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Terror Trial in Paris



Image Source: Wall Street Journal

Switzerland Referendum on Same-Sex Marriages

Putin's Europe Strategy

Migrant Crisis in Belarus

Nord Stream-2

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Global Politics is a primary focus of the NIAS Programme on Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR). The primary focus is on contemporary world affairs. The Programme publishes *The World This Week*, and *NIAS Fortnightly on Science Technology and International Relations*.

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

About Europe Monitor

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

The Monthly is an integral part of NIAS Europe Studies. It includes focused commentaries on Europe, short notes, and daily updates on contemporary Europe.

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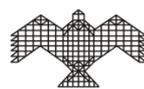
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National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) was conceived and founded in 1988 by the late Mr JRD Tata, who sought to create an institution to conduct advanced multidisciplinary research.

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



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The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

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Terror Trial in Paris

by Sourina Bej

“As the court sits to weigh on the testimonies of the accused and the 300 witnesses, a stark reality comes of the fore while decoding the social background of the accused and the victims.”

As the newspaper headlines on 9 September, 2021 would call it: “a historic trial” has begun in Paris. A special criminal court in France will now be in session for nine months prosecuting 20 accused and listening to 1800 plaintiffs. More than 330 lawyers are involved in the trial of those accused in the terror attacks of 13 November, 2015 and the session will be in a criminal court that was built to hold 550 people at the cost of 8 million Euro. The logistics detailed above only signifies how the legal, security, political and social institutions in France has come together to begin the process where the whole network towards the unfolding of a terror attack and the rationale behind the religious extremism will be tried and understood. And with it begins the questions: will the trial heal the victims or create more social divisions? Is the trial another response to state’s pre-emptive measures to combat domestic terrorism? Will the trial be an example of how religious terrorism, most importantly Islamist terrorism, be nibbed in the Western democratic countries?

A peek into the trial

The terror attacks of 13 November had claimed the lives of 130 people. The large expense, stature and expanse of the trial befits the call off being historic. Former president François Hollande will also testify before the court in November 2021.

Who are the accused?

As the court sits to weigh on the testimonies of the accused and the 300 witnesses, a stark reality comes of the fore while decoding the social background of the accused and the victims. While those accused have immigrant background and

are digitally radicalized, those impacted are also French nationals from a mixed ethnic background who work in the busiest economic quarters in Bataclan, Paris. The attacks in 2015 were planned in Syria and carried out by French nationals who had joined the ISIS and were able to travel back and forth undetected with the flow of migrants. The attackers were mostly French and Belgian citizens, born in Europe to immigrants from North Africa. The monster from within: is what Salah Abdeslam, the mastermind behind the attack, would represent when his testimony stands to be scrutinized.

Salah Abdeslam was arrested in Belgium in 2016 and the French-Moroccan individual faces life imprisonment.¹ Thirteen others, 10 of whom are also in jail, will be in the courtroom, accused of crimes ranging from helping the attackers with weapons or cars. Six more, mostly Islamic State officials, will be judged in *absentia* for providing other logistical help to the attackers.

Who are the victims?

For some it was the beginning to a rollercoaster Friday night when three coordinated mass bombing exploded in the heart of Paris. The Eagles Death metal rock concert was underway at the Bataclan theatre, a friendly football match between France and Germany was cheered by none other than President Hollande and the streets of Paris was drowned from the crowded cafes and restaurants until the shooting claimed more than 130 individuals. Those who witnessed the shooting are amongst the 300 plaintiffs ranging from some who lost their family

¹ [“Paris attacks of 2015: The logistics behind a historic trial,” France24, 07 September 2021](#)

members to small and large enterprise business owners.

“For the victims, the trial is the moment where facts could be re-examined, the ferocity of the act could be acknowledged and justice prevails if not as a compensation for the loss. However, what could be justice for the dead and the living in the terror attacks in Paris? Are the victims only those who are the plaintiffs or a larger community could be socially excluded by the acts of a few radicals?”

Similar trial is underway for those accused in the Charlie Hebdo terror attack in France. It is an important step towards beginning of the memorialization of the event at the individual as well as at the societal level. In this the role of the Judiciary as an institution to identify and open pathways for healings is significant. Plaintiffs not attending the hearings could follow via streaming radio: the first time such a tool is used for a criminal trial. The secure link will be audio-only and subject to a 30-minute delay.²

Justice and Beyond

The 2015 attack has not only wounded France’s national psyche but has also affected its body politic. A country with deep institutional roots for individualism, civic liberalism and secular values, the terror attacks has tested the people’s ability to truly comprehend multiculturalism and multi ethnicism in France. Along with it, the attack also eroded the tolerance towards political Islam and the trial highlights four issues beyond the immediate aim of justice and reconciliation.

Group attacks as an exception amid lone wolf attacks

The 2015 attack for the first time highlighted the expanse of local networks radicalized by international Islamic terrorist ideology. Not only did the ideology have a cross border influence, the individuals had also crossed the border to plan the attack. It was the largest attack the ISIS had carried out in the West and the modus operandi of the attack differed from other such Islamic State claimed operations. The event in 2015 was an exception as the patterns had moved beyond the lone wolf attackers. The attacks were well planned and executed under the direct orders of the ISIS operatives in Syria. It also indicated a logistical support that was based on an operational infrastructure in France with a backup in Belgium. And since 2015, terror attacks in the form of lone operatives, professing radical violent beliefs have time and again returned in France. The Nice truck attack of 2016 was equally lethal with 86 dead. The January 2015 attacks on the magazine office of Charlie Hebdo and the 2020 beheading of Samuel Paty, a school teacher who showed his class a satire comic of Prophet Mohammad before his beheading, have only reaffirmed that in France anybody could come under a terror attack.

The long hands of law strengthened by state’s security policies

It is the pre-emptive measures that has been the core of France’s counter-terrorism laws. France declared a state of emergency on the evening of the 13 November, 2015 which remained in place till 2017. In this period, the government had pushed through fresh anti-terror laws, granting police and intelligence agencies extensive powers to search and arrest, as simultaneous attacks had continued. With each attack, President Emmanuel Macron had replaced with tougher anti-terror laws. France had a long history of anti-terror legislation, since the 19th century, when the state adopted exceptional provisions under wartime regulations. A wave of Iran-sponsored terrorist attacks in 1986 in Paris, led the French government to lay the groundwork

² “ibid

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for its anti-terror legislation, which has provided the foundation of the country's anti-terror legal architecture. The trial is a product of this large legal infrastructure that has systemized accountability and intolerance for any form of religious extremism.

