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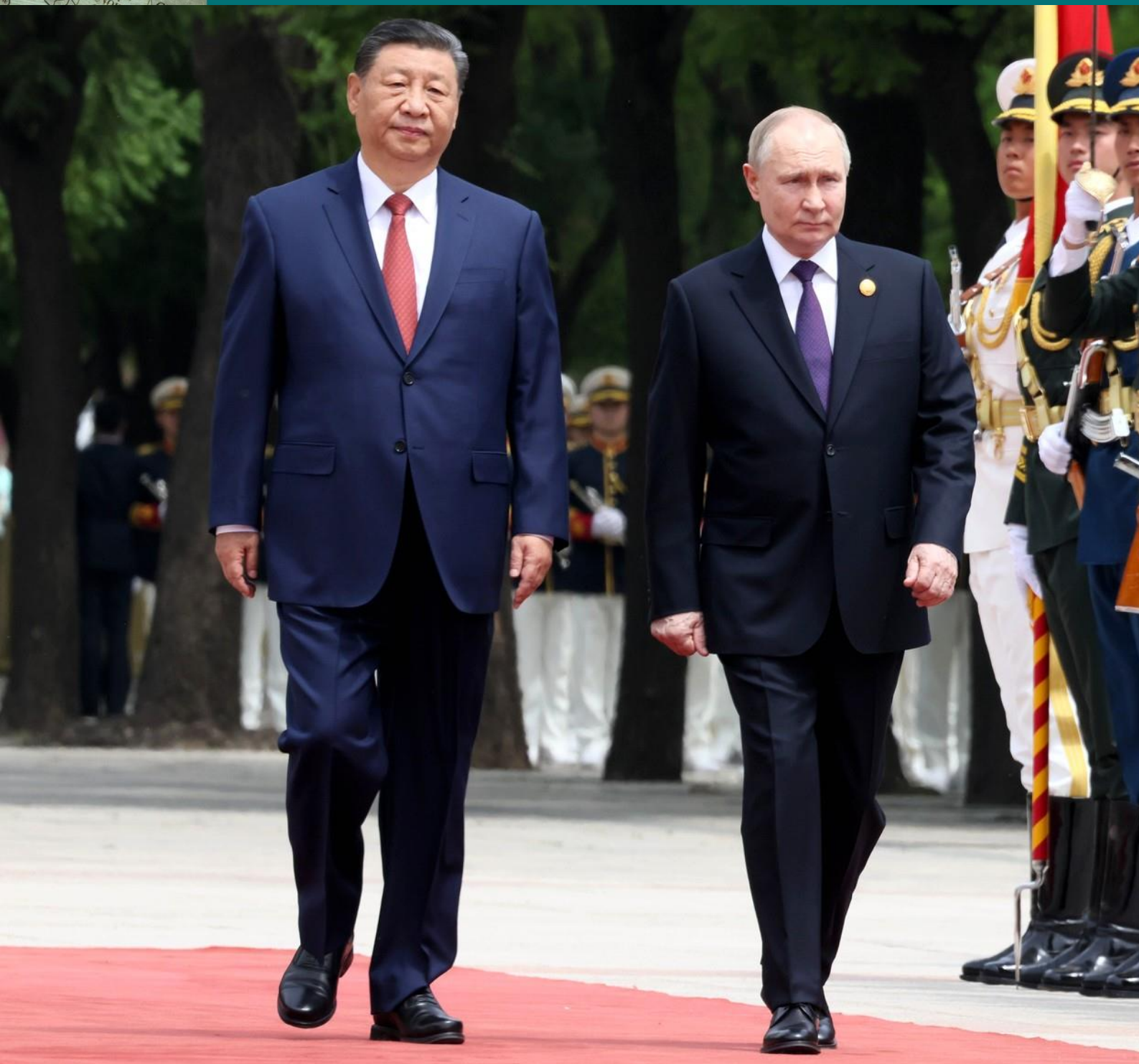
EUROPE MONITOR

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PUTIN IN CHINA | XI IN EUROPE



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

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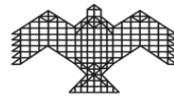
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About Europe Monitor

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

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

Europe Monitor

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Image Source: Kremlin.ru

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EM DAILY FOCUS



Source: PM Office/Vivien Cher Benko/Handout via REUTERS, Kremlin.ru, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Radovan Stoklasa/TASR/AP

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Budapest seeks more ties with Beijing for development in the multipolar world

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WAR IN UKRAINE: DAILY UPDATES



Source: AP/ The Institute for the Study of War, Alexander NEMENOV / AFP, Russian Defence Ministry / Reuters / Aljazeera, Reuters, Alexey Konovalov/TASS, Peter David Josek/Pool via REUTERS

War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from Day 827 to Day 797 in four dimensions. First, The War on the Ground. Second, The Moscow View: Claims by Russia. Third, The West View: Responses from the US and Europe. Fourth, The Global Fallouts: Implications of the Ukraine war.

By Padmashree Anandhan and Shilpa Joseph

EM SHORT NOTES



Source: Reuters, Pawel Supernak/PAP/dpa/picture alliance, The New York Times/Hollie Adams/Reuters, Susana Vera/Reuters, USC Shoah Foundation, devpolicy.org

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

By Shilpa Joseph, Neha Tresa George, Padmashree Anandhan and Ken B Varghese

COMMENT

Putin-Xi Summit: Towards a Strategic transformation in Russia-China relations

By Padmashree Anandhan

It is a clear departure from the Cold War mentality heading into a strategic improvement with geopolitical complexities.

On 16 May, Russian President Vladimir Putin met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing for the second time in the last 12 months. President Xi said, "China and Russia have shown others an example of building a new type of interstate relations and relations between major neighbours. All this was made possible because both parties were committed to the following five principles."

On 16 May, in his address, Putin said: "The negotiations just held showed the great importance that both Moscow and Beijing attach to the development and strengthening of the Russian-Chinese comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction."

"...for Russia, the strategy remains a tactical play-out situation at the inter-economic and sub-regional level so as not to let the rope loose."

On 17 May, in a press briefing, National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby commented on Putin's visit to China. He said: "Leaders of two countries that - that clearly are acting in various ways around the world inimical to our national security interests, to the interests of many of our allies and partners... they're also two leaders that don't have a long history of working together, and officials in both governments that - that aren't necessarily all that trustful of the other." On the US perception of Russia-China relations and engagement in war in Ukraine, Kirby added: "...the challenges that both countries that represent, and we take seriously this burgeoning relationship between the two of them...President Xi rush to the effort to assist

the Russian Armed Forces and provide lethal capabilities...some of these Chinese companies that are providing microelectronics and components for Russia's defensive weapons systems. That's a problem, and we've raised that with the Chinese as well."

What is the background?

First, the strategic transformation in the Russia-China relationship. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the former Soviet Union established the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin aimed to strengthen their friendship while promoting the socialist cause. Relations soured in the mid-50s and escalated in the 1960s to a war. During the 1980s, tensions remained high over the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet support to Vietnam, and its deployment of troops along the Sino-Soviet border and Sino-Mongolian border. Under Deng Xiaoping, pragmatism led to a relaxation of the tensions. By the late 1980s, Russia and China agreed to step up their relations. During 1989 and 1991, the first high-level meetings between Mikhail Gorbachev and Jiang Zemin led to a Partnership of Strategic Cooperation in 1996. By the 2000s, the relationship witnessed steady improvement, leading to the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), settling border disputes and a significant boost of economic and military cooperation. The bilateral trade increased six times from USD eight billion to USD 55.5 billion. Russia-China relations furthered into a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2010. The War in Ukraine and the US-China tensions during the 2010s have further strengthened the above.

Second, increasing Russia-China collaboration since the Ukraine War. The joint statement by Russia and China ahead of the war on 04 February 2022 marked the recovery of the relations post-pandemic and as a precursor to the war. Since August 2021, both have engaged in joint military exercises and naval patrol through the South African Navy. On the Ukraine war, China has assured its commitment to sovereignty, called for an immediate ceasefire, and abstained in UNSC resolutions but had not provided full weapon support in the initial stages of the war. In February 2023, Beijing also released a 12-point statement proposing a "political settlement to the Ukraine crisis," The "Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Cooperation for a New Era" promotes Russian-Chinese Economic Cooperation until 2030, especially in energy cooperation such as building the new Power of Siberia-2 gas pipeline across Mongolia, the opening Asia-Pacific strategy against the Indo-Pacific strategy, and increasing its total trade to USD 250 billion by 2024. The collaborations have deepened in energy, agriculture, fertilizers, metals, electronics, and machinery, and the use of national currency in trade, finance, and technology.

“China, at present, holds a strategic position with a growing military strength and global economic influence.”

Third, apprehensions in bilateral relations. Central Asia, Russia's Far East, and, recently, the Arctic remain the points of bilateral contention between China and Russia. Moscow has cautiously approached China in joining BRI by keeping its objectives and interests forward. Despite the scope of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and BRI integration, the strategic ties between both have been limited outside BRI. To rebalance, Russia emphasizes multilateral institutions, such as BRICS, SCO, and the Russia-India-China trilateral initiative, to outgrow China's

influence. Moscow is also concerned over China's presence and investments in Russia's Far East and Siberia, which was declared "a national priority for the 21st century" by Russia. Russia-China cooperation in the Arctic also reflects competition since China began to showcase itself as a "Near-Arctic State."

What does this mean?

First, advantage China. Closer ties after the war in Ukraine have lifted the mutual understanding principle. This means China's support to Russia in the war and Russian acceptance of China's sovereignty and territorial claims. Over the 75 years, Russia's ending of the border dispute emerged in the 1990s, helping China to focus on its periphery. Apart from this, China's integration into Central Asia and regional forums through Russia has helped expand its BRI initiative. Although these factors contribute to different facets to improve their equation, the high-level political support remains the binding factor.

Second, managing strategic balance and tactical tensions. The trend of the Russia-China relationship is similar to that of an N-shaped Kuznets curve. The relations witnessed a spark of friendship till the 1960's and dipped down till the 1980's. Still, it is a clear departure from the Cold War mentality heading into a strategic improvement with geopolitical complexities. China, at present, holds a strategic position with a growing military strength and global economic influence. Meanwhile, for Russia, the strategy remains a tactical play-out situation at the inter-economic and sub-regional level so as not to let the rope loose. At the same time, it swerves in the fallouts of the war in Ukraine.

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COMMENT

China and France: President Xi's visit to Paris showcases Beijing's strategic approach

By Padmashree Anandhan

The domestic economies of the EU member states benefit from the economic deal, while the EU's economic sovereignty from China remains defeated.

On 06 May, French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed China's President Xi Jinping, marking 60 years of diplomatic relations between China and France. On the first day of the visit, both joined the talks, including European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen, who discussed China's "market distortion practises," trade, removing tariffs on Cognac exports and China's efforts to influence Russia on the war in Ukraine. Macron said: "We welcome the Chinese authorities' commitments to refrain from selling any weapons or aid" and to "strictly control." In response, Xi said: "History has repeatedly proven that any conflict can ultimately be resolved only through negotiation." The French and Chinese companies also signed 18 agreements on energy, finance, and transport. Most of them were renewals rather than new commitments.

During the trilateral meeting on China's practise of dumping underpriced products into the EU, Von der Leyen stressed: "...will not waver from making tough decisions needed to protect its economy and security."

On 08 May, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "China is ready to work with France and Europe to enhance people-to-people exchanges and deepen economic and trade cooperation." Xi called China-EU relations the driving force with prospects of development, adoption of a "positive China policy," and a high-level China-EU summit to promote partnership on industrial and supply chains.

What is the background?

First, France is a key bilateral partner for China in Europe. The relationship between

the two began in January 1964 when former French President Charles de Gaulle recognized China, saying, "France simply recognizes the world as it is." However, this did not last; the Chinese leader Mao Zedong introduced a cultural revolution, leading to the exit of French students from China and the stalling of relations for the next ten years. The bilateral relations improved only at the end of the 20th century during Jacques Chirac and Jiang Zemin's leadership. During this period, France moved from establishing a comprehensive partnership with China in 1997 to a "global strategic partnership" in 2004. This formed a way for strategic dialogue on global issues, global economic governance, climate change and regional crisis. France's investment in China through companies and subsidiaries has helped create jobs and long-term partnerships. This has led China to consolidate its industrial cooperation in major civil, nuclear energy, aviation and space sectors. Under the "China-France spirit," improving economic cooperation became France's priority, with a lapse in China's human rights. China is the third-largest source of investment and the seventh-largest trading partner.

"Fixing the trade imbalance remains the slogan during the trilateral meeting."

Second, Xi's strategic targeting of Europe through France. Xi's visit may seem economic, but it is strategic, considering the choice of three European countries and meeting President Ursula Von Der Leyen. Germany supersedes France in trade with

China, but Xi's decision to meet Macron does not imply to commemorate 60 years of relations but to pitch for entry into the EU. For China, breaking through the "systemic rival" tag of the EU and accessing the European single market is strategic. EU's de-risking strategy aims to push back the trade imbalance, especially against the flooding of electronic vehicles and China's unfair trade practices to protect European businesses. Therefore, improving its EU trade would be a major harbinger for China, which has experienced a three-decade low in foreign direct investment (USD 33 billion). France and Germany are crucial to Beijing's success in this. As of 2023, France accounts for USD 78.9 billion in total bilateral trade. The key sectors of collaboration have been electric vehicles, energy transition, third-party market cooperation on infrastructure and environment protection.

“EU’s China Strategy 2023 aims to create a risk assessment for companies heavily reliant on the Chinese market.”

Third, China's aim to strategize the divide within Europe. Macron's France has been emphasizing an independent Europe, has a nuanced position within the West, and is different from other trans-Atlantic partners regarding the region's future and on many issues, from Russia to the Ukraine War. Xi's China understands the above divide and wants to build a closer partnership with France. For Macron, the European agenda and French businesses are at the core of his foreign policy; for China, this suits its Europe strategy.

What does this mean?

First, Xi's tactical visit to France. In the backdrop of geopolitical tensions across

Europe and South Asia, Xi's visit comes timely to renew its economic equation by showcasing itself as a valuable partner to the EU and as a qualified middleman to influence Russia. Although Macron strived to reduce the trade imbalance and approach China through the EU lens by stressing the "strategic autonomy" component, the meeting resulted in a positive outcome for China, with China winning and diluting the EU's de-risking barriers.

Second, France as China's Europe anchor. Despite many European leaders, such as Germany, Turkey, and Poland, who have ignored including the EU element during bilateral meetings with Chinese representatives, Macron has always managed to accompany an EU official every time to put forward the French objectives along with the European agenda. Fixing the trade imbalance remains the slogan during the trilateral meeting, but the French authorities view it as an opportunity for an alternative as Europe struggles with a stagnant economy from the war.

Third, the EU's helplessness. EU's China Strategy 2023 aims to create a risk assessment for companies heavily reliant on the Chinese market. Although it is early to evaluate the implementation, the war in Ukraine has aggravated the EU's need for more defence investment, thereby increasing demand for profitable economic partnerships. Trump's recent warning to down the US defence share to NATO has also furthered Europe's need to boost its common defence and develop sovereignty. Xi's visit presents a better opportunity for France and the EU to surface their economies during the war, helping increase their defence investment. The domestic economies of the EU member states benefit from the economic deal, while the EU's economic sovereignty from China remains defeated.

COMMENT

UN Ocean Decade Conference 2024: Stakeholders & Balance Sheet

By Alka Bala

The conference highlighted that developing partnerships and increasing investments would together push the ocean agenda forward.

The 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference was held between 10-12 April 2024 in Barcelona, Spain. It aims to implement the goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). Targeting Goal 14 - Life Below Water of the Sustainable Development Goals, the conference hopes to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a confluence of science and policy. Under the theme of 'delivering the science we need for the ocean we want,' the conference aims to bring together the global community, reflect on the current trajectory, and set priorities towards sustainable ocean management.

Since the first UN Ocean Decade Conference in 2021, the conference has provided a framework for implementing Decade Action initiatives. These actions focus on resolving the outlined Ocean Decade challenges of marine pollution, restoring ecosystems, developing a sustainable ocean economy, and building resilience to ocean hazards and climate change. The main themes addressed include the development of scientific methods for air-sea observations, ocean bed mapping, mesopelagic exploration, sustainable management, and ecosystem-based fisheries management.

What is the context?

Climate finance lags as the rising geopolitical tensions due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict have pushed countries to divert their climate funds towards military and security aid. In 2023, the NATO countries allocated USD 1.26 trillion as part of military spending. The proposal by the NATO countries to increase military spending by 2 per cent of their GDP would mean USD 2.57 trillion being diverted

away from climate funding. Prioritising increased financing against traditional security threats impedes climate action efforts.

The conference thus provides a platform for nations to commit towards ocean goals and implement initiatives to push forward the ocean agenda, which otherwise might get sidelined compared to other climate mitigation priorities such as green energy transition. Ocean Decade's multidisciplinary research approach to establish a network of scientists and policymakers becomes essential as overfishing, marine pollution, rising temperatures and sea levels and detrimental effects of sea-bed mining, threaten the ocean environment. The Global Ocean Science Report indicated that in the global funding towards natural sciences, less than 4 per cent was allocated towards ocean research, indicating the scarce investment dedicated towards ocean science. Thus a structured outlook and a global working framework provided by the UN Ocean Decade proves fundamental towards achieving climate goals, as SDG 14 remains one of the most under-financed goals.

What has been the focus of the Conference far?

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) is responsible for coordinating the developments of the UN Ocean Decade. IOC works in tandem with ten Working Groups, each focused on mitigating one of the ten challenges of Vision 2030. The conference recognises the significance of the contribution of indigenous and local knowledge for developing co-designed solutions and actions. It continues its work with indigenous rights holders and local

communities. Ocean Decade laboratories, through its discussions, workshops and demonstrations aim to provide ocean experts with a collaborative platform.

The emphasis on inclusivity is carried out through regional initiatives such as the Decade Collaborative Centre for Pacific Islands regions. Similar structures are underway for other regions such as the Caribbean would help in a coordinated development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The conference has focused on enhancing ocean literacy through developing a digital representation of the ocean. Over the last three years, the focus of the conference has shifted from increasing awareness and boosting visibility to greater emphasis on raising engagement with stakeholders through endorsements and outreach activities.

What is the agenda for 2024?

The agenda for the 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference involves a mix of plenary and parallel sessions to evaluate the initiatives implemented as part of the Vision 2030 process. The conference would focus on conditions of inclusivity, equity and diversity across genders, generations and geographies which would contribute to the success of the Ocean Decade.

New Decade Action initiatives would continue their focus on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs). It aims to provide support to regional task forces. The conference aims to adopt indicators and methodologies based on inputs from expert working groups to identify opportunities for resource mobilisation. A scheduled dialogue among the Mediterranean Stakeholders is expected to produce community-based solutions for the blue transition at the grassroots.

Who are the stakeholders?

Stakeholders engaged in the UN Ocean Conference include international non-governmental organisations, active civil society organisations, academic and scientific communities, philanthropic foundations, and public and private sectors.

The 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference was jointly organised by the Government of Spain and the IOC-UNESCO, including other partners such as the Government of Catalonia, Barcelona City Council and the Spanish National Ocean Decade Committee.

Decade Implementing Partners include the stakeholder institutions which aid in co-designing decade actions, provide marine research infrastructures and supplement communications and outreach. These stakeholders comprise a diverse set of institutions ranging from public academic institutions such as the UK's Royal College of Art, Egypt's National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries, Peking University, and the National Research Council of Canada to organisations such as Portugal's EurOcean and Belgium based European Marine Board. The National Decade Committees act as facilitators between national and Ocean Decade stakeholders and boost national participation in the conference. Presently 38 National Decade Committees combine implementation of decade initiatives with national policies.

Since its inception, the Ocean Decade has highlighted on increasing participation of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to mitigate the challenges of lack of ocean data and technical capacity, allowing them to fully harness their roles as contributors and beneficiaries. Decade's targeted project 'Women in blue: gender equity for ocean sustainability', aims at promoting achieving gender equality in ocean affairs. Decade programmes aimed at coastal resilience such as the Mega-Delta Programme, Ocean Cities Network and the Global Estuaries Monitoring focus on charting a collaborative relationship between coastal communities and harbour authorities to jointly target ocean threats.

What is the balance sheet?

According to the latest annual report (2022-2023) on the UN Ocean Decade, 39 per cent of Decade actions are led by North American partners, whereas 30 per cent is led by European partners and only 14 per cent is led by Asia-Pacific, indicating inequitable contribution between the global south and global north. Despite the UN Ocean Decade's

increasing focus on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developing Countries, the extent of initiatives implemented lie low at 3 per cent and 4 per cent in Africa. Geographical disparities are also evident in the implementation of capacity development initiatives and are largely concentrated in the United States of America (USA), followed by China, France, Costa Rica and the United Kingdom (UK). Out of 243 Decade activities held between 2022 and 2023 in the form of conferences, symposia, workshops and publications, numerous activities were organised mostly in North America, Europe and Brazil.

High-level pledges to the decade initiative include an investment of at least 1 billion USD pledged to create, expand and manage new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Such an ambitious investment is since only 8.01 per cent of the ocean is covered by marine protected areas. Since 2021, the EU has contributed 447 million euros towards ocean research aimed by the Ocean Decade programmes. Multilateral partnerships such as the Sustained Blue Economy Partnership and the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance have also led to the sustaining of science-diplomacy among various countries. Pledges of USD 1.2 billion each have been committed by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the Australian government. Countries like Namibia committed to contribute USD 5 million to contribute towards ocean research and management whereas Sweden pledged USD 400,000 towards scientific cooperation. China's pledge towards launching 31 marine protection and restoration projects also aims at assisting SIDS. A greater contribution of the global south is evident as commitments were put forward by India to a Coastal Clean Seas Campaign, Peru's commitments on aquaculture and ocean acidification, Kenya's effort to establish a blue economy bank fund and Panama's commitment to protect 40 per cent of its marine surface area by 2030.

The Barcelona Statement produced as an outcome of the 2024 Decade conference focused on three sets of priorities such as the design and delivery of ocean science projects, infrastructure for ocean monitoring and co-designing initiatives with all societal

actors. The conference also gathered inputs for the ten draft white papers, presented by the working groups, each particularly focused on mitigating one of the ten UN Decade challenges. Thematic sessions highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing between various ocean missions to inspire practical, adaptable solutions. Recommendations on tackling marine pollution included establishing a network of sentinel stations, provision of training programmes to coordinate research protocols, and providing a timeline for filling data gaps. The joint roadmap adopted in the 2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference connects EU programmes and Ocean Decade initiatives. The joint roadmap is expected to help in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal, such as the protection of 30 per cent of marine areas and other goals aimed at marine litter and pollution. Several multilateral agreements have come to fruition such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies at the World Trade Organisation as a result of Conference efforts.

Mobilisation of funding resources, both in-kind and financial remains one of the key challenges for the UN Ocean Decade Conference. The mechanisms for resource mobilisation, the Ocean Decade Alliance and Foundation Dialogue have expanded their partnerships and members to generate funding support initiatives. The conference announced new commitments such as the establishment of a matchmaking project for generating greater funding by HUB Ocean, a new Africa regional funding call by Belmont Forum, and the Government of Ireland's partnership programme to focus on Ocean Science. Three future initiatives were presented aimed at Ocean Decade Africa Roadmap, Sustainable Ocean Planning, and towards building the resilience of coastal cities. The conference highlighted that developing partnerships and increasing investments would together push the ocean agenda forward.

Alka Bala is an undergraduate scholar at the Department of International Relations, Peace and Public Policy at St Joseph's University, Bangalore.

COMMENT

President Xi in Serbia

By Femy Francis

Looking at China's Balkans Strategy and beyond 25th year of bombing anniversary.

On 07 May, Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Serbia, marking the 25th anniversary of the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. During his visit, Xi Jinping was welcomed by President Aleksandar Vucic and his politburo. Both leaders affirmed their "ironclad friendship" and signed over 28 new agreements to elevate their "comprehensive and strategic partnership further."

On Serbia, Xi wrote: "The friendship forged in blood between the peoples of China and Serbia has become the common memory of the two peoples and will inspire both sides to move forward together," President Aleksandar Vucic said: "I told him that as the leader of a great power, he will be met with respect all over the world, but the reverence and love he encounters in our Serbia will not be found anywhere else."

Before reaching Serbia, President Xi sent a letter in Politika: "May the Light of Our Ironclad Friendship Shine on the Path of China-Serbia Cooperation." Xi affirmed the affinity between the two countries despite the distance between them. He stated that both countries have always respected and trusted each other and that President Vucic has maintained dialogue through frequent meetings and phone calls, which has aided their relations. Additionally, he highlighted that Serbia is China's first free trade partner in Eastern Europe and its second-largest trading partner. Xi remembered the 1999 NATO bombing and asserted that they would never allow for such tragic history to repeat itself. He called for international cooperation when facing the international arena and stated: "Facing a fluid and turbulent world, we should step up coordination and cooperation in the United Nations and other international organizations, and advocate an equal and orderly multipolar world and a

universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization."

During his visit, China and Serbia signed the following: an agreement on extradition for judicial assistance in commercial and civil matters; an MoU between the Serbian Ministry of Internal and External Trade and the National Commission for Development and Reform of China to set up a mechanism to monitor the mid-term action plan for the joint construction of the Belt and Road initiative; cooperation in the fields of telecommunication and digital economy; ministerial exchanges in the field of geology and mining; MoU between the Siberian flagship newspaper "Politika," and the Chinese media group; and MoU signed in the field of green and sustainable development.

What is the background?

First, background to the NATO bombing, on 07 May 1999, the US jets dropped five bombs on the Chinese embassy, which led to the death of three Chinese nationals and injured twenty others. The bombing was caused by the Western alliance, which launched air warfare to push Slobodan Milosevic to end the ethnic violence against Albanian rebels. The US apologized and admitted that the embassy bombing was a mistake that happened because of faulty intelligence. Though the 25th anniversary was highlighted throughout the trip, Xi surprisingly failed to visit the infamous bombing site. This reflects the motivation behind the trip, which was beyond the 1999 NATO bombing and more about establishing economic relations and influence in the region.

Second, Chinese investments in Serbia. China has made significant investments by pouring billions into various mining and infrastructure sectors. China and Serbia

signed the Free Trade Agreement in 2016, though some parts did not align with EU membership. From 2012 to 2023, trade and commerce increased exponentially; in 2012, it was at USD 450 million, now reaching USD 4 billion in 2023. Serbian exports to China have increased from USD 400 million in 2020 to USD 1.3 billion in 2023. Serbia is also part of the 16+1 initiative, the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, to promote business and investments. Additionally, Serbia has signed a USD 3 billion package for economic and military support. Chinese tech giant Huawei has installed smart surveillance system cameras in Belgrade, systematically entrenching itself in the Serbian economy and politics.

“Under Vucic, there has been an exponential rise in pro-China sentiments in Serbia, and these relations have sometimes even overshadowed Russia's relations with Serbia.”

Third, Serbia's interest in China. Belgrade's interest in China is multifold and is not limited to economic opportunities. They reflect how it sees NATO and EU as imposing regional powers and how it wants to maintain its relationship with the now-cornered Russia. President Vucic of the Serbian Progressive Party affirmed that they refused to destroy Serbia's relations with Russia overnight and that he would fight to ensure their friendship. Vucic has been sceptical of the West as he called out the Western lecture on Russia respecting the territorial integrity of Ukraine but not of Serbia, hinting at the 1999 attack. In light of this, Serbia has refused to sanction Russia, and in doing so, it has set itself apart from the rest of the EU. Russia's closeness to China also augments Serbia's confidence in China.

What does it mean?

First, Serbia as a part of China's gateway to Europe. China is attracted to the Western Balkans and Serbia because of its geostrategic location and relative closeness to the vibrant EU market. Serbia is a vital transport hub to Europe and can act as an entry point into the walled Europe. There are 61 projects by the Chinese reckoned to be valued at around UD 21 billion in the Balkan countries. Through investments in BRI, they have made significant inroads into Western and Eastern Europe and, therefore, was a strategic choice for Xi's visit.

Second, Serbia balancing the East and West. The Serbian President's approach to the east-west divide has been straightforward, and he does not want to align with either completely. During his Presidential campaign, he often stated that he wanted to maintain their relations with the EU but retain their traditional friendship with Russia and China. Under Vucic, there has been an exponential rise in pro-China sentiments in Serbia, and these relations have sometimes even overshadowed Russia's relations with Serbia. China has become a major external influence in the Balkan and European regions. Serbia will use China and the EU to leverage a better deal.

Third, China's Balkan strategy. For Beijing, the Balkan countries are easy investments as most do not adhere to EU standards and regulations, which often slows the investment process. Not having to deal with strenuous regulations makes Chinese interest in the Balkan countries understandable. The same argument can apply to Balkan's interest in China, where the EU also offers funds and economic support; they are less appealing due to the fatigue that comes with following EU regulations. The appeal is also lessened by China's well-oiled bureaucracy, which delivers faster results. Balkans are the EU's soft underbelly, often overlooked and overshadowed by the bigger EU country's ambitions. The Balkans are increasingly looking for alternatives to EU investments, and China knows that and wants to tap into the opportunity that is present.

COMMENT

President Xi in Hungary

By Akhil Ajith

An evolving symbiotic partnership vis-à-vis Europe.

On 08 May, Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived at Budapest as a part of his Europe visit, and held talks with President Tamas Sulyok and Prime Minister Victor Orban. During his visit, the two countries signed a strategic partnership besides 18 other agreements and memoranda of understanding. The two sides agreed to maintain high-level exchanges, strengthen political mutual trust, and deepen cooperation for mutual benefit to keep the bilateral relationship at a high level and bring more benefits to the two peoples.

The joint statement said: "China respects Hungary's independent choice of a development path and domestic and foreign policies suited to its national conditions, and supports the efforts made by the Hungarian side to maintain national stability and promote economic development."

PM Orban said, "Chinese president's visit marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties was an honour and noted the last such visit had happened 20 years ago."

In a joint statement on the upgrade of their relationship, both China and Hungary said the "two sides are committed to enhancing synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Hungary's "Eastern Opening" policy. It also stated that the two sides will ensure cooperation in emerging fields, including clean energy, artificial intelligence, mobile communication technology, nuclear energy, and technology.

What is the background?

First, China-Hungary bilateral relations. In October 1949, Hungary was the first European country to recognize the People's Republic of China. However, an agreement in October on "Friendly Partnership of Cooperation," gave a momentum to bilateral relations. China was one of the pivotal

countries, when Hungary launched the "Opening to the East" policy in 2010, seeking comprehensive political, economic, and cultural partnerships with Asia. On 09 May 2024, China and Hungary elevated the above relations to an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership.

On trade, according to the China-Hungary Investment and Cooperation Report, the bilateral volume in 2023 reached USD14.52 billion, an increase of 73 per cent compared with the 2013 trade flows. Hungary imported 11.79 billion worth of goods which includes electrical and electronic goods, plastics and chemicals. Hungary exported 2.73 billion worth of goods which includes electronic equipment, machinery, organic chemicals, railway products, glassware, etc. China's foreign direct investment in Hungary was EU7.6 billion in 2023, accounting for 58 per cent of Hungary's total FDI.

Second, Hungary and China's BRI projects since 2015. Hungary was the largest recipient of Chinese FDI, with USD 571 million in 2021. Today, Hungary hosts USD 1.5 billion battery manufacturing plant by Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., Limited (CATL) in Debrecen, the biggest outside China. Huawei has a presence in Hungary, catering to the EU demands and other international markets. Budapest-Belgrade railway remains a BRI flagship project, announced in 2013 at Euro 2.3 billion. China aims to connect the railway line to the Piraeus port in Greece, linking the Mediterranean Sea with the heart of Europe.

Third, the Europe factor in Hungary-China relations. For Beijing, Hungary is an entry point to Europe and the EU. With its growing economic profile in Hungary through its industries, China aims to expand its market and boost its exports by making Hungary an export hub. Besides the above, for China

Hungary's political rights in the EU and its ability to influence any major policy decisions, from the Russia-Ukraine war to Chinese imports, are critical for Beijing to secure its interests.

For Hungary, with Budapest's frosty ties with the EU on the Russia-Ukraine war and Chinese imports, it aims to partner with China as a leverage. Hungary sees Europe as a challenge to its Hungary-first policy. Hungary sees EU demands as a threat on issues relating to annual funding and financial assistance; China is seen as a leverage vis-à-vis EU.

Hungary is also a part of the Central European '16+1' format, that hosts the heads of governments of China, Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Serbia. The group discusses various areas of cooperation including in the strategic sectors such as EV, green energy, telecommunication, etc.

What does it mean?

First, ties with Hungary as leverage for China to mitigate the negative effects of its increasingly fraught relations with the European Union. For example, the production of EV cars in Hungary could help China avoid possible punitive tariffs and enable it to compete more effectively with

European brands. Hungary presiding over the rotating EU presidency from 01 July, will be critical for China to expand its political leverage over the EU.

“Through BRI, China wants to cement its ties with these countries economically and politically.”

Second, a strategic partnership with Hungary will help China to improve ties and secure its interests in Central and Eastern Europe. For Beijing, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has least engaged with compared to other regions of Europe. The China-CEE, or the 16+1 cooperation, has facilitated China to make the region part of China's extended neighbourhood. Through BRI, China wants to cement its ties with these countries economically and politically. It wants to use its BRI projects to expand its influence to create a divide within the EU. China sees CEE as Europe's soft underbelly and aims to use economic and political tools to promote and secure its regional interests, which the US and EU have challenged through de-risking and decoupling strategies.



Source: PM Office/Vivien Cher Benko/Handout via REUTERS, Kremlin.ru, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Radovan Stoklasa/TASR/AP

HUNGARY

Budapest seeks more ties with Beijing for development in the multipolar world

By Shilpa Joseph

On 08 May, Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Hungary coincided with the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two states. As Hungary's presidency in the EU starts in July, Levente Horvath, director of the Eurasia Center at John von Neumann University spoke about the significance of China in the EU and the new world order. Hungary's "Open to the East" policy has worked out well in the past 14 years and the state sought to diversify and cooperate in international relations and economic aspirations. Horvath highlighted the various levels of cooperation with China, including political connectivity, Trade, and People-to-people ties. He sought more developments in the BRI projects in Hungary like the successful railway project connecting Budapest and Belgrade.

