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THE WAR IN UKRAINE



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D Suba Chandran

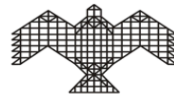
Assistant Editor

Padmashree Anandhan

Editorial Team

Rishika Yadav

Sreeja JS



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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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Vilnius Summit 2023. Image Source: nato.int

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War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from Day 552 to Day 524 in four dimensions. First, The War on the Ground. Second, The Moscow View: Claims by Russia. Third, The West View: Responses from the US and Europe. Fourth, The Global Fallouts: Implications of the Ukraine war.
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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.

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COMMENT

The War in Ukraine: Ukraine's Strategies and Endgame

By Sreeja JS

Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President announced a "special military operation" in Ukraine resulting in a full-scale invasion of the country. On 08 July 2023, 500 days have passed and the end appears distant as the war has escalated in the past few months.

Since the beginning of the war, Ukrainian forces and citizens have shown exceptional courage and will to defend their homeland and fight for their freedom and identity. As far as the negotiations extend, Ukraine's primary demand remains the same, complete withdrawal of Russian forces from its territory and the restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Currently, around 20 per cent of Ukraine's territory is under Russia's occupation and the intensity of war has significantly increased resulting in more casualties and damage to the civilian infrastructure on both sides.

Starting from the early stages of war, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President was able to garner support from countries across the globe. This resulted in the isolation and enforcement of sanctions on Russia and the continuous flow of military, financial and humanitarian aid to Kyiv. Moreover, Ukraine was able to launch successful counteroffensive operations in both Kharkiv and Kherson in September-October 2022 and the long-awaited spring counteroffensive launched in June 2023 is currently underway with significant progress yet to be seen. For Ukraine, victory in this war is crucial as it cannot lose either its territory or its identity. To win this war, Kyiv requires prudent tactical approaches on the military front, successful diplomatic approaches, continuous military, financial and humanitarian aid from the allies, stable economic recovery and tackling of

challenges within its government such as high levels of corruption.

Therefore, this paper aims to address Ukraine's strategies and its endgame in the war by analyzing recent developments and a few key issues and challenges it is currently facing.



Blue indicates the gains made by Ukraine on the ground. Image Source: Institute for the Study of War/The New York Times

Issues

First, slow progress in the counter-offensive. In June 2023, Ukraine launched its long-awaited counteroffensive. So far, it made relatively significant gains. In June, Ukrainian forces made small advances in southern and northern Bakhmut while liberating a cluster of four villages in Donetsk. According to the International Study of War report, Ukraine launched another major phase of the counteroffensive on 26 July to penetrate fortified Russia's defence lines in Zaporizhzhia. Altogether, they advanced only a few miles so far and the progress remains slow against Russian forces. One of the major reasons for the slow progress is the challenge posed by the

heavily mined and multi-layered Russia's defence lines in Zaporizhzhia and elsewhere. Another is Ukraine's change to a cautious tactical approach to minimize casualties and maximize gains for a long-term offensive operation. It involves calculated and concerted attempts to disrupt Russia's supply lines and damage its logistic hubs and command centres.

Second, the role of NATO and the delayed membership of Ukraine. The purported reason behind Russia's invasion was Putin's allegation of NATO expansion. Ukraine has been aspiring for membership in the alliance since the Bucharest Summit in 2008. This year in Vilnius, Zelenskyy was clear and he was looking for strong assurances that membership would be offered once the war was over. However, in the communique released, NATO could only affirm that the Membership Action Plan would be removed and Kyiv would be offered membership only "when allies agree and the conditions are met." NATO countries refrained from providing either a timeframe or an invitation. Kyiv was further offered security guarantees under the G7 declaration to add momentum to the economic and military support the G7 and NATO countries were already offering Ukraine.



Zelenskyy visit to Saudi Arabia for Arab League Summit. Image Source: Saudi Press Agency/Handout via Reuters

Third, the impact of Kyiv's diplomatic offensive. Ukraine's diplomatic offensive was in full swing during May - June as Zelenskyy was touring capitals and summits to keep the war on top of the international agenda and beef up military, financial and political

support for its war against Russia. On 19 May, he visited Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and spoke at the Arab League Summit. On 20 May, he was in Hiroshima, meeting the G7 leaders and the representatives of Global South. He also met with the leaders of the UK, US, Germany and France and could secure military and financial aid. Recently, on 04 and 05 August, in a renewed attempt to ramp up support mostly from the 'Global South' countries, Ukraine convened peace talks in Jeddah hosted by Saudi Arabia. Russia was uninvited to the talks. It is highly unlikely that the countries would change their stance, but the talks could garner much support compared to the talks held in Copenhagen in June 2023. Moreover, it was a prelude to the Global Peace Summit Zelenskyy is planning to conduct soon where a more fruitful response is expected. The diplomatic offensive has been an important strategy of Kyiv to muster political, financial and military support to add to the war efforts. Also, it played a major role in steering public opinion towards Ukraine.

“Ukraine might have deployed its strongest fighting forces bolstered through western equipment and training.”

Fourth, problems in converting the pledges of military and financial aid into reality. The US pledged the most financial support to Ukraine, estimated at EUR 71 billion in military, financial and humanitarian aid since the invasion in 2022. EU institutions are the second largest donors (EUR 35 billion) followed by the UK and Germany (EUR 11 billion each) and Japan (USD 7 billion). In terms of GDP, the statistics show that Estonia has contributed about 1.3 per cent followed by Latvia (1.1 per cent) and Lithuania (one per cent). However, the problem lies in converting promises into action. The latest counter-offensive was delayed and only made small advances due to the lack of advanced weaponry in the beginning. Later, with the training and delivery of weapons such as cluster munitions and other weapons, Ukraine is slowly picking up momentum. As the war is

likely to prolong for quite some time, the aid cannot stop and training for Ukraine's troops to help them "fight the way it fights best" is necessary as Russia is not an adversary who can be taken lightly.

Fourth, Ukraine's urban warfare, the role of technology and the war of attrition. The war has certainly redefined the principles of modern-day warfare. The war showed that big war-fighting equipment like tanks, warships and fighter aircraft could become more vulnerable to low-cost defensive systems such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles that can severely damage high-rise buildings and other infrastructure. As the new reports on the counteroffensive operations of Ukraine suggest, despite having western mechanized weapons, the offensive was stalled by multiple layers of deeply entrenched Russia's defence lines filled with landmines, "dragon's teeth" concrete barriers, anti-tank ditches and lines of barbed wire. Therefore, as Edward Luttwak, a US author and strategist said: "This is a war that must be fought by sheer, grinding, attrition, just like the First World War on the Western Front." The recent thrust in the counter-offensive aimed at seeking out gaps and weaknesses in Russia's defences and thus reducing the ability of Russian forces to quickly respond to Ukraine's attacks. These attempts are supplemented by drone strikes on Moscow and Russia's patrol vessels in the Black Sea, significantly impacting their morale.

"The reconstruction and rebuilding exercise would require massive international support and changes within Ukraine's government."

Conclusion

First, prolonged conflict, high chances of further escalation and the chances of a successful counteroffensive are yet to be seen. The question arises whether it is time to discuss the endgame of this war. It has

been more than 500 days and the recent developments indicate that the war did escalate. Nevertheless, the counteroffensive is progressing slowly. Likely, Ukraine might have deployed its strongest fighting forces bolstered through western equipment and training. Ukrainian forces could make gains but breaking through Russia's well-trenched defences could be challenging. Unless there is a significant breakthrough, the war will be prolonged and a ceasefire now is less agreeable if Russia does not agree to withdraw its forces from nearly 20 per cent of the occupied territory in Ukraine. Economically as the war prolongs, sustaining it is problematic, which points out that western economic and military aid is essential for Ukraine.

Second, the question of the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. The task would be burdensome and excruciating for a country hammered by missiles and artillery that devastated much of its civilian infrastructure, lives and livelihood of its citizens. The government of Ukraine, the World Bank, the European Commission and the UN estimated the cost of reconstruction and recovery at USD 411 billion as of 24 February 2023. The reconstruction and rebuilding exercise would require massive international support and changes within Ukraine's government. Enormous international support for financial aid, investments, global, national and local innovative solutions and mechanisms to tackle huge levels of corruption at the government level is essential for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

Sreeja JS is part of NIAS Europe Studies at NIAS. She is currently a post-graduate scholar at Madras Christian College, Chennai. The comment is published as an outcome of the War in Ukraine workshop held on 05 August in collaboration with the University of Madras and India-Office KAS Office, New Delhi.

COMMENT

The War in Ukraine: Russia's Endgame

By Genesy B

Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine War is a complex and ongoing conflict that has had far-reaching consequences for both countries and the international community as a whole. Russia annexed Crimea, a region of Ukraine having historical ties to Russia, in 2014. The annexation set in motion a chain of events that culminated in a full-fledged military conflict in eastern Ukraine. Territorial issues, political conflicts and conflicting visions for the region's future characterise the war. It has also been characterised by allegations of Russian military involvement, support for separatist organisations and human rights violations, all of which have resulted in broad humanitarian effects. The battle had far-reaching regional and global ramifications. It has damaged Russia-western relations, leading to sanctions and geopolitical tensions.

Why did Russia invade Ukraine?

One of the primary motivations for this invasion was to safeguard Sovereign territory. The initial Russian reason for such an invasion was to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine. The story of "denazifying Ukraine" is part of Russia's larger geopolitical ambitions in the region. The nature of left-aligned countries' ideological evangelism is to accept responsibility for liberating right-wing supremacy and protecting the state. Both the right and left extremists are antidemocratic, claiming to be on a mission to bring about a revolution and blaming all of the nation's issues on a specific group. This has been a consistent tendency throughout history. The Soviet Union's support in the liberation of Auschwitz is one example of such a tendency to accept responsibility to protect the state. This tendency backs up Putin's assertion denazifying Ukraine. Surges of nostalgia for Soviet-era economic and social programs might be seen as an attempt to re-establish a lost sense of

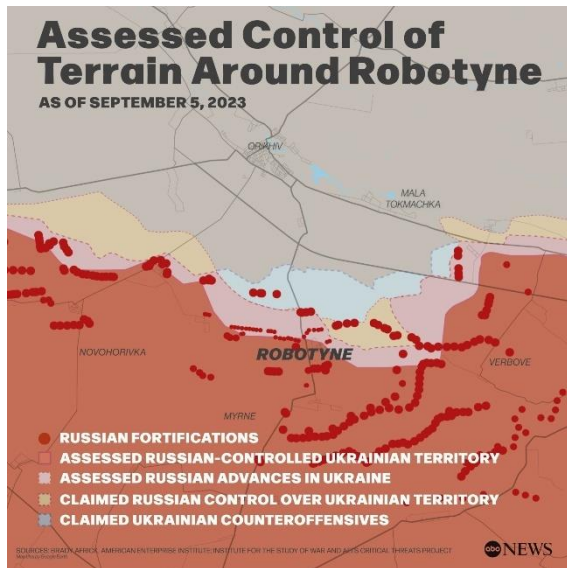
connectivity to the world and oneself. This is because, despite the fall of the USSR and the establishment of a new system, Russia retains parts of left ideology that cannot be eradicated from its people due to a shared cultural and social history. It is also related to Russia as it has always had a powerful state but a weak society with a skewed sense of national identity. This derives from imperial Russia, where Russians identified with the empire rather than developing national unity amongst themselves, whereas the West established a common identity.

Russian President Vladimir Putin proclaimed the independence of two breakaway territories in eastern Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk, just days before invading Ukraine. The strategic geographical location of the two warring countries, as well as Putin's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk, in Ukraine, are both significant. Russia wants to keep its influence in Ukraine and keep it from completely integrating into the European Union and NATO. Russia has deliberately played the game in such a way that even if Ukraine joins NATO, Russia will be protected since both of these regions will operate as a buffer zone, protecting NATO's direct influence in Russia. NATO's refusal to admit Ukraine as a permanent member makes it far more likely that Russia will not be at war with NATO.

Challenges

One of the major challenges that Russia faces is warrants. Russia is now subject to over 13,000 restrictions which is further than Iran, Cuba and North Korea put together. Russian GDP declined by only 2.1 percent in 2022 and is anticipated to grow in 2023, contrary to the UK frugality. In the short term, sanctions have helped Russia by separating it from global shocks, while damaging it in the medium and long run. Another component of Russia's reaction to sanctions has rebounded in Moscow

strengthening connections with various countries.



Russia's occupied area in Ukraine. Image Source: abcnews

Russia has evolved into state capitalism, in which enterprises are subservient to the government, in discrepancy with the western model. China's government's foundations in communism along with capitalist market impulses, are opposed to and parallel to free market capitalism in the West. As a result, Russia and China and their growing commercial ties in recent years, are extremely important. Russia's relationship with China aims to reduce the dollar's impact. The much-touted de-dollarization of the Russian economy is just becoming yuanization. Russia does not want the West to be the sole strong force in the globe, diminishing its reliance on the dollar. Not only Russia, but countries in the global south are breaking away from the US-led world order by substituting different currencies for the US dollar and expanding their self-sufficiency. The latest summits between China, Russia and North Korea also indicate the strengthening of this trilateral bloc and Russia's efforts to recruit allies to the east.

The change in global order is one of the major inevitable effects of this conflict. Sharp geographical variations in opinions about the war, democracy and the global balance of power suggest that Russia's invasion marks

the advent of a "post-western" international order. With the new development of power, different countries emerge with different models and methods that are advantageous to them in order to defend their security rather than to seek new change. The preference for moral superiority over rule-grounded order, on which the West focuses, is dominant, favouring a non-aligned and neutral posture if given a choice. Thus, current trends and former strategy documents allude to increased geopolitical conflict, more economic protectionism and fragmentation and a loosening of the transnational order's structures. In the face of multiple issues such as the climate crisis, information weaponization and public opinion manipulation, the multilateral system is under tremendous strain and risks losing legitimacy and efficacy in addressing global challenges.

The gap between the global north and the global south is having an increasing impact on global order. The conflict in Ukraine has exacerbated the north-south divide. This is about various priorities as well as relative influence and status inside the international system. It has strengthened western governments' commitment to liberal values, norms and institutions. There are many more active and influential players in the international system and therefore an agreement is much harder to achieve.

Conclusion

The Ukraine conflict is still a very complicated and fluid conflict with numerous scenarios and possible outcomes. This scenario may have serious consequences for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The conflict might worsen, with far-reaching implications for regional stability and global security.

Genesy B is a Research Intern at NIAS. The comment is published as an outcome of the War in Ukraine workshop held on 05 August in collaboration with the University of Madras and India-Office KAS Office, New Delhi.

COMMENT

The War in Ukraine: NATO's Challenge

By Feben Itty

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the world has been divided into three like cold war times. Those in favor of Ukraine, Russia and the neutral countries. The NATO group is one of the biggest supporters of Ukraine, but in the Vilnius Summit held in July NATO is yet to reach a consensus to grant Ukraine membership status. Till now NATO has supported 500 million euros to Ukraine along with fuel and medical supplies. NATO also has supplied weapons and ammunition for the self-defense of Ukraine, even now many of the member countries are hosting refugees from Ukraine. The recent summit also approved new spending goals of increasing the defense budget to a minimum of two per cent of the GDP for member countries and assured to provide long-term support to Ukraine. Yet, the main issue overshadows Ukraine's membership in NATO.

“NATO can make diplomatic relations with CSTO member countries to make a joint diplomatic move for creating peace in this region.”

Issues

First, Ukraine's determination to become part of NATO. Since the USSR's disintegration, Ukraine has been trying to attain NATO due to the fear of being invaded. In 1997 NATO established a Ukraine-NATO commission, to provide a platform to discuss Ukraine's security concerns and to bridge relations without NATO membership. The major reason for this membership is to get full confidence that Russia will not make another invasion.

Second, Russia's objection to Ukraine becoming a member of NATO. After the disintegration of the USSR, the world turned into a unipolar world. Russia claims that President Gorbachev was promised by the US that NATO would not move towards the east. But the situation has gone the opposite, as many countries joined NATO, such as the Baltic Republics, Poland, Romania and Lithuania. Which triggered Russia. NATO's expansion towards the east has made tensions for Russia and in the case of Ukraine it is much more important. Ukraine is one the most important strategic points in eastern Europe, it is the second largest country in Europe and it has access to the Black Sea and its borders are connected to Russia to the east. These elements are making Russia go against Ukraine in the matter of NATO membership. Recently Finland has joined the alliance but then also that is not triggering Russia because, for Russia, Ukraine is more than a strategic point. Ukraine was part of the Soviet and presently there are many old Soviet countries that are in the eastern European area. That is also triggering Russia to go against Ukraine joining NATO. In other words, in the Russia's dimension it is also having an identity crisis.



Presence of NATO in the Baltic and northern Europe. Image Source: CSIS
 Third, NATO's expansion in the Baltic and northern Europe. The Alliance was formed with the intention of collective security just after the Second World War in 1949. In other words, the alliance was formed at the beginning era of the Cold War with twelve member countries and the present status is 31 countries. The first expansion of the alliance in 1952, NATO gave admission to Greece and Turkey which itself pointed out the intention of the western powers to grow their influence into the East. Later the alliance increased the number of members in the alliance. After the collapse of the USSR, the alliance made significant Penetration into the Baltic and the East European regions. Now the alliance has 31 members and a dozen countries are waiting and willing to join the alliance including Ukraine. NATO is expanding. It is in a state of pause due to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. NATO is not only moving east they are encircling the whole of Russia.

Fourth, NATO is a platform of peace diplomacy between Russia and Ukraine. NATO is one of the main actors in this conflict but at the same time, they had not made any initiatives for peace talks or diplomatic discussions. Due to the absence of the initiative war is slowly escalating into a conflict. The conflict started around 500 days ago if NATO initiates a dialogue with Russia, then 'NATO can create platforms for both countries to make peace talks and agreements.

Fifth, CSTO is not like NATO. Just like NATO was formed in 1949 under the leadership of the US and the West, there was the Warsaw Pact under the leadership of the USSR. The Warsaw Pact came into existence in 1955. This mutual defense had eight members and with the fall of the

USSR, this alliance was broken. After the disintegration of the USSR Russia came as the substitute for all relations and as a substitute for Warsaw a new alliance was formed under the leadership of Russia and it was called the Collective Security Treaty Organisation In 2002, Russia's President Vladimir Putin established this new organisation is seen as an attempt to form a similar organisation like NATO. Presently this alliance has six member States along with one observer State, all of which are from central and western Asia. NATO is giving support for Ukraine in all forms but CSTO is not that much cooperative with Russia on the issue with Ukraine. The recent reports and news clearly say that CSTO is in a stage of inside conflict or even in a situation of collapse. NATO can make diplomatic relations with CSTO member countries to make a joint diplomatic move for creating peace in this region.

“The major reason for this membership is to get full confidence that Russia will not make another invasion.”

Conclusion

NATO is one of the main actors in this conflict between Russia and Ukraine and presently NATO is supporting Ukraine in different fields and areas. After the inclusion of Finland, NATO has turned strategically more powerful in that region. This all makes NATO more responsible for protecting and safeguarding the population in that area.

Feben Itty is a postgraduate scholar at Madras Christian College. The comment is published as an outcome of the War in Ukraine workshop held on 05 August in collaboration with the University of Madras and India-Office KAS Office, New Delhi.

COMMENT

The War in Ukraine: Poland's engagement

By Yogeswari S

Introduction

Poland, a key NATO ally sharing a border with Ukraine, as a fallout of the war in Ukraine Poland is inevitably affected due to refugee influx and increased threat from Russia's aggression. Poland's diplomatic and military significance in the region has grown throughout the war. It has been the primary destination for US troops arriving in eastern Europe, providing vital support to Kyiv. Its strategic location between Russia and western Europe makes Poland a crucial player in Europe's security relationship with Russia and an essential part of NATO's deterrence network against Moscow.

Poland has a history of tension with Russia due to its occupation during World War I and II and its opposition to Putin's regional posturing. The threats posed by a militant, Kremlin-reliant Belarus and the potential direct threat from Belarusian territory have raised concerns for Poland's security.

(Kranz, How the Russia-Ukraine Crisis Is Turning Poland Into a Strategic Player, 2022) Poland aims to play an active role internationally and supports Ukraine's pro-western orientation to create a prosperous neighbor free of Russia's intervention. The strong economic and social ties between Poland and Ukraine, including being Ukraine's second-largest trading partner and hosting many Ukraine's residents and standing against Russia motivate Poland's engagement in the war.

Impact of war in Ukraine

First, the refugee crisis. The war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 has led to a massive refugee crisis in Europe, with an estimated 6.3 million (by UNHCR) people fleeing the conflict. 968,389- Refugees

from Ukraine recorded in Poland: The number of immigrants from Ukraine in Poland will be significantly higher in the coming months (or maybe years) than at the beginning of 2022. As of 15 May 2022, around 1.1 million war refugees have registered in Poland, with many children, working-age females and elderly individuals. The largest Polish agglomerations, such as Mazowieckie, Śląskie and Dolnośląskie, have received the most significant number of registered refugees. In Warsaw alone, approximately 300,000 refugees stayed in the city as of 24 April 2022. The city faced a considerable challenge in providing shelter and integrating refugee children into the schooling system.

“It is proposed to relocate refugees within the European Union, specifically within Poland and establish modular housing estates.”

Second, healthcare. The number of refugees reached over four million; most were women, children and the elderly. Studies have shown that refugees are at a higher risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection than native-born populations. One concern is that many refugees fleeing Ukraine may not be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 due to suboptimal vaccination rates in their home country. The refugees have been allowed to enter Poland without vaccination certificates or negative test results, which could lead to the spread of COVID-19 in the host country. The rapid increase in the number of people needing healthcare poses a new and challenging task for the healthcare systems of countries receiving refugees. Mental health is one of the most pressing issues due to the trauma

of displacement and ongoing conflict, leading to a higher risk of mental health disorders like depression, anxiety and PTSD. To address these issues, governments and humanitarian organisations must collaborate to provide refugees access to basic healthcare services.

Third, cyber threat. Poland has been a target of Russia's cyber operations and cyber-enabled information warfare for several years. Still, the attacks intensified after the February invasion of Ukraine. As Poland became a key logistical hub for military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine and accepted many refugees, it experienced a surge in cyber-attacks. During the first quarter of 2022, the number of cyber-attacks on Polish IT systems and networks surpassed the total for 2021. One significant attack involved Russia's hackers targeting Polish subscribers of the Viasat satellite internet system. They disabled modems communicating with Viasat's satellite network, cutting off Ukraine's military and population internet access. While Polish networks were affected, the impact was less severe compared to Ukraine. In addition to the Viasat attack spillovers, Poland faced deliberate cyber-attacks during the early stages of the war.

Fourth, employment. Before World War II, Ukrainians had a significant presence in the Polish labor market. Despite the entry of around 150,000 war refugees into the Polish labor market, employing several hundred thousand more Ukrainians might not be straightforward. The recent influx mainly consisted of women with children, whereas pre-war workers from Ukraine in Poland were primarily men in male-dominated fields. This implies potential skill mismatches between available skills and labor market needs. Substantial training and retraining programs tailored to professionals from Ukraine backgrounds will be essential to address this. Additionally, measures must be implemented to prevent workplace exploitation, bullying and sexual

harassment, given the scale of the influx and the vulnerable position of war refugees.

Fifth, education and care for children. The challenge of providing education and care for children from Ukraine in Poland is significant, with potentially up to a million children requiring assistance. With proper support, caregivers, often mothers or family members, would likely be able to work. Unique solutions are needed, with a few existing models providing a foundation. The first model involves children from Ukraine following their home country's curriculum, requiring infrastructure for remote learning and recognition of teachers from Ukraine qualifications in Poland. The second model proposes preparatory classes to prepare children from Ukraine for entry into Polish schools the following year. The third model focuses on children from Ukraine proficient in Polish, allowing them to attend Polish schools under the same conditions as local students. The choice of model should be left to parents, contingent on their child's proficiency in the Polish language.

Sixth, housing infrastructure. The main challenge in various scenarios involving war refugees is the provision of adequate housing infrastructure. Depending on the situation, having refugees rely primarily on private houses or apartments for shelter is not sustainable, especially in the short term. To address this issue, it is proposed to relocate refugees within the European Union, specifically within Poland and establish modular housing estates. These housing estates would serve as temporary shelters for individuals without apartments, particularly during the autumn and winter.

Yogeswari S is a postgraduate scholar at the University of Madras. The comment is published as an outcome of the War in Ukraine workshop held on 05 August in collaboration with the University of Madras and India-Office KAS Office, New Delhi.

COMMENT

The War in Ukraine: Issues for Europe

By Annem Naga Bindhu Madhuri

Introduction

The Ukraine war, which erupted in 2014, has impacted Europe at political, economic and security levels. Stemming from Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in eastern Ukraine, this protracted war has significantly reshaped diplomatic relations, tested regional security mechanisms and raised questions about the future of Europe's unity. Reasons that led to the war, integrating Ukraine into the NATO and EU and Strategic control over Ukraine as Russia's Policy Priority. The Russia-Ukraine war has the potential to reshape Europe's perceptions of security. Amid concerns of a possible Russia invasion of Ukraine and its consequences, public debate has depicted Europe as divided and weak. However, a pan-European poll held by the Council of Europe on Foreign Relations revealed surprising unity among Europeans. Respondents from Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania and Sweden, representing a massive portion of the EU population, agreed that Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is likely and that Europe has a responsibility to defend Ukraine.

The war sparked a geopolitical awakening among Europeans, prompting them to consider the possibility of war in Europe seriously. The survey highlighted the need for Europe's governments to plan for various contingencies to reduce the impact on citizens, as well as the importance of addressing different countries' distinct concerns over war. Overall, the war has brought the question of Europe's security order to the forefront and underlined the necessity of coordinated responses to Russia's aggression. This introduction seeks to explore the effects of the Ukraine war on Europe, highlighting the key outcomes that have unfolded during this intense period (Krastev & Leonard, 2022).

Issues

First, geopolitical debates and theories in the West. The war in Ukraine and Russia's actions have disrupted Europe's security governance, sparking significant debate and theories in the West. European and Transatlantic leaders perceive Russia as a global security threat, responding with military measures and sanctions. The war intensified geopolitical tensions and triggered discussions about Europe's security architecture. Scholars are divided in their assessments, with some emphasising state-centric realism and power rivalry, while others note the EU's preference for cooperative norms and its unique non-state, economically-focused and normative approach. The Ukraine war revived neo-classical geopolitics, emphasising territorial rivalry, but the EU's distinctive features and the complex interplay of norms and power in the Russia-West relationship complicate the geopolitical discourse (Averre, 2016; Raik, 2019).

Second, the energy security crisis. The war has exposed Europe's energy security vulnerabilities, highlighting the region's heavy dependence on Russia's hydrocarbon imports, despite the ongoing focus on green policies and climate efforts. This war prompted the search for alternative energy sources and an unfortunate reliance on more polluting fuels. While Europe's Green Deal faces challenges, it underscores the need to prioritise energy security. The interdependence between Russia and Europe in oil and gas trade has shaped their economies, leading to the EU's efforts to standardise energy trade through measures like the third energy package. The war has pushed the EU to transition to an EU-level approach, enhancing its bargaining power and bolstering energy security through investments in diversifying energy sources, aligning with the goal of long-term energy independence (Prisecaru, 2022; Ozawa,

2022).

Third, negative economic impact. Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine is set to have severe economic repercussions for Europe, including higher inflation and supply chain disruptions. Europe's heavy reliance on Russia's oil and gas exports may lead to increased energy prices and reduced economic growth. The war-induced uncertainty could hinder consumption and investment, negatively impacting the eurozone's GDP growth. Financial markets are disrupted, affecting global and regional economies. Vulnerable sectors like automotive and shipping face inflation-related risks, potentially causing deflation and turmoil. Emerging economies in Europe and Central Asia, already affected by the pandemic, face further strain. Energy dependence on Russia poses inflation and trade risks, while sanctions, trade restrictions and a refugee crisis exacerbate economic turmoil (Mbah & Wasum, 2022; Khudaykulova, Yuanqiong, & Khudaykulov, 2022).

Fourth, humanitarian consequences. The war has had severe humanitarian consequences for Europe, with a significant influx of Ukrainian refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries, notably Poland. This surge has strained humanitarian resources and social cohesion, with Poland issuing over 295,000 work permits to Ukrainian migrants in 2020 and providing medical care and benefits. Russia's invasion has created a humanitarian crisis, resulting in over four million refugees and seven million internally displaced people. Attacks on hospitals and environmental concerns add to the complex humanitarian challenges (Lewtak et al., 2022; Jankowski & Gujski, 2022).

Fifth, peace negotiations and conflict resolution. Europe has actively engaged in peace negotiations and conflict resolution efforts to address the Ukraine war and restore regional stability. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) played a pivotal role by mediating between conflicting parties, deploying monitoring missions and fostering dialogue.

