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# EUROPE MONITOR

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# POLITICAL CRISIS IN FRANCE



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An area studies initiative of NIAS

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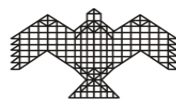
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The objective is to nurture a broad base of scholars, managers and leaders who would respond to the complex challenges that face contemporary India and global society, with insight, sensitivity, confidence and dedication.

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

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## WAR IN UKRAINE: DAILY UPDATES

By Neha Tresa George and Padmashree Anandhan



Source (Clock-wise): Biden announced aid to Ukraine. Source: SAUL LOEB/AFP, Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow. Xinhua/Bai Xueqi, Gabriel Bouys/AFP, Reuters/BBC, Mikhail Metzel/Sputnik, Site of explosion in Taganrog in 2023 Source: Rostov-on-Don region Governor Vsiliy Golubev/AP  
The War in Ukraine section covers the everyday developments from Day 1038 to Day 1011 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 War in Ukraine.

## Europe Monitor

#40, Vol. 05, No. 01, January 2025



Image Source: REUTERS/Sarah Meyssonier

### EM COMMENTS

#### Political Crisis in France

By By Prajwal T V

#### Elections in Ireland: Continuity and Change

By Abhiruchi Chowdhury

#### Norway Stalls Deep-sea Mining Bill

By Neha Tresa George

### EM DAILY BRIEF

By Samruddhi Pathak and Neha Tresa George



Source (Clock-wise): Mikheil Kavelashvili sworn as Georgia's president. Source: Irakli Gedenidze/Pool/Reuters, Friedrich Merz and Chancellor Scholz Image: Michael Kappeler/dpa/picture alliance, Protests in Georgia. quincyinst, EU signs Mercosur deal, Martin Varela Umpierrez/Reuters, European Union, 2024, Giorgi Arjevanidze, AFP

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

## COMMENT

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### Political Crisis in France

By Prajwal TV

*Macron has pledged a special finance law to avoid a shutdown and ensure public services continue. His next steps are critical for restoring political stability and economic confidence.*

On 4th December 2024, for the first time in over 60 years, France's National Assembly ousted Prime Minister Michel Barnier's government through a historic no-confidence vote, after only three months in office, making him the shortest-serving Prime Minister. The motion came after Barnier forced an unpopular budget bill through parliament without a vote. The no-confidence motion passed with 331 votes in the 577-seat National Assembly. This political crisis was a result of a hung parliament following the summer snap elections, leaving no party with a majority and the far right holding significant influence. With no possibility of elections until 2025, France is grappling with a fragile democracy, economic uncertainty, and questions about its leadership under President Macron.

#### **What triggered the No-Confidence Vote?**

The no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Michel Barnier was triggered by his decision to invoke special constitutional powers under Article 49(3) to pass a controversial social security financing bill without parliamentary approval. This move united factions across the political spectrum, including the hard-left alliance and Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally, in opposition. The bill, part of a broader 2024 austerity budget aimed at reducing France's rapidly growing public debt, proposed €60 billion (\$63 billion) in tax increases and spending cuts to bring the fiscal deficit down to 5% by 2025. The no-confidence motion was led by the left-wing alliance, which criticised the government's budgetary priorities for disproportionately impacting lower-income citizens. The far-right supported the motion, framing their opposition as a defence of national

sovereignty against austerity measures allegedly imposed by the European Union.

#### **How did France reach here?**

After the snap parliamentary elections in the summer of 2024, called by President Emmanuel Macron following a series of governance challenges, France found itself with a hung parliament. No party secured a majority, leaving the legislative body fragmented. President Macron's centrist Renaissance party faced significant losses, while the far-right National Rally and the hard-left alliance gained ground. Michel Barnier, Macron's fifth prime minister since 2017, was appointed in an attempt to stabilize governance. However, his tenure was marked by contentious policy decisions and mounting opposition. The country faces significant fiscal pressures, with its budget deficit projected to reach 6% of GDP in 2024 and potentially rising to 7% in 2025 without corrective measures. While the European Union urged France to implement fiscal discipline, austerity measures have faced widespread public resistance. The inability of ideologically polarized parties to collaborate has further deepened instability, particularly on key policies such as the budget.

#### **Where do the parties and leaders stand?**

The hard-left alliance, which initiated the no-confidence vote, rejects austerity policies and advocates for greater social spending. Their opposition is rooted in a critique of Macron's neoliberal economic agenda, which they argue exacerbates inequality. Marine Le Pen's National Rally has indicated that it would accept an emergency bill extending the 2024 budget's tax-and-spend measures into 2025 to ensure temporary financing. However, the party has leveraged the crisis to strengthen its position as a formidable opposition force. Although ideologically

opposed to the left, the far-right joined the no-confidence vote to challenge Macron's leadership and present itself as the defender of French sovereignty. Le Pen framed her support for the no-confidence vote as a stand against the government's "elitist" policies. President Macron has vowed to remain in office until the end of his term in 2027 and has emphasized the need for France to uphold its constitutional framework. However, Macron's ability to govern effectively is severely constrained by the fractured parliament, which has made coalition-building exceedingly difficult.

### **What next for the Parliament?**

The immediate challenge for the National Assembly is to support the appointment of a new government and pass critical legislation, including the 2025 budget. With no parliamentary elections permitted until 2025, the assembly must navigate a period of political deadlock over the next 10 months. The left-wing New Popular Front has already stated it will oppose any government that does not include a left-wing leader, while the far-right remains staunchly opposed to Macron's leadership. François Baroin, a centrist leader, has been mentioned in French media as a potential successor to Barnier. While, President Macron has urged Barnier and his cabinet to stay on as care-taker government till the next Prime Minister is appointed. Without a parliamentary majority and unable to

dissolve the National Assembly until mid-2025, France faces a fractured political landscape. The next government must pass legislation on a case-by-case basis, seeking issue-specific support from opposition parties.

### **What next for President Macron?**

French President Emmanuel Macron is navigating a political crisis following the collapse of Michel Barnier's government after a historic no-confidence vote. With no parliamentary majority, Macron must urgently appoint a new prime minister capable of uniting a fractured legislature and passing the 2025 budget. His options include reappointing a figure similar to Barnier, like François Baroin or Bruno Retailleau, or selecting a loyal ally such as Sébastien Lecornu. Another option is centrist veteran François Bayrou, who may bridge gaps between factions. However, Macron has ruled out appointing a left-leaning PM like Bernard Cazeneuve or Lucie Castets, fearing it would signal defeat to his opposition. Until June 2025, dissolving parliament is not an option, heightening the risk of prolonged stalemates. Macron has pledged a special finance law to avoid a shutdown and ensure public services continue. His next steps are critical for restoring political stability and economic confidence.

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## **COMMENT**

### **Elections in Ireland: Continuity and Change**

*By Abhiruchi Chowdhury*

*The far-right candidates and parties up till now have been unsuccessful in making inroads in Ireland's political system. However, if the issue of housing and health remain unsolved.*

On 29 November, Irish citizens came out to vote for forming their new government. The outgoing government coalition consisted of three political parties - Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Green Party. Sinn Féin remained as the

largest opposition party. It was already clear that the contesting parties would aim to form alliances after the elections as none of the them fought on enough number of seats to form government on their own. Out of the

total 174 seats, Fianna Fáil won 48 seats, followed by Sinn Fein and Fine Gael which won 39 and 38 seats respectively. Green Party slipped from winning 12 seats in 2020 elections to retaining just one seat in 2024.

### **What is the background?**

First, a brief recap of what happened in 2020 and 2016 elections. In 2020 elections, Fianna Fáil clinched maximum number of seats – 38. Sinn Fein and Fine Gael closely followed Fianna Fáil and won 37 seats and 35 seats respectively. The 2020 elections saw the resurrection of Sinn Fein which not only won the maximum number of first preference votes but also increased its share of votes by two times from 2016 elections. In 2016, Fine Gael won the maximum number of seats – 50. Fianna Fáil and Sinn Fein won 44 seats and 23 seats respectively.

Second, the dominance of three major political parties in Irish politics – Sinn Fein, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Sinn Fein has a history of being Irish Republic Army's political wing. It is presently being spearheaded by the charismatic leadership of Mary Lou McDonald. Sinn Fein serves as a third left-leaning alternative to the centre-right parties- Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. In the present election campaign, it promised to work towards United Ireland. In 2020, for the first time, the two rival center-right leaning parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, which have 100 years of history of contention, came together to form the government to keep Sinn Fein out of power. The two parties have remained at the center stage in government formation since formation of the republic.

Third, major electoral issues. Housing crisis and dire state of health care system are the two major concerns of Irish voters. Renting a house in the Republic of Ireland is extremely expensive. The average rent for an accommodation in Ireland roughly comes around to EUR 2000. The Economic and Social Research institute in July 2024 had predicted that Ireland would need to build

53,000 houses every year to shrink the gap between demand and supply. Hospitals in Ireland do not have enough beds to accommodate all those seeking medical treatment. There is a serious shortage in the numbers of emergency beds. There is a significant surge in number of young people suffering from mental health disorders. However, the mental health services in Ireland are overburdened, with patients having to wait for long durations.

### **What does it mean?**

First, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are likely to return to power. However, in addition to the 86 seats which they have, they still need two more seats to cross the threshold required to form the government. Their return to power means, there would be no containment of the surging rent in Ireland and it would rise to unprecedented levels, given their opposition to rent freeze and their soft corner towards landlords.

Second, with Green party losing its voice in the government, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have lost their punching bag whom they could accuse for rising fuel costs. In the absence of Green party from the government, pro-climate action policies would not receive much consideration in government decision making.

Third, it remains unlikely that Fine Gael and Fianna Fail would be able to address and make significant changes to turnaround the present state of housing, health and cost of living crises given its past record and proposed policy measures. Though, Immigration was not among the top concerns of Irish voters, the blame for not being able to manage the issue of housing or health would be put upon immigrants and asylum seekers.

Fourth, the far-right candidates and parties up till now have been unsuccessful in making inroads in Ireland's political system. However, if the issue of housing and health remain unsolved, the day is not far when Ireland joins the infamous list of EU countries which are witnessing the rise of far-right ideological parties.

## COMMENT

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### Norway Stalls Deep-sea Mining Bill

By Neha Tresa George

*Suspension of the bill would spare some time for the country to conduct thorough assessments in this industry thus minimising the risks of threats to ocean and marine ecosystems in the future.*

On 01 December, Norway stalled the deep-sea mining bill approved in January 2024. The bill aimed to allow the issuance of licenses under the "Seabed Minerals Act" to kick-start deep-sea explorations in Norwegian waters from the first half of 2025. The Act suggests the exploration and exploitation of minerals in the continental shelf, safeguarding certain aspects like "value creation, environment, safety and other business activity." While environmentalists hailed the decision as "a crucial win against the destructive industry," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere, from the Labour Party said it was just a "postponement." The government confirmed that preparatory works would be restored by formulating regulations and assessing environmental impacts. According to them, more research should be carried out to open doors for exploitation without much environmental impact.

#### What was the controversial deep sea mining bill?

In January 2024, Norway's Parliament approved the bill on deep-sea mining in Norwegian waters with a margin of 80-20 votes. With this bill, the country becomes the first in the world to move forward with "commercial-scale deep-sea mining." While the country's Conservative, Labor, Centre and Progress Parties were in favour of the bill, the Socialist Left was against it. According to Norway's minister of energy Terje Aasland, the bill would grant licenses in the first half of 2025 to start commercial mining by 2030 in the Svalbard archipelago. The bill opened up 3,00,000 square kilometres of Norway's exclusive economic zone in the Arctic Sea to companies for exploring minerals like lithium, scandium, cobalt, nickel, copper and manganese. Deep-

sea mining helps explore the various rare elements and other critical elements that lie as nodules in the seabed using heavy machinery. They could then be used in electric vehicle batteries, solar panels, wind turbines and other clean or green technologies. Although the bill became the first step toward expanding commercial sea mining, the government did not give a green signal to companies to start mining. They were required to submit proposals and environmental assessment reports which the parliament would then scrutinize. According to the Ministry of Energy state secretary Elisabeth Sæther, the licenses granted would be exploitation licenses. These would enable the companies to begin their "exploration" within the licensed area with appropriate mapping. Despite the name, the license did not allow exploitation but further research. Only the companies registered under the regulations of the legislation would be granted exploitation licenses.

#### What are the primary features of Norway's geography and resources?

Norway is a Scandinavian country located in the northern Europe. It includes the islands of Svalbard and Jan Mayen while bordering Sweden, Finland and Russia. It also has the North Atlantic and the North Sea on the west. The country is home to a wide range of farms, fields, forests, lake, plateaus, glaciers and mountains. The Norwegian Sea lies to the northwest of Norway. It contains rich sediments of oil and natural gas on its continental shelf. The Norwegian Offshore Directorate is responsible for locating the "most commercially interesting mineral deposits" on continental shelf. According to their estimates, some of Norway's seabed minerals are sulphides, manganese crusts and nodules, lithium, cobalt, nickel, and other rare earth elements. The Directorate also pointed out that copper, zinc and cobalt were in high contents. It further noted that

some were found in higher proportion than other parts of the world.

### **What were the responses to the bill by the civil societies?**

Norway's bill was met with criticisms from NGOs, environmentalists, scientists and other countries of the EU along with the UK. They expressed concern regarding the destruction of marine ecosystems, noise and light pollution and the risk of chemical leaks into the ocean. In November 2024, around 120 lawmakers of the EU wrote an open letter to Norway demanding the suspension of the bill. Greenpeace Norway, an independent organization fighting for climate change condemned Norway as it was supporting ocean destruction, despite being the key figure in protecting the ocean. The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) spoke about the lack of knowledge about seabed while pointing out the devastating consequences of deep-sea mining, impacting the unique and unknown flora and fauna. Some of the scientific studies suggest that there would be significant impacts on ocean life with further progress of extraction and mining. One of the reports published by EJF further said that undersea mining was not necessary for clean-energy transition as other on-ground minerals could be utilised for the same. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Norway sued the government for ratifying the bill. They argued that the environmental impact assessment (EIA) carried out by the government was inadequate. The Norwegian Environment Directorate also resonated with WWF's argument. Since Norway has dismissed the bill for now, the status of the case remains pending. While the majority of the people are against the bill, some scientists believe that it would open the prospects of greater investment in the marine environments.

### **What led to the change in the government's stance?**

The decision came after Norway's Socialist Left (SV) Party refused to support the government budget unless the first set of licenses were suspended. WWF Norway praised the SV party for understanding the importance of protecting ocean health and marine life. Moreover, environmentalists,

scientists, climate change activists and almost 32 countries, especially from the EU, sharply criticised Norway's move. It even faced legal action from the WWF for encouraging the exploitation of ocean and marine ecosystems. Apart from that, the country was also at odds with the EU and the UK. However, the government has said that the halt was temporary as further research and assessments would be continued for future explorations. Meanwhile, the three Norwegian seabed mineral start-ups - Stavanger-based Loke, Oslo-based Green Minerals and Bergen-based Adepth set to apply in the first round- haven't commented on the paused bill.

### **What does this mean for Norway?**

Amidst international criticisms against passing the bill, Norway's primary argument was the transition to green energy. Deep sea exploration could be one of the ways to turn away from fossil fuels towards more sustainable energy. Norway has called on all the countries to explore sustainable ways to extract minerals and metals. The bill made Norway the first country in the world to commercialise deep-sea mining and exploration. This would have decreased the dominance of the rare-earth metals industries of Russia and China. In addition, it would have paved the way for more research and development, focussing on marine ecosystems and creating a novel industry with additional jobs. However, the position of Norway as the chair of the Arctic Council and a member of the UN High Seas Treaty was deeply impacted. The bill came at a time when it was trying to maintain "environmental stewardship" in the Arctic. Moreover, it failed to follow the High Seas Treaty conventions, which require the members to conduct environmental impact assessments before approving any ocean activities. The bill also led to problematic relations with the EU, the UK and several other countries fighting against climate change. However, the suspension of the bill would spare some time for the country to conduct thorough assessments in this industry thus minimising the risks of threats to ocean and marine ecosystems in the future. It would also secure the position of Norway amongst the countries where climate change has become a primary concern.



## War in Ukraine: Daily Updates\*

By Neha Tresa George and Padmashree Anandhan



Source (Clock-wise): Biden announced aid to Ukraine. Source: SAUL LOEB/AFP, Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow. Xinhua/Bai Xueqi, Gabriel Bouys/AFP, Reuters/BBC, Mikhail Metzel/Sputnik, Site of explosion in Taganrog in 2023 Source: Rostov-on-Don region Governor Vsily Golubev/AP

### **War in Ukraine Day 1038:** **Russian armed forces claim launching 38 group strikes across Ukraine**

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

On 27 December, Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine, announced that Ukraine had sent 500 tons of wheat to Syria under its humanitarian aid program. According to him, the aid program aims to deal with the food crisis arising after an alliance of various forces in Syria toppled the Russia-backed regime. The program is a part of its "Grain from Ukraine" initiative. The shipment is expected to feed 33,250 families, approximately 167,000 people, over the coming weeks. Each bag of flour can sustain a family of five for a month. Zelensky also informed that the initiative launched in 2022, had saved 20 million people from hunger.

On 27 December, *CNN* reported on the increased drone attacks by Russia in

Ukraine. In May 2024, 400 drone attacks carried out by Russia, while by November 2024, they increased to 2,400. However, the numbers are according to Ukrainian media reports. According to Ukraine, a total of 1,700 drones have been reported so far in December by the Ukrainian media. *CNN* has also reported about increased production of Iranian-designed attack and surveillance drones, usage of a range of Chinese components and recruitment of a very young, low-skilled workforce of Russian teenagers and African women in Russia's southern Tatarstan region. In 2023, Russia and Iran signed a deal to produce drones domestically in Russia. Alabuga drone factory is built to produce the Shahed-136 drones. Under the agreement, 6,000 drones will be manufactured until September 2025. The factory produced 2,738 Shahed drones in 2023. Russia also has an indigenously developed Gerbera drone. According to *CNN*, Russia aims to produce around 10,000 Gerbera drones by the end of 2024.

\* 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.

On 27 December, *Yonhap News* reported that a North Korean soldier died in Ukrainian custody, citing South Korea's spy agency. The US government had also stated before that thousands of North Korean soldiers have died fighting the war for Russia in Ukraine. According to media reports in Ukraine and South Korea, more than 10,000 North Korean soldiers have deployed to fight the Russia-Ukraine war. Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine, said that North Korean soldiers are being provided with fake Russian IDs. Storm Corps, North Korea's best military contingent, has been deployed in Ukraine. The unit is trained in infiltration, infrastructure sabotage and assassinations.

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

On 27 December, *TASS* reported that Russian armed forces had launched 37 group strikes of high-precision weapons and one massive strike in the past week. Russian weapons aimed at energy facilities that maintained the operation of enterprises of Ukraine's military-industrial complex, the infrastructure of military airfields, ammunition depots, fuel storages, strike drones production workshops, storage sites, places of storage, and launch preparations, as well as drone operator training centres. The settlements are Zagryzovo in the Kharkiv Region and Ivanovka, Gigant, Ostrovskeye, Krasnoye, Novy Trud and Storozhevoy in the Donetsk People's Republic. The Russian military claims that Ukraine has lost 11 tanks, 13 infantry fighting vehicles, 13 armoured personnel carriers and 44 armoured combat vehicles and has suffered 2,450 casualties in the past week. In the Battlegroup West, Russia claims to have pushed 3,080 Ukrainian soldiers back and destroyed a Leopard tank, which is manufactured by Germany, two US-made M113, 38 vehicles and 53 field artillery guns. According to Russia's claims, its Battlegroup South destroyed 22 Ukrainian artillery guns, 13 motor vehicles, three armoured combat vehicles, and Ukraine suffered 1,970 casualties. Meanwhile, the Battlegroup Centre of Russia claims that Ukraine lost six infantry fighting vehicles seven armoured personnel carriers, including four US-made M113 and 11 other armoured combat

vehicles.

On 27 December, *TASS* reported that Russia's government claims to have been attacked by Ukraine in six districts of Russia's borderline Belgorod Region, which resulted in casualties of several civilians. *TASS* claims that 17 munitions were fired in four bombardments and 16 UAVs were launched against the settlements of Dubovoy and Razumnoye, the villages of Krasnoye, Krasny Khutor, Nikolskoye, Petrovka, Repnoye, Tavrovo, Cheremoshnoye, Shchetinovka and the farmstead Ugrim. Settlements in the Shebekinsky municipal district were attacked by 52 Ukrainian munitions in six bombardments and five drones. Four of the five drones were shot down by the Russian armed forces, it claims.

On 27 December, *TASS* reported on the claims made by the Russian army on advancing in the Kharkiv region in Volchansk. Andrey Marochko, a military expert, was interviewed by *TASS*, and he said that the army has advanced in the town and forced the Volchya River as well.

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1037:**

**Putin agrees for peace talk mediation by Slovakia's Prime Minister**

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

On 26 December, *Reuters* reported on the

Russian drone attacks in the town of Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region. It destroyed a multi-story apartment building, killing two and injuring two more. Further, regional officials in the Dnipropetrovsk region said that another drone strike in the Nikopol town wounded eight people. Governor of Zaporizhzhia Ivan Federov reported on the strike in the city, however no injuries were observed. On the same, the Ukrainian military confirmed intercepting 21 out of the 31 drones launched in an overnight attack by Russia.

On 26 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported on the claims by the Centre for Strategic Communication and Information Security (CSCIS) and military intelligence. According to CSCIS, the Ukrainian Air Force attacked a plant in Kamensk-Shakhtynsky in the Rostov Oblast region used for producing solid propellant for ballistic missiles. In a statement: "This strike is part of a comprehensive campaign to weaken the capabilities of the Russian armed forces to carry out terrorist attacks against Ukrainian civilians." However, these claims could not be verified by *The Kyiv Independent*. In addition, Ukraine's Military Intelligence (HUR) said that North Korean troops deployed in the Kursk suffered considerable losses. Reportedly, Ukrainian strikes in December resulted in more than 3000 of them being killed. HUR also confirmed the destruction of a North Korean mortar unit. Further, they reported on the logistical barriers faced by the North Korean units, particularly in the front line of the Kursk region.

On 26 December, *The Guardian* cited a poll on the decreasing support for Ukraine in the EU. The YouGov survey suggests that in the past 12 months, the public desire to stand with Ukraine until it won had decreased across France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Denmark and the UK. Meanwhile, an alternative solution through peaceful negotiations was the most preferred option in these countries. It was unclear whether it was because of a "declining interest or increasing fatigue" about the war. The poll pointed out that most people in Sweden, Denmark and the UK opposed giving away Ukrainian territories to Russia compared to

France, Spain, Germany and Italy. About 66 per cent of Danes, 63 per cent of Swedes and Spaniards, 59 per cent of Britons, 53 per cent of Germans and Italians and 52 per cent of French believed that military assistance to Ukraine was not enough. However, only a few proportions of Sweden, the UK, Germany, France and Italy felt they should increase the aid.

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

On 26 December, *RT* reported that Russia approved Slovakia as the suitable location for further peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. Putin said that Slovakia was ready to host peace negotiations. This was because Slovakia had been suggesting a peaceful resolution of the conflict, opposing arms supply to Ukraine by the EU. This comes after Putin held a meeting with Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico in Moscow. According to Putin, unlike other EU countries, Slovakia takes a neutral position. After the meeting, they discussed on ways to end the Ukraine conflict and "military situation."

On 26 December, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke about Russia's stance with the US, France, Ukraine, the EU and Syria. On Ukraine, he said that Russia did not favour pointless discussions on resolution. He added that future agreements should involve steps to prevent violations. He further said that targets would be selected based on threats to Russia. Russia also welcomes open discussions with Trump and hopes for a better understanding of the primary causes of the conflict. However, it expects Washington to take the first step. It had also received several proposals from France to discuss a peaceful resolution with Ukraine. However, Russia seems skeptical about France as it has increased its military aid to Ukraine.

On 26 December, *RT* reported on the statements of Russia's President Vladimir Putin over Ukraine's position to halt the transit deal for the supply of Russian natural gas to the EU. Putin said that although Ukraine needed the EU's help to exist, it was punishing Europeans by suspending the contract. He noted that this would increase the European gases to more than USD 500

per thousand cubic meters. He added that it was Ukraine's policy as Russia opted for "depoliticization of economic issues." He said: "We supplied regularly and paid, and continue pay, by the way, money for transit." The five-year transit agreement between Russian energy giant Gazprom and Ukrainian state energy firm Naftogaz expires on 01 January 2025. The EU gets five per cent of its gas from Russia through Ukraine, and it has pipelines connecting Moldova, Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal has confirmed that the deal would not be extended further despite requests from some EU countries.