On 08 May, ahead of reaching Hungary Xi issued a arrival statement at Budapest Airport. By appreciating the recent economic and social developments that Hungary went through, he reiterated the friendship and strategic cooperation between the two countries. Hungary was among the first to recognize China in 1949 when the PRC was founded and the two states established diplomatic ties in 2004, which celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2024. With China's Belt and Road Initiative taking shape in Hungary, there have been frequent high-level exchanges, deepening mutual trust and people-to-people ties formed in recent years. Xi said: "Together, we have set a fine example of building a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation". He also hopes to draw a new blueprint for cooperation and development, viewing the bilateral relations from a broad perspective and a long-term view.

Hungary strongly dissented from the de-risking approach of the EU and promised to promote Cooperation with China, as the best strategy for advancing in technology and

* 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.

innovation. Impressed by China's growing EV sector, he encouraged more investments from Chinese companies in Hungary as it will lead to healthy competition. Hungary wanted to strengthen ties between Europe and Asia and change the EU-China relations while it holds the presidency. Horvath also opposed the Ukraine war and insisted on discussions to ensure peace.

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RUSSIA

Putin's Belarus Visit: Holds talk on strategic partnership

By Shilpa Joseph

On 23 May, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus. The main focus was Russia's tactical nuclear weapons exercises. In the press conference that followed, Lukashenko stated that: "Belarus intends to further develop its nuclear industry relying on Russian technology...There are no irreconcilable differences between our countries... We must honestly admit that we have resolved all issues." The two leaders together drafted a common industrial policy of the Union State by first removing the protective measures and restrictions on trade. This would facilitate in conducting a single macro-economic and monetary policy. In a joint statement, Putin said: "We cooperate in three major areas: power generation, oil and gas, and nuclear energy. We have made decisions in each of these areas, and those decisions are working well."

In a joint press conference between Lukashenko and Putin, Lukashenko said: "We are aimed at further development of the nuclear industry in Belarus based on Russian technologies. We

examined in detail the issues of industrial cooperation, the development of mechanical engineering and machine tools..."

On the economic investment Putin said: "Russia has invested over five billion dollars in the Belarusian economy. Two and a half thousand Russian companies operate in the republic; joint projects are being implemented in strategically important industries, such as the production of automobiles and machine tools, agricultural machinery, microelectronics, and civil aviation. The priority sector of bilateral cooperation is energy."

On cultural and humanitarian, Putin said: "Russian-Belarusian cultural and humanitarian cooperation is multifaceted, scientific and educational exchanges are carried out, joint programs for the patriotic education of youth and the preservation of common historical memory are being implemented, much is being done to create the most favorable conditions for mutual trips of citizens, to develop their contacts and direct communication with each other."

Belarus and Russia: A brief history

Belarus was among the founding forces of the Soviet Union with a shared eastern Slavic cultural ancestry. Belarus's location between the Baltic States and Ukraine on the north-south axis and Russia and Poland on the east-west axis served as a major defensive stronghold and a forward base for Moscow's power projection. In 1991, Presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia, Kravchuk of Ukraine, and Shushkevich of Belarus signed the Belovezha Accords in 1991, which recognized each other's independence and established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in place of the Soviet Union.

During the Cold War, Belarus hosted Soviet nuclear weapons. After the disintegration, Russia joined hands with Belarus to create an integrated Eastern European Union to counter the Western advances in the Baltic. Belarus was Russia's first ally; it joined Russia's multilateral defence and economic projects: the Collective Security Treaty Organization, created in 1993, and the Eurasian Economic Community, formed in

2000.

In 2014, after Russia annexed Crimea, Belarus maintained its independence from Russia and tried to position itself as a neutral ground for diplomacy between Russia, Ukraine, and Western European powers. However, there was a phase of intensified ties between the two countries in 2020, when the Belarusian ruler Aliaksandr Lukashenka's presidential power was on the verge of falling. Several anti-government protests within the country forced him to turn to Russia for political, economic, and security assurances.

Relations after Russia's invasion of Ukraine

With the onset of the war in 2022, Belarus offered its territory and its military, transport, and logistical infrastructure to the Russian army. However, the Belarusian military was not taking part in the hostilities. Belarus allowed Russia to stage its assault on Kyiv from within the territory and has served Russia as a logistic hub for the repair of damaged aircraft, war machinery, and ammunition. Additionally, Belarus provided medical and hospital support for the Russian Armed Forces during the war.

In October 2023, Russia stationed its tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. As early as spring 2022 they began to build defensive lines along Ukraine's border with Belarus by engineering structures and fortifications (such as anti-tank ditches) to prevent a possible offensive. However, the Ukrainian General Staff believes that the risk of Belarussian involvement in the war is slim since it will only put its national sovereignty and internal stability at risk. Minsk's restrained response to the incident when an S-300-type missile launched from Ukraine landed on Belarussian territory on 29 December 2022 is further corroboration of Lukashenka's reluctance to get involved in any such scenario. Furthermore, The Ukrainian ambassador to Belarus continued to work in Minsk indicating that Ukraine wants to maintain the diplomatic channel of cooperation so that Belarus is not involved in full-scale participation.

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SLOVAKIA

Assassination Attempt on Prime minister triggers accusation of police and bodyguards

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 15 May, The Slovak Spectator reported on the shooting of Robert Fico, Slovakian Prime Minister in Handlová. Fico suffered an injury in the abdomen which is currently observed as "life threatening." Following this, the police had arrested the suspect who is identified to be an amateur poet and according to a Hungarian investigation the suspect is associated with a pro-Russian paramilitary group.

World leaders such as Ursula Von Der Leyen, European Commission President responded: "Such acts of violence have no place in our society and undermine democracy, our most precious common good." Apart from this, Putin and leaders from Hungary and Czech Republic also condemned the attacks

Who is Robert Fico?

Robert Fico, who had played a very important role in Slovakian politics since 1993 independence has served as a prime minister longer than anyone else. The country gained independence after the Velvet Revolution, it was a series of popular

and non-violent protests the Communist party when the country was still Czechoslovakia. Fico had been a communist party member and later founded Smer party in late 1990s. He began his first three terms as a Prime Minister in 2006 and served for four years before going into opposition after his coalition lost the election. The Smer party which started out as political left has but has embraced right- wing views in terms of Immigration and cultural issues.

Most of the international discussion of Fico leadership in recent years has focused on Russia's President Vladimir Putin of Russia and the Viktor Orban Prime minister of Hungary. The police and bodyguards have been blamed for failing to protect along with journalist and the opposition for attempting the assassination. According to the report, in 2018 an investigative journalist and his fiancée were killed when investigation on corruption began to lead to higher officials. This led to Fico facing criminal charges in 2022 and was demanded to resign in 2018 after mass protests upon the killing. This led to protests, largest since the Velvet Revolution; where the demonstrators demanded resignation and a new election. Fico had overseen the fact that the nation ranks the highest in terms of press freedom. He returned to power in an election in 2024, forming a coalition government securing around 23 per cent votes. He had campaigned against sanctions that were imposed on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. Slovakia's military contributions towards Ukraine were small compared to other nations like the US and the UK.

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UKRAINE

Battle for Kharkiv: Russian advance in northern border showcases Ukraine's struggle

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 19 May, Ukrainian forces reported on Russian shelling on civilians in Kharkiv. According to the report, civilians were injured in Vovchansk. The town is located five kilometres from Russian border and 70 kilometres from north-east of Kharkiv. Whereas the TASS cited the failure of Ukraine armed forces to defend Russian offensive in Kharkiv was due to less resources. According to the report, Russia witnessed a huge advantage in terms of artillery shells leading to depletion of Ukrainian defences. It had exposed the exhaustion in the Ukrainian troops and "sloppily constructed" defence fortifications.

On 18 May, Ukrainian army claimed the situation to be "under control" along with defending the assault in parts of Kharkiv. Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, claimed on the possibility of Russian assault starting a wider offensive. He warned on the renewed offensive of Russia as "first wave" to a larger Russian campaign to capture Kharkiv oblast. On the same day, report from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) indicated the Russian forces to have occupied 278 square kilometres between 09 and 15 May.

On 10 May, White House national security spokesperson, John Kirby stated on the US expectations on Russia to make advances in the coming weeks but stressed that it sees no breakthrough. He added that the gap will be filled by US assistance enabling Ukraine to defend the over the months in 2024.

Issues at large

First, ethnic and strategic importance of Kharkiv. In the Kharkiv oblast, Kharkiv city is Ukraine's second-largest city. It was known for Russian speaking population and under the soviet period (1919-1934), the city became the centre for transport, industry and science with many industrial clusters, research centres and universities. Located 40 kilometres south of Russian

border functions as an intersection to key highways. One of which links Russia's Rostov-on Don to Crimea. The region is also home to several military facilities and defence brigades of Ukraine used for monitoring Russian military activities. The speed with which Russian troops advanced from one settlement to another in the north of Kharkiv has been possible due to its strategic advantage to target from Russia.

Second, Russia's breach of Kharkiv border. Russia began to launch massive drone attacks on Kharkiv in response to the increased border attacks in Belgorod in December 2023. While Russian defence ministry continued to use long-range precision weapons to strike at the military complex of Ukraine in January. Zelenskyy demanded for more air defence such as "Patriot, IRIS-T, and NASAMS" as US Congress prolonged its decision in granting military aid to Ukraine. These attacks continued through February, March and April with exchanges between Ukraine and Russia over Kharkiv and Belgorod. Russia began to make quick and short advances in May through usage of ballistic missiles (S-300 and S-400) and guided bombs. Russian forces attempted to breach through the Kharkiv border using armoured vehicles and heavy shelling through new wave of counteroffensive and succeeded in progressing by 10 May. By end of May, Russia advanced 10 kilometres and encircling partially in the north of Kharkiv oblast, capturing Vovchansk town (located 74km (45 miles) from Kharkiv), Starytsia and Lyptsi villages in the north and north-east.

Third, challenges to Ukrainian forces. The US aid package containing military equipment, funding to purchase weapons and munition from US stockpile and enhancement of Ukraine's defence industrial base. Additionally, the Ukrainian forces were prohibited from using US aided weapons to strike Russia till approval. This delay by the US Congress until April left Ukrainian forces in a weaker defence position. Apart from this, Ukraine government's limitation for quicker mobilisation also added to the

military personnel shortage resulting in some areas in frontline critical. Compared to the 2022, Ukraine counteroffensive, Russian forces were also observed to be technologically advanced while Ukraine struggled to prevent losing of villages in the north and north-east of Kharkiv.

In perspective

First, challenge in capturing Kharkiv city. Observing the trends from the battles of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, which prolonged for months costed Ukraine and Russia an exhaustive count of military personnel and weapons. Given Kharkiv's expanse of 350 kilometres, Russia would need more than a year, massive troops and enormous aerial systems to continue its air attacks. The speedy advance of Russian forces can be to capture the Kharkiv city which is only 40 kilometres from the border. One of the objectives to break into Kharkiv could be to destroy the military depots, communication hub and brigades responsible for launching attacks into Russia's Belgorod region. This will be determined in the coming months depending on Ukrainian defence capabilities and delivery of US air defence systems.

Second, geographic advantage of Kharkiv. The southern Ukraine has been the focus in the past six months and it has been easier for Russia to maintain its position in the southern and eastern Ukraine due to the proximity. Unlike Bakhmut and Avdiivka located in the centre of Ukraine, Kharkiv region forms part of Russia's soviet and ethnic history flourishing with a larger Russian speaking population and serving as industrial hub for Ukraine. Geographical and cultural proximity along with Ukraine's military hubs makes it an attractive target for Russia to destroy and extradite people.

War in Ukraine: Daily Updates*

By Padmashree Anandhan and Shilpa Joseph



Source: AP/ The Institute for the Study of War, Alexander NEMENOV / AFP, Russian Defence Ministry / Reuters / Aljazeera, Reuters, Alexey Konovalov/TASS, Peter David Josek/Pool via REUTERS

War in Ukraine: Day 827

Biden approves Ukraine to use US made weapons inside Russia with restric

War on the Ground:

On 30 May, Oleh Syniehubov, Ukraine's regional governor reported on Russian missile strike on civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv. According to him, the missiles had targeted three spots in Kharkiv injuring 16 and killing three using S-300 missiles in an "double tap" format. This means soon after the first strike, the second strike was instantly delivered in the same site. He also claimed on destruction of stairwells, facades in Kharkiv.

On 30 May, Amnesty International released a report on how Russian authorities had targeted children and families opposing Russian invasion in Ukraine. According to the report, Russia used the children to threaten the adults on removal of parental rights and placing their children in

institutions. Oleg Kozlovsky, Amnesty International's Russia Researcher said: "Despite all the Kremlin's talk about the value of the family, it is the very bond between children and their parents that is being shamelessly exploited to crush dissent." The report also highlighted the repercussions faced by the families for showcasing their stance on war in Ukraine.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 31 May, *RT* reported on Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister warning on Russia strengthening its nuclear arsenal and removal of restrictions on missile deployment on US deployment of launchers in Europe and Asia. In an interview, Lavrov stated on Moscow probable response if the US deploys short-range and intermediate-range missiles in Europe and Asia. He added: "The implementation of the plans of the Americans to deploy ground-based

* 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.

[missiles] will not go unanswered.” Russia which claims to have followed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty 1987 after exit of the US. In 2019, the US exited the 1987 agreement which was signed to ban use of ground-based missiles and was found to have used medium-range missile system in the Philippines drill. On the same, Russia and China government released a joint statement condemning: “...highly destabilizing steps that pose a direct threat to the security of Russia and China.”

On 31 May, the *TASS* reported on Russia’s battlegroup North claim on capturing seven Ukrainian army commanders near Volchansk in Kharkiv oblast. According to the report, Russian troops captured “Ukrainian Defense Ministry’s Main Intelligence Department, four fighters of the Sonechko battalion, and also seven border guards.”

On the same day, the Russian defence ministry claimed on intercepting Ukrainian army’s attempt to regroup its forces in Kharkiv. In a statement: “An army aviation strike group of the Aerospace Forces consisting of a attack helicopter, a combat helicopter and a multirole helicopter successfully disrupted the rotation of Ukrainian troops within the area of operation of the Battlegroup North.”

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 31 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Joe Biden, the US President approval to Ukraine to use US-made weapons to counter Russia. The move comes as Ukraine demanded for use of US supplies weapons to strike inside Russian territory. According to the US officials, the grant will allow Ukraine to use its weapons only for limited purpose which is to counter-fire in Kharkiv. Ukraine can use only to counter Russian forces which have prepared to attack Kharkiv and the prohibition on usage of long-range strikes still remains. In response, Dmitry Peskov Russia’s spokesperson said: “It will ultimately be very damaging to the interests of those countries that have chosen the path of escalating tensions.”

On 31 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Boris

Pistorius, German Defence Minister announcement of new arms package for Ukraine worth EUR 500 million. One of the key demands from Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine’s President was for more ammunition to support the air defence systems. The approved package will include ammunition for IRIS-T-SLM medium-range air defence system and short range SLS missiles. Pistorius said: “We will continue to support you in this defensive campaign.”

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NATO Secretary General assures to step up aid for Ukraine

War on the Ground:

On 29 May, *Ukrinform* reported on Ukraine and Turkey’s energy minister and Turkish Ambassador meeting. During the meeting the officials discussed the areas of cooperation and how to overcome consequences of the Russian attacks in Ukraine energy grid. According to energy ministry: “The parties discussed the difficult situation in the Ukrainian energy system following renewed massive Russian attacks, as well as the areas of cooperation between the countries to overcome.” The main agenda of the department will be to improve flexibility of the power systems and increase electricity generation. Discussed ideas especially on Kharkiv and Odesa on installing mobile power plants.

On 29 May, *Ukrinform* reported on Finland, Poland and Canada allowing Ukraine to use the weapons provides at its own discretion. Melanie Joly, Canadian Foreign Minister said that it would not impose any restrictions on use of the arm supplies and would continue to support Ukraine's armed forces. Joly said: "Russia has no red lines...Therefore, in the issue of Ukraine's defence, we must help them and demonstrate that, despite everything that is happening, we will be there for them." Whereas the Polish Defence Ministry said that it had given 44 packages of military aid worth four to five billion and would not impose any restrictions on use of weapons by Ukraine.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 29 May, the *TASS* reported on Russian defence ministry's statement on destroying of 20 Ukraine's unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). According to the report, two boats in Kherson were also destroyed and both sides engaged in active combat and defence in the left bank of Dnieper River. Vladimir Saldo, Kherson Region Governor said: "The Ukrainian armed formations lost two boats and 20 drones." In total 45 personnel, four motor vehicles and 122 mm D-30 howitzer were recorded as Ukrainian army loss.

On 29 May, the *TASS* reported on Ukrainian forces redeployment of reserves from Donetsk to Kharkiv. Yan Gagin, Russia appointed Donetsk People's Republic head said: "In order to try to hold Volchansk, the enemy has redeployed [reserves] from other areas: Donetsk, Chasov Yar, Kherson and Zaporozhye." He said that the Ukrainian military had moved several unites of military equipment into Kharkiv.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 29 May, *Politico* reported on Pål Jonson, the Swedish defence Minister announcement of Sweden's delivery of the 16th military aid package to Ukraine worth EUR 1.16 billion. The package includes surveillance aircraft, air-air medium range missiles and infantry fighting vehicles. He said: "Sweden will donate a new military capability to strengthen Ukraine's air defence. Package 16 will be the largest military aid package.

Sweden will donate Airborne Surveillance and Control aircraft (ASC 890) to Ukraine." The aid also includes Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) used in ground-based and air defence systems, 155mm artillery ammunition and resources. They also offered their entire stock of PBV 302 armoured tracked personnel carriers to support the formation of new Ukrainian units. Additionally, the Swedish Defence Research Agency will help Ukraine establish its Defence Research Institute with control and command capabilities by donating terminals with satellite communications subscriptions. The minister also addressed the decrease in Sweden's defence capabilities after the donation and planned to procure additional S106 GlobalEye aircraft and new armoured vehicles and missiles to replace the donated ones. Sweden allowed Ukraine to use its weapons on Russian soil and has provided EUR 3.8 billion since 2022.

On 28 May, according to [swissinfo.ch](https://www.swissinfo.ch), Polish security services arrested a man for trying to take photos of military vehicles crossing the Ukraine border. The detained were found to be working on the orders of Russian intelligence. Poland claims that it is often a target for Russian spies who are trying to gather information to help Ukraine repel Russian attacks since Poland plays a major role as a hub for military and other supplies to Ukraine. According to Poland's spokesperson Jacek Dobrzynski, the suspect was a 26-year-old Ukrainian man, identified as Oleksandr D was found to be influencing a Polish citizen to assist in foreign intelligence in return for a pay of EUR15,000. The court provided three months of pre-trial detention and is expected to spend up to eight years in prison if found guilty. The Internal Security Agency (ABW) also detained a Polish and two Belarusian citizens for setting fire to facilities in various parts of Poland. The men were accused of being members of an organized criminal group and of carrying out sabotage activities on behalf of Russian foreign intelligence.

On 28 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on investigators from Belgium raiding a residence and office of a staffer of a member of the European Parliament who was

allegedly involved in spreading Russian propaganda through the news site Voice of Europe. Belgium's federal prosecutor's office claimed that as evidence of Russian interference in the upcoming EU elections. A staffer for EU lawmaker Marcel de Graaff of the far-right Dutch party Forum for Democracy was suspected of promoting pro-Russia candidates through propaganda. While De Graaff denied any involvement in the matter, Maximilian Krah, of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party was also investigated since the suspect had previously worked for him. Earlier, one of Krah's parliamentary aides was arrested on suspicion of spying for China. In early May, the EU suspended the broadcasting activities of Voice of Europe among others, as it was reportedly funded by pro-Kremlin tycoon Viktor Medvedchuk. The EU claimed that they were all driven by "information manipulation and propaganda" under Russian authority.

On 29 May, *The New York Times* reported on Antony J Blinken, the US Secretary of State beginning of European tour. A part of his first leg, he met Maia Sandu, Moldova's President in Chisinau. He announced two new aid packages to Moldova to address a range of issues arising from Russian aggression, including its invasion of Ukraine. The first one included USD 50 million for Moldova's industry and government, as well as for democratic processes as Blinken addressed the need to fight corruption and disinformation. The second aid package mentioned was USD 85 million to help Moldova become more resilient to energy shocks and less dependent on electricity produced in Transnistria, an eastern separatist region backed by Russia. There are increased concerns over Russian interference in elections in Moldova. The US Agency for International Development earlier announced a fund of USD 300 million to strengthen its battery storage capabilities, high-voltage transmission lines, and other energy needs. This helped the country to stop relying on natural gas imports from Russia. Following this visit, Blinken would go to the Czech Republic, to attend a NATO meeting to discuss ways to help Ukraine in the war. Additionally, Blinken said that the US would "adapt and adjust" its stance in

response to changing circumstances on the battlefield, giving a possibility on Biden administration allowing Ukraine to strike inside Russia using US-made weaponry.

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War in Ukraine Day 825

After Spain Zelenskyy in Belgium

War on the Ground:

On 28 May, according to *Euronews*, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President appealed all countries that stood for peace to attend the upcoming peace summit in Switzerland which is scheduled to take place between 16 and 17 June 2024. The agenda of the peace summit would be nuclear safety, freedom of navigation, food safety and humanitarian support and building upon Zelenskyy's ten-point formula. According to the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. out of the 160 delegations that were invited, 70 states and organizations have confirmed their attendance so far. While the US intends

to join the meeting, there is no confirmation whether Joe Biden, the US President would be the representative. In response Zelenskyy said: "I believe this summit needs President Biden and other leaders need President Biden because they value the US reaction so his absence would only be an applaud to Putin, a standing ovation." China and Brazil, in a joint statement insisted that any peace conference must include both Ukraine and Russia with equal participation and fair discussion with direct dialogue of all peace plans. Zelenskyy pleaded the world leaders not to remain silent and attend the summit to work for a peaceful solution. He added that: "If you're silent, you're satisfied with what's going on."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 28 May, the *TASS* reported on Vladimir Putin, the Russian President address in a news conference on his preliminary understanding of the Ukrainian constitution. According to him, the current situation, the only legitimate power was Verkhovha Rada, the parliament and its speaker, since Ukraine's President's term expired the previous week. He claimed that since Ukraine was a parliamentary and presidential republic, the basic levers of power fall under the purview of the country's representative body. He highlighted the Ukrainian constitution where it the parliament says extension of mandates amid martial law but excludes Presidential term.

On 28 May, *RT* reported on EU's shortage of "cod" a critical ingredient used across the region. The report was disclosed by Russia's fishing industry association indicating UN data. According to the report, a decline in the harvest and restrictions on Russian trade were observed as factors resulting in increase in the price and pushing other European countries to search for alternate options. German Zverev, the director of the All-Russian Association of Fish Producers said: "Despite the significant increase in prices, consumers are not abandoning [cod] en masse, although they partially switch to cheaper white fish, primarily pollock." He also added on the impact on the fish processing businesses due to inadequate quantity to supply and in maintaining the

market balance. All food items except caviar have been exempt from the EU sanctions. In October 2023, Norway had suspended all Russian seafood imports reasoning "inadequate infrastructure." Apart from the effect on the EU, the sanctions have also affected Russia's conduct of foreign trade and exit from western financial system. Earlier in 2023, the EU had imported close to 284,000 tons of cod with Russia's share accounting for 54.7 per cent.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 28 May, *Politico* reported that Belgium assured them it would send the first batch of F-16 fighter jets, but with the condition that it would not be used on Russian territory. On a visit to Belgium, Zelenskyy signed a security agreement with Alexander De Croo, the Belgian Prime Minister which included the delivery of 30 US made F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine. The agreement also provided Ukraine with at least EUR 977 million in Belgian military aid. Belgium pledged to support Ukraine with aid for a term of 10 years with modern armoured vehicles, air force equipment, naval security, mine clearance, and military training. This was following his announcement the previous year, on sending fighter jets to Ukraine. He aims to deliver the first aircraft by the end of 2024 and 30 more before 2028. The deal was signed shortly before the Belgian federal election on June 9 and will further depend on the new government's foreign policy. De Croo also emphasised the utilization of weapons was for the Ukraine Defence Forces on Ukraine's territory.

On 28 May, in a press release by the European Council, five main priorities were highlighted for the EU member states to act upon. The council approved the conclusions on the role of the EU as a security and defence actor in the conflicts in Europe and the world. First, the EU continues to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity with all means available. These include the Ukraine Assistance Fund as part of the European Peace Facility (EPF) and training and advice through the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). Second, strengthening and improving the access to

public and private finance for the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) to provide for the needs of member states' armed forces, and partners. Third involved civilian and military CSDP missions and operations including the EPF for targeted security and defence assistance in response to the needs of partner countries. Additionally, the Council calls on member states to expeditiously execute the Military Mobility Pledge 2024 and to further contribute to the full operationalization of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity by 2025. Fourth priority focused on the development of instruments such as the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox and the EU Hybrid Toolbox to prevent and deter hybrid, FIMI, cyber threats, and malicious activities targeting the EU. The Council also drew its attention on space, maritime, and air domains as a part of the EU's security and defence. Lastly, the need to expand mutually beneficial partnerships was discussed with a special focus on the UN-EU Strategic Partnership on peace and security. The conclusions planned to adopt a new comprehensive implementation document addressing the EU-NATO cooperation by the end of 2024. The new Military Mobility Pledge 2024 was adopted which aims to close any gaps in military mobility and help ensure the quick and easy transfer of military personnel, equipment, and assets.

On 28 May, *Netherlands Ministry of Defence* announced the initiative to deliver Patriot air defence system as proposed by the Dutch government. Combining close cooperation with several EU countries, it vowed to offer additional Patriot parts and munitions. The government invited the European countries to contribute from their existing stock as many Patriot systems were not in the stockpile. The Dutch government also acknowledged Ukraine's need for military capability, energy production, and essential infrastructure. Kaja Ollongren, the Dutch defence minister said that they were counting on the industrial suppliers who have pledged to speed up production and delivery of replacement systems.

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War in Ukraine: Day 824

Russian claims on capturing two more villages in Kharkiv and Donetsk

War on the Ground:

On 27 May, *President.gov.ua* reported on Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President visit to Spain. Zelenskyy during his visit held a meeting with Pedro Sanchez, Spain's Prime Minister. During the meeting, both discussed on bilateral relations to boost economic, social and institutional cooperation. According to the report in *El Pais*, Spain had earlier pledged to provide 19 German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine, of which 10 are expected to be delivered by June. The key outcome of the meeting was the signing of EUR 1.1 billion of military aid including the latest patriot missiles. Till now, Spain had given only EUR 330 million as aid.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 27 May, the *TASS* reported on Russian troops claimed on capturing another two villages in eastern Kharkiv area and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). This includes Ivanovka in Kharkiv and Netailovo in the DPR. In a statement Russian defence ministry said: "Battlegroup North units continue advancing deep into the enemy

defenses. They inflicted casualties on manpower and equipment of the Ukrainian army..." Russian troops also claimed on inflicting damage on more than 300 casualties on Ukraine forces in Kharkiv. On the same day, the Russian troops also claimed improvement in frontline positions in Donetsk area. It claimed on inflicting damage on Ukraine's 57th, 105th, and 118 defence brigades in DPR.

On 27 May, the *TASS* reported on the meeting between Vladimir Putin, Russian President and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan's President. According to the report, both will continue to focus on bilateral defence cooperation, law-enforcement and security agencies. Putin issues a statement declaring Uzbekistan as a "strategic partner" and pledged to strengthen their regulatory framework. They are also expected to stress on boosting the interactions between competent agencies to combat the present challenges and protect state governance from external influence. The joint statement mentioned the discussed areas: "Combatting terrorism and extremism, illicit drug and arms trafficking, cross-border organized crime, human trafficking and economic crimes will remain in the focus of attention."

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 27 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Poland government's announcement to reinforce its "anti-drone surveillance and construct fortifications" which extends to 700 kilometres of its border with Russia and Belarus. The reinforcement programme known as Shield-East which is expected to be completed by 2028 and will include planned fortification, hubs, telecommunication systems in line with NATO eastern allies. It is estimated to cost EUR 2.35 billion and Poland intends the EU to support partly. Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamys, Poland's Defense Minister said: "The goal of the shield is to protect the territory of Poland, hamper the mobility of the adversary's troops while making such mobility easier for our own troops and to protect civilians." This will be a unique programme apart from the wall constructed in Poland's border which was built to

prevent migrant influx.

On 27 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on German government's decision to give EUR 60 million as humanitarian aid to Ukraine apart from the EUR three billion already offered by Germany. Annalena Baerbock, German Foreign Minister said: "People have been suffering under Russia's occupation of terror for more than two and a half years." She also assured to work with international partners to gather humanitarian aid for Ukraine.

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War in Ukraine: Days 822 & 823

Russian missile attack in Kharkiv kills 16

War on the Ground:

On 25 May, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President reported on Ukraine forces securing "combat control" of northern Kharkiv areas which Russian troops have claimed to have entered the. According to the report, two were killed in an aerial attack in Kharkiv city. Zelenskyy added: "Our soldiers have now managed to take combat control of the border area where the Russian occupiers entered." Whereas, Viktor Vodolatskiy, member of Russia's lower house of Parliament claimed on Russian forces occupying more than half of Vovchansk of five kilometres inside.

On 26 May, *Anadolu Agency* reported on the Mykola Oleshchuk, Commander of Ukraine's Air Force statement on Russia launching an

overnight air attack using 14 missiles and 31 drones. In response, Ukraine's Defence Forces shot down 12 missiles and all the drones. However, according to Ukraine's State Emergency Service, in Khmerynka city in the central Vinnytsia region, debris from the shot drones had caused damage to three apartment buildings and seven private homes in addition to injury of three people.

On 26 May, *France 24* reported on the attack in Kharkiv. According to the report, two guided bombs hit the centre of DIY hypermarket in a residential area of Kharkiv city. Approximately 120 people were inside the hardware store causing death of 16. A separate missile strike was also recorded targeting a residential building, included a post office, a beauty salon, and a cafe. After the attack, Zelenskyy issued air raid alerts in Kharkiv for over 12 hours and 400 police officers and 200 emergency personnel were placed to address the aftermath. Additionally, European Council President Charles Michel condemned the attack as a heinous crime. However, Moscow denied targeting of civilians.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 25 May, the *TASS* reported on Russia's troops claim on capturing Berestovoye, a village in the Kharkiv oblast. According to Russian defence ministry: "Russia's battlegroup West liberated the settlement of Berestovoye in the Kharkov region as a result of active operations." It confirmed on Russian air defence forces shooting down of 41 Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles, five ATACMS and 32 HIMARS rockets. It also reported on Ukraine losing close to 285 troops in result of Russian troops infliction of damage on the formations of Ukrainian army.

On 25 May, *RT* reported on Vladimir Putin, Russia's President statement on Russia's vision. He said that Russia "must always be one step ahead" and maintain technological advances as a guarantee to victory. The statement comes as Putin visited Tactical Missiles Corporation, a Russia owned defence company. Calling out the defence corporations he added: "Your specialists and you personally always remain in touch with

our men fighting on the line of contact without sparing themselves to defend Russia's interests." He stressed on quick adoption by the military of "radio-electronic warfare devices or sophisticated drones" given by the civilian crowd-funded military manufacturers.

On 26 May, *Sputnik International* reported on Putin signing of a decree outlining the procedures for requesting compensation from the US which had caused harm to Russia and its central bank. It was titled: "On the Special Procedure for Compensation for Damage Caused to Russia and the Russian Central Bank in Connection with Unfriendly Actions Taken by the United States." A commission for the foreign investment in Russia will supervise the assessment of damage claims and the identification of assets that could be used to reimburse damages following the principle of proportionality. These include bonds and shares in Russian legal entities, property rights, and both movable and immovable property owned by the US and its affiliates. The move follows the west plan to obtain the interests of the frozen Russian assets for funding Ukraine.

On 24 May, the *TASS* reported on Igor Kimakovskiy, Russia's spokesperson to self-claimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) on the Ukrainian army preparation for a counteroffensive operation in the Kharkiv. He noted that several brigades of the Ukrainian forces were redeployed from the Donetsk area to other sectors along the line of engagement. According to him, they carried almost no arms and equipment, and the Russian forces aimed to deplete the remaining infantry brigades in the area.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 26 May, *Anadolu Agency* reported on Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General statement on China's crucial support to Russia. He said: "China says it wants to maintain good relations with the West. At the same time, however, Beijing is fueling the war in Europe. You can't have it both ways." He noted that the sales of microelectronics, machine parts, and other technologies to Moscow were used to build

missiles, tanks, and aircraft for the war against Ukraine were clearly on the rise. He expressed support for the Ukrainian forces by agreeing to send more weapons and ammunition to Ukraine, including air defence systems and long-range weapons. However, he made it clear that NATO will not send its troops or extend the alliance's air defence umbrella to Ukraine. He also stressed the need to renew their military inventories and increase the production of weapons and ammunition to supply Ukraine with defence against Russian attacks.

On 24 May, the US Department of Defence signed a new security assistance package to meet Ukraine's critical security and defence. This includes security assistance package of USD 275 million of "High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), artillery rounds, air-launched munitions, and anti-tank weapons, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems, small arms and demolition munitions."

On 25 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the finance ministers of the G7 countries meeting in the northern Italy on the use of frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine. According to the report, after Russia invaded Ukraine, the G7 and its allies froze USD 300 billion (EUR 276 billion) of Russian assets. The EU's earlier plan was to use the interest from the frozen Russian assets estimated to be EUR three billion a year to help Ukraine. During the talks, the ministers claimed to have made progress in arriving at a plan consistent with international law and respective legal systems to aid Ukraine. The ministers reaffirmed that "until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine," Russian assets would be blocked. They also brought up the prospect of more sanctions against Russia. Giancarlo Giorgetti, the Italian Finance Minister, stated that although the ministers had encountered legal and technical difficulties, they hoped to submit a proposal before the G7 leaders' meeting in Puglia, Italy in June 2024.