Projects like the National Dialogue Project, human rights assessments and crisis management aimed to de-escalate tensions and promote dialogue between Ukraine and Russia (Sinambela & Arsyad, 2023). Proposed peace processes include weapon withdrawal, prisoner exchanges, UN-supervised demilitarised zones and political agreements. Various mediators like France, Germany and Turkey, along with international leaders like India and China, seek peace, but trust deficits and geopolitical complexities remain challenges (Waslekar, 2023).

Conclusion

Navigating the war in Ukraine demands a multi-pronged approach to ensure lasting stability, security and cooperation in Europe. EU member states can take efforts to mediate and facilitate diplomatic negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Building on the OSCE's initiatives, sustained dialogue and confidence-building measures are essential to achieve a comprehensive ceasefire and address territorial disputes. Europe should expedite energy diversification plans, investing in renewable sources and reducing reliance on Russia's hydrocarbons. Strengthening energy cooperation within the EU and exploring new trade partnerships can enhance energy security and mitigate the impact of potential disruptions. Constructive engagement with Russia is crucial to address the underlying issues and prevent further escalations. Broad-based initiatives that engage diverse stakeholders, including India, China and other neutral parties, can help in resolution. The trajectory for Europe post-Ukraine war entails persistent efforts towards conflict resolution, energy security, humanitarian support and strengthened regional cooperation.

Annem Naga Bindhu Madhuri is a postgraduate scholar at the University of Madras.

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COMMENT

The crisis over Turkey-Cyprus road project: Six Questions

By Rishika Yadav

What happened?

Cyprus, nestled in the eastern Mediterranean, boasts a rich history marked by intricate cultural, political and religious dynamics. On 22 August, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's President, rebuked UN peacekeepers (UNFICYP) for obstructing a road project in ethnically divided Cyprus, branding it "unacceptable" and alleging bias against Turkish Cypriots. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, said: "...threats to the safety of UN peacekeepers and damage to UN property are unacceptable and may constitute serious crimes under international law." President Erdogan stated that denying Turkish Cypriots access to Pyla infringes on their rights and criticised the peacekeepers for compromising their impartiality. Erdogan said: "What is expected of the United Nations peacekeeping force is that it does justice to its name and contributes to finding a solution to the humanitarian needs of all sides on the island."

On 19 August, Turkish Cypriots clashed with international peacekeepers; the latter had halted the construction of a road encroaching upon the island's UN-monitored buffer zone. On 17 August, the UN mission in Cyprus said that it would prevent the construction of a road by Turkish Cypriots that would breach the UN-controlled buffer zone, potentially escalating tensions.

What is the road project all about?

On 17 August, the construction of the road project began, when Turkish Cypriot security personnel, alongside a civilian contractor, commenced construction near the Pergamos checkpoint within the buffer zone. Turkish Cypriot authorities aim to connect Pyla/Pile village in the UN-controlled buffer zone to their territory, emphasising improved access and mobility for Turkish Cypriot residents. They assert their right to develop their sovereign territory's infrastructure autonomously. However, Greek Cypriot authorities and the

UN peacekeeping force oppose the project, citing disruption to the buffer zone's status quo and jeopardized peace prospects.

What is the problem?

Two prominent ethnic groups, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, distinguish the island with diverse linguistic, religious and historical roots. The island's division since 1974, triggered by Turkey's intervention in response to a Greek Cypriot nationalist coup, has led to the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus controlling the south and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus reigning in the north, albeit recognized solely by Turkey. UNFICYP and the buffer zone maintain separation, despite failed attempts at reunification.

The current road project discord reflects the persistent tensions between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities. Turkish Cypriots seek to link Arsos (a village in Turkish Cypriot territory) to Pyla (Greek Cypriot-Turkish village), within the buffer zone to their territory, aiming to uplift conditions for their residents. The status quo in the buffer zone is maintained by a 1974 UN mandate, which faces disruption in the middle of road disputes. However, Greek Cypriots and UNFICYP denounced the endeavour, citing buffer zone disruption and jeopardized peace efforts. Accusations of Turkish Cypriot forces clashing with UN personnel and damaging vehicles complicate matters further.

What is UNFICYP? And what is its involvement?

Established in 1964, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) serves to prevent conflicts between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, distinct in ethnicity, language and faith. UNFICYP upholds law and order, aids humanitarian efforts and supports negotiations to resolve the Cyprus problem. Since its deployment after the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus,

UNFICYP's role has evolved significantly. Tasked with supervising the newly established 180-kilometer buffer zone, its initial focus was to prevent hostilities, oversee ceasefire lines and aid displaced populations. UNFICYP orchestrated prisoner exchanges and facilitated movements of Cypriot communities between the north and south. High-level agreements in 1977 and 1979 for a bi-communal federal republic marked cooperative efforts. Yet, challenges emerged, as in 1989, Greek Cypriot protests turned violent, straining relations and raising tensions. Adaptations continued, with a broader civilian component introduced in 1993. UNFICYP played a pivotal role in expanding crossing points in 2003, fostering personal connections and building trust. It supported peace negotiations in 2008 and grappled with the unsuccessful Switzerland summit in 2017, enduring increased tensions and incidents in the buffer zone. Throughout, UNFICYP has aimed to defuse conflicts, encourage cooperation and uphold its mandate. UNFICYP's role in the current road project discord stems from its responsibility to patrol and oversee the 180-kilometer buffer zone dividing the island. This zone aims to prevent strife and maintain the status quo until a peaceful solution is achieved.

What are the issues?

First, complex regional dynamics. The road project initiative aligns with Turkey's forceful foreign policy, intertwined with ongoing disputes over maritime boundaries and energy reserves in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey's involvement in gas exploration and drilling activities near Cyprus' contested waters has intensified tensions, leading to standoffs and clashes involving Cyprus, Greece, France and the EU. The road project also violates the UN resolutions and the buffer zone agreement, which prohibit any unilateral or military activities in the area.

Second, socio-economic disparities. Turkish Cypriots lack international recognition, the EU access and struggle with development, infrastructure, education, health and environment. Greek Cypriots, on the other hand, benefited from the EU integration but

grappled with unemployment, debt and corruption. These hurdles fuel frustration and pessimism among Cypriots about their island's future, eroding confidence-building measures.

Third, conflicting perspectives. Turkish Cypriots advocate a two-state solution for sovereignty, while Greek Cypriots support a federal arrangement. Greek Cypriots suspect military motives, contrasting with Turkey's portrayal of the project as "humanitarian." Greek Cypriots accused the Turkish Cypriot force of intimidation, undermining sovereignty and security by enabling Turkish military presence. The UN and international community favor a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. For Turkish Cypriots, the project is essential, granting access and aiding Pyla/Pile village residents isolated from services. They argue sovereignty rights and minimal impact on the Greek Cypriot zone. They also urge project cessation, condemn attacks on UN personnel and emphasises UNFICYP's role.

What about international actors?

France, critical of Turkey's Mediterranean involvement, supports Cyprus's sovereignty, condemning the road project as a breach of UN resolutions. It calls for Turkey to respect UNFICYP's role, urging dialogue with Greek Cypriots.

The UK, a guarantor power and Cyprus' base-area holder expresses concern over the project's security impact and settlement prospects. It supports dialogue, aiding reconciliation efforts.

The EU, having Cyprus as a member despite the Annan Plan rejection, backs the Republic and Greece in their maritime disputes with Turkey. It denounces the road project as a hindrance to peace, reaffirms UNFICYP's mandate and supports a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation for settlement. External actors' stances influence both sides, with France and the EU aligning more with Greek Cypriots, while the UK strives for equilibrium.

Rishika Yadav is a Research Assistant at NIAS.



Source: LETA, Ieva Leiniša, Reuters, svidomi.in.ua andrii Klymenko/Euromaidan, Saudi Press Agency/Handout via REUTERS, AP Photo/Petros Karadjias

ITALY

The Mediterranean: Continuing Migrant Boat Disasters

By Sreeja JS

On 07 August, *BBC* reported on a shipwreck near Tunisia’s Kerkennah Islands, with 11 dead and another 44 migrants missing.

On 03 August, two vessels were reported to have sunk near the Italian island of Lampedusa. Italy’s coast guards rescued around 57 people while 33 were missing. Flavio di Giacomo, spokesperson of the International Organisation for Migration, said that the migrants were from Guinea and the Ivory Coast. According to survivors’ testimony, they departed from Sfax, a Tunisian port city, before being capsized and rescued by a commercial boat. He also noted that the vessels were frail and could quickly capsize and disintegrate after setting out to the sea.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, more than 1800 people have died in the Central Mediterranean in 2023. The number of departures increased

compared to last year. According to UNHCR, sea arrivals to Italy are 104,808 in 2023 (year-to-date) compared to 49,792 (year-to-date) in 2022.

Who are the migrants?

Tunisia has become the key transit point for migrants to go to Europe, especially Italy, where the migrant population has substantially increased since 2014 (according to organisations such as Human Rights Watch, UNHCR and IOM working with the migrants the numbers are between 20,000 and 50,000).

The biggest group is those from the Ivory Coast, who represent one-third of the total, followed by citizens of Guinea and Mali. According to a report by *Africa News*, these countries have free visa agreements with Tunisia, indicating that many migrants arrived through legal means.

According to *Le Monde diplomatique*, the immigration status of a vast majority of migrants hailing from Sub-Saharan African countries is irregular. Even those eligible for visas also face troubles because of the

* 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.

bureaucracy. A fine of around USD 6.50 is charged to those who overstay their visa. Thus, the accumulated debt and the monetary need to go either home or to Europe force the migrants to take up blue-collar jobs where they are paid average salaries even 30 per cent less than Tunisians.

What are the reasons for migration?

First, political instability and violence in Tunisia and Sub-Saharan Africa (countries such as Guinea, Sudan and South Sudan). The migrants often flee due to extreme poverty, unemployment, political persecution and political instability in their home countries. When they pass through the North African countries, they face unfair treatment and prejudice from the locals, forcing them to embark on the perilous journey across the Sea. Traditionally, Tunisia has been a transit route used by migrants. The recent outbreaks of conflict and the amplifying insecurity in the region have increased the arrival of Sub-Saharan migrants in the country. The government is often hostile to the migrants. Moreover, in February 2023, Kais Saied, Tunisia's President, delivered a speech in which he claimed that Sub-Saharan migrants threaten the country's identity, accelerating migration across the Sea. The country is also facing a political upheaval after Saied rewrote the Constitution in 2021 to concentrate power in his hands.

Secondly, the economic crisis in Tunisia. According to the International Organisation for Migration, around 1,600 Tunisians crossed the Mediterranean Sea on smugglers' boats between January and March 2023, compared to 900 from last year (January to March 2022). Apart from the crackdown on migrants, inflation and food shortages plague the country. Tunisia's debt has reached 90 per cent of its GDP, increasing the risk of default. Saied also refused to endorse an IMF bailout of USD 1.9 billion, adding to donors' worry that he would not implement the reforms his administration has promised before disbursement. Moreover, Joseph Borrell, EU's Foreign Policy chief, warned in March 2023 that the political and economic crisis in Tunisia could fuel a wave of migration into

Europe.

Where are they migrating from?

According to UNHCR, from January to July 2023, 104,808 people migrated into Italy from Türkiye, Tunisia and Libya and Algeria via Sea routes. There are ten most common countries of origin. 26 per cent of the migrants are from Guinea and Ivory Coast (13 per cent each). Followed by Egypt (nine per cent), Tunisia and Bangladesh (eight per cent each), Pakistan (seven per cent), Burkina Faso (six per cent), Cameroon and Mali (four per cent each). In 2022 (between January and July), 21 per cent of the migrants were from Egypt; 20 per cent were from Tunisia, followed by 17 per cent from Bangladesh.

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LATVIA

Latvia's Prime Minister Resigns: Three Questions

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 14 August, following the split in the coalition government, Latvia's Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš announced to resign. Kariņš New Unity (JV) party which formed a coalition with National Alliance and United List in the 2022 elections will be dissolved due to persisting differences and a new prime minister will be chosen. The clash of interest is due to objections from the National Alliance (NA) and Combined List (AS) on the proposal against Karins to include the Progressive Party (PRO), the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS). Apart from this, differences also exist in approving policies relating to welfare schemes and economic growth. Karins said: "For any country, there are difficulties when someone tries to hold on to their office."

How New Unity won the 2022 Saeima elections?

Until 2019 due to wide differences, forming a coalition was a challenge. The win of the New Unity party in the October 2022 elections was viewed as a positive signal as it laid the basis for continued political stability. This was possible due to a shuffle in the support for other competing parties. Harmony Party (a centre-left pro-Russian party) which had topped in the 2018 election, lost the majority in 2022, the Union List which had competed for the first time came third and the Union of Greens and Farmer vote share increased by three per cent. The divide in votes and the inability to form a coalition by other parties led to Karins's success in forming a coalition after 2018, again in the 2022 elections with the National Alliance and the Conservatives maneuvering through COVID-19, the war in Ukraine. It projected safety for Latvia against Russian aggression and provided scope to engage closely with NATO.

What are the differences within the coalition over Karins?

When the coalition was signed in 2022, Latvia was affected by the war in Ukraine similar to Europe in terms of inflation and

the energy crisis. By 2023, this inflation lowered by 6.4 per cent but not the differences within the coalition. Karins's decision to include ZZS and PRO in the existing coalition with NA and AS was proposed to implement reforms. This was not well taken by the existing partners as they feared more members would lead to more differences. According to NA and AS, issues such as "...school network arrangement, improvement of health care situation, labour force issue, stock exchange listing of state-owned capital companies, social issues." Missed priorities are top among the concerns of NA and AS. Apart from this missed priorities of the government and personal differences over budget to health and education between the JV and AS party heads cracked the coalition.

What's ahead for the JV?

The JV has managed to increase its representation in 2022 in the parliament from eight to twenty-six mandates. This was possible not due to socio-economic development but due to people's aversion to Russia's aggression and the government's timely response. JV's coalition with NA and AS held 54 votes in total in the parliament. After the dissolution opens a possibility for JV to join with ZZS and PRO giving 52 seats to maintain the majority and prevent another snap election or intermediary government.

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The War in Ukraine: Escalation after drone attacks

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 01 August, the Russian Ministry of Defence reported three drone strikes in Moscow and the Black Sea and accused Ukraine of launching the attacks. The strikes ranging 450 kilometres into Moscow caused damage to several ministerial buildings and oil depots. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denied the claims and stated: "inevitable, natural and fair process....we don't attack Putin or Moscow." He added: "We fight on our territory. We're defending our villages and cities. We don't have enough weapons for these."

On 01 August, *RT* reported and BBC corroborated that another Ukraine drone attack took place in Moscow's business district. The Russian Ministry of Defence states that three drones were involved, with two destroyed in mid-air and the third suppressed by electronic warfare systems, crashing into a non-residential complex.

In response to the drone attacks, on 5 August, Russia retaliated with a series of drones and missiles using cruise missiles and Shahed-136 drones over the Caspian Sea. Russia's spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated: "There can be no justification for such barbaric actions, they will not go unanswered and their authors and perpetrators will inevitably be punished."

Following the drone attacks in the Black Sea, on 08 August, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence declared war in the Black Sea against Russia. It stated that Russia's ports surrounding the Black Sea would be a "war risk zone."

Key Issues

First, increased drone attacks. According to the reports from Russia, close to 120 drone attacks have been targeted inside Russia and in the Russian-occupied region including Crimea. The attacks have concentrated across Bryansk, Belgorod and Crimea, located in the border area of Ukraine and a few into Moscow. In 2022, Ukrainian energy infrastructures across eastern and western districts were the target of Russia's military.

This shifted by 2023 when Ukraine's military arsenals became the key target of Russia's drones. The concentration of these drone attacks has gradually expanded both in Ukraine and Russia from districts of Ryazan, Saratov, Kursk and Belgorod closer to the border to farther into central cities of Moscow, Kyiv and Lviv.

Second, Ukraine's counter-offensive. Ukraine's earlier counter-offensive in 2022 involved maximum ground defence and limited airpower. The June 2023, long-delayed counter-offensive demands more air defence with increased drone attacks from Russia. Ukraine, which has denied launching drone strikes into Moscow, evidence shows the usage of Ukraine-made drones. Ukraine's long demand for air power is starting to materialize on the ground as it produces its drones with the support of private funding and aid from the West. This was possible with aid from the US and the UK in supporting Ukraine with air defence missiles, small drones, long-range drones and munitions to deploy in the drones.

Third, escalation in war through geographic expansion. Observing the frequency and intensity of the drone attacks between February 2022 and May 2023, the fight was restricted to only Ukraine's territory and Russia's occupied territory. This is now beginning to expand geographically in Crimea, an occupied territory of Russia into air and maritime warfare. Geographic expansion of war indicates Ukraine's ability to utilize the weapons supported by the West to launch wider attacks.

Race and escalation

First, Ukraine's race to scale up. Despite the denial of accepting the drone strike claims, significant efforts are being taken by Ukraine to develop its drones. According to the reports from The New York Times, the Bober and the UJ-22 Airborne have been increasingly targeted inside Russia at twice the rate of 2022. This has been possible due to private funding and the Ukrainian government's incentivizing private companies such as Ukrjet that engage in drone production.

Second, the threat of escalation. Increased exchange of drone attacks marks the starting point of improvement in Ukraine's air defence. The drone incursions also mean a trigger for Russia to use its air superiority. In terms of attacks and counter-attacks, Ukraine's gradual progress can be witnessed from holding a strong defence to an offensive stance in the ongoing counter-offensive. Followed by the on-ground exhaustion and shift into precision striking provides space for both actors to regroup their ground forces. This will drive external players such as the US, NATO, Europe and Iran to further air defence. Thereby, escalating the war in terms of advanced weapons and geography to further the war long.

Third, Russia's withdrawal from the grain deal was a trigger. The fallout of war into the air and maritime domain comes after Russia's move to withdraw from the grain deal. This has become a trigger for Ukraine to launch a war in the Black Sea affecting Russia's maritime trade. Therefore, with the cease of the grain deal and increased exchange of attack in the ports, Ukraine and Russia's maritime trade, especially oil and grain exports, can be expected to be affected.

RUSSIA

Prigozhin killed in a plane crash

By Rishika Yadav

On 23 August, according to the TASS, Russia's Federal Agency for Air Transport initiated an investigation into the crash of an Embraer plane in the Tver Region. The plane, en route from Sheremetyevo International Airport, Moscow, to St Petersburg, crashed with all ten people on board reported dead. The passenger list, according to reports available in the media, included the names of Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner Group leader and Dmitri Utkin, Wagner's top commander.

Until now, there are no comments from Vladimir Putin, Russia's President.

RIA Novosti, the state-run Russian news

agency, uploaded an unverified video capturing what seemed like an uncontrolled descent of an aircraft, plummeting almost vertically with a trail of light gray smoke. The footage, taken shakily from a mobile phone, omitted the plane's actual impact. Another video shared on Telegram displayed a burning aircraft identified as an Embraer Legacy 600 business jet. Notably, the paint and partial registration number, RA-02795, aligned with a jet linked to Prigozhin. Rescue teams reached the crash scene, revealing airplane fragments, including a portion of a blue wing or tail fin.

Earlier this week, Prigozhin emerged in a video claiming to be in Africa, where his mercenaries relocated after the failed uprising. Speculations about Putin's involvement linger following the crash. Prigozhin's demise will heighten tensions in the Russian army. The jet crash coincided with Gen Sergei Surovikin's removal from leading the Russian aerospace forces, marking the highest-level dismissal post-Prigozhin's mutiny. Questions arise about Prigozhin's support for Surovikin linked to the mutiny. Amid shock over the crash, Russian circles previously hinted at Putin's likely response to Prigozhin's betrayal.

Prigozhin's end: Who said what?

On 23 August, Russia's Federal Agency for Air Transport said: "An investigation of the Embraer plane crash that happened in the Tver Region this evening was initiated. According to the passenger list, first and last name of Yevgeny Prigozhin was included in this list."

On 23 August, Sergei Markov, a popular blogger and former advisor to the Kremlin, said: "We should be killing our enemies, not our own. All our enemies are celebrating... The death of Prigozhin is Ukraine's biggest achievement this year."

On 23 August, The Russian Ministry of Emergency Services wrote on its Telegram account: "In the Tver region, near the village of Kuzhenkino, a private Embraer Legacy aircraft crashed while flying from Moscow to St. Petersburg. There were 10 people on board, including 3 crew members."

On 23 August, Adrienne Watson, US National Security Council spokesperson, while briefing Joe Biden, US President, said: “We have seen the reports. If confirmed, Prigozhin’s death should come as no surprise. The disastrous war in Ukraine led to a private army marching on Moscow and now-it would seem-to this.”

On 23 August, Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State, also commented: “The fact that Prigozhin made a direct challenge to Putin’s authority, the fact that he questioned publicly the very premises that Putin has advanced for the aggression against Ukraine – that’s playing out and will continue to play out.”

On 24 August, *The New York Times* reported: “Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, the leader of the Russian Wagner mercenary group that staged a short-lived mutiny against the military top brass in June, was listed on the passenger manifest of a private plane that crashed outside Moscow on Wednesday, killing all 10 people on board. The Russian authorities have not confirmed his death.”

UKRAINE

Peace talks in Saudi Arabia: Moscow's response and China's renewed interest

By Sreeja JS

On 04 and 05 August, Saudi Arabia hosted Ukraine peace talks in Jeddah, attended by delegates from 42 countries and the UN. Russia was not invited to the talks.

According to Ukraine’s government, the delegates agreed that any peace treaty to end Russia’s war against Ukraine must be rooted in respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the UN Charter.

Andriy Yermak, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, said: “We had very productive consultations on the key principles on which a just and lasting peace should be built.” Later, he mentioned that the implementation of the “peace formula is part of Ukraine’s victory strategy and the meeting in Jeddah will go down in history.”

Li Hui, China’s Special Envoy for Eurasian Affairs, said: “We have many disagreements and we have heard different positions, but it is important that our principles are shared,” underscoring China’s renewed commitment to support the peace talks.

Celso Amorim, Brazil’s Chief Presidential Adviser, said: “Any real negotiation must include all parties. Although Ukraine is the biggest victim, if we really want peace, we have to involve Moscow in this process somehow.” Previously andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico’s President, rejected the meeting calling it “pointless” unless Russia was present.

Ukraine's aim

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, first announced his ten-point peace formula at a G20 summit held in November 2022. The formula includes proposals for Russia’s complete withdrawal from Ukraine’s territory, restoration of pre-war borders, a special tribunal to prosecute Russia for its war crimes and the prevention of escalation of conflict. The meeting in Jeddah was the second in the series, with a similar meeting held earlier in Copenhagen (June 2023) where the formula could not garner the support it received now. In Jeddah, Ukraine reiterated the importance of the peace formula and the need to draft principles to end the conflict. Renewing the diplomatic offensive, Zelenskyy engaged with the delegates from the ‘Global South’ countries such as Brazil, India, China, South Africa and the oil-rich Gulf countries who largely remained neutral.

Moscow's response

Moscow’s response to the ten-point peace plan and the Jeddah meeting remains the same; no talks would be successful without acknowledging Russia’s concerns. On 31 July, Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary for Russian president Vladimir Putin, commented that Moscow would closely follow the meeting in Jeddah. He added that any attempts to promote a peaceful settlement are “worthy of a positive assessment.” On 07 August, Maria Zakharova, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, remarked that “...without Russia’s participation and without taking

into account its interest, no meeting on the Ukraine crisis has any added value." The response of Russia is lukewarm and despite its willingness to start negotiations, actual efforts are yet to be seen. Further, Vladimir Putin recently said there could be no cease-fire while Ukrainian forces are on the offensive without rejecting the idea of peace talks over Ukraine.

China's interest

China was at the centre stage of the Jeddah meeting as a probable diplomatic success story for Ukraine. Previously, China refrained from attending a similar meeting in Copenhagen. China's renewed interest follows its proposal of a 12-point peace plan in February 2023. Putin said the plan could become viable if the West and Ukraine are ready to dialogue and negotiate. This peace plan proposed by Beijing aimed to portray itself as a neutral actor and a potential mediator. It called for respect for the UN Charter, balanced European security architecture, cessation of hostilities, conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation and an end to unilateral sanctions. Despite the stark criticisms raised against it, the initiative necessarily denotes a shift in Beijing's approach from abstaining to initiating the dialogue. One of the reasons could be to project itself as a responsible global power. For Ukraine and the West, China's engagement is a win despite

its future, given the larger role it can play in the negotiating table because of its close relations with Russia.

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War in Ukraine: Daily Updates*

By Sreeja JS, Rishika Yadav and Padmashree Anandhan



Source: Alyona Popova/TASS, Dmitry Yagodkin/TASS, Kacper Pempel/Reuters, Planet Labs PBC, via Associated Press, AP Photo/Alexandru Dobre, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff / European Pressphoto Agency / The New York Times

War in Ukraine: Day 552

War on the Ground:

On 29 August, due to a precarious security situation and Russia's attacks, authorities ordered the mandatory evacuation of children and individuals with reduced mobility from five settlements in Zaporizhzhia Oblast. The decision was made in response to an appeal from the Zaporizhzhia Oblast Military Administration during a Coordination Staff meeting for population evacuation under martial law. The affected areas include Huliaipole, Stepanivka, Preobrazhenka, Yehorivka and Novopavlivka. A total of 54 children and 67 accompanying persons will be evacuated to ensure their safety.

On 29 August, local authorities in the Kupiansk district in Kharkiv Oblast ordered immediate evacuations. Roman Semenukha, the Deputy Head of Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration, noted that due to Russia's

ongoing attacks, 24 people were evacuated recently.

On 28 August, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, stated that Ukraine is committed to significantly boosting its defence industry production, spanning firearms, drones, missiles and armored vehicles. He expressed confidence in Ukraine's resources to achieve this goal, emphasising the country's determination. This follows Zelenskyy's earlier announcement of a substantial increase in drone production and Oleksandr Kamyszin's, Deputy Prime Minister, report of doubled defence industry production capacity within a month.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 29 August, Russia's Defence Ministry reported continued progress in the special military operation. In the Donetsk direction, Russian forces repelled AFU attacks,

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

eliminating over 340 militants and destroying vehicles and equipment. Similar progress was noted in the Zaporizhzhia, Kupyansk and Krasny Liman directions, with AFU losses and military hardware destruction. The Vostok Group destroyed roughly 100 AFU personnel, vehicles and artillery in the South Donetsk Direction.

On 29 August, according to the TASS, Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of Wagner Group, was laid to rest at the Porokhovskoye cemetery in St. Petersburg. The private ceremony was attended by his family and friends, with Prigozhin's press service confirming the event and allowing well-wishers to visit the cemetery to pay their respects.

On 29 August, according to the TASS, Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary for Russian president Vladimir Putin, stated that Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, would not attend Prigozhin's funeral, regardless of the arrangements. He also emphasised that the Kremlin lacked any kind of information about the funeral.

On 29 August, Russia's Defence Ministry stated that Russia's air defence systems intercepted and destroyed several of Ukraine's drones over the Tula and Belgorod regions. The drones were downed without information provided on potential damage or casualties. Ukraine's drones have targeted Moscow and Russia's areas recently in response to Kyiv's promise to escalate the conflict into Russia's territory.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 29 August, Antony J Blinken, US Secretary of State, announced a new military assistance package for Ukraine to aid in its defence efforts. The package, valued at USD 250 million, includes AIM-9M air defence missiles, artillery ammunition, anti-armour systems, small arms ammunition, ambulances and more.

On 29 August, the Vatican aimed to address the controversy arising from Pope Francis' praise of Russia's imperial history, clarifying that he did not intend to endorse current Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Matteo Bruni,

the Vatican spokesperson, stated that Francis aimed to highlight positive cultural aspects and spiritual history, not endorse imperialism. Beatitude Sviatoslav, Ukraine's Greek Catholic leader, criticised Francis' comments, interpreting them as support for nationalism causing the Ukraine conflict. The Vatican Embassy in Kyiv clarified that Francis opposes imperialism and colonialism, remaining neutral in the war while seeking peace.

On 29 August, as per the recent UK Defence Intelligence report on Ukraine, military service in Russia's Armed Forces has grown lucrative post-invasion. Putin's updates highlighted rising salaries, with junior ranks in Ukraine earning over 200,000 rubles monthly, significantly higher than Russia's average salary. This financial incentive attracts personnel, particularly from economically disadvantaged regions. Nonetheless, meeting volunteer recruitment targets remains unlikely for Russia.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 29 August, according to a report by UNICEF, widespread learning loss was evident among Ukraine's children due to ongoing disruptions caused by war and the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to deteriorating learning outcomes in language, mathematics and reading. Regina De Dominicis, UNICEF's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, highlighted the distressing impact of attacks on schools and the challenges faced by over 6.7 million children. Around 57 per cent of teachers report declines in Ukraine's language skills, while only one-third of enrolled students experience fully in-person learning. The ongoing education reform is crucial for Ukraine's socio-economic recovery, with UNICEF working to enhance access to quality learning, support teachers and ensure lifelong learning for all vulnerable children.

