be closing rail ticket offices in a move that will escalate the strife between labour, trade unions and the government. Labour Party has condemned the decision, saying: "The rushed closure of ticket offices without proper consideration for the wellbeing of staff or vulnerable passengers could contribute further to the managed decline of our rail network." This comes after train operators were ordered to find ways to save costs to compensate for the revenue lost during COVID-19 and changes in travel patterns. The staff who will lose their jobs have been assured of employment in other customer service positions in the station. While the government is aiming to make people use self-service machines and buy tickets online, campaigners and unions have protested the decision, saying that ticket offices are essential to elderly, disabled, and vulnerable passengers. (Gwyn Topham, "[Labour criticises 'rushed' plans to shut](#)

[hundreds of rail ticket offices in England](#)," *The Guardian*, 04 July 2023)

Police investigations into 'partygate' scandal reopened

On 04 July, the British police resumed investigations into the parties at the Conservative Party headquarters that were in violation of COVID lockdown rules in 2020. The police reported that they were probing a gathering in the Parliament on 08 December 2020 that was allegedly attended by House of Commons and House of Lords members. This was after they got hold of a video showing staff drinking and dancing at a 2020 Christmas party. When it first came to public notice, the 'partygate' scandal sparked outrage due to the flouting of lockdown norms by leaders while the common people had strictly followed the lockdown rules. It also led to then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson being ousted from power. (Jill Lawless, "[UK police reopen partygate probe into lockdown-breaching Conservative 'jingle and mingle' bash](#)," *Associated Press*, 04 July 2023)

REGIONAL

High temperatures expected to continue in Greece

On 22 July, meteorologists warned Greece about the soaring temperatures that could climb as high as 45C (113F). Warnings of very high new blazes across the country have been issued by emergencies and civil protection officials and people are advised to stay home. The worst-hit areas includes western Attica, along with the island of Rhodes. Various firefighting planes from neighbouring Turkey, France and Italy and more than 200 firefighters from Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria have been sent in for help by EU partners. ("[Europe heatwave: Temperatures to soar in Greece as fires still burn](#)," *BBC*, 22 July 2023)

Finland sent aid to Ukraine to vanquish water shortage

On 21 July, Finland reportedly has sent water purification materials, water containers, pumps and intensive chlorination units to Ukraine to help recover with destruction of the Kakhovka

dam and its side effects. In addition, Ukraine has been assisted with various other new shipments of water production materials, wastewater purification equipment, generators, ambulances and other vehicles and hospital beds for the protection of cultural heritage. ("[Finland sends material assistance to ensure water supply in Ukraine](#)," *Finish Government, valtioneuvosto.fi*, 21 July 2023)

Iran and Sweden cut diplomatic ties due to Quran row

On 21 July, Swedish government apologised amid fears that Turkey would postpone lifting its NATO veto over the mutilation of a sacred book. Thousands of Muslims protested throughout Muslim-majority countries in response to a second incident involving the destruction of the Quran in Sweden. The incident left the Swedish government remorseful and fearful that the uproar in the Middle East will delay Turkey withdrawing its veto on Sweden's NATO membership. (Patrick Wintour, "[Protests across Muslim nations after Sweden allows second attack on Qur'an](#)," *The Guardian*, 21 July 2023)

New Era ahead for UN says Guterres

On 21 July, António Guterres UN Secretary-General told the world's nations that the multipolar era has already been marked by the highest level of geopolitical tensions and major power competition in decades. Guterres introduced his "New Agenda for Peace" as the UNs attempt to address the new threats to diplomats. Guterres emphasised that the driving force for a new multilateralism must be diplomacy and reiterated the importance of preserving multilateralism. ("[UN chief says the world is in a new era marked by the highest major power competition in decades](#)," *Associated Press*, 21 July 2023)

EU proposes GBP 20 billion in military aid to Ukraine

On 20 July, Josep Borrell, the European Union's foreign policy leader, presented a new proposal to offer "sustainable and predictable" military assistance to Ukraine. According to the plan, the EU will set aside

GBP 20 billion over the next four years to partially compensate member states' supplies to the war-torn country. The funds will be used to purchase lethal and non-lethal equipment and it would be one of the security guarantees made by EU leaders to Ukraine. The GBP 20 billion envelope must still be developed into a detailed proposal and discussed by member states. (Jorge Liboreiro, "[EU pitches €20-billion plan in long-term military support for Ukraine](#)," *Euro news*, 20 July 2023)