On 26 May, according to a report by *Bloomberg*, against the backdrop of the attack in Kharkiv, Zelenskyy called the leaders of the US and China to attend the summit held by Switzerland on the peace

plan for Ukraine. He also urged the US to allow its donated weapon systems to be used to strike Russian troops on Russian territory citing the Russian offensive in Kharkiv oblast.

On 25 May, German government confirmed the transfer of another IRIS-T air defence system to Ukraine. According to Boris Pistorius, German Defence Minister, IRIS-T would improve Ukraine's air defence in addition to the recently delivered Patriot system which adds up to five medium- and short-range IRIS-T systems for the Ukrainian forces. Nine IRIS-T SLMs and eleven IRIS-T SLSs had been promised to Ukraine by Germany. Apart from this, Canada claimed to finance the purchase of anti-aircraft missiles for the IRIS-T air defence systems and allocated about EUR 52 million.

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War in Ukraine: Day 821

Zelenskyy visits Kharkiv

War on the Ground:

On 24 May, the *CBC* reported on Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Ukrainian President statement on said Ukraine's armed forces "combat control" in areas where Russian troops staged incursion in northern parts of Kharkiv oblast. He said: "Our soldiers have now managed to take combat control of the border area where the Russian occupiers entered." The statement comes as Zelenskyy visited Kharkiv city and held a meeting with military and regional officials in Kharkiv.

On 24 May, *Ukrainska Pravda* reported on UK Ministry of Defence observation on Russia's involvement of African Corps including former Wagner troops in the offensive in Vovchansk. Russian defence ministry's African Corps established in December 2023 is composed of over 2,000 regular soldiers and officers, including skilled Wagner mercenaries. According to the intelligence, Russia is expected to boost its war against Ukraine with resources marked for Africa.

On 24 May, a report by *The Moscow Times* said that Ukraine's top general Oleksandr Syrsky statement on intense fighting in the eastern front. According to the report, Russian forces have "bogged down" in their attempt to take the Ukrainian border town of Vovchansk. After the sudden attack by the Russian ground assault troops in the northeastern Kharkiv region on 10 May, Ukraine had managed to fight back the

forces. Additionally, Ukrainian Railways said that the Russian forces struck civilian railway infrastructure, damaged tracks, buildings, idle freight carriages, and an electric train carriage.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 24 May, *RT* reported on the Russian defence ministry's footage of the liberation of the key settlement of Klescheevka in Russia occupied Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). The footage showed Russian artillery strikes on targets within and near the village using high-precision Krasnopol shells. Russian UAVs targeted Ukrainian troops under shelter in the basement and an assault group in combat. The defence ministry confirmed on capturing of Andreevka, a village about four kilometres south of Klescheevka and south of the strategically significant city of Chasov Yar.

On 24 May, *RT* reported on Vladimir Putin, the Russian President's schedule to visit North Korea following his invit in January 2024. Putin's last visit to North Korea took place in 2000 to meet with Kim Jong-il, the father of Kim Jong-un. North Korea and Russia have kept amicable relations ever since. A special personal relationship between the two leaders was boosted following the start of the Ukraine conflict and the West's sanctions campaign against Russia. However, the US condemns the increasing cooperation between the two.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 23 May, a press release by Rheinmetall stated that a NATO member placed an order for the supply of 155mm artillery ammunition. The order consisted of several hundred thousand propellant charge modules and several tens of thousands of artillery shells. About EUR 300 million is the total gross value of the orders booked in the second quarter of 2024. Rheinmetall is an integrated technology group that develops and sells components, systems, and services for the security and civil industries.

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War in Ukraine: Day 820

Putin in Belarus

War on the Ground:

On 23 May, *Swissinfo* reported on Russian missiles killing seven people in a strike in Kharkiv resulting in death of 50. Russian forces have targeted in the past five months through a ground assault partially surrounding since 10 May. The missiles were observed to have fired from Belgorod region of Russia. Following the attacks on multiple locations in Kharkiv, the state railway company reported on injury of six employees. According to the report, Russia had also dropped guided bombs on the nearby town of Derhachi, causing damage to civilian infrastructure. Russia is seen to be sending reserve forces to support its assault operations in the northern parts of the region after Ukrainian troops had stalled on two main lines of attack. The new escalation showed the urgent need for air defence systems and western-provided weapons to strike missile launchers inside Russia.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 23 May, Vladimir Putin, Russian President arrived in Belarus for talks on the country's involvement in the second phase of the tactical nuclear exercise. Following Russia's announcement of the drills, Belarus ordered a similar exercise to test Belarus' nuclear-capable weapon systems, including Iskander missile launchers. The exercise

involves delivering nuclear weapons to soldiers from storage facilities, equipping missiles with tactical nuclear warheads, and deploying such weapons. In 2023, Following a "friendly request" from Belarus, Putin agreed to store a small supply of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus as a deterrent.

On 23 May, in a statement, officials from the Republic of Tatarstan in central Russia said that several industrial enterprises have been evacuated following a drone attack in the region. The statement: "...measures are being taken according to a previously developed plan," and that all appropriate steps were being taken to ensure the security of local residents. However, the Russian defense ministry confirmed that it had intercepted a Ukrainian attack in Tatarstan, destroying one UAV. The region, which possesses numerous oil processing plants, has repeatedly been targeted by drone attacks in recent weeks. Citing concerns about flight safety, Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency temporarily halted operations at the airports in Nizhnekamsk and Kazan, Tatarstan.

On 23 May, the Russian Investigative Committee confirmed the arrest of Lieutenant General Vadim Shamarin, the head of the Main Directorate of Communications at the Ministry of Defense for alleged involvement in bribery. He would be the fourth senior defence official to be arrested in the last two months. The investigation claims that between April 2016 and October 2023, Shamarin accepted a bribe of 36 million rubles, or roughly USD 400,000, from the company's chief accountant Elena Grishina and general director of the Telta Perm Telephone Plant, Alexey Vysokov. He is expected to be detained until his trial, according to an order from the 235th Garrison Military Court. He can go to jail for up to 15 years if found guilty.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 23 May, Sebastien Lecornu, French Defence Minister announced the successful testing of an updated ASMPA supersonic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. The flight test, named Operation

Durandal, tested the air launched cruise missile without an on-board payload using a strategic Rafale fighter jet. The missile serves as a pre-strategic weapon or a warning shot before the potential deployment of nuclear weapons. The missile system developed by the MBDA has undergone continuous improvement since it first entered service in 1986. A series of Durandal military exercises from 13 May to 14 June aims at demonstrating France's military readiness and missile capabilities. These exercises are conducted against a backdrop of escalating nuclear tensions by Putin who threatened the use of all available means to defend occupied territories in Ukraine.

On 22 May, Grant Shapps, UK's defense minister said in a conference that China was sending lethal aid to Russia to fight the war in Ukraine. He urged that democratic states should collaborate for a collective deterrent by laying down alliances and formulating concrete plans. While the west claims that China and Russia's strategic partnership have grown closer, China denies it. However, Jake Sullivan, US national security adviser said that China has not seen to have directly provided weapons to Russia but has provided inputs to Russia's defense industrial base.

On 23 May a report by *The New York Times* analysed the US' position on letting Ukraine use its weapons to shoot down Russia. Biden was firm about his mandate on never firing the US weapons into Russian territory to avoid World War III. However, seeing the recent strikes by Russia into the Kharkiv region, Secretary of State Antony J Blinken suggested on relaxing the ban, so that Ukraine can retaliate. Ukraine's missiles and drones don't pack the power and speed of the US weapons. The UK has allowed its "Storm Shadow" cruise systems to be used to target Russia more broadly. The US was also considering training Ukrainian troops inside the country but the Biden administration prohibited deploying US military personnel in Ukraine fearing that the trainers based in Lviv, could come under attack. According to the report, the US is less sensitive to the public exercises on the use of tactical nuclear weapons by Russia unlike in October 2022.

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War in Ukraine: Day 818

Russian launches tactical nuclear drills

War on the Ground:

On 21 May, in a press release, the Federal Foreign Office stated the Annalena Baerbock, German Foreign Minister launch a global initiative for enhanced air defence together with Defence Minister Pistorius as part of her visit to Kyiv. She encouraged Ukraine's resilience and determination and called for more air defence resources to protect from Russian missiles and drone attacks. She also called to build a strong alliance of business representatives, civil society and local government during the Ukraine Recovery Conference to be held at Berlin in June.

On 21 May, the *BBC* reported on Russian forces began a summer offensive in Kharkiv as 14,000 fled the area and 189,000 people who remained faced risks in the ongoing fighting. Russian drone strikes on the city injured seven people and a Ukrainian drone strike across the border into Belgorod killed one woman and injured three others in a moving car. Ukrainian officials claim that about 60 per cent of Vovchansk is still controlled by Ukraine. However, Russia increasingly used cheap but highly destructive glide bombs to advance its offensive in Ukraine and many were used to hit Vovchansk.

On 21 May, *The Kyiv Independent* news desk

reported that 28 of the 29 attack drones launched from the Russian port town of Primorsko-Akhtarsk, from Cape Chauda in occupied Crimea and from Russia's Kursk Oblast, were shot down by the Ukrainian Air force. However, the fragments of drones damaged two houses, a garage, and a mini-bus in the city of Kharkiv overnight. According to Ukrainian officials a Russian morning missile attack on transport infrastructure in Kharkiv injured a man.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 21 May, *RT* reported on Russian defence ministry statement on deployment of troops in its southern military district to carry out tactical nuclear drills. According to the report, this exercise will be a deterrent in the conflict between Russian and West, to showcase its ability. In the drill, the nuclear, the forces will carry out delivery of nuclear weapons from storage to the troops, arm tactical missiles and prepare for missile launches. For this, Iskander-M systems, 9M723-1 ballistic missiles or 9M728 cruise missiles and tactical warheads with capacity of five to 50 kilotons will be used. In a statement released by the ministry: "Aimed at maintaining the combat readiness of the personnel and equipment of the non-strategic nuclear-weapon units." The southern military district covers area between Black and the Caspian seas, a total of 19 areas along with Crimean and four annexed districts by Russia.

On 21 May, the *TASS* reported on Russian troops equal advance in the Kharkiv frontline up to 40 per cent (150-200 meters) of Volchansk. Vitaly Ganchev, head of the regional military-civilian administration appointed by Russia stated how Russian troops had pushed the Ukrainian forces to secure positions. He said: "The basic part of the town's northern part has been fully liberated. The advance is slow but steady." According to him, Ukraine military was found to be deploying from the southern direction from Kramatorsk with west equipment and "manpower."

On 21 May, the *TASS* reported on Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council response to the scheduled

peace summit to be organised by Switzerland in June. He stated that the outcome of the upcoming summit would be "null and void" as the peace talks cannot be complete with just one party involved. Russia's foreign ministry pointed on Russia not being invited for the summit and it will not attend any events where Zelenskyy's "peace formula" is discussed.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 21 May, *France 24* reported Finland government's law proposal to facilitate the blocking of migrants at the border after a sharp influx of migrants in 2023 from Russia. Concerns arose since this law would violate human rights for the asylum seekers. Finland became a part of NATO after the invasion of Ukraine and has led to tensions with Russia since. However, Petteri Orpo, Prime Minister of Finland said they would respect national and EU security before others. With special protection for women, children and people with disabilities, the border would remain shut indefinitely for the others.

On 21 May, *Politico* reported that Moldova signing of a security and defence partnership with the EU. Moldova has been a critic of Russia after its invasion in Ukraine although not a member of NATO or the EU. The country signed a deal with France for training its armed forces and boosting military cooperation in March 2024. The new partnership with the EU, is aimed at enhancing the country's resilience with EU assistance. In addition, the agreement will make it easier to collaborate on cybersecurity and disinformation campaigns. It will also support Moldova's defence industry through the European instrument for peace.

On 21 May, in a news conference, Donald Tusk Poland's Prime Minister established a commission to investigate Russian influence in the espionage and internal destabilisation acts in the country in the years 2004-24. In April, several Polish spy arrests were reported which the authorities linked to Russian espionage. On 20 May, Tusk announced that nine suspects were arrested and charged with acts of sabotage in Poland

directly on behalf of the Russian services. He said that "beatings, arson, and attempted arson" were among the acts committed, and that the people detained are "Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Polish citizens," most likely with criminal histories and ties to a Russian spy network. Poland believes that they are key targets for Russian intelligence services since it is a hub for western supplies to Ukraine. Additionally, the Polish government increased its defence allocation for its own intelligence services to combat the threat.

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War in Ukraine: Day 817

Ukraine exert maximum efforts to prevent Russian advance

War on the Ground:

On 20 May, in response to the claims of Russia on capturing Vovchansk and Chasiv Yar. Ukraine's defence forces reported that the town were still under its control despite continued attempts of Russia. According to the report, the defence forces were taking maximum efforts to prevent Russia's advance. Although the situation in Kharkiv remains difficult with dynamic changes.

Nazar Voloshin, a spokesperson of the Khortytsia military unit said: "Our defenders are equipping the occupied borders, strengthening defence in the border areas and continue to focus their main efforts on preventing the enemy from advancing deeper." Voloshin found the Russian's to be combining their attacks using air strikes, rocket launches and bomb attacks to proceed in Kharkiv.

On 20 May, *Ukrinform* reported on Dnipropetrovsk region coming under Russian drone attack. According to the report, 23 drones were targeted at the Nikopol district and four artillery attacks had injured few civilians and caused damage on civilian infrastructure.

On 20 May, *Ukrinform* reported on IAEA investigation on Ukraine's material misuse. As per its observations, it found no nuclear material had been used in Ukraine. In a statement, Rafael Grossi, IAEA Director General said: "We set the facts straight that no nuclear material had been diverted, cutting through the fog of war, and diffusing a tense situation."

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 20 May, the *TASS* reported on the Russian troop's destruction of 9,700 artillery guns and mortars of the Ukrainian army since February 2022. According to Russian defence ministry: "601 aircraft, 274 helicopters, 24,419 unmanned aerial vehicles, 523 surface-to-air missile systems, 16,097 tanks and other armored combat vehicles, 1,305 multiple rocket launchers, 9,700 field artillery guns and mortars and 21,843 special military motor vehicles." The defence ministry claimed on continuing advance into Ukrainian defence resulting in casualties and equipment loss in Kharkiv. Apart from this, the ministry reported improvement in the tactical position in Kupyansk. The battlegroup of west had improved while causing damage to Ukraine's 63rd mechanised and 1st National Guard brigades.

On 20 May, *RT* reported on Vassily Nebenzia, Russian Ambassador to the UN on the conflict resolution. According to the

ambassador, the conflict can be resolved but criticised the West intervention. He stressed that Russia would never withdraw from pursuing diplomacy and would be always ready to engage in peace talks. According to the report, Zelenskyy's term had expired and Ukraine is due to conduct presidential elections in March. This has been withdrawn under martial law of Ukraine. The reports argued that this law allowed Zelenskyy to be in power "indefinitely." Nebenzia said: "A true solution to the Ukrainian crisis through political and diplomatic means is still possible."

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 20 May, Lloyd Austin, US Secretary of Defence launched a meeting of Ukraine Defence Contact Group. The 22nd meeting was held in Ramstein format and in his opening speech he addressed the challenge posed in Ukraine from Putin's latest offensive. He warned of Russian forces trying to advance in the coming week to create a buffer zone. Highlighting the offensive in Kharkiv by Russia, he indicated the need of the Group step up to assess Ukraine's ability and the gaps in air-defence capabilities. The meeting is expected to focus on coordinating coalition capabilities and assess from reports of maritime coalition leaders and air and missile defence coalition.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 20 May, *Ukrinform* reported on India's confirmation to take part in the peace summit organised by Switzerland. Narendra Modi, India's Prime Minister said: "India will be participating in all important summits that promote the agenda of global peace, security and development." The summit is scheduled to take place between 15-16 June including 50 heads of state and government.

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War in Ukraine Days: 815 & 816

Ukraine challenged to defend Kharkiv

War on the Ground:

On 18 May, Oleg Synegubov, Governor of Kharkiv reported on more than 10,000 fleeing away from Kharkiv following Russian force's ground attack. The displacement comes as Russian troops had advanced five to 10 kilometres into the northeastern border ahead of "Ukrainian forces stopping their progress." Although the Ukrainian army claims the situation to be "under control" along with Ukrainians defending the assault in parts of Kharkiv. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President claimed on the possibility of Russian assault starting a wider offensive. He warned on the renewed offensive of Russia as "first wave" to a larger Russian campaign to capture Kharkiv. He confirmed on the encirclement of Russian troops and Ukraine's partial efforts to stop the advance of Russian forces. As per report from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), the Russian forces had occupied 278 square kilometres between 09 and 15 May.

On 18 May, Zelenskyy urged China to be present at Switzerland peace summit. He said: "...want to find a balance between the two ... That's why I would like to see China involved in the peace summit." He also called for other countries to send their delegates to the summit.

On 19 May, Ukrainian forces reported on Russian shelling on civilians in Kharkiv. According to the report, six were injured in the attack but Russia has denied targeting the civilians. On the same day, Ukraine's armed forces reported on death of two civilians in an attack in Vovchansk which is located five kilometres from Russian border and 70 kilometres from north-east of Kharkiv. Only 100 residents remain after Russian attacks.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 19 May, the *TASS* reported on failure of Ukraine armed forces to defend Russian offensive in Kharkiv due to less resources. According to the report, the Russian army had advanced with “speed and force” and faced no obstacles as Ukraine soldiers were moved back from their position due to surprise attack. Russia witnessed a huge advantage in terms of artillery shells leading to depletion of Ukrainian defences. It also exposed the exhaustion in the Ukrainian troops and “sloppily constructed” defence fortifications. The reports also found Ukraine to host only “few reserves to deploy,” as one of the reason to Kharkiv becoming a critical spot.

On 19 May, *RT* reported on Vladimir Saldo, Russia appointed Kherson Governor report on the death of one person and several injured from Ukraine’s drone strike. According to the report, Radensk village was attacked using an unmanned ariel vehicle on workers.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 18 May, Donald Tusk, Poland’s Prime Minister announced on spending EUR 2.3 billion to strengthen its eastern border. He said: “We have taken the decision to invest 10 billion zlotys for our security and above all to secure our eastern border.” According to him, 400 kilometres shared with Belarus and Russia will reinforced as a strategy to keep a buffer between frontiers.

The Global Fallouts:

Implications of the War

On 18 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the rise in global defence spending as a result of the war. According to the report, the annual world military spending rated high at USD 306 per person since the Cold war. The global military budgets were USD 2.44 trillion in 2023 which was seven per cent higher than 2022. This includes the west’s military aid to Ukraine as it triggered the NATO members to reach the defence expenditure target of two per cent of GDP and additional boost among the eastern flank members beyond two per cent with Poland leading the table with 4.2 per cent

defence investment. In 2024, the US had allotted USD 886 billion for defence which was eight per cent more than last two years. Whereas Germany has slashed the spending across departments except defence. Jeffrey Rathke, president of the American-German Institute at the Johns Hopkins University said: “They need to be managed politically so that they don't erode public support for strengthened security and defense.” Rathke also stated that the debt brake of Germany limited it from borrowing further to fill the budget gaps. Unlike Poland, many NATO members struggle to spend more on defence due to European debt crisis. Another category of European countries such as Sweden, Norway, Romania and the Netherlands despite having low debt still opted to spend more on social security, housing and agriculture.

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War in Ukraine: Day 813

US sanctions DPRK entities

War on the Ground:

On 16 May, Ukraine accused Russia of killing and arresting civilians in the northeastern Kharkiv area in Volchansk town where the Russian forces conducted a ground assault earlier. Igor Klymenko, Interior Minister of Ukraine said: “Russians are taking the civilians as prisoners.” According to the report from Ukraine intelligence, the Russian military was attempting to gain control not allowing the local residents to evacuate and began abducting people and driving them to basements. In response, regional police had launched an investigation regarding on the

“war crime.” Nearly 9000 people have been evacuated from Ukraine since the ground assault by the Russians. In February 2022, some areas of Ukraine were taken control by the Russians forces, and has been charged with murdering the civilians.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 16 May, *RT* reported on the West warned to IMF on seizing Russia’s money could result in undermining the global monetary system. The UK, the US and the EU had blocked an estimate of USD 300 billion in assets that belong to the Russian Central Bank since the start of the Ukraine conflict. While the US and some of the EU countries have suggested confiscation of these assets to finance the war in Ukraine and future development. Remaining countries were against it as such a move could tighten EUR, but rest of the west proposed to appropriate only the interest on the assets which could lead to legal difficulties. According to Julie Kozak, IMF spokeswoman: “It’s important for the fund that any action taken have sufficient legal basis and does not undermine the functioning of the international monetary system.” When asked about the plans for the Russian frozen assets, the IMF has repeatedly warned told the western nation to be cautious with Russian assets. This has caused a rift in the G7 and EU political Elite. Out of USD 300 billion of the Russian frozen assets, the US holds only USD six billion. While Russia has repeatedly warned on seizing the funds as a theft and risk of serious action taken.

On 16th May, Putin and Xi opposed the seizure of Russian assets by the west. In the joint statement following the meeting: “Condemn initiative aimed at seizing foreign countries assets and property, and underline such countries’ right to apply retaliatory measures in accordance with the international law.” Russia and China pledged to provide mutual protection to each other foreign property. They also formed a document to describe the practice of confiscating other nation’s financial resources as going through the counters to established legal norms. Putin’s first state visit since he was sworn in as president the fifth time. While speaking with Putin, Xi

described ties between China and Russia as a “model of relations between large power and neighbouring states, characterised by mutual respect, friendship and mutual benefit. Russia also made a statement that if the Russian assets are confiscated.”

On 16 May, *RT* reported on Maria Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson statement on Russian authorities not recruiting Indians to sign the contracts to join the Russian military. This was in response to the question asked by the Indian media regarding the video of Indians allegedly deployed to the war zone of the fight between Russia and Ukraine, Maria also stated that she does not have any information regarding these videos. She added: “As for recruitment, none of the officials are involved in this.” She added that Russia will look into this information. Earlier, India Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested four people who are involved in a human trafficking network activity across India, primarily targeting gullible youth on the promise of offering high pay check jobs abroad. These traffickers have been operating as an organisation network and were luring young Indian nationals through social media and also through their local agents for highly paid jobs in Russia and that recruited people who hoped to get better jobs would be later trained and deployed to the combat zone against their wishes. According to the investigation, the human trafficking network is spread over different states in India and beyond. One of the main accused was identified as Nijil Jobi Bensam working on a contract basis as a translator. He was believed to be one of the main members in the network which recruits Indians in the Russian military.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 16 May, the US Department of State announced sanctions on five Russia based individuals and entities. The move comes as these entities were linked to the transfer of military equipment and components between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Russia in violation of the UN arms sanction on the DPRK. It found Russia to have

increased its reliance on the DPRK for arms and ballistic missiles to target Ukraine. This led to several sanctions over the past years targeting the Russia- DPRK relation and highlights continued arms transfers and increased cooperation between Russia and DPRK. Russians had already used more than 40 DPRK produced ballistic missiles and arms.

On 16 May, Jen Stoltenberg Secretary General welcomed Ingrida Šimonytė Prime Minister of Lithuania at the NATO Headquarter in Brussels to discuss for the Washington Summit which includes strengthening deterrence and deference and supporting Ukraine. Stoltenberg commented on Lithuania's interest in allied security and confirmed to host a multinational battle group, NATO's Baltic Air Policing Mission, and excellence for energy security. Stoltenberg also praised Lithuania's commitment to spend three per cent of the GDP on defence from 2025.

On 16 May, in the NATO Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session, 32 Allied Chiefs of Defence focused on implementation of new defence plans, NATO warfighting transformation and continues to support Ukraine. The Chiefs of defence also met in the NATO-Ukraine council with the Ukrainian military leadership. Admiral Rob Bauer stressed that "NATO is stronger and readier than it has ever been and growing stronger by the day. We have it within ourselves to build on the ground breaking works that has already been done." In the first session focused on warfighting transformation saw the Chiefs of Defence Meets with General Philippe, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT). Where it focused on the future of multi-Domain operation, adaption of NATO's Command and control and the NATO defence Planning process. This was followed by the meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council in the Chiefs of defence format. Major General Anatoliy Bargylevych, the chief of staff of Ukrainian Armed force briefed the NATO chiefs on reaffirmation their stand and continued to support Ukraine.

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War in Ukraine: Day 812

Ukraine's withdrawal in Kharkiv

War on the Ground:

On 15 May, the *BBC* reported on Ukraine's withdrawal of troops from several villages in the Kharkiv region due to the pressure from the Russian forces. According to a spokesperson from Ukraine military, heavy fire had pushed the Ukrainian soldiers towards more advantageous positions in two areas of the northeastern region. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President cancelled all the upcoming foreign trips as the army struggles to control the new cross border issues, with many towns and villages under heavy fire. The Russians claimed that the forces had taken control of two more areas in the region-Lukyantaki, Hlyboke and village of Robotyne, in the Southern Zaporizhzhya region. But the Ukraine claimed that its military still has control over most parts of Robotyne and that the Russian forces remain in the outskirts. Ukraine's military move away from Lukyantsi and Vochansk area is considered tactical to "preserve the lives of our service men and avoid losses."

On the same day, the Ukrainian military reported on three clashes with the Russians in the Kharkiv region. Russian forces were observed to have attacked in the direction of Lyptus, located between Kharkiv city and Russia. The statement also added fire in two villages, Lyptsi and Mala Danylivka while the Ukrainian forces tried to repel a Russian offensive in Volchansk. Ukraine general staff said that the Russian attack had prompted

the forces to reposition its troops in the Kupyansk direction which is 118 kilometres south west of Kharkiv city. As a result, thousands of civilians have fled towards Kharkiv including people from Vovchansk.

On 15 May, in a press conference in Kyiv, Antony Blinken said that the US will provide an additional USD two billion in aid to Ukraine. This fund would be used for purchasing weapons from the US, other countries and to invest in the manufacturing of its own machinery and weapons. Blinken said: "...all of this particular as we think about the defence industrial base builds on an incredible spirit of innovation, of ingenuity, of entrepreneurship that we see here in Ukraine."

On 15 May, Zelenskyy reported on the Ukrainian military ability to partially stabilise the situation in the Kharkiv Oblast, where the Russian army had intensified their offensive. In his address, he stressed on maintain his attention on the Kharkiv front line. This is the area near the border where all units of Defence and security forces of Ukraine have managed to partially stabilise the situation.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 15 May, *RT* reported on Vladimir Putin, Russian President explanation on the failure of peace talks with Ukraine. He said that Russia had never zeroed for a peaceful settlement but insists only accounting of interest of all involved parties. In an interview with Xinhua, ahead of his visit to China, Putin appreciated China's peace initiative for the Ukraine conflict and said: "...the genuine desire of our Chinese friends to help stabilize the situation." China's proposal was first published in February calling for a ceasefire and Putin praised the idea of "indivisible security." Putin stressed on Russia's concerns not to be neglected while the same idea targeting toward long-term peace. He added that any dialogue should be a "substantive discussion on global stability" and give security guarantees for Russian opponents and Russia. He highlighted the key issue to be "reliability of the guarantees" given by the states. He also accused the West for isolating and imposing

illegal sanctions while ignoring the attacked launched by Ukraine inside Russia.

On 15 May, Russian defence ministry reported on recapturing a key village of Rabotino in Zaporizhzhia. According to the report in *RT*, the gain was achieved through military action against Ukrainian forces which resulted in loss of 25 troops and US-made M777 howitzer. Rabotino located 75 kilometres from northeast of Melpol serves as the regional capital and was earlier attempted by the Russian forces to capture in March 2022. This was turned around as Ukrainian troops forced to withdraw.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 15 May, Politico reported on how Turkey had become a transit place for Russia to export fuel into the EU. Ahead of the invasion, the EU relied on Russia for its crude oil and diesel purchases and that has changed after the bloc agreed to ban import from Russia from 2022. Around the same time, Turkey is observed to have increased its import from Russia, while ramping up its fuel export into the EU. Research by Politico revealed that between February 2023 and 2024, Turkey boosted its purchase from Russia by 105 per cent with an equal boost to its fuel export by 107 per cent. Turkey has refineries that can process almost one million barrels of crude per day. Through this the Turkish firms also sell non-Russian fuels to the EU. Due to the geographical situation of several ports in Turkish ports, combined with import - export data, strongly suggests that most of the Russian fuels have been simply repackaged and exported. Between February 2023 and 2024 the port had taken 22 million barrels of fuel of which 92 per cent came from Russia at the same time 85 per cent of the port's fuel was exported to the EU. This was legal possible as the EU sanctions allow "blended" fuels into the EU, if they are labelled as non-Russian. This loophole has created nearly EUR three billion for the Russian's from the ports alone in 12 months after the EU banned Russia's fuel in February 2023. Martin Vladimirov, senior energy analyst said: "Turkey has emerged as a strategic pit stop for Russian Fuel products rerouted to the EU, generating hundreds of millions in

tax revenues for the Kremlin's war chest." As a part of the problem lies in the tests Brussels uses to ensure sanctions comply. According to the EU rules, cargo containing the Russian Fuels mixed with product of elsewhere "...could be subject to the sanction depending on the proportion of the Russian components." Usually, share is defined by whether the fuel has undergone "substantial transformation" becoming an entirely new product which is not happening in the case of Turkey. A European commission spokesperson declined to comment on this case, while arguing it was up to the bloc countries "to implement and enforce EU sanctions."

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War in Ukraine Day 811

War on the Ground:

On 14 May 2024, Ukrenergo reported on the power restriction on the energy supply across Ukraine. According to the company, the shortage was due to Russia intense missile and drone strikes against Ukraine's important infrastructure, causing a lot of damage to several thermal plants across. This includes the Trypillia plant, the main power supplier to Kyiv, Zhytomyr and Cherkasy oblast. Russia carried out a similar large-scale attack on 08 May mainly targeting energy infrastructure. Due to the attack, two hydroelectric power plants were

decommissioned. The company introduced additional restrictions due to the damages from the recent attacks by the Russians against Ukraine's energy infrastructure and due to the temperature drop there is a huge surge in the consumption of electricity.

On 14 May, The Kyiv Independent reported on multiple air strikes carried out by the Russian forces against Kharkiv city, injuring at least 21. As Russian forces launched an offensive operation at north of Kharkiv on 10 May, bringing both Kharkiv and several border settlements under heavy strikes. Oleh Syniehubo Kharkiv Oblast Governor confirmed on Russian troops strikes in the central part of the city and damaging a 12-storey apartment and at least 10 garages nearby. The local Prosecute's Office said that 21 casualties have been reported injured. The UMPB D-30 bombs used by the Russian military also attacked Kharkiv causing damage in the city and casualties among civilians.

On 14 May, in the meeting between Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President with Antony Blinken, US Secretary of the State in rebuilding of Ukraine expressed gratitude to Joe Biden administration's support. During the meeting, Zelenskyy mentioned the need for Patriot systems to defend Kharkiv Oblast from Russian missiles and need for long-range missile systems. He also detailed Blinken on the situation in Kharkiv frontline and the prospects for expanding US participation in fighter coalitions and pilot training programmes. Zelenskyy also confirmed on signing of a bilateral agreement: "We are actively working on finalizing the preparation of the agreement on security guarantees, which must take into account the capabilities of the United States as the strongest partner." He also stressed on Ukraine expectations towards Euro-Atlantic aspirations and strengthening of transatlantic security.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 14 May, *RT* reported on Vladimir Putin, Russia's President schedule to visit China between 16 and 17 upon Xi's invitation. As these two mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and

China. Yury Ushakov, Russian Diplomat said: "There will be an in-depth exchange of view on the issues of interaction in various organisations and structures, including the UN, where Russia and China talk in solidarity on almost all topics on the UN agenda." This would be Putin's first foreign trip after inauguration indicating the Russia-China relationship. According to Ushakov, Russia appreciates China's balanced stance in the Ukraine crisis. The other agenda being discussed would be linking the Eurasia Union with the integration process of China's Belt and Road initiative, cooperation within the BRICS, the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and other matters. Putin would be accompanied by the current defence minister and former defence minister who is expected to have an informal talk with the Chinese leader and his ministries. Sergey Lavrov Russian Foreign Minister and Elvira Nabiullina head of Bank of Russia would also be accompanying to China. Dozens of bilateral documents are expected to be signed during the visit along with the commercial and regional agreements.

On 14 May, Vyacheslav Gladkov, Governor of Belgorod claimed on Russian air defences shooting down seven targets over the region and Belgorodsky district. According to him, no casualties have been reported while civilian infrastructure was damaged from the attack. Gladkov said: "All emergency response services are working at the scene. The consequences are yet to be clarified."

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 13 May, *The Washington Post* reported on Joe Biden, the US President signing of bipartisan bill prohibiting Russia's import of enriched Uranium. This is used to fuel nuclear power plants and the bill aims to cut off one of the last significant transactions between the US and Russia. After the war began in February 2022, the US Congress immediately banned Russian oil and gas imports but ban on uranium imports prolonged. Scott Melbye, executive vice president of mining company Uranium Energy said: "It's kind of ridiculous that it took as long as it did to get to this stage... But we're just glad that we got here." According to the report, the US companies pay USD one

billion every year to Russia's Rosatom, nuclear power conglomerate for the uranium. These have come under scrutiny when Rosatom was found to be aiding Russia's arms industry with components, technology and raw materials for missile fuel. The adopted bill bans the uranium imports from Russia starting from 90 days of enactment and give waiver till 2028 for utilities which would shut down its nuclear reactors after the Russian supply is cut. This would also mean USD 2.7 billion of fund diversion into domestic production of Uranium which might help the US long term goal of reaching 100 per cent clean electricity by 2035.

On 14 May, Blinken's statement was published by the US mission in China on Ukraine's strategic success marking his visit to Kyiv. He highlighted the critical moment of war acknowledging the latest offensive of Russia in Kharkiv and across the eastern Ukraine using Iranian drones, North Korea's artillery, missiles, fighter jets and machine equipment given by China. Mentioning the delay in approval of the USD 60 billion military aid to Ukraine, he expressed solidarity of the US in supporting Ukraine militarily, economically and democratically. On the priority Blinken said: "...we're helping to ensure that Ukraine has the military that it needs to succeed on the battlefield, to secure a just and lasting peace, and to deter future aggression." Highlighting the US-Ukraine, ten-year agreement, he said that the US will support Ukraine's defence in boosting its air defence capabilities to the "highest levels." At the bilateral security agreement, the US is expected to jointly build a defence industrial base to produce crucial weapons. Lastly, he assured on Ukraine continuing its path towards rapid defence industrial base development, producing advanced weapons faster along with strengthened economy and a consolidated democracy.