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War in Ukraine: Day 551

War on the Ground:

On 28 August, according to *Ukrinform*, in the Zaporizhzhia region’s reclaimed village of Robotyne, Ukraine’s defenders were consolidating their position, focusing on stabilization, demining and preparation for further actions. Oleksandr Shtupun, the Joint Press Center’s spokesperson, highlighted recent progress southeast of Robotyne, enabling greater troop deployment and manoeuvrability. Anticipating resistance, Shtupun expects challenging fighting ahead for control of Tokmak, about 20 kilometers away.

On 28 August, despite Russia’s warning and the recent naval incidents, the Liberian-flagged cargo ship PRIMUS safely arrived in Istanbul after departing Odesa, becoming the second civilian vessel from Ukraine to sail since Russia’s exit from a UN-backed Black Sea grain export agreement.

On 28 August, according to *Ukrinform*, as confirmed by Dmytro Lunin, the head of the Poltava Regional Military Administration, a Russian attack struck an industrial facility in the Poltava region. He stated that details about casualties are being verified.

On 27 August, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine’s President, expressed his desire to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in 2024, contingent on legislative changes, funding from partners and international observers even at the front lines. Zelenskyy engaged with Lindsey Graham, US Senator, acknowledging potential US support for holding elections during wartime. He emphasised the need for legal changes and financial assistance for legitimate elections, proposing observers in trenches to ensure fairness. Zelenskyy mentioned the challenge of enabling seven million Ukrainian refugees to vote. He underscored the urgency of elections within a year, aiming to avoid a prolonged absence of elections.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 28 August, the *TASS* reported that according to Maria Zakharova, Russia’s Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Sergey Lavrov, Russia’s Foreign Minister and Hakan Fidan, Turkey’s counterpart, are scheduled to hold talks in Moscow soon. The upcoming discussions reflect ongoing diplomatic engagement between the two countries amidst the complex regional situation.

On 28 August, *Interfax* reported that Robert Shonov, a former US Consulate General employee in Vladivostok, was apprehended by Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB). The arrest was for allegedly gathering information on mobilization, military operations and protests in Russia, based on instructions from American embassy diplomats. The FSB revealed that Shonov, charged under Article 275.1, cooperated confidentially with US embassy political department members Jeffrey Cillin and David Bernstein to collect sensitive data. Interrogations of the implicated American diplomats are planned, with summonses sent to the US Embassy in Moscow.

On 28 August, according to the TASS, according to Sergey Sobyenin, Mayor of Moscow, Russia's Air Defence troops successfully intercepted and destroyed an approaching unmanned aerial vehicle near Moscow. The incident occurred in the Lyubertsy area of the Moscow Region, resulting in no casualties or damage.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 28 August, according to *Anadolu Ajansi*, Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's President, is set to visit Russia's Sochi soon, aiming to address the global food crisis. Turkey's officials are working to revive the Black Sea grain deal, which was suspended by Russia in July. Moscow cites western obligations' failure in its grain exports. However, Ankara seeks negotiations to end the Russia-Ukraine war and restore the grain deal paused due to the conflict.

On 28 August, government officials from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia urged Belarus to expel the Wagner mercenary group, citing territorial integrity concerns amid Russia's conflict in Ukraine. The NATO members, except Estonia, share borders with Belarus. If a critical incident occurs, they will close all border crossings with Belarus. The death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner's leader, adds uncertainty to the group's future. Western officials believe Russia might bring Wagner under more direct control while maintaining its fighting capability. Some Wagner troops in Belarus have reportedly left over low pay, raising concerns about their whereabouts.

On 28 August, according to *The Guardian*, a Swedish citizen of Russian origin was charged with gross illegal intelligence activities against Sweden and another foreign power. He is accused of transferring advanced technology with potential military use to Russia through his business activities. The suspect's actions were allegedly aimed at enhancing Russia's military capabilities. Sweden's security police are actively countering such threats and preventing foreign powers from acquiring sensitive technology. They have also intensified efforts against illegal intelligence activities from foreign powers, particularly Russia,

which seeks Swedish hi-tech products for military advancement. The suspect however denies the allegations.

On 28 August, the UK's Ministry of Defence stated that Russia is highly likely to have cancelled Exercise ZAPAD 23, a planned joint strategic exercise (JSE) scheduled for September 2023. In recent years, Russia has prioritized western Russia for these exercises due to perceived NATO threats. However, the limited training value and domestic criticism following an underwhelming performance in Ukraine likely contributed to this cancellation decision. Russia's military may lack sufficient troops and equipment for the exercise and wartime sensitivities could be a factor as well.

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War in Ukraine: Day 548

War on the Ground:

On 27 August, the second ship previously blocked in Ukraine due to Russia's aggression successfully entered Romania's territorial waters. On August 26, the bulk carrier PRIMUS, flagged under Liberia, left Odesa Port, marking the second such departure post- grain deal termination. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, confirmed this while expressing gratitude to those involved in ensuring freedom of navigation. The vessel, laden with steel for African clients, had been stranded in Ukraine since February 2022.

On 27 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Oleksandr Shtupun, Ukraine's Defence Forces spokesperson of Tavria's direction, said that Ukraine's defence forces are advancing. The advancement is towards Novoprokopivka, in the Zaporizhzhia sector. Despite tough conditions, advancements occurred in the Urozhayne, Robotyne, Melitopol and Berdiansk sectors. Russia's pressure on the Avdiyivka and Maryinka fronts was unsuccessful, with 17 captives taken.

On 27 August, Serhiy Popko, Chief of Kyiv City Military Administration, confirmed that Ukraine's air defence forces effectively neutralized Russia's targets advancing towards Kyiv. Russia's Tu-95 strategic bombers launched Kh-101/555/55 missiles from the Caspian. No casualties or damage in Kyiv were reported. Specifics about downed targets will be shared by the Air Force after verification.

On 26 August, according to *Ukrinform*, a tragic incident occurred on 25 August, as two L-39 combat training aircraft collided mid-air in the Zhytomyr region, resulting in the loss of three pilots' lives. Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office initiated a criminal proceeding for a flight rule violation. The Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigations is conducting the pre-trial investigation, while the Air Force of Ukraine confirmed the crash and pilot casualties. Notably, a prominent pilot from the 40th Tactical Aviation Brigade, known as JUICE,

was among the victims.

On 26 August, according to *Ukrinform*, two innocent civilians lost their lives due to Russia's attack on the Kupiansk district in the Kharkiv region. This incident occurred as Russia's projectiles struck a cafe with people present, resulting in two deaths and one injury. Oleh Syniehubov, Kharkiv Regional Military Administration Head, reported the incident on Telegram.

On 26 August, according to *Ukrainska Pravda*, Oleksii Makeiev, Ukraine's Ambassador to Germany, attributed the slower pace of the current Ukraine's defence counteroffensive to delays in western weapons supply. Makeiev emphasized that Russia had utilized the time to fortify positions. He highlighted prolonged efforts in training and equipping Ukraine's assault brigades with western weaponry. Makeiev engaged in substantial negotiations with Germany for Taurus missiles and stressed the importance of F-16 fighter jets due to Ukraine's limited airspace control.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 27 August, Russia's defence ministry reported Russia deploying a fighter aircraft to prevent a US Air Force reconnaissance drone from entering its airspace over the Black Sea. The foreign UAV changed its course upon the approach of Russia's fighters, avoiding any violation of Russia's border.

On 27 August, Russia's Investigative Committee confirmed the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner paramilitary group, after a plane crash. Formal genetic analysis identified all ten victims, including Dmitry Utkin, suspected Wagner operations manager, on the Embraer jet. Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary for Russian president Vladimir Putin, dismissed foul play claims on Russia. An air traffic violation investigation is underway; the cause of the crash remains undisclosed.

On 26 August, the Russian Defence Ministry's report highlighted ongoing progress in their military operation. In the Kupyansk sector, Zapad Group units, aided

by aviation and artillery, improved their position, thwarting five attacks by Ukraine's detachments. Zaporizhzhia saw three of Ukraine's attempts countered by Russian forces. The Donetsk direction saw successful defence against six AFU assault groups. The Tsent Group halted attacks near Chervonaya Dibrova, while the Vostok Group held against two attacks and the Kherson direction saw losses for Ukraine. Russian forces destroyed numerous military assets, including radar stations and unmanned aerial vehicles.

On 26 August, Sergey Sobyenin, Moscow Mayor, stated that an attack drone heading towards Moscow was successfully intercepted by Russia's Air Defence Forces. The incident occurred in the Istra district. Fortunately, no casualties or damage were reported, according to preliminary information shared by Sobyenin.

On 26 August, according to *The Moscow Times*, Russia reported shooting down two approaching drones, one near Moscow and another near the Belgorod border. The surge in attacks on Russia and Crimea coincides with Kyiv's intent to expand conflict with Russia. In the Belgorod region, Ukraine's shelling injured six in Urazovo, near the border. Vyacheslav Gladkov, Governor of Belgorod Oblast, accused Ukraine of using cluster munitions, causing residential damage and serious civilian injuries.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 26 August, the UK's Ministry of Defence updated that while Ukraine's counter-offensive pressures Russian forces in Bakhmut and southern Ukraine; Russia's western Group of Forces continues small-scale attacks in the Kupiansk-Lyman area, achieving limited advances. The Ministry analysed that as Ukraine gains ground in the south, Russia may shift its strategy towards a potential operational-level offensive, focusing on the Kupiansk-Lyman axis to create a buffer zone around Luhansk Oblast.

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War in Ukraine: Day 548

War on the Ground:

On 25 August, Hakan Fidan, Turkey's Foreign Minister, met Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, in Kyiv. Talks encompassed Ukraine's peace plan, preparations for the Global Peace Summit and concerns over Russia blocking the Black Sea grain route. Earlier, on 18 August, Germany's *Bild* newspaper revealed plans of Russia, Turkey and Qatar for a fresh grain export pact after Moscow exited the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Under this arrangement, Russia would supply grain mainly to African countries, supported by Qatar, with Turkey managing logistics.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 25 August, according to the *TASS*, Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary for Russian president Vladimir Putin, rejected claims of Kremlin involvement in a plane crash involving Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner Group leader. Peskov emphasised the West's speculative angle and urged reliance on facts. He highlighted the ongoing investigation to establish more details.

On 25 August, Moscow's Federal Security Service (FSB) accused Kyiv of manipulating Russians to ignite government buildings, warning such acts could lead to 19-year jail terms. Attacks on army offices and rail sabotage have risen since Russia's troops entered Ukraine. The FSB claims Kyiv recruits Russians online for arson, targeting various groups. Several cases have led to sentences.

On 25 August, Russia's Defence Ministry announced the downing of 42 Ukrainian drones near Crimea, the largest recent aerial attack on the peninsula, following Kyiv's claim of a special forces raid. Nine drones were destroyed over Crimea, while 33 were electronically suppressed or crashed before reaching targets.

On 25 August, Russia's Defence Ministry

reported thwarting Ukraine's attempt to launch an improved S-200 missile for an attack on Russia's civilian sites. The missile was detected and destroyed over the Kaluga Region, preventing the strike.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 25 August, according to *Meduza*, Finland's police apprehended Russia's ultranationalist Yan Petrovsky, leader of the neo-Nazi paramilitary group "Task Force Rusich," on Ukraine's war crime charges. He replaced injured Alexey Milchakov, commander of Task Force Rusich and fought alongside Russia's military in Ukraine. Kyiv requested his extradition, confirmed by Russia's Embassy.

On 25 August, according to *European Pravda*, agriculture ministers from Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary will halt Ukraine's grain imports after 15 September, with possible individual restrictions. They also aim to extend subsidies for grain transit and expand import bans to other products. The EU initially allowed domestic bans until 15 September, but Poland and Hungary's intent to persist strengthens their stance against lifting restrictions. Ukraine demands EU negotiations, while Poland remains firm on maintaining the ban independently.

On 24 August, the Pentagon announced plans to commence F-16 fighter jet training for Ukraine's pilots in the US from September. Originally, a European coalition effort led by the Netherlands and Denmark was set for pilot instruction. However, due to capacity constraints, Ukraine will now send several pilots and support personnel for training in the US. The training will begin with English-language courses in Texas, followed by flight training in Arizona. While the F-16s won't immediately impact Ukrainian counteroffensive, Zelenskyy anticipates receiving around 61 F-16s from various NATO countries, bolstering the country's air capabilities.

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War in Ukraine: Day 547

War on the Ground:

On 24 August, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, congratulated Ukraine's Independence Day, acknowledging its resilient people. Celebrating the 32nd anniversary, he emphasises the fight for independence, thanking soldiers, families and supporters. He honored those lost and underscored the unity against adversity.

On 24 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Ukraine's Defence Forces, led by Kyrylo Budanov, Head of the Main Intelligence Directorate, planned to extend actions beyond strikes on occupied Crimea, including a ground operation. Budanov emphasised that these actions aim to instill hope and resilience among the population, with an assurance that Crimea's liberation is on the horizon. He stressed that diplomacy alone lacks effectiveness without tangible force.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 24 August, according to TASS, Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister, reaffirmed

Russia's willingness to rejoin the grain deal with António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, but only if all obligations to Russia are met. This was conveyed during their meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg. Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, cited unfulfilled promises by western countries in the deal.

On 24 August, according to the TASS, Putin conveyed condolences to the families of those killed in the crash of Yevgeny Prigozhin's Embraer jet. During a meeting with Denis Pushilin, the head of the Donetsk People's Republic, Putin described the incident as a tragic event. The crash took the lives of individuals associated with the private military company Wagner.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 24 August, at the White House, Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor, hosted a meeting with national security advisors from France, Germany, Italy and the UK. On Ukraine's Independence Day, they reiterated support against Russia's aggression, discussed ways to hold Russia accountable and emphasised keeping Russia's assets immobilized until reparations are paid.

On 24 August, according to the Government of Norway, Jonas Gahr Store, Norway's Prime Minister, affirmed support for Ukraine's modern air defence system development, including donating F-16 fighter jets. The donation will be coordinated with allies, reinforcing Ukraine's military capabilities and ongoing cooperation. Bjorn Arild Gram, US Defence Minister, emphasises Norway's continued substantial military aid to Ukraine. Norway will also provide anti-aircraft missiles for Ukraine's air defence system, IRIS-T, as part of ongoing support against Russian threats.

On 24 August, on Ukraine's Independence Day, the US took new actions against entities and individuals linked to human rights violations since Russia's invasion. The Department of State imposed sanctions on two entities and 11 individuals involved in transferring Ukraine's children to camps promoting Russia's indoctrination. Visa restrictions will be applied to three Russia-

installed officials for abusing Ukraine's minors in forced deportations. These actions demonstrated the US commitment to accountability for Russia's abuses in Ukraine, in line with Executive Order 14024 and the Immigration and Nationality Act. On 24 August, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Federal President, welcomed the audience and the Ukraine's Freedom Orchestra at a Berlin concert. The orchestra, composed of refugees and Ukraine's European orchestra members, sends a musical message of peace and freedom. Steinmeier praised the initiative's significance, highlighted by Olena Selenska's patronage and acknowledged musicians involved in fighting Russia's invasion. He celebrated Ukraine's Independence Day amid the ongoing conflict, expressing solidarity and admiration for Germany. Steinmeier affirmed support for Ukraine, including its path to the EU.

On 24 August, in an interview, Marcus Faber, a German Free Democratic Party lawmaker, stated that Putin's presumed death is a short-term strength but a long-term weakness. Faber emphasised Putin's ability to eliminate opponents within Russia and noted that the incident underscores that there can be no compromise with him. He highlighted that the Wagner Group's infrastructure may persist under new leadership, maintaining its operations.

On 24 August, European leaders cautioned on Prigozhin's end following a private jet crash. Annalena Baerbock, German Foreign Minister, warned against hasty conclusions and noted widespread suspicion of Kremlin involvement. Olivier Veran, French spokesperson, cited "reasonable doubts" about the crash, while the EU refrained from assumptions. Zelensky denied involvement and suggested Kremlin responsibility.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 24 August, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, the impact of Prigozhin's presumed death was significant in Africa, where Wagner's involvement in autocratic regimes advanced the Kremlin's influence and challenged the US. Since 2018, Wagner has extended to the Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya and Mali, amassing a force of

around 5,000, close to US troop levels. His death prompted inquiries and concerns about a smooth transition. Wagner expanded into mining and political consulting, boosting Prigozhin's wealth and funding Kremlin's activities. Putin assured continuity post-mortem; now, the challenge is rebranding the organisation after its founder's authority.

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War in Ukraine: Day 546

War on the Ground:

On 23 August, leaders from around the world convened virtually for the Third Crimean Platform Summit. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President delivered a passionate address reaffirming the nation's commitment to reclaim Crimea from its isolation. Representatives from 63 countries and international bodies united to collectively denounce the occupation and forge agreements aimed at ending the ongoing aggression. The core mission of the Crimean Platform emerged as a resolute call for de-occupation and fostering international collaboration. Central to this vision was ecological restoration and modernization, with the President asserting Ukraine's commitment to preserving nature, promoting tourism and establishing modern institutions to rejuvenate Crimea.

On 23 August, according to Ukraine's Defence Intelligence, explosions took place in occupied Crimea near Olenivka village on Cape Tarkhankut, destroying a Russian S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft missile system. The blast annihilated the system, loaded missiles and personnel, delivering a substantial blow to Russia's air defence capabilities due to the system's limited availability.

On 23 August, Ukraine reported that Russia's attacks had decimated 270,000 tonnes of grain, damaging export infrastructure. Oleksandr Kubrakov, Ukraine's Infrastructure Minister, revealed the systematic targeting of grain tanks and warehouses, with recent attacks diminishing port capacities.

On 23 August, an Iranian-made Shahed-type drone targeted a school in Romny, Sumy Oblast. The assault claimed four lives

On 23 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Ukraine's defence forces intercepted Russia's military aircraft over the Black Sea, near Zmiinyi Island. The aircraft attempted an attack on Ukraine's vessels; Ukraine's combat boat fired a missile, damaging Russia's plane, which had to retreat.

On 23 August, Oleh Kiper, Governor of Odesa Oblast, reported that overnight, Russia

conducted a drone attack on Odesa Oblast, damaging a Danube grain storage facility. Although no casualties occurred, a grain warehouse suffered partial burning. The Ukraine's Air Force noted that Russia deployed 20 Shahed attack drones at night, with 11 destroyed over Odesa and two over Zaporizhzhia.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 23 August, according to the *TASS*, Russia's Federal Agency for Air Transport initiated an investigation into the Embraer plane crash in Tver Region. Notably, Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner Group leader, was among the passengers. The crash occurred near Kuzhenkino, claiming all 10 lives on board the business jet flying from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

On 23 August, according to *The New York Times*, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, continued to blame western countries for the Ukraine conflict during a comprehensive video speech at the BRICS summit, aiming to rally member countries. He confirmed Russia's upcoming BRICS chairmanship and a 2024 summit in Kazan. Russia's 18-month invasion of Ukraine was portrayed as a defensive response to a hostile government and western antagonism. Despite being sought for war crimes, Putin was the only absent BRICS leader due to ICC obligations. The summit focused on expanding the bloc and countering western influence, while heightened China and US tensions and the war in Ukraine drew attention.

On 23 August, according to *The Moscow Times*, Putin removed General Sergei Surovikin from his position as head of Russia's Aerospace Forces following a failed mutiny by Prigozhin. Surovikin had been seen urging Wagner fighters to halt their march toward Moscow to overthrow military leadership. His whereabouts after the incident remain unknown and reports of his arrest have not been officially confirmed. Viktor Afzalov, Colonel General, will temporarily assume the position. Surovikin, a key intermediary between Wagner and the Defence Ministry, has been reassigned elsewhere and is reportedly on vacation. The Kremlin has not commented on the situation.

On 23 August, according to *The Moscow Times*, Vyacheslav Gladkov, Governor of Belgorod confirmed that a Ukraine's drone strike killed three people in Russia's border region of Belgorod. The attack used an explosive device launched through a drone while civilians were on the street. The victims included refugees from occupied Ukraine's areas and a resort employee. The incident marked the second drone strike on the village within 12 hours. Over the past 24 hours, 12 other towns and villages in the Belgorod region faced drone and artillery strikes. The responsibility has not been confirmed by Kyiv.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 23 August, in an interview with *Deutsche Welle*, Margus Tsakhna, Estonia's foreign minister, supported Ukraine's right to defend itself and conduct attacks in Russian territory in response to recent strikes blamed on Ukraine. Ahead of Ukraine's independence day, Tsakhna emphasised sustained support for Ukraine rather than seeking peace at any cost, citing Russia's rule-breaking behaviour since its 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea.

On 22 August, Kajsa Ollongren, Dutch Defence Minister, announced in Kyiv that the Netherlands will supply Ukraine with portable charges for remote demining. Ollongren assured continued support, including air defence equipment, crucial for defence against Russia's invasion. The statement was made during her meeting with Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's Defence Minister and her participation in the VI International Veterans Forum.

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War in Ukraine: Day 544

War on the Ground:

On 21 August, according to *Ukrainska Pravda*, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, announced Greece's participation in the aircraft coalition during talks with Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Greece's Prime Minister. Greece will aid in training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets, bolstering Ukraine's defence capabilities. Zelenskyy expressed gratitude for Greece's support in safeguarding Ukraine's freedom.

On 21 August, according to Greece's Prime Minister office, Zelenskyy arrived in Athens for an official visit. Zelenskyy emphasised joint efforts to protect freedom in Europe. This concludes his European visits after Sweden, Netherlands and Denmark. Mitsotakis met Balkan leaders, hosting a commemorative dinner attended by Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission President and Charles Michel, European Council chief. The gathering celebrated 20 years since a pivotal Thessaloniki summit. Greece's stance shifted under Mitsotakis, unequivocally condemning Moscow's invasion. Greece offered to reconstruct the Mariupol maternity hospital in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy's parliamentary appeal for Mariupol and Odesa aid gained Greek support, except from the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and National Party-Greek.

On 21 August, in an interview with *BBC*, Zelenskyy assessed the June offensive, emphasising the importance of steady progress. He urged NATO to clarify Ukraine's membership prospects, tying its post-war direction to this. Insisting on no talks until Russian troop withdrawal, Zelenskyy downplayed the nuclear threat from Putin. Despite possible Vilnius summit absence, he saw the NATO invitation as a foundation for Ukraine's future. Zelenskyy rejected talks until full territorial restoration, rejecting frozen conflict prospects and calling them a trap. Dismissing Putin's nuclear threat, he surmised the Russian leader's concern for personal safety.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 21 August, according to the *TASS*, around 50 flights experienced delays at Moscow airports due to temporary flight restrictions due to two drone attacks by Ukraine. Sheremetyevo had 14 delays, Domodedovo 13, Vnukovo 20 and Zhukovsky 3. Amid the delays, 50 planes were diverted to other airports. The Russian Defence Ministry reported repelling two drone attacks in the Moscow region, one suppressed by electronic warfare and another shot down.

On 21 August, according to *Zawya*, Russia's envoy to Denmark criticised the country's decision to supply Ukraine with American F-16 jets as an "escalation" of the conflict. The Russian ambassador expressed concern that the move heightened the conflict and pushed Ukraine into a continued military confrontation. Moscow has previously labelled F-16s a potential "nuclear" threat.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 21 August, according to *Reuters*, the US State Department greenlit a potential USD 12 billion deal for Poland to acquire 96 AH-64E Apache helicopters, along with related equipment like 1,844 Hellfire missiles and 508 Stinger missiles. The request comes amid Poland's efforts to bolster its military

post-Russia's Ukraine invasion. While approved, the notification to Congress does not confirm the contract signing. Boeing and Lockheed Martin are the main contractors for the deal.

On 21 August, according to the UK's Ministry of Defence, Russia formed the 18th Combined Arms Army (18 CAA) to bolster military efforts in southern Ukraine. This likely involves reorganising units in Kherson Oblast, including the 22nd Army Corps stationed in Crimea. Primarily composed of mobilized personnel, the 18 CAA is expected to focus on defensive operations, possibly freeing experienced units for critical fronts. Notably, airborne forces have been moved from Kherson to the contested Orikhiv sector.

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War in Ukraine: Days 542 & 543

War on the Ground:

On 20 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, announced on Telegram that Ukraine and the Netherlands reached a consensus on the transfer of F-16 jets. The government of Denmark would donate F-16 jets together with the Netherlands. Earlier, it was agreed that F-16 jets would be transferred to Ukraine subject to certain conditions, in close cooperation with the US and other

partners. Conditions include (but are not limited to) successfully selected, tested and trained F-16 personnel in Ukraine, authorizations, infrastructure and logistics. At present, the Netherlands has 42 F-16 jets for training Ukraine's personnel in Denmark and Romania.

On 19 and 20 August, Zelenskyy visited Sweden for the first time since Russia's invasion. He met Ulf Kristersson, Sweden's Prime Minister and discussed the preparation of the 13th military aid package to Ukraine, which would include the joint production of Swedish CV90 light tanks.

On 20 August, *Ukrinform* reported that the number of civilians injured due to Russia's missile attack in Chernihiv had increased to 156. According to Oleksiy Kuleba, Deputy Head of the President's Office, 66 residential buildings, 10 administrative buildings and 67 vehicles have been damaged and the rescue operation has been completed.

On 19 August, Russia launched a missile attack on Chernihiv that killed seven people. Chernihiv, situated around 90 miles north of Kyiv towards Belarus was largely spared from major attacks since the beginning of the invasion. Further, the report said that the attack followed Vladimir Putin, Russia's President's visit to Rostov-on-Don at the headquarters of the special military operation group after Kyiv claimed some success last week on the battlefield and a day after the US approved the transfer of F-16 jets from Denmark and the Netherlands.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 20 August, *RT* reported that Russia's air defences shot down around three drones over the southwestern Belgorod Region. According to the Defence Ministry, the drones were downed in an unpopulated area avoiding casualties and damage to the ground. On the same day, another drone headed towards Moscow was downed. According to the Ministry, the drone was detected over the Stupino district and was suppressed through an electronic warfare system, causing no casualties or damage. According to *RT*, the border regions of Russia such as Kursk, Bryansk and Belgorod

have been reportedly attacked via drones and artillery shelling in the past couple of months while drone attacks have increased in Moscow.

On 19 August, according to Russia's Defence Ministry, a military air base in western Russia was attacked via an explosives-laden drone. The attack was thwarted but one aircraft was damaged.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 20 August, the *Financial Times* reported that US officials are becoming highly critical of the success chances of Ukrainian counteroffensive, deepening the relations between Kyiv and Washington at a critical juncture since the beginning of the invasion. According to the report, at this rate, Ukraine would struggle to recapture its territory before its forces ran out of combat power or muddy ground hinders their manoeuvres. The apprehensions come just weeks before the expiration of a USD 43 billion package of US funding to Kyiv, requiring the Biden administration to seek approval from Congress before continuing further assistance.

On 20 August, the UK Ministry of Defence in its daily intelligence update wrote that Russia's Aerospace Forces (VKS) are likely under intense pressure to step up air defences in western Russia as attacks have intensified in the past week. According to the ministry, Ukraine's attacks on Russia's territory are strategically important because Putin invaded Ukraine on the assumption that the war would have only a little direct effect on Russians.

On 19 August, the UK Ministry of Defence noted in its daily intelligence update that, over the last week the front line has remained unchanged. Ukrainian forces have advanced in the South along the Mokri Yaly River, securing the village of Urozhaine. In the north, Russian forces continued attacks in Kupiansk making no significant gains. According to the ministry, both sides confront a similar challenge: to defeat the well-entrenched forces while having limited uncommitted forces to open new assaults.

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War in Ukraine: Day 541

War on the Ground:

On 18 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Oleksii Makeiev, Ukraine's Ambassador to Germany, expressed hope for a swift decision on the transfer of German Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine. Speaking after a meeting in Dresden, Makeiev emphasised the need for defensive weapons amid the ongoing conflict, stressing their importance for Ukraine's victory, which he stated is in Germany and Europe's interests. Michael Kretschmer, Ukraine's Minister President of Saxony, reiterated strong solidarity with Ukraine and labelled the war a "terrible crime."

On 18 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Germany dispatched military aid to Ukraine, as detailed on the official German government website. The assistance encompasses vital equipment such as the Patriot air defence system, along with 16 Zetros trucks (part of a larger consignment of 76) and two border protection vehicles (totalling 122 sent). Notably, Germany

verifies the delivery once the weaponry is within Ukraine's borders and en route to deployment. The aid package also includes Leopard 2A6 tanks, Marder IFVs and specialized mine-clearing tanks, demonstrating Germany's commitment to bolstering Ukraine's defence capabilities.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 18 August, according to *Barron's*, Russia imposed sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor, who sought the arrest of Vladimir Putin, Russia's President and UK ministers critical of Russia's Ukraine offensive. Russia accused London of steadfast military support for Kyiv and an "anti-Russian policy" over 18 months of conflict. Karim Khan, the ICC's British prosecutor, issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March, alleging unlawful deportation of children from Ukraine. Although Russia, not an ICC member, calls the warrant against Putin "void," the ICC remains resolute. Moscow's sanctions target 54 Britons, including ministers, journalists and BBC, Guardian and Daily Telegraph reporters.