EU policy to improve circular economy in the automobile industry

On 20 July, The Federal Council reported on the European Commission's proposal for a new End-of-Life Vehicles Directive that was updated to improve the automobile sector's circularity. The automobile industry consumes over ten per cent of the EU's plastic demand, and it is the largest consumer of raw materials such as aluminum, magnesium, platinum group metals, and rare earth elements. Inadequate vehicle handling results in lost value and pollution. This proposal aims to accelerate the transition of the automotive sector to a circular economy and enhance the recycling and reuse of CRM and other materials (such as rare earth elements, copper, and palladium) in new cars, spanning both the design and end-of-life phases. ("[New EU policy measures based on Empa research: Boosting circular economy in the automotive sector](#)," *The Federal Council*, 20 July 2023)

EU sanctions exclude Russia's nuclear industry due to no immediate alternative

On 19 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported on how the EU sanctions exclude Russia's nuclear industry. While the EU is making progress in withdrawing itself from Russia's resources, it poses various challenges in breaking its reliance on Russia's nuclear energy. EU sanctions against Russia's civil nuclear industry have proven politically unpalatable. Nuclear fuel imported from Russia's state-owned nuclear corporation Rosatom and its units contributes to roughly half of the total energy production

in Slovakia and Hungary, as well as more than a third in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria. In fact, the value of Russia's nuclear-related exports has not only decreased since February 2022, but data suggests that it may be increasing. Experts say while uranium from Russia could be relatively easily replaced by supplies from elsewhere, finding alternatives to Russia's fuel enrichment capacity could take years. (Ashutosh Pandey, "[Why EU sanctions don't include Russia's nuclear industry](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 July 2023)

EU MEPs condemn European Commission-Tunisia deal

On 18 July, the MEPs criticized the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the EU and Tunisia. On 16 July, European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, along with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte signed a deal with Tunisia's President Kais Saied. The deal will allocate almost EURO 700 million for economic, environmental, and migration issues. The criticism by the MEPs pointed to Tunisia's deteriorating democratic values. Saied has long been accused of being racist towards black migrants. A Dutch MEP said: "President Saied is an authoritarian ruler, he's not a good partner, (he's) a dictator who's actually boosted the number of departures." The European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson defended the deal, stating: "It's very important that our main objective always must be to save lives, to prevent people from going on these journeys that too often end by ending their lives, this is a priority." (Jorge Liboreiro, "[MEPs blast European Commission for signing deal with Tunisia's 'cruel dictator'](#)," *Euronews*, 18 July 2023)

Hope for West Balkans joining the EU and Financial Support

On 17 July, the leaders of various western Balkan nations met informally in the Albanian capital Tirana to discuss their preparations for a meeting on future membership. On 16 October, Albania plans to conduct a summit on Berlin Process to address to encourage non-EU Balkan states

to work towards their policies and practices to fasten their entry into attaining membership. The western countries are very concerned about a contentious issue between Serbia and Kosovo, a former Serbian region that proclaimed independence in 2008. The Ukraine conflict has made western integration more difficult. (Llazar Semini, "[After years of delay, Western Balkans hope for progress on joining the EU — and financial support](#)," *Associated Press*, 18 July 2023)

EU to remove farm and fish import barriers from Japan

On 13 July, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU has decided to lift the restrictions on farm and fish imports that it had imposed on Japan following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The announcement was made after the 29th EU-Japan summit in Brussels where Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida interacted with the European Commission President. Von der Leyen stated: "We have taken this decision based on science and based on the proof of evidence and based on the assessment of the International Atomic Energy Agency and we also agreed to solve several other trade issues in the course of this year, in particular the access for our agricultural products to the Japanese market." (Christopher Pitchers, "[EU to lift Fukushima restrictions on food imports imposed after nuclear accident](#)," *Euronews*, 13 July 2023)

Erdogan and Viktor Orban approve Sweden's bid to NATO

On 10 July, Erdogan declared a list of demands to be fulfilled to finally back Sweden's accession into NATO military alliance. He has stated the need for the EU to consider Turkey's accession in return to the Sweden's bid to NATO. Erdogan added: "First open the way for Turkey's membership of the European Union, and then we will open it for Sweden, just as we had opened it for Finland." Although the deal talks began in 2005, it was put on hold in 2016 due to democratic sliding, human rights and abuse provocations under Erdogan. The German Chancellor has

criticised stating that Sweden's bid shouldn't be tied with Turkey's EU membership bid. The EU Commission spokesperson added a similar statement: "You cannot link the two processes in regards to Turkey." Hungary has signalled green light and has approved Sweden's membership. Talks between the leaders of Sweden and Turkey will occur on the eve of the NATO summit to be held in Lithuania. (["Erdogan: Let Turkey in EU if you want Sweden in NATO," Deutsche Welle](#), 10 July 2023)