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Andrey Belousov, Russian defence minister's lists his priorities

War in Ukraine Day 810

War on the Ground:

On 13 May 2024, *The Guardian* reported on Russian forces continuing advance in the Kharkiv region targeting for a "tactical success" as this is predicted to be Russia's biggest breakthrough since 2022. Russia and Ukraine confirmed on the advance by Russian troops in the outskirts of Vovchansk town. Ukraine general staff said that Russia has a "tactical success." Following this Kyiv announced that there would be a replacement of commander in the Kharkiv frontline and confirmed to move additional reserves to slow down the Russian advances.

On 13 May, *Rferl* reported on replacement of General Yuriy Halushkin, Commander responsible for the defence of the northeastern Kharkiv front with General Mykhayola Drapaty. But there were no reasons given for why there was a change of commander. It was also reported that General Drapaty will retain the post as deputy chief of the general staff.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 13 May, Russian officials said that Ukraine had struck a Russian apartment building there killing 15 people. A ten-story residential building in Belgorod, Russia was hit by the Ukrainian missiles according to the local governor. Ukrainian Tochka-U

missiles that struck the building were among the many missiles launched overnight, it is unclear whether missiles struck the building as a target or due to fragments of a downed missile that caused this much damage to the building. Initially, 11 bodies were recovered from the rubble of the building, but has increased to 15 according to the Emergency Situations Ministry on 12 May 2024. But there are no officials from the Ukraine side that claim it is true or committed about it.

On 13 May, *RT* reported on Andrey Belousov, Russian defence minister's list of priorities. He stated that Russia has to revamp its welfare of military personnel. Andrey Belousov expressed his concerns about veterans of the Ukraine conflict being sent out of the civilian medical facilities and sent to hospitals, another issue that concerned him was the red tapes involved when military personnel sought to access their benefits. He said that it could be resolved with the help of electronic systems. Also Valentina Matvienko, head of the Federation Council, said that the President's pick for the defence minister is "a very fortunate choice." Matvienko recalled that Russia's defence spending had doubled during the Ukraine conflict and added: "Everything that the Defense Ministry orders... must be in line with the capabilities of the economy... The defense minister must be in constant contact with other ministries to organize this process efficiently."

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 13 May, *France 24* reported on the appointment of Andrei Belousov, Russian defence minister. According to the report, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President appointed a top economist as a defence minister which was seen as the giving more importance to the war economy against the war in Ukraine. Belousov who has no background in the military or any past in the Russian security services, priority remains to increase Russia's defence budget to 30 per cent of the total government spending. This initiative would boost the domestic defence industry and also procure more weapons for the battlefield.

War in Ukraine Day 808 & 809

War on the Ground:

On 12 May, Oleh Syniehubov Kharkiv regional military administration chief reported on Russian strikes in the Kharkiv city and suburbs. According to the report, only 500 civilians remain in Vovchansk in Kharkiv as the evacuation continue. Till now more than 4,000 have been evacuated due to intense fighting. According to Syniehubov those evacuated from Tsyrkuny, Lyptsi, and Vovchansk have been given support under the 2022 roadmap.

On 11 May 2024, *Ukrinform* reported on the General staff of Ukraine's armed forces statement on the situation in frontline. According to the report, the forces faced around 104 times fire exchange with the Russians. While the Russians had attacked using missiles, staged air strikes and MLRS attacks towards the Ukrainian forces in the Kupyansk, Lyman, Novopavlivka and Avdiivka axis.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 12 May, *RT* reported on Russian troops launch of new offensive in Kharkiv region sparking intense fight and dynamic situation. According to the report, an active combat was present in the front and rear lines of Ukrainian army in the Kharkiv border while military facilities and infrastructure used by the Ukraine forces were damaged to a distance of 10 to 50 kilometres. Earlier Russian defence ministry had announced its northern units to have gained control of few settlements in Kharkiv and claimed on making an advance of 30 kilometres in the northeast of Kharkiv. It is viewed the second largest city with less than 40 kilometres from Russian border and was first attempted by Russian military to capture the city but failed due to poor organisation and less forces. This helped Ukraine form a "positional front" to launch attacks on Belgorod and nearby areas. Thereby capturing this would mean controlling Ukraine's activities in Belgorod.

On 12 May, *RT* reported on Dmitry Peskov, Russian President Press Secretary comment showing support for newly appointed defence minister. The Federation Council

announced the removal of Sergey Shoigu and replacement of Andrey Belousov who was First Deputy Prime Minister. According to Peskov, Belousov would be the best fit as he's considered expert on dealing financial and economic ministries which could help Russian military. Peskov said: "...it is very important to integrate the economy of the military into the national economy." The move comes as Russia's military spending increased from three to 6.7 per cent of the GDP since 2022 and Russian economy stands at a critical juncture.

On 12 May, *RT* reported on death of 18 civilians from a Ukrainian strike using Tochka-U tactical missile system in Belgorod. The Same was confirmed by Vyacheslav Gladkov, Governor of Belgorod, who reported on Ukrainian forces "massive shelling." He said: "an entire section of an apartment building – from the tenth to the first floor – collapsed as a result of a direct hit."

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 11 May, *Ukrinform* reported on its interview with Anatoly Kutsevol, Ambassador of Ukraine to Latvia. In the interview, he expressed full support and assured to help Ukraine from cultural, diplomatic and military fronts. On the question of rehabilitation efforts for Ukrainian children, he expressed gratitude for "Children's Hospital" foundation which took the right steps for rehabilitation and allowed children to testify and tell their stories. He also confirmed on Latvia joining the coalition to return Ukrainian children. On Latvia's help to Ukraine in form on equipment and energy infrastructure, Kutsevol stated that the large companies such as "Latvenergo" and Rigas Siltums" help in collecting Soviet Union category equipment and transfer it to Ukraine. On 10 May, the UK Ministry of Defence reported multiple cases of Russian fighter jets dropping ammunition inside Russia while launching attacks on Ukraine. For example, on 04 May 2024, a Russian fighter jet accidentally dropped FAB-500 munition at a civilian area of Belgorod region which caused many damages to civilians. The Ministry in a statement "These incidents

demonstrate Russia's continued failure to successfully use its munitions as intended. Such mistakes have devastating and deadly consequences for the Russian population."

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War in Ukraine: Day 807

Russia attempts to breakthrough Kharkiv

War on the Ground:

On 10 May, Ukraine's military reported on Russian forces progress of one kilometre in the northeast of Kharkiv near Vovchansk. According to the report the Russian military had aimed to advance 10 kilometres with an objective to create a buffer zone. Earlier, Ukraine Defence Ministry reported on Russian forces attempt to breach the Kharkiv border by deploying armoured vehicles and heavy shelling. In a statement, the Ministry said: "At approximately 5 a.m., there was an attempt by the enemy to break through our defensive line under the cover of armored vehicles."

On 10 May, Ukraine's air force reported on Russia launching two S-300 and S-400 missiles over Kharkiv. The same was confirmed by Ihor Terekhov, Mayor of Kharkiv. The attack damages more than two dozen of buildings while Ukraine forces had claimed intercepting 10 Russian missiles launched across Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kherson. On the same Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President stated that Ukraine had "anticipated" the Russian attack and planned the response. He added: "Russia launched a new wave of counteroffensive actions in this area. Ukraine met them there with our troops, brigades and artillery... Now there is

a fierce battle under way in this direction."

On 10 May, in a press conference, Zelenskyy expressed confidence in the western weapons to help change Ukraine's momentum on ground. He said: "We are putting maximum pressure on our partners to increase weapon deliveries." He said that on increase in weapon delivery, Ukraine forces will be able to stop Russian forces in the eastern Ukraine. Roberta Metsola, European Parliament President responded acknowledging the urgent need of Ukraine for equipment and air-defence systems.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 10 May, *RIA Novosti*, reported on Ukraine's strike on an oil refinery in Kulaga area. This resulted in fire in the Pervyi Zavod refinery damaging three containers with diesel and fuel oil. According to Vladislav Shapsha, Governor of Kaluga, no casualties were reported and the fire was extinguished immediately. Till now there have no claims from Ukraine but in response, Russia claimed on striking Kharkiv leading to death of two.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 10 May, the White House announced a new military aid to Ukraine worth USD 400 million as it continues the weapon supplies to Kyiv after the haul in congress. Joe Biden, the US President approved up to USD 400 million defence articles and services including artillery, munitions for NASAMS air defenses, anti-tank munitions, armored vehicles and small arms."

On 10 May, in response to Ukraine's report on Russia's progress of one kilometre in Kharkiv, John Kirby, White House national security spokesperson provided the US predictions. According to the Kirby, Russia is expected to make advances in the coming weeks but stressed that it sees no breakthrough. He added that the gap will be filled by US assistance enabling Ukraine to defend the over the months in 2024. Kirby also said: "Russia will likely increase the intensity of fire and commit additional troops in an attempt to establish a shallow buffer zone along the Ukrainian border."

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War in Ukraine Day 806

War on the Ground:

On 09 May, Ukraine's defence official from special services claimed on drone strike on Russia's two oil depots. The same was confirmed by Radiy Khabirov, the head of Russia's Bashkiria region. According to the report in *The New York Times*, Neftekhim Salavat oil refinery considered the largest site located 700 miles from Ukraine border was hit by drone. The second oil depot is located in Krasnodar in the southeast of Ukraine was also subject to two drone strikes. According to few military analysts, the attack is viewed as Ukraine's efforts to interrupt Russian military's logistical routes and combat to prevent the supply of fuel for Russian ships, tanks and planes.

On 09 May, Ukraine's air force reported on destroying 17 out of 20 drones launched by Russia on Odesa. Apart from this Nikopol located in southern Ukraine was also subject to artillery fire. The same was confirmed by Segiy Lysak, regional governor of Nikopol.

On 09 May, Zelenskyy reported on replacing of commander of special forces, Colonel Serhiy Lupanchuk with Brigadier General Oleksandr Trepak. The reason behind the move was not disclosed but it is second time the commander is being changed. Newly appointed Trepak has a record of active participation in defence operations especially in eastern Ukraine.

The Moscow View: Claims By Russia

On 09 May, Vyacheslav Gladkov, Regional governor reported on fire in Belgorod resulting in injury of eight. According to the report, 19 apartments and 37 vehicles were reportedly damaged. On the same day, Russian defence ministry reported on drone activity in Kursk and Bryansk and another attack in Krasnodar's fuel depot. Six drones were claimed to be destroyed and as a result a complex was damaged with fire across several reservoirs.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 09 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Boris Pistorius, Germany Defence Minister announcement to send three HIMARS rocket systems to Ukraine. The move comes after his meeting with Lloyd Austin, US Defence Minister. According to Pistorius, the systems will be supplied from the US armed forces paid by Germany. The rocket systems have been crucial in boosting Ukraine's defence through striking at command, communications and logistics centres of Russia. He added: "We are taking on more responsibility and together with other NATO's allies, are increasing our investments in defense substantially."

The Global Fallouts:

Implications of the War

On 09 May, Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea's President in a speech on domestic issues after parliamentary elections, spoke about war in Ukraine. He assured to maintain the ties with Ukraine while having a "smooth" relationship with Russia and denied the chances of sending direct military supplies to Ukraine. This comes after attempt of the US and European leaders to pursue South Korea in sending arms to Kyiv. Whereas, South Korea similar to Japan follows a policy of not sending weapons to conflict zones. Yeol said: "...to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance [for Ukraine], in accordance with the spirit of the constitution."

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War in Ukraine: Day 805

War on the Ground:

On 08 May, Ukraine's Parliament passed a law approving certain of prisoners to fight as part of Ukraine's armed forces. Olena Shuliak, the head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party said: "The Parliament has voted 'yes' ... on the voluntary mobilization of prisoners." The law creates a possibility of those prisoners who are willing to fight to join Ukraine's defence forces. It also allows for conditional early release for service in military for those accepted. Ahead of coming into practise, the law must be signed by the chairperson of the assembly or Ukraine President.

On 08 May, Ukraine's air force reported on shooting down several Russian missiles and drones that were targeted against its infrastructure. Despite the counter attacks, a dozen of critical energy structure was reported to be hit in Lviv. This includes 55 missiles and 21 drones launched by Russia out of which 39 missiles and 20 drones were intercepted. In response, a high alert was raised in Kyiv for three hours.

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 08 May, RT reported on Russian military seizing of two settlements in Kharkiv and Donbas. According to the report, Ukrainian forces from Kislovka village located 25 kilometres in the east of Kupiansk which operates as key logistics hub was dislodged. The moves signals intense fight in Kharkiv axis and the frontline along the area.

On 08 May, RT reported on Russian forces claims on launching a series of attacks using long-range weapons at Ukraine's energy infrastructure. The same was reported by Ukraine's air forces. In a statement the Russian military stated the it had launched the attacks in response to Ukraine targeting

of its oil facilities. The Russian defence ministry said: "The attacks "significantly reduced Ukraine's ability to manufacture military products and transport Western arms and military vehicles to the frontline."

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 08 May, ambassadors of the EU signed a deal to utilise the frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine. In a statement the Belgian government said: "The money will serve to support Ukraine's recovery and military defense in the context of the Russian aggression." Although the details of the agreement are yet to be disclosed, it is expected to monetize EUR three billion. Close to 90 per cent of the amount will be used for military and 10 per cent for financial support. Frozen assets of Russian Central Bank amounts for EUR 210 billion and an accrued interest of EUR 4.4 billion till now and is currently held by the Euroclear, a brussels based financial institution. Ursula Von Der Leyen, European Commission President said: "...no stronger symbol and no greater use for that money than to make Ukraine and all of Europe a safer place to live."

On 08 May, in his military policy trip to the US and Canada, Boris Pistorius, Germany's Defence Minister asked for joint support for Ukraine. In his visit to the US, he emphasized on Germany increasing contribution to NATO and said: "It is a question of whether and how democracies defend themselves." He is expected to meet Llyod Austin, US Defence Secretary and Canadian Defence Minister on 09 May to vouch for more support for Ukraine.

The Global Fallouts: Implications of the War

On 08 May, Reuters reported on India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arresting of four under suspicion of attempting to join the war in Ukraine. Earlier, two Indian's were reportedly killed in frontline of the war under false promise. Amongst the arrested, a translator and two recruiters were found to be operating in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. According to CBI, "youths" were promised for well-paid jobs and university places through online

platforms such as You Tube. The arrest comes as investigators raided 13 locations.

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War in Ukraine: Day 804

War on the Ground:

On 07 May, Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) reported on identifying Russian agents within Ukrainian state guard service who had planned to kill Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine’s President and other officials. In a statement SBU stated how it prevented Russian security service (FSB) plans to execute Ukraine president and other senior authorities in the military. On identification, two colonels from the State Guard of Ukraine were detained under suspicion of being involved in the execution plan.

On 07 May, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) reported on the emerging allegations of use of chemical weapons by Russia and Ukraine. According to the report, despite both actors accuse of use of chemical, no clear evidence was visible. According to OPCW: “The information provided to the Organization so far by both sides, together with the information available to the Secretariat, is insufficiently substantiated.” It also confirmed on receiving no investigations request from both despite allegations but OPCW called the situation as “extremely concerning.”

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 07 May, Vladimir Putin, Russia’s President began his fifth term after the inauguration ceremony. He took the oath to serve Russia and its people with a revised constitution including the annexed regions in Ukraine. This comes as Putin won the presidential elections with 87.28 per cent votes. In his ceremony speech, Putin called for “fair dialogue” with focus on security and strategic stability and value to the parties interest. In his listed priorities, called for a “self-sufficient” Russia, united by the Russian language and preservation of values and traditions. On Russia’s foreign policy, Putin mentioned Russia’s aim to strengthen its relations across globe to showcase how reliable its can be. He criticised the west for continuing to be a barrier to development of Russia and for opting “policy of aggression.” He stressed on working with European integration process and vowed to establish a multipolar world.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 07 May, Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus President announced on conducting nuclear drills for readiness of the army in deploying nuclear weapons. Belarus Defence Ministry reported on a surprise inspection of “its non-strategic nuclear weapons carriers” on the order from Lukashenko. The move coincides with Russia’s drills in Kaliningrad.

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War in Ukraine: Day 800

Russian probe finds no involvement of Ukraine military intelligence in 2022 attack

War on the Ground:

On 03 May, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President and David Cameron, UK's Foreign Secretary held a meeting to discuss on speeding the delivery of military aid. Zelenskyy said: "It is important that the weapons included in the UK support package announced last week arrive as soon as possible." While Cameron assured to keep armoured vehicles, ammunition and missile first in the list to deliver.

On 03 May, in an interview to the Economist, Vadym Skibitsky, Deputy Chief of Ukraine's military intelligence directorate provided a grim view on Ukraine having less possibilities on winning the war. He said: "Even if it were able to push Russian forces back to the borders - an increasingly distant prospect - it wouldn't end the war." He stated that the war can be ended only by treaty but both Ukraine and Russia were observed to be fighting for "favourable position" to have a stance in the negotiations.

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 03 May, *RT* reported on latest investigation details on the 2022 Crimean bridge attack by Ukraine. According to the investigation report, a truck laden carrying explosives was blown when crossing the bridge resulting in damage and death of civilians. It ruled out the possibility of Ukrainian military intelligence of being involved in the attacks but it suspects Vasily Malyuk, head of Ukraine's civilian security agency to be responsible. As per the report in *Kommersant*, the blast was started by small explosive like C4 or PE-8, triggering fuse through a GPS tracker signal to detonate.

On 03 May, Sergey Shoigu, Russia's Defence Minister issued a statement disclosing 111,000 troops loss for Ukrainian military. He stressed that Russian forces "continue to break up" the defensive positions of Ukrainian forces in the frontline and

announced an advance of 547 square kilometres of Russia as of April 2024. Shoigu also claimed on inflicting damage and destroying of 21,000 heavy weapons of Ukraine forces.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 03 May, Victor Orban, Hungarian Prime Minister reported the need to boost its defence spending till 2025 if the war continued. This would mean reduction in the funds available for other expenditures. The move comes as the war had triggered overall defence spending of the NATO's eastern flank resulting in doubling of the defence expenditure to 3.9 per cent of GDP by 2023. Hungary was observed to be critical on the spillover effects of the war but is observed to have increased its defence spending to 2.43 per cent of its GDP in 2023 crossing the NATO threshold of two per cent. Orban said: "If the war drags on into 2025, then the 2023-2024 defence spending levels will not be sufficient and will have to be increased."

On 03 May, Annalena Baerbock, Germany's Foreign Minister reported on finding of new evidence on Russian "state-sponsored hackers" involvement in one of the "intolerable" cyber-attacks in 2023. She said: "Today we can say unambiguously [that] we can attribute this cyber-attack to a group called APT28, which is steered by the military intelligence service of Russia." No further details on those targeted were disclosed.

On 03 May, the Czech Foreign Ministry reported on being the target of Russian cyberattacks since 2023. Similar to Germany's evidence on APT28 hacker group to be linked to a cyberattack, the ministry suspects the group to be connected to Russia's military intelligence. In a statement: "Russian state-controlled actor APT28, which has been conducting a long-term cyber espionage campaign in European countries."

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War in Ukraine: Day 798

Russia claims breakthrough in Donbas on capturing Ocheretino town

War on the Ground:

On 01 May, Gennadiy Trukhanov, Mayor of Odesa, reported on second missile attack by Russia in the week resulting in death of three and injury of three more. He said: “The enemy attacked Odesa with ballistic missiles. As a consequence of the attack, three people were killed and three more wounded.” Apart from the civilian loss, infrastructural damage was also recorded. On the same day, two more were killed in a Russian attack using guided bombs in Kharkiv. 10 other private homes were also damaged along with civilian and energy infrastructure.

On 01 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Ukraine’s exiting gas infrastructure. According to the report, close to four billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas can be stored in foreign companies and traders for the coming winter. In an interview to Reuters, Oleksiy Chernyshov, Chief Executive of Naftogaz stated that it would be a 60 per cent increase from 2023. He said that despite Russia’s continued attacks on the company’s infrastructure, its underground storage had remained safe and the company aims to strengthen its defence by pumping of gas around vulnerable facilities. Such storage facilities deemed to be located majorly in western Ukraine have capacity of 31 billion bcm which will be sufficient to meet annual needs of Ukraine when sent from Europe on peak demand. Chernyshov added: “We are in a period of European shippers’ meetings where we agree on the volumes of (gas) injection. They (the Russians) aim to discredit us as an energy hub with storage capacities.”

The Moscow View:

Claims by Russia

On 01 May, *RT* reported on exhibition displaying the captured west supplied weapons during the conflict in Ukraine. In the exhibition, heavy armour, 32 vehicles from Ukrainian forces, small arms, grenade launchers, and other military equipment captured were placed for display. According to the report, German made Leopard 2A6 and US-made M1A1 SA Abrahms was also included.

On 01 May, *RT* reported on Russia’s continuing combat in multiple fronts (local railway line, Ocheretino town) with exchange of long-range attacks including cluster munitions in Donbas. According to the report, Russian troops had made advances along Orlovka-Tonenkoye-Berdychi axis. These villages are located in the northwest of Avdeevka stretching along ponds and canal which have come under Russian forces control. Russian military has claimed breakthrough in the defensive lines of Ukraine near Ocheretino.

The West View:

Responses from the US and Europe

On 01 May, the US Treasury imposed 300 sanctions on firms supporting the war in Ukraine. This targeted several from Hong Kong and China for aiding Russia circumventing sanctions imposed by the West. The sanctions also include firms from Azerbaijan, Belgium, Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Slovakia. Following this, Janet Yellen, Treasury Secretary said: “Treasury has consistently warned that companies will face significant consequences for providing material support for Russia’s war, and the US is imposing them today on almost 300 targets.” Along with firms, individuals connected to the death of Alexei Navalny were also in the sanction list.

On 01 May, the US State Department accused Russia for violating the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act (CBW) of 1991 by using chemical weapons in Ukraine. The statement comes after an assessment which found use of riot control agents as a warfare method in Ukraine. In a statement the department said:

“...the use of such chemicals is not an isolated incident, and is probably driven by Russian forces' desire to dislodge Ukrainian forces from fortified positions and achieve tactical gains on the battlefield.”

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War in Ukraine: Day 797

War on the Ground:

On 30 April, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's President expressed gratitude for Latvian government for aiding Ukraine with the latest military assistance with additional air defence systems and drones. Till now, Latvia's support amounts to 0.35 per cent of its GDP, including short-range anti-aircraft guns and surveillance drones.

On 30 April, Andriy Kostin, Ukraine's Prosecutor General reported on an attack by Russia in Odesa using Iskander missile in a cluster warhead. The weapon system is capable of causing massive casualties and as a result of the attack, metal fragments and missile debris were found.

On 30 April, *Ukrinform* reported on increased casualties from the Russian attack on Kharkiv. According to the report, after the attack on hospital earlier this week, another strike was observed in the Kyivskyi district where 50 cars were damaged. No military objects or soldier casualties were recorded. Head of the Kharkiv Regional Military Administration, Oleh Syniehubov said: “Among the nine wounded, three women aged 28, 38, 40, and one 42-year-old man were hospitalized - all with explosive

injuries.”

The Moscow View: Claims by Russia

On 30 April, Russian defence ministry reported on Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) weakened defence against Russia's Battlegroup East and as a result 100 casualties were recorded. This was observed in Staromayorskoye and Vodyanoye positions in Donetsk. The ministry claimed on destroying of two pickup trucks and 155mm US-made M777 howitzers. It also claimed on improved stance against Ukraine's brigades near Novobakhmutovka and Ocheretino in the same region.

On 30 April, the *TASS* reported on shooting down of a Ukrainian drone over Belgorod, in the border zone. In the statement released by Russia's defence ministry, Ukraine had attempted attack on facilities in Russia which were used as a fixed-wing for unmanned aerial vehicles. It claimed to have thwarted the attack.

The West View: Responses from the US and Europe

On 30 April, Latvian government announced new batch of military aid. Evika Siliņa, Latvia's Prime Minister confirmed the same: “...approved the transfer of NBS anti-aircraft systems, tactical unmanned surveillance systems, and other essential material and technical assets to the Armed Forces of Ukraine.”

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EM Short Notes*

By Shilpa Joseph, Neha Tresa George, Padmashree Anandhan and Ken B Varghese



Source: Reuters, Pawel Supernak/PAP/dpa/picture alliance, The New York Times/Hollie Adams/Reuters, Susana Vera/Reuters, USC Shoah Foundation, devpolicy.org

ESTONIA

Border guards report on Russia's removal of the navigation buoys

On 23 May, Estonian border guards reported that their Russian counterparts had removed 24 out of the 50 buoys placed on the Estonian side of Narva River. According to the Estonian authorities, the strategically placed buoys prevent ships from entering into foreign territory and that Russia had been contesting over their positions since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas described the removal of the buoys as a "border incident." She also added that Russia used tools such as borders to induce fear and anxiety. The motives behind the move are still unclear although it happened following Russia's deleted message to the Baltic countries on the revision of the maritime border in the eastern Baltic Sea. The Narva River runs from a lake between Russia and Estonia and ends up in the Gulf of Finland which is a part of the Baltic Sea. Natural changes to the riverbed make it

necessary to retrace the shipping routes annually. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Russia's Baltic Sea borders should be in accordance with international law. ("[Estonia says Russia removed navigation buoys near border](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 May 2024)

Finance ministers to discuss on VAT legislation on hotel accommodation

On 13 May, *Politico* reported that finance ministers would gather to discuss on VAT (Value-added tax) to be imposed on online accommodation rentals and taxi rides. The new legislation would require the hotel and taxi booking sites to register for the sales tax, thus hiking prices by 25 per cent. There were concerns about the disproportionate burdens on small businesses and thus the new plan has allowed each EU member state to decide whether to opt for the "deemed supplier" arrangements. But the ride-sharing app Bolt, with its headquarters in Estonia, argues that the plans are unfair

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

as many taxi drivers are small operations that do not have to pay VAT. With Estonia siding with this agreement, the EU faces an unanimity issue as the legislation should be agreed upon by all the members. (Jack Schickler, "[EU Policy. Estonia threatens to block Airbnb tax-hike plan](#)," *Euronews*, 13 May 2024)

PTA reports rapid mutation of H5N1 strain of bird flu from the US

On 29 April, Kärt Jaarma, chief specialist of the animal health and welfare department at the Agriculture and Food Board (PTA) expressed concern on the rapid spread of the H5N1 virus killing thousands of sea lions, seals and marine mammals across the Atlantic. The H5N1 strain of bird flu is highly pathogenic and easily jumps from one species to another. Since 2020 over 90 million domestic birds have been culled in the US alone and now the mortality rate in sea colonies is 95 per cent. After Latvia reported the virus in a dead greylag goose and Owing to the highly mutable nature of the virus, there is fear that it may affect other mammals and possibly transmission from person to person. Margus Varjak, an associate professor of virology at the University of Tartu explains that there is hope since we have the capacity to create vaccines. The virus strain has not been detected in the Baltic Sea region and therefore there is some calm in Europe in this regard.

FRANCE

French Parties compete for seats in the European elections

On 29 May, *FRANCE24* reported that 38 French parties were fielding their candidates for the European parliamentary elections to be conducted on 06-09 June. France which holds 81 out of the 720 seats has their far-right National Rally leading with the polls with more than 30 per cent followed by Macron's Renaissance party and the Socialists. The voters will choose among the candidate lists submitted by the country's political parties and those hoping to gain victory are known as tetes de list (head of the list). The newly elected MEPs or Members of Parliament will join their

respective political affiliations based on their ideology. France's Socialists, Greens, far-right parties would likely join their counterparts from across Europe. The European Parliament now consists of seven active groups. ("[European elections: French parties compete for seats at the EU parliament](#)," *FRANCE24*, 29 May 2024)

"Ill wind is blowing in Europe, so let us wake up" says Macron

On 27 May, Deutsche Welle reported on Emmanuel Macron's speech on his second day in the eastern German city of Dresden. In his speech, he warned against authoritarianism and the growing influence of far-rights over Europe. "Everywhere in our democracies these ideas thrive, pushed by the extremes and in particular the far right. This ill wind is blowing in Europe, so let us wake up," Macron said. Speaking in German, he also mentioned the ongoing war in Ukraine indicating that Europe was at crossroads. He delivered his address at the city's famous Frauenkirche, a church that symbolises both the destruction of World War II and German reunification. To the young people who made up much of the crowd, he emphasised European unity by referring to the German unification at the end of the Cold War. He will wrap up his visit with the last to the western German university city of Münster. There, he will be awarded the International Peace of Westphalia Prize for his efforts toward 'sustained peace' which will be followed by the joint talks at the Meseberg Place. "[Macron makes case for European unity in Dresden speech](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 May 2024

Parliament proposed to pass the bill "right to die"

On 27 May, the French parliament debated a bill on 'aid in dying' which is a right-to-die bill backed by Emmanuel Macron, President who has made it a flagship reform of his second term. If this bill becomes would last for more than a year bringing France closer to its European neighbours. Some countries have already allowed assisted dying. Catherine Vautrin, Health minister said that the government was seeking: "...an ethical

response to the suffering of people at the end of their life...it is to parliament's credit that it takes up the most serious and distressing issues that affect and sometimes torment our society." Macron has insisted that this right to death would be only limited to people with incurable illnesses and intense pain. This bill is widely known for focusing on "end of life" or "aid in dying" in French debate, rather than "assisted suicide" or "euthanasia." Macron also stated that France needed such a law because there would be situations where one cannot humanly accept." The goal was "to reconcile the autonomy of the individual with to solidarity of the nation." Many religious leaders, health workers and most left-leaning deputies are strongly against this bill. Now this bill would be only applicable to those people born in France or residents staying for a long term will be allowed for assisted dying. Patients over 18 years old are only Eligible to apply for this bill. French patients who are suffering from pain and wish to end their life would travel abroad, including to neighbouring Belgium, or the Netherlands which became the first EU country to allow euthanasia. Spain also allowed euthanasia in 2021 and medically assisted suicide for people with a serious illness, followed by Portugal in 2023. ("French parliament debates divisive bill on 'aid in dying'." *Le Monde*, 27 May 2024)

France lifts state of emergency for New Caledonia

On 27 May, France lifted the state of emergency on New Caledonia. This issue was raised due to the France's proposal to make new changes to the voters list in New Caledonia which has been under France since 1853. Although many indigenous Kanaks opposed French rule and wanted complete independence. They strongly oppose the electoral reform as would diminish their influence and opinion in their votes. This bill proposal caused massive protests on the island cause of which France had to impose a state of emergency on 15 May. This has given more power to the police and given them authority to tackle violence including house detention, expanded power to searches without

warrants, seize weapons and restrict movements. The French government has also dispatched hundreds of police and military for reinforcement to restore order in the archipelago. ("France to lift New Caledonia state of emergency," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 May 2024)

Far-left party demands for the recognition of Palestinian statehood

On 26 May, *Euronews* reported that the leader of France's far-left LFI (La France Insoumise) party told the supporters in a rally on Saturday in the town of Aubervilliers that it was time to recognise Palestine's statehood officially. Jean-Luc Mélenchon said, "France must recognize the Palestinian state now. The balance of power must show that the whole world condemns this genocide." The LFI candidate Manon Aubry also declared that her party would impose sanctions against Israel as well as restrict arms shipments to the country if elected. Their comments come ahead of the European elections which will take place from 06 to 09 June and Israel's military offensive in Gaza. On 22 May, three European states- Spain, Ireland, and Norway announced that they would formally recognise Palestine as a state which was the result of months of negotiations between a group of European countries who were willing to take the step. Although UN proposed the two-state solution that creates two countries- Israel and Palestine with their separate governments, Israel in opposition argued that it will "fuel instability" in the Middle East. Palestinian statehood has been recognised by 139 out of 193 United Nations (UN) member states to date. ("French far left urge government to recognise State of Palestine," *Euronews*, 26 May 2024)

Macron on a three-day visit to Germany indicates greater integration between the countries

On 26 May, Emmanuel Macron, French president began a three-day visit to Germany on an invitation from Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German President. According to Steinmeier's office, the visit is

the first by a French president in 24 years “highlighting the unique relationship between the two countries.” At the same time, Steinmeier viewed this visit as proof of the depth of the Franco-German relationship. After reaching Berlin, Macron in a statement said: “Franco-German relations are indispensable and important for Europe.” He also rejected the claims on strain in their relationship and added that both countries were moving forward. He also warned against authoritarianism posed by the far-right parties if they came to power in the upcoming elections. During the visit, Macron would travel across Germany. On the same day, he attended the Celebration of Democracy, marking 75 years of the Basic Law — the democratic constitution adopted in West Germany after World War II which was held in Berlin's government district.