The legal and security centric intolerance had also led political actors to debate on the need for social policing. A debate had long raged in early 2016 when former President Hollande had proposed to strip dual-nationality terrorists of their French citizenship and deport them. The proposal never reached its legal end but it has fueled a social debate on what constituted in identifying one as a French over one's multiple group identities. In the past one year, the new anti-separatism law has eroded the multiethnic contours of the demography in France, especially, that of its Muslim communities. The legislation includes several provisions against online hate speech, the protection of civil servants, and tightened oversight of NGOs and religious associations deemed suspect by the state. It also strengthens the state's arsenal against forced marriages, polygamy, and the delivery of virginity certificates. Individual choices to wear *hijab* and consume *halal* food in public has been restricted as the State went on to ban the practices quoting it as anti-secular. The Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin hailed the new separatism bill as "excellent news for the Republic." In several cases, adopting new anti-terror laws is a way for the government to appear tough in its response to Islamist attacks. Also, it is often a political communication exercise.³ Thus, French nationalism steeped in civic liberalism supported by legalistic constitutionalism had made its minorities invisible in the society.

Widening social divisions

³[How the November 2015 attacks marked a turning point in French terror laws](#) "France24, 05 September 2021

⁴ ["Trial of the 2015 Attacks: France's Pre-emptive Counter Terrorism,"](#) IDSA Comment, 22 September 2021

Even though politicization of the terrorist events has pushed for the anti-terror laws, the immediate fallout has been a social divide where one community's practices stand to be scrutinized and treated exclusively against the whole. For several decades, France has struggled to deal with the fissures within its multi-ethnic and multi-religious demography, and the issue of a burgeoning Muslim citizenry has now become a part of the political discourse, on account of the terrorist attacks. The French colonial legacy in North Africa has pushed labour migration of several Muslim families from the region into Paris and their segregated housing has long prevented their social integration let alone the groups' social mobility. This social exclusion, in the times of economic and political crises, has resulted in communal disharmony and riots. The social rubric was further divided when the French conception of a more assertive secularism is believed to have now generated a sense of insecurity among the religiously devout sections of the ethnic Algerian community.⁴ A growing sense of socio-economic marginalization is seen to have probably worsened the divide. The trial and the probable persecution of the terrorist could also go ahead and instill a likely social alienation.

The 1986 law had instituted a centralized counterterrorism system that involves specialized prosecutors and investigating judges working in close cooperation with the intelligence services. But civil rights defenders have often criticized these laws as one that compromises liberties and procedural guarantees that is necessary to ensure fair trials.⁵ Similarly, Macron's anti-terror law promulgated on 30 October, 2017 is highly restrictive. The law allows police to establish "security perimeters", where individuals and vehicles can be searched. Other measures include the closure of religious establishments promoting radical ideas, and the use of

⁵[How the November 2015 attacks marked a turning point in French terror laws](#) "France24, 05 September 2021

passenger name records to monitor suspicious travellers.

Amid these stringent security laws, the ongoing trial and widening mistrust between different groups, the cohesion stands to be fractured. but with the above issues, the trial does peg one to question what outcome would the trial bring? As much as it will make the perpetrators accountable for their horrid act of violence, will it ensure a more inclusive society?

In perspective: Asking the tough questions towards collective consciousness

While defining collective consciousness, French sociologist Emile Durkheim famously wrote, “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own.” The social norms form the basis of a collective consciousness. But when does the *anomie* break? The terror attacks are a vivid example of one such social rupture but then could the trial bring in wholistic social norms or will it build on a social anxiety? As the nation awaits justice a path towards collective memorialization has formed the core of the national consciousness. One

could collectively agree on what needs to be condemned and also uphold the values that forms the social cohesion with an equal support from the socio-political institutions.

But, at a time, when the French society and the different groups within are searching for a common ground for integration, where does the trial leave one? The intra and the inter group cohesion in the French society has never been simplistic. And the trial puts a check on what it means to practice violent radical attacks but how much will it facilitate a social dialogue in combating the religious extremism is still in doubt. The other side of the spectrum where lensing and seeing the act of one Muslim man as the burden of a whole ethnoreligious community is also painfully problematic and marks the beginning of a social perception bordering on social exclusion. Indeed, this remains a trail to watch.

Sourina Bej is a doctoral candidate and KAS-EIZ scholarship holder at the University of Bonn. Her research interest extends from studying migration, group identity, conflicts, politics of integration to discourses on social exclusion in developing countries.

COMMENT

Switzerland Divided on Same-Sex Marriages Votes in a Referendum

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Switzerland's legislation for providing same sex marriage and IVF access has been subjected to a referendum which is scheduled for 26 September 2021. The legislation has been adopted by the government but is heavily contested among the citizens. Polls suggest that the law is set to pass with 63 per cent responders in support of the law, 35 percent opposing and 2 percent undecided. The essay focuses on why there is a referendum, why is the reform necessary and what would the reform change for the LGBTQ community in Switzerland.

Why was the referendum passed?

Passing of the referendum

The referendum comes in the wake of a highly-charged campaign by gay rights activists against the conservatives. The country remains among the last few in Europe to continue the ban over same-sex marriages. In December 2013, Lawmakers voted to legalize same sex marriage and simplify the process of legal gender recognition. The move was a major step forward for LGBTQ+ rights.

The legislation for same sex marriage recognition was under debate since 2013. The provisions also included simplification of gender marker and legal name changes on identity proofs. The minimum age limit to change gender without parental consent was set at 16. While the Swiss parliament adopted the legislation in December 2020, it was likely that the legislation would be contested through a referendum at the request of the conservative Christian parties.

Olga Baranova, the leader of the "Marriage for All" campaign said: "When you're favourite to win, the danger is that people in favour of the reform demobilise and suddenly, it is the opposing camp that wins.

That's why despite the overwhelmingly positive polls, we are redoubling our efforts to really make sure all the people with the right to vote use it". The referendum was announced immediately after the acceptance by the parliament. It came from the Democratic Federal Union with the support of Democratic Union of the Centre along with Christian-democratic party. This has been the fifth time that a referendum has been passed for population consultation on LGBT issues. In retrospect no other Western European country had opted for the same.