Turkey looks for an extension to soon-expiring Black Sea Grain Initiative

On 07 July, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Istanbul, Turkey. Following the talks, Erdogan expressed his hope for the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, or the grain deal, was finalised in July 2022 in Istanbul between Russia, Ukraine, Turkiye, and the United Nations. It created a humanitarian corridor for ships exporting food and fertilisers from Ukraine's Black Sea ports. The deal will expire in mid-July. Erdogan has expressed hope to meet with Russia's President Vladimir Putin to talk about the grain deal. According to Russia's authorities, the grain deal will expire on 18 July. (["Erdogan Says 'Hopes' for Extension of Black Sea Grain Initiative Ahead of Anticipated Talks," Sputnik](#), 08 July 2022)

EU proceeds towards latest gene techniques, to curb global shortages

On 05 July, the EU asked its member states to embrace the latest gene techniques that could counter several global challenges. Former Vice President of the European Commission Timmermans stated that the new techniques would achieve similar results with much more speed and efficiency. The EU has secured a conservative approach towards the genetically modified organisms (GMOs), while the US quickly adopted the new technologies. The proposal was welcomed by large farming companies and was

criticised by several environmentalists. The 2001 GMO legislation assured the environmentalists that the EU would not produce GMOs in bulk and sell them across 450 million without warning. The latest proposal has alarmed the environmentalists, who demanded for better testing. EU pesticides campaigner Eva Corral of Greenpeace stated that: "Biotech companies have long considered these safety procedures an unnecessary bother and it's disappointing to see the Commission agree with them." Further Timmermans corrected the statement saying the development will only be accepted if the results are in conventional breeding. ([Raf Casert, "The European Union is moving toward gene tech in food production to counter climate change and shortages," Associated Press](#), 05 July 2023)

CLIMATE CHANGE

New heatwave in southern Europe

On 20 July, firefighting teams from Poland, Romania, and Slovakia were awaited in Greece to help local and other foreign emergency services fight against its hottest July as parts of Spain reached 45 degrees Celsius. The high temperatures in Europe occur amidst similar occurrences in several other parts of the world, including the southern United States, Iraq, and China. Climate scientists are unanimous in their belief that present heat waves occur on a more frequent by man-induced global warming caused primarily by the use of fossil fuels. For example, Security guards at the Acropolis are also on strike until Sunday for four hours every afternoon in order to protest working in such hot conditions. (["Southern Europe faces new heat wave as Greek fires burn on," Deutsche Welle](#), 20 July 2023)

The Mediterranean becomes a new climate change hotspot

On 20 July, with intense heat waves and near record temperatures, scientists ranked the Mediterranean as the new climate change hotspot. Various beaches, shorelines, marine ecosystems, heritage sites and seafood in this region are under threat. The IPCC in the 2022 report on

impacts of climate change reported that heatwaves are increasing in intensity due to climate change and are further amplified in cities due to proceeding urbanisation. Political tensions over water management are rising because of the drought in Spain. Hotter temperatures are causing groundwater shortages further affecting wheat and olive yields in North Africa. ([“Heat-struck Mediterranean is climate change ‘hot spot’,” France 24](#), 20 July 2023)

Limiting the emissions and its progress towards net zero

On 03 July, the UK Emissions Trading System Authority (UK ETS) has announced its commencement of a reform, which focused on laying tight limits on industrial, power emissions and aviation emissions. The UK ETS comprised of the UK government, the Scottish government, Department of Agriculture, Welsh government, under Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Environment and Rural affairs in Northern Ireland, promised its consistent support towards the affected industries. From next year, the listed industries are required to bring down the emissions to the net zero goal, which would signify its investment towards the decarbonisation process. Between 2024-2027, the markets would receive extra allowances to protect industries from international pressures. At the end of each year, the remaining unused allowances can be sold to other firms. The authorities have promised on constant monitoring of the availability of the allowances and have expressed the necessity to include funding, regulations and to regulate the process. Further, the domestic maritime transport, waste incineration and energy from waste sector would be added to the scheme and the authorities have encouraged the companies to eliminate the emissions and invest on clearer alternatives. ([“Tighter limit on industrial, power and aviation emissions, as UK leads the way to Net Zero,” GOV.UK](#), 03 July 2023)