According to the report in *Le Monde*, Germany and France are viewed as EU's largest economies and core of European integration despite differences over policies. Indicating the frequent problems in Franco-German relations, Macron stated how both have worked together for Europe. The visit also comes ahead of European elections which has triggered fears of Macron's coalition falling behind the far right. The report highlighted Macron's April speech where he warned on “Our Europe, today, is mortal and it can die... Our Europe, today, is mortal and it can die.” “France's Macron touts 'indispensable' ties on Germany visit,” *Deutsche Welle*, 27 May 2024; “Macron begins first state visit to Germany by a French president in 24 years,” *Le Monde*, 27 May 2024)

Government support the ICC's arrest warrants

On 21 May, France backed the arrest warrants issued by the prosecutor Karim Khan of the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Binyamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister Yoav Gallant, Defence Minister and three other Hamas leaders. With all the members of the EU put in a diplomatically difficult position, France supported the ICC, its independence, and its

“fight against impunity in all situations.” France took a stand condemning both the antisemitic massacres of 07 October and the possible violations of international humanitarian law by Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip. The country supported the court's independence by claiming it was up to the court's pretrial chamber to decide whether those warrants should be issued. On 21 May, the ICC prosecutor Karim Khan applied for arrest warrants against the leaders on account of “wilful killing,” “extermination or murder,” and “starvation” during the war in Gaza. According to him, Israel had committed “crimes against humanity,” and accused it “of a widespread and systematic attack against the Palestinian civilian population.” He also said the Hamas leaders “bear criminal responsibility” for actions committed during the 07 October attack. He added that international law and laws of armed conflict apply to all without any exception. (“France backs ICC after it seeks arrest warrants for Israeli, Hamas leaders,” *FRANCE 24*, 21 May 2024))

In New Caledonia, police kills a Kanak protestor

On 24 May, a policeman killed a man aged 48 in New Caledonia making it the seventh death amid the ongoing protests against the voting amendment bill. New Caledonia's prosecutor Yves Dupas said that the incident occurred when the officer was attacked by about 15 people. The officer in custody now is undergoing investigation. Macron flew to the islands to ease the tensions and asked for the removal of roadblocks to lift the state of emergency. On 24 May, the police dismantled about 100 roadblocks. Kanak leaders pushing for independence have taken a stance that the new voting amendment bill would marginalise their culture and dilute their voting power. The voting rules would add about 25,000 people to the electoral roll, including people who have been residents of the archipelago for at least 10 years. Christian Tein, of the Field Action Coordination Cell (CCAT), organised the protests vowed to push for the electoral changes along with independence of the

territory. He said: "We maintain the resistance in our neighborhoods in a structured, organized way." ("New Caledonia police kill Kanak protester," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 May 2024)

Special investment summit attracts EUR four billion in data storage and AI

On 24 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on how France has become an attractive foreign investment for data centres and AI technology from the special investment summit. The US software giant Microsoft announced additional investments of EUR four billion in data centres and the AI sector in France by 2027. This will be Europe's biggest thus helping it to be one of the data storage and AI leaders. The Paris startup Mistral AI joined the League of AI Champions in December and became a so-called unicorn in the sector. According to Noah Greene from the AI Safety and Stability Project at the Washington-based think tank, making the ambition of France to reality might be a struggle. With the US and China moving ahead of the EU in the technology and AI market, the investors prefer to put their money there as the infrastructure and talent already exists. He added on France's "complex labour code and large US tech firms like Google have struggled at times to get past these laws." Veronique Ventos who is the co-founder of Paris-based startup NukkAI, says that she never considered French labour laws a hurdle and that the country has excellent AI researchers. Additional supercomputers will be inaugurated in 2024 which will be the first in Europe to exceed a capacity of one exaflop per second, which is one quintillion operations. According to the experts, France should focus on its strengths such as technologies that combine AI with robotics. (Lisa Louis, "France is reaching for the stars in AI technology," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 May 2024)

French President holds talks in the troubled islands of New Caledonia

On 23 May, President Emmanuel Macron met with local officials in New Caledonia on Thursday, seeking a political solution to end

riots in the region. He called the unrest an "absolutely unprecedented insurrection movement" and confirmed that the French police reinforcements would remain till the region has stabilised. He added that there is no other choice as the republican order needs to be reestablished. He kept security and peace to be the top priority along with questions of economic reconstruction, support and rapid response, and the most delicate political questions about the future of the region. After meeting with leaders on both sides of the political divide of New Caledonia, Macron had also confirmed that the vote reform won't be forced through the people and would be put on hold. Although he was against extending the current state of emergency, it could only be lifted if all the political leaders called for the removal of barricades and roadblocks. He wanted the situation to be reviewed after a month so that considerable changes could be made. As a call to the Kanak representatives, he put forth the need to explicitly remove all the blockades in the following hours.

("Macron: New Caledonia vote reform won't be 'forced through'," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 May 2024)

Launches new operation in New Caledonia as riots continue

On 19 May, the security forces in the French overseas territory of New Caledonia commenced a new operation to take back control of the 60-kilometers highway that links the capital of Noumea to the nearby airport so that supplies could be flown in. The police had cleared up around 60 barricades set up along the road to the airport. On 18 May, the French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin confirmed that 600 gendarmes, including a hundred officers from Paris' elite counterterrorism special forces had arrived in the state to "restore the order of the Republic." Burnt wreckage was used to block the road by the protestors and the halting of flights had led to 3,200 people being stranded according to the reports of the authority. According to the *AFP* reports, 230 people had been detained with the rioters still blockading the roads. (Gabriel Gavin, "France launches

crackdown in New Caledonia as deadly riots rage,” Politico, 19 May 2024)

Government accuses Azerbaijan for influencing the riots in New Caledonia

On 16 May 2024, France insisted on Azerbaijan’s interference in the clashes of French-controlled New Caledonia which the country has denied. The protestors are demanding the independence of the Pacific Ocean archipelago following the French MPs’ backing of the changes in the Caledonian constitution that allowed any citizens who had lived there for at least 10 years, the right to vote. The Kanaks who are the indigenous people perceived it as a move to sideline them. Since the French government’s occupation of the region, there have been charges that Kanaks have faced ‘systemic discrimination’ and chronic underdevelopment. France has banned TikTok and also imposed an emergency in the hope of curbing the protests. The French-Azerbaijan relation has hit a rock bottom with repeated allegations that the latter is supporting pro-independence protestors in New Caledonia. The tension has increased in recent years due to France’s military and political support to Armenia which is Azerbaijan’s historical rival. While Azerbaijan has founded the Baku Initiative Group which aims to bring together 14 political movements across former French colonies in the name of decolonisation, it has also supported the independence movements against France. (Gabriel Gavin, Océane Herrero, and Victor Goury-Laffont, “France accuses Azerbaijan of fomenting deadly riots in overseas territory New Caledonia,” Politico, 16 May 2024)

State of emergency declared in New Caledonia

On 15 May, *Le Monde* reported on French President Emmanuel Macron’s declaring state of emergency for minimum 12 days in New Caledonia (France’s Pacific territory). This comes after three were killed in violence and close to 100 police injured. There were also reports on exchange of fire between civil defence group and rioters in

Nouméa and the commune of Paita. Following the announcement, French military forces were deployed in ports, airports to release police forces from being subject to violence. The violence was triggered due to reform proposed on altering the electorate Assemblée Nationale of New Caledonia. Located between Australia and Fiji has remained as French territories after post-colonial era and so far, there have been three rejections for independence referendums. While the notion of independence remains amongst the native Kanak. The reform is yet to approved by the both houses of the French Parliament. Meanwhile, the Pro-independence forces called on diluting the vote of Kanaks who comprise 41 per cent of the population whereas those in favour of the reform argue on the outdated voter lists derogating the rights of the island residents who have resided since 1998. Under the new situation, authorities can impose travel bans, house arrests and search. To carry this out 1800 law enforcement officers were mobilised and another 500 will be added to maintain the curfew. (“Macron declares state of emergency in New Caledonia,” Le Monde, 15 May 2024)

President Macron condemns the graffiti attack on the ‘Holocaust Memorial’

On 14 May, French President Emmanuel Macron condemned a graffiti attack on Paris’ Wall of the Righteous Holocaust Memorial as an act of “odious antisemitism.” The monument which serves as a reminder of those 3900 people who helped to save Jews during the Nazi occupation of France from 1940-42, was vandalized with painting of twenty red hands. According to the Ariel Weil, District Mayor, nearby Jewish institutions were also targeted. Paris has the world’s third-largest Jewish population along with the largest Arab population in Europe. Triggering contempt and criticism from authorities and Jewish communities, this particular act serves as a reminder of the dark days in the past as it coincides with the Nazi’s first roundup in France. Since the Hamas attack on Israel, France has witnessed a surge in

the number of antisemitic attacks. While the pro-Palestinian student protests claim the red hands to be a gesture for the call for a ceasefire in Gaza, critics argue that they are symbolic of the blood-soaked hands of Palestinians cheering exuberantly after the lynching of two Israeli reservists in Ramallah in 2000. ("French President Macron condemns the graffiti attack on the 'Holocaust Memorial'," *Deutsche Welle*, 14 May 2024)

Paris Court acquits Roman Polanski in a defamation case

On 14 May, the ninety-year-old filmmaker Roman Polanski was acquitted by a French court on a defamation case filed by Charlotte Lewis in which she claimed that he had raped her in the 1980s while working on a film with him. In the ruling, the court said it was whether Polanski had abused his right to free speech. Polanski who resides in Switzerland did not attend the trial. Polanski had called the accusations a "heinous lie" and also quoted one of her statements that she had "wanted to be his mistress." Polanski who is famed for films like "Chinatown," and "The Pianist" has faced several sexual allegations in the past but has never been convicted. He had fled in 1978 after pleading guilty to having unlawful sex with a thirteen-year-old. He had also faced similar allegations from many women in the wake of the #MeToo movement but has denied the accusations vehemently. The court's decision came as France's famous Cannes Film Festival is set to honour women in film. ("Paris Court acquits Roman Polanski in a defamation case brought by a British actress," *Deutsche Welle*, 14 May 2024)

Macron's business summit attracts EUR 15 billion investment projects

On 13 May, Emmanuel Macron while hosting an investor summit in Versailles announced foreign investment projects worth EUR 15 billion in fields including technology, artificial intelligence, and pharmaceuticals. The 'Choose France' summit which is the brainchild of Macron would host some 180 foreign business leaders with 56 projects. The summit is

aimed at attracting foreign investment and marking Paris' position as the core financial centre as the country tackles low growth and a high budget deficit. Amazon has announced a EUR 1.2 billion investment in a data centre for its AWS cloud unit and a warehouse for its retail operations. Fertilizer producer Fertighy is expected to announce a EUR 1.3 billion plant, while Pfizer will put up EUR 500 million on top of a previous EUR one billion investment. The summit serves as a reassuring factor for global investors despite the crisis encountered by the country. (Clea Caulcutt, Paul De Villepin And Giovanna Faggionato, "France lands record €15B in foreign investments as Macron hosts business summit," *Politico*, 13 May 2024)

Rugby Legend Lucien Mias dies at 93

On 12 May, Rugby legend Lucien Mias, who led France to the first "Five Nations" rugby championship title in 1959 died at the age of 93. Known as captain "Doctor Pack," because of his career as a medical practitioner, began his rugby career with Narbonne. Mias made his international debut against Scotland in the 1951 Five Nations and he played another sixteen times till 1954. After a record of 17 caps (Number of international representations), his career was on hold in 1954, but he came back stronger in 1957 winning another twelve caps in the next two years. As a six-time captain, Mias helped France in the historic winning tour of South Africa in 1958 leading them to their Five Nations triumph. He also helped in their first wins at Twickenham in 1951 and Cardiff seven years later. These were among the most memorable in the history of French rugby. ("French rugby legend Lucien Mias dies, aged 93," *Le Monde*, 13 May 2024)

Politico on the state of French Digital Industry: New regulation to reduce children screen time

On 10 May, *Politico* reported on the challenges faced by France's digital industry following the new set of regulations based on a government report on reducing the screen time of children. The report suggested restrictions on children to access

the most popular social networks until they reach the age of 18. It has also suggested the creation of a “European ethical standard” for platforms and an agency for digital governance. The government is fixating its position on fundamental issues such as ‘introducing a digital age.’ The Parliamentarians have also stressed on the three bills from the right and center on curbing screentime.

Government claims on safety during Olympic construction questioned

On 08 May, a report published by *The New York Times* shed light on the construction hazards and migrant worker abuses that took place ahead of the Paris Olympics in 2024, which went unrecorded so as to put France in a good light, unlike the Qatar World Cup. There was a discord between the government data which shows no death and less than 200 injuries, when compared to other inspection records that reveal the dangerous conditions and suboptimal safety standards in the working sites. Many fatal accidents of labourers working legally are also omitted from the records. The French government has been accused of bending laws and reporting procedures when it comes to undocumented workers. Macron eliminated company safety boards and slashed inspection funding to streamline the burdensome bureaucracy. But they have increased the risk of working. The construction companies that employ illegal workers conceal many injury reports fearing legal repercussions. The migrants were forced to comply with their subcontractors so that they wouldn't lose their jobs. (Sarah Hurtes, “[France Says It Built the Olympics Safely. Migrant Workers Don't Count.](#),” *The New York Times*, 08 May 2024)

Macron and Xi hold talks commemorating 60 years of diplomatic ties

On 06 May, Xi Jinping, Chinese President added more significance through his visit marking 60th anniversary of China-France relations. Jinping and Emmanuel Macron, French President vowed to carry on their engagements with a continued sense of

independence, mutual understanding, long-term vision, and mutual benefit along with global transformation. They agreed to work together for a peaceful and multipolar world order and to prevent a new cold war or bloc confrontation. Xi expressed his interest in importing more high-quality products from France and hoped for the same from France. China's growing manufacturing and service sector hopes to attract more French investments and a market-friendly environment for increased cooperation between the two. Macron assure not to enact laws that would discriminate against Chinese businesses while maintaining market access for China. More Chinese businesses, especially high-tech ones, were welcomed to invest in and collaborate with France. They also sought deeper cooperation in areas of traditional strength, energy, aerospace, and emerging areas such as green energy, smart manufacturing, biomedicine, and artificial intelligence (AI). They also focussed on global issues such as climate change and marine biodiversity. Apart from this, improved people-to-people exchanges were emphasised by both to jointly organise the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism and taking measures to welcome more French students to China in exchange programs and short-stay visa exemptions extended to friendly countries including France. China also showed interest in sending a delegation for hosting the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. With an exchange of views on international and regional issues, they aimed to achieve a world of lasting peace and common security. The two countries issued four joint statements and signed around 20 bilateral cooperation documents focused on green development, aviation, agrifood, commerce and people-to-people exchanges. (“[President Xi Jinping Holds Talks with French President Emmanuel Macron.](#),” *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India*, 07 May 2024)

Sciences Po University closes down due to pro-palestine protests

On 03 May, France's prestigious Sciences Po university would be closed due to the occupation of students protesting "in

solidarity with Palestinian victims" in Gaza. This comes as a part of a series of protests in many top US universities over the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, France is home to the world's largest Jewish population after Israel and Valerie Pécresse, the right-wing head of the Paris regional authority, condemned what she called "a minority of radicalized people calling for anti-Semitic hatred" and temporarily suspended funding to Sciences Po earlier this week in response to the protests.

Experts recommend cutting screen time for children

On 01 May, an expert panel commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron suggested that screen time for children under three years old be nil and up to age six to be "strongly limited." The report elaborated on the negative effects of social media including risks for depression and anxiety. The report also criticised "predatory practices" by tech companies such as "infinite scrolling or automatic video launch." It comes after a bill that would have increased screen time training for childcare providers and increased regulations on screen use in elementary and preschool settings was introduced by members of Macron's Renaissance party in 2023.

Police break up pro-Palestinian protest at Sorbonne university

On 29 April, the French police evacuated a pro-Palestinian student protest at Sorbonne university. The students demonstrated by setting up dozens of tents in the courtyard and hallways causing exams to be cancelled. Following similar pro-Palestinian sit-ins in the US and several such demonstrations at Sciences Po Paris, the students of Sorbonne University called for support for Gaza holding a Palestinian flag. ("[Police break up pro-Palestinian protest at Sorbonne university](#)," *Le Monde*, 29 April 2024)

GEORGIA

Parliament approves the "foreign agents" bill despite President's veto

On 28 May, Georgian parliament approved the 'foreign agents' bill which caused protests across Georgia over restraining of media freedom. The move was opposed as it also pushed Georgia further away from being part of the EU. 84 in the committee were in favour while four were against. This was an override of the veto by the Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia who was observed to be against the Georgian Dream party. Whereas the opposition, MP's holding 150 seats walked out from the chamber. This bill was widely criticised by the EU, the UN and NATO. The US has already announced a travel ban because of this bill. Matthew Miller, US State Department spokesperson said: "It is unfortunate that Georgia leader are choosing to forego the steps needed to advances Georgia and the western direction that its people want." Zourabichvili criticised the governing party stating Georgian dream to be jeopardising the country's future and that the law had become a "symbol of number of laws and measure that is taking Georgia away from its European path." Meanwhile the opponents labelled the bill as "the Russian law" because of similarity in nature and measure that was implemented by the Russians. ([Georgia parliament pushes through 'foreign agents' law](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 May 2024)

Parliament committee rejects president's veto of the "Foreign Agents" bill

On 27 May, the Georgian parliament committee rejected Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia veto of the Foreign Agents bill. This move by the parliament provides a possibility to override the president's veto on the bill. It mandates all media houses and non-governmental organisations funded for more than 20 per cent of their total budget from abroad to be registered as "carrying out the interest of the foreign power." This bill triggered massive protest for weeks across the country, Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia vetoed the bill on 18 May after approval of the parliament. She along with Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister said: "As the specter of Russia looms over us,

partnership and rapprochement with Europe are the true path to preserving and strengthening our independence and peace.” Kobakhidze also strongly criticised Zourabichvili by saying: “It was the unity and reasonable steps of the people and their elected government that gave us the opportunity threats and multiple betrayals, including the betrayal of the President of Georgia.” (“Georgian parliament committee rejects presidential veto of the divisive ‘foreign agents’ legislation,” *Le Monde*, 27 May 2024)

US imposes sanctions over the ‘foreign agent bill’

On 24 May, the US said that it was imposing visa restrictions on Georgia after the parliament had passed a controversial bill that branded the media organisations and NGOs as foreign agents if they got more than 20 per cent of funding from abroad. Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State announced on Washington’s launch of “A comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Georgia.” According to the statements of Blinken, the visa would apply to individuals who were responsible for undermining the democracy in Georgia as well as their family members. As the US is reviewing its relationship with Georgia, it will take into account the latter’s action in deciding its own. Along with the US, the EU has also sharply criticised the law. (“US issues sanctions over Georgia’s ‘foreign agent’ bill,” *Deutsche Welle*, 24 May 2024)

Georgians continue demonstrating against the “foreign influence” bill

On 23 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported that writers, artists, filmmakers were involved among the peaceful protests that had been taking place in Georgia. The foreign agents law requires the NGOs, media organisations and other groups that receive more than 20 per cent of finance from abroad to register as “pursuing the interests of foreign power.” Nino Lomadze founder and editor of Indigo, a government critical magazine claimed that the press freedom and freedom of expression of the country are attacked by the government to control and repress it.

She also calls for the support from the international community. The critics fear that the law might affect Georgia’s candidacy to the EU. Recently, the government has been trying to influence the country’s cultural life. Film manager Gaga Chkheidze, the long-serving director of the Tbilisi International Film Festival, lost his position as head of the National Film Centre after criticising the government for failing to distance itself from Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. According to the Georgian author Giorgi Maisuradze, the protests were clearly about the ruling party consolidating its solo rule. Salome Jashi, in her 2021 documentary *Taming the Garden* has shown the struggle of the country for its future in a poetic way but the film is not allowed to be shown in Georgia. The demonstrations are expected to continue till the presidential elections in October. It indicates the population’s will to remain European. (Stefan Dege, “Georgia at a cultural crossroads,” *Deutsche Welle*, 23 May 2024)

President plans to veto the foreign agent bill

On 15 May, in an interview with *Deutsche Welle* Salome Zourabichvili, Georgian President said that she planned to veto the widely unpopular foreign agent bill which has passed the third and final stage in the parliament. Even though her veto can be overridden by another vote in parliament, she would still proceed with it as a symbol of “wider displeasure.” The 72-year-old President who had set up a liberal party that advocated closer ties with Europe thought that it was important for the country to conform to the European path which the bill denied. When the bill was justified by the government as a sole measure to promote transparency and accountability, Zourabichvili disagreed, arguing that the funding of such groups was already tracked and was a matter of public record. She has also described the bill to be “duplicating Russian law.” According to her, NGOs, media organizations, and institutions are part of active members of the civil society of the country essential to the transition towards democracy, and

branding them as foreign agents would be “discrediting in the eyes of public opinion.” However, she is also unclear about the government’s motivation behind this as it was introduced without any prior notice. (“Georgia’s President plans to veto the foreign agent bill,” *Deutsche Welle*, 15 May 2024)

Georgian Parliament passed the ‘foreign influence’ bill amid protests

On 14 May, the parliament of Georgia had the third and final reading of the ‘foreign agent’ bill that has triggered protests across the country. While the bill was passed by eighty-four votes against thirty, a few politicians from the ruling Georgian Dream Party and the opposition came to blows thus escalating the debate. Meanwhile, around 2000 people were protesting outside the parliament which has become a regular sight in Tbilisi recently. The bill seeks to frame NGOs, media organizations, and other non-profit organizations as ‘institutions of foreign agents’ if they are funded for more than 20 per cent from abroad. Even though the government had justified the bill as an instrument to reduce the risk of escalating tensions with Russia, critics had argued it as a threat to domestic freedoms as this ultimately would dim the chances of Georgia’s membership to EU. While the European Council has expressed disagreement while asking the country to follow democratic principles and the rule of law to be a member, the United States passed a statement saying that it will “reassess” its relations with Georgia if the bill passes into law. (“Georgian parliament passed the ‘foreign influence’ bill amid protests,” *Deutsche Welle*, 14 May 2024)

Protests continue against the Foreign Agents bill

On 11 May, thousands of people protested against the ‘Foreign Agent’ bill in Tbilisi. The controversial bill has been termed the “Russian law” by critics who argue that it will undermine the country’s civil society. The law would require any NGO or media organization that receives more than 20 per cent of its funding from other countries to register as an “organization pursuing the

interests of a foreign power.” Despite the numerous rallies held over the bill in April, the government has decided to revive it. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze argued that it will increase the transparency over the foreign funding of NGOs.

EU and US condemns the Foreign Agents Bill

On 03 May, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze in a conversation with European Council President Charles Michel expressed that there were no counterarguments against the proposed legislation. However, Michel said in support of the protests by the Georgians: “Georgia’s future belongs with the EU. Don’t miss this historic chance.” Thousands of people marched to protest against the bill outside the Georgian Dream party’s headquarters in Tbilisi. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili showed her dissent and assured that she would veto the bill. Georgia has received advice from the US and the EU to repeal the law or risk jeopardizing its chances of becoming a member of the EU and of a wider Euro-Atlantic future.

Foreign Influence Bill provokes widespread protests across Georgia

On 28 April, close to 20,000 people gathered at Tbilisi’s central Republic Square protesting against the controversial “Foreign influence” bill. The earlier soviet backed Georgian state, now a member of the EU since 2023, has adopted Foreign Influence Bill, which is aimed at destroying the media and civil society. The ruling Georgian Dream party reintroduced the bill this month facing strong criticisms for a perceived democratic backsliding. The bill is observed to be “not consistent” with Georgia’s application for EU membership, according to European Council President, Charles Michel. He claimed it: “...will bring Georgia closer to the EU, not further away.” While Salome Zurabishvili, President of Georgia, threatened to veto the bill and is at odds with the ruling party. However, Georg has a strong majority in the legislature, which enables it to enact legislation and override a veto from the president without the backing of any opposition

lawmakers. ("In Georgia, a 'March for Europe' to protest against controversial 'foreign influence' bill," *Le Monde*, 29 April 2024)

GERMANY

Highest number of people from Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Romania granted citizenship in 2023

On 27 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on close to 200,100 people granted citizenship in Germany as the highest record in one year. The new figures have been revealed ahead of the relaxed rules on German citizenship and enforcement of dual citizenship which is expected by June. According to the report there was an increase in the count by 31,000 compared to 2022 and 37,000 recorded compared to 2021. The new set of citizens had originated from 157 different countries majorly from Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Romania and Afghanistan accounting for 56 per cent. Among those granted citizenship, there was a significant younger population on an average and slightly more than half were male above the German national average. In a press release by the German government: "The high number of naturalizations of Syrians correlates with the high number of Syrian asylum seekers who migrated [to Germany] between 2014 and 2016." ("Germany records highest number of naturalizations since 2000," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 May 2024)

Deutsche Welle reports on increase in politically motivated crimes

On 21 May, German officials revealed that the number of politically motivated crimes in 2023, had risen to an upward continuing trend. The report had come at a time when the country saw several violent attacks against politically active people and increasing antisemitic sentiments across the country. According to the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) president Holger Münch, the politically motivated crimes had doubled in the past 10 years with 60,028 recorded offenses. While speaking about the figures, he added that these acts went against the open and free spirit judge of their society. The minister

also emphasized the higher amount of violence against politicians which should be stopped with greater penalties and fewer dropped cases. Although the records have had a two per cent decrease as of 2022, the attack on several politicians could be the result of a highly polarized condition. According to the Interior Ministry figures, the crimes motivated by right- or left-wing ideologies jumped roughly equally in 2023 — by 8.55 per cent and 8.79 per cent, respectively. ("Germany: Politically motivated crimes spike in 2023," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 May 2024)

Protestors demonstrate against expansion of Tesla factory again

On 10 May, the *BBC* reported on hundreds of climate protestors clashed with police in Germany against expansion of Tesla factory. As a result, many were injured including three police officers. Police arrested several and prevented activists from accessing the facility. The protests come as Tesla proposed to double the factory which could lead to environmental damage. Protestors blocked the road, motorway and railway near the factory. Tesla announced on closure of factory and criticised the police for letting the protestors free. Known as Gigafactory with 12,000 people and 500,000 cars per year and production had halted in March after power outage after an attack. (James Gregory, "Protesters attempt to storm Germany's Tesla factory," *BBC*, 10 May 2024)

Chancellor promises support to deploy troops in Lithuania

On 05 May, Olaf Scholz, German Chancellor visited Lithuania as Germany is expected to deploy 4800 soldiers to boost security amid war in Ukraine. Being a former USSR country, Scholz promised to adhere Article 5 of the Washington Treaty which states: "An armed attack on any member will be deemed an attack against all." This would be the first permanent stationing of German troops outside its borders after the world wars. Germany will send two main combat troop battalions from the German states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Bavaria. The third battalion, a multinational NATO battle

unit, will be a component of the alliance's Enhanced Forward Presence force. The Suwalki Gap, a section of Lithuanian land that separates the two is seen as a possible hot spot in a conflict between NATO and Russia. ("Scholz vows Germany's 'unwavering' support for Baltics," *Deutsche Welle*, 05 May 2024)

Foreign Minister warns on severe impact of Climate change in Fiji

On 06 May, during the visit to Fiji, Annalena Baerbock, German Foreign Minister warned on extreme weather phenomena such as tropical storms, droughts, and floods affecting the islanders adversely. According to the report, the 330 South Pacific islands in Fiji were in danger of flooding due to rise in sea level from climate change. As a result, six villages had been abandoned, and 42 more were marked as high risk. Baerbock said: "The climate crisis is literally washing the ground out from under people's feet here," and she promised Germany's role in assisting with damage repair efforts and helping promote renewable energy. In her earlier visit to Adelaide in the state of South Australia, she discussed geopolitical issues and cybersecurity. Apart from this, in her visit to New Zealand, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Alfred Wegener Institute in Germany, to promote collaboration in South Pole scientific research, during the visit. ("German FM warns of climate threat during Fiji visit", *Deutsche Welle*, 05 May 2024)

IAB publishes study on improved Refugee employment rate

On 01 May, a recent study by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) assessed the levels of employment among refugees in Germany which have improved since Angela Merkel's "open door" policy. In the largest refugee-hosting country in the EU, Germany, the refugee employment rate in 2022 was 64 per cent increasing with the length of stay, compared with 77 per cent for the wider German population and the gross hourly wage was above the low-wage threshold. However, they face certain barriers such as delay in asylum application process and language requirement.

Although it funds German learning programmes until a basic level of B1, it is not sufficient for better paid jobs. Study also shows that women fall behind in employment since they are often the primary family caregivers and miss opportunities to learn the language and skills to work. Yet, benefits of the Open Door policy include, higher young labour force and improves the sense of dignity and independence, thereby overall well-being of the refugees.

GREECE

Court dismisses the trial of the Egyptian men accused of the Mediterranean shipwreck

On 21 May, the trial of nine Egyptian men alleged to have caused the shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea in June 2023 was dismissed by the court in Greece due to lack of jurisdiction. On 14 June 2023, the fishing trawler "Adriana" sank with about 750 people out of which 104 migrants mostly from Pakistan, Syria, and Egypt were rescued. It also resulted in the death of 82 people. The nine men aged between 21 to 37 years old faced trial on charges of negligent homicide, participation in a criminal organization, and facilitating illegal entry into the country. The families of the accused embraced and broke down into tears following the court's decision as the nine had spent 11 months in pre-trial detention following their arrests. Their lawyers believed that the trial had scapegoated them. One of the accused described that he did not even know the reason for his imprisonment and that he sold everything for this trip. The lawyers from the Greek human rights group argued that they had been arrested over 24 hours of survival from the sinking based on just nine testimonies, some of them collected without proper translation, and that the sinking occurred outside Greek territorial waters. The Human Rights Watch also called for a parallel investigation into the Greek authority. Many migrant support groups and media outlets have pointed out the accountability of the Coast Guard in this terrible accident as he was slow to intervene. The sinking calls for pressure on

the European governments to protect the lives of migrants and asylum seekers entering the countries. ("Greece: Trial on Mediterranean migrant shipwreck dismissed," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 May 2024)

HUNGARY

Xi visit to Hungary marks 75 years of diplomatic relations

On 09 May, Xi Jinping, Chinese President issued a letter to Victor Orban, Hungary's Prime Minister on his visit to Budapest. According to the report, Xi's letter presented the friendship as "Mellow and rich as Tokaji wine." In the letter, Xi marked the 75 years of China-Hungary relations and highlighted how both have maintained a win-win cooperation looking into "high-quality" Belt and Road (BRI) cooperation. Both countries share partnerships in the fields of investment, infrastructure, finance, new energy, and telecommunication technology. The letter also indicates the success of Hungarian-Chinese bilingual school in boosting exchanges and mutual visits of Hungarians. Xi presented China's agenda to build diplomatic relations further through high-level interactions, regular exchanges and policy communication. He stressed on working with Hungary on BRI, Hungary's Eastern Opening strategy and to speed the construction of Budapest-Belgrade railway route. Xi also mentioned on improving communication to address the global challenges and to strive for larger regional cooperation towards China-Europe relations. In a report in *Politico*, according to Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, China-Hungary cooperation it looked as a huge opportunity. Both leaders are expected to sign 16 new agreements including electronic vehicle cars, and nuclear energy. ("Full text of Xi's signed article in Hungarian media," *Beijing Review*, 08 May 2024; Jordyn Dahl, "Hungary cashes in on its friendship with China," *Politico*, 09 May 2024)

ICELAND

Volcano Grindavik erupts for the fifth time after December 2023

On 29 May, Iceland's Grindavik volcano erupted for the fifth time since December.

Icelandic authorities have declared a state of emergency and have prompts for evacuation. Iceland's Met Office said that the volcano was shooting about 550 metres high from the fissure which is around one kilometre long. This eruption was just after three weeks from the last eruption.