The referendum was passed in the wake of opponents fearing the legislation would hamper traditional family rules. The interparty committee said: "Marriage and family are closely linked because children are born naturally only from the union of a man and a woman". The conservatives indulged in hard core campaigning against the legislation.

Arguments by both sides

Supporters of the bill argue for the elimination of inequality. Thierry Delessert, a historian noted that the vote would be of "huge significance" and vouched for the elimination of the discourse on differentiated inequality that exists towards the LGBTQ community. The opponents for the legislation have lost to every referendum they have launched previously. They also argue for there being no valid reason for the denial of marriage rights considering the rest of Europe has legalized the same and for their children who do not receive the same level of protection as heterosexual parented children receive. They state that the law is set to protect families and children beyond the symbolic power of marriage equality for all.

The opponents argue on the same base of protecting families by emphasising traditional family values. They were immediately able to generate the needed 50,000 signatures required to request a referendum under Swiss law. Expressing concern over the absence of a father figure Marc Fruh said: "We simply can't erase fathers from the Civil Code, because that's one of the issues. I do not accept that the father becomes a secondary parent. That's a no." The opponents also expressed concerns over providing "children on demand" and indulged in putting graphic cryptic billboards to depict a zombie insinuating that the sperm donors used by Lesbian couples could be dead.

What would same sex marriage change?

Switzerland has been relatively progressive as compared to other European countries in terms of allowing same sex couples to enter into "civil partnerships" since 2007. This provided the same sex coupled with equal tax benefits as any heterosexual married couple. The following referendum allows for same sex couples to adopt children that are not of either partner, Lesbian couples would be allowed to make use of sperm donation and both be recognized as the mother of the child. Foreign residents married to a citizen would also be able to register as a citizen if they're married to Swiss partners. The major reason for an opposition to civil unions lies in the immediate need to disclosing gender identity at the time of registration of the union, or even when hunting for jobs and apartments.

What would it mean if the referendum gets passed?

For the LGBTQ+ Community

For the LGBTQ+ community; the reform will guarantee a better standard of living and a true sense of equality. Referendums have been seen as the most effective way to oppose authorities. With the required legal backing, the LGBTQ community would be

able to proclaim a well-established majoritarian victory over the conservative concerns.

"The main concern facing Switzerland would be the referendum fuelled homophobia. The campaigns this year were extremely violent as the existing homophobia came to light. Urban centres were flooded with hotline calls supporting victims affected by verbal and consensual violence. Switzerland's parliament would have to address the acts of discrimination at the hands of the opposition who hold the marriage between a man and woman to be a "privilege" which cannot be granted to same sex couples."

For the rest of Europe

The polls highly indicate that the legislation may get passed. With the passing of the Legislation, Switzerland would come at par with its other Western European countries like Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Norway etc. It would also become the 30th country in the world to allow for same sex marriage. Italy would be the only other country where same sex marriage is not legalized despite legal civil unions since 2016.

Assuming that the major influence to advocate for the legislation in Switzerland came due to the legalisation for same sex marriage in Germany and Austria; one may assume that the same wave of activism may take over Italy.

Vaishnavi Iyer is a Research Assistant at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS.

COMMENT

From Crimea to Navalny: Putin's calibrated Europe Strategy

By Joeana Cera Matthews

Russia remains the biggest security threat to the West, particularly with its crippling cyber-attacks. Disunity within Europe allows Russia to continue pursuing political repression of its own citizens and territorial aggression against neighbouring countries with less foreign interference. How is Moscow looking at Europe? What factors in Russia's European strategy?

Navalny, Nord stream and Ukraine: Kremlin's Europe strategy

Russia budging on issues regarding Putin-critic Alexei Navalny or the annexed Crimean Peninsula and Ukraine is unlikely. These core interests won't be given up for maintaining good relations with Europe. In fact, Europe has been repeatedly warned to not meddle in Moscow's internal affairs. Putin is not a fan of common victory which implies compromise, instead, he is a staunch believer in the survival of the fittest. In this scenario, competing with the US or the Russian people's interest are not his priorities. Instead, his focus remains on the survival of his interests regarding Russia.

Natural gas continues to be the Russian 'bedrock of power' – both domestically and internationally. For Putin, the Nord Stream pipeline is an opportunity to increase his influence in Europe by deepening the region's dependence on Russian energy. This pipeline just gives a new direct and powerful access to Moscow in western Europe. Being one of the world's largest producers and exporters of oil and gas, Putin has extraordinary leverage over his neighbours that rely on Russia for their energy needs and upsetting the Kremlin can force them to shut off these facilities as we witnessed in 2006 and 2009. Capturing the European gas market will further enrich Putin's kleptocratic regime. It also amounts to be a real weapon against Ukraine –

threatening both its security and financial sectors.

The latest threat to annihilate Ukraine if NATO closed in on the region shouldn't be completely pushed aside as empty threats as we saw what happened with the UK's HMS Defender that navigated the Black Sea waters last week. It did not end well.

EU Summit 2021 and a divided Europe over Russia

The EU Summit 2021 was held in June in Brussels. One of the main focuses of the summit was to figure out ways to destabilize the strained bilateral relations of the bloc with Russia. Realizations of sanctions being ineffective and of Europe losing control over Russia to the Chinese were all matters of concern for this year's summit. Despite warnings and efforts from the EU to maintain better bilateral relations, Russia seems unlikely to budge from its core interests in order to uphold stability in the Euro-Russian relations.

The summit saw France and Germany's proposal to initiate a dialogue with Moscow being rebuffed by the bloc. The new approach of negotiations was shared by other countries like Italy. This change in viewing Russia can be explained with an economic argument, claiming that Germany has national interests over the bloc's interests, considering its trade ties with Russia's Nord Stream pipelines project. The summit also recognized the inefficiency of sanctions as it only helped to antagonize the bilateral relations. Russia's increasingly provocative reaction to the sanctions also made Europe realize that it has lost its leverage over Moscow. The EU talks cannot, however, be termed as a total failure since it saw them learning from their mistakes and moving away from the purely reactive logic of ineffective sanction impositions.

The mixed reactions within the bloc can be attributed to the role of history. The fierce resistance that Germany's proposal faced from Poland and the Baltic states can be seen as a defensive posture due to the history of the USSR rule in the region. They've been first-hand witnesses and victims of Moscow's aggression. These countries don't even want to consider the possibility of negotiations with a Putin-led Moscow that continues to "provoke them" with its "aggressive policies". Initiating a negotiation with someone like that, the Poland PM said, would imply that they were appreciating him instead of reprimanding him.