On 18 August, according to the Russia's defence ministry, two Russian warships thwarted a Ukraine attack using an unmanned boat near Crimea. The patrol vessels, Pytlivy and Vasili Bykov engaged and eliminated Ukraine's boat through gunfire.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 18 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Ukraine and Romania have inked a pact to enhance Kyiv's grain exports through Romania, following Russia's termination of a crucial wartime shipping accord. Denys Shmyhal, Ukraine's Prime Minister and Marcel Ciolacu, Romania's Prime Minister, met in Bucharest, discussing ways to bolster Ukraine's grain exports and improve transportation infrastructure, including at borders. Ukraine relies heavily on farming, with its grain vital for global wheat, barley and sunflower oil supplies. Ciolacu aims for Romania to handle over 60 per cent of Ukraine's grain exports.

On 18 August, according to *Reuters*, the British court denied billionaire Eugene Shvidler's bid to overturn UK sanctions linked to his association with Roman Abramovich, a Russian businessman. The oil tycoon, worth USD 1.6 billion, was sanctioned after Russia's Ukraine invasion; his jets were seized. Shvidler claimed unfair targeting, emphasising his distance from Russia. UK Foreign Office praised the judgment and sanctions' strength. Shvidler plans to appeal, asserting the absence of UK government guidance. Over 1,600 individuals, including Abramovich, were UK-sanctioned following the invasion, freezing USD 23 billion. Shvidler's legal team argued he gained no financial benefits from Abramovich and sanctions impacted his assets and reputation.

On 18 August, according to *Reuters*, the US approved to transfer F-16 fighter jets from Denmark and the Netherlands to Ukraine for defense against Russian forces once pilot training concludes, according to a US official. The move follows Ukraine's active pursuit of F-16s to counter Russia's air superiority. Denmark and the Netherlands were assured of expedited transfer approval after pilot training. A coalition of 11 nations will train Ukraine's pilots in Denmark. Despite doubts about the F-16s' immediate impact, NATO allies Denmark and the Netherlands have led training initiatives to strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities against ongoing Russian aggression.

On 18 August, according to *Euronews*, amid concerns over Russian mercenary group Wagner, Lithuania closed two border crossings with Belarus, citing security and smuggling concerns. The closures are driven by rising tensions and allegations of Belarusian provocations. The move comes as Lithuania seeks to limit cross-border journeys due to fears of potential espionage recruitment and amid strained relations due to the disputed 2020 Belarusian election and the Ukraine conflict. Belarus criticised Lithuania's decision, deeming it "far-fetched."

On 18 August, according to the latest intelligence update by the UK's Ministry of Defence, Sergey Kiriyenko,

Russia's Presidential Administration's First Deputy Head, visited Donetsk, occupied Ukraine. He assessed school integration into Russia's education. Zaporizhzhia Oblast received Russia's instructions for new educational standards. Russia's journalists join the occupied regions' media and a pro-Kremlin history textbook praising Russia's military operation will be used in occupied areas and Russia from 01 September.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 18 August, according to the *Associated Press*, leaders of the US, Japan and South Korea convened at Camp David to strengthen security and economic ties, addressing regional challenges posed by China and North Korea. The "Camp David Principles" were established, including a communications hotline for threat response. Although the summit emphasised broader security concerns, leaders criticised China's "dangerous and aggressive" actions in the South China Sea, opposing unilateral changes to the Indo-Pacific's status quo. The three nations pledged to consult and share information in times of Pacific security crises. Despite historical differences, Japan and South Korea are seeking rapprochement amid shared security challenges from North Korea and China.

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War on the Ground:

On 17 August, according to *The Kyiv Independent*, Ukraine's Azov Brigade, part of the National Guard, resumed military operations at the front, engaging in combat tasks near the Serebrianskyi forest. The brigade is holding captured lines and causing significant losses to Russian forces. Recently, the brigade's artillery destroyed a Russian mortar and a vehicle in Luhansk Oblast. Azov Brigade gained prominence for defending Mariupol's Azovstal steel plant.

On 17 August, according to *Africa News*, Dmytro Kouleba, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, aimed for a "long-term" effort to enhance relations with Africa, seeking to diminish Moscow's influence on the continent. Kouleba envisions a "Ukrainian-African renaissance" and partnership based on mutual cooperation. He asserts that while many African nations remain neutral in the conflict, a shift away from Russia is evident in countries like Liberia, Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique. Kouleba accuses Russia of using "coercion, corruption and fear" to maintain control in Africa and pledges to liberate Africa from Russian dominance through diplomacy and cooperation.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 17 August, according to the *TASS*, Lieutenant-General Igor Konashenkov, Russia's Defence Ministry Spokesman, said that the Russian forces launched a missile strike, destroying a Ukrainian military train with ammunition in the Dnepropetrovsk Region. In the Kupyansk area, Russian forces eliminated around 125 Ukrainian troops and improved their forward position. They also

attacked Ukrainian units in Krasny Liman, destroying about 55 Ukrainian soldiers. Successful offensive operations were conducted in the Donetsk area, destroying over 310 Ukrainian troops. Air defence forces downed 18 Ukrainian military drones, while Russian forces wiped out two Ukrainian UAV control posts and an ammo depot in Donetsk People's Republic.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 17 August, the Riksdag, Sweden's Parliament, approved donating military equipment worth up to SEK 3.25 billion to Ukraine. The government can provide spare parts, emergency supplies, ammunition, mine-clearance equipment and transport vehicles. Additionally, the government can sell a limited number of Rb 99 (AMRAAM) air-to-air missiles to the US, as part of a program to strengthen Ukrainian air defences. The move will increase the defence budget by MSEK 545 in 2023, allowing the Government to order equipment worth SEK 2.8 billion to replenish the donated items. The decision was initiated by the Committee on Finance, not a government bill or private motion.

On 17 August, according to *The Press United*, Nicolas Sarkozy, former France's President, emphasised the need for diplomacy to resolve the Ukraine conflict, urging a neutral Ukraine to act as a bridge between Europe and Russia. He stated that Russia's invasion was a mistake, but stressed that diplomacy is the way forward. He suggested recognizing Crimea as Russian territory and proposed referendums under international supervision for disputed areas. Sarkozy criticised unrealistic promises of EU and NATO membership for Ukraine, advocating for its neutrality instead. He asserted that Europe and Russia need each other and highlighted the importance of strong security assurances for Ukraine's neutrality.

On 17 August, according to *Reuters*, Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General, affirmed Ukraine's autonomy in determining negotiation timing after the Russian invasion. This echoes NATO's unchanged stance following recent comments from a senior member. Stoltenberg stressed that

Ukraine alone can gauge when conditions are ripe for talks and decide on acceptable solutions at the negotiating table. NATO's recent summit confirmed an invitation to Ukraine when conditions align and members agree, underscoring Ukraine's independent path apart from Russia.

On 17 August, according to *Barron's*, General Daniel Zmeko, Slovakia's army chief, made a rare official visit to the southern Ukrainian front line, as confirmed by Ukrainian military sources. General Zmeko met with the Tavria operational-strategic group near Zaporizhzhia. He expressed gratitude for Slovakia's "material and technical assistance."

On 17 August, according to the *Associated Press*, amid Russia's conflict with Ukraine, the scheduled performance of Anna Netrebko, a Russian opera singer, in Prague was canceled due to political pressures. Prague's government and coalition parties opposed the concert as insensitive. The cancellation was agreed upon by Prague's Municipal House and the organising agency, Nachtigall Artists Management. Netrebko, who previously faced controversy for her support for Russia's President Vladimir Putin, won't seek compensation.

On 17 August, according to *The Daily Sabah*, a civilian cargo ship, defying Russia's blockade, arrived in Turkey after leaving Ukraine. The Joseph Schulte, a Hong Kong-flagged vessel, challenged Russia's bid to seal Ukraine's Black Sea access. It utilized a new humanitarian corridor established by Kyiv after Russia paused a grain agreement brokered by Turkey and the UN. This move comes after Russia fired warning shots at a Turkish-crewed cargo ship bound for Ukraine.

On 17 August, according to *The Kyiv Independent*, Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus's President, stated that Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, isn't trying to drag Belarus into the Ukrainian war. Lukashenko, an ally of Putin, emphasised that Belarus won't participate unless Ukrainian forces cross their border. He noted Russia's alleged goals in its "special military operation" in Ukraine were fulfilled. Lukashenko urged negotiations without preconditions,

including discussing Crimea and contested Ukrainian territories. He warned of a forceful response to external aggression and indicated the potential use of nuclear weapons.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 17 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Li Shangfu, the Chinese Defence Minister, visited Belarus to enhance military cooperation, meeting with Lukashenko. While they agreed on increased military drills, the specifics of the collaboration were not detailed. Lukashenko emphasised that their cooperation was not directed against other nations, relying on China and Russia for military aid. Shangfu's visit follows his meeting with Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defence Minister in Moscow.

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War on the Ground:

On 15 August, Denys Shmyhal, Ukraine's Prime Minister, reported on Telegram that another Russian missile attack hit multiple Ukrainian cities, damaging civilian structures in eight regions. The attacks caused casualties and injuries, affecting residential buildings, schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. Shmyhal praised the Air Defence Forces for intercepting most missiles during the night, minimizing the impact. Over 200 emergency service personnel are engaged in firefighting and rescue operations. The missile strikes occurred after an air alert due to missile launches from the Caspian Sea region.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 15 August, according to the TASS, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President addressed the 11th Moscow Conference on International Security, attributing global security challenges to western geopolitical recklessness and neocolonialism. Putin highlighted the simmering tensions worldwide and emphasised that these issues primarily arise from the West's selfish actions and geopolitical decisions. He cited examples such as the Sahara-Sahel region's instability due to the fallout from the intervention in Libya. Putin advocated for international cooperation to counteract these challenges, strengthen confidence between nations and create development opportunities.

On 15 August, according to Russia's defence ministry, Russian forces conducted airstrikes on multiple military-industrial facilities in Ukraine, causing significant damage. Ukraine reported that the country's air force successfully destroyed 16 of the 28 cruise missiles launched by Russia. One missile hit a Swedish ball-bearing factory in Lutsk, killing three employees. The strikes also damaged a sports complex in Dnipro and a children's playground in Lviv. On the frontlines, Russia claimed to have repelled multiple attacks. Additionally, Russia intercepted French SCALP missiles delivered to Ukraine.

On 15 August, according to *The Moscow*

Times, Alexander Bogomaz, Bryansk regional governor, Russian military and security forces successfully intercepted a Ukrainian sabotage group attempting to infiltrate the Bryansk region in western Russia. The operation involved Russia's armed forces, Federal Security Service (FSB) border agents and National Guard special units. The targeted area was Kurkovich village, located across the border from Ukraine's Chernihiv region.

On 15 August, according to *The Moscow Times*, Russia's Central Bank raised interest rates from 8.5 per cent to 12 per cent due to the ruble's decline below 100 against the US dollar. The decision aims to curb price stability risks. The ruble briefly strengthened before falling back below 98 after the rate hike announcement. This emergency meeting marked the first since February 2022, when rates were raised to 20 per cent during the Ukraine conflict.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 15 August, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, British police arrested five individuals, including three Bulgarians, suspected of working for Russian intelligence while living undercover in the UK. Charges include violating the Official Secrets Act and possession of false identity documents. They were released on bail and are due to appear in court in September. The UK has also passed new legislation criminalizing undeclared covert agents for foreign powers and actions undermining democracy.

On 15 August, according to *Reuters*, Sweden plans to provide Ukraine with a new military support package worth USD 313.5 million, including ammunition and spare parts for existing weapon systems. The Defence Minister stated that this aid is part of Sweden's long-term commitment to Ukraine in what is anticipated to be a prolonged conflict. This marks Sweden's 13th military aid package to Ukraine, bringing the total value of their assistance to around USD two billion.

On 15 August, according to *Reuters*, Poland showcased its largest military parade since

the Cold War in Warsaw, with a display of military strength aimed at sending a message to Moscow and bolstering ruling party Law and Justice (PiS) credentials ahead of upcoming elections. With 2,000 soldiers from Poland and NATO countries, 200 military items and 92 aircraft participating, the parade marked the 103rd anniversary of Poland's victory over the Soviet Union. PiS, in power since 2015, intends to double the army's size and allocate four per cent of GDP to defence.

On 15 August, according to *The Defence Post*, Germany was reportedly considering modifying its long-range Taurus missiles before potential deployment to Ukraine. Kyiv seeks these air-launched cruise missiles to counter Russian aggression. Concerns over using the weapon to strike deep into Russia have made Germany hesitant. Discussions with the missile manufacturer are underway to integrate programming restrictions.

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War in Ukraine: Days 535 & 536

War on the Ground:

On 12 August, according to *Ukrinform*, the Russian army conducted 67 attacks on the Zaporizhzhia region. Yuriy Malashko, Head of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Administration, reported that these strikes targeted 28 settlements. Notably, 54 artillery attacks were directed at various locations including Huliaypole, Novodarivka and Levadne. The Russian military also employed MLRS in Temyrivka and Lobkove three times and conducted airstrikes on Orikhiv, Omelnyk and Mala Tokmachka. Komyshuvakha experienced four missile strikes, while UAVs were deployed over Zaporizhzhia, Huliaypilske and Chervone. Despite extensive destruction of property and infrastructure, no casualties were reported.

On 12 August, Serhiy Cherevaty, spokesperson for Ukraine's eastern group of Armed Forces, revealed Russian attempts to escalate and gain control in the Kupyansk direction. Ukrainian forces successfully repelled these assaults, resulting in 69 Russian casualties and 97 wounded. They also destroyed two T-72 tanks, three armored vehicles, a D-30 howitzer, a mortar, two Russian drones and a command post.

On 13 August, according to *Reuters*, Ukrainian border guards erected a new sign on Snake Island, commemorating the island's resistance during Russia's invasion. The event, when a Ukrainian guard famously responded to Russian orders to surrender with a defiant phrase, symbolized Ukraine's early resistance. The island's strategic importance lies in its oversight of sea lanes to Odesa, a key Black Sea port.

On 13 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Russian shelling in the Kherson region led to the deaths of six people in two settlements. Stanislav village was targeted with MLRS, resulting in two deaths, an injury and damage to five residential buildings. In Shyroka Balka, three adults, including a woman and two men, along with a 12-year-old child were killed. Ihor Klymenko,

Ukraine's Minister of Internal Affairs, emphasised the need to forcefully stop Russians who continue to harm civilians.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 12 August, according to the *TASS*, a Su-30 fighter jet crashed during a training flight in Russia's Kaliningrad region, resulting in the crew's fatalities. The incident occurred in an uninhabited area without ammunition onboard. The crash is attributed to a technical malfunction, according to the western military district.

On 12 August, according to *The Moscow Times*, Russian air defence forces intercepted and destroyed two Ukrainian missiles over the Kerch Strait, ensuring the safety of the Crimean bridge connecting annexed Crimea to mainland Russia. The missiles were aimed at the bridge, but no damage occurred. The Ukrainian drones near Crimea were also shot down, 14 through air defence systems and six through electronic warfare.

On 13 August, according to the *TASS*, Russia's naval ship Vasily Bykov forcibly halted the Palau-flagged cargo ship Sukru Okan en route to Ukraine's Izmail port for inspection. The Sukru Okan's captain ignored inspection demands, prompting Vasily Bykov to fire warning shots to stop the vessel. A Russian helicopter with servicemen inspected the cargo ship, which eventually halted for inspection. Once the inspection concluded, the Sukru Okan continued its course to Izmail, while Russian fleet patrols persisted in the area, according to the Russian Defence Ministry's statement.

On 13 August, the Russian Defence Ministry provided an update on its ongoing special military operation. In the Kupyansk direction, Russian forces repelled six unsuccessful attacks by Ukrainian brigades, causing losses of up to 60 Ukrainian servicemen, along with vehicles and equipment. In Donetsk's direction, coordinated actions by Russian units led to the repelling of six attacks, resulting in approximately 300 Ukrainian casualties and the destruction of vehicles. Similar successes were reported in Krasny Liman, South Donetsk and Zaporozhye directions,

inflicting heavy losses on Ukrainian forces. Overall, over 458 aircraft, 246 helicopters, 5,708 UAVs and various military equipment have been neutralized in the operation.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 12 August, according to *The Brunswick News*, police in Poland confiscated stickers featuring the logo of the Russian mercenary force Wagner, which appeared in Kraków. The stickers carry the message "We are here. Join us," along with a QR code linking to Wagner's recruitment website. The incident has raised concerns due to Wagner's activities in neighboring Belarus. Polish law prohibits recruiting for foreign armies and mercenary groups, punishable by up to five years in prison. Authorities are investigating the matter to determine whether it's a serious threat or a prank.

On 13 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, despite sufficient gas reserves, the German Network Agency cautioned about lingering energy supply risks in the upcoming winter due to the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Klaus Müller, President of the German Network Agency, emphasised the need for continued savings and warned of potential scenarios, including an extremely cold winter and potential disruptions in gas supply to southeastern Europe. While storage rates are higher than in previous summers, concerns remain about possible gas interruptions and pipeline attacks.

On 13 August, according to *Bild am Sonntag*, German company Rheinmetall plans to supply Ukraine with a Luna New Generation drone system by the year's end, including drones, a ground control station, a launch catapult and military trucks. The versatile drone system could serve as a reconnaissance tool, establish an LTE network and potentially intercept or disrupt communications.

On 13 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's Foreign Minister stressed the significance of German Taurus cruise missiles for Ukraine, stating they are crucial to saving lives and expediting the conflict's resolution. He explained that the extended missile range equates to a shorter

war duration. Kuleba noted the missiles' potential to target Russian occupying forces, disrupt logistics and incapacitate command centers. While the German government is contemplating supplying Taurus missiles, no final decision has been made yet.

On 13 August, the UK's Ministry of Defence gave the latest defence intelligence update on the situation in Ukraine. It reported that the Wagner Group appears to be downsizing and reconfiguring due to financial constraints, possibly triggered by the Russian state's actions against its owner Yevgeny Prigozhin's business interests. If Russia discontinues funding, Belarus might become the next potential financier, despite the strain on its limited resources. This downsizing could have significant implications for the group's operations.

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War in Ukraine: Day 534

War on the Ground:

On 11 August, Ukraine's spokesperson Andriy Yermak announced the beginning of consultations with the UK on security guarantees. After the NATO summit in July, the G7 countries promised to help Ukraine build its military equipment on land, sea and air through consultations. The decision was made to help Ukraine meet pre-conditions to join NATO.

On 11 August, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy removed the heads of military recruitment due to corruption. He said: "This system should be run by people who know exactly what war is and why cynicism and bribery during war is treason." Since January, Ukraine has been centered around corruption scandals of procuring military catering and generators and since then Zelenskyy has taken actions such as an exclusive commission and corruption prevention body to combat corruption.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 11 August, Russia's defence ministry claimed to have hit a "foreign mercenary" base in Zaporizhzhia. In a statement: "In the area of the city of Zaporizhzhia, the point of temporary deployment of foreign mercenaries was hit." It also claimed of jamming a drone that was targeted towards Moscow. In response to the increased drone attacks, Russia suspended operations in Moscow's Vnukovo airport under safety concerns.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 11 August, the US State Department imposed sanctions on four key members of "Russia's financial elite." According to the department, all the sanctioned individuals were linked to Alfa Group Consortium, one of the largest financial and investment

corporations and will be held accountable for making profits from the war in Ukraine. Upon the sanctions, the assets held by them in the US will be blocked and those US businesses and people dealing with them will be restricted from transacting.

On 11 August, the US, the UK, France, Albania, along with Japan and Malta issued a joint statement demanding the return of Georgia's territory to Tbilisi. When Georgia attempted to capture two regions in 2008 against Russia, it recognized the areas and set its military bases. The statement stressed Russia's to return the areas and condemned its aggression in Ukraine. In response, Russia's UN ambassador called it a "Russophobic West."

On 11 August, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz responded to Ukraine's request to Germany for Taurus Cruise Missiles. He said that there was no update and Germany will continue to focus on discussing with international partners ahead of the delivery of such cruise missiles. The EU delivered 223,000 shells to Ukraine in line with the pledge to boost its shortage of artillery shells. According to the EU's spokesperson: "...delivered around 223,800 artillery ammunition -- long-range self-propelled, precision-guided ammunitions as well as mortar ammunitions -- and 2,300 missiles of all types."

On 11 August, an Austria-based charity organisation revealed that close to 385 children from Ukraine who were deported to Russia were returned. According to Ukraine, more than 19,000 have been deported since the invasion and had been placed in "institutions and foster homes." Of the 385, 84 were brought back by the charity organisation.

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War in Ukraine: Day 533

War on the Ground:

On 10 August, according to *The Kyiv Independent*, Russian attacks on Zaporizhzhia killed four and injured 20. The strikes targeted a church, shops and high-rise buildings, hitting civilian infrastructure. The governor stated no military targets were involved in the attacks.

On 10 August, according to *Ukrinform*, Ukraine announced temporary merchant vessel routes for Black Sea ports. These routes are primarily for civilian vessels stranded in Ukrainian ports since Russia's invasion. Ships confirming readiness to navigate under current conditions will be allowed.

On 10 August, according to *Ukrinform*, a massive drone attack hit Ukraine's oil depot. No casualties were reported and radiation and chemical levels in the region remain within normal limits, eliminating the need for mandatory evacuations.

On 10 August, the occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP) suffered a power outage from its main 750-kilovolt external line. Forced to switch to a backup 330-kilovolt line, further disconnection could lead to a blackout, posing a nuclear and radiation safety threat to the plant. The plant's unit four is already in a precarious

"hot shutdown" state due to the occupiers' actions, according to Energoatom (State Enterprise National Nuclear Energy Generating company).

On 10 August, according to *Alarabiya News*, Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister, lauded Saudi Arabia-hosted talks and growing global interest in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's, Ukraine's President, 10-point peace plan, seen as a breakthrough. Over 40 nations attended, including major economies but not Russia, aiming to support Ukraine's vision for peace amid its conflict with Russia.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 10 August, according to *Barrons*, Russia declared the Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) 'undesirable.' Russia's prosecutor has labelled the CIT, known for investigating Moscow-related conflicts, as "undesirable," a move often used to suppress dissent. This action criminalizes CIT's work, endangering its staff and banning the sharing of its content online. The group, which monitors Russia's Ukraine offensive, is accused of engaging in anti-Russia propaganda campaigns. This decision aligns with Russia's efforts to curb independent media, as it has previously targeted outlets like Meduza, Dozhd and Bellingcat.

On 10 August, according to the *TASS*, Russian air defence brought down two drones targeting Moscow. According to Sergey Sobyenin, Moscow Mayor, Russian Air Defence Forces intercepted and destroyed two military strike drones aimed at Moscow. The drones were shot down in the Kaluga Region and near the Central Ring Road federal highway.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 10 August, according to *The Washington Post*, Joe Biden, US President, requested USD 20.6 billion in additional funding for Ukraine. Biden has urged Congress to approve USD 20.6 billion in extra funding for Ukraine as its military faces challenges in its counteroffensive against Russia. The funding request includes USD 13 billion for new military aid and USD 8.5 billion for

economic, humanitarian and security assistance, with additional forms of support. While the western allies have provided strong support, the ongoing counteroffensive's progress has been slow and questions arise about the conflict's state. The White House's request for aid aligns with Ukraine's 10-point peace plan. The House Freedom Caucus opposes more funding, potentially leading to debates over government spending in September. Biden's overall funding request totals around USD 40 billion.

On 10 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Poland plans to station 10,000 troops along its Belarus border due to concerns about Russian-linked mercenaries in Belarus and unauthorized migrant crossings. The move follows Poland's addition of 2,000 troops to the border in the next two weeks. Worries over migrants entering illegally from Belarus have persisted for two years, with Poland accusing Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko of exploiting the situation for "hybrid warfare." Concerns also extend to the Wagner Group fighters deployed in Belarus and Belarusian military helicopters entering Polish airspace. The move to bolster security aligns with Poland's parliamentary elections in October, as the ruling Law and Justice party seeks a third term. NATO monitors the situation in Belarus but sees no immediate threat.

On 10 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Germany announced the dispatch of two more Patriot air defence missile systems to Ukraine. Zelenskyy hailed the move as a step toward establishing a comprehensive air shield for the nation, safeguarding both people and communities. The Patriot system, developed by the US, effectively counters Russian aircraft, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. It encompasses mobile batteries equipped with command centres, radar stations for threat detection and launchers. Ukraine already utilizes German and the US-supplied Patriot systems, which have successfully intercepted Russian hypersonic missiles. The reinforcement highlights international support for Ukraine's defence capabilities amid ongoing tensions.

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War in Ukraine: Day 532

War on the Ground:

On 09 August, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reported the spike in deaths in Pokrovsk after a missile attack by Russia. Zelenskyy accused Russia of launching Iskander missiles to target rescue workers. The same was confirmed by Ukraine's military administration on the death of 82 after the attack. Russia's Defence Ministry had claimed the attack on 08 August, stating a strike on Ukraine's command post in Pokrovsk.

On 09 August, Ukraine's spokesperson Mykhailo Podolyak denied Russia's accusation that Ukraine attacked Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant using a drone. He said: "Ukraine did not carry out any kind of drone attack on the ZNPP, was not planning and will not even in theory do so." Earlier, Russia accused Ukraine of targeting a nuclear fuel storage plant.

On 09 August, Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister announced the re-opening of the humanitarian corridor between Russia and Ukraine which was closed after the war. The decision comes after refugees found it difficult to cross front line and have entered EU countries like Georgia instead of Ukraine.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 09 August, the TASS reported an explosion at Zagorsk, a optical-mechanical factory located 50 kilometres northeast of Moscow. According to the report, 60 were injured and 38 apartment blocks had been damaged. The factory is the key manufacturer of precision optical devices for Russia's military such as night vision goggles, binoculars and for police.

Moscow's Mayor Sergei Sobyenin reported on shooting down of two combat drones targeted towards Moscow. According to the report: "An attempt by the Kiev regime to carry out a terrorist attack by unmanned aerial vehicles over the territory of the Moscow Region was thwarted during the night." This will be the third consecutive drone attack into Moscow since August. Russia appointed governor in Donetsk reported on Ukraine shelling in the eastern Donbas resulting in death of a child and injury of two people.

On 09 August, Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that Russia will be increasing its military in the western borders, especially Finland and Poland. Shoigu pointed that the move was in caution with NATO's move to deploy forces and weaponry in Finland and Poland's movement of military forces to its border.

On 09 August, the TASS reported on multiple exchanges of air and artillery strikes in the direction of Kupyansk, Lugansk, Mankovka, Krasny Liman and Zaporizhzhia between Russia and Ukraine.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 09 August, Poland's government announced to send an additional 2,000 soldiers to its eastern border shared with Belarus. It is due to increasing fears after the

movement of the Wagner group into Belarus. Apart from the security threat, Poland also faces the problem of refugees from Africa and the Middle East who have been trying to enter Poland through Belarus. According to its President, Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus has been conducting military exercises on both sides of the border. On 09 August, an arms-producing German company, Rheinmetall announced it to provide Ukraine with 50 Leopard 1 tanks. The company bought the weapons system earlier from a Belgian company called OIP Land Systems and re-equipped it in Germany. Leopard 2 was earlier agreed by Germany along with Leopard 1 tanks for Ukraine. Comparing both, Leopard 2 is slightly advanced in terms of calibre, speed and engine type. Leopard 2 has a calibre of 120 mm, whereas Leopard 1 has only 105 mm. In speed, Leopard 2 is seven kilometres per hour speedier than Leopard 1.

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War in Ukraine: Day 531

War on the Ground:

On 08 August, according to *Ukrinform*, a

Russian attack in Donetsk left 31 police officers injured, seven emergency service workers wounded and one dead. In a targeted strike on Pokrovsk, the second Russian attack occurred on 07 August. Ivan Vyhivskiy, the head of the National Police, conveyed on Facebook: "Yesterday's assault on Pokrovsk left 31 police officers injured." He also expressed empathy for the deceased Andriy Omelchenko, a Deputy Head of the State Emergency Service in Donetsk.

On 08 August, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President, appealed for support after the devastation in Pokrovsk, Donetsk region. A residential building was hit, causing casualties. Rescue operations are ongoing with support from various services. Ukraine pleaded for global assistance, vowing to hold Russia accountable for the destruction caused by this ongoing conflict.

On 08 August, according to the *Kyiv Post*, Ukraine excavated a female spy network in Ukraine's Donetsk region having ties to Russia. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) revealed a secret female agent network linked to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) and Wagner group. Local women were recruited to aid Russia's aggression. They gathered intelligence on Ukraine's defence forces' equipment, including flight paths of combat aircraft and armoured vehicle transport routes. Three Russian agents were captured during operations, revealing communication channels to the FSB and Wagner group.