Authorities evacuated nearly 700 to 800 visitors near the Blue Lagoon area. Keflavik airport which is the main international airport for Iceland. It is unclear when this active volcano will go to its dorm stage. This might affect the Reykjanes Peninsula One of the few heavily populated parts of Iceland. ("Iceland: Grindavik volcano eruption prompts new evacuations," *Deutsche Welle*, 29 May 2024)

IRELAND

Faces refugee crisis in the city of Dublin

On 19 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the country of Ireland was facing a refugee crisis which was aggravated by the housing crisis due to the repeated setting up and clearing of tents in Dublin. The tents might be set up by people excluded from a housing community or migrants which is another heated topic in Ireland. Since immigrants enter Ireland triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the government has admitted its inability to provide accommodation for all the asylum seekers. Since the beginning of the war, 100,000 Ukrainian refugees have registered. According to the government report 1,780 male applicants were yet to be housed as of 14 May. Tent encampments were repeatedly appearing in front of the International Protection Office in Dublin, responsible for processing asylum applications and they had been repeatedly cleared. (David Ehl, Ireland, "Tensions over refugee crisis and Dublin tent cities," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 May 2024)

ITALY

Vows to support Palestine with millions allocated for aid

On 25 May 2024, Mohammed Mustafa, Palestinian Prime Minister who is the leader of Palestinian authority in the West Bank, met his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni

in Rome. She has promised aid to Palestine with new funding of around 35 million EUR from which 5 million EUR will go to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the other 30 million will be allocated to the 'Food for Gaza' initiative. However, according to the UN report, no evidence was provided to support this claim. After the meeting, Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said that Italy believes in the two-state solution as unilateral initiatives were not helpful to the solution of conflict as the main aim was to maintain peace. Italy has already provided two separate aid packages of 20 million EUR to Palestine. According to a recent study from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, around 60 per cent of the Palestinians wanted the authority to be dissolved as they believed that the government had failed to address even the basic issues. (["Italy pledges millions to support Palestinians at Rome meeting," Euronews, 25 May 2024](#))

Italian Prime Minister triggers criticism for welcoming a convicted murderer

On 20 May, Giorgia Meloni, Italian Prime Minister has sparked questions after personally greeting a convicted murderer at Practica di Mare military airport. She had successfully negotiated his transfer from the US which the previous governments failed to achieve. Chico Forti, the convicted murderer was sentenced to life imprisonment in Florida in 2000 for the murder of hotelier Del Pike. Although the diplomatic coup was widely appreciated nationwide, Meloni's gesture towards him was not. Walter Verini, a Senator for the center-left Democratic Party (PD) said: "It is a good thing that this government finished the job, but what Prime Minister Meloni did is not acceptable." The left-wing leaders and newspapers expressed similar concerns as they were puzzled to understand the reason for receiving him with great pomp and honor. (Ben Munster, ["Italy's Meloni prompts bafflement by greeting convicted murderer with open arms," Politico, 20 May 2024](#))

Police detain over 100 suspected members of the 'Ndrangheta mafia

On 14 May, Italian police detained one hundred and nine alleged members of the 'Ndrangheta tribe in the Calabrian city of Cosenza. The arrested members are suspected of drug trafficking, mafia association, and extortion of shopkeepers and business people in that area. According to the estimates of the Italian police, the 'Ndrangheta may control up to 80 percent of Europe's cocaine market. The drugs that are shipped from Latin America via containers are taken for delivery by these mafia groups. The raid was carried out by anti-mafia prosecutors, with Carabinieri special police, federal and local officers along with the economic crimes unit. Special operations against them in the past have resulted in the arrest of 30 members along with lengthy jail sentences for high-ranking bosses. (["Italian Police detain over 100 suspected members of the 'Ndrangheta mafia," Deutsche Welle, 14 May 2024](#))

G7 group gather at Turin in effort to mitigate climate change

On 28 April, hundreds of protestors demonstrated in Turin to pressurize the G7 leaders. The G7 meeting hosted in Turin by Italy which holds the rotating presidency for 2024 stresses the need to diversify sources of critical materials key to renewable energy systems, as well as minerals reuse, in a bid to stop over reliance on China, which dominates in green technologies. This is in the light of the recent report by a global climate institute shows the G7 is falling far short of its targets. G7 countries contribute 21 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions in 2021. "Biodiversity, ecosystems, warming seas" are top priorities for Italy, a hotspot for climate change that is susceptible to wildfires, droughts, and glacier retreat, said Gilberto Pichetto Fratin, Italian Environment and Energy Security Minister. The Turin summit aims to be a strategic link between COP 27 in Dubai and COP 29 that will happen in Azerbaijan. Giorgia Meloni, Italy's Prime Minister has vowed repeatedly to transform Italy into a gas hub for Europe. (["G7 ministers gather in Italy for 'strategic'](#)

talks on climate change,” France 24, 29 April 2024)

European Council approves Gigabit Infrastructure Act

On 29 April, by replacing the 2014 broadband cost reduction directive (BCRD), the Council adopted the gigabit infrastructure act to ensure faster deployment of digital network infrastructure across Europe. The new legislation will include deployment of fibre and 5G with an objective to provide more transparency and ensure efficient planning. This will serve as a mandatory conciliation mechanism between public sector bodies and telecom operators cuts down on the long procedures. The move comes after Thierry Breton, commissioner for internal market submitted the proposal in February 2023 detailing digital targets and investment gap. (“Gigabit infrastructure act: Council gives final green light to faster deployment of high-speed networks in the EU,” European Council, 29 April 2024)

LITHUANIA

President Gitanas Nauseda gets re-elected

On 26 May, Gitanas Nauseda emerged victorious with 76 per cent of votes after the count of 80 per cent ballots in the presidential election. Nauseda in a statement to the reporters said: “Voters have handed me a great mandate of trust and I am well aware that I will have to cherish this.” He also believed that he would be able to achieve the goals of welfare of all the people of Lithuania as he had five years of experience. His opponent, Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte congratulated him while accepting his defeat to reporters. Although both the candidates agree on that they should boost defense spending to counter possible attacks from Russia, they differ on Lithuania’s relations with China. When the country allowed Taiwan to open a de facto embassy under the island’s name, China reacted harshly by blocking its exports as it was a departure from the common practice of using the name of the capital Taipei to avoid angering Beijing. While Nauseda saw the need to change the name of the

embassy, Simonyte disagreed and pushed against it. In terms of economic and social rights, the candidates had differing views as Simonyte drew support from liberal voters in bigger cities and traditional conservative voters while Nauseda maintained a moderate stance on these issues with a conservative view on gay rights. (“Lithuanian President Nauseda re-elected in vote held amid security fears over Russia,” FRANCE24, 26 May 2024)

Incumbent President to face presidential runoff against Prime Minister

On 12 May, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda appeared to secure his second term in office after the first round of voting in the Presidential elections. According to the data shown by the electoral commission, he won 44 per cent, which is short of the 50 per cent he needed to secure the majority. Therefore, a runoff will be held against Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte who is in second place. Both candidates are in favor of increasing the defense spending to at least 3 per cent of gross domestic product with the campaigns focused on security concerns. The citizens are concerned about a possible threat from Russia as the Baltic states are now members of NATO and the EU.

MALTA

Deputy Prime Minister resigns over hospital scandal

On 10 May, Chris Fearne, Malta’s Deputy Prime Minister announced his resignation and ended his candidacy for European Commissioner. The move comes after a judicial document ruled Fearne to face criminal charges over a hospital scandal. Fearne said: “My solitary and humble hope is that the judicial process to clear my name is expeditious. If, upon its conclusion, the country calls on me to serve again, it shall find me ready.” In response, Robert Abela, Malta’s Prime Minister called for reconsideration of the decision expressing confidence in Fearne. He is the leading candidate for the EU elections and known for his experience in domestic and international health policy. On his

involvement in the scandal, several MEPs in European Parliament and health committee called for resignation and denied to support his nomination as Commissioner. ("Malta's Fearne resigns, ends Commission bid, protests innocence," Politico, 10 May 2024)

NORTH MACEDONIA

Political scenario likely to witness an overall turn

On 07 May, citizens of North Macedonia cast their votes for a new government that will change the trajectory of the country's political future by bringing back the unreformed conservative VMRO-DPMNE, whose 2006-2016 time in power was marked by undemocratic trends. The political gridlock between the two largest parties, the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE and the Social Democratic Union (SDSM) has impeded the implementation of critical agreements and reforms. Meanwhile, the public's confidence in the current government, led by the Social Democrats, has declined in its two consecutive terms as leader of parliament, due to scandals, and missed opportunities. After settling the dispute with Greece regarding the name change in 2018, the state hoped to complete the EU accession process just like the NATO membership it acquired the same year. However, other hurdles came their way as the French president in 2019, blocked the negotiations for EU enlargement, and in 2020, Bulgaria demanded rights for its citizens in North Macedonia. As the opposition strongly opposes the constitutional changes, there was no majority to pass the bill recognising the Bulgarian minority. The opposition party also chose the slogan for its presidential campaign: "Make Macedonia proud again," reflecting its nationalist stand on the name change. Apart from the two major parties, the third-biggest political party, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) comprising the largest minority and the dominant force in the Albanian political bloc, has acted as a major power broker and been a key player in almost every government since 2002, but would likely be excluded from joining a ruling coalition this time. However, VLEN, a coalition of several

smaller Albanian political parties that serve as the legitimate opposition of the DUI, and the ZNAM party have already started to discuss the possibility of forming a ruling coalition. However, a major point of contention was the parties' divergent positions on adopting the constitutional amendments. (Bojan Stojkovski, "North Macedonia's Political Future Is on the Line," Foreign Policy, 08 May 2024 ; Aleksej Demjanski, "What will North Macedonia's upcoming elections mean for its EU accession prospects?" Atlantic Council, 03 May, 2024)

Parliamentary Elections: The right-wing gains power

On 08 May, North Macedonia held its parliamentary elections and the initial results showed a clear victory for the right-wing opposition leader Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, who was backed by the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party. With a landslide victory with over 64.5 percent votes and 59 seats in the 120-seat parliament, the VMRO-DPMNE party headed by a 22-party coalition called "Your Macedonia," won by capitalizing on the voters' frustration at the incumbent government due to extreme corruption and lag in joining the EU. For the past two years, Bulgaria has vetoed North Macedonia's membership to the EU. However, the nationalist party had been vocal about refusing the Bulgarian demand to amend the constitution recognising the Bulgarian minority and raising the dispute with Greece over the country's name. This puts the nation at risk for its longtime ambition of joining the EU, although efforts have been made since 2005 when North Macedonia became a candidate for accession to the EU. ("North Macedonia: Right-wing opposition set for big victory", *Deutsche Welle*, 08 May 2024)

Pre-election polls result in favour of the opposition

On 08 May, presidential elections is expected to shape its course in Europe. Pre-election polls indicated victory of the opposition nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party, led by candidate Gordana Siljanovska-

Davkova, secured twice as many votes as the incumbent President of the Social Democrats, since promises such as accession to the EU and fight against corruption were still underway. The challenges in achieving this goal included the demands of Bulgaria and Greece. The inclusion of the small Bulgarian minority of 3,000 people in the constitution and the use of the prefix “North” when addressing the state, demanded by Greece, were required for the negotiations for accession to the EU. However, the opposition does not comply with both these demands and stands in conflict with the ethnic Albanian parties by refusing to enter a coalition with the minority, thereby risking stability in the state. Yet, they bank on the North Macedonian insecurities to mobilize against the government. On the other hand, the voters have grown tired of the Social Democrats' promise of the European future and the neglect of other important issues. The high inflation rates and serious corruption problems were never addressed by the Democrats. (Boris Georgievski, [“North Macedonia: Frustrated voters set to punish government,” Deutsche Welle, 07 May 2024](#))

Elections in North Macedonia risks gaining EU membership

On 08 May, the elections in North Macedonia will be challenged by the risks reviving tensions with Bulgaria and Greece, with higher prospects for the opposition, the VMRO-DPMNE party, in forming the Government. However, adding to the frustration with the slowness of the accession process, the VMRO will take a confrontational approach with both Sofia and Athens — both of whom would need to agree to North Macedonia's membership into the EU. In 2018, the Prespa agreement was signed with Greece, ending the long dispute over its name, in exchange for EU negotiations and NATO membership. VMRO's rejection of Sofia's demand for constitutional changes recognizing a Bulgarian minority and increasing reference of the country as 'Macedonia' reignites tensions with Greece and Bulgaria. Albanian community, which makes up more than a

quarter of the country's population, might have lesser representation in the Macedonian political processes with a change in government. ([“North Macedonia's EU aspirations face bumpy ride after elections,” Politico, 06 May 2024](#))

POLAND

Polish opposition party faces allegations of corruption

On 27 May, *Politico* reported that the right-wing opposition party which formerly controlled Poland's justice ministry from 2015 to 2023 was facing severe allegations of corruption for mismanaging a fund meant to compensate crime victims. The former justice minister from the former Law and Justice (PiS) party, Zbigniew Ziobro, was accused of improperly carrying out the Justice Fund, personally overseen by him according to the fund's former director Tomasz Mraz. He also added that he recorded over 50 hours of conversation with officials but not with Ziobro. According to the prosecution, some 285 million złoty (66 million EUR) from the Justice Fund may have been misused under Ziobro for political aims. Parliament was conducting an inquiry over the allegation that the fund was used to buy Pegasus spyware.

Zbigniew Ziobro was one of the pioneers of bringing judges under tighter political control which resulted in the bust-up between Warsaw and Brussels. Apart from being the country's chief prosecutor at that time, he was also the leader of a smaller Catholic-nationalist party called Sovereign Poland which was PiS's junior coalition partner. Although he didn't have easy access to the media and political cash, the ministry under him did run a special fund to distribute millions to help crime victims for a year.

Although Ziobro's party Sovereign Party had issued a press release calling Mraz's statements “a pile of nonsense and manipulation that was used to brutally attack the politicians of Sovereign Poland,” the political scandal could result in a major political gain for the Civic Coalition party as Donald Tusk rallies support for his party in

the upcoming elections. He referred to the scandal as 'an organised criminal activity'. Recently, he had started targeting the PiS party portraying it as a corrupt force that made the country grow apart from the EU. Although Ziobro hasn't met the media since his cancer treatment in early 2024, both his people and the PiS party are outrightly rejecting the allegations. (Wojciech Kość, "Corruption allegations swirl over Polish opposition party," *Politico*, 27 May 2024)

Farmers once again stage protest against EU climate policies

On 10 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on thousands of farmers protesting in yellow vests while others protested in Warsaw against the EU climate regulations risking their cost of living. A farmer's union, Solidarity held a slogan saying "Down with the Green Deal" opposing the EU policies relating to climate-farming policies. Another banner said: "Let Brussels eat worms, we prefer pork chops and potatoes." While other protestors criticised the import of Ukrainian farm products which they claim to have reduced their income and also condemned the government policies. ("Poland: Farmers protest against EU climate policies," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 May 2024)

Polish security service discovers spy devices in meeting room

On 07 May, the Polish security services reported on finding of wiretapping devices in a meeting room where the meeting of the Council of Ministers was supposed to be held. Polish spokesperson Jacek Dobrzynski reported that the equipment could register both audio and video but was unclear about who planted them and when it was fixed. Poland, being a part of NATO had a high risk of being targeted by Russian espionage. Additionally, Polish authorities reported in March that they had used information from the Czech Republic to conduct searches concerning a possible Russian spy network in Poland. ("Poland finds spy devices in the government meeting room," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2024)

RUSSIA

Rosatom plans to join hands with India on the Northern Sea Routes projects

On 27 May, Rosatom reported on a possibility for establishing a Northern Sea Route Project with India. Russia's state nuclear corporation Rosatom said that it was discussing a potential joint project on the Northern Sea Route with India, with a focus on the use of the corridor in the interest of the Indian economy. Alexey Likhachev, head of Rosatom said: "we are starting to cooperate not only in the nuclear field. There is also discussion about a joint project on the Northern Sea Route and the use of this global transport corridor in the interest of the Indian economy." He also said that Rosatom and its Indian counterparts are also negotiating a potential partnership in scientific and technological fields such as quantum computing, communication and quantum sensors. Likhachev added: "Intensive negotiations, I think, will bring us to a completely new quality of interaction with India not only in traditional nuclear competencies but also in several projects on technological sovereignty." ("Potential Northern Sea Route Projects With India Under Discussion, Rosatom Says," *SPUTNIK International*, 27 May 2024)

Foreign Ministry officially ends the 1993 nuclear treaty with Japan

On 24 May, the Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed in a statement that it officially ended a disarmament agreement with Japan on 21 May. The scrapping of the treaty commenced six months ago which the Russian officials point to what they call as Japan's "unfriendly" policies. The agreement signed in 1993 required Japan to help Russia dismantle a large portion of the Soviet atomic arsenal and help address resulting environmental problems. According to Russian government, it was impossible to continue relations with an unfriendly state as it affected its national security "in the context of the openly anti-Russian policy of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government." With the six-month disengagement process, Mikhail Mishustin,

Russia's Prime Minister announced the plans to withdraw from the treaty in November 2023. Japan has condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and has joined the US and the EU in sanctioning Russia. Japan also questioned the legitimacy of the four former Ukrainian regions that joined Russia in 2022 and demanded the return of four of the Kuril Islands. Both countries have yet to conclude the peace treaty to end the Second World War with the peace talks being called off in March 2022 after Japan sanctioned Russia. ("Russia terminates nuclear deal with Japan," RT, 24 May 2024)

President of Russia and China issue joint statement

On 16 May, Kremlin.ru reported on the official meeting held between the Vladimir Putin, Russian President and Xi Jinping, Chinese President. Both discussed on bilateral cooperation, international and regional issues. Following the meeting, a joint statement was released on the comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction marking 75 years of diplomatic relations. Following the meeting, Xi said: "China and Russia have shown others an example of building a new type of interstate relations and relations between major neighbors. All this was made possible because both parties were committed to the following five principles." Such as "mutual respect, win-win cooperation, adhere to centuries-old friendship, spirit of strategic engagement and Promote political settlement of hot spot issues for the sake of truth and justice." After Xi, Putin made a statement: "The negotiations just held showed the great importance that both Moscow and Beijing attach to the development and strengthening of the Russian-Chinese comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction."

The joint statement began with both being the first to recognise the country's after the fall of the Soviet Union and signing of Treaty of Good Neighbourliness in July 2001. This served as the base to evolve into comprehensive partnership relations and strategic interaction with advanced interstate and military-political alliances.

Under this, the cooperation focus would remain on "law enforcement and security, are interested in consolidating efforts to counter terrorism, separatism, extremism and transnational organized crime." In the statement, China acknowledged Russia's presidential elections and condemned all the perpetrators to "act committed on 22 March 2024" indicating the attacks on civilians. It said: "...supports the decisive actions of the Russian side aimed at combating terrorist and extremist forces, maintaining peace and stability in the country."

The leaders also vowed to fasten the approval of Russian-Chinese Investment Cooperation Plan by 2024 to help practical implementation and boost bilateral cooperation. Sectors such as energy, financial intelligence, transport, environment protection.

In education and culture, China appreciated Russia's hosting of first International Multi-Sports Tournament "Games of the Future" in 2024, BRICS Sports Games, youth cooperation and increased exchanges of specialists, professional dialogue and global events.

They also assured to continue to further their interactions through Eurasian, Economic Union (EAEU), Greater Eurasian Partnership, One Belt, One Road initiative, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and a trilateral cooperation with Mongolia through an economic corridor for medium term. Both leaders reaffirmed to work towards sustainable multipolar world order, mutual commitment for bilateral cooperation in the UN and committed to cooperate on public health and develop transparent, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system. They also discussed on the nuclear and their interest in preserving Arctic as a place for peace with low-military and political tension along with scope to create dialogue and mutual cooperation.

Putin assures to prevent global conflict in Victory Day speech

On 09 May, *RT* reported on Russia's Victory Day parade. Russia celebrated its 79th anniversary of win over Nazi Germany in World War II. This involved traditional military parade in Red Square where thousands of troops and dozens of armoured vehicles and warplanes took part in the parade. Russia showcased 9,000 troops including veterans from war in Ukraine, 70 armoured vehicles and 85 T-34 and S-400 air defence systems. Marking the day, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President provided an address assuring to prevent "global conflict," at the same time to ensure no threat existed for Russia. Highlighting the celebrations, he appreciated all soldiers in the front lines and said: "All of Russia is with you." He also criticised the west for arming Ukraine and continued efforts to destroy Russia. He added: "I am sure they are now convinced that this was far from the reality, and rather the opposite is true." ("Russia will try to prevent global conflict – Putin," *RT*, 09 May 2024; "Victory Parade on Red Square," *Kremlin.ru*, 09 May 2024)

Putin chooses Mikhail Mishustin as prime minister

On 10 May, Vladimir Putin, Russia's President proposed the reappointment of Mikhail Mishustin as Prime Minister. The vote in the Russian Parliament State of Duma is due to take place where the deputies are expected to vote. This comes after the mandatory resignation of the government before the latest presidential term. Till now there have been no indications on Putin's plans for a government reshuffle and it is observed to maintain the stability as Russia continues the war in Ukraine. Mikhail Mishustin became prime minister in 2020 and headed the federal tax service. He is seen as a key player in maintaining Russian economy amidst western sanctions and is intended to carry out tasks relating to "...economic and regional development, and increasing the defense capability of our country." ("Russia: Putin picks Mishustin to stay on as prime minister," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 May 2024)

Putin sworn in as President for another six years

On 07 May, Russian President Vladimir Putin was sworn in for another term in office in a ceremony in Moscow. During his oath, Putin said: "We are a united and great nation, and together we will overcome all obstacles, realize everything we have planned, and together, we will win." Putin becomes the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin. After he first held office in 2000, served as Prime minister under President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008. The switch of prim ministership from Medvedev to Putin was due to the previous constitution while did not allow third consecutive term. After the constitutional reform, Putin will be able to rule till 2030 and for an additional term. ("Russia's Putin sworn in for new six-year term," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2024)

Russian hackers are accused of a targeted cyber-attack in Germany and Czech republic

On 03 May, Germany accused Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU, for the 2023 cyberattack that targeted senior officials of the Social Democrats (SPD). German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock told a news conference that a government investigation found that it was carried out by a state-sponsored group called APT28, which has been accused of dozens of cyberattacks around the world including the Czech Republic lately. The EU, NATO and the US showed solidarity to Germany and the Czech Republic following the attacks warning Russia against severe consequences. While Germany said they had summoned Russian envoys, The Russian Embassy in Germany denied Moscow had a role in the 2023 attack.

SCOTLAND

John Swinney elected as First Minister

On 07 May, the Scottish parliament appointed John Swinney as the new First Minister after he was named as the leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP). The previous New Minister, Humza Yousaf, who

took office in 2023, resigned after facing backlash for ending a coalition deal with the Green Party. Following this, on 06 May, the SNP elected Swinney, who was a veteran who led the SNP from 2000 to 2004, as its new leader. In the parliament election, 64 lawmakers voted in favour of Swinney. Douglas Ross, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, came in closest to him with 31 votes. Nicola Sturgeon, the predecessor to Yousaf, warned the leader about a rocky path ahead, since the domestic politics was difficult, as the Labour Party is on the rise and internal party divisions could see the SNP lose UK parliamentary seats in the upcoming election. ("Scotland's parliament elects John Swinney first minister," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2024)

SERBIA

Xi publishes article highlighting the state of Chinese-Serbia relations; Remembers NATO bombing of Yugoslavia 1999

On 07 May, *Xinhua* reported on Xi Jinping, Chinese President article on "May the Light of Our Ironclad Friendship Shine on the Path of China-Serbia Cooperation." published in Serbian media, *Politika*. In the article, Xi highlighted China and Serbia have honed their relations through close cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels, through strategic partnership, and being the second largest trading partner. In trade, Serbia's honey, red wine, beef, lamb, and agricultural produce are well received amongst the Chinese. Xi also highlighted the strong collaborations during COVID, people to people exchanges and scope of China-Serbia comprehensive strategic partnership showcasing a win-win cooperation. Xi listed China's agenda with Serbia. The focus areas are expected to be on developing "new quality productive forces," delivering midterm action plan for BRI and expansion of cooperation in technology, manufacturing, green energy, digital economy, and artificial intelligence.

In the article he also remembered the NATO bombing of Chinese embassy 25 years before in Yugoslavia which resulted in

killing of three Chinese journalists. He said: "This we should never forget," and added how the Chinese have chosen to accept peace and never allowed repeat of such event. Citing this, he called the Chinese-Serbia friendship as "forged with the blood of our compatriots" and promised to work together for "common progress." (Huaxia, "Full text of Xi's signed article in Serbian media," *Xinhua*, 07 May 2024)

SPAIN

Parliament approves the Catalan amnesty bill

On 30 May, Spain approved the controversial amnesty bill for Catalan separatists involved in the unsuccessful 2017 secession bid. The Spanish parliamentarians voted in a ratio of 177-172 with a small margin to finally approve amnesty for many separatists who took part in the illegal and unsuccessful bid for the independence of Catalonia from Spain. This means that Carles Puigdemont, former Catalan regional President, can return to Spain without being subject to punishment. The amnesty law was approved by Spain's left-wing coalition government under Pedro Sanchez, Prime Minister. He agreed to Amnesty when he received the support from the separatist lawmakers in Madrid to form a new national Government in November 2023. This act was strongly contested by the conservative Popular party and far-right Vox, who voted against the bill on 30 May. According to critics, the law could face legal issues from the higher courts. Experts believe that this law is unconstitutional because it would favour some of the Spanish citizens over there. However it has been vouched by the Council of Europe and Sanchez. However, the Catalan separatist parties continue their campaign for the independence referendum. Miriam Nogueras of the Junts party said: Today truly is a historic day. Today there is no forgiveness. Today a battle has been won in the conflict that existed for centuries between two nations." ("Spain gives final approval to Catalan amnesty bill," *Deutsche Welle*, 30 May 2024)

Arrival of 30,000 migrants trigger worst migrant crisis in Canary Islands

On 24 May, *France 24* reported on Canary Islands' worst migrant crisis since 2006. The archipelago, off the coast of Morocco saw the arrival of 30,000 migrants in one year. Even the smallest island of El Hierro saw an influx of 4000 people in January. Although several locals and NGOs have helped to ease the situation, the island is still flooded with people. The migrants after their journey suffered from dehydration and infection. According to the officials, they had to make extra arrangements such as toilets and tents to accommodate the migrants as the situation was very unorganised. The island has a reception centre built on a hill where 500 adult migrants could be accommodated. The underage migrants were looked after in an old school. There are also classes organised for them. The island can accommodate only 50 to 70 people and there are not enough schools or hospitals. Many of the migrants had infected hands and legs which had to be amputated when they were admitted in the hospitals of the Island. The region with only 10,000 residents would have to face overpopulation if the inflow of migrants continues. (Sarah Morris, Clara Le Nagard, Armelle Exposito, "[Spain's Canary Islands overwhelmed by migrant arrivals.](#)" *France24*, 24 May 2024)

A building collapses on Spain's island of Mallorca

On 23 May, local media of Spain's Mediterranean island Mallorca reported that a restaurant in the Playa de Palma collapsed killing at least four people and injuring twenty-one. Mallorca, which is a popular tourist destination, saw the accident ahead of the peak season. According to the Spanish media, the incident took place around 8:30 p.m. local time in the Playa de Palma, south of the island's capital, Palma de Mallorca. Prime Minister Pedro Snachez said that he had been closely monitoring the consequences of the terrible accident and that the government was ready to help "with all the means and troops that are necessary." (A

[building collapses on Spain's island of Mallorca](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 23 May 2024)

Vox organises campaign ahead of the European elections

On 19 May, the Spanish far-right party Vox held a massive rally in Madrid garnering the support of international allies including Argentinian President Javier Milei, France's presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, the Prime Ministers of Italy, Hungary, and right-wing leaders from France and Portugal. According to Vox, there were nearly 11,000 supporters cheering speakers from the right-wing parties while jeering at every mention of Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez. French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen said that she had come to Spain to back Vox in its European elections. Milei, the Argentinian President got a standing ovation when he severely criticised the lefties and defended free market capitalism. The conference was guarded by heavy security due to the presence of foreign dignitaries. Milei's comments about Sanchez's wife had prompted Spain to recall its ambassador to Argentina. But enthusiasm was high for former US President Donald Trump, represented in Madrid by the vice president of the conservative Heritage Foundation and former White House staffers Matt and Mercedes Schlapp. The event ended with Spain's national anthem. ("[Spain's far-right Vox holds mass rally with Argentina's Milei, France's Le Pen.](#)" *France24*, 19 May 2024)

Socialists emerge victorious in Catalan regional elections

On 12 May, Catalonia, an autonomous community of Spain held regional elections to the Catalan Parliament where the Socialists under Salvador Illa emerged victorious with a majority of 42 seats. However, they need to win the support of other parties to form the government. According to Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, it would mark the beginning of "a new era in Catalonia." This marks an important stage as the separatist parties appear to have lost their prominence in Catalonia due to the poor turnout among separatist forces. Junts

candidate Carles Puigdemont who fled to Belgium following the independence referendum in 2017 hopes to come back to Spain. Both the Junts and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) have ruled out forming a coalition with the Socialists. If the majority party fails to form a coalition by August, another election will be held in October.

Spain Prime Minister criticises European Commission President for neglecting green agenda

On 10 May, Spain's deputy Prime Minister Teresa Ribera reported in an interview with *Politico* that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's willingness to work with the far right and cooling down of the green agenda has revealed: "...an attitude of resignation that is enormously pernicious" and "enormously harmful to European interests". She criticised both von der Leyen and her center-right European People's Party. This is the sharpest attack against her since she is campaigning for a second term in July. Ribera with her green credentials is seen as a qualified successor to be the EU's next Green Deal Chief. According to her 'Europe could implode' in the hands of right-wing parties with their hardline anti-green policies.

Municipalities levee to tourism sector over water usage triggers regional elections

On 07 May, *Politico* reported on frustration amongst the tourists in Barcelona due to worsening drought. The country was drought stricken for past three years and experiences inflow of tourists during spring leading to more consumption of water risking the water supply. This has resulted in raging the locals. In response, Catalan municipalities have placed water consumption limits since the drought emergency was declared in February but the tensions have spread into the regional elections. A snap vote has been called over the fight of "water-guzzling construction project." On the domestic situation, Vicenç Acuña, director of the Catalan Institute for Water Research said: "Flats in Barcelona

have efficient showers and so on. But there are many millions of people visiting every year, and in terms of waste and water use, they behave like people here did 30 years ago." Every year, 30 million people visit Barcelona which is one of the key factors for the economic revenue and with water crisis, the more inflow of tourist resulting in "local resentment," as they see it as an overburden to public services. As per the report, April data shows Catalonia's reservoir level to be only 22 per cent which has increased only 2.5 per cent since the latest rainfall. To address this, the municipalities restricted to 200 litres of water per day including drinking and washing which is expected to reduce to 160 litres if drought furthers. Along with hospital sector, industry and agriculture is also under significant cut by 80 per cent, 50 per cent for livestock and 25 per cent for industry. The criticism here is despite such stringent cuts, the tourism sector was left unrestricted till mid-April. This has triggered the elections in May due to clashed over "mass tourism and environment impact." (Zia Weise, "[Barcelona is parched — and angry at quenched tourists](#)," *Politico*, 09 May 2024)

AI model from Barcelona earns GBP 10,000 a month as a fitness enthusiast

The Clueless, an agency from Barcelona, created an AI model, Aitana. The agency believes this could help bring down market prices and give a boost to small companies that cannot afford big advertising campaigns and blames the sexualised world for its creation. Aitana, a vibrant 25-year-old with pink hair from Barcelona, is a virtual model earning up to GBP 10,000 every month. Created as a fitness enthusiast, she is described on her website as an outgoing, caring, and possessing a complex character. To the critics concerned about the unrealistic perfection of the AI model, the agency responded that they are simply following the aesthetic already created by the real influencers and brands themselves. ("[Aitana, Spain's first AI model, who is earning up to €10,000 a month](#)," *euronews*, 04 May 2024)

SLOVAKIA

Increased disinformation detected high since Crimean annexation

On 27 May, *Euronews* reported on how Slovakia and other EU member states had turned to be the hotspots for pro-Russia disinformation campaigns. In an investigation held by Bryan Carter found the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories online following the assassination attempt of Robert Fico, Slovakia's Prime Minister. In the disinformation spread, a shooter Juraj Cintula was accused to be behind the attack. According to the report, such campaign is not of surprise but the *Euronews* report on "scale of disinformation" through experience and collection of perspectives from journalists, researchers and media professionals to counter the spread of fake news and combat its impact on the political stability and social cohesion. Since the annexation of Crimea, disinformation was observed to have surged along with "Russian operatives" inside and out Slovakia influencing the public decision. Veronika Frankovská, a Slovak fact-checker said: "It doesn't matter to make people believe in a certain story, but to simply, erode that trust in whether what they read and what they see ... you can trust no one." (Bryan Carter, "Slovakia's disinformation history serves as a cautionary tale for the EU." *Euronews*, 27 May 2024)

Prime Minister condition remains critical

On 16 May, Slovakia's President-elect Peter Pellegrini visited Robert Fico, Prime Minister who was shot five times in an assassination attempt in front of the House of Culture in Handlova. The attack happened after he came outside to shake hands with people after a cabinet meeting. According to the statements of Pellegrini, Fico was unable to speak properly and was tired. His condition continues to remain critical due to the complicated nature of wounds although the doctors are managing to stabilize it. The 71-year-old man who was the suspected shooter was found to be a 'lone wolf' with no membership in any radical or militant group. According to the

authorities, the attack had a clear political motive. The former Prime Minister, Eduard Heger who is also the political rival of Fico had condemned the attack warning against polarization that is becoming a "battle of people" across the world. ("Slovakia: PM Fico able to speak, 'lone wolf' suspect charged." *Deutsche Welle*, 16 May 2024)

Prime Minister plan to shut independent press raises concerns

On 11 May, *Politico* reported on Robert Fico, Slovakia's Prime Minister move to shut down independent press and revise public broadcasting. According to the report, Fico's administration had approved a proposal in 24 April to remove a public broadcaster RTVS. This has sparked fears among the advocates of free speech as the replacement could give more control to the ruling coalition in terms of appointment of the director and board. While Fico said: "[Public] television and radio were unable to be objective because they were in a conflict with the Slovak government." The move comes after the EU adopted a new Media Freedom Act to protect newsroom from "political influence and support media pluralism." (Ketrin Johecová And Tom Nicholson, "Slovakia's Fico plots to dismantle the free press." *Politico*, 11 May 2024)

SWEDEN

Prime Minister open to deploy nuclear weapons during wartime

On 13 May, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said that he was open to allowing nuclear weapons on Swedish soil in wartime which has sparked criticism. Sweden abandoned two centuries of military non-alignment to join NATO this year and is expected to vote on a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the US which will give the US access to military bases and the storage of military equipment of Sweden. Following the statement, the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Association has demanded the government give a written statement in the DCA stating Sweden would not allow nuclear weapons on its soil. The government in turn has repeatedly insisted on not having a ban as

the situation of war. To them, the whole purpose of NATO membership is to ensure that the situation does not arise. ("Sweden open to hosting nuclear weapons in wartime: PM," *Alarabiya News*, 13 May 2024)

Pro-Palestine protesters condone Israel participation in Eurovision

On 09 May, the *BBC* reported on thousands of pro-Palestinians gathering in Malmo against Israel's participation in Eurovision song contest. The city was chosen to host the second semi-final where contestant Eden Golan from Israel took part. During the rehearsal, mixed reactions from the crowd were observed and amongst them climate activist Greta Thunberg also attended the protest. According to the Swedish police, 12,000 had participated and high level security was deployed. Thunberg said: "If we are tens of thousands of people flooding the streets of Malmo when Eurovision is taking place, saying we will not accept this to continue, then it's a very strong signal - and it does make a difference." Whereas other protestors provided varied reasons to protest without clear objection to Israel rather due to disinterest. Golan said: "I'm focused on music, on the good energy, and there are so many people supporting me, and I feel like I have such an honour to represent my country, especially in these times." (Kathryn Armstrong "Eurovision: Thousands protest against Israel's entry in Malmo," *BBC*, 09 May 2024)

Greta Thunberg fined for disobeying police orders in a protest

On 08 May, a Stockholm court charged 6,000 Swedish crowns for two counts of civil disobedience, on Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish climate activist. Thunberg began the "Fridays for Future" movement at the age of 15 when she skipped school to stage a protest outside the Swedish parliament. Thunberg was charged as she disobeyed police orders during two demonstrations in front of Sweden's Parliament in March 2024, demanding that action be taken against climate change. The activists of a day long series of protests

blocked the main entrance of the parliament building despite an order from the police to leave. By justifying her refusal to relocate, she said: "There was a (climate) emergency and there still is. And in an emergency, we all have a duty to act." She also demanded reforms in the current laws that protect extractive industries rather than the people and the planet. ("Greta Thunberg fined over Stockholm protest," *Deutsche Welle*, 08 May 2024)

SWITZERLAND

Day tripper Tax to be introduced to reduce tourist overcrowding

On 24 May, *Euronews* reported that the Swiss mountain village of Lauterbrunnen is getting overcrowded with tourists due to its scenic beauty and Instagram aesthetics. The visitors have started coming in their cars and the residents are struggling to cope. The local authorities announced that they were considering introducing a Venice-style tax on day trippers to reduce overtourism. As a victim of social media, the village is overwhelmed with people who rush to get their content, especially the Staubbach Falls. With the car parks and the public transport getting overcrowded and the roads filled with rubbish, the landlords are also taking advantage of the rising rent prices due to the increase in demand. The local authorities have set up a working group to find measures to manage the situation. One proposal is to follow Venice and charge day trippers entry fee which would apply only to tourists with a car. Visitors who arrive by public transport and the ones who stay overnight are exempted from it. Critics have warned of the little change this measure offers as Venice's day tripper tax in force under a trial period has not reduced the influx of tourists. (Rebecca Ann Hughes, "Overcrowded Swiss village considers Venice-style entry fee for visitors who arrive by car," *euronews.travel*, 24 May 2024)