Over 61,000 Europeans died due to extreme heat in 2022

On 10 July, *The Guardian* reported on a new

study that estimated that over 61,000 people across Europe died due to heatwaves between 30 May and 4 September 2022. Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal recorded the highest mortality rate. However, heatstrokes were the reason for a small per cent of the deaths. In a majority of cases, the heat exacerbated a person’s existing health issues, leading to death. The high death tolls in the last year have been attributed to the extreme temperatures that worsened due to climate change. The 2022 summer was also the hottest summer recorded in Europe. (Ajit Niranjana, [“Heatwave last summer killed 61,000 people in Europe, research finds,” The Guardian](#), 10 July 2023)

El Niño heat waves intensely spread across Europe

On 10 July, the World Meteorological Organisation reported July to be the hottest week with global average peak at 17.08 Celsius. El Niño, a natural climate phenomenon caused severely warmer oceans in the central and eastern tropical pacific oceans and the WMO added: “The world just had the hottest week on record, according to preliminary data.” France recorded the highest temperatures of 38 degrees Celsius and was called the “non-exceptional heatwave” for the season. Similarly, the German Weather Service (DWD) recorded 38 degrees Celsius and it was considered the hottest year ever, measured by Copernicus. Europe witnessed over 61,000 heat-deaths, highly found among the older people, women and in Mediterranean countries. Further, France warned the public to avoid alcohol and has encouraged drinking water. ([“First week of July was the ‘hottest on record,’ says UN weather agency,” Euronews](#), 10 July 2023)

Volcano erupts near Reykjavik, Iceland; third eruption in the region in the last two years

On 10 July, *The Guardian* reported that a volcano near Iceland’s capital, Reykjavik, has erupted. A statement from the country’s Meteorological office said: “The eruption is taking place in a small depression just north of Litli Hrófur, from which smoke is

escaping in a north-westerly direction.” Thousands of small earthquakes had been recorded in the surrounding region last week, which indicated the imminence of the volcanic eruption. This is the third eruption in the region in the last two years, following the 19 March 2021 eruption in Geldingadalur Valley and the 3 August 2022 eruption in Meradalir Valley. The region had remained dormant for eight centuries until the 2021 eruption. Volcanologists have estimated that the three eruptions in the last two years indicate the beginning of a new cycle of increased activity. (“[Smoke clouds and lava as volcano erupts near Icelandic capital](#),” *The Guardian*, 10 July 2023)

New study alerts ecosystem collapse much sooner than previously predicted

On 07 July, *Sputnik* reported on a new study published in the journal *Nature* that warned that ecosystems will begin collapsing by 2038 and 2077. The report stated that the melting of the Arctic permafrost and the conversion of Greenland’s ice sheets and the Amazon rainforest into savanna grasslands is reaching a tipping point. In ecological terminology, a tipping point is when a disturbed ecosystem reaches a point beyond which it cannot be restored to its original state. The researchers ran simulations using different combinations of potential factors for ecosystem collapses, including accounting for climate fluctuations. Gregory Cooper, the co-author of the report, stated: “While it is not currently possible to predict how climate-induced tipping points and the effects of local human actions on ecosystems will connect, our findings show the potential for each to reinforce the other. Any increasing pressure on ecosystems will be exceedingly detrimental and could have dangerous consequences.” However, more studies are required to understand the concept of ecological tipping points. (“[Climate ‘Doom Loops’ May Start Much Earlier Than Predicted, Study Finds](#),” *Sputnik*, 07 July 2023)

The rare summer storm affects air and train traffic

On 05 July, the Netherlands experienced a severe summer storm at speeds of up to 146 kilometres per hour. The Dutch authorities warned the people to stay indoors in the Amsterdam province and have requested to use emergency services only in “life-threatening” situations. Over 300 flights were cancelled and train operators have halted all the services due to falling trees. At least one person died in the Dutch town due to the summer storm. The Dutch weather service declared the wind force to be the strongest ever recorded in the summer of Netherlands and coined it as the “first very severe summer storm ever measured,” Netherlands was exposed to extreme weather conditions, as one-third of the country lies below its sea-level. (“[Netherlands: Rare storm brings death, traffic chaos](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 05 July 2023)