Russia, on the other hand, conveyed its regret in the EU's inability to confirm a negotiation with Moscow. Even if the EU overcame its internal differences and gave way to bilateral dialogue, Moscow agreeing to this is highly unlikely. Maintaining peace would inevitably mean budging on their core interests. This would lead to the collapse of the existing regime and the citizens would lose faith in a government that gives up its core interests to achieve anything – including peace. Despite the Kremlin spokesperson expressing Putin's interest in improving the bilateral relations, Putin would never stake his legacy and power, even if the people were to agree to it.

On one hand, concerns regarding the EU further straining relations by the imposition of more sanctions remain. On the other hand, the possibility of these being rhetoric or empty warnings to threaten the Russian economy also holds. Both parties need to recognize that negotiation is key.

The China Factor

China seems to be Putin's confidence-

booster. Efforts by various actors to dull down this camaraderie have proved unsuccessful. The recent extension of the 20-year-old Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation (TGNFC) between Xi and Putin further reinstates this. The frequent interactions between top leaders also shows the deepening mutual trust and only adds to the failure of the Western attempts to split them.

“The Russia-China equation in Europe is rather accommodative where we see Moscow providing security while Beijing provides development, enabling both to essentially stay out of the other's way. The general opinion of recognizing China as a rising power and Russia as just a distraction seems to have given Moscow a complex, and maybe even an identity crisis. Putin's need to prove that Russia is as much of a threat or a power as China would only lead to more chaos.”

Russia is stubborn when it comes to its national interests. The only way that it would approve of peaceful negotiations and stick to them is if the present status quo holds and the sanctions imposed on them are waived. Both seem extremely unlikely.

Joeana Cera Matthews is a Visiting Research Scholar with the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS

COMMENT

The Weaponization of the Migrant Crisis in Belarus

By Harini Madhusudan

On 21 September, one day before the Polish president's address at the UNGA, it was reported that four people had died of hypothermia and exhaustion on the borders of Belarus-Poland. The news came amid accusations that the Belarusian government had been funnelling migrants from various regions across its borders into Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania. With the help of Moscow, it is said that Minsk is aiding Iraqis and Afghans; with the aim to spread chaos and sow domestic discord among Eastern European countries. Are the migrants a tool for the Lukashenko regime? What are the roots of the migrant issue in Belarus?

Weaponization of migrant crisis

On the outset, the actions by Belarus are a defensive response to the consistent sanctions being placed on the regime by the European Union since the elections. As a counter-strategy, using the migrants for political leverage is a low blow. However, the regional responses to the migrant situation have been weak too. The immediate response/priority had to be to secure the safety of the individuals. The death of four people at the borders is an indicator that- human safety has taken a backseat over all the states trying to make political gains through the situation, given that all of them have responded in line with their strategic and legal commitments. Belarus has indeed weaponized the migrant situation in Eastern Europe and has triggered a very sensitive battle of consciences in the region by fostering the crisis.

People were reported to be illegally crossing across the borders, and on 23 August the Prime Ministers of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Estonia, called on the United Nations to take action against

Belarus claiming that the latter was "using immigrants to destabilize neighbouring countries." Poland and the Baltic countries have observed a surge of thousands of migrants, who are mostly from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan crossing into their borders. The Prime Ministers allege the ongoing crisis to be "planned and systemically organized," and revealed in a joint statement that it constitutes a breach of international law qualifying as a hybrid attack on the bloc. "We urge the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to take active steps to facilitate the solution of this situation and to require Belarus to comply with its international obligations," the statement said.

Previous concerns

In May 2021, Latvia and Lithuania had raised their concerns over Belarus giving free passage to immigrants. Since then, several stand-offs have been observed on the borders. Warsaw, Vilnius, and Riga believe that these migrants, who are mainly from Iraq, are being used by Lukashenko for political leverage against the sanctions imposed on his regime. In response, Latvia and Poland have declared a state of emergency. Lithuania has begun installing a razor-wire fence across their 670-kilometer border with Belarus. Poland has begun to construct barbed-wired fences across the Polish Belarusian border to contain the record numbers of migrants crossing from Belarus. In May 2021, following the hijack of the Ryanair plane and the arrest of the young opposition activist, the European Union imposed sanctions on the Lukashenko government. As a response, Lukashenko announced that Belarus would no longer prevent drug smuggling and illegal immigration across the borders.

Regional tensions

The tensions between Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania have been high since Belarus' disputed elections. Lithuania hosts many of the pro-democratic rivals of Lukashenko, and Poland in recent weeks gave refuge to the Belarusian Olympic Athlete Krystina Tsimanouskaya. Early August, direct daily routes from Sulaymaniyah and Erbil of Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as Basra to Belarus, were paused after the EU's persuasion of Iraq. This saw a sharp reduction in the number of migrants arriving in Lithuania. However, the fall in Lithuanian arrivals saw an exponential increase in the migrants crossing into Latvia and Poland.

“Sufficient evidence, both verbal and visual, has shown the involvement of Belarusian forces funnelling, escorting, and directing the migrants, mostly from Iraq, to reach across the Belarusian borders. There is suspicion that Belarus would attempt to bring refugees from Afghanistan for the same reason. Lukashenko is said to have instructed his officials to also tighten Belarus' border which has effectively trapped many migrants in a no man's land after they were turned back by the EU.”

According to Lithuanian border authorities, 4,115 illegal immigrants have been detained so far in 2021. The numbers are alarmingly high compared to 81 interceptions in 2020, 46 in 2019, and 104 in 2018. A majority of these migrants were from Syria and Iraq but reports also show migrants from Russia and a few African countries. In 2021, Latvia has detained 343 individuals for illegally crossing, and Poland has recorded 891 individuals crossing their borders illegally. The EU home affairs minister, who visited the Belarusian-Lithuanian border in early August, has accused the current situation as “a very severe aggressive act” which shows an intention to provoke. The border guard

chief of Latvia stated that these individuals were seen arriving in an organized flow and in large groups.

Legal Grounds

The 2009 Lisbon Treaty emphasizes that the EU would share competence in regards to the number of migrants allowed to enter a member state to seek work, legislative procedures for regular and irregular immigration, and handed the jurisdiction of the field of immigration and asylum to the Court of Justice. In 2011, the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility established a general framework for the EU relations with third countries related to immigration. In 2015, the commission published the European Agenda on Migration which enhanced the management of all aspects of immigration more effectively, by revising the Blue Card directive, re-assessing the existing frameworks, and strengthening cooperation with key countries of origin for legal ease of immigration and improved returns. In 2020, the commission also published a New Pact which aims to also integrate the individuals for resettlement, offer community scholarships, pathways to education, and work. The common approach has made checking irregular migration, returns directives, and integration easy.