On 26 December, *RT* reported Putin's warnings on the usage of Russia's new Oreshnik ballistic missile. He said: "We have more than one system in our inventory, but we are not in a rush to use them, because this is a powerful weapon, designed to address specific problems." He further confirmed the deployment of Oreshnik missiles in Belarus. Earlier, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko informed us about the deployment of ten missiles by Russia and the chances of further installations in the future. Oreshnik missiles can carry multiple warheads with ability to strike at hypersonic speeds.

On 26 December, *Anadolu Agency* reported on the claims put forth by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation on the capture of Hihant village in Ukraine's Donetsk region, lying eight kilometres south of the Kurakhiv reservoir. According to the ministry, the village was captured as a result of an operation undertaken by the Southern Forces. Ukraine has not yet commented on these claims.

On 26 December, *CBS NEWS* reported that Russia's top security agency known as the Federal Security Service detained four suspects allegedly involved in Ukraine's suspected plans to assassinate several senior military officials. The agency said that these people were planning to execute one of the officers with a remotely controlled car bomb. Another officer was to be attacked by an explosive device, hidden in an envelope. However, they did not mention the identity

of the officials who were targeted in this plot. Further, they released a video showing the arrest and interrogation of the unnamed suspects. They also arrested a citizen of Uzbekistan, alleged to have been recruited by Ukrainian special services. This development follows the death of Russian General Igor Kirillov in early December.

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

On 26 December, the *Associated Press* reported that Finnish authorities had detained a Russian ship, the *Eagle S*, for its investigation on the Baltic Sea power cable sabotage. Finnish police and border guards entered the vessel currently being detained in the Cook Islands, in Finnish waters. According to Finnish customs officials, *Eagle S* is an oil tanker, part of Russia's shadow fleet of fuel tankers, used to evade Western sanctions. It cited police statements and reported that the *Eagle S* anchor was suspected of damaging the cable.

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## **War in Ukraine Day 1030:**

**“Ready for negotiations and compromises,” says Putin**

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

On 19 December, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, announced that Ukraine will not allow any transition of Russian gas from 01 January 2025. The statement was made after Zelensky met with other leaders of the EU. The ban will apply to any gas flow coming from Russia since Russian gas is being sold to Europe under the false label of Azerbaijan-made gas. This has led to tensions between Ukraine and Slovakia because Slovakia is highly dependent on Russian gas for energy. Every year, Slovakia imports three billion cubic metres from Gazprom, Russia's gas monopoly, covering most of its domestic demand. However, Slovakia might resort to gas from Azerbaijan but it would be a controversial alternative due to Azerbaijan's poor human rights record. It is a concern for Ukraine since Russia supplies gas to Ukraine labelled as "Azeri gas" while Azerbaijan buys from Russia labelled as "Russian gas" using the same infrastructure. Thus, the EU indirectly buys Russian gas from Azerbaijan. However, Zelensky has said that Ukraine would allow the transit of Russian gas if the European buyer agreed not to pay Russia until the war ended.

On 19 December, Zelensky held a press conference and asked for cooperation from the US and the EU to achieve durable peace. Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the US, has promised to put an end to the conflict in Ukraine. Trump has also stated that he might withdraw support from Ukraine. There is a fear among European leaders that Trump might cut his support for Ukraine and NATO as well. Zelensky said it would be very difficult for Europe alone to support Ukraine without US involvement. On the other side, the collapse of Assad's government in Syria has also led to rise in security concerns and shifted the focus back to the Middle Eastern region. Alexander De Croo, the Prime Minister of Belgium, said the EU needed to “engage with the HTS, show that we are ready to provide a maximum of humanitarian support and try to stabilise the

situation.” The Kiel Institute for the World Economy has calculated that without new US aid packages, the West's total military aid next year could drop from a projected EUR 59 billion to EUR 34 billion.

On 19 December, Lee Sung-kwon, a member of the parliament in South Korea, said that at least 100 North Korean soldiers have died so far during the war in Ukraine while more than 1,000 have been injured. In October, some media house reports claimed that North Korea had sent more than 10,000 soldiers to Ukraine to fight for Russia. The US Pentagon report has confirmed that North Korean soldiers have been killed in Ukraine, however, the number has not been specified. The casualties are recorded to have occurred in Russia's Kursk region where Ukrainians are defending a small area of territory captured in August. On 19 December, Zelenskyy called Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban to suggest a Christmas ceasefire. He also proposed a large-scale prisoner exchange. Zelensky called the prisoner exchange proposal a ‘Political PR.’ He also said that Ukraine will only enter into a ceasefire agreement if it has security guarantees. Zelensky also said, “The ultimate security guarantee would be NATO membership.” He also emphasised the role of the US in ensuring Ukraine a NATO membership. Zelenskyy also called for more air defence systems, to protect nuclear plants and other energy infrastructure that Russia is deliberately targeting. He also listed fighter jets, missiles, ammunition and other weapons as desperately needed.

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

On 19 December, President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, held his annual year-end press conference. He said that Russia had accomplished its mission in Syria and was winning the war in Ukraine. He said that he is ready for potential talks with President Trump. He also expects that the new administration in Washington will push for a negotiated end to the war in Ukraine. Putin also mentioned the capability of the Oreshnik, a new nuclear-capable ballistic missile that Russia recently fired at the Ukrainian city of Dnipro. Putin also said that he had no conditions for starting talks with

the Ukrainian authorities to end the war. In November Putin was open to discussing a Ukraine ceasefire deal with Trump, but ruled out making any major territorial concessions and insisted Kyiv abandon its ambitions to join NATO. Meanwhile, Zelensky's term has already expired as the President but he has postponed the elections. Thus, currently Zelensky is not a legitimate authority to sign ceasefire agreements. Putin has ruled out any possibility of temporary truce, saying he only seeks permanent peace solutions. On 19 December, North Korea's foreign ministry issued a statement, accusing 10 countries and the European Union of "distorting and slandering" its cooperative ties with Moscow. North Korea called it "reckless provocation." Australia, Canada and Germany described North Korea's growing involvement in Ukraine as a "dangerous expansion of the conflict." Since the war started in February 2022, North Korea and Russia have deepened their military and strategic ties. North Korea justifies that it has the sovereign right to strengthen its cooperation with Russia. North Korea claims it was making "crucial efforts to preserve regional and global peace and security."

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

On 19 December, Defence Secretary of the UK, John Healey, met Rustem Umerov, the Defence Minister of Ukraine, and announced five principles for UK's support to Ukraine. The UK promised to offer more training to Ukrainian soldiers. The package announced by the Defence Secretary will increase Ukraine's military capability with new maritime drones, boats, air defence systems and counter-drone systems. The new package includes EUR 92 million for equipment to enhance Ukraine's naval capabilities, including small boats, reconnaissance drones, uncrewed surface vessels, loitering munitions, and mine countermeasure drones, directly supporting the maritime coalition co-led by the UK and Norway. EUR 68 million for air defence equipment including radars, decoy land equipment, and counter-drone electronic warfare systems. EUR 26 million to provide support and spare parts for critical systems. EUR 39 million to provide more than 1,000

counter-drone electronic warfare systems and for joint-procurement of respirators and equipment to enhance the protective capabilities of Ukraine's Armed Forces. On 19 December, Chancellor of the Federation of Germany, Olaf Scholz, in a speech at a German-Ukrainian business forum said, "If you invest in Ukraine today and in the coming years, you are investing in a future EU member." He also informed that German trade with Ukraine had grown from some EUR eight billion in 2021 to almost EUR 10 billion in 2023 and around 2,000 German companies were active in Ukraine. Denys Shmygal, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, said "the role of private business is key" in the rebuilding of the country. Germany has been Ukraine's second biggest military backer after the US. The German Federation has supplied Kyiv with a total of EUR 37 billion in aid since the start of the war. However, the future of German support is still uncertain since snap elections in Germany are due to 23 February. Scholz also called Trump to discuss western allies' unity for support to Ukraine.

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1029:**

**"In four or five years, we might be in big difficulty" says Mark Rutte**

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

On 18 December, *RT* reported on the "counter-sabotage operation" carried out by the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) in a government quarter in Ukraine. In collaboration with other law enforcement agencies such as the civilian National Police and military police the operation was carried out. According to SBU, the operation aimed to "Check the counter-sabotage protection of the area and the safety of people eligible to state-level security." The officers checked the building for restricted items. The SBU asked citizens to be cooperative, prepare themselves for any inconveniences and to carry identification documents with them. However, it was not evident whether the operation resulted in any practical results. The operation which came a day after the assassination of the Russian General aimed to strengthen the security of Ukraine's primary leaders.

On 18 December, *RT* reported on starting of a criminal investigation by Investigative Committee of Russia on Brazilian national Lucas Ribeiro de Jesus for fighting as a mercenary along with the Ukrainian troops in the Kursk region. In a statement: "He is suspected of being a mercenary and carrying out a terrorist attack in Kursk Region." He was also condemned for torturing and killing two Russian Prisoners of War (POWs). The Investigative Committee said that De Jesus illegally crossed the Russian border along with Ukrainian troops. They are taking further steps to monitor and locate his accomplices.

On 18 December, *RT* reported on the statements of the Press Secretary of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov on the peace talks brokered by the upcoming US President Donald Trump. He said that the Kremlin has not received any information

from the team of Trump on possible negotiations with Ukraine. Trump had promised to negotiate a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia during his campaigns. According to Western media sources like Reuters, retired Lt Gen Keith Kellogg, named by Trump as the special envoy for Ukraine and Russia would visit Europe and Ukraine. Meanwhile, Bloomberg said that Kellogg would be travelling to Russia after he visits Ukraine. However, his plan was not finalised yet. His agency also commented that he had no plans to visit Moscow yet. Several media reports informed that the main aim of the visit was "fact-finding" and not "active negotiations." Kellogg is expected to be one of the key figures in formulating peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia.

#### **The West View:**

##### **Responses from the US and Europe**

On 18 December, in a **press conference**, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte ahead of the meeting with European leaders and Zelenskyy in Brussels provided remarks on what the discussion would focus on. According to him, the meeting will focus on all aspects and to ensure that the maximum is given to strengthen Ukraine on the ground. The second would be on Ukraine's economy and what a peace deal can contain. However, the aim would be deter Russia from winning. On the question of membership, Rutte said that Ukraine was decided to become a NATO member in 2008 and under former leader Jens Stoltenberg it became an irreversible path. He added that such discussions helped increase the bilateral security agreements between Lithuania and Ukraine. He also cited the example of a joint agency in Poland which traces lessons to be learnt from Ukraine and highlighted the pledge of EUR 40 billion as military support to Ukraine. On the ground, Rutte observed that there was movement in the front line from east to west which is not seen as positive but stated that Russia can do with the heavy cost of the death of soldiers. He assured that NATO working on everything to help strengthen Ukraine's position and that would be the priority. On the NATO countries taking 10 years to reach two per cent of defence spending target, a question was posed how the NATO members would reach the latest target at

this slow pace. Rutte responded stating two per cent pledge and maintaining the same would be safe at present but in the next five years it would be difficult and that demands for a quick decision and discussion on identifying what is needed. He stressed on ramping up the defence production.

On 18 December, the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola addressed the EU and Western Balkans leaders in Brussels emphasising the importance of EU enlargement. He called for the members for an active and faster enlargement of the EU by integrating members, especially the Balkan regions. She noted the increasing geopolitical tensions in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and urged for "real progress." She highlighted that enlargement based on a merit-based approach had been the strongest tool for the EU. She urged the EU members to invest in the Balkan states and thus help them in opening a European Parliament representation in the region. She also encouraged the implementation of reforms in the Balkan states. He asked the countries to make use of the Growth Plan to revamp their economies and resolve bilateral disputes.

On 18 December, *The New York Times* reported on the meeting held between Mark Rutte, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other European leaders in Brussels to discuss the present situation of war. Rutte talked about convincing Russia's President Vladimir Putin that he has nothing to gain in Ukraine and called for increased support for Ukraine. He called for strengthening air defences and increased weapons delivery for Ukraine and noted Zelenskyy's request for 19 air defence systems for protection. Along with Rutte, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Poland's President Andrzej Duda were also set to attend the meeting. The meeting would also focus on Europe's aid to Ukraine and prepare it for a ceasefire in the future.

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1028:**

**Russian General Igor Kirillov killed in a special operation**

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

On 17 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the death of the head of the radiation, chemical and biological protection forces of the armed forces of the Russian Federation Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his assistants. According to Ukrainian security sources, they planned a special operation to kill Kirillov. They said: "Kirillov was a war criminal and an absolutely legitimate target, as he gave orders to use banned chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military." The Russian state media said that one more person was killed apart from Kirillov. He was killed by an explosion caused by a homemade device, outside the residential building in Ryazansky Prospekt, about seven kilometres southeast of the Kremlin. The bomb was reported to have operated remotely and had roughly 300 grams of TNT. The investigative committee in Russia informed that forensic experts and operational services were working on the incident. They added that the explosive was hidden in an electric scooter outside the building. Former Russian Prime Minister and the current chair of Russia's Security Council Dmitry Medvedev has warned Ukraine against a possible retaliation over the incident. The Kremlin was considering this situation as a "terrorist attack." Earlier, Ukraine had accused Kirillov of allegedly using banned chemical weapons in Ukraine which Russia denied. Countries like the UK,



Canada and the US have also sanctioned him and his unit. According to Ukraine, around 4800 occasions have been recorded on Russia's illegal use of chemical weapons in Ukraine since 2022.

On 17 December, *First Post* reported on the statements of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Russia's "shadow fleet." He urged the Western allies to halt Russia's shadow fleet of vessels in the European seas through sanctions and other means. Russia allegedly used these vessels to avoid sanctions from Europe. Zelenskyy said that these vessels were one of the biggest threats as they were used to fund the war in Ukraine. He further said that they were "old, poorly maintained and were operated without proper monitoring."

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

On 17 December, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin held talks with the head of the UN Trade and Development agency Rebeca Grynspan. According to the statements published by Russia's ministry, the discussion focussed on the hindrance posed by the West to Russian food exports. Vershinin pointed out its impact on the global food supply chain. They also talked about working on Russian contributions to grain and fertilizers with the help of the UN. This would strengthen Russia's position to counter challenges to agricultural resources in the international arena.

On 17 December, *Anadolu Agency* reported that Russia claimed to have captured another settlement in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region. According to the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, the forces took control of the Hannivka village, nine kilometres from the south of Kurakhove. This announcement came after Russian troops claimed to have captured Yelyzavetivka, a village located four kilometres southeast of Hannivka. Ukraine has not yet made an official comment on the claims.

On 17 December, *ARAB NEWS* reported on the statements of the commander of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces Sergei Karakayev. He said that Russia was planning to revamp

its ballistic arsenal with new strategic missile systems, maximum-range launches and increased testing amidst security threats. Karakayev said: "In terms of range, there is no place where our missiles cannot reach." He also confirmed publicly Russia's preparation of a new intercontinental ballistic missile system called the Osina and several others. He added that Russia was working on missile systems similar to the recently launched Oreshnik missile. Russia's President Putin said that they would be produced in large numbers soon. Further, he said that Russia's new state armament development program would monitor the measures taken by the US after the expiration of the New START nuclear arms treaty between them in 2026. He also said that Russia could increase the number of the warheads after the treaty expires.

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

On 16 December, *First Post* reported on the sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia's shadow fleet and Chinese entities. The latest round of sanctions included 52 additional vessels that were part of Russia's shadow fleet used to transport oil, arms and grains. This increases the total number of sanctioned vessels to 79. In addition, the UK announced sanctions on 20 ships that were allegedly used for evading sanctions on Russian oil.

On 17 December, *TVP World* reported on the sanctions imposed by the US on North Korea and Russia amidst increased cooperation between the countries. The new wave of sanctions by the US Treasury targeted North Korean banks, generals, officials and Russian oil shipping companies. The listed banks involved Golden Triangle Bank, one of the biggest banks in the northeastern Rason Special Economic Zone, and Pyongyang-based Korea Mandal Credit Bank. These sanctions ban the American companies from trading with these entities and the US assets would be frozen. They also sanctioned Sibregiongaz, AO, the Russia-based parent company. Apart from this, South Korea stated that it had blacklisted 11 people and 15 entities allegedly involved in promoting military cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

On 17 December, the UK announced EUR 35 million as emergency support to aid Ukraine's energy infrastructure in winter. The package involves the creation of a project to generate electricity of up to 20 MW, capable of providing power to 20,000 homes. Another EUR 10 million would be given through the UNHCR to provide 21,000 families with thermal kits, shelter repairs, extra cash payments and generators for winter. Prime Minister Keir Starmer also imposed new sanctions on Russia's shadow fleet targeting 20 vessels. Till now, it has sanctioned over 100 ships, including 93 oil tankers.

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1027:**

**North Korea suffers casualty in Kursk says Pentagon**

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

On 16 December, the *BBC* reported on the damage of two Russian oil tankers in the Black Sea, leading to an oil spill. According to footage released by Russia's Southern Transport Prosecutor's Office, the bow of one tanker was destroyed, and streaks of oil

leaked into the water. The rescue mission managed to rescue 13 crew members from one tanker and 14 from another. However, one of them was reported to be dead. It happened in the Kerch Strait which separates Russia from Crimea. It is also a primary route for exporting Russian grains, crude oil, fuel oil and liquified natural gas. Putin has called for the creation of a working group headed by Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Savelyev to manage the incident. According to analysts, two vessels were small and owned by the company Volgatanker. They could carry around 4300 dead-weight tonnes of oil each.

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

On 16 December, *RT* reported on the statements of Russia's President Vladimir Putin on Russia's defence spending. He said that Russia could not step up its defence expenses indefinitely without considering other spheres. According to him, Russia currently spends around 6.3 per cent of its GDP on defence. He said: "In order for all the components of the country's life – the economy, the social sphere in the broadest sense of the word, science, education, healthcare – to develop, we can't increase these expenses infinitely." Although the current expenses were not as high as in some other countries in the world, he noted that the money should be used "reasonably." He confirmed that Russia would protect itself and its allies while prioritising its economic and social development. He also noted that the lessons learned during the war should be applied to the defence industry. Further, he called for an increase in the production of drones. He also informed that the modernisation of nuclear weapons had reached 95 per cent.

On 15 December, *CNN* reported on the destruction of two Russian tanks- the Volgoneft 212 and Volgoneft 239 vessels in the Black Sea. According to Greenpeace Ukraine, around 3700 tonnes of oil got spilt into the sea. It also informed about a similar incident in 2007, which had resulted in the contamination of the coastlines of the Kerch Strait, impacting marine life. Further, this oil spill had the "potential to be serious" with the area's weather conditions, which could

make the leak “extremely difficult to contain.” To bypass sanctions, Russia had been known for sending oil through its “shadow fleet” to countries like India, China and Turkey. Some left from the Black Sea, and while travelling to the Mediterranean, they turned off their transponders to dodge the international sanctions.

On 16 December, *RT* reported on the statements of Russia’s Defence Minister Andrey Belousov unveiling the number of people enlisted in the army in 2024. He said that around 400,000 people joined the army, and 1200 people voluntarily signed up for military service every day. According to him: “We continue systematic work on staffing the armed forces... Since the start of the year, over 427,000 servicemen have already been recruited.” He added that the military should continue recruiting more people and apply new techniques in personnel training and combat experience. Earlier, the reports indicated that more than 300,000 Russian servicemen were undergoing training in reserve regiments. However, Belousov did not mention the total number of Russian troops participating in the war.

On 16 December, *RT* reported on Russia’s plan to create a new unit of armed forces called the “Unmanned Systems Troops.” Belousov made the announcement as part of Putin’s plans to enhance the use of drone technology on the war front. According to Putin, the creation will be completed in the third quarter of next year. He further said that the usage of drones was increasing, with more than 3500 being used currently on the battlefield. He also noted that the Russian air defence system has showcased “high efficiency” since 2022. Putin has continuously called for an increase in drone production as he believed that Russia needed to address the demands of the battlefield faster.

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

On 15 December, *the Financial Times* reported on the conditions of North Korean soldiers deployed in the Kursk region of Russia. According to the Pentagon, they suffered heavy casualties while fighting alongside the Russian troops. US National

Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that they had been either killed or wounded. Defense Intelligence of Ukraine (DIU) directorate found out that the North Korean troops fighting with the Russian marine and airborne forces attacked the villages of Plekhovo, Vorobzha and Martynovka in Kursk. In retaliation, Ukrainian forces used suicide drones and heavy artillery against them. According to the estimates of the DIU, around 30 North Korean soldiers were either killed or wounded out of the 200 casualties from the Russian side. These claims could not be verified independently. Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claimed that the Russians were trying to hide these casualties by burning the faces of North Korean soldiers killed in the battle. According to Ukrainian think tanks, North Korean soldiers were forced to go through Ukrainian minefields of two kilometres to carry out operations in Plekhovo. They were also replaced with another intake after the losses were incurred during the operation. They also reported on the communication gaps between the North Korean and Russian troops which resulted in huge mistakes. Zelenskyy also warned that the soldiers would also be extended to other parts of the Ukraine to undertake operations.

On 16 December, the Institute for the Study of War reported on the statements made by the defence minister of Russia Andrey Belousov. He said that Russia should ensure that the goals set out by Putin in June 2024 to attain victory. He was referring to Putin’s statements on entering negotiations with Ukraine only after the complete withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev noted that Russia’s current territorial objective involved all four oblasts. Further, Belousov updated on the Russian military’s investments in technologies such as Artificial intelligence, robotics, and quantum computing. He added that the logistics and supply system faced no challenges in 2024. He further said that the Ministry of Defence frequently met to discuss the war.

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## **War in Ukraine Days 1025 & 1025:**

**Russia will achieve its "long-term objectives" says Putin**

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

On 16 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported on the reforms in Ukraine's army under the newly appointed Commander of Ground Forces General Mykhailo Drapatyi. He said the efforts aimed to enhance the recruitment system without tolerance for corruption. The revamp in the recruitment system was intended to improve the training and integrate advanced technology into training and operational purposes. He suggested that the Ground Forces transform into an "elite" military unit, focussing on personnel, technology, and transparent management. He called for better training to prepare soldiers on the frontline and improved social support for the service members. These developments came amidst speculations on personnel shortages in Ukraine's military.

On 14 December, Ukraine's military reported on targeting an oil terminal in Oryol, in the western Russian region. The drone attack resulted in a fire at the facility. On this, Ukraine's chief of staff said that the targeted facility was one of the largest oil terminals in the city, which was part of a "military-industrial complex providing the Russian army. In addition, the governor of Oryol reported that the Russian air defence forces had intercepted the drones during the attack. He also added that there were no casualties.

On 15 December, *Politico* reported on the statements made by Zelenskyy over the deployment of North Korean troops in the Kursk region. He believed that Russia had deployed a "considerable amount" of North Korean troops in the Kursk region. He said: "We already have preliminary data that the Russians have begun to use North Korean soldiers in their assaults. A significant number of them." He added that the Russians put them in combined units to work for operations, especially in the Kursk region. He also stated that the troops could extend to other areas of the front line. Further, he emphasised that Ukraine would defend itself against these forces and their Western partners through coordinated actions.

On 15 December, *the Associated Press* reported on the Ukrainian drone attack on a campus that belongs to Russia's National Guard in Chechnya. The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said that the drone had also struck a site of the Akhmat Grozny riot police battalion, while the defence forces shot down two other drones. In retaliation, he promised to order a missile strike upon the military facilities in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine. However, these claims could not be verified independently.

On 15 December, *Ukrinform* reported that the Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine had shot down over 56 Russian drones in the Chernihiv, Sumy, Kyiv, Poltava, Cherkasy, Khmelnytskyi, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. According to them, the Russians attacked with S-300 anti-aircraft guided missiles and Shahed-type combat drones, along with other types of drones, from the Kursk, Orel, Bryansk, and Millerovo areas. Three of the 56 drones returned to Russia, while the other 49 were invisible. The interception of these drones resulted in damage to apartments, houses, vehicles and other properties in various regions of Ukraine.