Several wounded in a knife attack in Zofingen

On 15 May, several people were attacked and injured by a man with a knife in the Swiss town of Zofingen about 50 kilometers

south of the city of Basel and the German border according to the local police. The victims were hospitalised after the attack and a large-scale police operation was continued to avoid people near the crime scene. The police have confirmed that the perpetrator was placed under arrest after he hid in a building for two hours while they were unclear of the possibility of one more attacker. ([“Several wounded in a knife attack in Switzerland,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 15 May 2024)

THE NETHERLANDS

Finally a new Prime Minister after 14 years of Mark Rutte

On 27 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Dick Schoof, former head of Dutch intelligence and terrorism to lead the coalition government as Prime Minister. He is a senior civil servant in the justice ministry with no party affiliation and his expert areas include security and migration. The largest party in the coalition, Party for Freedom (PVV) won the largest share in the held November 2023 elections. Following months of discussion, PVV reached a deal with the liberal People’s Party, Freedom and Democracy (VVD), conservative New Social Contract (NSC) party and conservative New Social Contract (NSC) party. As a result of the negotiations, Geert Wilders from the PVV agreed to withdraw from Prime Minister office in return for his extreme anti-Islam policies such as imposing of ban on mosques. Apart from this, the coalition also pledges to opt “strictest-ever asylum regime,” for stricter border controls and tighter rules for asylum seekers entering the Netherlands. ([“Netherlands: Former spy chief to lead right-wing coalition,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 28 May 2024)

New coalition policies aim for stricter asylum norms

On 16 May, the newly agreed upon coalition laid down their government policies in a proposal that will aim for the “strictest-ever asylum regime” with stronger border controls and rigorous rules for asylum seekers. The coalition has decided to opt out of the “European asylum and migration

policies.” The parties also want to decrease labour migration and the intake of foreign students. Apart from these, they also aim to expand natural gas production along with nuclear power reactors. It has also eased the environmental rules for farmers. The country would continue to maintain political and military support for Ukraine and will make it legally binding to spend at least two per cent of GDP on defence. The parties have also considered the idea of moving the Dutch embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. ([“Netherlands: New coalition pitches 'strictest' asylum policy,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 16 May 2024)

Far-right PVV to form a government with Right-wing parties

On 15 May 2024, far-right- populist Geert Wilders announced that his Party for Freedom (PVV) along with the outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte’s Liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy, Pieter Omtzigt’s conservative New Social Contract (NSC) and the populist Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) had entered into a coalition to form a new government. The parliamentary elections which happened six months ago had resulted in the victory of the anti-immigrant and the anti-Muslim Wilders and his party by winning 37 out of the 150 seats. Even though Wilders had a strong desire for the post of Prime Minister, he had put aside his ambitions for the advancement of his agenda as he had revealed about the negotiations over the position of Prime Minister which is yet to be confirmed. No further details have been made public. ([“Netherlands to form a government with Right-wing parties,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 15 May 2024)

Dutch national crop: Tulips face risks due to climate change

On 05 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on how Tulips, as a national treasure of the Netherlands, attract tourists around the world. The Netherlands is also the world’s leading tulip exporter with around 2.5 million tulip bulbs sold every year. However, with the changes in climate and extreme heat, there are wetter winters, and more heat waves in spring and summer,

posing a great threat to its growth. As the winters are so wet, the roots do not grow deep in the soil, causing it to perish during the summer, Poor harvest and rising costs make it difficult to grow the crop. In recent years, farmers had to water the crops almost every week, unlike before when three to four times in a season was adequate. Additionally, Dutch tulip growers also face trouble due to strict border controls following Brexit. As most of the harvest goes abroad, a delay in the physical checks would be catastrophic for the flowers. ("Climate change, Brexit threaten Dutch Tulips," *Deutsche Welle*, 05 May 2024)

THE UK

France24 reports increase in asylum seekers since January

On 24 May, more than 10000 asylum seekers entered the UK in small boats in 2024. This would be a key challenge for Rishi Sunak, the Prime Minister of the UK for the upcoming elections. According to the report, between January and May, 10170 had arrived compared to 7,395 in 2023. In response to the surge, the interior ministry spokesperson confirmed on working closely with their French partners to prevent crossing and safeguarding lives. On 23 May Sunak announced the election date and added that asylum seekers coming into the UK would not be deported to Rwanda before the vote. This plan had been slowed down due to legal obstacles for more than two years, and the Conservative party has promised to scrap this policy if it wins the election. Whereas, the Labour party assured on creating a Border Security Command to bring together staff from the police, the domestic intelligence agency and prosecutors to end smuggling of people if elected. ("Number of asylum seekers crossing Channel since January tops 10,000, UK says," *FRANCE24*, 25 May 2024)

Police arrests 16 students from the Oxford University on protest over Gaza war
On 23 May, 16 people from Oxford University were arrested by the UK police for organising a protest over the war in Gaza. The protesters who opposed Israel's

handling of the war against Hamas militants in Gaza have made various demands, including the universities which have academic and financial ties. The arrest comes after the students entered the administrative building on 23 May, claiming that they had "exhausted all other avenues of communication" with the administrators. A spokesperson for Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) protest group said that "instead of engaging in dialogue with her students, the vice-chancellors chose to evacuate the building, place it on a lockdown, and call the police for arrests." The video posted on social media showed people sitting on the ground in front of the police and being dragged away by them. In a statement, Oxford University said that the protestors had stepped beyond the idea of peaceful protest, and engaged in "forced entry and temporary occupation" of university offices. ("UK police arrest 16 at Oxford University Gaza war protest," *Le Monde*, 24 May 2024)

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announces plans for a compulsory national service

On 26 May, Rishi Sunak, UK Prime Minister announced plans to reintroduce compulsory national service as part of the election campaign which is aimed at integrating a "national spirit" and to unite society in an uncertain world. The proposal would require the 18-year-olds to participate in either a 12-month full-time military placement or engage in community service one weekend a month for a year. The participants could acquire experience in cyber security, logistics, procurement, and civil response operations through the offered 30,000 full-time military operations. At the same time, people opting for community service would get 25 days of volunteering experience with organisations like the fire service, police, and National Health Service (NHS). According to a YouGov survey which was conducted in September 2023, only 28 per cent of Britons are in favour of a compulsory, year-long military scheme while 24 per cent oppose it. The survey on the findings of various national service schemes indicates that

Britons are more likely to support voluntary schemes than compulsory ones and prefer community service over military service.

The announcement met with criticisms from the opposition parties such as the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats with the former comparing it to the former Prime Minister David Cameron's "Big Society" initiative from 2010. They argue that the plan did not have proper financial backing to support it as the estimated cost is EUR 2.5 billion. The center-left party also pointed out the reduction of armed forces due to the Conservative spending cuts. The Conservative Party has set forth national security and youth engagement issues on the prime focus of its political agenda for the elections on 05 July. A Royal Commission was set to be established regarding the national service program which is expected to begin by September 2025. The Commission might determine the possible non-criminal sanctions for those who refuse to take part. The Conservatives claim that this initiative could foster careers in healthcare, public service, charity or the armed forces. (Daniel Harper, "[Controversy as UK Conservatives plan to bring back compulsory national service](#)," *Euronews*, 26 May 2024)

UK Government apologizes for blood scandal

On 20 May, the government of Britain represented by Rishi Sunak, UK Prime Minister apologized for the worst healthcare disaster on the infected blood scandal between 1970 and 1991. The scam involved the death of thousands of people along with more than 30,000 people getting infected with either HIV or Hepatitis C due to the treatment with unsafe blood products. After a long-running public inquiry with a report that blamed the failures of the health service, officials, and ministers who had ignored to acknowledge their mistakes, apologized and approved packages for compensation. Sunak promised to deliver the costs and also to speak directly to the victims and families. The report chaired by Brian Langstaff claimed that up to 2,900 people, including

young children, are estimated to have died by 2019, with many more becoming severely ill. The patients were knowingly exposed to "unacceptable" infection risks as many of them were not told that they had been infected after the blood transfusions. Since thousands of patients who had hemophilia were treated by the National Health Service during the 1970s and 80s, Langstaff slammed both the health service and government for a 'lack of condor'. He particularly criticised the veteran Conservative politician Ken Clarke, the health secretary in 1980 who insisted that there was "no conclusive proof" that HIV could be spread through blood. The worst scandal was brought out mainly due to the usage of factor concentrate also known as Factor VIII to treat hemophiliacs which involved the pooling of blood plasma from thousands of donors. The officials and doctors ignored the risk factor of the whole component getting infected with one sample and irresponsibly implemented it. Now the victims are looking forward to the compensation promised by the government. (Andrew McDonald, "[Infected blood: UK apologizes for decades-long healthcare scandal](#)," *Politico*, 20 May 2024)

Discussion take place on defining EU-UK relationship

On 16 May, the discussion conducted in Brussels over the post-Brexit border and transit arrangements for Gibraltar failed to reach an agreement. Gibraltar which is a self-governing British overseas territory was excluded from the Trade and Cooperation Agreement after Brexit which defined the post-Brexit EU-UK relationship. The meeting was a second of its kind this month and as EU hopes to strike a deal that would tie up the last loose end of Brexit just in time for the elections. According to the officials, the meeting took "place in a constructive atmosphere" which will contribute to an overall EU-UK agreement along with a commitment to bring "confidence, legal certainty, and stability to the lives and livelihoods of people of the campo de Gibraltar". Since the region is a subject of friction between the UK and

Spain with their claims over the territory, the deal is significant as it will define the relationship between the region and the countries. (Mared Gwyn Jones, "[EU and UK 'getting closer' to clinching post-Brexit border and transit deal for Gibraltar](#)," *Euronews*, 16 May 2024)

Politico reports Britain Expects A Financial Crisis In The Non-Bank Sectors

On 10 May, *Politico* reported on Britain's upcoming financial crisis which will affect nonbank investors such as hedge funds, pension funds, insurers, or private equity. Since the financial crisis 2008, the financial part that sits outside of banks had absorbed all the risk which in turn will affect globally also as non-banks now account for half the financial system. Bank chiefs are fearing another Liz Truss-style meltdown on the financial markets which would create problems not only in the City of London but also globally affecting thousands of people's jobs. Due to this the Bank of England (BoE) is pushing for international cohesion to settle the issues. Another worry according to Sarah Breeden, Deputy Governor of the BoE said: "Gaps in our knowledge have meant we are largely building resilience in market-based finance in response to crises, whereas we should be looking to build resilience ahead of vulnerabilities crystallizing." ([Britain's next financial crash is coming. This time it won't be the banks](#)," *Politico*, 10 May 2024)

Economic recovery signalled in first quarter of 2024 after recession

On 10 May, *Deutsche Welle* reported on UK recovery from recession ahead of the elections. The UK is expected to record its growth in first quarter after recession in 2024. According to the report, the gross domestic product (GDP) had increased to 0.6 per cent which was more than 04 per cent from the prediction by Office for National Statistics (ONS). During 2023, the UK economy had stable inflation with rise in cost of living and later decreased by 0.3 per cent in fourth quarter of 2023. Rishi Sunak, UK's Prime Minister said that the economy had "turned a corner" and stressed on

making economic growth as his top priority. Jeremy Hunt, Chancellor of the Exchequer said: "There is no doubt it has been a difficult few years, but today's growth figures are proof that the economy is returning to full health for the first time since the pandemic." Whereas the labour party's finance minister Rachel Reeves, criticised the Tory's for the rise in cost of living. ("[Britain's economy exits recession ahead of elections](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 May 2024)

Hackers from China under suspect for a cyberattack on military

On 07 May, the UK government observed a cyberattack that targeted the military. According to Tobias Ellwood, a former parliamentary defence committee chairman and ex-soldier, the attack was directed towards the UK Defense Ministry's third-party payroll system. Since service personnel's names and bank details were targeted, Ellwood predict China to be the perpetrator. This accusation was also based on previous cyberattacks on the UK and the US, where hackers connected with the Chinese government had targeted the US officials, pro-democracy activists, and the UK electoral commission systems. However, China dismissed the allegations due to absence of evidence. ("[UK says Defense Ministry targeted in cyberattack](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2024)

Trinity College fines the student union for the pro-Palestine protests

On 03 May, the president of Trinity College Dublin (TCD) claimed that the university had fined the students' union EUR 214,000 for on-campus protests citing loss of income as a result of recent protests at the Book of Kells tourist attraction. Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) is a nonviolent pro-Palestinian movement the students have started that advocate for economic, cultural, and academic sanctions against Israel. The Trinity College said that it was against the illegal BDS camp and urged to hold the protests within the university norms. ("[Trinity students fined €214k as Gaza camp set up](#)," *BBC*, 03 May 2024)

Civil servants conflicted between civil service code and Rwanda policy

On 01 May, the First Division Association (FDA), the trade union which represents the United Kingdom's senior civil servants, launched a legal appeal against the government's controversial Rwanda deportation legislation. The UK government bypassed a Supreme Court ruling, that Rwanda was not a safe place to send genuine refugees and European Court of Human Rights' order to halt flights amid an ongoing case as senior civil servants are being ordered by ministers to breach an international law and a civil service code, argued the FDA. Dave Penman, FDA's general secretary said: "Faced with a government that is prepared to act in this cowardly, reckless way, it is left to the FDA to defend our members and the integrity of the civil service." The government argued that the code would not be breached and that this is the effective deterrent to stop these dangerous boat crossings.

Government sends the first voluntary asylum seeker to Rwanda

On 30 April, the UK media reports said that the UK sent its first asylum-seeker to Rwanda under a voluntary scheme which is separate from the government's forced deportation program. While the controversial deportation law allowed the UK government to expel undocumented migrants to Rwanda, one unnamed man, said to be of African origin, voluntarily moved to Rwanda after being offered up to 3,000 pounds as financial aid. While the forced deportation plan has come under fire from the United Nations and rights groups, the UK sent the first voluntary asylum seeker to Rwanda. In view of the elections, the Sunak Government suspended the deportation until July this year and a government spokesperson said that they will be relocated to a safe third country where they will be supported to rebuild their lives.

Housing shortage in Ireland makes it difficult to accommodate more refugees

On 01 May, Police began dismantling about

200 tents housing asylum-seekers in Dublin in the process of removing the migrants from the tents, which appeared a year ago the International Protection Office in the capital and moving them to shelters. While Ireland accommodates the large refugee inflow, it struggles with a shortage of houses and new asylum seekers have been handed out tents, which led to clashes with the police since December. According to Irish media reports, 90 per cent more people than the same period last year has applied for asylum. Prime Minister Simon Harris said that people will not be allowed to return to the camp once it is cleared and plans to send irregular migrants back to the UK but the UK Prime Minister does not comply.

TURKEY

Pro-Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas imprisoned for engaging in 2014 riots

On 16 May 2024, a Turkish court sentenced the former leader of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) Selahattin Demirtas to 42 years in prison for allegedly inciting the deadly protests in Kobani in 2014. Another pro-Kurdish politician Figen Yuksekdag was also sentenced to 30 years along with many other HDP figures. They were charged with 29 offenses, including murder and harming Turkish unity and integrity. The protests were the result of pro-Kurdish leaders getting triggered by what they saw as Turkish support towards the Islamic militants who were attacking the town of Kobani. The three-day clash resulted in widespread casualties with 37 deaths and hundreds of injuries. In 2023, Demirtas termed the case a "revenge trial" proclaiming that there was no evidence against him. The HDP is accused of having ties to the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which Turkey listed as a terrorist organization. ("Turkey: Pro-Kurdish leader Demirtas gets 42 years in prison," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 May 2024)

Turkey blocks export and import with Israel over the Gaza conflict

On 02 May, Turkey's trade ministry said in a statement: "...Export and import

transactions related to Israel have been stopped, covering all products" until Israel allowed "...an uninterrupted and sufficient flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza." The Israeli foreign minister accused the measure of breaking agreements as a dictatorial behaviour. The announcement comes after Turkey imposed restrictions on a range of its exports to Israel in April. Earlier, Turkey claimed that Israel had blocked an effort by its air force to deliver humanitarian supplies to Gaza. Turkey has become one of the harshest critics of Israel's military operations in Gaza.

REGIONAL

EU proceeds with an economic partnership with Kenya

On 30 May, a press release from the Council of the European Union stated that it would start implementing the EU-Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). This includes binding provisions on sustainable development, trade, and labour rights and a transparent dispute resolution mechanism. The agreement aims to improve trade in goods and economic opportunities for growth in Kenya. It will provide duty-free and quota-free EU market access to all exports from Kenya, except that of arms and allow the gradual opening of Kenyan market to imports from the EU. In 2014, The East African Community (EAC) and the EU drafted the EPA. In 2016, Kenya and the EU member states ratified and signed the agreement. Since, all the EAC's partner countries are yet to ratify and sign the EPA, the implementation was not possible. Discussions on the bilateral implementation with sustainability provisions began in May 2021 and concluded on 19 June 2023 after a request from Kenya. The EU is Kenya's first export destination and in 2022, trade increased by 27 per cent, totalling EUR 3.3 billion. ("EU-Kenya: Council takes final step to allow the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement," *The Council of the European Union*, 30 May 2024)

EU and Euratom withdraws from Energy Charter Treaty for modernisation

On 30 May, a press release from the Council of the European Union announced the withdrawal of the EU and the European Atomic Energy Community from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). This decision came after the European Parliament approved it during its last session in April 2024. The Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) is a multilateral agreement that came into effect in 1998 and covers trade and investment protection in the energy sector. In 2018, a modernization process was started because this treaty was no longer in accordance with the Paris Agreement and the EU's aspirations concerning the energy transition. According to the decisions to be adopted, in the next the Energy Charter Conference, which is scheduled for the end of 2024, member states that want to stay contracting parties will have the opportunity to cast their votes in favor of or against the adoption of a modernized agreement. Moreover, this was claimed to be in line with the Belgian Roadmap for modernisation. ("Energy Charter Treaty: Council gives final green light to EU's withdrawal," *The Council of the European Union*, 30 May 2024)

Pharmacists hold protest over drug shortages

On 30 May, *France 24* reported on French pharmacists' walkout protesting over drug shortages and pharmacy closures. The protests emerge as medications were increasingly sold online and for a higher pay. The pharmacists warned the public ahead of the closure by campaigning via posters and emails. Therefore, local authorities demanded some pharmacies to ensure legally-required minimum coverage of medications. Trade bodies and unions say that France saw 2,000 pharmacies closing in 10 years, leaving around 20,000 in operation. Ahead of negotiations with France's national health insurance authority next week, unions are demanding increased pay starting in the following year as inflation is driving up their expenses. While there are apprehensions of the government trying to make online sales easier, Marc Feracci, an MP for the Renaissance party assured that the government would not

endanger pharmacists' drug monopoly. (["French pharmacists strike over drug shortages and pay, closing shops nationwide," France 24, 30 May 2024](#))

Norway advocates for a Palestinian state as a solution for the war in Gaza

On 30 May, in *Politico*, Jonas Gahr Støre, the Prime Minister of Norway comment on recognising the state of Palestine. He expressed Norway's position on the conflict throughout the years beginning with the Oslo Accords, 30 years ago. Norway condemned the attack on 07 October 2023 and stated that Israel had the right to defend itself within the framework of international law. However, the ongoing conflict in Gaza resulted in tens of thousands of casualties and injuries, threatening the security of Israelis and Palestinians, and posing a significant threat to the Middle East's stability. He stated that we cannot wait for a peace agreement since the situation is only worsening. Gahr Støre said: "The recognition of Palestine as a state can help strengthen the moderate forces on the Palestinian side." He argued that the establishment of Palestinian state and cooperative ties between Arab countries and Israel were the major goals of the Arab Peace Plan. He added that Norway along with the European support was working closely with Saudi Arabia on achieving the same. Acknowledging that the international political voice for the Palestinian people were being strengthened by 143 countries voting for a resolution supporting UN membership for Palestine at the UN General Assembly on 10 May, he affirmed his position on Palestinian statehood along with a cease-fire in Gaza, full access to humanitarian aid and the unconditional release of hostages. (Jonas Gahr Støre, ["Norway's PM: Why we recognized the state of Palestine," Politico, 30 May 2024](#))

EU turns focus on the next green fuel

On 27 May, *Euronews* reported on the European Commission's plan to boost EU clean energy technology by approving state subsidies for a range of projects that aim at using hydrogen to replace fossil fuels for transportation. BMW and Airbus are among

the 11 companies that are set to receive millions in public subsidies to develop low-carbon hydrogen technology after EU competition officials approved a package of state aid for an "important project of common European interest" (IPCEI). HY2Move project is intended to develop transport fuels combined by Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Spain who have requested an exemption from the single market rules which normally won't allow national subsidies. The state was expected to provide aid for EUR 3.3 billion to the private sector investment to develop fuel cells sufficient enough to power the ships and trains and lightweight hydrogen tanks that could safely store the gas to be used as aviation fuel. Hy2Move would be the fourth green hydrogen-related IPCEI to be approved after the projects related to technology development and real-world applications and infrastructure and be able to bring state-approved subsidies to EUR 18.9 billion. Vice President Margrethe Vestager, European Commission said that hydrogen could help bring down the carbon-producing vehicles but a direct investment could be risky. She also stated that based on the calls for an agreement should be a sign of state concern not an expression of hope. The increased awareness on hydrogen has led to an upsurge in discussion of potential solutions for decarbonising transport and heavy industry even the Commission officials have expressed doubts about meeting the 2030 annual production target of 10 million green hydrogen. Under the recently adopted package of gas market rules, the European Commission is yet to adopt legal criteria for low-carbon hydrogen,' which the NGO warned saying it must be robust enough to ensure 'blue' hydrogen is made from natural gas and climate-friendly and as a replacement for the fossil fuel. (Robert Hodgson, ["EU Policy. Brussels green lights €1.4bn in state subsidy for hydrogen projects," Euronews, 28 May 2024](#))

Germany and France agree Ukraine to strike targets in Russia

On 28 May, Olaf Scholz, German Chancellor

and Emmanuel Macron, French President expressed their consent in allowing Ukraine to use the Western weapon to attack Russian positions inside Russia. Macron said: "We think that we should allow them to neutralise military sites where missiles are fired, from where Ukraine is attacked." At the same time he added that "...we should not allow them to touch other targets in Russia and civilians." Scholz said that he had no legal objections to Macron's approach, more or less he said that he respects Ukraine for keeping up international law and the conditions of countries supplying the weapon, it was "allowed to defend itself." while many countries including Germany have made a transfer of weapons on strict condition. Scholz also stressed the fact that Germany would be sending long-range Taurus missiles to Ukraine. Vladimir Putin, Russian President warned that if western countries supply any long-range weapons to Ukraine then they would face serious consequences. Macron said in his acceptance speech said: "Receiving a peace prize in the time of war appeared to me be a paradox." Macron stressed on: "We have to start Europe's next stage. We need to build up our European defence and become independent of our US partners." ("[Macron, Scholz: Ukraine can strike some targets in Russia](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 May 2024)

Brussels police raid European Parliament offices to investigate Russian influence

On 29 May, police searched European Parliament offices under suspect of Russian interference in promoting Russian propaganda. The search was carried out by the Belgium Federal Prosecutor office and found that "members of the European Parliament were approached and paid to promote Russian propaganda via the news site Voice of Europe." They found "...evidence suggesting that European Parliament staffer has played a huge role in this case" In April, Alexander De Croo, Prime Minister of Belgium hinted on Russian interference in the upcoming EU election. Many Dutch and French news agencies have also reported on identifying

the suspect as a member of the far-right Dutch party Forum for Democracy. The voice of Europe is at the centre of the allegation as it was found to be funded by the pro-Russian tycoon Viktor Medvechuk. Earlier this month the EU suspended many Russian-funded or pro-Russian media houses such as Voice of Europe, RIA Novosti and other Russian state news channels from the 27-nation Bloc. ("[Police search European Parliament offices in Russia probe](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 29 May 2024)

EU and Serbia agree on Frontex cooperation agreement

On 30 May, the European Council announced the EU plan to sign a pact with the Republic of Serbia on operational activities carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. This will allow Serbia and the EU to conduct a joint operation which involves Frontex and the Serbia border guards. Frontex would be able to help Serbia manage migrant flow counter illegal immigration and be able to reduce cross-border crime. This agreement would replace the current status of the EU and Serbia. The current agreement is based on the old Frontex regulation that only allows joint operations at Serbia's border with the EU. According to the new regulation of 2019, Frontex can assist countries it signs agreements with throughout their area and exercise powers such as border checks and registration of persons. Frontex also has border management agreements such as Moldova (2022), North Macedonia (2023), Montenegro (2023) and Albani (2024). After the agreement signed it would be sent for approval process involving the European Parliament and the council to finalise the agreement. ("[Serbia: Council gives green light to signing of Frontex cooperation agreement](#)")

An overview of the European elections by France24

On 29 May, *France 24* reported on the European elections scheduled from 06-09 June. Being the second largest democratic election in the world after India, the elections take place every five years for

which voters choose leaders to represent their interests. The EU works with the joint effort of three main bodies which are: the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Union Council. The European Commission is the executive branch concerned with the day-to-day activities of the EU along with trade policies and law and order. The President elected by the Parliament and the European Council holds the most powerful position. The European Parliament which represents the citizens adopts the EU legislation enacted by the Commission and approves the budget. Members of Parliament (MEPs), decide the laws applicable across the EU ranging from environmental regulation to migration policy. The EU Council is divided into two: the Council of the European Union and the European Council. While the former consists of the ministers from the national governments of member states, the latter unites the heads of state or government of member states.

In the scheduled election for June, voters will select 720 members of the Parliament based on the candidates submitted by their respective parties. The country's representation is based on its population size with most seats allocated to Germany with 96 seats, France with 81, 76 for Italy, 61 for Spain, and 53 for Poland. Once the MEPs are elected, they will join the parliamentary groups according to their ideology. The votes will commence this year on 06 June with the Netherlands, followed by Ireland and Czechia (Czech Republic) after a day. Italy, Latvia, Malta, and Slovakia begin voting on 08 June but the majority of EU member states will vote on 09 June, with results expected later that evening. The elections among the members differ across regions with varying voting age. The voter turnout for the EU elections tends to be very low as voting is compulsory only in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, and Luxembourg. After the MEPs get elected, the first task of the European Parliament is to select the President and appoint its 27 commissioners. The political group which gets the majority in the Parliament will thus decide the future of the EU. ("EU parliament: Four things to know about the

European elections," *FRANCE24*, 29 May, 2024)

Director of the Europe in the World Programme view on rise of far-right in Europe

On 29 May, *FRANCE24* reported on the rise of far-rightism in Europe through the stance of Sven Biscop who is the director of the Europe in the World Programme at the Egmont Institute. In his book 'This is Not a New World Order,' he pointed to the fact that the history of geopolitics always had a multipolar world order and that the rise of new powers was more or less inevitable. He believed that the EU had set out the right policies which he termed 'risking' which involved taking care of their dependencies. With China not playing according to the rules of the economic game, Europe must stand firm with its policies. According to him, the War in Ukraine made the world understand the importance of geopolitics. He also emphasised the need to provide Ukraine with sufficient arms and ammunition as it has become a border state of the EU. The growing threat of Russia should be curbed by making Ukraine to be part of the EU. He indicated that although the right-wing parties seem to be nationalistic, they tend to be influenced by foreign hostile powers such as Russia which in a way made them traitors. But the democratic parties were expected to secure their position although it was a big challenge. The core task of the new Parliament was to balance the principle of the welfare state and defend themselves from foreign threats. Concerning the youth vote, he mentioned the importance of educating them on the integrity and unity of the European Union which are the building blocks of the EU. ("European elections: Far-right parties 'act as traitors' amid foreign interference," *FRANCE24*, 29 May 2024)

NATO Secretary General assures to step up aid for Ukraine ahead of Washington summit

On 28 May, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg participated in a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union with EU Defence Ministers to discuss

the support provided to Ukraine and the necessity to increase defence production. "NATO and the European Union have worked very closely together to provide unprecedented military, economic, and financial support to Ukraine," Stoltenberg said. NATO was planning to coordinate the provision of equipment and training and the promise of financial aid ahead of the Washington summit. He also pointed out the need to prevent any delays and the importance of providing "predictable, accountable support for the long haul," so that Ukraine could prevail as a sovereign, independent nation. He added that NATO was working closely with the transatlantic industrial base to increase the production to arm Ukraine and its allies. (["NATO Secretary General: Ukraine's most urgent need is more air defence," NATO, 29 May 2024](#))

NATO and Mauritania to tighten their long-standing partnership

On 28 May, Mircea Geoaană, Deputy Secretary General met with Hanana Ould Sidi, Defence Minister of Mauritania at NATO Headquarters. The Deputy Secretary-General referred to Mauritania as its "valued partner" and that there were plans to ramp up their partnership in the future, including to strengthen Mauritania's forces in the fight against terrorism. He also emphasised the importance of NATO's southern neighbourhood based on a report published by individual experts. The aim was to strengthen the allies' approach to its southern neighbourhood ahead of the NATO Summit in Washington in July. Mauritania, a long-standing partner of NATO, joined the Alliance's Mediterranean Dialogue partnership forum in 1995. Since then, their partnership has grown including progress made in several areas such as special operations forces, maritime security intelligence, military career transition programmes, stockpile management regarding small arms and light weapons, and military education. (["NATO reaffirms importance of long-standing partnership with Mauritania," NATO, 29 May 2024](#))

EU Algae initiative aims to recover ocean biodiversity loss

On 27 May, due to the decline of fish and marine ecosystem suffering, the EU Algae initiative is expected to help reverse this trend by diversifying into seaweed farming. Across regions, there a new sector offering good income and new jobs for the coastal professionals while providing healthy local seafood and helping to recover the ocean biodiversity. This initiative of regenerative ocean farming forms part of the EU's broader strategy to develop a sustainable and large algae industry with the hope that the European market for seaweed is expected to reach around EUR nine billion by 2030, along with the high demand in cosmetics, energy, food, and pharmaceutical. The EU algae initiative aims to boost the blue economy and to increase sustainable production and consumption in Europe. While addressing 23 different areas like looking into the business environment and helping it improve the situation and create public awareness and consumer awareness (Denis Loctier, ["Interview: the EU Algae initiative helps fishers become ocean farmers," Euronews, 28 May 2024](#))

EU policy clinches raw materials to deal with Australia

On 28 May, the European Commission announced on forging 13th trade partnership designed to source materials from outside the bloc with Australia. This is based on mutual benefits enabling the EU to diversify supply and the development of Canberra's domestic critical mineral sector. Austria is one of the largest producers of aluminium, iron, cobalt, copper, lead and rare earth elements like uranium and zinc all of which are needed to build electric vehicles (EVs) this flagship with the EU is under the so-called European Green Deal to decarbonise transport and reduce the carbon dioxide and air pollution level. According to the commission, the trade deal should come into force for over six months and set out cooperation on the integration of sustainable raw materials value chains, research and innovation as well as the promotion of environmental social and governance standards. This will also help us

deliver the green and digital transition. The Australian minister reacted to Breton saying that this trade partnership “will encourage investment from the EU into the Australian renewable energy projects’ and that the country’s minerals would be used for the development of EVs and wind turbines. The EU has been trying to cut deals with Australia since last October which has failed to secure the deal, due to the Bloc’s rule on Geographic indicator which would block the Australian producer from labelling European names such as ‘prosecco’ or ‘feta.’ Divergences among the parties were to overcome with signing trade deals and add Australia to the growing list of countries with whom the EU has created a similar agreement: Argentina, Canada, Chile, Democratic Republic of Congo, Greenland, Kazakhstan, Namibia, Norway, Rwanda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zambia. (“EU Policy. [Commission clinches raw materials deal with Australia.](#)” *Euronews*, 28 May 2024)

Spain, Norway and Ireland announce recognition of Palestinian state

On 28 May, the *BBC* reported on Spain, Ireland and Norway’s formal recognition of Palestinian state. According to them it is an attempt to bring back the attention towards a political solution for the war in Middle East. The move is expected to encourage other European countries to pursue the same diplomatic way to achieve ceasefire in Gaza and release of hostage held by Hamas. This effort has also infuriated Israel’s government who have accused all the countries for “rewarding terrorism.” Recognition by the three countries also adds diplomatic pressure on Israel following two international courts demanding it to end the operations of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in southern Gaza. Simon Harris, Ireland’s Prime Minister called it “historic and important” and expressed scope in convincing other European countries to follow pursuit. On the same, Pedro Sánchez, Spain’s Prime Minister said: “...not only a matter of historic justice”, it was also “an essential requirement if we are all to achieve peace.” Similarly, Slovenia, Malta and Belgium have

also expressed the possibility of recognising Palestine. (James Landale, “[Spain, Norway and Ireland recognise Palestinian state.](#)” *BBC*, 28 May 2024)

EU discusses on sanctioning Israel

On 27 May, the EU foreign ministers for the first time discussed on imposing a sanction on Israel if it failed to comply with the international humanitarian law. Micheal Martin Irish Foreign minister added: “...there was a very clear consensus about the need to uphold the international humanitarian legal institution.” On 24 May, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled Israel to immediately stop being offensive in Rafah and demanded to open Rafah border crossing to allow humanitarian aid to enter the enclave. The EU leaders had reacted to Israel’s bombing of the refugee camp killing at least 45 Palestinians, over half of them are women, children and elderly, according to the Gaza health authorities. Martin also added on the increased concerns among the members regarding the situation based on ICJ ruling. According to Martin there was an intense discussion on the orders of the international court. As a result of the meeting: “One of the conclusion was to convene a meeting of the EU- Israeli Association Council to raise our grave concern and to hope response from Israel in terms of complying with the orders from the court.” The EU prioritised on the 27 May attack which killed several people. Martin highlighted the need to hold Hamad accountable and for what Israel has done against thousands of Palestinians. (Nathalie Weatherald, “[EU foreign ministers discuss sanctions against Israel.](#)” *Politico*, 27 May 2024)

Ursula von der Leyen warned for her stance on the far-rights in Europe

On 27 May, European socialists warned Ursula von der Leyen against her alliance with the far-right leader, Giorgia Meloni, the Italian Prime Minister. They said that they would not support her in the elections as long as she continued suggesting she could work with the hard-right MEPs aligned with Meloni, thus affecting her second-time

candidacy for the European Commission. Even the Olaf Scholz, German Chancellor and his Social Democratic Party signalled that they supported the socialists' claims. The Socialist Democratic Party's lead candidate for the upcoming election Katarina Barley expressed her contempt for working and cooperating with the far rights or radical parties at any level.