On 08 August, according to *Politico*, Ukraine's official warned of potential strikes on Russian Black Sea ports and ships. Oleg Ustenko, Ukraine's senior official, stated that Ukraine's military could target Russia's Black Sea ports and ships, including oil tankers, in retaliation for Russia's attacks and withdrawal from a grain deal. Declaring Russian ports a "war risk area," Ukraine aims to disrupt Russia's oil exports and financial resources for war. A Russian tanker, the Sig, was reportedly hit by a Ukraine strike. Tensions escalate as maritime safety diminishes.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 08 August, according to the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, a Ka-52 helicopter took down Ukraine's vehicle in a military operation. The Tsentr Group of Forces' Ka-52 helicopter successfully destroyed Ukraine's infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) with a Vikhr-M anti-tank missile in the Krasny Liman area of the special military operation zone. Coordinating with frontline observers, the pilots execute a low-altitude mission, evading Ukraine's defences. The helicopter's versatility enables precise strikes on various targets using different ammunition.

On 08 August, according to CNA, Russia claims a command post strike in eastern Ukraine amidst civilian casualties. Russia allegedly attacks Ukraine's command post in Pokrovsk, eastern Ukraine, while Kyiv reports civilian deaths and destruction. Emergency responders brought out survivors from the rubble. Russia also reports advancing toward Kupiansk, northeast Ukraine.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 08 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Germany plans to prolong Patriot Missile Deployment in Poland. Germany plans to extend the temporary presence of Patriot missile units in Poland until the year ends. The three squadrons stationed near Zamosc since January, originally for six months, aid NATO air defence. The deployment safeguards the eastern alliance area and civilian population. Germany clarified no extension beyond 2023 is anticipated.

On 08 August, according to the Government of the UK, the UK imposes sanctions on supporters of Russia's war efforts. James Cleverly, the UK's Foreign Secretary, announces 25 new sanctions targeting individuals and businesses aiding Russia's illegal Ukraine invasion. Entities from Turkey, Dubai, Slovakia and Switzerland are included. This measure aims to limit Moscow's access to foreign military equipment. Three Russian companies involved in importing crucial electronics for military equipment are also sanctioned. Action is taken against Iran and Belarus for supporting Russia's war, with sanctions on Iranian UAV developers and Belarusian

defence organisations. This marks the UK's substantial action against military suppliers, aligning with international efforts to curb Russia's conflict support.

On 08 August, *Civil Georgia* reported the global reactions to the 15th Anniversary of the Russia-Georgia 2008 war. Charles Michel, European Council President, reaffirms EU support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Roberta Metsola, European Parliament President, condemns Russia's aggression. Marija Pejčinović Burić, Council of Europe's Secretary General, affirms backing for Georgia's sovereignty. Oliver Varhelyi, EU Commissioner, addresses the continued military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Multiple nations denounce Russia's aggression and occupation, advocating for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On 08 August, the UK's Ministry of Defence gave the latest defence intelligence update on the Ukraine war. The update says Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, approves a law allowing Russia's National Guard, Rosgvardia, to acquire heavy weaponry. With up to 200,000 personnel, led by Viktor Zolotov, Putin's former bodyguard, the move follows the Wagner mutiny in June 2023. Despite claims of Rosgvardia's success during the mutiny, no evidence supports their effective action. Zolotov's suggestion of including artillery and attack helicopters indicates the Kremlin's focus on strengthening Rosgvardia for regime security.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the war

On 08 August, according to *Politico*, the shipping industry faces a dilemma amid the Black Sea conflict. Risks to maritime trade and Russia's oil deals prompt concerns. The G7's USD 60 per barrel price cap complicates matters. Greek, Turkish and foreign tankers may reconsider operations. The International Chamber of Shipping refrains from commenting on deterrence. Economic and safety concerns challenge the business-as-usual approach with Russia. Insurance prices surge, affecting profitability and vessel safety. It is time for western companies to reassess their involvement.

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War in Ukraine: Day 530

War on the Ground:

On 07 August, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Russia for launching strikes on a residential building in Pokrovsk located 70 kilometres from the Donetsk region. He said: “Two missile strikes. An ordinary residential building was hit.” On the same, Interior Minister reported five deaths and 31 to have been wounded.

On 07 August, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba during a phone call with US Secretary Antony Blinken placed a request for Army Tactical Missile System long-range missiles (ATACMS). The missile system can be launched 305 kilometres, with the ability to fire from the HIMARS launcher to push Russia and the command post far to more than 322 kilometres.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 07 August, Russia’s Education Minister Sergei Kravtsov revealed the new set of history textbooks which applauds Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The book designed for grade 11 was written in less than five months and is scheduled to be distributed in September. This is seen as a way to instill patriotism in children.

On 07 August, Russia claimed to have brought down Ukraine’s drone in the southwest of Moscow. According to Russia’s governor, the drone neither damaged infrastructure nor people.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 07 August, following the summit held by Saudi Arabia to discuss a peace plan to settle the Ukraine war, Germany assured its support to the process. Ministers from the US, China, India and Europe attended the summit. Russia in response to the summit stated that a peace settlement would be possible only if Ukraine stopped launching terrorist attacks.

On 07 August, the UK’s Ministry of Defence in its daily intelligence update stated that Russia’s air force does not have effectively support its land forces. According to the ministry Russia’s efforts to address the issue by deploying more free-fall bombs along with glide attachments, it said: “but they have yet to demonstrate consistent accuracy.” It also added: “Russia appears to have been less able to generate effective tactical airpower in the south.”

The Global Fallout: Implications of the war

On 07 August, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a phone conversation with Russia’s Sergey Lavrov stressed China’s position in the Ukraine war. He said that China will be an “objective and rational voice,” in the international forum to vouch for peace talks. In a statement released by the ministry: “actively promote peace talks.” China also proposed a 12-point peace proposal which was received well by Ukraine and Russia.

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War in Ukraine: Day 524

War on the Ground:

On 01 August, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine updated on the developments in the war. According to the report a missile strike and 49 air strikes, along with 33 rocket salvo fire strikes on our troops and civilians, resulted in casualties.

On 01 August, OHCHR released a report on the civilian casualties in Ukraine. The report found 748 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the invasion. In total, recorded casualties are 9,369 killed and 16,646 injured. Explosive weapons caused 96 per cent of the deaths and injuries, while mines and remnants of war accounted for four per cent.

On 01 August, *Ukrinform* reported on Russia's shelling in Kherson. According to the report, a health facility was struck, resulting in the death of a young doctor and injury to a nurse. The attack caused damage to the hospital and nearby cars. A pre-trial investigation has been launched for the violation of laws and customs of war.

On 01 August, *All Arab News* reported that Saudi Arabia will host a peace summit in

August with Ukraine, involving countries from the west and the global south, to discuss Ukraine's peace formula. The summit aims to gain international support for Ukraine's peace demands, without an invitation to Russia. The initiative may help Saudi Arabia gain diplomacy over the Moscow invasion and woo global south countries, resistant to western sanctions on Russia.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 01 August, *RT* news reported about Ukraine's maritime drone attacks. It reports that Ukraine's maritime drones attempt to attack Russia's civilian vessels heading to the Bosphorus Strait in the Black Sea but Russia's navy escort ships intercept and destroy them, as announced by the Defence Ministry. The Kyiv regime is accused of attempting an attack using three semi-submersible unmanned boats.

On 01 August, *RT* news reported on the attempt by Ukraine's Navy to attack Russia's patrol vessels in the Black Sea. It reports that the Ukrainians' Navy's attack using three unmanned boats failed and the targeted ships continued their operations, according to Russia's Defence Ministry. The maritime drones are destroyed by the Russia's Navy. The Russia's Defence Minister accuses Ukraine of using civilian infrastructure attacks as a distraction from their unsuccessful offensive.

On 01 August, *RT* news reported on another drone attack on Moscow's financial district by Ukraine. Several UAVs intercept on their approach to the district, but one manages to hit a high-rise in Moscow City, damaging the building's facade. Russia's Defence Ministry states that three drones were involved, with two destroyed in mid-air and the third suppressed by electronic warfare systems, crashing into a non-residential complex.

On 01 August, the *TASS* reported that approximately 80 rounds of munitions, along with explosives drops from drones, were fired by Ukraine's armed forces on populated areas in Russia's Belgorod region. The attacks damage eight houses, a car and a power line in multiple villages, including

Novopetrovka and Verigovka. Rzhevka also experiences artillery shelling, damaging three private residences and a power line. The villages of Novaya Tavolzhanka and Maryino are hit by mortar shells, while the Shebekino border-crossing point faces shelling from mortars and a grenade launcher.

On 01 August, the TASS reported on Russia's air defence forces intercepting of 16 HIMARS rockets and shot down 21 Ukraine's drones in the ongoing military operation in Ukraine, according to the Defence Ministry. Ukrainian forces attempt attacks in five directions, with Russia's troops advancing in the Kupyansk area and inflicting heavy losses on Ukraine's troops in various regions. They also destroy a counter-battery radar station and an ammunition depot.

On 01 August, the TASS reported that the EU urged Russia not to use drone attacks in Moscow as a pretext for escalating hostilities in Ukraine. The EU has no independent information about the drones' origin. Equipment provided to Ukraine by EU member states can only be used for its defence and Ukraine has the right to protect its sovereignty. The Russia's Defence Ministry says two drones came from Ukraine, but there is no official confirmation.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 01 August, the *Financial Times* reported that the Biden administration aims to supply more 155 millimetre shells to Ukraine amid the counteroffensive against Russian forces. The US will seek international allies' help in the short term and plans to increase domestic production in the next two years. Deals with Bulgaria and South Korea have been struck and talks with Japan are ongoing.

On 01 August, Iceland's Foreign Ministry reported that the Embassy of Iceland in Moscow suspended its operations. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland will now handle the representation of countries previously covered by the embassy, including Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The decision

is not a diplomatic relations severance and Iceland intends to resume embassy operations when conditions permit.

On 01 August, the Service of the Republic of Poland reported that two Belarusian helicopters violated Polish airspace near the Białowieża area at a low altitude, undetected by radar systems. The Polish Minister of National Defence ordered increased troops and resources on the border, including combat helicopters. Belarus's charge d'affaires will be summoned to explain the incident.

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EM Short Notes*

By Sneha Surendran, Rishika Yadav and Genesy B



Source: Roscosmos/Reuters, AFP, Euronews Green with Reuters, AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth, Euronews, AFP

AUSTRIA

Former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz charged with false evidence in corruption inquiry

On 18 August, according to *Le Monde*, Sebastian Kurz, Austria's ex-chancellor, faced charges of providing false testimony in a parliamentary inquiry related to alleged corruption during his first government, leading to his trial on 18 October. The indictment also involves Kurz's former chief of staff and another individual. The case centres on Kurz's role in setting up a holding company and its leadership appointments. Despite denials, Kurz stepped down in 2021 due to a separate investigation into suspected bribery. Austria's next election is scheduled for next year and recent polls indicate the Freedom Party leading. The charges against Kurz mark a significant development in Austria's political landscape, potentially affecting the upcoming elections and underscoring ongoing concerns about corruption in the government. (["Former Austrian leader Kurz](#)

[charged with giving false evidence in corruption inquiry,"](#) *Le Monde*, 18 August 2023)

BELARUS

Prominent human rights group labelled as extremist

On 23 August, Belarus labelled Viasna, the country's oldest and most prominent human rights group, as an extremist organisation. Founded by Ales Bialiatski, Nobel laureate, Viasna has been at the forefront of documenting human rights abuses in the country. This move is part of a wider crackdown on dissent following the disputed 2020 presidential election that saw Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus's President, secure another term. Thousands were arrested, NGOs were shut down and independent media outlets outlawed. Viasna's designation further escalates pressure on dissenters, with authorities threatening criminal charges for anyone involved with the group. The move reflects the ongoing suppression of opposition

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voices in Belarus. The labelling of Viasna as extremist underscores Belarus's sustained efforts to silence human rights advocates and curtail dissent, drawing international condemnation for stifling civil liberties. (Yuras Karmanau, "[Belarus outlaws prominent rights group Viasna, declaring it extremist](#)," *Associated Press*, 23 August 2023)

BELGIUM

Action plan to enhance security at Brussels' Gare du Midi

On 25 August, Belgium's government unveiled an action plan to bolster security in and around Brussels' Gare du Midi, responding to growing concerns about rising crime and drug abuse at the prominent international train station. Alexander De Croo, Prime Minister and Annelies Verlinden, Interior Minister, stated that the plan aims to address immediate security apprehensions while collaborating with federal and local police, SNCB (railway operator) security and immigration services to develop longer-term strategies against crime and illegal activities. Measures include homelessness support, addiction treatment, enhanced camera surveillance and infrastructure changes to improve safety. The move follows calls for assistance from the federal government due to alarming conditions reported by Sophie Dutordoir, CEO of SNCB. (Hanne Cokelaere, "[Belgium plans security boost at Gare du Midi after drugs and crime spike](#)," *Politico*, 25 August 2023)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Mass protests in Bosnia demand action on violence against women

On 15 August, according to the *Associated Press*, thousands of Bosnians rallied in multiple cities demanding authorities to address violence against women following a live-streamed murder of an ex-wife. Demonstrators called for increased protection for women, curbing violent media content and better police handling of violence cases. Bosnia's citizens were particularly outraged as the victim had reported harassment and the shooter had a criminal record. The incident highlights

pervasive gender-based violence in the Balkans, fueled by conservative norms and post-conflict challenges. This news illustrates the global concern regarding gender-based violence and highlights how incidents of violence against women spark widespread social movements demanding policy changes and increased protections. ("[Thousands in Bosnia protest against violence after man livestreamed killing of ex-wife on Instagram](#)," *Associated Press*, 15 August 2023)

Sanctions imposed on Serb officials for violating constitutional court decision

On 01 August, the US imposed sanctions on four ranking Bosnian Serb officials for undermining a 1995 peace agreement which threatens the country's successful integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions." The four officials sanctioned by the US Treasury are alleged to have taken part in drafting a law that undermines the unity of Bosnia by ignoring the decisions of the country's constitutional court. The US also imposed sanctions on the pro-Russian head of Serbia's security agency for involvement in illegal arms shipments, drug trafficking and misuse of public office. There is fear that Serbia would inflame tensions in the Balkans to divert the world's attention from the war in Ukraine. ("[4 separatist Bosnian Serb leaders are sanctioned by US Treasury for undermining a 1995 peace deal](#)," *Associated Press*, 01 August 2023)

ESTONIA

Calls for resignation of Prime Minister

On 25 August, opposition leaders in Estonia demanded Prime Minister Kaja Kallas's resignation over revelations that her husband's firm, Stark Logistics, continued business with Russia after it invaded Ukraine. The Center Party and Isamaa Party initiated discussions on a no-confidence motion against Kallas. Despite supporting Ukraine against Russia's aggression, Kallas's husband's actions created controversy. Stark Logistics indicated assistance to Estonian clients in accordance with imposed laws and sanctions. Kallas's Reform Party (Squirrel Party) supporters back her, but polls show majority public

opinion favouring her stepping down. Media outlets, including Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees, have called for Kallas to consider resigning. The scandal places Kallas in a politically challenging situation, showcasing the complex balance between personal business dealings and political leadership amidst sensitive international dynamics. ([“Turmoil hits Estonian Prime Minister Kallas over husband's Russia ties,” Euronews, 25 August 2023](#))

DENMARK

Illicit trade increases gang violence

On 27 August, a 30-year-old man was killed and four others were injured in a shooting in the Copenhagen district known for its counterculture ambience and thriving hashish trade. Poul Kjeldsen, the Copenhagen police officer, informed Danish media that two masked shooters opened fire inside a building in the Christiania neighbourhood. According to Kjeldsen, the shooting was linked to criminal gangs. Since the 1970s, when hippies began squatting at a decommissioned naval base, Christiania has been a freewheeling anarchist commune. Authorities tolerated hashish sales there until 2004 when police began to crack down on the illicit trade. Nonetheless, the hashish trade has continued, with occasional outbreaks of violence associated with criminal gangs. ([“1 killed, 4 wounded in shooting in Copenhagen’s Christiania neighborhood, police in Denmark say,” Associated Press, 27 August 2023](#))

Ban on burning Quran

On 25 August, Peter Hummelgaard, Denmark’s Justice Minister, announced a proposed ban on burning religious texts in public places, including the Quran, to prevent inappropriate treatment of sacred objects. While aimed at curbing religious offence, the ban raises debates about free speech and religious expression. The decision reflects Denmark’s attempt to balance between freedom of expression and preventing actions that incite religious tensions, while also acknowledging the sensitivities involved in such matters. ([“Denmark to ban Quran burnings, says justice minister,” Deutsche Welle, 25 August 2023](#))

Defence minister fires permanent secretary over artillery purchase handling

On 11 August, according to *Reuters*, Jacob Ellemann-Jensen, Denmark’s defence minister removed the ministry’s permanent secretary of state following criticism regarding the acquisition of artillery systems from Israel’s Elbit Systems. The USD 256 million purchase was hurriedly approved by parliament’s finance committee; later, it was revealed that the offer’s expiry date had been misrepresented. Ellemann-Jensen regretted the misinformation earlier in the week but disclosed during a meeting with parliament members that crucial details were omitted. The minister cited the necessity for “close and trusting cooperation” as the reason for the dismissal. This incident exposes the sensitivity and importance of transparent and accurate communication in defence procurement, especially as countries seek to modernize their armed forces. (Johannes Birkebaek and Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, [“Danish defence minister dismisses key staff member after Israel arms purchase,” Reuters, 11 August 2023](#))

FINLAND

Calls to ban swastika and hammer and sickle

On 21 August, according to *Politico*, amidst a series of racism scandals, Ben Zyskowitz, Finland’s MP, proposed a ban on swastikas and hammer and sickle symbols, part of a broader effort to combat discrimination and racism. The working group’s proposals, formed in response to scandals involving the Finns Party, seek concrete actions against racism. Petteri Orpo, Finland’s Prime Minister, asserts “zero tolerance” for racism and the parliament is set to vote on the proposal in September. The proposed ban on symbols associated with hate and extremism reflects efforts to address deep-rooted racism and intolerance, demonstrating the government’s commitment to upholding fundamental principles of equality and countering the rise of discriminatory ideologies. (Laura Hulsemann, [“Finland considers swastika ban after racism scandals rock government,” Politico, 21 August 2023](#))

Strategic CBRN reserve with EU funding established

On 17 August, according to the Finnish Government, Finland received EUR 242 million in EU funding to set up a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) strategic reserve to tackle emergencies and threats. The reserve will store protective equipment, detectors, tests, medicines and vaccines for first responders and civilians. A collaboration between various ministries and agencies is overseeing the project, which aligns with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. The move enhances Finland's preparedness for accidents and threats while contributing to the EU's joint capacities. Similar reserves are emerging in France, Poland and Croatia, with lessons learned from these projects to shape EU-wide guidelines post-pilot phase. ("[Europe's largest CBRN reserve to be established in Finland](#)," *valtioneuvosto.fi*, 17 August 2023)

Alexander Stubb to run for presidential elections

On 15 August, according to *Politico*, Alexander Stubb, Former Finnish Prime Minister, announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections in Finland. Stubb, known for his roles in Brussels and the Finnish government, will compete against other contenders including Pekka Haavisto, ex-foreign minister and Olli Rehn, Bank of Finland governor. The first round of voting is scheduled for 28 January 2024, with a runoff on 11 February, if needed. Alexander Stubb's candidacy adds a significant player to the Finnish presidential race, with his extensive political and European experience shaping the competition. (Elisa Braun, "[Former Finnish PM Alexander Stubb to run for president](#)," *Politico*, 15 August 2023)

Helsinki considers becoming a 'Sanctuary City' amid migrant crackdown

On 13 August, according to *Euronews*, Helsinki is contemplating the designation of a 'sanctuary city' as the right-wing Finnish government tightens rules on undocumented migrants. The new government, led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo and including the far-right Finns

Party, plans to reverse legislation requiring local authorities to offer free basic healthcare to paperless migrants across the country. The move is part of a broader effort to create a 'hostile environment' for migrants, including cutting access to social services. While many cities are stopping or not providing free health services, Helsinki, among others, intends to continue treating undocumented migrants, potentially making it an attractive destination for medical treatment. The divide between national and local policies on undocumented migrants' access to healthcare highlights tensions within the Finnish government and underscores the broader debate on migration policy. (David Mac Dougall, "[Helsinki could become 'sanctuary city' as Finland's right-wing government targets paperless migrants](#)," *Euronews*, 13 August 2023)

FRANCE

Religious garments banned to promote secularism

On 27 August, Gabriel Attal, France's Education Minister, stated that the Islamic garment known as the abaya will be prohibited in schools. France outlawed religious symbols in schools in 2004, including huge crosses, Jewish kippahs and Islamic headscarves. However, the abaya exists in a grey area and is not explicitly prohibited. The emphasis on abayas comes in the wake of an upsurge in girls wearing Islamic dress in French schools; a trend that critics claim violates the country's secularist norms. Religious minorities, according to critics, experience prejudice in a historically Christian society. In 2020, a radicalized Chechen refugee killed a French teacher who had presented cartoons of the prophet Muhammad in class, exacerbating tensions over education and religion. (Clea Caulcutt, "[French education minister announces ban on Islamic dress in schools](#)," *Politico*, 27 August 2023)

"It's the end of Renaissance" states Socialist Party

On 27 August, Gerald Darmanin, France's strong Interior Minister offered a stark warning about the risk of far-right icon Marine Le Pen winning the presidency in

the next election, while bolstering his own goal to follow Emmanuel Macron, France's President in 2027. Darmanin, who is still only 40 years old, leads what is now a super-ministry of the interior that also oversees France's global overseas territories. He's made a name for himself as a tough-talking right-wing personality. Polls reveal that public discontent is growing over problems such as immigration, security and the expense of living, which her National Rally (RN) party is increasingly confident of exploiting. According to the daily *Le Monde*, Darmanin decided to emancipate himself and go on the offensive after being rejected for the position of prime minister. Darmanin's political style is reminiscent of his mentor, Nicolas Sarkozy, former President, who similarly opened his presidential campaign with a hyperactive tenure as a tough interior minister. (["French Interior Minister Darmanin warns of risk of Le Pen victory in next election,"](#) *France 24*, 27 August 2023)

Macron outlines wide-ranging goals for the future

On 25 August, according to *Euronews*, Emmanuel Macron, France's President, discussed a range of objectives in an interview, emphasising geopolitical influence, immigration reform, climate action and social issues. He stresses the need for a strong European stance on various fronts, including addressing the crisis in Ukraine and climate change. Macron's approach to industry is to balance ecological goals with economic needs, advocating for domestic manufacturing and European investments. His push for immigration reform faces political challenges from both the left and right parties, highlighting the complexities of policy implementation in a diverse political landscape. (Gael Camba, ["Macron eyes key immigration and economy reforms despite political challenges,"](#) *Euronews*, 25 August 2023)

Sarkozy to face trial over Gadhafi funding allegations

On 25 August, France prosecutors reported that Nicolas Sarkozy, Former French President, was to be tried in 2025 for

allegedly accepting money from Moammar Gadhafi, Libyan leader, for his 2007 election campaign. Trial to include 12 co-defendants accused of conspiring to illegally finance the campaign. Charges include concealment of embezzlement, corruption and illegal campaign financing. Sarkozy could face up to 10 years in jail if convicted. The case marks the most serious legal challenge Sarkozy has faced. (["France: Nicolas Sarkozy to face trial in 2025 over Libya,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 25 August 2023)

Nîmes is a hotspot for drug violence

On 24 August, an 18-year-old man was shot dead in the southern French city of Nimes, days after a 10-year-old youngster was slain by gunfire in a drug-related attack. Both shootings occurred in the city's Pissevin neighbourhood, which has been beset by drug violence. Gerald Darmanin, Interior Minister, spoke of a "tit-for-tat attack between drug dealers." Yoda and DZ Mafia, two competing gangs, are claimed to be behind the majority of the shootings in northern regions of the Mediterranean port city, notably in high-rise buildings. Smaller regional cities such as Nimes are now becoming a hotspot for the drug war. (Paul Kirby, ["Nîmes shootings: Two killings in three days in small French city,"](#) *BBC*, 24 August 2023)

Extreme heat warnings as temperatures soar

On 21 August, France issued "red alerts" in southern regions due to scorching temperatures, with Rhone expected to reach 41 degrees Celsius. Meteo France also issued "orange alerts" for half the country, as temperatures climbed to 35-38 degrees Celsius. Europe has faced record-breaking heatwaves this summer, with southern Europe experiencing high temperatures and deadly wildfires. Scientists highlight the link between human-caused greenhouse gas emissions and intensifying heat waves. (["France issues 'red alert' warning amid extreme heat,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 21 August 2023)

Heatwaves across the southeast of France

On 21 August, *Le Monde* reported on the

heatwave with increased temperatures in the Rhone Valley region along with wildfire in the southeast. According to the report, the temperatures are expected to increase by 22 and 23 with southern France experiencing the highest temperatures. Close to 50 out of 96 health departments in France have warned of high heat warning levels. France's national weather service spokesperson said: "Some records could be broken, notably on Tuesday in the Rhone valley with 40-42°C expected." Following the 2022 summer, July 2023 is marked as the hottest of the season, where close to 250 acres of forest are reported to have been ambushed in the fire. ("[France sizzles in prolonged end of summer heat wave](#)," *Le Monde*, 21 August 2023)

Wildfire under control after evacuations

On 15 August, according to the *Associated Press*, a large fire in southern France, scorching 500 hectares, is now under control after evacuating over 2,000 people. No injuries were reported and residents have returned. Firefighters continue to battle the blaze as the affected area remains under watch. The Pyrenees-Orientales region faced extreme heat, dryness and winds. ("[France: Pyrenees wildfire contained but still dangerous](#)," *Associated Press*, 15 August 2023)

Court suspends disbanding climate activist movement

On 11 August, according to *Politico*, France's Council of State suspended the government's order to disband the climate activist movement, Les Soulèvements de la Terre. The movement, with over 150,000 supporters, focuses on environmental concerns and opposes infrastructure projects. The court stated that the order infringed on the activists' right to assemble and lacked sufficient evidence to support claims of incitement to violence. The group had challenged the disbanding in court with backing from political parties, arguing that it curtailed their freedom of expression. The ruling permits the activists to continue organising protests, including a planned two-week march. However, the court's final decision on the disbanding will be made after assessing whether the group has

incited violence or severely disrupted public order. (Louise Guillot, "[French court suspends ban on climate movement accused of 'ecoterrorism'](#)," *Politico*, 11 August 2023)

Far-right party dissolves

On 07 August, *Le Monde* reported that Gérald Darmanin, French Interior Minister, ordered the dissolution of the far-right party Civitas due to its anti-Semitic remarks during a summer seminar. The party, mainly consisting of ultra-traditional Catholics, gained political party status in 2016 and supported the far-right Eric Zemmour, in the previous year's presidential election. With about 165,000 members, it opposes same-sex marriage, promotes anti-immigration stances and has faced accusations of homophobia and disrupting events involving non-heterosexual individuals. Civitas had received public funding but is now targeted for dissolution due to its anti-Semitic stance. ("[France moves to ban far-right party for anti-Semitism](#)," *Le Monde*, 07 August 2023)

GERMANY

Audit court slams government's hidden debt

On 29 August, auditors criticised Germany's government for utilizing special funds amounting to EUR 869 billion, labelling it a "hidden debt." The move challenges the fiscal rule aimed at maintaining Germany's debt-to-GDP ratio below 60 per cent, as per EU standards. Olaf Scholz, Germany's Chancellor, led a coalition government that tapped into non-budget sources like a EUR 100 billion defence fund and a EUR 60 billion climate fund, amid concerns about Russia's war in Ukraine and rising energy costs. The court warned that these actions undermine parliamentary oversight and the debt rule's effectiveness. The Ministry of Finance noted that such measures are temporary and focused on crises. (Laura Hulsemann, "[Germany's audit court slams Lindner's 'special funds' — again](#)" *Politico*, 29 August 2023)

Storm causes boundless damage in a small town

On 27 August, a storm with huge hailstones

damaged four-fifths of the structures in a town in the southern German state of Bavaria. Police in Kissing, just outside Augsburg, reported that 12 people were hurt when a beer tent they were attempting to erect was blown over. Wind also broke wooden slats off the roof, while hail caused noticeable damage to the facade of a residential house. The biggest damage looked to be in Bad Bayersoien, with roughly 1,300 inhabitants. The country was struck by hailstones of up to 8 centimetres which damaged parked automobiles and cracked roof tiles and attic skylights. According to reports, 80 per cent of the buildings were severely damaged, but no one was injured. ([“Large hailstones cause extensive damage in a small German town as a storm hits Bavaria,”](#) *Associated Press*, 27 August 2023)

Turmoil in coalition government

On 27 August, Olaf Scholz, German Chancellor promised that his coalition government would rapidly resolve a dispute over child payments that has hampered efforts to end months of destructive public infighting. Scholz, a center-left Social Democrat, leads a coalition of three socially liberal parties. However, his two junior partners, the ecological, usually left-leaning Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, frequently disagree on economic and other issues. The two fought bitterly earlier this year over a proposal to replace fossil-fuel home heating systems, which contributed to the government’s low poll ratings. Top officials had planned to show a more united front following summer but turmoil emerged when the Green minister for families, Lisa Paus blocked a plan by Finance Minister Christian Lindner for tax relief for companies, meant to help Germany’s stuttering economy. ([“Germany’s Scholz vows a quick resolution to his coalition government’s latest standoff,”](#) *Associated Press*, 27 August 2023)