On 15 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported on the destruction of a Russian locomotive carrying fuel tanks in the Zaporizhzhia region. The operation was carried out by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the Ukrainian Army's Tavria

Group, the Military Intelligence Agency (HUR), and the Special Operations Forces (SSO). The train, moving with 40 fuel tanks was obstructed by an explosion planted by the SBU in the railroad track near the village of Oleksiivka in the Bilmak district. Meanwhile, HIMARS rockets were shot against the train and the outermost cars, igniting the fuels and preventing the Russians from separating the tanks and thus save some fuel. The operation led to the destruction of a supply line to the Russian army in the region. The targeted railway line turned out to be inoperable.

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

On 14 December, *RT* reported on the statements of Russia's President Vladimir Putin at the United Russia Party plenary session. He said that Russia would not cease to develop despite international threats or sanctions. Till now close to 22,000 sanctions have been imposed since 2014 by the West while Russia has condemned them as illegal, it has continued to maintain its strong presence on the group. Putin added that the country was growing amidst "unprecedented sanctions, blunt interference, and pressure from the ruling elites of certain states." He highlighted: "No blackmail or attempts from outside to hinder us will ever yield results." The party aimed to change its program, charter, and high and general councils. Putin also confirmed that Russia would achieve its "long-term objectives."

On 16 December, *The Express Tribune* reported on Russia's claims to have seized the eastern Ukrainian villages of Vesely Gai in the south of Kurakhove and Pushkino in the south of Pokrovsk, located in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). These "frontline villages" were captured amidst Russia's continued advances to capture Kurakhove and Pokrovsk. The troops were reportedly stepping up their advances in November 2024 than any other month since 2022.

On 15 December, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation reported that the Russian force had intercepted four Patriot anti-aircraft missile launchers provided by

the West to Ukraine. Its statement read: "Russian Air Force jets, along with drones and artillery groups, destroyed a combat control vehicle, an AN/MPQ-65 radar station and four launchers of the Patriot anti-aircraft missile system made in the US." The troops claimed to have captured two villages in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)- Vesely Gai and Pushkino, located south of Kurakhovo and Pokrovsk. Those are a few of the locations still under Ukraine's control. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has referred to these areas as "the most difficult" for Ukrainian forces as Russian troops have rapidly advanced over months.

On 14 December, *RT* reported on the Ukrainian attacks on Russia's Belgorod region. According to the region's governor Vyacheslav Gladkov, the attack resulted in the death of a nine-year-old child and injury of his mother and sister. Gladkov said: "The UAV targeted a residential area in the village of Maysky, located 15 miles from the border with Ukraine." The injured were hospitalised following the event. The governor also circulated pictures of the building to showcase the large-scale damage caused by the artillery and the UAVs. Gladkov further highlighted that around 30 shells and a dozen drones were used by Ukraine's forces in these attacks.

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## **War in Ukraine Day 1021:**

**Russia reports attack in southern port city Taganrog**

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

On 09 December, the *BBC* reported on Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's estimates on the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed in the war. According to him, around 43000 Ukrainian soldiers were killed, and another 370,000 injuries were recorded since 2022. For the Russian side, he claimed that 198,000 Russian soldiers had been killed and a further 550,000 injured. None of the estimates could be verified. The new estimate points out the increase in the number of deaths in Ukraine, compared to Zelenskyy's last estimate of 31,000. This number was similar to the calculation provided by the Western Officials who claimed that Russia suffered almost 800000 casualties.

On 09 December, the *Independent.co.uk* reported on Zelenskyy welcoming Western troops in Ukraine to ensure security. He said: "A troop contingent from one country or another could be present in Ukraine for as long as it isn't part of NATO." He added that there should be a clear understanding of when Ukraine would be accepted into the EU and NATO. The statement comes against a meeting with Germany's opposition leader, Friedrich Merz, in Kyiv. Responding to Merz's emphasis on making Ukraine stronger and capable of negotiating, Zelenskyy said that Putin chose not to end the war.

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

On 11 December, *RT* reported on the Ukrainian attack in the southern Russian port city of Taganrog. According to the Rostov regional governor Yuri Slyusar, the

missile attack destroyed an industrial site. Initial reports indicated that none were harmed. Taganrog, with a population of 242,000, is on the coast of the Sea of Azov and belongs to the Rostov region. The region has been frequently affected by missiles and drones.

On 10 December, *RT* reported on the statements made by Russian President Vladimir Putin on the new Oreshnik missiles. Putin said that the new Oreshnik missile system would reduce the need to use nuclear weapons. He aimed to improve the new missile system rather than Russia's nuclear doctrine. He said: "What we need now is not to improve the nuclear doctrine, but the Oreshnik, because, if you look at it, a sufficient number of these modern systems... simply put us on the brink of virtually no need to use nuclear weapons." Putin has also argued that the Western supplied long-range weapons could escalate and "change the nature" of the war.

On 10 December, *RT* reported on the details by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on the Oreshnik missiles deployed in Belarus. He said that the missiles would have Russian-supplied missiles with locally made launchers. He further said the plan will be executed in the second half 2025. His statements came after Belarus and Russia signed a security treaty that proposed the deployment of Russia's Oreshnik missiles in Belarus. Lukashenko argues that these missiles would provide the country with additional security. He said that the missile system is mighty. Further, numerous sites were considered in Belarus for stationing the missiles. Minsk remained responsible for identifying the potential targets for the strikes.

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

On 09 December, *Kyiv Independent* reported on the visit of Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal to Ukraine. After replacing Kaja Kallas, this was his first visit to Ukraine as the Prime Minister of Estonia. He said: "Supporting Ukraine to victory will remain Estonia's priority, we will not make concessions." He added that Ukraine's victory would mean a win for the EU, the US,

and all the democratic countries.

On 10 December, a joint press conference was held between Zelenskyy and Merz in Kyiv. Zelenskyy said: "Ukraine wants this war to end more than anyone else. No doubt, a diplomatic resolution would save more lives. We do seek it." Later, his spokesperson Serhiy Nikiforov announced holding a meeting with European partners and the US who would be capable of ensuring Ukraine's security. The primary aim of this is to formulate a joint agreement on both negotiations and security. Zelenskyy also said that he discussed a "freezing of the lines" in the war when he met Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron. Citing, Macron's statement on sending European troops to Ukraine, he welcomed it and called for further discussions.

On 09 December, *France24* reported the meeting between Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Germany's Opposition leader Friedrich Merz. Zelenskyy urged for more support to Ukraine from the German side, citing its attempts to join NATO and the usage of long-range weapons. He said: "We are counting on stronger, more decisive actions from Germany, from you personally. We are counting on it very much." Merz, being the leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union, constantly pressured German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to transfer Taurus missiles to Ukraine. He said that his position on delivering Taurus missiles remained the same. He also said: "The war in Ukraine must end as soon as possible. Only if Ukraine can defend itself will Putin enter into negotiations."

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1020:**

**Trump proposes immediate ceasefire and reduction of military aid**

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

On 08 December, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky said peace was necessary for Ukraine to defend itself from Russia. Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the US, recently stated that he could stop all the funding given to Ukraine for the war. Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine are also chalking out their foreign policy towards the US, with Trump elected to power. The article suggests Zelensky has also eased his position on territorial claims and ceasefire negotiations. Zelensky said, "Ukrainians want peace more than anyone else." So far, around 43,000 troops were killed due to the war and 3,70,000 injured. Even Russia is speculated to have lost at least 82,000 soldiers.

On 09 December, Volodymyr Zelensky said that he is open to the deployment of Western troops in Ukrainian territory to defend it from Russia. Zelensky said on his Telegram channel that the deployment of troops would be a step closer to joining NATO. At their summit in Washington in July, NATO declared Ukraine on an "irreversible" path to membership. Ukraine's borders would need to be clearly demarcated before it could join. Currently, one-fifth of Ukrainian territory is under Russian control. Russia launched nearly 500 powerful guided bombs, more than 400 attack drones and almost 20 missiles of various types against Ukraine in the previous week itself. Zelenskyy thanked Joe Biden, the current President of the US who will be stepping down in January, for the latest U.S. military aid of nearly USD one billion.

On 09 December, Zelensky met with Friedrich Merz, the opposition leader in Germany's Bundestag. While greeting the

leader, Zelensky said, “Germany’s assistance is very serious – the second largest in the world after the United States. In total, financial support for our army and humanitarian aid amounts to approximately 37 billion euros.” The two leaders also discussed Ukraine’s integration into the European Union, ensuring European unity, and its role in strengthening Ukraine. The discussion also focussed on the issue of Ukrainian refugees in Germany who fled their homes because of the full-scale Russian invasion. During the press conference, Merz said that the restrictions many Western allies had placed on Ukraine’s ability to use their weapons was “akin to forcing your country to fight with one hand tied behind your back.” Germany has refused to supply long-range Taurus missiles to Ukraine for the war. Merz said that he would reverse the decision if elected to power.

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

On 09 December, TASS published a report on approximate numbers of casualties during the war between Ukraine and Russia. The Russian Defence Ministry reported that the Ukrainian armed forces had lost more than 200 troops in the Kursk area on 08 December. In total, Ukrainian casualties have amounted to more than 39,460 troops since the fighting began in the region. According to the report in TASS, as of 08 December, Ukraine lost more than 200 troops, two tanks, eight armoured combat vehicles, two motor vehicles and three mortars. Since the fighting began in the Kursk Region, Ukraine has lost over 39,460 troops, 234 tanks, 171 infantry fighting vehicles, 123 armoured personnel carriers, 1,241 armoured combat vehicles, 1,100 motor vehicles, 308 artillery pieces, 40 multiple rocket launchers, including 11 HIMARS and six MLRS of US manufacture, 13 anti-aircraft missile launchers, seven transport and loading vehicles, 72 electronic warfare stations, 13 counter-battery radars, four air defence radars, 27 pieces of engineering and other equipment, including 13 counter-obstacle vehicles, one UR-77 mine-clearing vehicle, six armoured repair and recovery vehicles, as well as a command and staff vehicle.

On 09 December, the Russian Federation celebrated its Fatherland Day by honouring the Russian soldiers in the Kremlin. The ceremony included 60 recipients of the Order of Courage and 21 Heroes of Russia. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, also recognised contributions made by researchers, scholars, scientists and workers in the war against Ukraine. Heroes of the Fatherland Day was established in 2007, marking 1769 when Empress Catherine the Great established the Order of St. George the Victorious.

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

On 08 December, in an interview with NBC, Donald Trump said that he is considering reducing military aid to Ukraine and proposing an immediate ceasefire. He claims to have a warm relationship with Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia. He said that he is even reconsidering US membership in NATO. Trump also expects China to play a role in brokering peace between Russia and Ukraine. NATO members have increased their defence budgets partly due to pressure during Trump’s first term.

On 09 December, Kristi Raik, deputy director of the International Center for Defense and Security (ICDS), was interviewed by ERR on issues surrounding Russian aggression and uprising in Syria. She said that the rebellion uprising against Assad’s government in Syria is an indication towards weakening Russian influence. She also said that Donald Trump’s, President of the US, meeting with Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France, is a positive sign for Europe. She also emphasised US support for Ukraine for continuing the war. She said the UK and France are discussing providing Ukraine with more support. All strategies aim to halt military action from Russia, later agreeing to a ceasefire.

On 09 December, Kristen Michal, the Prime Minister of Estonia, arrived in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, to meet Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine. The meeting aims to open an Estonia-Ukraine Business Forum. Michal said, “Russia’s attacks have caused significant damage to Ukraine’s energy system. Estonia’s next aid



shipment of turbines, generators and transformers will arrive here within a month.”

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## **War in Ukraine Days 1018 & 1019:**

The US announces new military package worth USD 988 million to Ukraine

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

On 08 December, *The Washington Post* reported on the meeting between Zelenskyy and Trump in the Elysee Palace against the backdrop of the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral. Zelenskyy said that the meeting was “good and productive.” He also said that the leaders planned to work together and maintain contact. He said: “We all want this war to end as soon as possible and in a just way. We spoke about our people, the situation on the ground, and a just peace.” The meeting also portrayed French President Emmanuel Macron as Europe’s leading Trump influencer. Trump called to end the war in Ukraine quickly. Citing the US military packages to Ukraine, he criticised the government for spending too much on Ukraine.

On 07 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported on the delivery of F-16 fighter jets

from Denmark to Ukraine to strengthen its air defence capacities. Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced it through his social media post. He said: “Denmark’s decisive leadership in defending lives stands out. With this additional reinforcement, our air shield is stronger than ever.” Denmark’s Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen had earlier visited Ukraine and suggested that Danish industries could visit Ukraine and learn from their experience.

On 07 December, *Euronews* reported on the Russian attack in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia Oblast and Kryvyi Rih city. According to Zaporizhzhia’s Governor Ivan Federov, at least nine were killed and 20 more injured in the attack. Federov informed that the Russian attack aimed at a service station resulted in significant damage to nearby homes, businesses and vehicles. He condemned Russia for carrying out this attack, which targeted civilians. Further, he added that Russian forces’ target on the Kryvyi Rih city in the southern region of Dnipropetrovsk resulted in the death of two and injury of more than a dozen. A three-storey building, along with residential buildings and cars, were damaged in the attack.

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

On 07 December, *RT* reported on the statements made by Belarus Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Sergey Lagodyuk on deploying Russian Oreshnik hypersonic missiles. According to him, Russia’s decision to deploy the missiles in Belarus came as a response to the US’s plans to install medium-range missiles in Germany. Russia’s President Vladimir Putin and Belarus’s President Alexander Lukashenko recently signed a security treaty that proposed using all their forces and means with them. Following the meeting, Putin decided to install the Oreshnik missiles in Belarus by the second half of 2025 after determining how soon they would enter regular service with Russia’s strategic forces. This was in response to the decision by NATO in July to deploy the multipurpose Standard Missile-6 (SM-6), the Tomahawk land-attack cruise missile, and a hypersonic missile.

On 08 December, *RT* reported on the statements of the Press Secretary of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov on Donald Trump's estimated loss of Russian troops. In a social media post, Trump said that Moscow had lost around 600,000 servicemen and Ukraine around 400,000 troops along with civilians in the conflict. Peskov claimed this estimate was presented in the Ukrainian interpretation and the numbers were completely different. He added that Ukrainian losses were much higher than the Russian losses. He further said that if the war is prolonged with Western aid, it would lead to the "complete exhaustion of the Ukrainian army."

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

On 07 December, the US Department of Defence announced a military package of nearly USD one billion as security assistance to Ukraine. US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J Austin III stated that the aim was to help Ukraine strengthen its combat power in response to Russia's attacks. The package includes unmanned aerial systems, rocket munitions and support for maintenance and repair programs. Austin announced it during the Reagan National Defence Forum in California. He made it clear that the US always stood in support of Ukraine. He also highlighted the importance of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group and their efforts to defend against Russian attacks. Citing security assistance from allies, he said: "...Together, we have helped Ukraine survive an all-out assault by the largest military in Europe." Austin added that Russia saw around 700,000 casualties, with more than USD 200 billion spent since 2022.

On 06 December, *Kyiv Post* reported on the statements of the EU's new defence chief, Andrius Kubilius, on defence against Russia. According to his estimates from the European intelligence agencies, the EU or NATO could expect Russia's aggression before 2030. He said: "We need to move from what some people call incremental improvement of our defence capabilities to some kind of big bang approach." He referred to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as a "wakeup call" to the EU to defend themselves. However, the EU is still behind

Russia in terms of arms output. So, he said that the EU needed to invest at least EUR 500 billion in defence over the next decade. He also proposed using NATO's long-term capability targets to identify the required finances from the member states. He highlighted that the EU should strengthen its activities not against the upcoming US President Donald Trump but against Putin. He also clarified that the EU needed to rely on the US for long-range missiles to endure a long-term war.

On 07 December, *Le Monde* reported on the joint strategy Germany and the US developed for Ukraine. According to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, he was confident that he and Trump could develop a "joint strategy" for Ukraine. He said: "I have already spoken extensively on the phone with the future US president, and we are also in direct contact with those responsible for security policy." Although Trump has promised a change in the US policy towards Ukraine, he has not revealed his plans or details. He is set to meet Zelenskyy at the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral. Germany, the second largest supporter of Ukraine, had pledged to continue its support. While answering questions from the members of the Bundestag, he emphasised the importance of supporting Ukraine. Scholz highlighted Germany's military assistance to Ukraine as worth EUR 28 billion.

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## **War in Ukraine Day 1017:**

**Putin warns deploying hypersonic Oreshnik missiles in 2025**

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

On 06 December, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko announced an expected treaty between Russia and Belarus assuring security guarantees. He said: “I’m sure that the treaty will ensure the security of Russia and Belarus.” The move comes after a modification to Russia’s nuclear doctrine by lowering the threshold on the usage of nuclear weapons. On the same, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin said that the document would have the potential use of transferring tactical nuclear weapons into Belarus.

On the same day, Putin said that the hypersonic Oreshnik missiles to Belarus could be deployed. He confirmed that the deployment would take place in the “second half” of 2025 as the production of the missiles had “ramped up.” The Oreshnik nuclear-capable missiles were revealed in November and were used to strike Dnipro in central Ukraine escalating tensions in the war. It is also capable of flying 10 times the speed of sound striking up to 5,500 kilometers.

### **The West View:**

#### **Responses from the US and the Europe**

On 06 December, the Czech government reported on Russian oil flowing back to Czech through the Druzhba pipeline. The oil supply had stopped earlier in the southern branch for unknown reasons. The supply has been exempted by the EU for the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. In 2023, the Druzhba pipeline had received 58 per cent of the oil consumed by the Czech. It is also in the process of expansion through the

Transalpine Oil Pipeline (TAL) connecting Italy and Central Europe to end the dependency on Russian oil.

On 06 December, the governments of Sweden and Denmark announced signing a contract with a Swedish military equipment manufacturer to acquire 205 armoured combat vehicles. Out of the 205 CV90 vehicles ordered, 115 will be given to Denmark, 50 to Sweden and 40 to Ukraine. The Contract amounts to SEK 25 billion (EUR 2.17 billion). According to Swedish Defense Minister Pal Jonson: “These investments will make it possible for more Swedish combat vehicles to make Europe, and especially Ukraine, safer.”

On 06 December, Romania’s far-right presidential candidate Calin Georgescu, stated his decision to stop aiding Ukraine on victory. The latest run-off against conservative-liberal reform politician Elena Lasconi scheduled this weekend was stalled after the court’s annulment. The court called for a re-run of the election post-declassification of security documents. Georgescu said: “Zero. Everything stops. I have to take care just about my people. We have a lot of problems ourselves.” As per Romania’s system, the president is the core decider for foreign and security policy.

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## **War in Ukraine Day 1016:**

**Russia would prevent “strategic defeat” says Foreign Minister**

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

On 05 December, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the UN and Red Cross for not providing sufficient aid for Ukrainian captives in Russia which includes children. Ukraine claims that there were thousands of captured Ukrainian civilians in Russia. According to Zelenskyy, around six mayors and community leaders were held captive in Russia. He said that the world was not paying much attention to the Ukrainian prisoners held in Russia. This comes as the Human Rights conference is held in Ukraine. Recently, the death of the mayor of the southern Ukrainian town of Dniprorudne, Yevgen Matveyev and Ukrainian journalist Victoria Roshchyna were held captive in Russia. In 2023, the ICC also launched an arrest warrant against Putin and his children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova on allegations of illegally deporting Ukrainian children.

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

On 06 December, the *South China Morning Post* reported on the statements of Sergei Lavrov in an interview broadcast. He said that Russia would go to any end to prevent their "strategic defeat." This was on the Oreshnik hypersonic missile used by Russia against Ukraine. He said: "The US and the allies of the US, who also provide these long-range weapons to the Kyiv regime – they must understand that we would be ready to use any means not to allow them to succeed in what they call a strategic defeat of Russia." He added that unlike the West, Russia fought for their security interests. He referred to Zelenskyy's peace and victory plan as "pointless." He also said that Ukraine had lost its chance to maintain its territorial integrity as it failed to accept Russia's peace proposals.

On 05 December, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation reported on the phone call held between Russia's Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov and Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Charles Q Brown Jr. According to the ministry, the conversation revolved around the missile exercises in the Mediterranean Sea. In a joint statement: "During the conversation, the US side was informed about the exercises in the eastern part of the

Mediterranean Sea by the Russian Navy and Aerospace Forces groupings, involving live-fire drills and launches of high-precision missiles."

On 05 December, *Anadolu Agency* reported on the statements of Sergei Lavrov on Russia's future relations with the West. He said that if the proposals from the West resonated with Moscow's interests, they would consider normalising relations with them. He condemned the US for indirectly targeting Russia through Ukraine, citing Washington's unkept promises of not promoting NATO. He also warned against the remarks made by European countries on sending their troops to Ukraine. He accused them of not paying attention to the warnings made by Russia's President Vladimir Putin over the dangerous consequences. This was because there were speculations on any deployment of Western troops in Ukraine. Recently, France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said that there were no "red lines" on France's support for Ukraine.

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

On 05 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported on the statements of Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius on Russia's presence in the Baltic Sea. According to him, Russia has increased its naval and civilian presence in the Baltic Sea. These comments came after the alleged Russian firing at a German military helicopter. Pistorius also pointed out the presence of the Chinese fleet in the Sea. He said: "This demonstrates the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea for many, especially for Russia and China, including circumventing sanctions."

On 05 December, *France24* reported that Russia has called for the closure of the Polish consulate in St Petersburg. This move was in retaliation to Poland's closure of the Russian consulate in Poznan in October 2024 over claims of "sabotage attempts" in the country and its allies. In a statement by Russia's Foreign Ministry: "Guided by the principle of reciprocity, three diplomatic staff members of the consulate general of the Republic of Poland in Saint Petersburg have been declared persona non grata." It ordered for

the consulate to be closed on 10 January 2025. In response, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski warned to close all the Russian consulates in his country. He also referred to Russia's acts as "Terrorism."

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1015:**

**UK Government calls for increased support**

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

On 04 December, *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* reported on the decision of NATO to protect Ukraine's infrastructure. The members have confirmed the protection of Ukraine's infrastructure to be the top priority. According to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte: "There was a clear agreement around the table last night that to help Ukraine, particularly with its infrastructure, has to be a priority." The members were discussing providing adequate air defences for protection as Russia was stepping up its attack on energy facilities in Ukraine.

On 04 December, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for increasing reinforcements in eastern Ukraine. This comes after Russia's Defence Ministry claimed that they captured the village of Romanivka, south of the embattled town of Kurakhove in the Donetsk region and

Novodarivka, just above the border in Zaporizhzhia region. Responding to this, Zelenskyy said that Ukraine's position in the war depended on its Western allies. He urged them to supply weapons at adequate time. He said: "The Donetsk directions require significant reinforcement. This particularly involves the supply of weapons from our partners." He further said that Ukraine's long-range capabilities must be strengthened to counter Russia's offensive in the war. Referring to Ukraine's top commander, Oleksandr Syrskyy updates on the war, he added that the situation in Kurakhove and Pokrovsk remained difficult for Ukraine.

On 03 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported that NATO countries might downplayed Ukraine's call for its membership. A NATO diplomat said: "It will take weeks and months to get consensus." While Ukraine submitted its application in 2022, NATO affirmed its path to the alliance in July 2024. Despite Ukrainian officials' continuous bids to membership, the Foreign Ministerial meeting saw no progress in this regard. A US official said: "The best way to support Ukraine is to surge money, munitions, and mobilization." Although the members were keen to provide necessary military assistance to Ukraine, there was no immediate action taken for its accession to NATO.

#### **The West View:**

##### **Responses from the US and the Europe**

On 04 December, the UK government is set to call for increased support for Ukraine at the sidelines of the Foreign Secretary's first NATO Foreign Ministerial Meeting in Brussels. Foreign Secretary David Lammy assured that he would urge the members to step up their military assistance and ensure Ukraine's path to NATO membership. He will also warn the members against Russia's growing alliance with North Korea and Iran. The UK has provided about EUR 12.8 billion of support to Ukraine till now and will also grant EUR three billion per year until it is required. Lammy added that investment in Ukraine's security was just like investment in Euro-Atlantic and global security.

On 04 December, *Politico* reported on the

allegations put forth by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Russia and China. According to him, Germany's cybersecurity and infrastructure were under "severe threat" from Russia and China. He said: "As we all know, the main causes of attacks of this kind that affect our cybersecurity come from Russia. They also come from China from time to time." Scholz also pointed out the incidents of Chinese hacks, sabotage in the Baltic Seas and the alleged shooting of a Bundeswehr helicopter by a Russian ship crew. He believed that the security authorities should take adequate measures against these attacks. Scholz said that Ukraine should consider how things should proceed in the peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. He added that Russian President Vladimir Putin did not seem to have a plan to work in the peace direction.