Problems on the ground

However, different nations have different approaches to the same. In the case of the small Baltic states, one of the major complaints is that of alienation and poverty. For example, Latvia gives 139 Euros a month, but in Germany, the allowance is 400 Euros and they are given an apartment. The government of Latvia cannot afford to pay the same price, and the allowances are insufficient to meet the cost of living in Latvia. Additionally, by law, there is a need to know the local language to get a fairly-paying job. Hence, these conditions make the people leave Latvia as soon as their official papers are given to them. This is the case with all three Baltic states. Allowances in Lithuania vary between 102 and 204 Euros, and Estonia, 130 Euros a month. In Poland, the benefits are 149 Euros a month.

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Many in the Baltics, the nationalists, are in support of the refusal of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to house refugees.

Conclusion

The present crisis in the region brings to the fore two realities. The migrating individuals are the only ones losing amid political greed, while countries are using the complexities of the EU legal structures to their advantage. First is the timing of the crisis which is very close to the joint Belarus Russia military exercise in the background. This could serve as an intimidation factor used by Lukashenko in response to the sanctions placed on his regime. As a double-edged sword, the Russian side could also be using the situation in Belarus to trigger a provocation against the Western Allies, considering there is a strong backing by

Russia to the administration in Belarus. Second, the situation has given an advantage to the far right in all the three states to take measures and effectively restrict the movement into their borders. With the announcement of plans to install fences and other barriers, the restrictions of movement across borders could remain for longer than the situation at hand. It is essential to uphold the dignity of these individuals, and respect their human rights, and ensure all procedures are dealt with in accordance with the existing EU legal framework. Evidently, sanctions against Belarus would not prove beneficial as a response to the same.

Harini Madhusudan is a Doctoral Scholar at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS.

COMMENT

Nord Stream-2: Why is the region unhappy about the pipeline?

By Joeana Cera Matthews

The Nord Stream gas pipeline system from Russia to Germany has been the centre of attention for a while now. The primary opposition against the completion of the pipeline has been from Ukraine and the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) since they stand to lose the most via the project. The Nord Stream project presents both an economic and security threat to these countries. The EU also voiced their concern regarding the project though their opposition hasn't been as strong.

The threats perceptions: Energy, economy and security

First off, the energy threat. Pre-Nord Stream, gas reserves from northern Russia's Yamal Peninsula would travel through Ukraine, Slovakia and Czech Republic to finally reach Germany. The initial pipeline bifurcated in Belarus travelling into Poland and the other CEECs, as well. Evidently, pre-Nord Stream gas transit happened via Ukraine and the CEECs. However, on completion of the Nord Stream pipelines, this route will be bypassed with the direct, underwater gas transit route. The detour implies that Ukraine and the CEECs lose out on their gas supplies. Their increased dependence on Russian natural gas leaves them facing an energy crisis with this transition. These countries, along with some members of the EU, thus view the pipeline as a Kremlin geopolitical project aiming to expand Russian influence over European energy resources.

Second, the economic threat. The bypassing of the present route affects the previously benefitting countries implying that these economies lose out on the gas transit fees. This loss will severely impact their revenues and put them in major financial crises. Third, the security threat. Currently, Russia depends on the CEECs and Ukraine

for supplying gas to their European consumers. The reduced dependence post-Nord Stream will assist Russia in increasing its regional destabilization. Their geopolitical argument rests on the premise that purchasing gas from a state-owned enterprise (Gazprom), funnels money directly to the Kremlin. Thus, they would basically end up funding Russia's nefarious activities both domestically and globally. Ukraine remains the most fearful of such an outcome given their existing conflict with Russia over the Crimean Peninsula and the Donbass region.

Fourth, the role of history. The regional history plays a significant role in better understanding the CEECs' stance against the completion of the project. The USSR regime had wreaked havoc in the CEECs and today's Putin-led Russia doesn't fall far behind in preying these countries. Ukraine and the CEECs (particularly Poland and the Baltic states) fear the potential increase in Russia's political leverage via the project. Placing the Nord Stream project in this historical perspective explains the vehement opposition staged by Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states.

The US-Germany joint statement fails to soften the threat perceptions

The US and Germany have made moderate concessions to Ukraine and the CEECs in an effort to soften the blow. Their joint statement was, in effect, a compromise wherein the US suspended all sanctions imposed on the Nord Stream-2 pipeline while Germany threatened Moscow against weaponizing the pipeline. Primarily focused on the most affected Ukraine, the statement speaks of a Green Fund to invest in Kyiv's energy sector thus reducing its dependence on fossil fuels. They also expressed their intent to back the energy transitions of the CEECs.

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Germany agreed to use its leverage over Russia to extend the Moscow-Kyiv gas transit agreement by another decade, which otherwise ended in 2024. Increased efforts to implement the Minsk Protocol via the Normandy format was also promised by Germany. But these are just declarations of intention and not substantial enough for the affected countries. Finally, the US' announcement of the Biden-Zelenskyy meet also raises suspicion of whether it is a US effort to cushion the 'betrayal' of Ukraine.

What next?

Ukraine was, primarily, disturbed by the covertness of the statement. The office of the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that any decision on Nord Stream-2 couldn't be taken without all those impacted by the project. Ukraine and Poland had also released a joint statement post the US-Germany declaration; they warned that the pipeline was not only a threat to Kyiv and the CEECs but also to NATO and the EU. They went on to state that supporting the completion of the pipeline only empowered Russia at a time it faced widespread criticism for its destabilizing activities.

The joint statement also indicated a diminishing trust in Germany; whether Berlin's economic interests outweighed its ability to take a firm stance against Russian aggression worried them. Another concern was the practicality of the declaration. Even if Germany and US upheld their end of the declaration, the fact that Russia held the other end impacted their reliability on the stakeholders. The inability to uphold past agreements added up to this concern.

Implications

The primary fallout via the latest statement and the larger pipeline project is the victimization of the previous transit countries. More often than not, the sacrosanct principles of the EU disappear when push comes to shove. Realpolitik overshadows value systems while the middlemen – here Ukraine and the CEECs –

end up as victims. If history is anything to go by, Germany's warning to Moscow politicizing energy has limited efficiency. Moscow has been sanctioned in the past and is currently under sanctions, yet it doesn't seem to abate the Kremlin ability to continue its malicious activities.