Legislation to boost integration and skilled workforce

On 23 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Germany’s Cabinet approved legislation aimed at easing citizenship rules to enhance immigrant integration and

address the skilled labour shortage. The bill, backed by Olaf Scholz, Germany’s Chancellor, proposes reducing the waiting period for citizenship eligibility from eight to five years, with exceptions for special integration achievements. Additionally, German-born children would become citizens if one parent has resided legally for five years, down from eight. Restrictions on dual citizenship will also be lifted. Nancy Faeser, Germany’s Interior Minister emphasised the importance of attracting skilled workers and creating a diverse society. However, the centre-right opposition Union bloc argues that the changes could have negative implications and compromise integration efforts. Germany’s move reflects a balance between facilitating integration and addressing labour needs, while also sparking debates about the pace and nature of citizenship for immigrants. ([“Germany is moving forward with a plan to ease its citizenship rules as it seeks to attract workers,”](#) *Associated Press*, 23 August 2023)

Economy to remain stagnant in Q3

On 21 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Germany, as Europe’s largest economy, is predicted, by the IMF, to stay stagnant in the current quarter, as the central bank forecasts minimal change in economic output. The country’s GDP remained flat in Q2 and has faced consecutive declines in previous quarters due to energy prices, borrowing costs and weakened Chinese trade. This trend aligns with the IMF’s projection that Germany is the only major economy to shrink this year, amidst global economic challenges. The continued stagnation in Germany’s economy reflects the broader challenges faced by many countries in maintaining steady growth amidst a complex global economic landscape. ([“German central bank sees the economy stagnating again in the 3rd quarter,”](#) *Associated Press*, 21 August 2023)

Interior Minister urges telecoms to get away from the Chinese 5G gear

On 18 August, according to *Politico*, Nancy Faeser, Germany’s Interior Minister, urged telecoms providers to move away from using Chinese company Huawei’s

equipment if it poses security risks. She emphasised that security authorities have long warned against dependency on such equipment. The government is conducting security checks on Chinese technology in telecom networks and plans to ban components with serious security risks. This move aligns with the European Commission's call for member countries to address security concerns posed by Chinese 5G vendors. Germany's stance reflects growing global concerns about potential risks associated with Chinese telecoms equipment. Germany's shift away from Chinese 5G equipment underscores the ongoing debate about the security implications of relying on such technology, highlighting the challenges in balancing technological advancement with national security concerns. (Mathieu Pollet, "[Time to cut back on Huawei. German minister tells telecoms giants](#)," *Politico*, 18 August 2023)

To get second second-largest NATO helicopter fleet

On 11 August, according to *Reuters*, Germany's acquisition of 60 Chinook helicopters from Boeing, at a cost of up to eight billion euros, will make it NATO's second-largest helicopter nation after the US. This was noted by Ingo Gerhartz, German Air Force Chief. Approximately 50 of these helicopters will be stationed at the Holzdorf/Schoenewalde site in eastern Germany, alongside 1,000 additional soldiers. This move underscores Germany's commitment to enhancing its military capabilities and its role within NATO. The purchase of a significant number of advanced helicopters highlights Germany's emphasis on strengthening its defence capabilities and contributing to NATO's collective security efforts. (Riham Alkousaa, "[Germany will own NATO's 2nd largest helicopter fleet after Chinook purchase, air force chief says](#)," *Reuters*, 11 August 2023)

GEORGIA

Protestors propelled Russian cruise ship

On 01 August, the Russian cruise ship *Astoria Grande* left the Black Sea port of Batumi after anti-war demonstrators threw eggs and called for its passengers to leave. Georgia is courting Russian tourists, but

protesters and opposition parties object to Russia's occupation of Georgian territory and its invasion of Ukraine. The ship hosted singers who have backed the war in Ukraine. As the tourists disembarked, protesters waved Georgian, Ukrainian and EU flags and chanted anti-Putin slogans. Pro-European President Salome Zurbishvili praised the protesters for challenging the "latest Russian provocation" after Russia suspended a deal allowing Ukraine's grain shipments and prevented free movement of shipping in the Black Sea. (Paul Kirby, "[Russian cruise ship leaves Batumi after Georgian protests](#)," *BBC*, 01 August 2023)

GREECE

Wildfire update: Day 11

On 29 August, 11 aircraft and a helicopter from the EU were sent to battle a massive fire that had consumed over 300 square kilometres in Greece, making it the EU's largest wildfire ever. Greece, facing its eleventh day of the blaze, has sought help from neighbouring countries to control the fire. Multiple fires this summer, attributed to climate issues, have plagued Greece. Janez Lenari, the EU's crisis management commissioner, emphasised the deployment's demonstration of the EU's crisis management commitment. ("[Greece wildfire declared largest ever recorded in EU](#)," *The Guardian*, 29 August 2023)

Greece wildfire update: Day ten

On 28 August, Greek officials increased firefighting operations in the country's northeastern region, where a major catastrophic wildfire was burning for the tenth day and showed no signs of abating. The fire in the Alexandroupolis and Evros areas near the Turkish border is responsible for 20 of Greece's 21 wildfire-related deaths. Several European countries provided reinforcements to the army. Authorities are investigating what caused the fire, which has devastated massive swaths of forest, scorched homes and forced the evacuation of thousands of people. Greece's firefighting troops are stretched to the breaking point and the country has therefore called for help from other European countries. Germany, Sweden,

Croatia and Cyprus have sent aircraft, while dozens of Romanian, French, Czech, Bulgarian, Albanian, Slovak and Serbian firefighters are helping on the ground. (Elena Becatoros, "[Greece reinforces firefighting forces to tackle massive blaze in the country's northeast](#)" *Associated Press*, 28 August 2023)

Nine-day wildfire continues to stay ablaze

On 27 August, a wildfire near the northeastern Greek region of Evros which was blazing for nine days was unlikely to be contained. According to the European Commission, the fire, which threatened Greece's Dadia National Park, is the largest single fire in EU history. Significant wildfires were also seen in the suburbs of Athens and on the Aegean island of Andros. Winds are predicted to shift, potentially spreading the flames much further this week. The government has ordered an evacuation. Climate change, according to European Union officials, is to blame for the increased frequency and intensity of wildfires in southern Europe. After 2017, last year was the second-worst year on record for wildfire devastation. ("[Greece: Evros fire 'cannot be contained' — regional official](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 August 2023)

Strategic ties with India

On 25 August, during the visit of India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to Greece, leaders of both countries committed to enhancing trade, defence and strategic cooperation. The two countries will boost military ties, promote skilled migration and aim to double bilateral trade by 2030. Aiming to establish direct flights, they also emphasised collaboration in sectors like tourism, pharmaceuticals and technology. The visit marks a significant step in strengthening the relations between India and Greece after 40 years. The agreement reflects both countries' intent to expand their economic and strategic partnerships, tapping into each other's strengths to foster growth and collaboration. ("[India's Modi visits Greece, the first visit to the country by an Indian prime minister in 40 years](#)," *Associated Press*, 25 August 2023)

Wildfires threaten Greece; Investigation into racist violence launches

On 23 August, according to the *BBC*, deadly fires continued to rage near Athens and the Evros region, with at least 20 lives lost. Eighteen victims are believed to be migrants who recently crossed the border, heightening concerns about their safety. Greece mourned the deaths near the Turkish border as firefighters battle fierce winds and scorching temperatures. The fires prompted suspicions of migrants causing blazes, while authorities investigated racist violence against migrants following the deaths. Greece's wildfire emergency highlights the vulnerabilities faced by migrants amid climate-related disasters and xenophobia. (Orla Guerin, Kostas Koukoumakas & Feras Kawaf, "[Greek fires rage after migrant tragedy near border](#)," *BBC*, 23 August 2023)

Patrol boats rescue migrants crossing from Turkey

On 21 August, Greek patrol boats saved around 80 migrants in two separate incidents as they attempted to cross from Turkey in inflatable dinghies. Over the weekend, 200 more were rescued, reflecting an increasing trend of dangerous journeys. Migrant arrivals in Greece have surpassed 14,000 this year, attributed to better summer weather and increased Aegean boat traffic. The government maintains control despite the rise. Greece has bolstered patrols since the 2015 migration crisis and allegations of illegal deportations persist. The ongoing challenges of irregular migration routes across the Aegean Sea highlight the need for coordinated efforts among European nations to address the humanitarian and security concerns associated with such journeys. ("[Greek coast guard rescues scores of migrants from boats drifting in the Aegean Sea](#)," *Associated Press*, 21 August 2023)

Battling wildfires amid heatwave

On 21 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Wildfires erupted in Greece amid scorching temperatures. Evacuations occur in villages near Athens, while a major fire rages near Alexandroupolis. The persistent occurrence

of wildfires in the region highlights the urgent need for effective wildfire management strategies and global efforts to address climate change's impact on fire risk. (["Villages evacuated in Greece as wildfires rage," Deutsche Welle, 21 August 2023](#))

48 migrants rescued from inflatable boat

On 13 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Greek authorities successfully rescued 48 migrants from a drifting inflatable boat near Lesbos, close to Turkey. A coast guard vessel spotted the boat on Sunday morning and safely evacuated the migrants, transporting them to the port of Mytilene. Three individuals received medical attention at a local hospital. The incident highlights the ongoing migrant arrivals from Turkey to Greece, particularly during favourable summer sailing conditions. It showcases the challenges faced by Greece and underscores the need for coordinated efforts among European countries to address migration and provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. (["Greece safely evacuates 48 migrants from inflatable boat off Lesbos island; vessel sinks," Associated Press, 13 August 2023](#))

Greece-Turkey to improve political ties

On 01 August, Greece's prime minister expressed his willingness to improve political and bilateral relations with Turkey. Greece and Turkey remain at odds over maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean which has affected irregular migration into the EU, mineral rights and the projection of military power. During a NATO summit in Vilnius, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Mitsotakis and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have agreed to initiate new lines of communication. (["Greek prime minister seeks improved relations with Turkey but says Ankara must drop aggression," Associated Press, 1 August 2023](#))

HUNGARY

Leaders discuss energy cooperation

On 20 August, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban held a meeting with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev. During the meeting, they discussed energy, physical

security, war in Ukraine and economic challenges. The discussion focused on the established physical gas transport link which allowed for storage of 50 million cubic meters of gas in Hungary. According to Hungary's Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, this cooperation between Hungary and Azerbaijan is expected to gain importance in Europe's gas supply due to the Ukraine war. (["Energy Cooperation with Azerbaijan Entering a New Dimension," Hungary Today, 21 August 2023](#))

ITALY

Lampedusa: A migrant hotspot

On 27 August, according to Italian media, 4,121 migrants and refugees were believed to be in the Lampedusa hotspot. Authorities are seeking to relocate the majority of the new arrivals to various districts throughout Italy. A total of 1,918 people arrived on the island in 65 different landings the day before, with another 1,798 arriving in 45 landings. Only two groups of migrants fled from Mahdia and one from Susa, Tunisia, according to the majority of the refugees. Filippo Romano, the Prefect of the Agrigento province, stated that "Lampedusa can no longer receive refugees." The majority of the migrants had already been transferred by the Italian authorities because the facility could not accommodate many people in the long run. (["Lampedusa under pressure after record-breaking migrant arrivals," Euronews, 27 August 2023](#))

Venice added to UNESCO's endangered list

On 01 August, the UN's cultural agency suggested that Venice should be added to a list of world heritage sites in danger. The iconic Italian city is vulnerable to flooding from overwhelming tourism, overdevelopment and rising sea levels due to climate change. The inclusion of Venice in the danger list had already been proposed by UNESCO two years ago. One of those measures was the decision to ban large ships - such as cruise ships - in the San Marco Canal, as well as the promise to launch an ambitious conservation plan for the city. Australia's Great Barrier Reef didn't make it onto this year's list despite

remaining under "serious threat" from climate change and water pollution. (Sofia Bettiza, "[Unesco recommends adding Venice to endangered list](#)," *BBC*, 01 August 2023)

KOSOVO

Statue in Pristina honouring Kosovo Albanians who rescued Jews

On 23 August, a "Wall of Honor" statue commemorating 23 Kosovo Albanians who saved Jews during World War Two was unveiled in Pristina, attended by descendants of the rescuers, political leaders and US and German ambassadors. In a region where many Jews perished, Albanians helped Jews escape Nazi persecution, often taking them to Albania. Arslan Rezniqui, a rescuer, was the first Kosovar included in Yad Vashem's "Righteous Among the Nations" list. Kosovo and Israel established diplomatic ties in 2020 and Kosovo became the first European country with a Muslim majority to open its embassy in Jerusalem in 2021. This event highlights the remarkable humanitarian efforts of Albanians during World War Two and showcases the unique bond between Kosovo and Israel, setting an example of cross-cultural unity and recognition. (Sylejman Kllokoqi and Llazar Semini, "[Kosovo inaugurates 'Wall of Honor' statue for 23 Albanians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust](#)," *Associated Press*, 23 August 2023)

NORWAY

World's largest floating wind farm

On 23 August, fossil fuel company Equinor launched the world's biggest floating wind farm, Hywind Tampen, generating 88 MW of energy for nearby oil and gas platforms. The project uses 11 floating turbines tied to the seafloor, aimed at reducing emissions from the carbon-intensive platforms. However, Greenpeace highlights Equinor's limited investment in renewables, with only 0.13 per cent of its total energy production coming from renewables in 2022. The company plans to increase installed renewables capacity to 12-16 GW by 2030, yet critics argue that the "dirty dozen" energy companies, including Equinor, need

more substantial green efforts. Equinor's investment in renewables reflects a growing trend among fossil fuel companies to diversify, but critics remain sceptical about their commitment to combating climate change. (Lottie Limb, "[Norway: World's biggest floating wind farm will power oil and gas platforms](#)," *Euronews*, 23 August 2023)

Southern Norway dam partially bursts amidst heavy rain and landslides

On 09 August, days of heavy rainfall triggering landslides and floods in southern Norway led to the partial bursting of a dam, forcing downstream communities to evacuate. Initially considering a controlled explosion to alleviate pressure, authorities abandoned the idea as water breached the dam at the Braskereidfoss hydroelectric power plant. The Norwegian Prime Minister warned of ongoing flooding risks, stating this could be the highest water level in 50 years. Dam generators failed due to a power grid outage, causing water to overflow and damage the power station. Storm Hans, affecting Scandinavia and the Baltics, was linked to extreme weather. Scientists highlight the challenge of old dams against intensified rainfall and potential climate change impact. (Jan M. Olsen, "[Dam in Norway partially bursts after days of heavy rain, flooding and evacuations](#)," *Associated Press*, 09 August 2023)

POLAND

Legionnaires' disease outbreak through water supply

On 28 August, *Politico* reported that the Legionella bacteria had been found in the water supply system of the south eastern Polish city of Rzeszow, prompting the country's counterintelligence agency, ABW, to investigate whether the city was intentionally contaminated. Rzeszow is Poland's key logistical hub for bringing military and humanitarian goods to Ukraine, as well as a US military facility. Since mid-August, the city has been the epicentre of a Legionnaires' disease outbreak in the country, with 11 deaths and 144 cases reported. However, the source of the pollution is unknown. According to the WHO, "the most common form of

transmission is inhalation of contaminated aerosols from contaminated water," which can occur through air conditioning cooling towers, hot and cold water systems, humidifiers and whirlpool spas. Rzeszow cleaned its water supply over the weekend as a precaution. (Wojciech Kosc, "[Poland launches probe as Legionella confirmed in city water supply](#)" *Politico*, 28 August 2023)

Tusk is the dangerous threat to Poland's security: says Prime Minister

On 24 August, according to *Politico*, the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party put forth four questions to a referendum that will be held on the same day as the 15 October parliamentary election. It also stated that anyone in favour of accepting illegal migrants should vote for Poland's opposition parties. The referendum questions are set to be approved on 24 August by the lower house of parliament, where PiS holds a narrow majority. The questions are designed to elicit public support. Under campaign finance laws, the referendum is also regarded independently from the election, allowing the ruling party to increase spending ahead of the vote. The PiS and the state-controlled media have been supporting the government and have claimed that if Donald Tusk, Former President of the European Council, regains power, he will jeopardize Poland's national security and economic prosperity. Mateusz Morawiecki, Prime Minister, stated that Tusk is the most dangerous threat to our security. Tusk has called for a boycott of the referendum wherein it will need voters refusing the referendum ballot while Morawiecki slammed Tusk's boycott proposal as "undemocratic". (Wojciech Kosc, "[Poland's ruling party throws the opposition a referendum curveball](#)," *Politico*, 24 August 2023)

Referendum planned on key issues amid opposition

On 18 August, according to *Euronews*, Poland's Law and Justice party (PiS) seeks a nationwide referendum in October on topics including migration, border security, retirement age and state company privatization. The opposition "Civic Platform" party criticises PiS for biased

questions. The referendum's approval is yet to be confirmed, but the opposition's boycott suggests concern about potential outcomes. The proposed referendum highlights political polarization in Poland, with the ruling party aiming to engage the public on critical issues. However, the opposition's scepticism underscores suspicions of a biased approach and fears of results favouring the ruling party's agenda. ("[Poland to hold referendum on accepting migrants as part of EU scheme](#)," *Euronews*, 18 August 2023)

PM proposes immigration referendum amid election

On 13 August, according to *Politico*, Mateusz Morawiecki, Poland's Prime Minister suggested holding a referendum during the upcoming parliamentary election on whether citizens support the arrival of "thousands of illegal migrants from the Middle East and Africa" due to the EU's relocation policy. Morawiecki's Law and Justice Party is known for its strict immigration stance, emphasising acceptance of European refugees like Ukrainians. The referendum question criticises the EU's forced relocation mechanism and alludes to Donald Tusk, the opposition leader. Law and Justice also plan referendums on state company privatization and retirement age. Poland's PM uses the proposed referendum on immigration to reinforce his party's restrictive stance and gain support for the upcoming election, tapping into the ongoing immigration debates in Europe. (Gian Volpicelli, "[Poland prime minister floats migration referendum with grim video](#)," *Politico*, 13 August 2023)

Ruling party plans referendum on state-owned enterprise sell-off

On 11 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Poland's Law and Justice party leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, announced a referendum that will ask Polish voters whether they support the privatization of state-owned enterprises. The move coincides with the party's intensified criticism of Donald Tusk, the opposition leader, ahead of fall parliamentary elections. The ruling party aims to

consolidate its conservative base by addressing emotional issues like privatization and migration through referendums. Critics view this as an attempt to secure a third consecutive term, given their lead in polls but uncertain majority. The referendum's focus on privatization led to accusations of hypocrisy, as the ruling party has also sold state assets. This strategy echoes tactics used by Viktor Orban, Hungary's Prime Minister, to polarize society and consolidate power. The ruling party's use of referendums on contentious topics reflects a broader trend in some European countries to leverage populist tactics for political gain, potentially intensifying social divisions and weakening democratic norms. (Vanessa Gera, "[Poland's ruling party seeks referendum on privatization as it steps up attacks on opposition leader](#)," *Associated Press*, 11 August 2023)

Concerns over Belarus's military exercises trigger Poland to deploy more border force

On 11 August, Poland's defence minister Mariusz Blaszczak announced the deployment of 10,000 additional soldiers on the Belarus border. According to Blaszczak: "...closer to the border with Belarus to scare the aggressor so that they do not dare to attack us." The move comes after Belarus plans to do a military exercise near Poland's border and the general elections date was announced. In 2021, Poland was breached by illegal border crossing by 4,000 migrants, post which a steel fence was installed covering half of the shared border with Belarus. (Raphael Minder and Barbara Erling, "[Poland to station 10,000 troops on Belarus border](#)," *Financial Times*, 10 August 2023)

Dates for general elections announced. Advantage PiS

On 08 August 2023 Andrzej Duda, Poland's President, announced to hold general elections on 15 October. He said: "The future of Poland is a matter for each of us! Use your rights." The current government, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) headed by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki leads by six per cent points under the centre-right

Civic Coalition. At the regional level, the PiS party's decision to bring the legal system under political control, natural gas deal with Russia and migration earned the objection of the EU, resulting in the withholding of pandemic recovery funds. This turned around when Poland began to support Ukraine militarily, becoming the highest spenders in NATO. At the domestic level, Poland is one of the fastest-growing economies in Europe with the lowest unemployment rate, despite the issues over LGBT and abortion laws which resulted in protests. Apart from the issues, an opposition with personal differences also adds to the benefit of PiS for the October elections. (Claudia Chiappa, "[Poland's president announces election date](#)," *Politico*, 08 August 2023)

ROMANIA

Explosions hit unauthorized gas stations

On 27 August, two explosions shook a gas station in Crevedia, Romania, just northwest of the city, of Bucharest. Authorities are currently investigating the event. Two people were killed and at least 56 others were injured in two explosions at a petrol station. The two explosions happened at a liquefied petroleum station (LPG) in Crevedia which was not authorized to operate. Raed Arafat, state secretary of the Interior Ministry, stated that the region must be evaluated as it remains hazardous. ("[Romania: Deadly explosions hit gas station near Bucharest](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 August 2023)

Prime Minister urges police action against beach violence

On 18 August, according to *Politico*, Marcel Ciolacu, Romanian Prime Minister, called on law enforcement to address the recent surge of violence at the country's seaside resorts. He emphasised "zero tolerance" for disturbances and expressed support for police and gendarmes. Several incidents, including fights involving tourists, lifeguards and police, have occurred on the Black Sea coast. Ciolacu's demand for stricter law enforcement reflects growing concerns over safety and order during peak tourist season. The prime minister's strong stance highlights the challenge of

maintaining a safe and peaceful environment in tourist destinations, especially during busy periods and underscores the need for effective policing to ensure a positive experience for visitors. (Laura Hulsemann, "[After beach brawls, Romanian PM urges 'zero tolerance' from cops,](#)" *Politico*, 18 August 2023)

RUSSIA

Roscosmos reports the crash of Luna-25

On 20 August, Russia's space agency Roscosmos reported that its lunar programme Luna-25 had crashed following an "abnormal situation." According to the report, in the first stage, the Luna-25 collided with the moon's surface after it got caught in an uncontrolled orbit. Roscosmos said: "During the operation, an unplanned situation arose on board the automatic station, which did not allow the manoeuvre to be carried out under the given parameters." Post the crash, Russia's specialists will be investigating the cause of the crash. ("[Russia says Luna-25 probe crashed into moon,](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 20 August 2023)

Russia imposes sanctions on UK's ministers

On 19 August, *BBC* reported on Russia's foreign ministry's imposition of sanctions on the UK's ministries and journalists. The list includes the Culture Secretary, ICC Chief Prosecutor and journalists from *BBC*, *Daily Telegraph* and the *Guardian*. According to the ministry, the sanctions were in response to the UK's "hostile anti-Russian course." Earlier, Russia had blocked several UK journalists and defence officers and the UK in line with the West has sanctioned Russia over diamonds, oil and gas impacting more than 1,000 businesses in Russia. ("[Russia sanctions UK politicians and journalists,](#)" *BBC*, 19 August 2023)

Roscosmos launches Luna-25 to study Moon's South Pole

On 11 August, Russia's space agency Roscosmos launched its first lunar mission after 50 years. Luna-25 mission aimed to study the moon's south pole, which is believed to hold water in the form of ice. Such resources will be critical to support

life on the moon and help explore the cosmos from the moon's surface. According to Russia's Space Research Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences spokesperson: "The first goal is to find the water, to confirm that it is there .. to study its abundance." From the geopolitical dimension, the US, China and India have been consistently working to land on the moon. The ongoing efforts by big space powers to mark their presence are driving a pole race on the moon. (Joshua Posaner, Matt Berg and Laura Hülsemann, "[Russia shoots for the moon as space race against US heats up,](#)" *Politico*, 11 August 2023; "[Russia launches first moon mission in nearly 50 years,](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 10 August 2023)

SLOVAKIA

Spy chief and officials charged with abuse of power

On 17 August, according to *Deutsche Welle*, Slovakia charged its spy agency chief, Michal Alac and other intelligence officials with alleged abuse of power and criminal conspiracy. The charges also target Vladimír Pcolinsky, former SIS head and Roman Konecny, National Security Authority Director. The accusations include forming a criminal group, abuse of public authority and obstruction of justice. Ahead of the September elections, these charges add political complexity. Eduard Heger, former PM, called for police investigation independence, while Robert Fico, ex-PM, criticised the cases as a "police coup." Fico's party might gain from recent polls, signalling potential policy shifts, notably on Russia. ("[Slovakia spy chief facing criminal charges ahead of key vote,](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 17 August 2023)

SPAIN

Soccer federation's restructuring plan after public uproar

On 29 August, Spain's government praised the soccer federation's reform plan, addressing the controversy surrounding its president's inappropriate gesture towards a women's national team member. Spain commits to fighting gender discrimination in sports. The federation faced societal and

sporting backlash and now seeks restructuring to ensure gender equality. Miquel Iceta, Interim Sports Minister, affirmed, "no more discrimination against women," emphasising the change. (["Spanish government welcomes soccer federation's restructuring plan after kiss furore"](#) *Reuters*, 29 August 2023)

Football Chief's mother on hunger strike to seek justice for son

On 28 August, Spain's football chief's mother locked herself in a church in southern Spain and went on an indefinite hunger strike to seek justice for her son, as authorities launched an investigation into his behaviour. Rubiales, Spain's football Chief, was sanctioned by FIFA after he refused to resign and stated that he was the victim of a "witch-hunt" by "fake feminists." Rubiales stated that forward Jenni Hermoso had agreed to the "mutual" kiss. In response, Hermoso claimed that this was incorrect and that she had been the victim of an abuse of power. She further accused the federation of attempting to coerce her into backing Rubiales. (["Spanish football chief Luis Rubiales's mother on hunger strike over her son's treatment"](#) *Euronews*, 28 August 2023)

Record-breaking cocaine seizure with disturbing labels in Spain

On 25 August, Spanish authorities seized a record-breaking 9.5 tonnes of cocaine hidden in banana boxes in a refrigerated container at the port of Algeciras. The shipment from Ecuador, labelled with swastikas and the word "Hitler," is believed to belong to a major criminal organisation involved in distributing cocaine to European networks. Over 30 European criminal organisations' logos were detected on the packages. The seizure dealt an unprecedented blow to the criminal group, though no arrests have been made yet. The labels' link to neo-Nazi groups or coded references are under investigation. This seizure highlights the significant reach of international criminal networks in drug trafficking and their use of symbolism for various purposes. (["Record cocaine haul hidden in Ecuadorean banana shipment"](#)

[intercepted in Spain,"](#) *Euronews*, 25 August 2023)

King of Spain initiates government formation consultations

On 21 August, Felipe VI, Spain's King, began consultations with political parties to form a new government. Parties include the People's Party (PP) and the ruling Socialist Party (PSOE). Neither leader has enough support for a coalition, but PSOE's potential partners provide an advantage. PSOE seeks support from Catalan separatist parties, while PP requires smaller regional parties' backing. If no government is formed, year end general election might be necessary. The consultations reflect Spain's political intricacies, with PSOE holding potential coalition-building advantages over the PP due to its broader support base. The inclusion of Catalan separatist parties' potential backing adds a layer of complexity, highlighting the delicate balance of regional and national interests in Spanish politics. (["Spain's king begins meeting parties to form new government,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 21 August 2023)

Wildfire rages in Canary Islands

On 21 August, a deliberately started wildfire in the Canary Islands prompted a visit from Pedro Sánchez, Spain's acting Prime Minister. The blaze has scorched 11,600 hectares, forcing 12,000 to evacuate. Despite firefighter progress, the situation remains challenging due to difficult terrain. The islands have faced drought due to climate change, exacerbating fire risks. Though no injuries were reported, the fire is a major concern for local communities and authorities. The arson investigation is ongoing. The ecological and human toll underscores the urgent need for preventive measures and stricter penalties against such intentional acts. (["Wildfires ravage 6% of Canary Islands, as crews tackle blazes in Greece, Italy,"](#) *Euronews*, 21 August 2023)

Wildfires spark in Canary Islands'

On 19 August, Spain's island of Tenerife reported extreme weather conditions. According to the island's regional councillor, the temperatures had increased

overnight along with low humidity and increased wind. In response, the towns in the north of Tenerife were evacuated upon the concerns of high proximity to fire. The reasons behind the wildfire sparked on 16 August in Spain's Mount Teide volcano remain unknown. In terms of the impact, close to 5,000 hectares are predicted to have been exposed to extreme fires. On 20 August, firefighters from the Canary Islands' reported on the advance made in safety efforts taken towards the community in combatting the wildfires. According to Canary Islands President Fernando Clavijo: "We warned of a complex situation, with rising temperatures and wind... and it's true the night started very hard with many calls saying the fire was very close to people's homes." The fires on the Island come after the heatwave and increased global temperatures. ("[Tenerife: More residents evacuated as wildfire spreads](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 August 2023; "[Firefighters push forward against Tenerife wildfire](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 August 2023)