On 04 December, *Euronews* reported that the oil flow from Russia to the Czech Republic through the Druzhba pipeline was halted. This was confirmed by the Czech authorities. Czech Industry and Trade Minister Lukas Vlcek said that they were prepared for such situations with a "robust system of state services." The company that controls the pipeline Mero informed us that it was investigating the incident. It also confirmed that the country's oil supplies would not be affected by this incident. It added that Czech has 90 days of oil reserves with the TAL and the IKL pipelines are operating normally.

On 04 December, *Euronews* reported on the stance of Olaf Scholz on sending German troops to Ukraine. He refuted the claims of sending troops to Ukraine and said that it was "completely inappropriate" to predict the end of the war. These comments came despite foreign minister Annalena Baerbock's suggestion to send peacekeeping forces to a demilitarised zone after a ceasefire was decided upon. She gave these considerations during a NATO meeting in Brussels.

On 04 December, *Euronews* reported that Annalena Baerbock had called for increasing surveillance in the Baltic Sea in the light of an alleged Russian shooting on a Bundeswehr helicopter. According to

German media, a Russian ship crew shot signalling ammunition at a Bundeswehr helicopter which was on a reconnaissance mission. She announced this incident at the sidelines of a NATO meeting in Brussels. She said: "Putin is attacking our peace order with hybrid attacks." She added that there would be increased monitoring of the pipelines and data cables in the Baltic Sea due to the rise in threats from Russia and its allies. Apart from this, there is an ongoing investigation against the sabotage of a cable connecting Finland, Germany, Sweden and Lithuania.

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1014:**

**NATO calls for strengthening support Ukraine**

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

On 02 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported on a Russian drone attack on Ternopil in western Ukraine. It led to a fire in a residential building. According to Ternopil Mayor Serhiy Nadal, the attack had led to the death of one person and injured three. He said: "Doctors are doing everything

possible to save the wounded.” The emergency services and rescue teams were working to put down the fire and prepare temporary shelters for the rescued residents.

On 02 December, *ABC News* reported on the Russian overnight drone attack recorded by the Ukrainian Air Force. According to them, 52 out of 110 drones were intercepted. Six of them flew into Russian or Belarusian airspace and one was still lingering over Ukraine. Since the attack of Massed Russian drone barrages were increasing during the winters, Zelenskyy pointed out that Ukraine was faced with “Russian aerial terror.”

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

On 02 December, *Reuters* reported on the meeting between the US and Ukrainian defence chiefs Lloyd Austin and Rustin Umerov. They discussed Russia’s new ballistic missiles, the US’s plans for military aid for 2025 and preparation for the upcoming meeting of arms donors. During the meeting, Austin expressed his discontent with Russia’s usage of barrage missiles, UAVs and an Intermediate Range Ballistic missile upon Ukraine’s critical infrastructure. Meanwhile, Umerov considered this meeting as a “strategic planning for 2025” concerning weapons and equipment. He further said that the meeting highlighted the preparations for the upcoming Ramstein Group, an alliance of NATO and the EU, in support of Ukraine. This meeting came amidst the US announcing USD 725 million in aid to Ukraine.

On 03 December, *Swissinfo.ch* reported that the Swiss parliament was planning to limit the issuance of Ukrainian S permits to the residents of war-stricken areas of the country only. Ukrainian S is a permit system that allows Ukrainians to seek protection, residence and livelihood in Switzerland without asylum. The House of Representatives of Switzerland partially approved the alteration with 96 votes in favour. Thus the new change would restrict the permit to people who lived in “contested and partially or wholly Russian occupied areas” of Ukraine. People who lived in areas without fighting would not be granted this

permit. However, this motion would not affect the S status permits for non-Ukrainians.

On 03 December, *Politico* reported on the statements of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer about his support for Ukraine. He said: “The UK must continue to back Ukraine and do what it takes to support their self-defense for as long as it takes.” According to him, this would push Ukraine toward a “just and lasting peace” guaranteeing their future. On the question of whether the UK’s approach was changing to the Ukraine war, Foreign Office Minister Catherine West argued that the UK had always supported Ukraine in achieving peace on its terms. She added that it was in Ukraine’s hands to identify its position during future discussions.

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### **War in Ukraine Day 1013:**

**US-Germany military assistance including land mines**

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

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temporary shelters for the rescued residents.

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### **The West View:**

#### **Responses from the US and the Europe**

On 02 December, *The Guardian* reported on the visit of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to Ukraine. During his visit, he announced a military package of EUR 650 million. He said: “Russia should not be allowed to “impose a dictated peace on Ukraine.” He added that no negotiations should take place without the presence of Ukraine. Scholz expressed his hope to bring a “a fair and lasting peace.” Further, he highlighted that Germany would be the “strongest supporter of Ukraine.” He also highlighted quick delivery of weapons and arms.

On 02 December, *The New York Times* reported that the Pentagon had announced USD 725 million in military assistance for Ukraine. This would include anti-personnel land mines, drones, portable anti-aircraft missiles and anti-tank missiles. In an official statement, the Pentagon said that these were part of increasing security aid to Ukraine as it was bracing for a new offensive from Russia. The arms were provided under the provision of “presidential drawdown authority” which allowed for the smooth transfer of Pentagon stocks to Ukraine. Otherwise, it would take years or months for the defence contractors to manufacture the weapons with new contracts. Till now, there have been a total of 15 drawdowns with USD 4.6 billion of arms, ammunition, vehicles and other supplies.

On 02 December, *Euronews* reported on the visit of Hungary’s Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó to Russia. He met his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and held talks on Russia’s war with Ukraine and the delivery

of energy supplies. Szijjártó said that the war was having negative consequences on the neighbouring countries including Hungary. He added that Budapest was on the “side of peace.” On the resolution of the war, he highlighted the importance of “open diplomatic channels” that promote negotiations. Meanwhile, Lavrov agreed to advocate peace but expressed concern over a “talk of ceasefire in the West.” Szijjártó also met with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak and Russian energy companies to discuss oil and gas imports.

On 02 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the visit of Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock to China. On meeting with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, she raised concerns over China’s growing relations with Moscow. She said that China’s support would affect “the ties between their countries.” She said: “Drones from Chinese factories and North Korean troops attacking peace in the center of Europe violate our core European security interests.” Further, she brought the issue of the EU’s trade tariffs on Chinese EVs into the limelight. She asked the authorities to engage in “constructive discussions” with the EU. This is important for Germany as it is one of the countries that awaits a negative impact on the German car market in China.

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

On 02 December, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported on the rise in revenues of the world’s major arms producers amid wars and conflicts. In the EU, the combined arms revenue of the 27 among the top 100 companies in 2023 saw a 0.2 per cent rise from 2022. The estimated USD 133 billion in revenue was the smallest increase in the world. However, this was because they were working on older contracts during 2023. Meanwhile, some European companies from Germany, Sweden, Ukraine, Poland, Norway and Czechia were able to increase their revenue. These were linked to the war in Ukraine. Two of the Russian companies listed under the top 100 were able to increase their revenue by 40 per cent with an estimated USD 25.5 billion. This pointed to the rise in arms revenues recorded by Rostec, a state-



owned company controlling arms producers. Turkey's Baykar UAVs also recorded a 25 per cent increase in revenue with USD 1.9 billion in 2023. These were widely used in the war in Ukraine.

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## **War in Ukraine Days 1011 & 1012:**

**Ukraine estimates EUR three billion weapon and equipment loss in November**

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

On 01 December, the report from Ukraine's Defence Ministry said that the Russian army had substantial losses in military equipment and personnel in November. According to the report, Russian losses increased during their offensive in the Donetsk sector, aiming to seize the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove towns. The estimates said that 45,720 Russian soldiers were wounded, killed, or captured. The enemy personnel losses were also recorded at 2,030, the highest figure since the war began. According to Ukraine's estimates, Russia's weapons and equipment losses were worth over EUR three billion in November. The Ukrainian forces were reported to have destroyed 307 Russian tanks, 899 armoured combat vehicles, and 884 pieces of artillery.

On 02 December, *The Kyiv Independent* reported that Zelenskyy

appointed General Mykhailo Drapatyi as Ukraine's Ground Forces commander, replacing Oleksandr Pavliuk who was serving from February 2024. On this, Zelenskyy said that Drapatyi had successfully launched the defence in the Kharkiv sector countering the Russian offensive. He was also the commander of Ukraine's 58th Separate Motorized Infantry Brigade from 2016 to 2019. In addition, Zelenskyy appointed Oleh Apostol, the commander of Ukraine's 95th Separate Air Assault Brigade, as deputy commander-in-chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces. Zelenskyy said that the newly appointed officers have proven their effectiveness in the war. He added that internal changes in the Ukrainian army were necessary to attain the goals of the country.

On 29 November, *The Moscow Times* reported that Russia fired over 132 drones in an overnight strike against Ukraine. It had resulted in the death of one person and injury of eight others. Among the 132 drones, 88 were intercepted by Ukraine's Air Defence forces. The resulting debris fell over a healthcare clinic in Ukraine leading to damage to infrastructure. This drone attack came after Moscow launched 90 missiles into Ukraine blocking power supply to over a million people.

On 01 December, *Ukrinform* reported that an explosion in the Dniproviskyi district of the Dnipro region led to the injury of 25 people. According to the Head of the Dnipro Regional Military Administration Serhiy Lysak, efforts were made to minimise the consequences of the attack. A statement from the administration said: "Philanthropists are working at the site. People receive building materials to repair their damaged homes. Kits for a quick recovery - boards, film." It added that a mobile station was deployed to monitor the situation. Injured people were hospitalised and doctors treated them. Serhiy Lysak further said that the families of the four people who died would be provided with financial assistance.

On 01 December, *Reuters* reported on the Russian attack on the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson that killed at least three

people. The attack that targeted public transportation also resulted in the injury of seven people. Russians were reported to be repeatedly attacking the Kherson region with artillery and drones.

### **The Moscow View:**

#### **Claims by Russia**

On 01 December, *Alarabiya News* reported on the statements of the Russian security official Dmitry Medvedev on the ongoing protests in Georgia. He said that a revolution was taking place in Georgia over the government's decision to break down the country's EU accession process. He said: "Georgia is moving rapidly along the Ukrainian path, into the dark abyss."

On 01 December, *Politico* reported on the new budget ratified by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Around 32.5 per cent (RUB 13.5 trillion) of the budget was set apart for national defence. This saw an increase from the 28.3 per cent allocated for 2024. The approval came amidst heightened tensions in the Russia-Ukraine war and the visit of European officials to Ukraine.

On 30 November, *Euronews* reported on the visit of Russia's military delegation led by Defence Minister Andrei Belousov to North Korea. In a meeting with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Un, the countries reached a "satisfactory consensus" on ramping up their strategic partnership to defend each other's "sovereignty, security interests and international justice." Korean Central News Agency quoted Kim who said: "North Korea will invariably support the policy of the Russian Federation to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity from the imperialists' moves for hegemony." Belousov also met North Korean Defence Minister No Kwang Chol and said that their strategic partnership was essential to defend from the "aggression and arbitrary actions of imperialists."

### **The West View:**

#### **Responses from the US and the Europe**

On 02 December, *TRT World* reported on the statements made by the White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan. He said that the US was not considering giving back the nuclear weapons to Ukraine which

it returned after the Soviet Union collapsed. He said: "What we are doing is surging various conventional capacities to Ukraine so that they can effectively defend themselves and take the fight to the Russians, not nuclear capability." On this, Russia commented that it was "absolute insanity." In 1994, Ukraine had given up the nuclear weapons it inherited after the Soviet Union collapsed. This was done under the convention of the Budapest Memorandum, in return for security assistance from Russia, the US and the UK. Meanwhile, Zelenskyy expressed Ukraine's necessity to join NATO to start any negotiations with Russia. He said: "An invitation for Ukraine to join NATO is a necessary thing for our survival." These statements were made during the meeting between the European officials.

On 29 November, *Le Monde* reported on the telephone conversation held between French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Macron pledged to provide "intense support" to Ukraine. He also condemned Russia's "indiscriminate" attacks in Ukraine and said that it violated the principles of the UN Charter. He added that these attacks would not deter French support to Ukraine. France has also said that Ukraine's use of French missiles was an option."

On 01 December, the newly appointed European Council president Antonio Costa, the high representative for foreign affairs Kaja Kallas and EU Enlargement commissioner Marta Kos travelled to Ukraine on their first day of office. The visit aimed to showcase the EU's unwavering support for Ukraine. Kallas and Costa were also set to meet Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Costa said that the EU remained strong with its humanitarian, financial, military, and diplomatic support to Ukraine. "The common European future and Ukraine's planned EU membership" were important issues of discussion. Meanwhile, Kallas said that the EU would resort to transactional language to convince the US. She further said that aid for Ukraine was not charity.

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## EM Daily Brief\*

By Samruddhi Pathak and Neha Tresa George



Source (Clock-wise): Mikheil Kavelashvili sworn as Georgia’s president. Source: Irakli Gedenidze/Pool/Reuters, Friedrich Merz and Chancellor Scholz Image: Michael Kappeler/dpa/picture alliance, Protests in Georgia. quincyinst, EU signs Mercosur deal, Martin Varela Umpierrez/Reuters, European Union, 2024, Giorgi Arjevanidze, AFP

### BELGIUM

#### **Sex workers get rights similar to employment rights for the first time**

On 01 December, Belgium sex workers gained the right to sick days, maternity and pension for the first time in the world. The vote was held in May to give the same employment rights for sex workers to control the abuse and exploitation. On the vote by lawmakers, the sex workers will now get employment contracts and legal protection. As per the law, sex workers will have the right to refuse partners or perform acts and stop at any time. They will not be fired on such refusals. The employers are also expected to be in “good character” to ensure the premise is equipped with panic buttons, showers, clean linen and condoms. The Belgian Union of Sex Workers called the law: “A huge step forward, ending legal discrimination against sex workers.” Some feminist organisations have criticised it as it would be “catastrophic” for young girls and victims of trafficking. (Jennifer Rankin,

“Belgium’s sex workers win maternity pay and pension rights in world first,” *The Guardian*, 01 December 2024)

### CROATIA

#### **Left-leaning president Zoran Milanović not predicted to be re-elected**

On 27 December, *Euronews* reported on the criticism faced by Croatia’s left-leaning president, Zoran Milanović ahead of the presidential election. According to the report, he is a critic of Western military support to Ukraine, who is aiming to get re-elected in the upcoming election. However, he is not expected to get a clear victory. The elections are scheduled for 29 December and if the eight candidates win more than 50 per cent of vote in the first round, a runoff would be scheduled on 12 January. Milanović has also been a critic of centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) Prime Minister Andrej Plenković which have led to clashes on deciding the political future of Croatia. Although the presidential

\* EM Daily Brief are notes published along with daily alert 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.

position is seen as ceremonial having control of political and military. HDZ has expressed its support for university professor Dragan Primorac who has vouched for the country's western alignment, but this also goes over the party's largest corruption scandal. According to one of the political expert, Milanović's re-election is seen as an advantage to balance the ruling party's dominance. (Oman Al Yahyai, "[Croatian presidential election: Milanović faces tough battle for second term](#)," *Euronews*, 27 December 2024)

## DENMARK

### **Copenhagen becomes a preferred destination for marriages finds *France24***

On 27 December, *France24* reported that Copenhagen was one of the most preferred wedding destinations among couples. One of the main reasons was the smooth and cheap procedure. Filing a marriage application with the Family Law Agency would cost around EUR 250. On top of that, some of the agencies have started clubbing trips along with administrative management as part of their packages. The Copenhagen marriages would then be conducted in the city hall with a traditional touch. Another striking feature of the destination is the efficient and digitalised administrative system which delivers fast services. According to a couple, it was simple and fast to get married, divorced and get a new passport in Denmark. It is also one of the destinations where same-sex couples can legally marry. However, there was the question of marriage being recognised as some European countries do not validate marriages conducted in other countries. ("[How Copenhagen became the global hotspot for fast and easy weddings](#)," *France24*, 27 December 2024)

### **Denmark plans to boost Greenland's defence**

On 25 December, the government of the Kingdom of Denmark announced that it plans to boost Greenland's defence capacity. The defence spending could amount to anywhere from EUR 1.34 billion to EUR 13.27 billion. The announcement came after

Donald Trump, the President of the US, made a statement regarding his interest in purchasing Greenland island, which has only 56,000 people. Trump said that the US would seek ownership and control of Greenland for "purposes of national security and freedom throughout the world." Meanwhile, Mute Egede, Prime Minister of Greenland, responded to Trump by saying that "Greenland belongs to the people of Greenland" and that the country is not for sale. Greenland was a colony of Denmark until 1953, after which it was included as a district of Denmark. Trump has also shown interest in the US taking control of neighbouring Canada and territories such as Panama. (Malek Fouda, "[Denmark to boost Greenland's defence after Trump repeats controversial remarks seeking US ownership](#)," *Euronews*, 25 December 2024)

### **Anti-whaling activist freed after five months of jail**

On 17 December, the government of Denmark freed Paul Watson, an anti-whaling activist after five months of jail in Greenland. The Ministry of Justice of Denmark rejected an extradition request filed by the government of Japan for Watson. According to Japan, Watson attacked one of its whaling ships in 2010 which he calls fabricated. He was detained from the port of Nuuk in Greenland after an arrest warrant was issued by the Interpol. Watson was a member of Greenpeace but was later removed due to multiple arrest warrants being issued against him. He founded his own Captain Paul Watson Foundation in 2022. He resides in France. He accuses Japan of carrying out illegal whaling operations. Japan, Iceland and Norway are the only three countries in the world to carry out for-profit whaling operations. In 2019, Tokyo withdrew from the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which oversees the management of whaling and the conservation of whales, to resume whaling in its own exclusive economic zone. ("[Denmark frees anti-whaling activist Paul Watson](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 December 2024)

## FINLAND

### **NATO holds the largest military exercise in Lapland**

On 19 December, *Euronews* reported on the statements of Finland's MP for Arctic Circle Heikki Autto on the military exercises held by NATO. In 2024, NATO held its largest artillery exerciser in Lapland to build a peaceful future. Finland became a part of NATO in 2023 in the wake of Russia's war with Ukraine. Autto said that the country was preparing for attacks as there was an increase in undersea sabotages, disinformation and instrumentalisation of refugees by the Russian-Finnish border. He added that Finland supported Ukraine with all the necessary means. It has the longest border of all the NATO countries with Russia- 1380 kilometres long. According to director of the Dynamic Front 25 exercise, Colonel Janne Makitalo said that the main objective was to "train and develop inter-operability" of NATO's artillery units and prepare against the Arctic harsh conditions. (['If we wish for peace, we have to prepare for war', says Finnish MP for Arctic Circle.](#) *Euronews*, 19 December 2024)

### **107th independence day**

On 06 December, Finland celebrated its 107th independence day. A flag raising ceremony was held at 9 AM in Helsinki. Alexander Stubb, President of Finland, laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Hietaniemi Cemetery in Helsinki. There were also protests and counter-protests being held across the city of Helsinki against rising right-wing sentiment among the Finnish public.. There was also a reception held in the Presidential Palace in Helsinki. The reception was attended by 2,000 guests. (['Finland celebrates 107th Independence Day in cloudy conditions.'](#) *yle*, 06 December 2024)

### **Authorities inspect the damage of two Fiber optic cables connecting Sweden**

On 04 December, Finnish authorities informed of new damage to two fibre-optic cables between Finland and Sweden. This damage has affected around 6000 private customers and 100 business customers.

Finnish Transport and Communications Minister Lulu Ranne said that they took the matter seriously and investigated it with Sweden. While the Swedish Civil Defence Minister Carl-Oskar Bohlin suspected the sabotage, the Finnish police did not believe there was any need to suspect criminal activity. The cables were now repaired. These events followed the rupture of two undersea fibre optic cables in the Baltic Sea last week. This shows the region's vulnerability, which has become more prone to sabotage recently. (['Finland: Outage reported after fiber optic cable damaged.'](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 04 December 2024)

## FRANCE

### **Handovers the first military base to Chad following the withdrawal of forces**

On 26 December, *France24* reported on the handover of France's first military base in Faya-Largeau to Chad, following the withdrawal of French forces. This was after Chad terminated its military cooperation with France in November. According to Chad's military chief, the public would be informed about the French withdrawal from bases in the eastern city of Abeche and the capital N'Djamena. Meanwhile, the French military chief said: "The handover took place in accordance with the calendar and the conditions agreed with Chad." The withdrawal was happening amidst parliamentary elections in Chad where France hosted around 1000 personnel. France further said that military vehicles would leave the country by January through the Cameroonian port of Douala. ([France hands over first military base amid withdrawal from Chad.](#) *France24*, 26 December 2024)

### **New Government formed under PM Francois Bayrou**

On 24 December, the French parliament saw its fourth government being formed in 2024. Elisabeth Borne and Manuel Valls, two former prime ministers, are also a part of the cabinet in the new government as education ministers and overseas territories ministers. Defence and Foreign Ministers are the same as in the previous

government. The new government was formed after three weeks of dissolution of the previous government under Michael Barnier. The new Prime Minister is Francois Bayrou. Many political thinkers perceive Bayrou as a centrist choice who can keep a rainbow coalition on board with most laws. One of his first tasks is to pass the 2025 Budget and reach an agreement. He said his government aims to pass the Budget 2025 by February 2025. Barnier had differences with Marine Le Pen, the leader of National Rally, a far-right party, over spending cuts and tax hikes.