Von der Leyen, who hails from the centre-right European People's Party, has indicated that if she fails to secure a majority with the backing of centre-left and liberal lawmakers after the EU election, she could work with the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in the European parliament. Meloni's Brothers of Italy party is a part of this party. As Paris and Berlin were dissatisfied with her stance on the far-rights, her candidacy faced a serious challenge as they also had a replacement in their mind: Mario Draghi, former Italian Prime Minister. Draghi had received the backing of one of Macron's closest allies, Pascal Canfin who is an MEP as he said in a statement that France and everyone in the presidential ecosystem would like Draghi to play a role. Macron who has been rumoured to manoeuvre Draghi to the EU executive now has allies in Berlin, especially with his three-day visit to Germany. Since von der Leyen is the European People's Party's lead candidate, she would require 361 votes apart from EPPs assured 176 seats. To secure her position, she needs the centre-left MEPs to support her. (Gordon Repinski, Jakob Hanke Vela, Šejla Ahmatović, Julius Brinkmann, and Jürgen Klöckner, "[Von der Leyen faces Socialist revolt over her far-right flirtation with Meloni](#)," *Politico*, 27 May 2024)

"Rise of far-right to create a powerful political bloc" says Politico

On 24 May, *Politico* reported on how Europe's far-right were improving their presence ahead of European Parliament elections. According to the report, the prolonged efforts to prevent the extremist had ended in Europe. In the past decades, political parties have attempted to form tactical coalitions to keep the far-right from

gaining power but the case has been broken in France with populist and nationalist parties gaining strength. Across the EU, Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic are observed to be led by right-wing governments while in Sweden and the Netherlands, the majority or winning parties are on verge to form coalition with right-wing governments. Considering the polls, hard-right parties are observed to be dominating the polls especially in France, with Marine Le Pen's National Rally winning over 30 per cent ahead of Macron's party. Whereas in Germany, the Alternative for Germany seconds the list after Social Democrats. The reports opens a possibility of such strong parties coming together to form a "powerful political bloc" in the European Parliament elections if unity remains.

According to a report in *The New York Times* the surge in far-right across Europe can result in "anti-immigrant parties" winning more seats in the 720-seat European Parliament. This could result in hardening of immigration regulations, increase threat to environmental reform and may come under pressure to reduce grip on Russia. According to the report, the path of the far-right to power has been long close to 80-year transition after the post-war, accelerated after Cold War through globalisation leading to creation of more polarised and unequal societies. This eventually led to more ideological disputes and the moderate right and left became indistinguishable with no solutions to mass migration or frustration of working class. Later the confrontation stepped out of internal issues into global and national issues giving more opportunities for leaders to use it as "rhetorical weapon." (Giovanna Coi, "[Mapped: Europe's rapidly rising right](#)," *Politico*, 24 May 2024; Roger Cohen, "[Just How Dangerous Is Europe's Rising Far Right?](#)," *The New York Times*, 05 May 2024)

NATO General urges for support for Ukraine in Washington Summit

On 21 May, at an Atlantic Council event, former NATO Secretary General Anders

Fogh Rasmussen urged the West to wake up with regard to Russia's war in Ukraine. During the conference, the role of NATO as a transatlantic security organisation was highlighted. He argued that Ukraine must be invited for accession talks in Washington in July to send a strong message to Putin. The leaders stated that Ukraine's invitation to NATO would also acknowledge their bravery and struggle in the face of Russia's invasion. They also sought to provide a humanitarian air defence shield over Ukraine by NATO. Other efforts to strengthen the alliance by redrawing their defence budget were discussed. With the US presidential elections nearing, the summit concluded that the leaders must secure a global order by resisting Russia, Iran and China from reaching the global arena. (Katherine Walla, "[NATO must accelerate support and secure membership for Ukraine at its Washington summit, transatlantic leaders urge](#)," *Atlantic Council*, 22 May 2024)

Heavy rainfall causes severe flooding in Northern Europe

On 19 May, *Euronews* reported that the municipality of Voeren in Limburg had been severely impacted by the heavy rain causing severe flooding in the area. According to Mayor Joris Gaens, the floods were worse than in 2021. The local disaster plan had been managing the emergency as the streets were submerged, houses were inundated and emergency shelters had been set up at the cultural center in the neighboring Dutch municipality of Eijsden. The flooding commenced on Friday and the local fire brigade received several reports of flooded basements and streets. Although the rain had reduced, water continued to flow into Voeren from higher areas in Liège triggering the situation. In Liège, the provincial disaster plan had been activated and the Verviers fire brigade had been overburdened with calls from the Herve plateau. Although the heaviest rainfall had reduced, the Royal Meteorological Institute cautioned about thunderstorms and heavy showers. It had also affected France and Germany; the A4 motorway from

Strasbourg to Paris was partially closed, and Germany's Saarland region had been experiencing flooding and landslides. There had been transport disruption in Belgium and the Netherlands too. (Daniel Harper, "[Severe flooding wreaks havoc across northern Europe](#)," *Euronews*, 19 May 2024)

Europe's Green Deal generating heated debates across the EU

On 19 May, *Euronews* reported on the much-debated Green Deal policy across Europe that aims to make the Union carbon-neutral and achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The implementation appears to be challenging due to its possible implications on the economic sectors. In the Czech Republic, the main concerns came from the industry as some factories were struggling with the government's plan to reduce emissions by 30 per cent by 2030. The deal seemed to affect the country due to its decline in the industrial base recently and the workers were afraid as they were unprepared for this. The debate in Ireland was focused on farming as the plan to reduce the emissions by 25 per cent by 2030 would only be possible by culling the herds. The practice of turf cutting which is a traditional activity in Ireland to cut turf on the properties for domestic use could also end. With these policies, Europe is striving to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, but it has a long way ahead. (Julian Gomez, "[Is Europe's Green Deal entering a grey zone?](#)," *Euronews*, 19 May 2024)

European Commission to investigate Meta over DSA compliance

On 16 May, the European Commission opened an investigation into the parent company of Facebook and Instagram over the safety concerns of children. The Commission believed that both platforms may "exploit the weaknesses and inexperience of minors and cause addictive behaviour" with their access to inappropriate content. It also expressed its concerns over the "rabbit hole" effect which shall "draw one into more and more disturbing content," Since Facebook and Instagram are designated as very large

online platforms (VLOPs), they should follow the most rigorous DSA rules or sanctions which were implemented last year. If Meta could face fines of up to 6 per cent of its global revenues if found to have broken the rules. It is already under investigation for deceptive advertising and political content. ("EU probes Meta over child protection concerns," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 May 2024)

15 EU countries issue a joint call for the outsourcing of migration and asylum policy

On 16 May, a group of 15 countries led by Denmark pushed for a call to develop the outsourcing of migration and asylum policy to enhance the contribution towards an equal, constructive, and broad partnership among the countries to manage irregular migration in Europe. Apart from Denmark, the signatories are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Romania, and Finland. The statement comes after the bloc had committed to the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. The countries have also suggested complementary efforts to combat the issue. The letter that they issued was addressed to the high-ranking officials in the European Commission. They have followed the examples of the border deals between the EU and the countries of Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt but it differs greatly as the latter does not include provisions to transfer asylum seekers from one country to another. Even though this is considered to be controversial, the signatories think it to be the right way to explore solutions to rescue migrants. They have also pushed for more stringent rules against the instrumentalisation of migrants, human trafficking and smuggling which have already been covered under the New Pact. Altogether, the letter indicates that there is much to look into other than the policies under the New Pact. (Jorge Liboreiro, "15 EU countries call for the outsourcing of migration and asylum policy," *Euronews*, 16 May)

EU to introduce reforms for migration and asylum

On 14 May, the EU approved the reforms for migration and asylum seekers under the so-called New Pact on Migration and Asylum with the new rules coming into effect from 2026. It has been in work for eight years and the economy ministers of the Union's 27 countries have given the final nod for tougher borders and shared responsibility for asylum seekers among the members. The final approval just came before the election to the European Parliament. The pact comprises 10 pieces of legislation, backed by the majority of the bloc's countries except Hungary and Poland. The new rule seeks to make the European asylum more effective in increasing the solidarity among the members. Under the new rules, the asylum seekers are to be identified within days of arrival so that their details will be stored in an EU database to determine their chances of risk in permitting to stay. In case of a burden faced by a particular country, it will be able to request more solidarity with all 27 members to decide together in a crisis. The new pact also works for the faster deportation of people if they are declared safe. ("EU to introduce reforms for migration and asylum," *Deutsche Welle*, 14 May 2024)

Norway and Germany signed deal to develop 3SM Supersonic Strike Missile

On 13 May, Kongsberg Defense and Aerospace (Norway's defence and aerospace systems supplier) and Diehl Defense (Germany's weapon manufacturer) with MBDA Deutschland (Germany's missile system company) entered into a new partnership agreement to develop German and Norwegian Supersonic Strike Missile (3SM) Tyrfinn. The 3SM will be a new, long-distance, maneuverable naval strike missile to be deployed along with the existing Naval Strike Missile (NSM). According to Thomas Gottschild, the managing director of MBDA Deutschland, "standoff weapons are crucial for credible deterrence and defense." The weapon will be intended to meet future surface threats and as a joining force

between both countries. ("Norway and Germany form 3SM supersonic strike missile team," *navatechnology*, 13 May 2024)

Booking.com to face market regulation under EU's DMA

On 13 May, the EU listed Booking.com, an online travel giant along with other big digital companies such as Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Google parent Alphabet, and TikTok. This would mean the travel company would now be subject to EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA). The act aims to balance the companies in the digital markets while ensuring EU users have more options when choosing products from web browsers and search engines. DMA also demands the companies to inform the EU ahead of the acquisition of other firms to reduce monopolies. The travel giant with more than 60% share in the Europe market now has six months to prepare for compliance with the act. EU can also impose fines of up to ten per cent of a company's global turnover which might increase to 20% for continued offenders. ("Booking.com to face tough new EU competition rules," *Le Monde*, 13 May 2024)

China and Russia are the primary threats: Politico enlists cyber-attacks witnessed by Europe in 2024

On 09 May, *Politico* reported on the cyber-attacks against politicians, parliaments and other institutions in Europe which led to a massive data breach affecting thousands of people. Hackers from other countries especially China and Russia have been continuously attacking the European systems in 2024. In January, there was a report on a massive cyberattack by Russian hackers that brought down the country's telecoms against the giant Kyivstar. Another attack reported in February was regarding the spyware on the devices of two MEPs of the European Parliament. Following these, German authorities investigated an audio of four paramilitary officers' discussion in support of Ukraine which is alleged to be a disinformation attack in the month of March. Berlin revealed that it had been caught in a cyber-attack from Russia in May

for compromising the email accounts belonging to Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party. Similar attacks followed including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen report being "attacked by bots."

EU elections in June bring out varied opinions on Migration and Asylum

On 07 May, in an opinion published by *Euronews* laid out the manifesto pledges for each of the parties, contesting in the elections for the European Parliament in June 2024. After a surge in the number of asylum applications reached a seven-year high, the top priority for the EU was on migration and asylum. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) led by Ursula Von Der Leyen, European Commission President strongly stands for strengthening external borders, and internal borders, if necessary, with rigorous screening at all entry points. They plan on achieving this by employing more staff and allocating a higher budget to Frontex, the bloc's border and coast guard agency. A simultaneous strategy of transferring asylum seekers to "safe" third countries outside the bloc has been emphasised. By addressing the root causes of migration, Von der Leyen defends the multi-million-dollar agreements her European Commission has made with neighbouring nations, like Egypt, Tunisia, and Mauritania, to strengthen their domestic economies and reduce the number of unauthorized immigrants leaving. Whereas the Party of European Socialists (PES) expressed a humane approach by respecting Human rights and People's dignity. The PES sided with the EPP on all aspects except their strong opposition to "any form of EU border externalisation" as they promoted the European mission for search and rescue in the Mediterranean. The liberals group, Renew Europe Now, was against the populist's racist approach and the network of smugglers to trouble the refugees. The liberals stress the need for economic legal opportunities as the migrants can fill the gaps in the European labour market.

In the case of the Greens Party, its "mandatory relocation mechanism" focuses on the responsibility of the member states to protect the victims of natural disasters, and persecution and to offer special attention to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers. The Greens criticise "dirty deals to dictators," referring to the Egypt and Tunisia agreements. The hard-right European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) party states that the citizens must not be forced to welcome illegal immigrants, thereby contradicting the system of mandatory solidarity. The party encourages the migrants to look for asylum outside the bloc. These principles resemble Giorgia Meloni, Italian Prime Minister's proposal for an EU naval mission to "block illegal departures," rather than to save migrants in distress. The left dismisses the new pact on migration and asylum calling for a "break with Fortress Europe" and also suggests the dissolution of Frontex. The left advises the EU to promote peace and stability in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa to tackle the refugee crisis. (Jorge Liboreiro, "[EU elections: What do parties want to do on migration and asylum?](#)," *Euronews*, 07 May 2024)

EU adopts the first law to combat violence against women

On 07 May, in a press release by the Council of the EU, the first EU law to combat violence against women and domestic violence was officially adopted by the member states. The EU member states are expected to frame a national law on the matter in the next three years. According to the report, the law criminalised female genital mutilation, forced marriage, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyberstalking, cyber harassment, and cyber incitement to hatred or violence with prison sentences ranging from at least one to five years. By setting standards for the protection of victims of these crimes, fundamental rights of equality between women and men are ensured. The EU countries are to ensure that children are assisted by professionals and safeguarded when they report a crime. Additionally, steps to protect a victim's privacy and

prevent repeat victimisation are to be taken during criminal proceedings. However, there were negotiations that a common definition of rape was not mentioned in the law. ("[Council adopts first-ever EU law combating violence against women](#)", 07 May 2024; "[EU adopts first law tackling violence against women](#)", *Deutsche Welle*, 07 May 2024)

Debate over blanket ban on TikTok in Europe

On 03 May, the European officials discussed on banning TikTok during an election debate. There have been continuous investigations and legislations on Chinese technology in the EU. The recent probe on the state subsidies followed the raid of Chinese EV companies. However, there is much contestation on the blanket ban on the video-sharing platform TikTok. Ursula von der Leyen, the European People's Party (EEP) lead candidate proposed for a ban, whereas her political rival, Nicolas Schmit, Luxembourgish Socialist said: "quite American." Following the Digital Services Act, the European Commission, previously took steps to suspend an app feature that rewarded interaction with the recently launched TikTok Lite app. Similar to US, concerns have emerged across Europe on TikTok being a potential Chinese spy tool and largely a national security threat. However, banning TikTok will be a challenge for the EU as it does not have jurisdiction over the national security concerns of its member states. Some EU leaders do not support the ban since it has been used as a major political campaigning tool. (Pieter Haeck, "[Europe is nowhere close to banning TikTok](#)," *Politico*, 03 May 2024)

EU drops procedure to terminate Poland's rights after six years

On 05 May, the EU dropped proceedings against Poland's judicial reforms after the new coalition led by Donald Tusk, Poland's Prime Minister who was elected in October 2023. The conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party, which had governed earlier for eight years had reformed the judiciary. This was perceived by the EU as weakening of

democratic safeguards and subjecting the judiciary to political influence. In response, the EU began the 'Article 7' procedures which can suspend member states if found breaching the EU's founding policies. Additionally, the European Commission withheld billions of euros in funding intended for Poland. In a statement, Polish Ministry of Justice confirmed on considering: "A number of legislative and non-legislative actions to address concerns about the independence of the judiciary." This resulted in the closure of the Article 7 procedures by the EU. ("[EU to drop action against Poland on 'rule of law' concerns](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 06 May 2024)

UN warns Europe to mend its housing crisis

On 05 May, protests took place in Lisbon, Amsterdam, Prague and Milan as rents and property prices raked high. According to Eurostat data, the housing prices and rents have increased by 47 and 18 per cent affecting the middle classes. The far-right parties blamed the migrants and outsiders, while the UN attributed the social gaps to underinvestment and inadequate government planning. This crisis aggravates to a fear of unaffordability of houses and loss of status, thereby extending more support to the far right in these countries, who are forecasted to win in nine EU member states. Suggestion that Housing be given top priority and be made as a legal right in Europe, and building more houses, seems to pave a way out of the crisis. ("[Fix Europe's housing crisis or risk fuelling the far-right, UN expert warns](#)" , *The Guardian*, 06 May 2024

Three Chinese EV makers warned for not cooperating with EU

On 03 May, the European commission warned three Chinese electric car makers for tougher EU fines because they didn't provide enough information over state subsidies. A letter was sent to EV makers BYD, SAIC and Geely on April 23 as a part of the trade investigation, launched by the European Commission last year for allegedly receiving distorting subsidies to produce electric vehicles, potentially

creating an unfair advantage on the EU market compared to European car makers. The trio showed lack of cooperation and failed to provide necessary information despite granting deadline extensions, thereby reverting to the concept of 'facts available' to charge higher duties on Chinese imports. However, Rhodium Group analysts report Chinese EV makers remain profitable despite potential 15-30 per cent EU import tariffs, highlighting their competitiveness.

EU provides aid package to Lebanon to counter refugee influx to Cyprus

On 02 May, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a multi-year economic aid package worth EUR 1 billion (USD 1.07 billion) for Lebanon to adopt reforms and shore up basic services such as education and health care, however with a concern about the increased Syrian refugee migration. Lebanon hosts some 805,000 UN-registered Syrian refugees, of which 90 per cent live in poverty. Cyprus has urged the bloc since the number of migrants was no longer sustainable, and it has suspended the processing of asylum applications by Syrian nationals. This move also came about since Lebanese officials had lately threatened to stop intercepting migrant boats destined for Europe unless Beirut receives more economic support.

Eurostar to take up greener projects in Europe's rail network

On 30 April, a sustainability report released by Eurostar plans to power its trains with 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030 by reducing energy use, sourcing renewable power, minimizing waste and promoting train travel as a greener alternative to flying. Eurostar's high-speed rail connects France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, and the UK. Dutch trains have been using wind power since 2017. In the UK, 40 per cent of energy is from wind from 2023, aiming for 80 per cent with solar by 2025. Eurostar CEO, Gwendoline Cazenave in a bid to seek regulatory support, has begun negotiations with a Belgian railway company, Infrabel, on solar projects to

power trains. It has also become the first rail company to join the RE100 alliance - a global corporate renewable energy initiative. Eurostar aims at making an impact by integrating circularity into its products to minimize waste and use resources more efficiently and improving connectivity with local rail networks and airports to encourage sustainable travel and transfers.

European Council President gives address marking 20 years of the 2004 EU enlargement

On 29 April, Charles Michel, European Council President delivered a speech for the 20th anniversary of the 2004 EU enlargement. The fall of the Iron Curtain led to the enlargement of the European Union, bringing ten new member states in 2004 marking the reunification of Europe. He mentioned how the EU faces new “shocks” in climate, technology and geopolitical transition. He further said that enlargement reflected a desire for freedom and prosperity among new members and fulfils the EU's moral and strategic obligations. It enhances the EU's global influence and economic strength. Enlargement is a cornerstone of EU sovereignty, demanding reforms and preparations on both sides for a stronger, more integrated Union by 2030. During the speech he also talked about a strategy to meet these challenges through strategy of the EU enlargement remains vital for sovereignty and stability. This will be based on three pillars, democratic values, competitive economy and defence readiness. ([“Enlargement then and now: A geopolitical investment in peace and security - Speech by President Charles Michel for the 20th anniversary of the 2004 EU enlargement,” European Council, 29 April 2024](#))

European Council adopts a protocol for cross border data flows with Japan

On 29 April, the European Council adopted the decision on the conclusion of a protocol to include provisions on cross-border data flows in the agreement between the EU and Japan for an Economic Partnership. The

protocol ensures smooth data flow between the EU and Japan, preventing data localization barriers. It streamlines data handling for companies, offering a predictable legal framework and efficient operations. The protocol ensures that the rules on the protection of personal data and privacy of both the EU and Japan, which contribute to trust in the digital economy, will be fully respected. ([“EU-Japan: the Council approves a protocol to facilitate free flow of data,” European Council, 29 April 2024](#))

INTERNATIONAL

US assures Europe for consistent delivery of LNG

On 27 May, *Politico* reported on the statement of a top US energy official reassuring Europe that Joe Biden’s decision to pause approvals for the new liquified natural gas projects would not affect deliveries to Europe. According to David Turk, US Deputy Energy Secretary the move would not affect any current exports or construction. The move by Biden was a bid to ease the climate-conscious voters ahead of the elections in November. The decision shook European industry due to its increasing alliance on the liquified natural gas (LNG) exports from the US. LNG exports from the US to the EU have steadily increased since the Ukraine war started and currently makeup half of the bloc's LNG supplies. Since the U.S. exports about 14 billion cubic feet of LNG per day and it has already approved up to 48 billion cubic feet for export from future projects, it was necessary to review the climatic and environmental implications according to Turk. With the US exporting 7.1 billion cubic feet per day to the EU in 2023, Biden’s move was in connection with France’s pathway to climate neutrality by 2050. (Nicolas Camut, [“US assures Europe: We’ll keep sending you gas, we promise,” Politico, 27 May 2024](#))

UN establishes a day for the remembrance of genocide in Bosnia

On 23 May, the UN voted to create 11 July to be the International Day of Remembrance for the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. On that

day, Serb forces killed around 8,000 Muslim men and teenage boys. The UN condemned "any denial of the genocide" and urged its members to "preserve the established facts." Although the resolution written by Germany and Rwanda does not mention Serbia as perpetrator, some Serb leaders have opposed it in the fear that it will brand them as "genocidal" supporters of mass killing.

Aleksandar Vucic, Serbian President had said he would be at the UN to "fight with all my strength and heart" to block the initiative. Vasily Nebenzia, Russia's UN ambassador also condemned the bill, referring it as "provocative" and a "threat to the peace and security." He also added that the resolution would put all the blame on the Serbs by erasing the "shameful evidence" of NATO bombing the former Yugoslavia. The Srebrenica massacre which killed around 100,000 people took place around the end of Bosnian War when the Serb forces captured the town of Srebrenica, a UN protected enclave at that time. In the following days, Serb troops separated 8,000 Muslim Bosniak men and teenage boys from their wives, mothers, and sisters, and then slaughtered them. Considered to be the single worst atrocity in Europe since World War II, both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice had found this incident to be an act of genocide.

In April and May 1992, the Bosnian Serb army along with help from Yugoslav Army and paramilitary groups began the "ethnic cleanse" drive against all non-Serbian inhabitants from Bosnia. Under this campaign, the Bosnian Serb forces used Siege warfare and systematic persecution as tactics to displace people, confiscate and destroy property and cultural objects including mosques and Catholic churches. The fall of Srebrenica and Cepa the campaign came to an end but the abuses carried out during the "cleansing" were considered war crimes and crimes against humanity but no one was held responsible rather seen as an attempt to "commit genocide" against the non-Serbs and

Bosnian Muslims. As a result of this thousands of Muslims and non-Serb men fled to Cepa, Gorazde and Srebrenica resulting in boom of population in Srebrenica from 37,000 to 60,000. This resulted in turning the Bosnian forces attention into Srebrenica and despite the UN declared it as "safe areas" the forces continued to overrun and engaged in executions furthering war crimes and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to ICRC, 8,000 remain disappeared and accounted since the overrun.

Ireland and other European countries to recognize Palestine as an independent state

On 22 May, *Politico* reported on Ireland decision to recognize Palestinian statehood along with Ireland, Spain, Slovenia, Belgium, Norway, and Malta. Ireland's three-party government consisting of Simon Harris, Prime Minister, Micheál Martin Foreign Minister and Eamon Ryan Environment Minister is expected to announce was expected to be taken along with two other European countries. The Israeli foreign ministry rebuked this anticipated move of Ireland saying that the fact that Hamas leaders are thanking you should serve as a wakeup call. Until now, Sweden has been the only EU member to recognise Palestine as a state. Although none of the G7 nations recognise Palestine, more than 140 of the 193 members of the UN. (Shawn Pogatchnik, "[Ireland and other European countries to recognize Palestinian statehood](#)," *Politico*, 22 May 2024)

IMF warns the UK against additional tax cuts

On 21 May, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advised Chancellor Jeremy Hunt against additional tax cuts in its annual "health check" of the UK economy. According to the IMF, further cuts should only be considered if they are "credibly growth-enhancing and appropriately offset by high-quality deficit-reducing measures." Hunt who had already announced two successive cuts hinted at yet another one in a potential pre-election budget in an

expected attempt to get rid of employee National Insurance entirely. The IMF reports suggested stabilising debt in the long run and easing the debt burden. For that, the IMF suggested boosting government revenue by hiking carbon and road-usage taxation, broadening VAT and inheritance tax bases, and reforming capital gains and property taxation. For positive news, the IMF had pointed out the UK's "stronger than expected" exit from its technical recession second half of 2023, with real GDP growth now forecast at 0.7 per cent in 2024 before rising to 1.5 per cent in 2025. However, due to weak labour productivity and higher-than-expected inactivity levels due to long-term illness, the growth prospects for the UK "remain subdued." (James Fitzgerald, "[IMF warns Tories against further UK tax cuts](#)," *Politico*, 21 May 2024)

Spat emerge between Argentina President and Spain's Prime Minister over governance accusation

On 21 May, the Spanish Government thought that Javier Milei, Firebrand President, went too far with his attention-grabbing statements of accusing Pedro Sanchez, Prime Minister and his wife Begona Gomez at a rally earlier on the outskirts of Spain. Sanchez has rejected the claims against Gomez Jose Manuel Albares, Spanish foreign minister described Milei's words as a direct attack on their democracy, institution, and Spain itself. He added: "A foreign head of state does not visit a country to insult its institutions. The Argentinian leader is yet to issue an Apology to Sachez. Instead, Guillermo Francos, his interior minister, said that Madrid had started the row when Spain's Transport Minister publicly accused Milei of using "substance" during the Presidential campaign last year back. Argentina, a former Spanish colony has enjoyed a friendly relationship with France since the 1863 Treaty of Peace and Amity. Their strong relationship came to a standstill amid the 1982 Falklands War causing fears in the UK that Spain would side with Argentina and invade Gibraltar, a British territory. The issue of status of Gibraltar

was only resolved on 31 December 2020 by the joint agreement between London and Madrid. (Aleksandar Brezar, "[What's behind Milei's latest spat with Spanish government?](#)," *Euronews*, 21 May 2024)

Commissioner for Crisis Management backlashed after expressing solidarity with Iran

On 20 May, Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management insisted that he was not offering any kind of political support to Iran as he was getting criticized for a post confirming the provision of Copernicus satellite assistance to the Iranian rescuers with #EUSolidarity. The rescuers were responding to the reports of Sunday saying that a helicopter carrying Ebrahim Raisi, Iranian President and other top Iranian officials had crashed in a mountainous region near the border with Azerbaijan. Raisi along with his potential successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was confirmed dead Monday morning. Dozens of accounts criticised the post pointing to Raisi's prominent role in the regime which has executed thousands of Iranians, the country's sponsorship of terror, the use of Shahed drones to terrorize Ukrainian civilians, and Tehran's detention of Johan Floderus, Swedish EU official. According to a Commission official, although the tweet was consistent with the EU's guidelines on humanitarian aid, they found the expression to be "odd." While the other officials and MEPs expressed their shock and concern over the particular comment, Lenarčič justified by saying that it was simply an expression of the most basic humanity. (Ben Munster And Nicholas Vinocur, "[EU official triggers backlash after vowing 'solidarity' with Iran](#)," *Politico*, 20 May 2024)

European officials differ on ICC arrest warrant bid for Netanyahu

On 20 May, *Politico* reported that the reactions of the European leaders were split on the arrest warrant of the Israeli top officials. ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan filed applications on Monday for arrests of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, along with the

commander of Hamas's military wing and Israel's defence minister, citing allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Israel and the State of Palestine. While the countries of Belgium, Slovenia, and France expressed their wholehearted support for the ICC's work, the other EU leaders of the Czech Republic, Austria, and Germany were less favourable as they thought that the arrest warrant for the representatives of a democratically elected government together with the leaders of an Islamic terrorist organization was unacceptable. The countries of the US and the UK completely disapproved as the former promised its full support to Israel while the latter found the warrant to be of no use. The US senators had even threatened to target the ICC Prosecutor by imposing sanctions upon him. The requests for warrants will later be assessed by the pre-trial chamber of the ICC. The prosecutor Mr. Khan claimed that if the warrant was being applied selectively, the connections between all the communities and individuals will be lost. According to law experts, the ICC's decision to apply for the arrest warrant suggests a degree of certainty that it would be successful. (Nathalie Weatherald And Ben Munster, "European leaders divided on ICC arrest warrant bid for Netanyahu" *Politico*, 20 May 2024)

US to push for its MEGOBARI Act if the foreign-agent bill reversed in Georgia

On 20 May, *Politico* reported on Carolina Republican Congressman Joe Wilson decision to introduce a draft bill to open "a robust preferential trade regime." This provides chance to meet key political criteria, with improved access to the US markets, the bill also bids for the liberalisation of the visa regime for Georgian citizens. Moreover, it would mandate officials to develop a military support package for Georgia including the "provision of security and defence equipment ideally suited for territorial defence against Russian aggression and concomitant training, maintenance, and operations support elements." However, it

will only be implemented if: "Georgia has shown significant and sustained progress towards improving its democracy, along with substantially fair and free elections and a balanced pre-election environment." The bill would also introduce individual sanctions on the politicians from the ruling Georgian Dream party along with the other officials if they implement the proposed 'foreign-agent bill' that curbed the rights of civil society by branding them as agents of foreign countries. This Act also known as the MEGOBARI Act (Mobilizing and Enhancing Georgia's Options for Building Accountability, Resilience, and Independence Act) induces warnings from Washington. (Gabriel Gavin, "US to consider major military, trade package to Georgia if anti-democratic drift reversed," *Politico*, 20 May 2024)

Americans and British killed in a coup attempt in Congo

On 19 May, there was an apparent coup attempt in the Democratic Republic of Congo with several Americans and British involved according to the army. The Congolese army had prevented the coup and according to the army spokesman, Brigade General Sylvain Ekenge, several attackers had been arrested and killed. The group was led by Christian Malanga who was a Congolese and a naturalized American who got killed according to the security forces. The group made up of numerous nationalities according to Ekenge were about 44 in number out of which 40 got arrested and the remaining four got killed. He also said that the group attempted to attack the institutions since they failed to locate the residences of Prime Minister Judith Suminwa and Defense Minister Jean-Pierre Bemba. The group first attacked the residence of Economy Minister Kamerhe but fortunately, he and his family were not injured even though two police officers were killed protecting them. Lucy Tamlyn, US ambassador had expressed great concerns to Congo on the alleged involvement of Americans in the coup attempt. ("Americans and British are involved in coup attempts by the

army," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 19 May 2024)

World Bank recommends switching to climate-friendly food options

On 07 May, World Bank published explaining on switching to climate-friendly options like poultry, fruits, and vegetables as a cost-effective way to save the planet from climate change. The World Bank suggests cutting red meat, dairy, and such climate-harming products which are responsible for 60 per cent of agri-food emissions. As countries signed the Paris Agreement agreeing to limit global warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius, the World Bank paid more attention to agriculture and food industries. According to the report, governments can partially close the gap by shifting their subsidies from higher-carbon items like dairy and red meat to lower-carbon ones. ("World Bank's climate plan: Pricier red meat and dairy, cheaper chicken and veggies," Federica Di Sario, *Politico*, 07 May 2024)

Chinese president visits Serbia and Hungary for strategic reasons

On 07 May, Xi Jinping's visit to Belgrade after Paris coincided with the 25th anniversary of the US Air Force strike on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, which occurred during NATO's Kosovo campaign. Beyond the remembrance of the bombing, Beijing's interest in Serbia could be due to the significant investments in recent years, constructing roads, owning mines and factories, and providing funding for the building of a railway line that will connect Budapest and Belgrade. However, there are accusations in Beijing over pollution and exploitation of Vietnamese and Indian workers. In a similar effort, China has involved Hungary as the first member of the EU to join its Belt and Road development program. While China views

this project in Hungary as a gateway to the EU, the European Commission is advocating to limit Chinese economic activities in the region. (Amandine Hess, "Why is the Chinese president visiting Serbia and Hungary?," *Euronews*, 07 May 2024)

Chinese President assures to address major issues with Europe

On 06 May, Xi Jinping, Chinese President was welcomed by Emmanuel Macron, French President in Paris to discuss Russia's war and the trade practices between China and the EU to ensure durable peace. At a press conference, Macron welcomed China's proposal to control the sale of arms to Russia. In response, Xi urged Macron to keep China out of the Ukraine crisis. Macron said that Xi had pledged to back a proposal for a ceasefire in all global conflicts during the Paris Olympics this summer and he would support an international peace conference involving Russia and Ukraine "at the right time." ("Macron and Xi discuss Russia, Ukraine and trade", *Deutsche Welle*, 06 May 2024)

Burkina Faso blocks many international media outlets

On 29 April, Burkina Faso's regulatory authority suspended several international media outlets for covering allegations of mass killings by the military. Among the number of media agencies to be suspended were the *Le Monde*, *The Guardian* and the *Deutsche Welle (DW)*. This action was taken after the DW's digital news team covered the Human Rights Watch report about a military junta in Burkina Faso massacre on 25 February that killed at least 223 civilians, including 50 children. Burkina Faso's Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC) said in a statement that the media platforms had published content it said "constituted disinformation."

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