“The lack of energy diversification in Europe and its consequently growing reliance on Russian energy – almost to a dangerous level – points to further worry. Environmentalists, however, are concerned of the harmful effects to the fragile marine ecosystems. Even if natural gas were friendlier to the climate than coal; its combustion contributes to global warming. Thus, the construction of a multibillion-euro pipeline indicates a long-term investment ‘locking’ Germany and the EU into fossil fuels. Thus, the pipeline stands to jeopardize the bloc’s move to a low-carbon economy.”

Finally, the larger strategy of the US vis-a-vis the compromise shouldn't go unnoticed. Under the pretence of maintaining ties with 'good friends', the US appears to have strategized weakening the Sino-Russian ties whilst strengthening Moscow-EU relations. Their sanctions yielded no results; changing the strategy to indirectly support Moscow seemed a better alternative. The US expects this to reduce Russian aggression in the region and improve bilateral relations. Unfortunately, Ukraine and the CEECs are caught in the political crossfire.

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EUROPE SHORT NOTES

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Boris Johnson asks France to “get a grip” over the AUKUS submarine row

By Vaishnavi Iyer

After being blindsided by the AUKUS allies, France reacted furiously as it indulged in escalating diplomatic rows. Boris Johnson commented: “prenez un grip and donnez-moi un break”, asking the French counterpart to get a grip and give him a break. The confrontational remark came with the announcement of France holding a call with the United States to facilitate the return of the French ambassador to the US. France had recalled its ambassadors to the US and Australia, but not Great Britain. When asked as to why France did not recall its ambassador from Britain, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian commented that they are familiar with Britain’s “permanent opportunism” and referred to the country as the “fifth wheel on the carriage”. The comment made by Johnson could be around the French claims of the misstep in ignoring France over the AUKUS deal to affect talks regarding Northern Ireland. France sought solidarity from the EU over the deal, comparing it to that of the consequences of Brexit. Johnson, on the other hand, insisted that the deal is a great step forward in social security and isn’t exclusive per se. He further elaborated that the deal was only about three like-minded allies coming together to share technological efforts and that it had nothing adversarial towards China.

Macron and Biden hold reconciliation talks

President Macron expected “concrete measures” on the US’ part to restore France’s trust and communication amidst the AUKUS diplomatic row. France reacted rather aggressively against the AUKUS members. The call between US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron took place on 22 September 2021. It was reported to be “friendly”, with France facilitating the

return of its French ambassador to the US. Before France recalled its ambassador, it had initially cancelled a gala which was to commemorate 240 years of the relation between America and France. There was also a direct comment by Jean-Yves Le Drian aimed at the Biden presidency, saying it mirrored the previous Trump presidency. He went on to call the decision of the US a “stab in the back”, calling Biden’s decision unpredictable, brutal and unilateral. However, after the 30-minute call on 22 September, the leaders vowed to launch consultations for building confidence and meet in Europe at the end of October. President Biden resonated with the idea of a strong European defence plan to complement the NATO alliance. There was a small difference between the noting of consultations in the French language and the English language. While the English report noted that the allies would have “benefited” from open talks; the French version wrote the allies could have “avoided this situation” which is an acknowledgement of the French anger. While no dates were set for the October meet, Biden would be in Glasgow and Rome for the COP26 and G20 summits respectively. Moreover, the French foreign minister finally warmed up to Antony Blinken at the UN summit on 23 September. France will send a detailed cancellation invoice to Australia for the failed contract. It was mentioned that the call was concluded with good messages, with France establishing that the reaction did not stem from the commercial loss of the deal but rather the breakdown of confidence with its counterparts. While France spoke with the US, there seemed to be no indication of French reconciliation with Australia or the UK, especially after Boris Johnson asked France to “get a grip”. Thus, the international community is yet to see when Macron ends the face-off with the AUKUS allies.

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INTERNATIONAL

76th UNGA session: Erdogan promises ratification of Paris Climate Agreement

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 22 September, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressed the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) confirming Istanbul's readiness to ratify the Paris Climate Agreement. The landmark agreement focuses on limiting the dangerous emissions that contribute to global warming. These dangerous emissions, scientists claim, are increasing extreme and frequent weather events. The announcement comes after Turkey was subjected to a year of devastating environmental conditions owing to climate change.

The Announcement

Erdogan's address titled, "A Fairer World is Possible", included calls to justice and touched upon the UNGA session's themes. From COVID-19 to multilateralism, several matters of concern were addressed. However, the President dedicated the entire closing section of his comprehensive speech to climate issues. Despite addressing a wide range of issues, his announcement on the Paris Agreement took precedence across media outlets. Turkey had signed the Paris Climate Agreement back in 2016, however, they did not officially ratify the same in the parliament. Deciding to finally ratify the Paris climate agreement was the highlight of Erdogan's address. He expects to complete the process in time for the UN Climate Change Conference in November at Glasgow.

Why ratify now?

From the torrential rain-induced flash floods to the scorching wildfires, the past year's weather conditions were not kind to Turkey. Erdogan and his government came under severe criticism over his handling of the crises — the flash floods, fires, and finally the drought. The lack of appropriate equipment and technology to handle the situation were some of the main criticisms that the Erdogan administration

received. In light of this, environmental issues have been prioritized, and approving the Paris Agreement is a step toward acknowledging and acting on these concerns.

Climate as a primary agenda at the UNGA

Climate change and biodiversity were among the themes chosen for the 76th UNGA. The recent IPCC report has raised concerns about the fastening pace and impact of climate change. Climate financing and adaptation have also been discussed at the assembly. Erdogan, himself stated that the world needed to prioritize climate change before inaction led to irreversible consequences. From the US' Biden's address to that of China's Xi Jinping's address, climate change definitely claimed importance as a matter to be acted upon at the earliest.

Erdogan in New York

On 20 September, Erdogan met with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the newly inaugurated Turkevi Center in New York. Later in the day, he also met with the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussing developments in Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya among other issues. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also met with his counterpart regarding continued cooperation on Afghanistan.