Meanwhile, according to Bloomberg, Bayrou might seek Le Pen's support to pass the new budget. After continuous failed governments, some leaders also demanded Emmanuel Macron's, the President of France, resignation. However, he will complete his second term, which ends in 2027. ("France unveils new government under PM Francois Bayrou," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 December 2024; Kavita Mokha and William Horobin, "Can new premier Francois Bayrou survive France's perilous politics?," *Bloomberg*, 24 December 2024)

### **President Macron faces criticism from Mayotte; Pledges to aid reconstruction**

On 20 December, Deutsche Welle reported on the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to the cyclone-hit Mayotte. The French overseas territory was devastated by Cyclone Chido destroying homes and killing at least 31. Around 2000 were injured in the aftermath of the cyclone. The winds particularly affected the shantytown of Kaweni on the outskirts of the capital Mamoudzou. On Macron's visit, he pledged to help in the reconstruction as he addressed the Mahorais community of the region. After touring the areas on a helicopter, he met with patients and residents who voiced their grievances. They said that the region was not safe anymore with a lack of electricity, water and houses. They added that were fighting amongst themselves for basic necessities. On the social media platform X, Macron announced that there would be a day of mourning for Mayotte. Macron extended his visit amidst criticisms from the local residents. (Macron

vows to rebuild Mayotte after cyclone devastation," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 December 2024)

### **Nicolas Sarkozy will continue to be under house arrest on court order**

On 18 December, the Court of Cassation of France, rejected a plea filed by Nicolas Sarkozy, former President of the Republic of France, challenging the sentence given to him by the lower court. The court sentenced him to three years under house arrest. He was found guilty of corruption in 2014. He has been ordered to wear an ankle electric monitor. Sarkozy's term in office from 2007 to 2012 was marked by high-profile corruption scandals often involving rich sponsors and favouritism for money. He is also charged with demanding and receiving expensive gifts from Mohammad Gaddafi, former dictator of Libya. He is the first French President in the post-war history of France to have been convicted for a crime. ("France: Sarkozy loses appeal, must wear electronic ankle tag," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 December 2024)

### **National Assembly approves special law to maintain core functions**

On 17 December, the National Assembly of the Republic of France approved a special law aimed to maintain core state functions and prevent any interruption of public services. The French constitution allows the lower house to pass a special law in the parliament that rolls over the tax-raising and spending provisions in the current budget to ensure there is no government shutdown in the absence of a proper budget bill. The law comes after Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France, named Francois Bayrou as Prime Minister. The Senate, upper house of the parliament, will approve the law to ensure functioning. ("French parliament avoids government shutdown by passing special budget rollover bill," *France24*, 17 December 2024)

### **Curfew imposed in Mayotte**

On 17 December, the French Government imposed overnight curfews in Mayotte, which was hit by cyclone Chido recently. The Interior Ministry of France has stated that the cyclone has killed thousands of

citizens causing havoc. Meanwhile, Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, has said that he will soon visit the French territory in the Indian Ocean and even declared a national mourning for the victims. The curfew has been imposed to prevent looting, as per the Interior Ministry. The cyclone has affected 70 per cent of the habitants. Experts believe that the cyclone was fueled by climate change. Mayotte is the poorest region in France, with almost one-third of its population living without a proper roof and thus offered scant protection against the storm. (["France imposes nighttime curfew on cyclone-hit Mayotte in bid to prevent looting," France24, 17 December 2024](#))

### **Macron to visit Mayotte after being hit by a devastating cyclone**

On 16 December, thousands of lives were affected by a cyclone in Mayotte, a French island in the Indian Ocean. Emergency workers are still rescuing individuals strangled. This was the worst cyclone in almost a century. He announced that he will be travelling to Mayotte in the coming days. He also announced national mourning for the victims. The cyclone that hit the region was cyclone Chindo. Cyclone Chido devastated large parts of East Africa on 14 and 15 December with winds of more than 200 kilometres per hour. (["Emmanuel Macron vows to visit cyclone-hit Mayotte," Deutsche Welle, 16 December 2024](#))

### **François Bayrou strengthens ties with political parties**

On 16 December, François Bayrou, the new Prime Minister of the Republic of France, met with Marine Le Penn to discuss formation of the new government. His appointment is being considered as a positive step by political thinkers amid the political turmoil that the country is facing. He is the sixth Prime minister under Emmanuel Macron, the President of France. Apart from getting all political parties on board, including the far-left and far-right parties, to remain in power, he also has to get the budget for 2025 passed by the National Assembly in the parliament. The former Prime Minister, Micheal Barnier, resigned from the post after a no-

confidence motion was passed against him. The motion was backed by far-right and far-left as well. Barmier became the shortest serving Prime Minister with a tenure of 91 days. According to Euronew, Bayrou is planning to meet all parties except far-left party France Unbowed (LFI), which has refused to deal with. (["France's Le Pen hails 'positive' meeting with new PM Bayrou," Euronews, 16 December 2024](#))

### **François Bayrou named as the new PM**

On 14 December, Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France, named the new Prime Minister, François Bayrou. When Macron took the Presidential office in 2017, Bayrou was named the Justice Minister. In February 2024, he was also acquitted from a case about fraudulent employment of parliamentary assistants by his party, the judge ruling that he was owed the "benefit of the doubt." Bayrou would be the sixth Prime Minister under Macron's presidency. It is a critical time for France as its parliament has been without a government for almost 100 days. Bayrou has worked with former Presidents like Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Jacques Chirac. Bayrou also authorises a biography of the 16th- and 17th-century French king Henry IV. He also stood for the Presidential elections in 2002. However, he managed to win less than seven per cent of votes and was eliminated in the first round itself. (["François Bayrou, Emmanuel Macron's centrist ally and France's new PM," France24, 14 December 2024](#))

### **Macron to appoint a Prime Minister in the next 48 hours**

On 10 December, *Agence France-Presse* reported that Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France, aims to name the new Prime Minister in 48 hours. The president invited leaders from all the political parties except leaders of the far-right party Rassemblement National (RN) and hard-left party La France Insoumise (LFI). Macron is determined to not announce any upcoming elections until the end of his term. Meanwhile, the political turmoil in France remains. The Greens party have ruled out joining a "national interest" government, while the Socialist



party leaders have said they would only serve under a left-wing Prime Minister. Even the budget for 2025 has not been passed yet. The budget deficit of France is six per cent of its GDP, much higher than the EU average of three per cent. ([“Macron aims to name prime minister 'within 48 hours'”](#), *Le Monde*, 10 December 2024)

### **President Macron calls for cross-party talks to discuss new executive**

On 08 December, *Le Monde* reported on the decision of France’s President Emmanuel Macron to call for “cross-party talks.” According to him, this meeting intended to “form or make a government of national interest.” His office stated that only the members keen to compromise had been invited to the meeting, leaving out the far-right Rassemblement National (RN) and hard-left La France Insoumise (LFI). The other party members were invited to Macron’s Elysee Palace. This meeting points out that a new executive will not come into place quickly as the country faces a political crisis. Politicians have also called for Macron’s resignation after the no-confidence vote’s success. However, he has pledged to complete his tenure, promising “30 months of useful action.” The allies have warned Macron against the current uncertainties prevailing in the country. They believe the upcoming Prime Minister should be “compatible with the left.” Meanwhile, the RN’s head Jordan Bardella, slammed Macron’s decision to exclude them. ([“Macron calls for cross-party talks to form new government.”](#) *Le Monde*, 08 September 2024)

### **Notre-Dame holds first mass after restoration**

On 08 December, Notre Dame, a famous Cathedral in Paris, was reopened to the public as a place for worship. Notre Dame was heavily damaged in a fire in 2019 and has been under construction since then. The inaugural mass was led by Archbishop Laurent Ulrich, along with 150 bishops and more than 100 priests. It was also attended by Emmanuel Macron, the president of the Republic of France, and other global leaders like Donald Trump, the President of the US. The Archbishop also said, “This morning,

the pain of April 15 2019 has been erased.” Around 2,500 attended the second service on Sunday evening. The event was organised amid political turmoil in the country. Micheal Barnier, former Prime Minister of the Republic of France, lost the motion of confidence in the parliament. Donald Trump was also the guest of honour for the event. The cost of reconstruction was around EUR 700 million. The cause of the fire in 2019 could not be found despite a forensic investigation. The church expects 14 to 15 million visitors this year. It was a unique 19th century Gothic building. Almost 2,000 have contributed to the reconstruction of the church. ([“Notre-Dame Cathedral holds first Mass after five-year restoration.”](#) *France24*, 08 December 2024; Stephanie Trouillard, [“Ten key moments in the colossal five-year reconstruction of Notre-Dame Cathedral.”](#) *France24*, 06 December 2024)

### **Socialist Party to discuss with Macron over forming the new government**

On 07 December, Olivier Faure, leader of the Socialist party, told the media that he is eager to discuss the formation of the new government with Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic of France. He said, “We need to find a solution because we can’t let the country grind to a halt for months.” Macron also made a statement recently that he is looking for a Prime Minister who will represent all blocs in general. However, leaders of the Greens party were not invited to the President’s office for the formation of the government. Therefore, the Greens party has issued a statement asking the Socialist party to be careful while negotiating with Macron. (Clea Caulcutt, [“French Socialist leader extends olive branch to Macron as talks on next government begin.”](#) *Politico*, 07 December 2024)

### **Barnier to remain caretaker of the parliament; Macron pledges to stay till his term**

On 05 December, Micheal Barnier, the Prime Minister of the Republic of France, handed over his resignation to Emmanuel Macron, the President of the Republic of France, after he lost the vote of confidence

in the parliament. The pressure has again been created on Macron for naming the new Prime Minister. Most world leaders, including US President Donald Trump, will be present in France on 07 December for the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral. Caretaker governments in France are appointed only for a few days until a new government is formed. The media has not reported on any potential successors of the PM position. On 05 December, Emmanuel Macron, the President of the Republic of France, addressed the French citizens through television after the government lost the vote of confidence in the parliament. The address came after Marine Le Pen demanded resignation from the President as well. After the address, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a far-left leader, gave an interview. He said that he was “democratically elected” and will stay “fully” till his term. Macron also said that he will appoint a new Prime Minister shortly and form a government in general interest and a new budget will be passed in January for 2025. He also accused the far-right and far-left parties of causing political chaos in France. (Victor Goury-Laffont, [“France’s Barnier to stay on as caretaker prime minister after resigning.”](#) *Politico*, 05 December 2024; Clea Caulcutt, [“Macron to Le Pen: I’m not going anywhere.”](#) *Politico*, 06 December 2024)

### **Government loses the no-confidence motion**

On 04 December, *Euronews* reported that France’s Prime Minister Michel Barnier lost the confidence motion in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament. Among the 577 legislatures, 331 from the left-wing New Population Front and far-right National Rally voted in favour of the no-confidence motion. This has pushed the country into political and economic security. Mathilde Panot, the leader of the hard-left party France Unbowed (LFI) said that this was a historic day for France and democracy. There is also pressure on the President of France, Emmanuel Macron to resign. However, his resignation is not considered as a “good solution” by some of the politicians from the Socialist Party. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the RN said:

“There was no other solution.” However, she did not consider the result as a “victory.” She added that she did not prefer an early call for presidential elections and Macron would have to make the decision. In the end, she stresses that RN would work for a budget that is acceptable for all. Meanwhile, other politicians from the right-wing parties opposed the vote as it would destabilise the country. Macron will address the country but there are no further details on his plans. ([“French far-right leader Marine Le Pen claims government collapse 'is not a victory'.”](#) *Euronews*, 04 December 2024)

### **“No-confidence vote in France could spell bad news for the economy” says *Deutsche Welle***

On 03 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the likely impact of the vote of no confidence passed against France’s Prime Minister Michel Barnier on the economy. Barnier’s attempt to reduce the public deficit from six per cent to three per cent in the proposed budget for 2025 faced a backlash in the parliament. Barnier, without a majority in the parliament, is now facing the threat of a no-confidence vote from the left and the right-aligned parties in the parliament. These uncertain circumstances come amidst some stable economic figures. French GDP is expected to grow by 1.1 per cent, the unemployment rate remains low at 7.4 per cent, and inflation has reduced from two per cent to five per cent. However, economists point out that French companies have become less competitive than Chinese ones. It was also estimated that the investors have become “cautious” since the war in Ukraine. They further pointed out that the number of companies filing for insolvency increased to 65000 from 56000 in 2023. Some analysts argue that the government’s failure and the lack of budget for 2025 would exacerbate the economic crisis. ([“Is France heading for an economic storm?”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 03 December)

### **President Macron meets Saudi Crown Prince; Deepens strategic partnership**

On 03 December, *Le Monde* reported on the meeting held between French President

Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They signed a strategic partnership strengthening their bilateral relations. This move aimed to deepen cooperation in: "Defence, energy transition, culture and mobility between the countries." They also called for a de-escalation of conflict in the Middle East and presidential elections in Lebanon. The leaders called for elections in Lebanon with the aim to bring the people together and carry out reforms. Macron's visit marks the first visit of a French President to Saudi Arabia since 2006. (Macron and MBS sign strategic partnership, call for elections in Lebanon, *Le Monde*, 03 December 2024)

### **Prime Minister Barnier pushes the 2025 budget; Opposition threatens with no confidence vote**

On 03 December, *Le Monde* reported on the political turmoil in France. French Prime Minister Michel Barnier pushed the social security financing plan by invoking Article 49.3 of the constitution. He said: "I honestly believe that the French people will not forgive us if we prefer partisan interests to the best interest of the nation." His move was followed by opposition from radical left party and far-right Rassemblement National (RN) which threatened to pass a no-confidence motion against the government. The government would fall if the motion is passed. The President of the RN party Marine Le Pen has been opposing several parts of the budget and threatening to pass a no-confidence motion. In case the government falls, it would be the first successful no-confidence motion after 1962 and the shortest-serving government since the establishment of the Republic. (French PM forces social security budget bill through, exposing his government to a no-confidence vote, *Le Monde*, 03 December 2024)

## **GEORGIA**

### **Officials face sanctions from the US and the UK over violence in protests**

On 20 December, the US and the UK imposed sanctions on Georgian officials as a retaliatory measure to the "unjustified violence" against Georgian protestors. The

US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said: "The United States strongly condemns the Georgian authorities' ongoing, brutal and unjustified violence against Georgian citizens, including peaceful protesters, media members, human rights activists and opposition figures." He added that the sanctions would restrict all the properties and interests of the officials in the US along with a ban on financial transactions with them. British Foreign Secretary David Lammy also condemned the crackdown on the protests and confirmed that the responsible would be held accountable. The UK sanctioned Georgia's Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri along with his deputy Aleksandre Darakhvelidze and Tbilisi Police Department Director Zviad Kharazishvili. Meanwhile, the US sanctioned Gomelauri and a senior member of a task force Mirza Kezevadze. (US, UK sanction Georgia officials over protest crackdown, *Deutsche Welle*, 20 December 2024)

### **"Lost in crisis" says an opinion in Deutsche Welle**

On 18 December, while being interviewed by *Deutsche Welle*, Gela Vasadze, a political scientist, described the current situation in Georgia as "lost in a crisis." After the national parliamentary elections held in October, Georgian Dream, a far-right party, won the majority while the opposition claimed that the elections were rigged. After the party in power suspended talks with the EU over membership until 2028, protests broke out in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Later, new protests erupted against the election of the new president, Mikheil Kavelashvili. For the first time, the president was not directly elected by the people but by a parliamentary commission. The Georgian Dream party has a majority in this commission. The opposition detests this selection process. Salome Zourabichvili, the current president of Georgia, said that she will not vacate the position until a successor is elected through democratic means. Korneli Kakachia, a political thinker, said that no one knows what could happen on 29 December when the new president is inaugurated and the current head of state refuses to leave office. The judiciary of

Georgia also suspects involvement of Russia in the elections. (“Juri Rescheto, [“Can Georgia still find a way out of its crisis?”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 18 December 2024)

### **Protests escalate as Georgian Dream names their president**

On 15 December, the ruling party Georgian Dream announced plans to appoint their new President Mikheil Kavelashvili, a far-right politician and former footballer. France24 interviewed some protesters who said President Salome Zurbishvili should stay in the office and guide the country through such a difficult time. On 14 December, an electoral college controlled by Georgian Dream is expected to elect Kavelashvili as president in an indirect vote in parliament boycotted by the opposition. Zurbishvili, meanwhile, has refused to step down and is demanding new parliamentary elections, paving the way for a constitutional showdown. With Zurbishvili refusing to leave office, opposition lawmakers boycotting parliament, and protests showing no signs of abating, constitutional law experts say that the vote will be illegitimate and Kavelashvili will see his presidency undermined from the day of appointment. (“[Georgia crisis deepens as new far-right president set to be appointed](#),” *France24*, 15 December 2024)

### **Protests in Georgia enter its 13th day**

On 11 December, protests in Georgia will last 14 days. Protests have been happening in Tbilisi against the ruling party, Georgian Dream. The police have detained more than 300 protesters and have been using tear gas against them. The Georgian government formally applied for EU membership in March 2022 after Russia attacked Ukraine. Georgia was granted EU candidate status in December 2023. Georgians had celebrated this on the streets of Tbilisi. However, the current government suspended EU membership negotiations until 2028, and protestors are also questioning the freeness and fairness of the elections held on 26 October this year. (“[Georgian anti-government protests enter twelfth night amidst intensifying policing](#),” *Euronews*, 11 December 2024)

### **Anti-establishment protests continue**

On 08 December, protests against the government gained more momentum. Protesters gathered in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, with EU flags. The protesters have two main demands i.e., a fresh election after the contested October 26 parliamentary vote and a return to the European path enshrined in their country's constitution. The ruling party, Georgia Dream, suspended the EU membership talks until 2028. The party has also blamed the opposition for staging a protest similar to the Maidan revolution in 2014, which occurred in Ukraine to topple the then pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich. The ruling party claims that the elections were free and fair. However, many experts have pointed out certain irregularities in the elections. This questions the legitimacy of the elections. Around 400 detained by the police for protesting, and 300 injured due to tear gas and pellet guns being used by the police. (Maria Katamadze, “[Why are thousands of Georgians protesting day after day?](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 08 December 2024)

### **Mass protests against the government continue**

On 05 December, the police used water cannons and tear gas to curb protests in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. The protests were sparked in the country after the government suspended talks with the European Union to join the bloc. Euronews reported that retaliation by the police, specifically journalists and reporters. The protests have been going on for a week. More than 300 protesters have been arrested so far. Salome Zourabichvili, the President of Georgia, and the opposition party have accused Georgian Dream, the ruling party, of rigging the elections that took place on 26 October. Protests started on 29 November when the government announced that EU accession talks will be on hold until 2028. Protestors have also accused the government of causing democratic backsliding in the country. Zourabichvili has urged western countries to respond to the ruling party's police brutality by putting strong pressure on the government. (“[Protests across Georgia against suspension of EU accession talks](#)”

enter second week. Euronews, 06 December 2024)

### **Opposition party leader detained in police raid**

On 04 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the leader of an opposition party Nika Gvaramia had been beaten and detained by the police during the protests. This development followed police raids on opposition parties. The party known as Coalition for Change posted a video on the social media platform X, where an unconscious Gvaramia was being carried by several men by the arms and legs when the police raided their offices. The post read: "Gvaramia was dragged by the police and thrown into a detention car as he was physically assaulted and unconscious. This happened on Sharashidze Street." However, the reports are not verified yet. Other opposition parties also informed of police raids without warrants. There was also a report that two leaders from another opposition party Strong Georgia was detained by the police. ("Georgia protests: Opposition says leader beaten and detained." *Deutsche Welle*, 04 December 2024)

### **Protests continue; Government refuses negotiations**

On 04 December, the *BBC* reported on the ongoing protests in Georgia over the ruling Georgian Dream Party's victory in the elections and their policies. Although the Dream Party denies any allegiance to the Kremlin, its recent actions, mainly stalling Georgia's accession process to the EU, will have far-reaching impacts on the country's future. Further, it has not responded or altered its policies following the suspension of its strategic partnership with the US. The protests resulted in hundreds of injuries among the police force and, severe beatings, and facial and head injuries among the protestors. According to the human rights activists of the country, the police resorted to "brutality" and "abuse of their authority." The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze did not agree to negotiations and claimed that the protestors were funded from abroad. The protestors believe that the newly formed Georgian

government is "illegitimate" as the elections were rigged. There seems to be no end to these protests, as the government is not ready to negotiate. It has also led to several resignations from public services and ambassadors, including Georgia's ambassador to the US. ("Georgia's moment of truth: Protesters demand Western path not Russian past," *BBC*, 04 December 2024)

### **Germany expresses support to Georgia's EU accession bid**

On 02 December, the German government expressed its support for Georgia's accession to the EU amid protests. According to the German foreign ministry spokesman Sebastian Fischer: "What is important is that Georgia decides to take this path, and the people we see protesting want to take this path." He condemned the Georgian government for stalling the accession process. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier condemned the violence against the protestors and expressed his support to the people. The ongoing protests continued while several government authorities criticised the suspension of the EU accession. It has resulted in 224 people getting arrested and 21 police officers being injured. ("Georgia: Germany still open to Tbilisi EU membership." *Deutsche Welle*, 03 December 2024)

### **Canada set to impose sanctions on organisations suppressing Georgian protests**

On 03 December, *Euronews* reported on Canada's support to the protestors in Georgia. Canadian foreign minister Mélanie Jolie expressed their concern over Russia's alleged involvement in Georgia. Jolie said that Canada will impose sanctions on "key individuals and also businesses, entities that are involved in either human rights violations or corruption." This was in resonance to the move adopted by the Baltic states- Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. They earlier announced sanctions on people who suppressed the protests. These measures came amidst the fifth day of protests in Georgia. (Canada to impose sanctions against those suppressing Georgia protests. *Euronews*, 03 December 2024)

### **Mass protests continue for the fourth day against the Georgian Dream Party**

On 01 December, thousands of Georgians held mass protests for a continuous fourth night. According to the national media, the protests were held across eight cities leading to roadblocks and shut of access to the Black Sea port of Poti. Since 26 October, Georgia has faced protests since the pro-Russian Georgian Dream Party claimed the win. As a consequence of Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's announcement to pause its accession to the EU, the opposition boycotted the parliament along civil unrest sparked. Whereas incumbent President Salome Zurbashvili, refused to step down and called for a "new vote." She pledged to be in office and called the EU's decision unconstitutional and it was against Georgian's interests. She said: "We only have one demand, which is based on the constitution. The only way to achieve stability is through new elections, there is no other way." Earlier, the European Parliament called for an investigation into the October ballot due to "serious electoral irregularities" and held back the recognition of the Georgian Dream as a winner. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed regret over the Georgian government's decision to divert from EU's principles. In response to the protests, the Interior Ministry said that the actions of the individuals have been violent and police response will be as per the violation. ("Georgia: Mass protests grow entering fourth night," *Deutsche Welle*, 01 December 2024; "Georgia: Clashes outside parliament on third protest night," 01 December 2024)

## **GERMANY**

### **President Steinmeier announces the dates for general elections**

On 28 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the announcement of general elections in Germany. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier made the announcement after Olaf Scholz lost the confidence vote as the Chancellor. Steinmeier said: "I have decided to dissolve the 20th German Bundestag to fix the date for an early election for February 23." He added that "political

stability" was a precious asset for Germany. The leaders of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) had agreed on the date earlier. According to recent opinion polls, the presidential candidate of CDU, Friedrich Merz will lead the polls with the SPD candidate Scholz running behind. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) was also expected to perform strongly with Alice Wiedel as its candidate. However, no party has agreed to work with them so far. Steinmeier said that hatred and violence must be avoided in the election campaigns. He further told the political parties and the voters that the upcoming government would be made to face an economically unstable Germany, wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, immigration and climate change. ("Germany braces for elections as parliament dissolved," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 December 2024)

### **Olaf Scholz approval ratings drop**

On 24 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the unpopular reputation of Olaf Scholz, the former chancellor of the Federation of Germany. Despite the government losing a confidence motion in the Bundestag, Scholz is running for the chancellor again in February 2025, and the Social Democrats Party (SPD) is endorsing him. The current polls show that the Christian Social Union (CSU) and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) are ahead of SDP. His coalition government named the "traffic light" coalition after the three parties' colors i.e., SPD (red), Neoliberal Free Democrats (FDP) (yellow) and Environmentalist Greens (Green) was an alliance among different political ideologies which could not be bridged. While Germany was dealing with COVID-19, Scholz provided billions of Euros of aid to companies to deal with the shutdown. Even though the SPD currently approves Scholz as the top candidate, he has not yet been nominated. A top candidate's official nomination is scheduled at a party conference in January. (Sabine Kinkartz, "How German Chancellor Olaf Scholz became so unpopular," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 December 2024)

### **Alternative for Germany party holds march after Christmas market attack in Magdeburg**

On 23 December, Alternative for Germany, a far-right party, held a march in Magdeburg, a city in eastern Germany, for the victims of a car-ramming attack in a Christmas market that happened on 20 December. The incident left five people dead and more than 200 injured. A Saudi citizen has also been arrested as the suspect behind the incident. Leaders of the AfD party stated, "Terror has arrived in the city." The crowd during the march shouted "Deport! Deport!" The incident has brought issues of security and immigration back to the center of German politics ahead of the February 2025 elections. The Magdeburg market was secured with police and heavy barricades, but the attacker managed to drive through a five-metre gap. He drove into the market in a rented BMW vehicle and drove it through the market, injuring more than 200 people. Questions are being raised about security authorities since the local media also reported that the King of Saudi Arabia had warned the German authorities against the person and his mental illness. The accused refuted to Germany in 2006 and got a refugee visa in 2016. ("Germany far-right party AfD holds march after Christmas market attack," *Le Monde*, 25 December 2024)

### **Outgoing government ratifies the Basic Law amendment to protect the judiciary**

On 19 January, Deutsche Welle reported that Germany's parliament Bundestag took steps to ensure the independence of the Federal Constitutional Court amidst increasing far-right influence. It was one of the final amendments ratified by the government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz. SPD, Greens, CDU/CSU, the FDP and the socialist left party voted in favour of the bill. It aimed to curb the growing strength of the far-right parties, particularly the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The amendment proposed to fix the number of judges which is 16 in number, their tenure of 12 years and their maximum age (68 years). The "Basic Law" would also require the judges to perform duties until an upcoming successor. It also upheld the autonomy of the court's internal

procedures and aimed to secure them from political interference. Apart from that, the appointment of judges also required a two-thirds majority from either of the two parliamentary chambers- the Bundestag and the Bundesrat. According to Germany's Social Democrat Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, the law would ensure that "The enemies of our democracy don't have a gateway" to the judicial system. In response, AfD's member Fabian Jacobi condemned the government for restricting the party from participating in the appointment of judges. While some of the analysts believed that the changes were instrumental, others speculated the provision of the required two-thirds majority. (Ben Knight, "Germany moves to protect top court against far right," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 January 2024)