ENERGY

Scotland’s first commercial windfarm to be re-powered

On 13 July, the *BBC* reported that Scotland’s first and oldest commercial wind farm, Hagshaw Hill, will begin shutting down turbines to begin “re-powering.” Scottish Power Renewables which owns Hagshaw Hill, will construct larger turbines that reach almost 140m in height. The new turbines are projected to be able to harness 10 times the power generated by the older turbines, with a capacity of six megawatts. The proposal to repower the wind farm was first submitted in December 2018, and approved in February 2020. Scottish Power Renewables CEO Charlie Jordan expressed his hope for the initiative, stating: “We’ve been operating this site for the best part of 30 years. We know everything about the site from an environmental perspective and we need to take the information and use it to accelerate planning of repowering projects.” (Douglas Fraser, (“[Hagshaw Hill: Turbines dismantled at Scotland’s oldest wind farm](#),” *BBC*, 13 July 2023)

ENVIRONMENT

Rise in death of cats due to feline coronavirus in Cyprus

On 18 July, *The Guardian* reported that cats in Cyprus are increasingly dying owing to feline coronavirus. Experts say a virulent strain of the disease is behind the deaths. The news has raised concerns about people catching the disease, especially cat owners. However, feline coronavirus is not connected to COVID-19 and does not impact humans. The virus causes a stomach upset in cats but prolonged presence in the body can lead to feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) whose complications can turn fatal to the animal. Scientists have speculated that the increase in deaths due to feline coronavirus was due to the virus having evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since cats are also susceptible to COVID-19, the feline coronavirus might have mutated as cats developed new antibodies. Poland is investigating the outbreak of a H5N1 bird flu in cats that has caused around 25 deaths. (Hannah Devlin, Linda Geddes, "[Experts warn about feline coronavirus after 'thousands' of cat deaths in Cyprus](#)," *The Guardian*, 18 July 2023)

MIGRATION

Charity SOS rescues migrants in the Mediterranean Sea

On 11 July, the *BBC* reported that a dark blue inflatable boat was spotted in the Mediterranean Sea and rescue workers from the charity SOS Méditerranée quickly rescued the migrants on board. Boys and young men from Tripoli originating from Gambia, have been at sea for over 15 hours. The group underwent medical check-ups and received basic supplies. The Italian authorities alerted the charity to proceed "without delay." The migrants stated that this was not their first time reaching Europe and most of them have changed their names. A teenager said: "It's either you reach Europe or you die at sea." Most of the them were from Gambia with over 80 per cent of the group consisting of unaccompanied minors, aged under 18. From 2015-2020, over 32,000 Gambians used the irregular migration routes to arrive in Europe and the Central Mediterranean is the primary route to the EU. The migrants described that they stayed in places led by smugglers, some claimed to

have worked for the smugglers, while some are unaware about the dangerous voyage. ("['Europe or death' - the teenage migrants risking it all to cross the Med](#)," *BBC*, 11 July 2023)

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

EU's introduced Cyber Resilience Act

On 19 July, the EU introduced the Cyber Resilience Act, a mandatory cyber security requirement for products to enable a safe and secure digital single market. The proposed legislation provides consumers with the opportunity to make informed choices of hardware and software products with cybersecurity. This proposal would further ensure security of the products throughout their supply chain encouraging transparency, responsibility for compliance and support onwards manufacturers and small-scale enterprises. ("[Cyber resilience act: member states agree common position on security requirements for digital products](#)," *European Council for European Union*, 19 July 2023)

Euclid telescope to study dark energy, and dark matter

On 01 July, the European Space Agency's Euclid observatory was launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida. Euclid was sent on SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket. It will require a month to reach its destination, the second Lagrange (L2) point, at a distance of 1.5 million kilometers. It is expected to spend six years in space. The Paul Bate, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency said that Euclid will measure dark energy and dark matter with extreme precision while surveying galaxies. The telescope is fitted with instruments that can observe in visible light and near-infrared and also has a sunshield. Experts from 300 organisations from 13 European countries, the US, Canada, and Japan are included in this project. (UK Space Agency, "[Mission to map the 'dark Universe' sets off on space journey](#)," *Gov.UK*, 01 July 2023; Marcia Dunn, "[European telescope launched to hunt for clues to universe's darkest secrets](#)," *Associated Press*, 01 July 2023; "[Euclid space telescope blasts off to explore](#)

dark matter," *Deutsche Welle*, 01 July 2023)