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FRANCE

Profile: The Failed France-Australia Submarine Deal*By Vaishnavi Iyer*

In 2016, The Franco-Australian USD 90 billion submarine deal was signed under the socialist president Francois Hollande. The aim was to establish a strategic partnership agreement with Australia and the Australian Navy's 6 Collins-class submarines end service in 2036. Thus, it was essential for Australia to invest in a deal in the face of an assertive China in the Indo-Pacific region. France has nearly two million of its population living in the Indo-Pacific, inclusive of New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Nearly 7000 French soldiers patrol the South China Sea. In the submarine deal of 2016, Australia chose France over Japan and Germany to replace its old submarines with 12 diesel-electric submarines.

It was confirmed by the French government on numerous occasions that the deal was still in action. In a meeting as recently as 30 August, both countries had made specific reference to the important future submarine programme and deepening defence operations. Two weeks later, the Australian counterpart tore up the deal. At a point in time, the Australian government referred to the Future Submarine project as one of the most complex and largest defence acquisitions in the history of the nation. This was meant to counter China's growing military fleet which had doubled since 2015. However, the deal was torn up owing to the same reason. Australia expressed no regret in mentioning that the French submarine would not be able to provide for the level of defence required against the Chinese counterparts, which are now the largest navy in the region. While Australia cancelled the deal over the inadequacy of the French submarines; the deal is to be understood as a non-commercial contract for France as well. The deal would have allowed France to underpin its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The present deal (AUKUS) will enable the US and UK to share cutting-edge technology with

Australia, including artificial intelligence and quantum technologies. Essentially, it will consist of security and military capability enhancements. The eight nuclear-powered submarines will be in operation by the Royal Australian Navy. In the future, Australia is set to acquire long-range missiles for its armed forces. The new deal seems more beneficial for Australia given the nuclear technology information access enabled by the US. Moreover, the new deal is significant in terms of the allies coming together after the Second World war; making the deal comparatively historic or rather as historic as sharing the deal with France. Thus, in terms of the technological and historic benefits; the AUKUS deal promises more significance and power for Australia in the Indo-Pacific region than the failed French deal.

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INTERNATIONAL

AUKUS: Pact to counter China*By Vaishnavi Iyer*

Announcing a historic pact, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom decided on security cooperations, in an effort to counter China. The trilateral programme is focused on knowledge sharing of nuclear-powered submarines. Australia, being the primary beneficiary in the deal, is looking at modernizing its security capabilities over the next decade. The pact is deemed the most significant between the three countries post the Second World war. The pact will enable the US and UK to share cutting-edge technology with Australia, including artificial intelligence and quantum technologies. Essentially, it will

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consist of security and military capability enhancements.

The three nations did not explicitly mention China as the counterforce but insisted on having to provide for a solid strategy against the growing threats in the Indo-Pacific region. China has been flexing its military muscle in the region near the South China Sea to Ladakh. The alliance has deemed the move necessary to push high skilled jobs and maritime security.

The US will be sharing its nuclear submarine technology after 50 years. The eight nuclear powered submarines will be in operation by the Royal Australian Navy. In the future, Australia is set to acquire long-range missiles for its armed forces. Australia has reassured that it doesn't aim to obtain nuclear weapons.

The move has been largely discouraged by China and has been deemed as 'damaging'. The country highlighted the consequence of a looming arms race leading to international distrust. France has expressed dissatisfaction with Australia for the consequent cancellation of the submarine-building alliance between the two countries. Australia was set to receive 12 attack-class submarines from France, which has now been terminated. The UK still insists that relations with France are solid. France reports complications of relations with Australia and the US calling the move a 'stab in the back'. The France-Australia deal was in fact reaffirmed two weeks ago, without any indication of the coming AUKUS. France predicts a harsh future legal battle with Australia over the contract. France also attacked the concerning 'American behavior' citing Biden's decision to be a reflection of his predecessor Trump's unpredictability. This pact also allows for separate operations of these three countries from the Five Eyes. The following alliance hints at a powerful shift in region. Despite being a part of the Quad, the formation of AUKUS highlights a larger power play in the region.

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THE UNITED KINGDOM

Lorry driver shortage highlights a wider European problem

By Vaishnavi Iyer

The British government has referred to its current situation as a 'manufactured situation'. Grant Shapps, the UK transport secretary, mentioned truckers' associations being "desperate to have more European drivers undercutting British salaries". The ministries and the government have had to assure the citizens about having no fuel shortage and that Britain is well stocked on the item. However, for the last three days, citizens have been queuing for fuel furthering the panic buying process. BP, a petroleum major, mentioned that nearly 1/3rd of its supplies was worn out by 26 September, a result of which the company cut the supply of 90% of its fuel stations to ensure fair distribution. Among other suppliers reporting fuel shortages was Shell. With worldwide fuel and gas prices on the hike, especially in Europe; the UK government has blamed it on a lack of lorry drivers.

Facing a shortfall of 100,000 truck operators, 25,000 heavy goods vehicle operators, the UK is in the midst of an acute shortage of drivers. A few other problems include separate individualized tests to deliver hazardous substances, drivers who left the EU in 2020 yet to return home, and finally the older drivers nearing retirement. Truck and cargo drivers have claimed that driving in the UK is less attractive than anywhere in the continent, owing to the lack of toilet, shower, and canteen facilities, along with lesser wages and higher taxes.

A group of analysts have suggested a primary reason for this crisis to be Brexit. Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition slammed the government for failing to foresee shortages of labour post-Brexit. The shortage of labour has

affected the farming and food processing sectors as well. Government still maintains that the shortage of truck drivers is due to the pandemic and has issued 5000 temporary visas to incentivize truck drivers. The incentives seem to be failing. The UK in the early 2000s relied on drivers coming from Eastern Europe, after leaving the bloc, the drivers opted for employment in other countries around the continent accounting for better pay and working conditions. While the shortage remains, the UK says it wouldn't want uneducated people from the EU. Critics are certain that the 3-month visa will not incentivize drivers given the already heavy UK taxation policies, they would prefer any other European country over the UK.

Following Brexit, the government has pushed for domestic countries to replace reliance on labour from across the continent; however, the process is cumbersome and difficult. To address the shortage of truck drivers, the government has initiated tests and with the help of the defence ministry sought to train new drivers. About 4000 people are being trained for HGVs. According to industry leaders, the “short term fix” is said to render pointless as the labour crisis will worsen by Christmas. The UK has also handed out similar 5000 visas to poultry workers to ease pressure on the food industry. Driver shortfall across Europe has risen to 400,000 as predicted by the Transport intelligence and Brexit seems to be one of the probable causes of the shortfall owing to mismanagement of the labour force after the exit. While the UK re-emphasizes its sovereignty devoid of the EU; the overall socio-economic crises fuelled in the middle of the pandemic may lead to further criticisms.