### **Snap elections to be held as Scholz loses vote of confidence**

On 16 December, Bundestag, the parliament of the German Federation, passed a no-confidence motion against Olaf Scholz, the chancellor of Germany. Thus, Olaf Scholz is no longer the chancellor of the German Federation. However, he is the acting head of state as the country until the next government is formed will remain active on an international level. New elections will be held in February and there will be significant time between the announcement of the elections and the formation of a new government. According to the latest survey, opposition's candidate Friedrich Merz, from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, is ten points ahead of Scholz. Polls suggest that CDU has 32 per cent of the vote share. Meanwhile, Alternative for Germany (AfD) is ahead of Socialist Democratic Party, the party Scholz belongs to. On 17 December, Scholz visited Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the President of the German Federation, to propose dissolution of the Bundestag. 394 members voted against the government, 207 voted in favour and 116 abstained. ("German election: Scholz loses confidence vote," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 December 2024)

### **Schools closed temporarily due to MPOX virus**

On 16 December, the MPOX clade 1b variant

was found to be present in all members of a family. Two children were found to be positive with MPOX clade 1b variant of the virus. The school is near the city of Cologne. The clade 1b variant has caused concern due to the increased risk it poses, however, MPOX is generally not very contagious. The World Health Organization has declared the virus a "public health emergency of international concern" due to its spreading in various parts of Africa where it has killed many people. However, there have been only a few reports of the disease in Germany and no casualties, so far. ("German school temporarily closed after mpox case reported," Deutsche Welle, 17 December 2024)

### **Olaf Scholz to be questioned over tax scandal of EUR 36 billion**

On 05 December, *Politico* reported on the challenges that continue for Olaf Scholz, the Chancellor of the German Federation. Scholz will present himself on 06 December before Hamburg's parliamentary investigation committee due to charges over "cum-cum affairs." The scandal is estimated to be around EUR 36 billion as some banks and corporations have filed for enormous tax reimbursements. He will also be questioned over his dealing with HSH Nordbank which has paid around EUR 126 million to the tax authorities in 2014. Scholz was the Mayor of the Hamburg city-state in 2014. Julia Klöckner, a senior lawmaker from the center-right Christian Democratic Union, said, "Scholz is responsible for the fact that the state has lost millions of taxpayers' money." Germany's snap elections are due in February 2025. The opposition will hold on to the scandal during the elections to make an issue. Meanwhile, Scholz is already struggling with political hold in the country. Scholz has been questioned over other scams before as well. During his time as the Mayor of Hamburg, Scholz met the former head of the Warburg bank, Christian Olearius, several times who stood trial over tax evasion resulting in losses of EUR 280 million. However, the financial lobby in Germany is very strong. Therefore, convicts of financial crimes either are pardoned or get benefit of the doubt due to systematic proceedings in

such cases. (Nette Nostlinger, "€36B tax fraud scandal returns to haunt Germany's Scholz," Politico, 06 December 2024)

### **Demand for chocolate rises amidst global price rise for Cocoa**

On 04 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported that demand for chocolate in Germany had not reduced despite the global price rise of Cocoa. In 2024, there has only been a 1.6 per cent decrease in Germany in 2024. Due to poor harvests, rising shipping prices and demand led to cocoa beans becoming the "most important raw material for making chocolate in 2023. Despite these, the per capita chocolate consumption in Germany remained high. In 2023, according to the estimates, Germans ate up to 10 kilograms of chocolate. They are in high demand, especially during the holiday season. The German sweets industry produced some 1.14 million tons of chocolate products in 2023, a 4.6 per cent increase from 2022. ("Germany can't quit chocolate, despite record-high prices," Deutsche Welle, 04 December 2024)

### **Fifth German-African Business Summit in Kenya**

On 04 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the statements of Economy Minister Robert Habeck at the sidelines of the fifth German-African Business Summit (GABS) conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. He pointed out the business concerns about "security and stability" in Africa. He said: "German investors need a safe and stable investment environment as political uncertainty can be poison for direct investment." He further highlighted that the constant growth rates do not undermine the prospects for more growth. Meanwhile, the head of Kenya's cabinet, Musalia Mudavadi said that Africa had huge potential and condemned the laws and regulations that interfered with the foreign direct investment in the country. He thanked Germany for contributing to science and technology and Kenya's economic development. Habeck also proposed the transfer of African workers to Germany, opening doors for new skills and development. GABS is the most significant event organised by Germany once in two years with participation from 35 African



countries. In 2024, it saw around 800 participants from these countries. ("Businesses need 'safe and stable' Africa to invest: Habeck," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 December 2024)

## GREECE

### **Migrant boat collapses killing five**

On 14 December, five migrants died after the boat carrying them collapsed near Crete, a Greek island. 40 are missing while 39 survivors have been rescued. The Ministry of Migration reported that there has been an increase of 25 per cent in migration in Greece and a 30 per cent increase to Rhodes and the southeast Aegean. There have been quite a few incidents that have led to the death of migrants. In November, eight migrants, six of them minors, died north of the island of Samos, on a route frequently used by people smugglers. ("At least five dead, dozens missing after migrant boat capsizes off Greek island near Crete," *France24*, 14 December 2024)

## ICELAND

### **Most women in Nordic countries are victims of sexual violence study by JAMA reveals**

On 08 December, a study published in JAMA Network Open revealed that almost 40 per cent of women in Iceland have suffered through sexual violence and are struggling with its aftermath i.e., post-traumatic stress disorder. This is shocking because Iceland has been topping the World Economic Forum's global gender equality rankings for 15 years. The study surveyed 28,200 women and found that many of them had living traumas like stillbirth, having a child taken away, divorce, or discrimination and humiliation. Two in three women said they had either witnessed or were a direct victim of unwanted sexual experiences. The researchers have highlighted that the number might be inflated because victims are more likely to complete the survey. Another analysis concluded that women are four times more vulnerable to sexual violence than men. These analyses bring Iceland's image as a gender-neutral country into question. Finland, Denmark, and Sweden all report higher lifetime levels of

sexual or physical assault compared with the rest of Europe. This reflects that there is much room for improvement. Euronews report suggests that the judicial process in such cases can be fastened, and public services can be improved. (Gabriela Galvin, "Inside the 'Nordic paradox': Why the world's best country for women struggles with sexual violence," *Euronews*, 09 December 2024)

### **Government Iceland to allow whale hunting until 2029**

On 07 December, the government of Iceland issued new permits for the whaling season. Under the new permits, 209 fin whales and 217 minke whales can be hunted during the whaling season, from June to September. Animal rights' groups have condemned the new regulations. The government has justified its stance by stating that it will add revenue to the poultry and fishing industry. The government also clarified that a limit will be set for the number of whales being hunted. The country is one of only three in the world that allows whaling for meat, blubber and oil. The other two countries are Japan and Norway. In 2023, whaling was suspended for two months because the whaling methods used did not comply with animal welfare laws. (Amy Walker, "Iceland issues permits allowing whale hunting until 2029," *BBC*, 07 December 2024)

## IRELAND

### **Israel announces closure of its embassy in Dublin**

On 15 December, Israel's Foreign Ministry announced that it was closing its embassy in Ireland, citing the Dublin government's "extreme anti-Israeli policies" as a reason. The bilateral ties between Ireland and Israel have deteriorated after Ireland recognised Palestine as a state and backed a case in the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide in the Gaza Strip. Ireland has also been outspoken regarding its criticism of Israel since the Israel-Hamas war started on 07 October 2023. Gideon Saar, the Foreign Minister of Israel, said: "The actions and antisemitic rhetoric used by Ireland against Israel are rooted in the delegitimation and demonisation of the

Jewish state.” In November, Simon Harris, the Prime Minister of Ireland, said the Irish authorities would detain Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, if he travelled to Ireland since the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for him. After Ireland recognised the Palestinian state, Spain, Norway and Slovenia followed the same suit. In November, Dublin accepted the appointment of a full Palestinian ambassador for the first time. (“Israel shuts Dublin embassy, accuses Ireland of ‘extreme anti-Israel policies’,” *France24*, 15 December 2024)

### **Fianna Fáil secures the maximum seats in the general elections**

On 02 December, Fianna Fáil, the Republican Party won the most 48 seats in the lower house of parliament after the general elections. While Sinn Féin, an Irish republican and democratic socialist political party won 39. Fine Gael has been the coalition partner for Fianna Fáil since 2020 securing 38 seats making it possible to form coalition. Whereas, the Green Party lost 12 out of 13 competed seats. the parties competed for 174 seats in the lower house and needed 88 to win the majority. Totalling Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael the seats are 86. Therefore, to form the government the two parties will either have to include Labour or the Social Democrats who have 11 seats each. Another alternate would be to sign a deal with the right-wing Independent Ireland which has four seats. (Enda McClafferty, “Fianna Fáil emerges as largest party in Irish election,” *BBC*, 02 December)

### **Green Party loses and centrists gains strength in the general elections**

On 01 December, the Green Party in Ireland was defeated in the general election on the leader of the party announced its “rebuild” phase and the electorate removed the option of re-entering the government. In the held elections, the Greens lost all except one out of the 12 seats. This means the party will not be able to team with two centre-right parties “Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael” who are expected to win close to 88-seat majority to form the government. The

proportional representation system involves multiple counts and close-to-call scraps for final seats in many constituencies and as per the vote record, it is the worst since 2011. Eamon Ryan, the recently retired leader succeeded by O’Gorman, said even one seat will be “a huge difference.” The results appeared to direct a coalition between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. In response, the centre-right parties appreciated the reversal of global trends and highlighted the change in the voter spur of far-right candidates. Jack Chambers, the Fianna Fáil deputy leader, said: “I think, in the main, centrist politics in Ireland has strengthened here. Whereas, Sinn Féin, which secured 19 per cent of first-preference votes is behind Fianna Fáil’s 21.9 per cent and Fine Gael’s 20.8 per cent. This is expected to increase by 30 seats but would not enough to form government. (Lisa O’Carroll, “Irish Greens virtually wiped out in general election rout,” *The Guardian*, 01 December 2024)

## **ITALY**

### **Prime Minister grants citizenship to Argentina's President**

On 14 December, Giorgia Meloni, the Prime minister of Italy, received Javier Milei, the President of Argentina, and gave him the news that his citizenship applications had been granted. Milei took part in a festival on 15 December organised by the Brothers of Italy, the party from which Meloni comes. Milei had announced harsh public spending cuts in 2023. He claimed Italian citizenship based on his ancestry. His grandparents migrated from Italy to Argentina in the early 20th century. He also stated that he was 75 per cent Italian. His sister, Karina Milei, has also received Italian citizenship. Riccardo Magi, a member of parliament from the opposition, said that granting citizenship to Milei was an “insult” and an act of “intolerable discrimination against so many young who will only get it after many years.” (“Italy grants citizenship to Argentine President Javier Milei,” *Deutsche Welle*, 14 December 2024)

### **Government bans independent check-ins in rentals and properties**

On 03 December, *Euronews* reported on the Italian government's ban on the "self-check-in system" in rental accommodations and Airbnb or booking properties. The government statement said: "The automated management of check-in and entry to a property without visual identification of guests" means there is a risk it "could be occupied by one or more individuals whose identities remain unknown to the relevant police authorities." This was because residents of Rome, Florence and Milan had sabotaged the key lock boxes as protests against the rise in housing prices. As a result, with the government's new law, the guests will now have to meet the people directly on their arrival. The rule is applicable to all sorts of short-term tourist accommodations such as Airbnb and Booking rentals. Through this, the government aims to minimise safety risks to the possible accommodation of individuals related to criminal or terrorist organisations. Although this was signed back in November 2024, the authorities have just started to inform the rental platforms and owners. Guests would now be barred from checking in independently. This law was condemned by residents of the EU. (Rebecca Ann Hughes, "[Italy bans key boxes on holiday rental accommodation. What does it mean for travellers?.](#)" *Euronews*, 03 December 2024)

## KOSOVO

### **Government announces opening of first state-financed ammunition factory to develop military industry**

On 05 December, the government of Kosovo announced plans to open its first state-financed ammunition factory. The government has announced plans to transition into an army by 2028. Albin Kurti, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, told the media that the country has doubled the size of Kosovo Security Forces and tripled the budget. The increased expenditure comes after tensions between Kosovo and Serbia have risen. Meanwhile, NATO peacekeepers under a UN mandate, KFOR, have been in charge of Kosovo's security. Ejup Maqedonci, the security minister of Kosovo, also said that the Security Ministry in

Kosovo has received a feasibility report with a state-owned manufacturer from the Turkish Ministry of Defence for developing Kosovo's military capabilities. Currently, Kosovo's military equipment is sourced from NATO member countries like the US, Turkey, Germany, the UK, and Croatia. The Kosovo Security Forces have expanded their weaponry by acquiring armoured and transport vehicles, howitzers and mortars, Bayraktar drones, and Javelin anti-tank missiles. (Lucy Davalou, "[Kosovo to open first state-financed ammunition factory.](#)" *Euronews*, 05 December 2024)

## LITHUANIA

### **President Nausėda proposes to allocate five per cent of GDP on defence**

On 19 December, *Euronews* reported on the statements of Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda on his country's increase in defence spending. Lithuania was planning to spend five per cent of its GDP to strengthen its defence and security. He said: "My country's view is that we have to strengthen our defence and we do it nationally, but we need pan-European decisions." He also advocated issuing Eurobonds for defence. Meanwhile, Lithuania's defence minister Laurynas Kasčiūnas has proposed a four per cent of GDP on defence. A boost in defence spending has been a major discussion for the EU and NATO since Russia's war with Ukraine in 2022. According to the estimates of the European Commission, the defence industry requires EUR 500 billion over the next decade to maintain competition and demands. (Alice Tidey, "[Lithuanian President touts 5% of GDP on defence in 'coming years'.](#)" *Euronews*, 19 December 2024)

## NORWAY

### **A ship carrying military supplies ran aground off the southwest coast**

On 09 December, a cargo ship known as Finland Seaways carrying Norwegian weapons to Poland were grounded in the Karmsundet Strait, near Haugesund, located north of Stavanger in southwest Norway. The ship carrying military supplies also included fighter jets, military personnel and

a NASAMS air defence system to support Rzeszow's airport in Poland, a primary logistics centre for NATO. Since it ran aground, there was a delay in transferring this equipment to Poland. The extreme winds also made it difficult to move the vessel. However, there were no reports of injuries. The ship captain confirmed that all 23 crew members were safe and did not need an evacuation. Norway's Defense Force also investigated the incident in collaboration with the Norwegian Coast Guard and Maritime Safety Authority. They also plan to change the ship to carry on the delivery. ("Ship Carrying Essential Military Supplies For Poland Runs Aground Off Norway," *Marine Sight*, 09 December 2024)

### **Sovereign wealth fund pulled out from a Russian and Israeli company**

On 04 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the sovereign wealth fund of Norway has withdrawn from two groups- one Russian and another Israeli. The decision was ratified by Norway's Central Bank which controls the fund of about USD 1.8 billion. The Israeli company Bezeq was alleged for providing services to Israeli and Palestinian settlements in West Bank. This was also noted by Norway's Council of Ethics which received a statement from Bezeq. The Council added that this was a violation of international law. The wealth fund was also withdrawn from the Russian company Evraz, a steel company. According to the Council, as the company sold steel to Russia's Defence Ministry, it was indirectly helping Russia in the war against Ukraine. ("Norway's wealth fund divests from Israeli and Russian firms," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 December 2024)

### **Oslo suspends plans to allow for deep-sea mining**

On 02 December, Norway suspended its plan to allow companies to use the seabed for deep mining to explore precious metals. Earlier, it had adopted a controversial measure to allow companies to mine 280,000 square kilometres (108,000 square miles), larger than that of the UK. It was blocked after the Socialist Party confirmed that it would not support the government's budget plan. According to Greenpeace

Norway's leader, Frode Pleym, "mining on the seabed is gambling with marine life." He also praised the Socialist Party for having an impact on the nature of the country. The deep-sea areas are some of the last untouched ecosystems on the planet. Norway, being the first country to allow for seabed mining was met with criticisms and environmentalists and NGOs. However, Norway's Prime Minister, Jonas Gahr Stoer said that the move was a: "Postponement and preparatory work to work on environmental regulations ahead." ("Norway halts deep seabed mining in historic win for nature," *Oceanographic*, 02 December 2024)

## **RUSSIA**

### **Transport Minister points out "external interference" leading to plane crash**

On 28 October, *BBC* reported on the response from Azerbaijan over the plane that crashed during its attempt to land in Russia's southern republic of Chechnya. According to Azerbaijan's transport minister Rashad Nabiyev, the Azerbaijani plane underwent "external interference" before it crashed. He said: "All the survivors without exception stated they heard three blast sounds when the aircraft was above Grozny." He added that further inquiry would focus on the kind of weapon or rocket used. The airlines of the country cited a preliminary inquiry and highlighted both "physical and technical external interference." Russian air defence systems are speculated to have fired at the plane, diverting it across the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan and leading to the loss of 38 lives. Meanwhile, experts from Azerbaijan argue that the plane's GPS was affected by electronic jamming which was then destroyed by shrapnel from missile or other air defence systems of Russia. Moreover, one of the MPs of Azerbaijan is also upholding the possibility of Russian interference. The Kremlin hasn't made any comments on the increasing reports of Russia's role in the plane crash. Press Secretary of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov said that Russia would not respond unless conclusions are made after proper investigation. While Russia and Kazakhstan

suggested a committee from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for investigation, Azerbaijan insisted on an international inquiry. (Paul Kirby & Konul Khalilova, "Azerbaijan says plane hit by 'external interference' over Russia before crash." *BBC*, 28 October 2024)

### **President Putin expresses willingness to talk with Trump on war in Ukraine**

On 19 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on Russian President Vladimir Putin's annual December news conference. He spoke about the war in Ukraine, Russia's economy, the fall of the government in Syria and the new Oreshnik missiles manufactured in Russia. Putin said that Moscow was ready for a "long-lasting peace" with Ukraine and not a temporary truce. He said that the latter would allow Ukraine to arm itself with more weapons and ammunition. He confirmed that Russia would attain all of its objectives in the war. According to him: "We are getting closer to the main objectives we set ourselves at the start of the special military operation." Meanwhile, Putin said that he would not negotiate with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since his office technically ended in May 2024. Putin claimed him to be an illegitimate leader. On the upcoming US President Donald Trump, Putin said that he would be ready to meet him although no plans were there yet. In addition, he highlighted Russia's new Oreshnik missiles claiming that Western air defences would be unable to intercept them. He also challenged them for what he called a "high-tech 21st-century duel." He seriously took the question on the killing of the Russian General Igor Kirillov and accepted the shortcomings of Moscow's special services. He also said that he was yet to meet Syrian President Bashar Assad who was granted asylum in Moscow. He also confirmed that the fall of the regime did not mean Russia's failure even with its military investments in the region. Lastly, he assured that Russia's economy was moving in the right path despite external threats and sanctions. He affirmed that the situation was stable and hoped to cope with the rising prices. ("Putin sees shortfalls in

Kirillov killing, but not in Syria," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 December 2024)

### **Tons of oil products spilt in the Black Sea in storm**

On 15 December, two Russian tankers carrying tons of oil products split apart due to a sea storm. The incident took place in Kerch Strait. The vessels issued distress calls. One was also killed during the incident. Criminal proceedings have been initiated to investigate whether the crew failed to follow the safety measures. Both tankers have a loading capacity of about 4,200 tonnes of oil products. The Kerch Strait is a key route for exports of Russian grain and is also used for exports of crude oil, fuel oil and liquefied natural gas. More than 50 and equipment, including Mi-8 helicopters and rescue tugboats, had been deployed to the area. Ukraine accuses Russia of keeping the Strait under its unilateral control while Russia denies it. ("Oil spill near Black Sea after two Russian tankers seriously damaged in storm," *France24*, 15 December 2024)

## **SERBIA**

### **Students organise protests and traffic blockades against the construction collapse**

On 27 December, *Euronews* reported on the widespread protests in several cities of Serbia against the collapse of concrete construction at a train station in Novi Sad in November. The incident led to the death of dozens of people and the severe injury of two more. The university students along with citizens and high school students organised protests across the cities, demanding accountability for the incident. They left piles of old school books in front of the Education Ministry as part of their daily protests. In addition, there were scattered traffic blocks in various places in Serbia at 11:52 am, the exact time of the collapse. These blockades have been organised every Friday since the incident which would last 15 minutes for the 15 victims. Majority of the citizens of the country blame corruption and inadequate works done in the railway station for the tragic incident. ("15 minutes for 15 lives: Students in Serbia demand

[accountability for Novi Sad tragedy,](#) *Euronews*, 27 December 2024)

### **Mayor announces free public transport from 01 January in Belgrade**

On 18 December, the Mayor of Belgrade announced that public transport will be free from 01 January 2025 in the city. Belgrade has almost 1.7 million residents and does not have an underground transport system. The decision was taken after the city was facing issues like high traffic and hours of gridlock on roads. The number of cars has increased by 250,000 over the past decade. The government has promised a transport system by 2030 but the project remains stalled. The Mayor has also promised to replace old trams and buses by 2027. ([“Belgrade to make public transport free from January 1,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 18 December 2024)

### **Serbians protest against lithium mining**

On 14 December, *France24* reported about the anxiety among rural dwellers in Serbia due to lithium mining contracts that the government is signing. Many residents fear that lithium mines will replace their village in the coming years, leaving them homeless. Local protesters also complain that the process of raising their voice against the government has made them less productive towards their work and taken much of their time. The government, meanwhile, has looked the other way towards their plight. The protesters believe the kind of favouritism Australian mining company Rio Tinto is getting might cause an environmental catastrophe. Jadder region in western Serbia has the largest lithium deposit and of a higher quality as well. Demolition of some houses has already begun. Meanwhile, the profit earned from lithium mining would favour the offshore company more than to the local residents. ([“Residents in rural Serbia rally against lithium mining project,”](#) *France24*, 14 December 2024)

## **SPAIN**

### **Spanish fishermen protest against EU restrictions on fishing**

On 10 December, the European Union

announced new restrictions on the number of days allowed for fishing in the Mediterranean Sea. The new restrictions announced will reduce them from 130 to 27 days. The EU aims to protect biodiversity and fish stocks in the Mediterranean sea through these restrictions. Protesters argue that these cuts would harm Spain's economy and the fishing industry badly. They also believe the EU's plan is based on flawed data and does not consider local fishermen's concerns. The industry reportedly employs around 3,000 on board and generates a further 17,000 jobs indirectly. ([“Spanish fishermen protest against EU fishing quotas,”](#) *Euronews*, 11 December 2024)

## **SWEDEN**

### **Police authorities visit a Chinese vessel on invitation over a cable sabotage investigation**

On 19 January, *Deutsche Welle* reported that Swedish authorities were invited onto a Chinese vessel in the Baltic Seas regarding a recent investigation linked to a cable sabotage in the Swedish waters in mid-November. Two of the cables linking Finland-Germany and Sweden-Lithuania were undergoing investigation from Beijing. Chinese vessel Yi Peng 3 was found to have sailed above the cables during the sabotage. According to the statements of Swedish police: “Representatives of the Chinese authorities are conducting investigations aboard the vessel and have invited the Swedish authorities to take part in an observer role.” They added that no investigative measures would be taken aboard as the observations made were not considered part of inquiries. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson had requested China to cooperate and added that no accusations were put on Beijing at any level. ([“Swedish police board Chinese ship to observe cables probe,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 19 January 2024)

## **SWITZERLAND**

### **Swiss youth are looking for vocational jobs less likely to be replaced by AI, says *Swissinfo.ch***

On 17 December, *Swiss.info* published a

report regarding the changing job preferences of youth in Switzerland. The report said that youth thinks that creative jobs are likely to be replaced by generative AI like ChatGPT while manual work like bricklaying cannot be replaced. Professions that involve interpersonal roles like nursing, therapists and teachers are also becoming popular. Deloitte conducted a global survey and found that six in ten individuals of the Gen Z and Millennial generations, individuals born between 1981 and 2012, expect to re-train either in skills resistant to automation or in AI-related expertise which is increasingly in demand. (Sara Ibrahim, "[Swiss youth in vocational training seek jobs less prone to automation.](#)" *Swiss.info*, 17 December 2024)