Socialist candidate secures key parliament win

On 17 August, according to *Le Monde*, Spain's newly elected Parliament voted in favor of Francina Armengol, Socialist Party candidate, as chamber speaker. The move supports Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's push for a leftist government. The outcome of inconclusive elections raises doubts about Sánchez's ability to form a cohesive government, potentially leading to new elections. The Popular Party's defeat underscores its isolation due to alliances with Vox, weakening its position. The involvement of Carles Puigdemont, a Catalan politician and journalist, adds political complexity, as he seeks commitments on separatist issues from the incoming government. The win for the Socialist candidate reflects a potential shift towards a leftist government, but challenges in forming a cohesive administration remain amid a closely divided Parliament. ("[Spain: Socialist wins key parliament vote that could pave way for new leftist government](#)," *Le Monde*, 17 August 2023)

Registration and naming of stillborn babies

On 15 August, according to *Euronews*, Spain passed a law allowing stillborn babies with a gestation period of over six months to be registered and named in the civil registry. This change follows advocacy by pregnancy loss associations. Previously, such babies were registered as "Abortion Creatures" without names or parents' identification. While some view this as a positive step for grieving families, feminist organisations are concerned it could be a step towards recognizing the fetus as a person and undermining abortion rights. The law doesn't conflict with Spain's current abortion rights, however, it reflects a delicate balance between acknowledging grief for families while sparking concerns about potential implications for abortion rights in Spain. (Laura Llach, "[Spain's new registry for stillborn babies sparks deeply personal debate](#)," *Euronews*, 15 August 2023)

SWEDEN

Raises terror threat level after Quran burnings

On 18 August, according to *Euronews*, Sweden elevated its terror threat to four out of five due to a series of public Quran burnings by anti-Islam activists, triggering global Muslim protests. Ulf Kristersson, Sweden's Prime Minister, announced the decision based on law enforcement and security service advice. Recent desecrations of the Quran in Sweden prompted outrage and demonstrations across Muslim nations. Kristersson urged citizens to maintain their daily routines while safeguarding democratic values. Concerns have arisen about potential retaliatory actions from extremist groups like Hezbollah, al-Shabaab and al-Qaida. This development underscores the global impact of local actions and demonstrates the delicate balance between protecting freedom of expression and preventing radicalization and violence. ("[Sweden raises its terror threat to four out of five after Quran burnings](#)," *Euronews*, 18 August 2023)

Government raises security threat level amid Quran burnings

On 17 August, according to *Politico*, Sweden elevated the security threat level to four out of five due to Quran burnings, becoming a "priority target" for violent Islamism. The Swedish security service urges normalcy despite the heightened alert. Estonia advises caution for travelers in Sweden, while the UK warns of possible terror attacks. Recent Quran burnings by far-right groups spark condemnations and concerns, leading to tensions with Muslim-majority countries. The incidents highlight the challenges of managing religious sensitivities and extremism in Europe. (Laura Hulsemann, "[Sweden raises terror threat level after Quran burnings](#)," *Politico*, 17 August 2023)

SWITZERLAND

Federal Council orders Xplain data leak investigation

On 23 August, the Swiss Federal Council sanctioned an administrative investigation into the data breach incident at Xplain AG. The Federal Department of Finance (FDF) will appoint Geneva-based law firm OBERSON ABELS SA to probe the Federal Administration's compliance with its duties in selecting, instructing, supervising and collaborating with Xplain AG. The investigation aims to uncover circumstances that allowed Xplain AG access to Federal Administration data and propose preventive measures. The FDF will coordinate with the investigative body and aims to conclude the investigation by March 2024. The results will guide potential consequences. The breach, attributed to hacker group "Play," exposed sensitive federal data on the darknet in June 2023. The investigation reflects the government's commitment to cybersecurity and accountability, aiming to enhance data protection measures for government entities. ("[Xplain hack: Federal Council approves investigation order](#)," *admin.ch*, 23 August 2023)

THE NETHERLANDS

Wopke Hoekstra to be next EU commissioner

On 24 August, the Netherlands is set to pick Wopke Hoekstra, Foreign Minister as its next European commissioner after the retirement of Frans Timmermans, climate czar. Hoekstra, whose cabinet is set to hold elections in November, would take over for Timmermans, who announced his return to national politics in July. The Commission announced that Maro Efovi will take up Timmermans' duties as executive vice president, including control of the European Green Deal's implementation in Europe. The European People's Party has fought a political battle against Timmermans' environmental agenda, organising a rebellion in the European Parliament against the Commission's nature restoration bill, which narrowly failed to overturn the planned legislation. The candidacy of Hoekstra for any climate-related position would be contentious in Brussels. Dutch political operatives have mentioned liberal ex-finance minister Sigrid Kaag as a possible candidate for the position of commissioner. (Nicholas Vinocur, Jacopo Barigazzi, "[The Netherlands set to name Wopke Hoekstra as EU commissioner](#)" *Politico*, 24 August 2023)

Pieter Omtzigt launches a new party ahead of elections

On 21 August, according to *Politico*, Pieter Omtzigt, longtime Dutch Christian Democratic appeal member, established the "New Social Contract" party for November's election, aiming to implement good governance and livelihood security proposals. Omtzigt's popularity poses a challenge to various parties, including Labour Party and GreenLeft, as indicated by polls estimating him to win up to 29 per cent of votes. Omtzigt, known for uncovering the child benefits scandal, seeks meaningful change over merely seeking the largest party position. Upcoming elections follow the collapse of Prime Minister Mark Rutte's coalition in July, fostering a competitive landscape influenced by issues like migration and climate policy. The emergence of Pieter Omtzigt's new party adds complexity to the Dutch political landscape, particularly given his track record in uncovering significant scandals and his ability to resonate with a sizable

portion of the electorate. (Claudia Chiappa, "[Popular Dutch politician shakes up November election with new party](#)," *Politico*, 21 August 2023)

THE UK

Ultra-Low Emission Zone expansion

On 29 August, London extended its Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to cover all of Greater London, amid controversy and resistance. Mayor Sadiq Khan and supporters believe this expansion will improve air quality, but critics fear the financial strain on residents already facing a cost-of-living crisis. Noncompliance may lead to fines of up to GBP 180 daily. The move aligns with European cities adopting similar zones to combat pollution. Khan plans to assist vehicle owners by offering subsidies to replace non-compliant vehicles, addressing the financial challenges. ("[London expands ULEZ toll zone for polluting vehicles](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 29 August 2023)

Conservative lawmakers strongly criticise Sunak's leadership before quitting

On 27 August, Nadine Dorries, UK's Member of Parliament, launched a harsh attack on Rishi Sunak, the Conservative Party's leader, accusing him of running a "zombie parliament" and without political direction. This came after a series of scandals drove Boris Johnson, former Prime Minister, to resign and economic difficulties forced his successor, Liz Truss, to resign after only six weeks. Sunak has attempted to rebuild his party's legitimacy through technocratic leadership. However, with high inflation, economic stagnation, industrial unrest and long wait times for the state-run healthcare system. His Conservatives are trailing Labour in polls ahead of the upcoming election. Dorries commented, "In your impatience to become Prime Minister, you put your personal ambition above the stability of the country and our economy." ("[Conservative UK lawmaker formally quits with scathing attack on PM Sunak](#)," *Reuters*, 27 August 2023)

Rishi Sunak alleged to have violated Parliament standards

On 24 August, an inquiry concluded that Rishi Sunak, the UK's Prime Minister, had violated parliament's standards guidelines by failing to properly declare his wife's interest in a childcare concern that stood to gain from government policies. This investigation was initiated in April after receiving indications of a possible rule violation. Sunak was asked about a government childcare project that would provide incentive payments to anyone who signed up as new child-minders through one of six designated organisations. Akshata Murty, Sunak's wife, an investor in Koru Kids, one of the organisations, was scheduled to gain from the government's trial program. Sunak, however, did not disclose his interest to the committee. During the investigation, Daniel Greenberg, the UK's Parliamentary Commissioner discovered that Sunak's omission to declare his wife's ties constituted a violation of the regulations governing MPs' conduct. However, he concluded that the failure was caused by "confusion" between the registration of interests and the statement of interests. Greenberg stated that the breach would be remedied by "rectification" processes, which typically entails MPs apologizing and addressing the breach. (Claudia Chiappa, "[Rishi Sunak broke rules by failing to properly declare wife's shares in a childcare firm](#)," *Politico*, 24 August 2023)

Coastal defence upgrade in Humber Estuary to protect communities and infrastructure

On 23 August, according to the Government of UK, the Environment Agency's initiative will enhance coastal defences over 4.5 kilometres along the Humber estuary's south bank, safeguarding 2,300 properties, essential industry and future development areas. This phase is part of the Stallingborough Sea Defence Improvement Scheme, which has strengthened sea walls in stages over 15 years. Large rock armour will be installed across three kilometres, while the remaining 1.5 kilometres of defences will be repaired. River outfalls will also be upgraded. The sustainable approach aims to minimize environmental impact and generate GBP 1.1 billion in economic

benefits over 25 years. The initiative is a crucial component of Humber's flood risk management strategy. It highlights the intersection of environmental resilience and economic development, illustrating a sustainable approach to protecting vulnerable coastal regions. (["Humber flood defences £29m upgrade begins at Stallingborough," GOV.UK](#), 23 August 2023)

London police close investigation into allegations involving Prince Charles' charity

On 21 August, London police ended a probe into claims that associates of Prince Charles offered Saudi billionaire knighthood for donations. Metropolitan Police find no evidence to take further action after reviewing documents from The Prince's Foundation and The Times of London's report. The foundation states it's focusing on its education and training programs. The conclusion of the investigation underscores the challenges of navigating potential ethical concerns and maintaining transparency within charitable organisations connected to high-profile individuals. (["UK police to take no action after investigation into cash-for-honors allegation at king's charity," Associated Press](#), 21 August 2023)

Immigration policies' negative spiral

On 18 August, according to *Le Monde*, the UK's tough stance on immigration, including recent policies to deter migrants from crossing the English Channel, has drawn criticism. Despite hostile rhetoric, such policies haven't curbed migration flows, with perilous sea crossings rising. Tragic incidents highlight the human cost. Hostile statements fuel hatred and xenophobia, leading to violence. While debates on immigration need openness, labor shortages must also be addressed. Brexit hindered coordination tools and skewed migration policy. Effective management involves European cooperation and relations with countries of origin. Unless the truth is acknowledged, developed nations risk perpetuating powerlessness in their immigration policies. It highlights the potential negative consequences of xenophobia and emphasises the need for

more open debates on immigration while focusing on practical solutions like cooperation and addressing labor shortages. (["The United Kingdom's immigration dead end," Le Monde](#), 18 August 2023)

UK invests in AI initiatives to slash carbon emissions

On 15 August, according to the Government of the UK, the UK allocated GBP one million to fund twelve AI projects aimed at reducing carbon emissions and advancing renewable energy generation. These initiatives cover diverse areas, including AI-enhanced solar energy forecasting, AI robots for monitoring dairy farming's environmental impact and low-power AI hardware development. An additional GBP 2.25 million will back more AI innovations targeting emission reduction in energy sectors. This funding aligns with the UK's ambitious goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The UK government's financial support of AI-driven projects demonstrates its commitment to leveraging technology to achieve ambitious environmental targets. By fostering innovation in AI and decarbonization, the government aims to propel the nation toward a sustainable future, reducing carbon emissions across various industries. (["AI to help UK industries cut carbon emissions on path to net zero," GOV.UK](#), 15 August 2023)

Northern Ireland Investment Summit to showcase innovation and global opportunities

On 13 August, according to the Government of the UK, over 100 global investors are set to attend the Northern Ireland Investment Summit in September, highlighting the region's innovative businesses. The event will spotlight Northern Ireland's strengths in sectors like advanced manufacturing, technology, financial services and health sciences. Speakers including UK government officials and US Economic Envoy Joseph Kennedy III will emphasise the region's potential for growth and job creation. US financial group Citi is the principal partner, reaffirming Northern Ireland's attractiveness to international

businesses. The summit aligns with the UK government's efforts to build a sustainable and inclusive economy while underlining Northern Ireland's role as a competitive business destination. (["More than 100 investors confirmed for summit in Northern Ireland," GOV.UK](#), 13 August 2023)

Junior doctors extend strike amid ongoing pay dispute

On 11 August, according to the *Associated Press*, tens of thousands of junior doctors in England commenced their fifth round of strikes, lasting four days, in a prolonged pay disagreement with the government. The strikes, scheduled until 15 August, will exacerbate the backlog in the National Health Service (NHS), with over a million procedures and appointments expected to be affected. Junior doctors' work stoppage adds to recent strikes by radiographers and senior doctors. The British Medical Association, representing around 75,000 junior doctors, seeks a 35 per cent pay increase to restore 2008 levels adjusted for inflation. The government's six per cent offer with additional consolidation has triggered the strike. The UK's ongoing labor disputes underscore rising inflation concerns in Europe. Prolonged strikes in essential sectors like healthcare can strain public services and impact the overall economy, raising questions about governments' ability to address workers' demands while managing inflationary pressures. (Pan Pylas, ["Doctors in England walk off job again as pay dispute with UK government shows no progress," Associated Press](#), 11 August 2023)

Apology for data breach of Northern Ireland police personal information

On 11 August, according to the *Associated Press*, Northern Ireland's police chief apologized for a significant data breach exposing the personal details of over 10,000 officers and staff. Given the region's sensitive security climate due to historical sectarian conflict, the breach raises concerns. Dissident republicans claim to possess this data and are circulating it on WhatsApp. Authorities are advising officers due to potential threats. A second breach occurred in July, involving the theft of

documents and police-issued devices. The Police Federation for Northern Ireland, representing rank and file officers, received numerous concerned calls after the breach. The breach's potential impact on officer safety and security is deeply troubling, considering Northern Ireland's history of violence. This incident highlights the critical need for robust cybersecurity measures, especially in regions with historical tensions, to safeguard sensitive information and protect individuals from potential harm. (["Northern Ireland's top police officer apologizes for 'industrial scale' data breach," Associated Press](#), 11 August 2023)

Data leak of police officer prompt relocation in the Northern Ireland

On 10 August, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) chief apologised for an accidental leak of police officers' online. According to the chief: "An early worst-case scenario that we have been dealing with is that third parties would attempt to get this data to intimidate, corrupt, or indeed cause harm to our officers and staff." Such leaks are sensitive as the officers become targets of "dissident groups" The data leak, which took place in July, was also revealed on 09 August and included the details of the UK's domestic intelligence body MI5 in Northern Ireland. In response, the government plans to relocate the officers whose data was exposed. (["Northern Ireland police data breach puts officers at risk," Deutsche Welle](#), 11 August 2023)

Seven foreign ships being detained after failing inspections

On 09 August, the UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) reported that seven foreign-flagged ships were detained in UK ports in July due to failed Paris MOU Port State Control (PSC) inspections. The MCA also noted five new detentions during the month. This action is in line with Lord Donaldson's inquiry recommendations to prevent pollution from merchant shipping. The Paris MOU, a regional port state control agreement, aids inspections and targets high-risk vessels for future assessments using the THETIS electronic database. Inspections, conducted by MCA surveyors,

identify non-compliance, potentially leading to detention. The list provides ship details, company information, classification society, recognized organisation and flag state. Grounds for detention and other deficiencies are also outlined. The detention of foreign ships underscores the importance of stringent inspections to ensure maritime safety and environmental protection. ([“Foreign flagged ships detained in the UK during July 2023 under Paris MOU,” GOV.UK](#), 09 August 2023)

Legal action on firms underreporting water pollution

On 08 August, *BBC* reported on the six biggest water firms subject to legal action for underreporting pollution and overcharging customers. Of the six, Severn Trent, Water UK, Thames Water and United Utilities are in the line. According to a law firm, the result of the case could give GBP 40 for each customer, but the case does not guarantee success. One of the environmental consultants pointed out that the legal action would be new, but comparing previous cases, non-had reached a conclusion and may take a longer period. For the Competition Appeal Tribunal to go through the claims and grant permission for the process to continue may take a year, given the ambiguity settlement will take time. According to one of the spokespersons from Water UK: “The regulator has confirmed that over 99% of sewage works comply with their legal requirements. If companies fail to deliver on their commitments, then customer bills are already adjusted accordingly.” Other firms denied the claims as “highly speculative.” (Noor Nanji, [“Water firms face legal action over sewage pollution,” BBC](#), 08 August 2023)

University students face graduation delays amid an ongoing labor dispute

On 07 August, *Associated Press* reported, that thousands of UK university students, including Hafsa Yusuf, facing graduation delays due to ongoing labor disputes. Around 140 universities are affected, with staff refusing to mark papers over pay and work condition disagreements. Many students who paid for graduation-related

expenses are now in vain. The University and College Union estimates tens of thousands will not graduate this summer, impacting job offers and visa applications for international students. Graduates are criticising university leaders for not negotiating to end the dispute. Some are even considering legal action for breach of contract. Students feel disillusioned after COVID disruptions and high fees. (Sylvia Hui, [“Lecturers in the UK refuse to mark exams in labor dispute, leaving thousands unable to graduate,” Associated Press](#), 07 August 2023)

UK establishes its first postal drone delivery service

On 01 August, the UK launched its first permanent postal drone delivery service on the Orkney Islands off the coast of Scotland. The drone will transport items to staff on Graemsay and Hoy allowing postal workers to carry out their usual island delivery routes. Royal Mail remains a critical part of keeping the Isles connected - and local knowledge and care are vital to that network. As weather and geography can disrupt delivery services, the drone service is expected to significantly improve service levels and delivery times to Graemsay and Hoy. The Royal Mail claims that using electric drones for inter-island distribution will significantly increase safety by allowing postal workers to transport between ports. This service will initially operate for three months and its permanency will be decided based on Orkney's unique landscape and the proximity of the islands to one another. ([“UK's Royal Mail launches its first permanent postal drone delivery service,” Euronews](#), 01 August 2023)

TURKEY

Magnitude 5.3 earthquake hits southern Turkey

On 10 August, a 5.3 magnitude earthquake struck southern Turkey, causing building damage and injuring 23 people. Centered in Yesilyurt, Malatya province, it was felt in Adiyaman as well as in areas already affected by deadly earthquakes in February. This earthquake's impact on regions previously affected by seismic events emphasises the ongoing seismic risks in the

area and the need for robust infrastructure and preparedness measures. (Roberst Badendieck, "[5.3 magnitude earthquake hits southern Turkey wounding at least 23 people and damaging buildings](#)," *Associated Press*, 11 August 2023)

Southern Turkey struggles to recover from earthquakes

On 07 August, *BBC* reported that six months after twin earthquakes struck southern Turkey, Antakya remains in disrepair. Thousands still live in makeshift tents and containers. Reconstruction has been slow, with estimated costs of USD 105 billion for 11 provinces. Despite President Erdogan's one-year deadline, the rehabilitation process is expected to take longer. Some projects are underway, like new apartment blocks north of Antakya, with a school, health center and playground. However, many continue to wait for permanent housing, facing challenges like safe drinking water. The region's recovery efforts emphasise the need for national and international aid. (Victoria Craig, "[Families in Turkey's quake cities battle dust and rubble six months on](#)," *BBC*, 07 August 2023)

REGIONAL

Potential EU climate commissioner stirs controversy

On 29 August, the European Commission proposed appointing Wopke Hoekstra, the Dutch Foreign Minister, to lead EU climate action, even though he is fiscally conservative and lacks green policy expertise. The Dutch caretaker government nominated Hoekstra to replace Frans Timmermans, prompting concerns from left-wing MEPs in the European Parliament about his suitability. Socialists worry about political balance, while others highlight his inexperience in climate policy. Hoekstra faces a challenging confirmation process. (Zia Weise, "[Von der Leyen proposes Dutch minister as climate commissioner](#)" *Politico*, 29 August 2023)

Commission criticises EU's 2030 expansion ambition

On 29 August, the European Commission dismissed Charles Michel's 2030 EU

enlargement goal, creating a clash with the European Council. The dispute emerged after Michel suggested the EU should prepare for new members by 2030, prompting tensions. French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a "multi-speed" approach to candidate country entry. Balkan countries keen to join must fulfil legislative conditions. The EU leaders will address this in October, particularly due to Ukraine's conflict reigniting enlargement debates. The process is merit-based, requiring applicant countries to meet specific criteria for inclusion. (Gregorio Sorgi, "[Commission snubs Charles Michel's 2030 EU enlargement target](#)" *Politico*, 29 August 2023)

Danish Parliament in charge of BSPC

On 29 August, Henrik Miller, a member of Parliament, was elected President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) by the Danish Parliament. BSPC unites legislators from the Baltic Sea region to address climate and other regional concerns. Denmark's inaugural BSPC presidency, lasting a year, will focus on Baltic security, encompassing energy supply, environment and defence. The region's energy vulnerability was exposed by Russia's conflict with Ukraine, highlighting heavy reliance on Russia's gas. ("[The Danish Parliament takes over the presidency of the Baltic Sea collaboration](#)" *The Danish Parliament*, 29 August 2023)

Bosnia and Herzegovina elections

On 29 August, the European Court of Human Rights deemed Bosnia and Herzegovina's elections as undemocratic, favouring dominant ethnic groups and prioritizing ethnic representation over other democratic principles. The European Commission responded by urging reforms to ensure equality and non-discrimination, emphasising strengthening the country's structure, including changes at the constitutional level, to achieve these objectives. The territorial division also affects voter rights, with ethnic-based voting in different regions. (Mared Gwyn Jones, "[Bosnia and Herzegovina elections undemocratic, amplify ethnic divisions -](#)

[Human Rights Court](#) " Euronews, 29 August 2023)

EU to add new members by 2030

On 28 August, as the EU prepared for a new debate about its future size, Charles Michel, European Council President, announced that he wants Europe to be ready for enlargement by 2030. While eight countries are formally candidates, the accession process has stalled for many in the western Balkans. For some countries, such as Turkey, the process has been officially halted, although dynamics related to the conflict in Ukraine have reenergized the debate. According to Michel, the most difficult hurdle may be persuading Europeans to support the enlargement effort. He demanded that the next long-term EU budget examine enlargement ambitions and that the EU consider modifying its institutional structure for a larger form. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has focused minds in Brussels on the need for new political momentum to promote the ambitions of many applicants for membership. He also advised all applicants to settle bilateral disputes before joining the EU. Edi Rama, Albania's Prime Minister, welcomed Michel's announcement, urging that words "materialize in... real steps forward." He also expressed caution that Ukraine's EU bid should not be at the expense of more established countries. (Lili Bayer, "[Charles Michel: Get ready by 2030 to enlarge EU](#)," *Politico*, 28 August 2023; "[Michel says EU must be ready to admit new members by 2030](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 28 August 2023)

EU economy's return to trade surplus

On 28 August, after six straight quarters of deficit, the trade balance between the EU and the rest of the world returned to surplus. The shift occurred in the second quarter of this year when the EU posted a surplus of EUR one billion. The major drivers of the increased trend were global sales of EU-made chemicals, machinery, vehicles, food and beverages, which managed to offset purchases of energy items, such as gas and oil, whose prices remain abnormally high as a result of the war in Ukraine. The EU is heavily reliant on

foreign producers of fossil fuels, making it vulnerable to significant price swings in global markets. Since mid-2021, the EU has had to foot a significant sum in order to ensure energy supplies, keep the economy going and prevent the dreaded scenario of blackouts or rationing. Because the EU spent less money on gas and oil, the trade balance improved and reached a surplus in the second quarter of this year. ("[EU economy returns to trade surplus after almost two years in deficit](#)" *Euronews*, 28 August 2023)

Legal action against three EU climate policies

On 28 August, the Polish government filed legal challenges against the European Parliament and the EU Council, arguing that three EU climate policies endanger energy security and fail to protect citizens' well-being. Warsaw has requested that the EU's highest court annul the three policies, which include the bloc's historic phaseout of the combustion engine. The first contends that the EU prohibition on the sale of new CO2-emitting cars beginning in 2035 imposes undue taxes on the weakest members of society. The second lawsuit contends that the EU's annual targets for greenhouse gas emissions established for Poland endanger the country's energy security. The EU's so-called market stability reserve, which tries to handle the surplus of emission allowances in the EU carbon trading scheme, is the final challenge. Poland believes the policies violate EU treaties since they were enacted without majority Council approval. (Mared Gwyn Jones, "[Poland asks EU Court of Justice to cancel three EU climate policies](#)" *Euronews*, 28 August 2023)

Increasing train mishaps linked to Russia's involvement

On 28 August, Polish police investigated a series of sabotage assaults that halted dozens of trains over the weekend, amid increased concerns about Russian attempts to disrupt the country. According to Polish rail authorities, many occurrences involving the unlawful activation of an emergency stop signal occurred affecting the trains. (Loveday Morris, "[Poland investigates train](#)

[mishaps for possible Russian connection](#) " *The Washington Post*, 28 August 2023)

New EU Digital Services Act imposes rules on tech giants

On 25 August, according to the *BBC*, major tech platforms, including Facebook, TikTok and Google, must comply with the EU Digital Services Act (DSA), which aims to protect users. Platforms with over 45 million EU users, like Alibaba, Amazon and Twitter, face stringent rules to prevent illegal content, protect rights and ensure public security. Breaches could result in fines of up to six per cent of turnover and service suspension. DSA requires transparency in algorithms and sharing data with researchers. Some platforms have already implemented changes in line with DSA, impacting advertising and content visibility for younger users. The DSA reflects growing concerns over tech giants' influence and their responsibility to safeguard users' interests, setting a precedent for digital regulation worldwide. (Chris Vallance, "[EU safety laws start to bite for TikTok, Instagram and others](#)," *BBC*, 25 August 2023)

EU's climate aspirations off track with Paris Agreement's climate targets

On 24 August, *Euronews* reported that according to CAN Europe and the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), the European Commission's annual emission allowances (AEAs) for EU member states are unambitious and violate EU environmental law. The non-governmental organisations have requested an internal review of a European Commission Implementing Decision which establishes annual emission permits for each EU member state in sectors such as road transport, buildings, agriculture, waste and small industries. They claim that the allowances, as well as the EU's overall climate aspirations, are "alarmingly off-track" with the Paris Agreement's climate targets and fail to respect fundamental human rights. The Commission informed *Euronews* that it will evaluate the two NGOs' request for an internal review, but denied that the Implementing Decision violates

fundamental rights. However, CAN Europe and GLAN argue that falling climate aspirations jeopardize basic rights. (Mared Gwyn Jones, "[NGOs demand review of 'insufficient' EU emission reduction targets](#)" *Euronews*, 24 August 2023)

Campaigners challenge EU over climate policy

On 24 August, environmentalists took the first step in suing the European Commission over a program to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, claiming it falls short of Europe's "fair share" in combating climate change. Climate Action Network Europe and the non-profit Global Legal Action Network have formally requested that Brussels alter legislation dictating how quickly EU countries must reduce emissions in areas including agriculture and transportation. The EU aims to reduce the bloc's net emissions by 55 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. That is one of the most aggressive climate goals of any big economy, but environmentalists want it raised to 65 per cent. The Commission has 16 weeks to respond to the request, following which the organisations are eligible to file a legal challenge with the EU's highest court. (Kate Abnett, "[Campaigners threaten EU with legal action over climate policy](#)" *Reuters*, 24 August 2023)

ECB in a dilemma over interest rate hikes

On 24 August, *Euronews* reported that the European Central Bank (ECB) is at a crossroads to determine whether to continue its cycle of interest rate hikes in September, as eurozone businesses face steep losses in output and new orders. The latest Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) showed that the EU's business activity had reached its lowest level since 2020, owing to a severe drop in the services sector and a sustained decline in manufacturing. Germany, the world's economic powerhouse, has been hurt the worst. The ECB has consistently stated that interest rates will continue to climb until inflationary pressures on consumer prices subside, but economists believe that slow economic growth may divide the Governing Council. Some ECB governors are concerned

that further tightening of monetary policy could push the eurozone into recession next year. The impact on businesses demonstrates that the ECB has been overly tolerant of the detrimental impact of its rate hikes on the economy. Other experts feel the ECB's data-based strategy is problematic since there is a time lag between adopting monetary policy and seeing its influence on economic data. (Mared Gwyn Jones, "[Explained: The ECB's rate-hike dilemma as eurozone business activity falls](#)," *Euronews*, 24 August 2023)

EU gas reserves near full capacity ahead of winter

On 18 August, according to *Euronews*, the European Commission reported that the European Union's natural gas reserves were at 90.12 per cent of capacity, well ahead of the 01 November target. With 1,024 TWh in storage, EU nations are better prepared for winter, notably following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Kadri Simson, EU Energy Commissioner, said that investment in renewable energy and efficiency can further enhance energy stability. While EU nations vary in storage levels, the bloc's efforts to diversify energy sources have contributed to reduced reliance on Russia's gas. The EU's proactive measures to bolster gas reserves and diversify sources have increased energy security, mitigating the impact of geopolitical disruptions. This news underscores the importance of strategic energy planning and investments in reducing dependency on a single supplier. ("[EU gas reserves reach 90% ahead of November deadline](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 August 2023)