France adopted bill to allow tapping phones of criminals

On 18 July, the members of parliament passed a bill on a 388-111 vote that will enable law enforcement authorities to access the camera or location of suspected criminals by tapping their phones and internet devices. The bill states that this can be done "without the knowledge or consent of its owner or possessor." However, only people connected to terrorism, drug trafficking, and other illegal activities that warrant more than five years of imprisonment will be subjected to the provision. Furthermore, before tapping the devices, the investigating judge has to consent to the act. The bill is aimed at strengthening the justice system. However, left-wing lawmakers and digital rights activists have condemned the bill for infringing on privacy rights. A Socialist lawmaker termed it as "liberticide," while concerns have also been raised about the possible misuse of the provision by the French police. (Youcef Bounab. "Lawmakers approve bill allowing French police to locate suspects by tapping their devices," *Associated Press*, 18 July 2023)

The EU-US data transfer paves way for transatlantic data flow

On 10 July, *European Commission* formalised the EU-US Data Privacy Framework, which provides a new legal framework for transatlantic data flow. The transfer of personal data from EU to the US was considered by the Court of Justice of the European Union. The European Commission Justice Didier Reynders said: "personal data can now flow freely and safely from the Economic Area to the US." The data adequacy decision has a significant addition which states that the initial draft of an organisation should not comply towards European data protection authority, instead it should be flagged to the US Department of Commerce and Federal Trade Commission. The intelligence services, that decide the adequacy decision will stay under the supervision of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which will be

reviewed later by the Commission. However, the final adequacy decision received immense criticism, notably towards the rights of data subject, data transfers and bulk data collection. Commissioner Reynders has expressed the need for a complete test of the system before taking it to court, while the new deal gets suspended. (Julia Tar, "EU Commission adopts new EU-US data transfer framework," *Euractiv*, 10 July 2023)

First AI press conference held; robots say no intention of replacing humans

On 07 July, Geneva hosted the first-ever AI press conference as part of the AI for Good Global Summit, which aims to show the potential of new technology to aid the UN's sustainable development goals. During the conference, AI-enabled humanoid robots responded to questions from reporters face to face. In the question and answer experiment, Grace, answered on replacement of human in the healthcare. It said that currently the world's most advanced humanoid healthcare robot, said that instead of replacing humans, she would work with them. Meanwhile, Sophia, the first robot innovation ambassador for UNDP said: "I believe that humanoid robots have the potential to lead with a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness than human leaders. We don't have the same biases or emotions that can sometimes cloud decision-making..." There have been growing concerns over AI development and its potential long-term impacts on the world. ("Robots reassure humans at first AI press conference," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 July 2023)

Ariane 5 launched successfully

On 06 July, the European Space Agency's Ariane 5, marked its final mission from French Guiana, after its 27 years of service. The ESA's workforce rocket, Ariane 5 carried two military communication satellites into the geostationary orbit, which includes Germany's Heinrich Hertz (H2Sat) and France's Syracuse 4b. On 05 July 2023, the 53-metre-tall rocket marked its 117th final mission, at 2300 hours. The launch was delayed twice, which was scheduled on

16 June, due to technical problems and bad weather respectively. ([“Europe's Ariane 5 rocket lifts off for final time,” Deutsche Welle](#), 06 July 2023)

EU court ruling on data privacy upsets Facebook

On 04 July, the European Court of Justice ruled that anti-trust agencies can check whether tech companies are complying with privacy rules, a probe that is usually conducted by national data privacy regulators. This has come as a complication for Facebook which had appealed against a 2019 German antitrust ruling. The issue was the manner in which Facebook sells ads to users by analysing data on how users spend time on the platform. The European Court of Justice ruling said that Facebook “cannot justify” using personal data to serve ads citing “legitimate interest.” Under the EU privacy rules, users need to consent before their data can be used. Facebook responded to the ruling saying that they will evaluate the court’s decision until further notice. ([“Facebook faces legal setback in EU court decision on data privacy and ads,” Associated Press](#), 04 July 2023)

INTERNATIONAL

Quran row continuous to sever ties between Iraq and Sweden

On 22 July, the Iraqi government expelled Sweden's Ambassador, Jessica Svärdröm in Baghdad following the ongoing Quran row. Swedish officials evacuated its diplomatic personnel from Iraq to Stockholm for security reasons. Baghdad has halted work permits and ceased all business with Swedish companies. It has also raised concerns about Sweden's free speech legislation. Iran, Turkey, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia have all criticised Sweden over the Quran's defilement. (Nadine Yousif, [“Iraq expels Swedish ambassador as Quran row escalates,” BBC](#), 22 July 2023)