### **Swiss interests in scientific research and diplomacy in Djibouti**

On 17 December, *Swiss.info* published a report on Switzerland's strategy in the Gulf of Aden. Switzerland had taken part in an expedition carried out in the Gulf of Tadjoura where researchers found samples of the unique vegetation. The researchers think that the DNA analyses will help them discover the biological processes of these corals, which can be more resistant towards climate change than reefs in other parts of the world. Switzerland also has diplomatic objectives in the research as it wants to intertwine scientific research and diplomacy. The Red Sea region, with its many tensions, could also play an important geopolitical role in the future beyond coral reefs. Djibouti has the biggest American military base in Africa, similarly, other countries like China, France, Italy and Japan also have their military bases. Bab el-Mandeb strait in the Red Sea, is one of the busiest sea lanes in the world. It is one of the most important trade routes between Europe and Asia. Nearly 25 per cent of the world's shipping traffic passes through this waterway every year. Switzerland is an important player as many shipping lines and logistics firms are headquartered in Geneva and other Swiss cities. These firms are realising the impact of maritime security threats in the region. According to the report, Switzerland has used its humanitarian aid and development

cooperation activities in the Horn of Africa to try and play a constructive role in stabilising the region. Its neutrality policy prevents the country participating militarily in the region; it has developed scientific and research based methods to interact with the Horn of Africa on a diplomatic level. ("[How Switzerland is handling geopolitics in Djibouti.](#)" *Swiss.info*, 17 December 2024)

### **A Swiss campaign against gender-based violence end**

On 10 December, a campaign against gender-based violence ended after 16 days. More than 300 organisations were a part of this campaign, and more than 10,000 participated. One of the participants said that addressing gender-based violence has become a societal emergency. The campaign aimed to demand better public support for women in distress and provide the victims with gender-based justice speedily. The campaign sparked after statistical data was released suggesting that one woman is killed every two weeks in Switzerland due to gender-based violence. ("[Sixteen-day Swiss campaign against gender-based violence ends.](#)" *Swiss.info*, 10 December 2024)

## **THE NETHERLANDS**

### **Netherlands implements border controls to curb migration**

On 08 December, the Netherlands deployed border checks at specific points where it shares borders with Germany and Belgium. Eijsden Faber, a member of the far-right Freedom Party (PVV), which is a part of the ruling coalition, said that the border checks aim to reduce the influx of migrants that the Netherlands is facing. The current border checks are based on Article 25 of the Schengen Border Code, which allows an EU member to implement temporary border control measures in case of a "serious threat to public order or national security." This means that the influx of migrants is treated as a matter of national security and a threat to public order in European nations. However, municipalities near the border have protested against the new measures as it would create hurdles for those who work cross country daily. ("[Netherlands starts](#)

border controls to curb migration," *Deutsche Welle*, 09 December 2024)

### **Activists from Curacao and Mayotte call for climate change justice in the ICJ case**

On 02 December, *Euronews* reported on the growing crisis across the island between the Dutch Caribbean and France's Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte. Issues such as rising sea levels, temperatures and extreme weather events such as droughts and hurricanes have been borne by small islands. There is increasing international attention and funding for developing states which was observed in COP29 with a grant of USD 300 billion. However, activists from Curacao and Mayotte state that it is underfunded and overlooked. This is mainly due to territories being under colonial control limiting autonomy to tackle climate change. According to one of the Climate activists from Curaçao: "The Dutch government has thrown most of the responsibility for climate adaptation into the laps of the territories themselves, and are extremely flaky with regards to funding and implementation." Those living in the island hope that the public hearing at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will lead to greater recognition for small island states and climate vulnerable territories. (Kieran Guilbert, "Small island states seek climate change justice in landmark top UN court case," *Euronews*, 02 December 2024)

## **THE UK**

### **Andrew Tate to face tax evasion charges in the UK**

On 18 December, a court in the UK ordered the British police to seize more than EUR two million from Andrew Tate, a social media influencer, and his brother Tristan Tate. They failed to pay taxes on around GBR 21 million in profit from their online businesses, such as War Room, Hustlers' University, Cobra Tate and OnlyFan from 2014 to 2022. They became famous after misogynistic content on social media platforms. They have been banned from TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook due to controversial content. They also have had most of their assets and bank accounts

frozen in the UK. As a response to the court, Andrew Tate said, "This is not justice. It is a coordinated attack on anyone who dares to challenge the system." ("UK court rules against Andrew Tate in tax case," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 December 2024)

### **Becomes the first European member of CPTPP**

On 15 December, the Government of the UK announced that it has become the 12th member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP. The accession treaty was signed by the Conservative Government in 2023. Most members have ratified the UK's entry into the Partnership. Officials in the UK estimate that inclusion of the UK will boost the economy by EUR 2.4 billion per annum. After Brexit, the UK is trying to sign economic deals with other countries since its economy has also been struggling. The EU still makes up to 40 per cent of the total exports of the UK and over 50 per cent of the imports. Before the UK joined, CPTPP had 11 members i.e., Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Initially, the US was planned to be a member of the CPTPP. However, it withdrew after Donald Trump was elected as the president in 2016. China is also seeking a membership in CPTPP. The members of CPTPP contribute up to 15 per cent of the global GDP. The UK has signed several deals with Australia, New Zealand and Singapore since it left the EU. However, economists have said that Brexit's economic loss dwarfs the impact of these deals. Jonathan Reynolds, the Business Secretary under the Labour Government, said the government will publish a trade strategy paper in 2025. ("UK joins Indo-Pacific trade bloc as first European member," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 December 2024)

### **British oil company to reduce its investment in renewable energy**

On 10 December, British oil company BP announced that it would reduce its investment in renewable energy by 2030. It has collaborated with Jera, a Japanese company, on wind energy projects. A new venture called Jera Nex BP has been



announced. Both companies will equally own it. This will be the British company's most significant offshore business. Murray Auchincloss, the CEO of BP, said that the company is emphasising more than oil and gas to boost profits. Offshore wind is one of the primary renewable energy sources that Europe is counting on to decarbonise electricity production, but rising costs and supply chain issues have challenged recent projects. ("Oil giant BP to 'significantly reduce' investment in renewable energy for rest of decade," *France24*, 10 December 2024)

### **Community faces electricity outages and travel disruptions following Storm Darragh**

On 09 December, *BBC* reported on the flood warnings in the UK. Following Storm Darragh, the cities faced electricity outages and travel disruptions. Last week, two men died as a result of falling trees. The train operators were also informed of the continued disruption in rail networks. Around 102 flood warnings continue across the regions of England and Wales. According to the Energy Networks Association in the UK, about 66,000 customers were devoid of power despite 97 per cent of them getting reconnected. The Northern Ireland Electricity Networks also reported on electricity outages in the area. However, community centres provided the concerned people with hot drinks and charging facilities. (André Rhoden-Paul, "Flood warnings as thousands without power after Storm Darragh," *BBC*, 09 December 2024)

### **Prime Minister Starmer expresses speculation on removing HTS from terrorist groups**

On 10 December, *BBC* reported on the statements made by the Prime Minister of the UK, Keir Starmer on the decision to remove the Syrian rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) from a list of banned terrorist groups. Earlier, cabinet minister Pat McFadden said the UK could remove the group from the list. However, Starmer said that it was far "too early" to decide on a policy change. He said that this should be a "peaceful opportunity and better future" for

Syria. He said: "We've got to make sure this is different." The UK's Foreign Secretary David Lammy also said that the country would assess HTS by their actions on how they treat civilians. The UK government also announced a package of EUR 11 million humanitarian aid to Syria. They believe the package would help more than 370000 people displaced by the upheaval. (George Wright & André Rhoden-Paul, "George Wright & André Rhoden-Paul," *BBC*, 10 December 2024)

### **PM Starmer says no plan to increase taxes in an interview to the BBC**

On 07 December, Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister of the UK, in an interview with *BBC* said that his government does have plans to raise taxes. However, the possibility of raising taxes cannot be ruled out in case of exceptional circumstances. He also announced building 1.5 million new homes in England and ending hospital backlogs. The UK is already dealing with a housing crisis. Rachel Reeves, Chancellor of the UK, announced an increased public spending of GBR 70 billion. More than half of the higher taxes will be collected from businesses. There will also be an increase in capital gains tax on share sales and a freeze on inheritance tax thresholds. Businesses have also warned the government that a raise in taxes will lead to decreased salaries, less job availability and increased layoffs. Government has already implemented a pay rise for lower wages. Starmer's popularity has also fallen since he was elected as the Prime Minister. (Kate Whannel, "No plan for more tax rises but we can't rule it out - Starmer," *BBC*, 07 December 2024)

## **TURKEY**

### **Erdogan expresses frustration towards weakening Syria's leadership**

On 06 December, after the Friday prayers in Turkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkey, expressed his concerns over the increasing influence of anti-regime forces in Syria. He said that he had made a call to Assad al-Bashar, leader of Syria, regarding the issue. However, he did not receive a positive response on this. He said that the UN-initiated and supported

political process in Syria can only resolve the existing conflict. He also stated that he has discussed the Syrian issue with Antonio Guterres, the Chief of the United Nations. Turkiye is currently hosting more than three million Syrian refugees. ("Erdoğan hopes Syria's anti-regime march continues 'without disasters'," Daily Sabah, 07 December 2024)

### **Former Turkish Ambassador elected as the new Secretary General of OSCE**

On 07 December, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, a former Turkish ambassador, was elected as the new secretary general of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE is a body to engage the West with the East. There are 57 member countries in the group. All member states approved Sinirlioğlu's three year term which implies that it was not opposed by Greece, the Greek Cypriot administration and Armenia. Recently, it has been working on normalising its ties with Greece and Armenia. Turkey is also attempting to mediate certain conflicts. It has repeatedly offered to hold talks between Russia and Ukraine to reach an agreement. The Russia-Ukraine war has led to many decisions being either vetoed or blocked by Russia. ("OSCE elects former Turkish envoy as new secretary-general," Daily Sabah, 07 December 2024)

### **Per capita GDP projected to exceed USD 15,000 in 2024**

On 05 December, Turkiye's top finance officials informed the media through a press conference that the country's per capita income is projected to increase to USD 15,000 by the end of December 2024. The expected economic growth in 2024 is 3.5 per cent. The per capita income is expected to cross USD 20,000 by 2027. The current account deficit has dropped below USD 10 billion from USD 56 billion in 2024 itself. Even though the risk premium of developing countries has fallen by 45 points, the risk premium of Turkiye has fallen by 448 points. Inflation in the country fell by 47 per cent in November. It has been rising at an annual average rate of 5.5 per cent since the past 20 years. ("Türkiye's GDP per capita could exceed \$15,000 in

2024: Şimşek," Daily Sabah, 05 December 2024)

### **"We're with either America or Europe, is plain wrong" says Prime Minister Starmer**

On 04 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the statements of Economy Minister Robert Habeck at the sidelines of the fifth German-African Business Summit (GABS) conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. He pointed out the business concerns about "security and stability" in Africa. He said: "German investors need a safe and stable investment environment as political uncertainty can be poison for direct investment." He further highlighted that the constant growth rates do not undermine the prospects for more growth. Meanwhile, the head of Kenya's cabinet, Musalia Mudavadi said that Africa had huge potential and condemned the laws and regulations that interfered with the foreign direct investment in the country. He thanked Germany for contributing to science and technology and Kenya's economic development. Habeck also proposed the transfer of African workers to Germany, opening doors for new skills and development. GABS is the most significant event organised by Germany once in two years with participation from 35 African countries. In 2024, it saw around 800 participants from these countries. ("Businesses need 'safe and stable' Africa to invest: Habeck," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 December 2024)

## **ROMANIA**

### **Romania's presidential candidate detests cancellation of elections**

On 08 December, Călin Georgescu, a far-right candidate in the presidential race in Romania, protested against cancelling presidential elections in front of a closed polling station. He called the cancellation of elections "cancelling democracy." Georgescu was leading the presidential race and is known as the "TikTok messiah." Meanwhile, the Court has cited reasons such as illegal use of digital technologies, artificial intelligence and undeclared funding sources for cancelling the elections. The Court said one candidate received "preferential

treatment" on social media platforms, distorting voters' expressed will pointing towards Georgescu. New dates for the upcoming elections have yet to be announced. ("Romania's far-right Georgescu denounces cancelled vote outside closed polling station," *Euronews*, 08 December 2024)

### **Prosecutors raid three houses after irregularities in elections**

On 08 December, police raided three houses in Romania to investigate the electoral financing during the elections held in November, which the Supreme Court later cancelled. The investigation will also look into evidence indicating racist and xenophobic sentiments being exploited during the presidential election campaigning. The Court cancelled the elections over illegal financing and the alleged role of Russia in the promotion of candidates. Meanwhile, Russia has denied any role in the elections. ("Romania: Police raid houses after presidential poll annulled," *Deutsche Welle*, 08 December 2024)

### **Court cancels Presidential elections amid allegations over Russia's security threats**

On 06 December, the Supreme Court of Romania cancelled the upcoming presidential elections due to concerns over Russia's potential "hybrid" attacks on the country. Russia's involvement was already speculated due to the rising popularity of pro-Russia candidate, Călin Georgescu, due to TikTok. Meanwhile, the government of Romania will have to make adequate preparations for fresh presidential elections. The current presidential term was supposed to end on 21 December. However, it has been extended now and he will stay president until a new president is sworn in. The Romanian government declassified certain intelligence reports that suggested that the TikTok algorithm was manipulated through paid promotions in favour of a pro-Russia narrative. Re-election has created further confusion since more than 48,000 Romanians living abroad had already voted in the elections. (Tim Ross, Carmen Paun and Andrei Popoviciu, "Romanian court cancels presidential election amid Russian

influence fears," *Politico*, 07 December 2024)

### **Thousands participate in pro-Europe rallies ahead of Presidential elections**

On 05 December, more than 4,000 citizens in Romania participated in pro-Europe rallies across Bucharest. Presidential elections are scheduled on 08 December. This incident depicts the larger public opinion in the country. However, the first round of polls suggest that the far-right candidate, Calin Georgescu, of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) won almost 23 per cent of votes. Euronews suggested that his presence on platforms like TikTok has increased his reach to the younger population in the country. He has an anti-Europe and anti-NATO stance in his campaigns. He has also pledged to cut down Romania's military supply to Ukraine. The shift towards right-wing candidates is just not limited to the Presidential elections but is also extending to parliamentary elections. The parliamentary elections were held only a week after the first round of presidential elections. The voting trend showed the same pattern. PSD won almost 22 per cent of the votes. ("Thousands of Romanians stage pro-Europe rally days ahead of presidential runoff," *Euronews*, 06 December 2024)

### **EU orders TikTok to 'freeze and preserve' data on political content before elections in Romania**

On 06 December, the European Union ordered TikTok to retain the data on promotion of political content and spread of fake news under the Digital Services Act. The impact of TikTok was prominent in Romanian elections. The order will apply from 24 November 2024 to 31 March 2025 and monitor upcoming elections in Romania, Croatia, Austria, Greece and Germany as well. The European Union is also expected to open a formal investigation against TikTok for its potential role in Romanian elections. Klaus Iohannis, the current President of Romania, has suggested that Calin Georgescu's sudden rise to fame was "not a natural outcome" but the result of artificially coordinated action to manipulate and exploit TikTok's

algorithm. Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) reported that nearly EUR one million were spent in the campaign by an individual supporting Georgescu's candidacy, with up to EUR 950 paid for a repost. (Jorge Liboreira, "[Brussels asks TikTok to keep all data about electoral risks in Romania as fears of interference grow.](#)" *Euronews*, 06 December 2024)

### **Presidential candidate Georgescu benefitted from online TikTok campaigns, says intelligence reports**

On 05 December, *Politico* reported on declassified Romanian intelligence documents that argue that the ultranationalist presidential candidate Călin Georgescu took advantage of a TikTok campaign that promoted his candidacy. According to the reports, paid influencers and members of extremist groups related to organised crime were part of his online TikTok campaigns. Although the reports did not point a direct linkage of the campaigns to Russia's interference, this operation was similar to alleged Russian influences undertaken in Ukraine and Moldova. Georgescu had won the first round of elections. He has also expressed his deep connection with Russia and disapproval for the EU and NATO. He had earlier claimed of not getting any foreign campaign support. He and his team has completely rejected the arguments put forth by the intelligence documents. The reports also suggest that the activity could have been monitored by a state actor as each TikTok account had separate IP address, making it difficult to figure out the scale of the network. Although Romanian authorities demanded TikTok to take down Georgescu's contents, it was still accessible to a wide number of users. The US has also expressed concern over the increasing cyberattacks on Romania's electoral process. ("[Romania's presidential front-runner Georgescu benefitted from Russia-style booster campaign, declassified docs say.](#)" *Politico*, 05 December 2024)

### **Social democrats secure the highest votes in the election**

On 03 December, *Euronews* reported on the final results of the Romania elections. The Social Democrats won the most votes with

the far-right nationalist Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) in second position. The third position was attained by the centre-right National Liberal Party. The country also saw an increase in support for the far-right candidates. This would likely result in pro-Western parties forming a coalition in the parliament. However, there would be difficulty in forming a coalition as the far-rights were attaining huge support. According to political analysts, this election showcased "widespread anti-establishment sentiments" in Romania. They also stated that the decisive factor would be the upcoming President who would choose the next Prime Minister. According to the leader of the far-right AUR party George Simion, this marked a "watershed moment as Romania is reborn." ("[Pro-Western parties come out on top despite far-right gains in Romania election.](#)" *Euronews*, 03 December 2024)

### **Ruling Social Democrats win major votes; Far-right candidate wins most in the exit polls**

On 01 December, Romania's ruling Social Democrats (PSD) won most of the votes in the parliamentary elections. The exit polls come ahead of a far-right movement which challenges the pro-west alignment of Romania. Close to 85 per cent of ballots were counted where 23.5 per cent was won by PSD ahead of 17.8 per cent of the hard-right alliance, the Union of Romania (AUR). All the far-right parties were observed to have made major gains combined to 30 per cent showcasing the polarisation. According to Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu, a Social Democrat: "It is an important signal that Romanians have sent to the political class." Ciolacu pledged to follow the EU path of "protecting our identity, national values and faith." Whereas, the AUR leader George Simion won 14 per cent: "It is the beginning of a new era in which the Romanian people reclaim the right to decide their destiny." Although the exit poll does not include thousands of Romanians working abroad who are predicted to favour the far-right. Following the first round of presidential elections, far-right candidate won the major votes. According to the report in *Deutsche Welle*, "Who gets to form the government

will depend on who wins the presidential election, as the president appoints a prime minister, and the timetable for doing so is unclear." (["Romania: Ruling Social Democrats appear set to win elections," Deutsche Welle](#), 01 December 2024)

## REGIONAL

### **Estonia begins protection patrol; NATO assures to enhance security in the Baltic Sea**

On 27 December, *France24* reported on the statements of NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte on the undersea cable sabotage in the Baltic Sea. Rutte said that NATO would increase its military presence in the Baltic Sea following the severance of the EstLink 2 submarine cable, carrying electricity from Finland to Estonia. Rutte informed that he spoke to Finland's President Alexander Stubb and expressed his complete support and solidarity to Estonia and Finland. After speaking to Kallas, he also condemned these attacks against critical infrastructure in the Sea. On the same day, Estonia's Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna announced on beginning naval patrols to guard the power cable in the Baltic Sea linked from Finland. He said: "If there is a threat to the critical undersea infrastructure in our region, there will also be a response." This is because there is more frequent damage to the "subsea installations." Finland authorities have also expressed seizing oil tanker under suspicion of engaging in cutting of the cables. (["NATO to enhance presence in Baltic Sea after suspected undersea cable sabotage," France24](#), 27 December 2024; ["Estonia starts naval patrols to protect undersea cables," Deutsche Welle](#), 27 December 2024)

### **EU Foreign policy chief Kallas imposes restrictions on Russia's vessels following the investigation of sabotage**

On 27 December, *RT* reported on the statements of EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas on Russia's alleged involvement in the undersea sabotage connecting Finland and Estonia (EstLink2). She said that the EU was planning to impose sanctions on Russia's shadow fleet of tankers. This

statement followed the detainment of a Russian oil tanker Eagle S by Finnish authorities as part of the investigation linked to EstLink 2 power cable. According to Kallas, this alleged vessel was part of Russia's shadow fleet which evades Western sanctions and endangers the environment and security. Kallas referred to the sabotage as the "deliberate destruction of Europe's critical infrastructure." With the imposition of sanctions, she directly blamed Russia for the incident. She added that additional restrictions would be imposed targeting this particular fleet. There were attempts to strengthen and protect these undersea cables following the incident. Estonia has stationed naval patrols to protect the EstLink1 power cable as they are crucial for the transfer of electricity from Finland to Estonia. Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said that Estonia would respond in case of any threats to undersea infrastructure in their region. He added that these damages were becoming more frequent recently. (["EU threatens Russia after latest cable incident," RT](#), 27 December 2024, ["Estonia starts naval patrols to protect undersea cables," Deutsche Welle](#), 27 December 2024)

### **Olaf Scholz approval ratings drop**

On 24 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the unpopular reputation of Olaf Scholz, the former chancellor of the Federation of Germany. Despite the government losing a confidence motion in the Bundestag, Scholz is running for the chancellor again in February 2025, and the Social Democrats Party (SPD) is endorsing him. The current polls show that the Christian Social Union (CSU) and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) are ahead of SPD. His coalition government named the "traffic light" coalition after the three parties' colors i.e., SPD (red), Neoliberal Free Democrats (FDP) (yellow) and Environmentalist Greens (Green) was an alliance among different political ideologies which could not be bridged. While Germany was dealing with COVID-19, Scholz provided billions of Euros of aid to companies to deal with the shutdown. Even though the SPD currently approves Scholz as the top candidate, he has

not yet been nominated. A top candidate's official nomination is scheduled at a party conference in January. (Sabine Kinkartz, ["How German Chancellor Olaf Scholz became so unpopular,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 24 December 2024)

### **Alternative for Germany party holds march after Christmas market attack in Magdeburg**

On 23 December, Alternative for Germany, a far-right party, held a march in Magdeburg, a city in eastern Germany, for the victims of a car-ramming attack in a Christmas market that happened on 20 December. The incident left five people dead and more than 200 injured. A Saudi citizen has also been arrested as the suspect behind the incident. Leaders of the AfD party stated, "Terror has arrived in the city." The crowd during the march shouted "Deport! Deport!" The incident has brought issues of security and immigration back to the center of German politics ahead of the February 2025 elections. The Magdeburg market was secured with police and heavy barricades, but the attacker managed to drive through a five-metre gap. He drove into the market in a rented BMW vehicle and drove it through the market, injuring more than 200 people. Questions are being raised about security authorities since the local media also reported that the King of Saudi Arabia had warned the German authorities against the person and his mental illness. The accused refugee to Germany in 2006 and got a refugee visa in 2016. (["Germany far-right party AfD holds march after Christmas market attack,"](#) *Le Monde*, 25 December 2024)

### **EU leaders discuss Ukraine, Syria and migration on the first day of summit in Brussels**

On 19 January, *Euronews* reported on the summit held between the 27 member countries of the EU in Brussels. The main agendas discussed were Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Syria's fall of government, migration policies and the upcoming US President Donald Trump. This marked the first summit under the new presidency of Antonio Costa. The meeting was not expected to bring any major breakthroughs

although lower-level consolidations would be planned. Firstly, the leaders had a meeting with Ukraine's President Zelenskyy where he urged them to deliver air defence systems and more military support. Zelenskyy said: "It's a very good opportunity to speak about security guarantees for Ukraine for today and for tomorrow." He also warned of the increasing number of North Korean troops in Russia. After that, the leaders focussed on a discussion titled "The EU in the world" highlighting Trump's comeback and its possible consequences. As they fear a hasty ceasefire in Ukraine under the influence of Trump, they also discussed the importance of strengthening Ukraine's position. A senior diplomat said: "Europeans are strongly united in saying that European support for Ukraine must be continued and even strengthened and that we must not relax our efforts." However, the leaders of Hungary and Slovakia took a different opinion and suggested the EU shift from an arms supplier to a peacemaker. They also discussed Syria's transition of power after 24 years. The EU maintains its position on branding the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the rebel force currently in power as a terrorist organisation. The European Commissioner Ursula von der Leyen travelled to Turkey to discuss Syria's transition. They were also of the opinion that Syrian refugees should be returned only voluntarily based on the internal situation of the country. Other major topics of discussion were EU's migration policies and protests in Georgia. (Jorge Liboreiro, ["EU leaders meet to discuss Ukraine aid, Syria's transition and Trump's comeback,"](#) *Euronews*, 19 December 2024)