UN to halt Turkish Cypriot road construction in buffer zone

On 17 August, according to the *Associated Press*, the UN mission in Cyprus will prevent the construction of a road by Turkish Cypriots that would breach the UN-controlled buffer zone, potentially escalating tensions. The UN aims to obstruct the road's creation through non-violent means, as it contravenes the mission's mandate to maintain the buffer zone's status quo. The road links a Turkish Cypriot village to a mixed Greek Cypriot-Turkish

Cypriot village and the construction is seen by Greek Cypriots as a potential military maneuver. The move may hamper peace talks and impact Turkey's EU relations. Cyprus is striving to restart negotiations to end its division. (Menelaos Hadjicostis, "[UN says it will block road construction that would encroach on a buffer zone in divided Cyprus](#)," *Associated Press*, 17 August 2023)

Bulgarians charged in UK espionage case

On 15 August, according to the *Associated Press*, three Bulgarians arrested in England in February on suspicion of espionage have been charged with possessing false identity documents. Orlin Roussev, Bizer Dzhambazov and Katrin Ivanova were also suspected of working for Russian security services. The trio was found with multiple fake IDs from various countries. They were initially arrested under the Official Secrets Act 1911. The investigation is ongoing and two others were arrested in connection with the case. This incident highlights the ongoing concern over espionage activities and the use of false identities in international intelligence operations. ("[3 Bulgarian nationals arrested in espionage investigation face charges in U.K.](#)," *Associated Press*, 15 August 2023)

Romania to pay foresters to prevent cutting of trees

On 10 August, the European Commission approved EUR 200 million as aid to Romania to pay its foresters. Till 2027, the foresters will receive the aid to not cut trees. The motto of the scheme is to reverse biodiversity loss, boost the ecosystem and preserve the habitat. In the press release of the European Commission: "...the scheme was necessary and appropriate to support the development of the forestry sector." In 2020, the Commission began an infringement procedure against Romania to protect the Natura 2000 forests and prevent the illegal cutting of trees. Romania, which was under EU's pressure to combat illegal logging for years has implemented similar measures to control such illegal activities and deployed a police force to follow such crimes. According to many environmentalists, such measures have not been effective. (Louise Guillot, "[Romania to](#)

[pay farmers to leave trees standing,](#)” *Politico*, 10 August 2023)

Energy prices are expected to double by winter for Europe

On 10 August, the *Financial Times* reported on the increasing gas prices and Europe’s energy shocks. According to the report, Europe was able to thwart the energy crisis in 2022, but after supply cutoff by Russia has led Europe to depend more on LNG. This has resulted in energy prices becoming more sensitive to supply shortages and price surges of up to 40 per cent. According to one of the energy consultants: “Europe has understandably backfilled Russian pipeline supply with versatile LNG. But that versatility leads to increased price volatility.” One of the top investment banks, Goldman Sachs warned that energy prices can double or triple by winter in Europe. The existing problems are, that Australia’s LNG is not cost-effective to reach Europe’s shores due to long voyage and high shipping cost Europe’s storage currently stands at 90 per cent, but the reserves do not promise as winter temperatures may be severe. (Shotaro Tani, “[Gas price spike underscores Europe’s vulnerability to global energy shocks,](#)” *Financial Times*, 10 August 2023)

Multinational effort combats Cyprus wildfires

On 07 August, the *Associated Press* reported that a multinational force including firefighting aircraft and ground crews from Israel, Lebanon, Greece and Jordan is assisting Cyprus in battling a stubborn wildfire that has burned about 3.2 square miles of land. The fire was mostly contained overnight but rekindled in some areas, prompting continued air and ground efforts. The cause of the rekindling is being investigated, with officials downplaying arson suspicions due to strong winds. Villagers have returned home after evacuating as a precaution. (Menelaos Hadjicostis, “[Multinational force fights stubborn wildfire in Cyprus, including Lebanon, Greece and Jordan,](#)” *Associated Press*, 07 August 2023)

EU and NATO rush aid to flood-hit Slovenia

On 07 August, the *Associated Press* reported that Slovenia received urgent aid from the EU and NATO following severe flooding that killed at least six people and displaced hundreds. France, Germany, Bulgaria, Croatia and even Ukraine offer support, including helicopters, bridges and engineering teams. The flooding, triggered by heavy rains, submerged villages, fields and towns, while extreme weather across Europe is linked to climate change. The EU activated its Civil Protection Mechanism for both Slovenia and Cyprus due to floods and wildfires. NATO expresses solidarity with Slovenia. (“[NATO and the EU send aid to Slovenia after floods that killed at least 6 and left many homeless,](#)” *Associated Press*, 07 August 2023)

Poland accuses Russia and Belarus of orchestrating migrant influx at EU border

On 07 August, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Poland alleges that Russia and Belarus' secret services are coordinating a surge of migrants across the Polish border into the EU. Maciej Wasik, Poland's Deputy Interior Minister cites intensifying operations by these agencies. The Polish border guard requests 1,000 more troops due to the alleged involvement of Belarusian authorities. Tomasz Praga, Poland's border guard chief claims Belarus's secret services have turned into a criminal group profiting from illegal immigration. About 19,000 attempted entries in 2023, up from 16,000 last year, prompting the deployment of 5,000 guards and 2,000 soldiers. (“[Poland says Belarus, Russia behind new migrant influx,](#)” *Deutsche Welle*, 07 August 2023)

Solar power mitigates heatwave shortages

On 07 August, *Euronews* reported that solar power surge in southern Europe is helping to alleviate energy shortages caused by record-breaking temperatures and increased demand for cooling during heatwaves. Spain and Greece have significantly increased their solar capacity, with solar energy providing nearly 24 per cent of Spain's electricity in July. Solar output in Sicily covered almost half of the excess power demand during peak demand.

Despite low power demand due to high energy prices and climate change mitigation efforts, experts emphasise the need to invest in energy grids and storage to ensure solar growth meets climate goals as heat waves intensify in the future. ([“Heatwave energy shortages would have been ‘much worse’ without solar power, experts say,” Euronews, 07 August 2023](#))

CLIMATE CHANGE

Storm 'Hans' ravages Scandinavia

On 09 August, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the powerful storm 'Hans' swept across Scandinavia, unleashing strong winds and heavy rain that triggered landslides, infrastructure damage and evacuations. The storm hit Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, disrupting power, flooding villages and halting public transport. Mud and rocks from overflowing streams damaged roads and homes in northwestern Sweden. Denmark's northern parts faced storm winds complicating wildfire containment. The storm's impact underscores the region's vulnerability to extreme weather events. ([“Storm 'Hans' batters Scandinavia,” Deutsche Welle, 09 August 2023](#))

Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Portugal and Scandinavia experience climate extremities

On 04 August, deadly floods began in Slovenia resulting in landslides affecting more than 2.1 million people. Following the continued floods, a team from Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) has launched an operation to evaluate the damages and deploy more personnel with equipment for rescue. Slovenia's government announced the execution of a Disaster Response Mechanism, where rescue teams from other EU countries will be involved in recovery operations. Apart from this, the German Foreign Ministry will provide USD 767000 for the operation and France will support it with two special excavators. Similarly, Sweden, Finland and Norway have issued yellow and orange alerts facing the worst floods and storms in 25-50 years. On 08 August, Portugal experienced forest fires of 6700 hectares in the south and the north has been issued red

alert to carry out early evacuations. The government has reported the temperatures to have hit 41 degrees Celsius with more than 120 municipalities marked high-risk areas. ([“Slovenia floods: First German emergency team starts work,” Deutsche Welle, 08 August 2023](#); [“Sweden, Norway issue red alerts as heavy rain derails train, floods roads,” Al Jazeera, 07 August 2023](#); [“Forest fires in Portugal spread towards Algarve, 1,400 people evacuated,” De Standaard, 08 August 2023](#))

ECONOMY

UBS terminates Swiss government guarantees in credit crisis resolution

On 11 August, according to the Federal Council of Switzerland, the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) definitively ended the agreements with the Swiss government and the Swiss National Bank (SNB) for federal loss protection and liquidity assistance guarantees, respectively, related to the Credit Suisse crisis in March 2023. These measures, taken under emergency law, have been terminated, eliminating associated risks for taxpayers. UBS's move comes after its takeover of Credit Suisse helped stabilize the Swiss financial system. The Confederation earned approximately CHF 200 million from these guarantees. The Swiss government will now introduce a public liquidity backstop (PLB) under regular law to further bolster financial stability. This move marks the successful resolution of a financial crisis through coordinated efforts between the government, central bank and financial institutions, contributing to long-term financial stability. ([“Credit Suisse/UBS: all federal guarantees terminated,” admin.ch, 11 August 2023](#))

Italian bank stocks plunge as 40 per cent tax on profits approved

On 09 August, according to *Associated Press*, Italian bank stocks faced sharp declines after the approval of a proposal to impose a 40 per cent tax on certain bank profits this year. The tax aims to assist consumers and businesses grappling with higher borrowing costs caused by European Central Bank interest rate hikes. Major banks like UniCredit, Intesa Sanpaolo, Banco BPM,

BPER and Banca MPS experienced stock drops on the Milan Stock Exchange. The Italian finance ministry justified the tax, stating it aligns with existing European rules on extra bank margins. Analysts anticipate banks will challenge or seek amendments to the proposal during parliamentary approval. The unexpected tax announcement triggered significant stock declines for Italian banks, hinting at potential opposition from the banking sector during the upcoming parliamentary process. (Nicole Winfield, "[Italy proposed a bank tax to help people with interest rate hikes. The move sent stocks plunging](#)," *Associated Press*, 09 August 2023)

Companies targeting less emissions amidst sharp fall in profits

On 01 August, Oil giant BP reported a steep fall in profits between April and June after energy prices fell back from spikes caused by Russia's war with Ukraine. Wholesale oil and gas prices have fallen back sharply since last year. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has announced plans to extract more fossil fuel from the North Sea when he said the government would grant 100 new oil and gas licenses for the region. BP had previously promised that emissions would be 35-40 percent lower by the end of this decade but now it's targeting a 20-30 percent cut. (Noor Nanji & Jennifer Meierhans, "[BP profits drop after Russia-Ukraine war windfall fades](#)," *BBC*, 01 August 2023)

ENVIRONMENT

Stagnation in European freshwater biodiversity

On 09 August, the Federal Council of Switzerland reported that an international team, including a researcher from Eawag, published a study in the journal *Nature* focusing on the biodiversity of European inland waters based on invertebrates. The study reveals that biodiversity in river systems across 22 countries increased significantly since 1968, but this positive trend has stalled since 2010, as many rivers struggle to fully regenerate due to ongoing pressures like pollution, climate change and invasive species. The research underscores

the need for further measures to restore freshwater biodiversity, emphasising the importance of combating pollutants, linking floodplains and adapting river systems to changing conditions. The study provides valuable insights into the state of European freshwater biodiversity and the need for sustained conservation efforts to counter ongoing threats, echoing global concerns over ecological degradation in aquatic ecosystems. ("[First recovery, then stagnation: The state of biodiversity in European bodies of water](#)," *admin.ch*, 09 August 2023)

MIGRATION

Central Mediterranean's deadly migration route sees surge in deaths

On 13 August, according to *BBC*, the central Mediterranean route, deemed the world's most perilous migration path, witnessed an increase in shipwrecks and fatalities. More migrants attempt the treacherous journey, setting sail from North African shores to reach Europe, particularly Italy. European border agency Frontex reports that crossings and reported incidents are at their highest since 2017. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has recorded over 1,800 migrant deaths so far this year, compared to 1,400 in 2022, with the real toll likely higher due to unrecorded tragedies. Overcrowded and unseaworthy boats, storms and insufficient search-and-rescue efforts contribute to the dangerous conditions. The surge in deaths on this route underscores the urgency for more coordinated efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in the central Mediterranean, including enhancing search and rescue operations and creating safer avenues for migration. (Alice Cuddy, "[Migrant boats in the Mediterranean: Why are so many people dying?](#)" *BBC news*, 13 August 2023)

Calamitous migrant shipwreck: Lampedusa

On 09 August, *Politico* reported on the shipwreck in the Italian island of Lampedusa. According to the report, a small boat carrying migrants capsized in the Strait of Sicily. Forty-one migrants, including three children, lost their lives,

while four survivors were rescued by a Maltese cargo ship. The survivors recounted that a seven-metre metal boat carrying 45 migrants had left Sfax, Tunisia. After about six hours, it capsized due to a large wave, leading to the tragic incident. The bodies of the deceased migrants have not yet been recovered. The International Organisation for Migration reports that 2,387 people have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean this year while attempting to reach Europe. Italy's far-right government seeks to revise EU rules on welcoming and relocating migrants, while the EU recently reached an agreement with Tunisia to deter asylum seekers from departing for Europe. Around 1,100 migrants hosted in Lampedusa will be transferred to other towns in Sicily. (Elena Giordano, "[41 migrants die in shipwreck off Italy's Lampedusa island](#)," *Politico*, 09 August 2023)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Zoom's new terms spark user data privacy debate

On 08 August, *De Standaard* reported on increased criticism against Zoom for adjusting its terms of use. Zoom introduced a new set of terms in March which allows the company to take customer data under "perpetual and worldwide license." This is later used to develop its machine learning and AI and test other Zoom products. According to Zoom, the use of customer data is only to improve "customer experience," but after repeated criticisms, it has detailed that it does not use the data without the user's consent. Zoom which recently launched services such as digital meeting assistant and Zoom IQ is said to be developed from user conversations and video chats. Apart from Zoom, Microsoft and other big tech companies are beginning to explore AI technologies as future potential. (Stijn Bronzwaer, "[Another riot about privacy when using Zoom](#)," *De Standaard*, 08 August 2023)

SPORTS

La Liga files complaint against PSG alleging EU law breach

On 13 August, *Politico* reported on Spanish

football league La Liga lodged a complaint with the European Commission against Qatar-owned Paris St-Germain (PSG). It accused PSG for claiming their funding model and violating EU competition rules. La Liga alleges Qatar's investment gives PSG an undue advantage by using foreign subsidies to secure top players and coaches, impacting rival clubs' recruitment. The complaint relies on the recent EU Foreign Subsidies Regulation, which seeks to prevent market distortions caused by non-EU funding. This move by La Liga highlights the increasing scrutiny on the financial operations of football clubs and attempts to ensure fair competition in the sport. (Gian Volpicelli, "[Spain's La Liga files EU complaint over Qatar funding of French club Paris St-Germain](#)," *Politico*, 13 August 2023)

Croatian Soccer fans in Athens court over deadly violence

On 09 August, around 100 Croatian soccer fans faced criminal charges in an Athens court, including murder and affiliation with a criminal organisation, for their alleged involvement in deadly fan violence. Following the fatal stabbing of a Greek fan outside AEK Athens' stadium, charges were issued against 103 suspects, primarily Croatian nationals, for offences like assault and illegal possession of explosive materials. The murder charge is expected to be reconsidered for most defendants. Video footage showed youths wielding weapons and explosives during the incident, leaving 10 injured and one dead. Greek authorities arrested six Croatian nationals attempting to flee the country. The Greek capital hosted a Champions League qualifier amid high security, while UEFA Super Cup preparations continued. (Derek Gatopoulos and Lefteris Pitarakis, "[Nearly 100 Croatian soccer fans face murder, gang-related charges in Greece after deadly violence](#)," *Associated Press*, 09 August 2023)

INTERNATIONAL

Former Algerian defence minister accused of violating laws

On 28 August, Khaled Nezzar, Former Algerian Defence Minister, was indicted by the Swiss Attorney General's Office at the

Federal Criminal Court. The charges include violating laws of armed conflict and committing crimes against humanity during the Algerian civil war (1992-1994). Nezzar is further accused of condoning torture and brutal acts and orchestrating structures to eliminate opposition, resulting in war crimes and attacks on civilians. The final submissions will be presented during the court hearing, with Nezzar presumed innocent until the final verdict is reached. ([“The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland indicts former Algerian defence minister”](#) *The Federal Council*, 29 August 2023)

Niger Coup: France ambassador refuses to leave

On 28 August, *BBC* reported that despite being given a 48-hour deadline to depart from Niger, Sylvain Itte, France’s Ambassador remained in the nation. He was compelled to leave as diplomatic relations deteriorated significantly. On July 26, Mohamed Bazoum, Niger’s President, was deposed in a coup condemned by France and many of Niger’s neighbours, including the West African regional group ECOWAS. Some protesters held posters calling for the withdrawal of French troops, while a video released on social media appeared to show local Muslim imams leading prayers outside the installation. Anti-French sentiment and protests in the region have recently heightened, with some critics claiming France’s presence to be a new kind of colonialism. Amid this unrest, soldiers in Mali, Burkina Faso and recently Niger, staged coups while claiming that a change in government was required to combat the jihadists. (Wedaeli Chibelushi, [“Niger coup: France defies ultimatum for ambassador to leave Niamey,”](#) *BBC*, 28 August 2023)

EU plans new anti-terror missions in Gulf of Guinea

On 27 August, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the EU undertaking of a new mission in West Africa. The combined military-civilian operation will seek to prevent the spread of unrest caused by jihadi groups. The mission will aim to train and advise local security forces, assist in the preparation of anti-terror operations, provide technical

assistance and implement security-related confidence-building measures. The EU is concerned that Islamist militants would “extend their activities in West Africa from the Sahel zone to the southern coastal countries on the Gulf of Guinea, leading to even more widespread instability in the region.” The EU also seeks to fight Russian influence in the region, which has been spread by Wagner mercenaries who have supported Sahelian military governments. The collapse of Niger to junta control has been especially troubling because it had been a crucial ally to western countries working in the region. The EU’s situation deteriorated further when Mali expelled French and German servicemen that had been training Malian military and police. ([“EU planning new Africa mission in Gulf of Guinea — report,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 27 August 2023)

Dutch Supreme Court rejects lawsuit against Israeli officials over Gaza airstrike

On 25 August, the Dutch Supreme Court upheld a ruling that former Benny Gantz, Israeli Defence Minister and Amir Eshel, ex-Air Force Commander, cannot be sued over a 2014 Gaza airstrike. Ismail Ziada, who lost family members in the attack, sought damages, is arguing that the Israelis’ actions constituted war crimes. The court’s decision stems from “functional immunity,” aligning with previous lower court verdicts. Ziada expressed disappointment and is considering an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. The case highlights the complex balance between pursuing justice and protecting officials acting on government policies. (Mike Corder, [“Dutch Supreme Court confirms immunity of former Israeli officers over a deadly 2014 Gaza airstrike,”](#) *Associated Press*, 25 August 2023)

US supports North Macedonia’s EU bid amid constitutional changes

On 25 August, Gabriel Escobar, a senior US State Department official, expressed optimism that North Macedonia will successfully navigate politically challenging constitutional changes required for its EU membership bid. North Macedonia is

amending its constitution, including adding Bulgarians and other ethnic groups, to satisfy neighboring EU member Bulgaria. The process faces resistance from the main opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE. Escobar, while affirming US support for North Macedonia's EU aspirations, hopes the amendment process continues. North Macedonia and Albania began EU membership negotiations in 2021, with Bulgaria's concerns over ethnic representation complicating North Macedonia's accession. ("[US official voices hope North Macedonia will be able to proceed with EU membership bid](#)," *Associated Press*, 25 August 2023)

Hungary partners for combat drones

On 18 August, the *Associated Press*, reported on Hungary's collaboration with Israeli and German firms, via an agreement to manufacture combat drones, bolstering its military capabilities and defence industry. The partnership involves Israeli company UVision and an unnamed German counterpart. Viktor Orban, Hungary's Prime Minister, highlighted Hungary's commitment to a robust defense industry, including a combat vehicle factory majority-owned by German firm Rheinmetall. The move signifies Hungary's determination to strengthen its defence forces while advocating for peace in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The country's increasing defence spending aligns with NATO's expectations. Hungary's strategic partnership with Israeli and German companies for combat drone production not only enhances its military prowess but also underlines its commitment to self-sufficiency in defence technology. This move aligns with NATO's defence spending guidelines, reflecting Hungary's focus on both regional stability and national defence capability. (Bela Szandelszky, "[Hungary is to produce combat drones in cooperation with Israel and Germany, the prime minister says](#)," *Associated Press*, 18 August 2023)

EU condemns Niger coup

On 12 August, the EU strongly denounced the Niger coup, foreseeing detrimental effects on Niger's population, security and regional stability. The EU urges the return

to constitutional order, supporting President Bazoum and ECOWAS decisions for a diplomatic resolution. The EU backs ECOWAS efforts and the potential implementation of sanctions. President Bazoum's unjust detention and deteriorating conditions raise EU concern, demanding their immediate release. The EU pledges humanitarian aid and unwavering support for Niger's people, emphasising human rights commitment. ("[Niger: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU](#)," *consilium.europa.eu*, 12 August 2023)

Switzerland participates in G20 anti-corruption meeting

On 12 August, according to the Federal Council of Switzerland, Switzerland was invited by the Indian G20 presidency to join the annual G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG) ministerial meeting. Ambassador Alexandra Baumann led the Swiss delegation, discussing international anti-corruption measures and sharing Switzerland's experience. During the meeting, G20 High-Level Principles were adopted, focusing on international law enforcement cooperation, asset recovery mechanisms and promoting integrity in public offices. Switzerland stressed its commitment to prosecuting corruption cases, cooperating in asset recovery and involving civil society in anti-corruption efforts. The meeting also highlighted the importance of coordination in Ukraine's reconstruction to prevent corruption during recovery and emphasised connecting anti-corruption and human rights efforts. Switzerland's active participation in the G20 ACWG reaffirms its commitment to combating corruption and aligning such efforts with human rights principles. ("[Switzerland takes part in G20 anti-corruption ministerial meeting in India](#)," *admin.ch*, 12 August 2023)

UK and Turkey strengthens anti-illegal migration partnership

On 09 August, according to the UK Government, UK and Turkish law enforcement agencies are intensifying collaborative efforts to combat organised immigration crime and disrupt the supply

chain of materials used in illegal migration journeys, including boat parts. Following Robert Jenrick, the UK's Immigration Minister, visit to Turkey last month and other strategic international visits, this partnership aims to tackle illegal migration routes and smugglers. The cooperation involves joint operations, information exchange and the establishment of a new "Centre of Excellence" by the Turkish National Police, supported by the UK, to counter organised immigration crime. A MOU will facilitate swift data and intelligence sharing, while increased personnel deployment will enhance collaborative efforts to dismantle criminal gangs involved in facilitating illegal crossings. The partnership reflects the UK's commitment to addressing global migration challenges through international cooperation and disruption of criminal networks. (["UK and Türkiye strengthen partnership to help tackle illegal migration," GOV.UK](#), 09 August 2023)

Ignazio Cassis visits to Australia and New Zealand

On 09 August, according to the Federal Council of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis, Swiss Federal Councillor, concluded his visit to Australia and New Zealand from 06 to 09 August, focusing on bilateral relations, Pacific geopolitics and climate change. During the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties celebration with New Zealand, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed to establish diplomatic relations with Niue. Cassis highlighted the strong bonds between the countries and their commitment to multilateralism. In Australia, discussions centred on cooperation, science, the Ukraine conflict, consular relations and climate change, with plans for Australia to host COP31 in 2026. Cassis also engaged with Swiss communities abroad, emphasising their connection to their homeland. His visit marks the first by a Swiss government member to Australia and New Zealand in a decade. Cassis' visit signifies Switzerland's diplomatic efforts in strengthening relationships with Pacific countries, addressing climate concerns and engaging with its diaspora. (["Federal Councillor](#)

[Ignazio Cassis in Australia and New Zealand: global security and bilateral relations at centre of talks," admin.ch](#), 09 August 2023)

Lebanese traffickers arrested for Europe-bound migrant smuggling

On 09 August, Lebanese troops arrested Lebanese and Syrian traffickers planning to send migrants to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. The military detained 31 Syrians and 15 Lebanese in northern coastal towns, where they had prepared boats for illegal sea crossings. The detainees are under investigation. The country, once a haven for refugees, now witnesses Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians seeking better prospects overseas. In September, a boat from Lebanon sank off Syria's coast, claiming 94 lives. The incident led to a crackdown on smuggling networks. Lebanon's deteriorating economic situation has prompted a rise in people attempting dangerous sea journeys to Europe, challenging its role as a host for refugees. (["Lebanon's army says it has detained dozens of smugglers planning to send migrants to Europe," Associated Press](#), 09 August 2023)

Belarus and China reach an all-weather partnership

On 07 August, in an interview Belarus's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to China, Yuri Senko stated that Belarus and China had reached an all-weather partnership level. According to Senko, after Pakistan, Belarus will be second to reach this level. Belarus's rapeseed oil production, agricultural products, potash fertilizers and tourism industry will be key points of collaboration. Rapeseed oil is one of the components for China to produce a new type of product that is well-demanded in the domestic market and Belarus is the top destination in Europe for many Chinese for the weather and good food. China is expected to spend close to USD 600 billion in tourism and Belarus has become one of the places of investment. For Belarus, China's mechanical engineering, Chinese traditional medicine and setting of the China-Belarus industrial park are

attractive to upgrading its production facilities and healthcare. ([“Ambassador: Belarus is the second country to reach all-weather partnership with China,”](#) *eng.belta.by*, 07 August 2023; [“Brantsevich: Economic cooperation between Belarus, China's Chongqing on growth track,”](#) *eng.belta.by*, 07 August 2023)

Evacuees from Niger land in Paris

On 01 August, the first of three planes carrying 262 people on board mostly French and European people evacuated from Niger landed in Paris a week after a coup toppled one of the last pro-western leaders in the jihadist-plagued Sahel. The third military takeover in the region has raised security concerns in France. Niger has accused France of organising a military intervention and Paris has announced that it will withdraw its citizens and offer to evacuate other Europeans as well. Paris blamed the departure on violence against our embassy and the fear of closure of the airspace, leaving our compatriots without the ability to leave. The Niger junta, on the other hand, announced the restoration of the country's land and air borders with five neighbouring countries. ([“French plane carrying evacuees from Niger lands in Paris,”](#) *Le Monde*, 01 August 2023)

Wildfires spark in Canary Islands'

On 19 August, Spain's island of Tenerife reported extreme weather conditions. According to the island's regional councillor, the temperatures had increased overnight along with low humidity and increased wind. In response, the towns in the north of Tenerife were evacuated upon the concerns of high proximity to fire. The reasons behind the wildfire sparked on 16 August in Spain's Mount Teide volcano remain unknown. In terms of

the impact, close to 5,000 hectares are predicted to have been exposed to extreme fires. On 20 August, firefighters from the Canary Islands' reported on the advance made in safety efforts taken towards the community in combatting the wildfires. According to Canary Islands President Fernando Clavijo: “We warned of a complex situation, with rising temperatures and wind... and it's true the night started very hard with many calls saying the fire was very close to people's homes.” The fires on the Island come after the heatwave and increased global temperatures. ([“Tenerife: More residents evacuated as wildfire spreads,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 19 August 2023 ; [“Firefighters push forward against Tenerife wildfire,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 20 August 2023)

Dates for general elections announced. AdvantagePiS

On 08 August 2023 Andrzej Duda, Poland's President, announced to hold general elections on 15 October. He said: “The future of Poland is a matter for each of us! Use your rights.” The current government, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) headed by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki leads by six per cent points under the centre-right Civic Coalition. At the domestic level, Poland is one of the fastest-growing economies in Europe with the lowest unemployment rate, despite the issues over LGBT and abortion laws which resulted in protests. Apart from the issues, an opposition with personal differences also adds to the benefit of PiS for the October elections. (Claudia Chiappa, [“Poland's president announces election date,”](#) *Politico*, 08 August 2023)

About the authors



Annem Naga Bindhu Madhuri

Ms Madhuri is a Post-Graduate Scholar at the University of Madras, Chennai. Her areas of interest include the economy, maritime and Europe's external relations.



Feben Itty

Mr Itty is a Post-Graduate Scholar at Madras Christian College, Chennai. His areas of interest include Europe defence and security.



Padmashree Anandhan

Ms Anandhan is a Project Associate at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. As part of the NIAS Europe Studies, her research focuses on issues relating to politics, protests, Brexit, economy, maritime and NATO operations. Her larger research interest includes studying peace, conflict and global initiatives taken towards the ocean in Europe.



Rishika Yadav

Rishika Yadav is a Research Intern in NIAS Europe Studies at NIAS, Bangalore. Her area of interest includes the impact of Europe's Foreign Policy and domestic politics. She is currently working on an issue brief on elections in Turkey 2023. Her other areas of interest include South East Asia and East Asia.



Sreeja JS

Ms Sreeja is a Research Intern at NIAS, Bangalore. She is currently a postgraduate scholar at Madras Christian College, Chennai. Her areas of interest include EU-China relations, challenges in EU integration and emerging technologies. She is currently working on an issue brief on Germany and China's bilateral equation and the challenges to EU integration.



Yogeswari S

Ms Yogeswari is a Post-Graduate Scholar at the University of Madras, Chennai. Her areas of interest include climate change, eastern European affairs.

Genesy Balasingam

Ms Balasingam was a Research Intern at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Her larger areas of interest include Pakistan domestic and economic affairs and war in Ukraine.