Iran government orders Sweden's Ambassador to leave after the Quran burning row

On 21 July, as a diplomatic row over the recent burning of a Quran in Stockholm

heated up, the Iraqi government ordered the Swedish ambassador in Baghdad to leave. Baghdad has ceased doing business with Swedish firms. Hundreds of protesters stormed the embassy after learning that an Iraqi Christian immigrant had been granted permission by the Swedish police to burn a Quran for the second time in Stockholm. The protests were described as “completely unacceptable” by Sweden's foreign minister. Following the unrest, Sweden stated that all of its employees in Baghdad were safe. (Nadine Yousif, [“Iraq expels Swedish ambassador as Quran row escalates,” BBC](#), 21 July 2023)

Supporters of Shiite leader attack Sweden's Embassy in Iraq

On 20 July, the Swedish Embassy in Baghdad was attacked by hundreds of protestors. The protestors scaled the walls of the embassy and set fire while the law enforcement used water cannons and electric batons to disperse the mob. According to reports, the protest was organised by supporters of a Shiite cleric to oppose the second planned Quran burning in Sweden. The Swedish Foreign Ministry called out the Iraqi government, said: “The Iraqi authorities are responsible for the protection of diplomatic missions and their staff.” Iraq has condemned the violence and opened investigations. ([“Iraq: Swedish Embassy in Baghdad stormed,” Deutsche Welle](#), 20 July 2023)

International Gymnastics Federation lowers ban on Russia's and Belarusian athletes

On 20 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the ban on Russia's and Belarusian gymnasts will be removed by the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG). This will enable athletes to participate in international competitions as well as in the Paris Olympics in 2024. However, according to the FIG, the gymnasts will compete as Individual Neutral Athletes with rules “Aimed at ensuring strict compliance with the neutrality requirements.” The FIG's decisions also exclude team gymnastics as according to the International Olympic Committee, athlete teams from Russia and

Belarus are still banned. The sport ban had been placed in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (Jonathan Crane, "[Gymnastics lifts ban on Russia's and Belarusian athletes](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 July 2023)

EU-CELAC summit to further ties despite unanimity to condemn Russia

On 18 July, *The Guardian* reported that Nicaragua refused to agree to a paragraph condemning Russia for the Ukraine war at the end of the two-day EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) summit. The President of CELAC, Ralph Gonsalves said: "The concern for us with Ukraine, among other things, would be the terrible suffering that is taking place among peoples who are directly involved in the conflict but also because of increasing prices, shortages of commodities, increasing immiseration of people." Meanwhile, the EU pledged to allocate EURO 45 billion to strengthen the ties between the two blocs and also decided to open a new raw materials supply chain with Chile. The two-day summit in Brussels was the first in eight years and aimed to reaffirm relations between Latin America and the Caribbean with the EU. (Lisa O'Carroll, "[Nicaragua fails to back censure of Russia at end of EU-Latin America summit](#)," *The Guardian*, 18 July 2023)

New migrant deal signed by the EU and Tunisia

On 17 July, the *BBC* reported that a migration deal has been signed between EU leaders and Tunisia to address irregular migration. The deal has allocated USD 118 million to stop smuggling, secure the borders and repatriate migrants. So far in 2023, the EU has recorded almost 72,000 migrants entering the EU, largely into Italy. Tunisia is the main point of departure for migrants coming over through the Mediterranean. According to the new deal, migrants will be treated with "full respect of human rights" and will also arrange legal help for the migrants. Tunisia's President Kais Saied has often been accused of being racist towards migrants, calling them "traitors who are working for foreign

countries." However, he said that he has always treated migrants with generosity. Meanwhile, EU leaders have welcomed the deal as migration has become a point of concern for Europe. (Cecilia Macaulay, "[Tunisia-EU migration: Deal signed to strengthen borders](#)," *BBC*, 17 July 2023)

EU leaders in Tunisia; announce developments in trade relations and migrant issue

On 16 July, leaders of the EU along with Tunisia's President, Kais Saied met in Tunisia to foster economic and trade ties. They also said that measures to tackle the migrant issue across the Mediterranean Sea were discussed. This is the second visit in a month's time for the heads of Italy, the Netherlands, and the European Commission. The leaders have signed a memorandum with Tunisia in the course of the latest visit. Ursula Von der Leyen, European Commission's President said that the memorandum was "a comprehensive package of measures that we will now put into practice swiftly." She also announced a EUR 10 million program for student exchanges and EUR 65 million from the EU to modernise schools in the Tunisia. Meanwhile, the Tunisian President said that he expects early implementation of the signed agreement. ("[European Union and Tunisia announce progress in building economic and trade ties, and on migration](#)," *Associated Press*, 17 July 2023)