### **A potential EU enlargement could alter the current budget of the bloc says a study**

On 18 December, *Euronews* reported on the consequences of the EU enlargement on the existing states, citing a Bruegel study. If the bloc admits all the nine waitlisted members, there would be a significant alteration in the bloc's current budget. The cohesion funds received by the less developed regions would be shifted to the new members as most of the undeveloped regions are

situated there. The current regions would then be termed as “transition regions” receiving less funds. The largest funding cuts would be experienced by Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary and Romania. In an overview, the enlargement to 36 member states would raise the budget from EUR 1211 billion to EUR 1356. The study also pertains to changes in other parts of the budget such as Common Agricultural Policy, Neighbourhood and Public Administration. It also argues that the enlargement would strengthen the economy of the existing members in terms of exports and FDIs. They could also bring an additional workforce to the economy. The candidates are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. (Alessio Dell'Anna & Mert Can Yilmaz, “These EU members could pay the highest price in case of EU enlargement.” *Euronews*, 19 December 2024)

### **A higher number of registered EVs in 2023 finds a report in *Euronews***

On 19 December, *Euronews* reported on the increasing number of hybrid and electric vehicles in the EU. Out of the 10.7 million newly registered cars in the EU in 2023, 48.3 per cent of them were hybrid and electric. This number exceeded 4.4 million, 88 times more than in 2013. This figure was almost equal to the 48.8 per cent share of traditional cars. The country with the largest number of registered EVs is Finland, followed by Sweden and the Netherlands. Meanwhile, Bulgaria and Croatia recorded the lowest number. (“Slowly but surely? Nearly half of EU's new cars in 2023 were hybrid and electric.” *Euronews*, 19 December 2024)

### **Inflation in Eurozone lesser than expected**

On 18 December, Eurostat, Luxembourg-based statistics office, released its report for inflation recorded in November 2024. The inflation was 2.2 per cent, which is less than predicted earlier i.e., 2.3 per cent. However, Germany's inflation stood at 2.4 per cent which is higher than the average. However, Belgium recorded the highest inflation i.e., 4.8 per cent. The lowest annual inflation

was recorded in Ireland, Lithuania and Luxembourg. In France and Italy, the inflation was two per cent, lower than the average. The overall inflation has come down from over ten per cent in 2022 when the Russia-Ukraine war had just begun. According to Eurostat data, construction output rose by one per cent recording the strongest growth since February 2023. Experts have suggested that the rebound in output was fueled by a 1.6 per cent growth in civil engineering activity, a 0.7 per cent rise in the building sector, and a 0.5 per cent profit in specialized construction activities in the Eurozone in October 2024. (“Eurozone inflation rises less than expected, more in Germany.” *Deutsche Welle*, 18 December 2024)

### **Brain drain in the EU affects 30 per cent of the population finds *Euronews***

On 18 December, *Euronews* published a report on the reasons behind brain drain in Europe. Brain drain is affecting almost 30 per cent of the EU population, according to *Euronews*. Portugal is a clear example since around 30 per cent of Portuguese young people live abroad, while 70 per cent of Portuguese immigrants are under 40. To reverse the brain drain, the Portuguese government has launched a plan to cut taxes for workers aged between 18 and 35. Apart from these initiatives, an initial investment of some EUR 200 million has been made to provide better health services. With this pace, it is predicted that the EU might lose 30 per cent of its population by 2080. (Julian Gomez, “How can the European Union tackle ‘brain drain’?” *Euronews*, 18 December 2024)

### **The GDP gap widens to 30 per cent due to low productivity in the EU finds *Politico***

On 19 December, *Politico* published a detailed editorial on economic backsliding of European economies. With Donald Trump's election to power, his intention to provide aid or funding programs to Europe is not high. He has also announced plans to levy more tariffs on the continent, upto 20 per cent more. Currently, more than EUR 500 billion worth annual exports are made to the US from the EU. Meanwhile, even the

UK is planning to increase tariffs on EU products. Meanwhile, Europe is also losing its market. Europe today does not have a single entry among the 15 best selling electric vehicles and only four of the world's top 50 tech companies are European. In terms of industrial competitiveness, Europe is far behind the US. The gap in GDP per capita has grown to 30 per cent, due to lower productivity growth in the EU. On an average, Europeans work 20 per cent less than Americans. The US tech companies spend more than twice on research and development than European tech firms, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The US companies have seen a 40 per cent jump in productivity since 2005 while the productivity in European tech companies has stagnated. Europe never crossed the benchmark of 3 percent of the bloc's GDP on R&D that it has decided. Expenditure on R&D is the main driver of economic innovation. ("Europe's economic apocalypse," *Politico*, 19 December 2024)

### **Politico reports on loopholes in EU's climate policy**

On 16 December, *Politico* published an editorial based on the interview of Janez Lenarčič, former EU Commissioner on climate change. According to him, the EU relied too much on the top-to-bottom approach like raising the cost of fossil fuels rather than supporting industry and making climate-friendly alternatives affordable. The EU's policy to tackle the social consequences of this approach is to allocate EUR 86 billion to help poor households cope with a new carbon price on car and heating fuels. Critics argue that the sum is insufficient to help the households and help the transition. He also said that there is a lack of incentive for the poor households and industrialists to make green transition. Even the EV demand in the EU has come down. Meanwhile, conservative groups in the EU parliament have advocated reversing of climate legislation towards deforestation rules, pesticide regulations and emissions standards for cars. Many EU governments are also demanding less strict green laws to maintain industrial competitiveness. Many businesses and farming associations are also lobbying

against the green laws. (Zia Weise, "EU climate strategy risks Yellow Jackets-style backlash, ex-crisis chief warns," *Politico*, 16 December 2024)

### **Trump to visit Germany before the national elections**

On 17 December, Olaf Scholz, the Chancellor of the Federation of Germany, said that he hopes Donald Trump, President of the US, after he is sworn in as the President on 20 January 2025. National elections in Germany are likely to be held on 23 February 2025. Donald Trump has also invited Xi Jinping, the President of People's Republic of China, to his swearing in ceremony. Meanwhile, political parties in Germany have started drafting their manifestos. Political analysts suggest that Scholz's meeting with Trump might change some discourse of the elections. There are debates on television lined up between Olaf Scholz and Friedrich Merz, the candidate from the opposition parties i.e, Christian Democratic party (CDU). The debate lineup has been criticised by the Greens party and Alternative for Germany (AfD) for inviting only two candidates for the debate. Scholz and Merz will debate each other on free-to-air channels ARD and ZDF on 09 February and again on private channel RTL on 16 February. ("German election: Scholz plans Trump visit before vote," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 December 2024)

### **Hungary and Slovakia vetoes proposal to impose EU sanctions in Georgia**

On 16 December, sanctions were proposed by EU High Representative Kaja Kallas against Georgia. This is due to the crackdown the government is showing towards protesters demonstrating pro-EU sentiments. The sanctions were vetoed by Hungary and Slovakia. However, an alternative plan is being proposed by EU countries to impose travel restrictions on Georgian passport holders. This is the first proposal Kaja Kallas has proposed since he assumed office on 01 December. After the meeting ended, he said, "It's my first Hungarian veto but I can guarantee it's not the last." To impose sanctions, a vote of all 27 members is required. Protests sparked



after the ruling party announced suspension of talks regarding joining the EU until 2028. In December itself, other Baltic states also imposed sanctions on Georgia for using violence against the protesters. Protests have been going on for more than two weeks now. ([“Hungary and Slovakia veto EU sanctions on Georgian officials as protests continue,” Euronews](#), 16 December 2024)

### **EU approaches the European Court of Justice over citizens' rights**

On 16 December, the EU decided to refer the UK to the EU Court of Justice after the UK failed to grant rights to EU citizens which it had promised under the Brexit deal signed in 2019. Currently, three million EU citizens dwell in the UK. During Brexit negotiations, the EU made the rights of Europeans already living in the UK one of its top three issues, along with the UK settling its budget bill with the European Union and safeguarding an open land border with Ireland. Keir Starmer, the Prime minister of the UK, himself a former international human rights lawyer, has promised to reset the Brexit deal. He called it botched while highlighting ongoing issues with touring musicians and the trade in food products. ([“Brussels takes UK to court over EU citizens' rights,” Euronews](#), 16 December 2024)

### **EU countries halt asylum applications of Syrians following the fall of Assad**

On 09 December, *Politico* reported on the European countries' plan to deport Syrians from their countries following the fall of Syria's dictator Bashar Assad. Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, the UK and Germany halted asylum applications from Syria. Austria's Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said: “I have instructed the ministry to prepare an orderly return and deportation program to Syria.” Following the US's decision to list Syrian rebel factions, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) under terrorist organisations, these countries altered their migration policies, closing all their borders to asylum seekers. Meanwhile, this decision was considered hasty by the refugee rights and aid organisations. According to them, Syrian

refugees had the right to seek asylum amidst uncertainties in their country. Even ahead of the fall of Assad, European countries found it difficult to manage the refugees. Germany saw the most number of asylum seekers from Syria in 2024. The governments seek to have a better relationship with Syria, paving the way for the deportation of Syrians. (Seb Starcevic, Dan Bloom, Nektaria Stamouli and Andrew McDonald, [“Austria prepares to deport Syrian migrants after Assad regime falls,” Politico](#), 09 December 2024)

### **EU Commission plans to make EU strategically independent**

On 10 December, the EU Commission discussed plans to make the European defence less dependent on the US. Andrius Kubilius, the EU's first Commissioner for Defence and Space, told the press that democracies must unite against authoritarian regimes. Between February 2022 and 2023, 75 per cent of new orders for the EU defence sector came from outside Europe, according to the European Aerospace, Security and Defence Industry (ASD). During an interview, Guillaume de La Brosse, head of the defence industrial policy unit, said that the EU executive recognises defence industry dependency as a problem and is committed to ensuring a "strong transatlantic partnership" on defence. The EU Commission is currently working towards sourcing 65 per cent of the defence equipment from the continent itself. (Paula Soler, [“EU seeks to reduce defence dependency on US over longer term, says Commission official,” Euronews](#), 10 December 2024)

### **European aviation industry suffers due to Russia-Ukraine war says Politico**

On 11 December, *Politico* reported on the disadvantages due to the Russia-Ukraine war. The EU has made Russia a no-fly zone for European airlines. Passenger and cargo carriers are forced to take longer routes to avoid Russia. They are also forced to bear the costs of burning fuel and paying overtime for pilots and cabin crew. The struggle to profit from travel between Europe and Asia has led several airlines, including Lufthansa, British Airways and

Poland's LOT, to suspend some routes. This led to overpricing of flights for customers. Most airlines are dropping their direct flight to China. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese airlines flights from Beijing to Europe has increased significantly. (Tamasso Lecca, "[Flying over Russia: Chinese airlines win and Europeans lose](#)," *Politico*, 11 December 2024)

### **EU aims to combine green energy goals with industrial revival**

On 10 December, Wopke Hoekstra, the EU Commissioner for climate change policies, said that the EU is weakening its green policies to resume industrial revival. *Politico* interviewed him about the EU's sustainability goals. The EU Commission has recommended that the bloc to reduce carbon emissions by 90 per cent to reach its goals of net zero emissions by 2050. However, a formal bill has not yet been passed in parliament. This year, the EU passed a law to alter existing deforestation laws that might increase deforestation. Hoekstra said that altering environmental laws in favour of industrial development is not an answer to environmental issues. (Zia Wiese and Barbara Moens, "[Changing green rules won't help industry, EU climate chief says](#)," *Politico*, 11 December 2024)

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### **EU struggles to compete with the US over search engines and digital infrastructure**

On 09 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the EU's reliance on the US search engines. 90 per cent of Europeans rely on the US's Google, while five per cent use Microsoft's Bing. CEO of Germany's largest search engine Ecosia Christian Kroll, said: "If the US turned off access to search results tomorrow, we would have to go back to phone books." Since the US companies were making access to search engines more expensive, there was increasing speculation about the upcoming US President Donald Trump and its effects on the EU's tech sector. Ecosia and a French company Qwant are set to launch a European web index called European Search Perspective in 2025. They suggest that the engine should be more relevant to Europeans. The engine points out one popular trend in the EU, called "digital sovereignty." The company argues that the EU needs to manage primary digital infrastructures and services to minimise its dependence on other global powers. However, the growing modifications in search infrastructure like AI pose numerous challenges to the EU's ideas. Moreover, the US companies have greater access to investors, which marks greater competition for European companies. (Alex Matthews, "[Can Europe build itself a rival to Google?](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 09 December 2024)

### **El País reports on the tenure of Josep Borrell as the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**

On 09 December, *El País* reviewed Josep Borrell's tenure and role as an EU Representative and his contribution towards strengthening the EU's position in

global politics. Last week, he also issued a final warning on Russia's expansionist policies in the Baltic region. He has appointed Kaja Kallas, the former Prime Minister of Estonia, as his successor. The Article reports that the population in the Baltic region has been living in existential anxiety since Russia invaded Ukraine. The Article also calls for the membership of the Baltic states in NATO and the EU as their life insurance. The defence spending in the Baltic states is amongst the highest in Europe in terms of GDP per cent. Amid this, the Article also speculates that the appointment of Donald Trump as the president of the US might lead to the withdrawal of military aid from the US, which amounted to around USD 100 billion during President Biden's term. Thus, politicians in Estonia are reiterating Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, which states: "If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power." However, even the implementation of this Article has systematic issues, such as every country having a different system for commanding and controlling its army.

Nonetheless, defence spending among the EU countries has increased by 50 per cent since 2014. Europe is still not strategically independent as the weapons program can take 20 years to materialise. Borrell has said, "what is really lacking is political will [in Europe]." He also differentiates between NATO and the EU by stating, "The EU is not a military union like NATO. It was born to avoid wars in Europe." The report also writes about their interview with Borrell. He said that his biggest achievement as the EU Representative is that he brought all the 27 member states on board to provide arms to Ukraine in a coordinated way. The Article also states that Kallas was set to replace Borrell in 2021. Kallas' strategy is to be careful against Russia, support a two-state solution in the Middle East, keep an eye on Iran, North Korea, and China, and develop the European defence industry. The EU has created European security and defense instruments like the European External

Action Service and Crisis Response Centre in the past five years. Meanwhile, the EU also holds frozen Russian assets worth EUR 260 billion. The EU has already given Ukraine €1.5 billion in interest generated by that capital. (Jesus Rodriguez, "[Josep Borrell's final days at the head of European security](#)," *El Pais*, 07 December 2024)

### **Europe is dependent on China to meet its green energy goals, says an opinion in *El Pais***

On 08 December, *El Pais* published on Europe's dependence on China for clean energy vehicles. BYD, a Chinese EV manufacturer, aims to overtake Tesla to become the biggest producer of electric vehicles globally. BYD stands as an acronym for "Build Your Dreams." The company hosted a tour for journalists in one of their factories. The factory had the capacity to produce 3,000 vehicles in one day. The company has research and development funded for all their parts. China has become the leader of EVs with more than 30.16 million cars produced in 2023. The number is far ahead of the US which produces 10.6 million cars annually, according to data from the International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA). China is also leading in wind and solar energy sectors. China manufactures 60 per cent of the world's wind turbines, more than 80 per cent of solar cells, and almost 40 per cent of heat pumps, according to a report published by the European Commission as part of a "trade defense" investigation in April 2024. China also has the largest battery producers in the world. However, the green transition of energy is much faster and advanced in Europe than in China. 60 per cent of electricity produced in China still comes from coal. The subsidies provided by the PRC government are also backfiring. The solar sector in China is currently experiencing the effects of these subsidies. The main manufacturers recorded large losses in the third quarter of 2024, due to serious excess capacity and price wars. This has led to laying off 30 per cent of the workforce in the sector. On the other side, tariffs imposed by the EU on Chinese EV manufacturers have also backfired. A large part of European electric cars use Chinese

batteries, which account for around half of the total cost of the vehicle. China controls almost two-thirds of world production in this sector, according to a study conducted by Natixis CIB. China is the world's largest supplier of critical raw materials. China's strategy is to control all stages of the value chain, from the extraction of materials to final output. The country also accounts for almost all of the world's graphite production, another key material in battery production. (Manu Granda and Guillermo Abril, "[The green revolution, 'made in China': The two sides of Europe's ecological transition](#)," *El Pais*, 08 December 2024)

### **EU signs deal with Latin America amid disagreement with France**

On 06 December, Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Parliament, signed a deal with Latin American countries. "Today marks a truly historic milestone," von der Leyen said after summit talks with leaders of the Mercosur bloc in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. The agreement will create a free trade zone for more than 700 million citizens. The deal took 25 years to be completed and signed. It is opposed by France since the deal will affect the poultry and farming industry of France. Meanwhile, German leaders are celebrating the deal. Siegfried Russwurmhe, head of the Federation of German Industry (BDI), issued a statement, "This agreement will provide an urgently-needed growth impulse for the German and European economy." The deal aims to deepen ties between the EU and the Mercosur countries. However, the deal is yet to be ratified by the signatory countries. (Giorgio Leali, "[EU snubs France to seal huge Latin American trade deal](#)," *Politico*, 07 December 2024)

### **France accuses Leyen of favouring Germany over Mercosur deal**

On 06 December, *Politico* reported on the disagreement between Germany and France over the Mercosur deal. Under the deal, poultry and beef products will be imported from Latin American countries at a much cheaper rate. This might undermine the poultry and beef industry of France which is a major source of income. Farmers' lobby is

also very strong in France which affects the politics of the country. France has been repeatedly vetoing the deal in the European parliament. German leaders were questioning the hold of the European council in the parliament after France was vetoing the bill. After the deal was approved by Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the EU, the spokesperson of the PM office in France issued a statement suggesting that the French government will continue to fight for its agricultural sovereignty. The deal can threaten the relations between France and Germany, according to *Politico*. *Politico* also suggested that the deal might threaten the very foundational understanding between the EU members. (Camille Gus, Giorgio Lealli, Nette Nostlinger, Clea Caulcutt and Lucia Mackenzie, "[Franco-German fight over South American trade deal threatens EU rupture](#)," *Politico*, 06 December 2024)

### **EU condemns Taliban's rule to ban women from medical services**

On 04 December, *Euronews* reported that the EU condemned the Taliban's ban on women and girls from training as midwives and nurses in Afghanistan. The EU denounced this decision as an "appalling violation of the human rights and education of women in Afghanistan." It will affect around 17000 female trainees in the country. The institutions having medical courses for women were asked to close as female trainees were prevented from attending the classes until further notice. The EU called for the immediate withdrawal of the rule and expressed its concerns on the consequences of the law. In a statement, it said that this would worsen the humanitarian crisis and suffering of people in Afghanistan. According to officials in Afghanistan, the law will increase the mortality rate of mothers and children, especially in remote areas. The health sector of Afghanistan will also face a lack of workers and services provided to female patients. (Kieran Guilbert, "[EU condemns reported Taliban ban on women's medical education in Afghanistan](#)," *Euronews*, 04 December 2024)

### **ICJ to undertake the landmark case on**

### **climate change**

On 03 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) began its hearing on the landmark case on the legal obligations undertaken by a country to counter climate change. Being the largest case in the ICJ, it would hear from 99 countries and more than a dozen intergovernmental organisations in two weeks. The final result could bring out legal obligations applicable worldwide. Vanuatu and other low-lying at-risk islands in the Pacific Ocean were set to head the hearings. Head of Vanuatu's legal team Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh said: "We want the court to confirm that the conduct that has wrecked the climate is unlawful." In addition, the speakers from Vanuatu said that they were in the middle of a crisis which they were not responsible for. The hearings followed the COP29 summit where the wealthy nations refused to allocate enough funds to combat climate change. The hearing would continue till 13 December and the court's opinion would be given in 2025. ("ICJ begins hearings to clarify climate change obligations," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 December 2024)

### **ICC President condemns the US and Russia over their economic sanctions on the court**

On 03 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported on the statements of the President of the International Criminal Court Tomoko Akane condemning the US and Russia. Referring to them as permanent members of the Security Council, he referred to the threat of economic sanctions from them against the court. She criticised them for meddling with the investigations of the court, calling it "appalling." She said: "The court is being threatened with draconian economic sanctions by another permanent member of the Security Council as if it was a terrorist organization." She was referring to the statements made by US Senator Lindsey Graham who called the court a "dangerous joke." Graham threatened Canada, the UK, Germany and France in case they helped ICC. Akane pointed out that these threats violated the existence of the ICC. ("ICC chief criticizes US and Russia over threats," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 December

2024)

### **Euronews report finds direct linkages between ocean warming and increased cyclones**

On 02 December, *Euronews* reported on the increased ocean warming since 2005 and its impact on the sea and land. According to the report, marine heatwaves were devastating for life under sea and land intensifying the hurricanes, floods and droughts. The scientists traced that long stretches of high sea surface temperatures known as marine heatwaves could amplify the storms and heavy rainfall. This was particularly seen in the hurricanes of Helene and Milton which hit Floris in 2024 autumn. Marine heatwaves lead to intense cyclones, occurring in the Atlantic where 35 per cent compared to cyclones. The study published by Nature also found the interlinkages between the ocean and weather which affected both the US and European coasts with multiple wildfires in the Mediterranean region. (Cristina Coellen, "Storms, droughts, Mediterranean hurricanes: Are marine heatwaves making natural disasters worse?," *Euronews*, 02 December 2024)

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Turkish President, and Lebanese PM hold talks on regional issues**

On 18 December, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkiye, and Najib Mikati, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, met to discuss regional issues and security threats to both countries in Ankara, the capital of Turkiye. Mikati, through X, post meeting said that Israel continues to carry out ceasefire violations in the Lebanese territory. Meanwhile, Erdogan emphasised that Israel must compensate for the damage it has caused in Lebanon and only a ceasefire in Gaza can truly bring about stability and prevent a spillover of the fighting in the neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, Syria has emerged as another concern for both countries as both of them share their borders with Syria. Both leaders said that they look forward to strengthening ties with Syria and rebuilding the country. ("Turkish President Erdoğan hosts

Lebanese PM Mikati in Ankara to discuss regional issues, instability,” Euronews, 18 December 2024)

### **EU ministers meet over enlargement talks**

On 17 December, an enlargement conclusion report was released after EU ministers met in Brussels. Turkiye and Georgia are reported to have received least approval due to democratic backsliding in the country. Meanwhile, Moldova and Ukraine were favoured by most. Regarding Georgia, the EU raised concerns regarding rule of law, fundamental rights, functioning of the judiciary and institutional independence. Georgia's overall failure to align with the EU's foreign policy and restrictive measures, including against Russia and Belarus, was another point of concern for ministers. Meanwhile, Turkiye problematic ties with Cyprus, an EU member, became an issue. Turkey is the only country in the world that recognises the sovereignty of the northeast portion of the island of Cyprus. Meanwhile, Ukraine was appreciated for high alignment with the EU foreign and security policy. Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia were rated fairly well as potential EU members. (Alice Tidey and Maria Psara, “EU affairs ministers rebuke Georgia and Turkey in enlargement conclusions,” Euronews, 17 December 2024)

### **Western naval stations to check ageing Russian oil tankers**

On 17 December, the UK, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Poland and Estonia said that they will ask suspected shadow fleet vessels for proof of insurance as they pass through bodies of water such as the English Channel and Danish Strait. These countries were a part of the two-day meeting of the Joint Expeditionary Force, a grouping of ten Ukraine-supporting nations, in Tallinn. Western countries have prohibited their companies from offering services such as insurance or financing to ships that offer

crude oil over an agreed price cap of USD 60 per barrel. These countries accuse Russia of circumventing restrictions using a network of ageing whose poor condition could lead to oil spills or other disasters. This comes after two Russian oil tanker ships were severely damaged due a storm leading to the spilling of tons of oil. (Jack Schikler, “UK, Denmark vow to ‘disrupt and deter’ Russia’s shadow fleet,” Euronews, 17 December 2024)

### **Erdogan urges the EU to focus on common interests such as Syria**

On 17 December, after Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkiye, met with Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the EU, Erdogan told the media, “There is a need, more than ever, for stronger and more institutional relationship between Turkey and the EU.” He pushed for better relations between Turkey and the EU and focused on Syria. Turkiye was an EU candidate in 1999 but the negotiations have been conclusive since then. The membership bid was also put on a standstill in 2018 due to deterioration in democracy of the country and high-level political dialogue has also been suspended since 2019. Turkiye has backed the Syrian National Army, an opposition group based in Northern Syria that took part in the offensive that toppled Assad. It is also a mediator between Western allies and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the rebel force leading the transition of power. Turkiye hosts around 3.2 million Syrian refugees. After the meeting, von der Leyen announced a support of EUR 1 billion for Syrian refugees in Turkiye. *The Wall Street Journal* also published a report suggesting that the US officials are becoming wary of a possible Turkish invasion on Syrian Kurds, who are backed by Washington. (Jorge Liboreiro, “Erdogan pushes for EU-Turkey upgrade after meeting von der Leyen to discuss Syria,” Euronews, 17 December 2024)

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