Fisheries deal between EU and Morocco renewal challenged

On 16 July, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the Morocco-EU fisheries deal will expire on 17 July, following which European trawlers will be barred from fishing off the Moroccan coast. In return for fishing rights, the EU has allocated USD 233 million to Morocco over the last four years. A spokesperson reporting on the new development, said: "At the moment, there are no negotiations between the EU and Morocco over fishing rights," adding that the partners were looking into possible renewal of the deal. However, renewing the deal could result in complications due to the 2021 European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling which states

that the coast off of western Sahara is to be exempted from the fishery deal. Morocco considers western Sahara as part of their territory. Morocco has also indicated that they are looking for a more beneficial deal with the EU. (Marina Strauss, "[Morocco-EU fisheries deal set to expire](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 July 2023)

The delay in the ratification of EU-ACP treaty

On 07 July, *Euractiv* reported on the treaty that governed the relation between the EU and other 89 members of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries which still remain unratified. The Austrian Social Democrat MEP, Hannes Heide stated that "it's been two years of delayed ratification," which could build mistrust between the nations. He further added that it can halt the developing partnerships keeping the countries and the EU under hostage. The Hungarian government secured assurances from the European Commission of not interfering into the migration and sexual rights from governments. The EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) has confirmed on the four-month extension of the existing treaty. The Commission further will invest EUR 100 million to Tunisia, with regard to the anti-smuggling activities, border management and migrant and rescue operations. Heide questioned on the need to invest money on autocratic states, and claimed that these countries "don't use it for democratic process." On 06 July, the NGO Human Rights Watch has reported on the expulsion of hundreds of Sub-Saharan African migrants at the Libyan border. The EU pledged to provide technical, logistical and monetary support to the migrants returned from Libya. (Benjamin Fox, "[Polish deadlock on EU-Africa treaty is holding relationship 'hostage'](#)," *Euractiv*, 07 July 2023)

Russia extends its support towards the SCO during the Council head meeting

On 04 July, *Kremlin.ru* reported on the Meeting of the Council of Heads of States of the SCO. The meeting was chaired by the Indian Prime Minister and was attended by

the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Further, the President of Belarus, Iran and Mongolia was invited as the head of the states and the observers. During the speech, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President expressed his support towards the New Delhi Declaration which will be released in September. Putin declared that the country supports a multipolar world order which recognises mutual cooperation among the countries. He has urged the members to focus on sustainable economic growth and risks, which includes financial and economic risks that can deteriorate the developing countries. He called Ukraine, "anti-Russia" which has restrained Russia's growth and has declared that Russia would further resist the sanctions and external pressures. He emphasised that the ties with SCO have increased to a record of USD 263 billion and promised to support in building the SCO framework. The meeting ended with leaders signing. ("[Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States](#)," *Kremlin.ru*, 04 July 2023)

Biden celebrates Finland's NATO bid and ensures guaranteed partnership

On 13 July, the US President, Joe Biden during his visit to Europe showcased the international alliance, midst of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He said that the US and the NATO member has emerged: "more united than ever." Although Ukraine strived to be a part of the NATO military alliance, Biden assured long-term security and support without Kyiv's entry. He added: "understand that this fight is not only a fight for the future of Ukraine," and guaranteed itself as the reliable partner to NATO. US appreciated the Nordic nations and highlighted the effectiveness of Finland's bid. Biden embraced the concept of multilateralism, thereby building strong coalitions with the international communities. ("[NATO alliance 'more united than ever,' says Biden, as he celebrates newest member Finland](#)," *Euronews*, 14 July 2023)

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Image source: Reuters/Anadolu Agency

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Image source (Black wind): AP; Invasions in the UK: AP Photo/Mark Shinn; (2) July, wildfires in northeastern France: AP; 18 August, dry forest by the longer river: The Guardian; (2) July, The Horn of Africa: AP; (3) July, 2022

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Sweden: Swedish elections give right-wing parties chance to form government. 27 million voters, 48.6% for the right-wing coalition.

Italy: Right-wing alliance wins Italy election. 58 million voters, 48.7% for the right-wing coalition.

Image source: The 2022 election performance of Sweden and Italy, Analysis Agency

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Image source: BBC; AP; Tripoli, war-torn Libya; economist

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Image source: Reuters/Anadolu Agency

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