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RUSSIA

Russian Elections 2021: Amidst allegations of fraud and unfairness, United Russia wins

By Joeana Cera Matthews

From 17 to 19 September, Russia witnessed elections at the local, regional, and national levels. The parliamentary elections were the primary focus as it would elect 450 deputies for the next five years to the State Duma (lower house of parliament). The preliminary results of the three-day polling came to an end with the Kremlin-loyal United Russia attaining an overwhelming majority. Russia's Electoral Commission head Ella Pamfilova announced the final results on 23 September.

Preliminary results in numbers

As the vote-tallying ended, United Russia emerged the winner with a vote percentage of 49.83. This implies that United Russia will contribute more than two-thirds of deputies in the lower house, thus, receiving a constitutional majority. Despite winning comfortably, the party lost ground in comparison to the 2016 elections wherein they secured 54 per cent of the vote. The Communist party garnered 19 per cent of the vote while the nationalist LDPR party and the Fair Russia party contributed around 7.5 per cent of the vote, individually. A new pro-Putin party — New People, also garnered 5 per cent of the vote share. Overall, the elections saw an official voter turnout of 52 per cent.

Pre-election issues

Russia's guided form of democracy was clearly visible throughout the electoral processes. Before the elections, Moscow saw a major crackdown on Kremlin critics. Any individual or institution that criticized the Putin-led government was either arrested, tried in court, or managed to flee the country. There were no apprehensions regarding the outright removal or banning of critics prior to the elections. Alexei Navalny, the most popular Putin opponent, was jailed while his organization was labelled ‘extremist’. A strategic voting app promoted by Navalny's group was taken down from the stores of

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Apple, Telegram, and Google after they were pressured by Russian authorities.

Criticisms: Internal and International

According to reports, this year's election saw Russia transitioning from a flawed democracy to a fully-fledged authoritarian state as the pro-Kremlin results were inevitable. Criticisms ranged from accusations of voter fraud to requests of annulling the results. Ballot box stuffing, pens with disappearing ink, and threats against observers were other alleged violations. According to the Interior Ministry, 750 complaints of voting violations were received, none of which were serious enough to affect the vote outcome. Those that criticized the elections from within the country included the Communist party, Navalny's supporters, and other anti-Kremlin sentimentalists. However, there also came an international backlash. From the US State Department spokesperson Ned Price to the EU Foreign Affairs spokesperson Peter Stano, the Russian elections were termed undemocratic and staged. Many other countries in Europe also criticized the growing authoritarianism in Moscow.

Kremlin remains unswayed

Despite the widespread criticism, the Kremlin has reiterated Putin's priority of transparency and honesty regarding the elections. They deny the existence of political motives behind the intimidation of opponents, justifying that those prosecuted had broken the law. His popularity remains pristine to those that credit him for standing up to the West and 'upholding national pride'.

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POLAND

Amnesty International raises concern over the treatment of Afghan refugees

By Vaishnavi Iyer

On 29 September, Amnesty International reported brazen human rights violations at Usnierz Gorny, where a group of migrants were encamped. The guards resorted to the use of threat and force to return the group to Belarus. Using a satellite image from 18 August, Amnesty reported the unlawful treatment of the migrants escaping from Afghanistan over Poland's new laws. Amnesty also said that the Belarusian border guards regularly help migrants cross into Poland and Lithuania. Lukashenko has been accused by Poland of weaponizing the migrants. Announcing the change in its legislation, Poland issued laws that make it almost impossible for groups crossing the border to apply or claim asylum. This is in contrast to the larger EU and International law where migrant claims need to be individually assessed. Poland and Lithuania have reported increases in migrants from Afghanistan and Iran, flowing from the Belarusian borders, a strategy they believe Minsk has adopted to put pressure on the EU sanctions. While human rights groups and media have not been able to access Belarusian borders, they have criticized Poland for its nationalistic government's approach to the crises. Four migrants died near the Polish borders which are devoid of food, shelter, clean water, and medical facilities. Currently, the International Organization is urging the government to protect the rights of the 32 refugees including a teenage girl. The Polish government has declared a state of emergency sealing off its borders and restricting access; however, with the satellite images, Amnesty concluded irrefutably that the position of the migrant group shifted from Poland to Belarus overnight. Without an individual assessment, migrants cannot be forced back as per international and EU law, owing to which Amnesty has requested Poland to carefully consider its violations and provide

for legal, medical aid to the migrant groups along with food, shelter, and clean water.

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EUROPE IN SEPTEMBER 2021

by Joana Cera Matthews and Vaishnavi Iyer

GERMANY

Germany: SDP party wins with a small margin as CDU, CSU performs poorly for federal elections

On 25 September, exit polls predicted Germany's Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to be essentially in a tie. On 26 September, the official preliminary results concluded that Olaf Scholz's SPD secured 25.7 per cent of the votes while Armin Laschet's CDU secured a vote of 24.1 per cent. The Greens secured third place. After the final election debate, the opinion polls had suggested the Social Democrats to be leading by just one percent followed by the FGW center-left party with 25 per cent. The winning candidate will be under extreme pressure to take the green policies forward. A month-long discussion is expected to follow this, as decisions will be made on who should form the government and other talks on the coalition. (["Germany: SPD intends to form coalition with Greens and liberals," *The Guardian*, 27 September 2021](#); ["German candidates clash in last TV debate before vote as SPD lead narrows," *Reuters*, 24 September 2021](#); ["Thunberg spearheads German climate protests to pressure candidates before polls," *France24*, 24 September 2021](#))

Germany: Murder following a request to wear face masks highlights concerns over radical views

On 19 September, a 20-year-old was killed when he asked a customer to wear a mask. Lawmakers in Germany are concerned about the radicalization among people who oppose COVID-19 restrictions. In the wake of the killing of the 20-year-old clerk in Idar; authorities expressed fears over the growing radicalization. Police authorities did not release details till September 20 regarding the matter. The 49-year-old man turned himself in on September 19, and upon arrest said that he had acted "out in anger". (["Germany: Gas station employee killed over a face mask," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 September 2021](#))

***Washington Post* on the legacy of Merkel**

On 13 September, a *Washington Post* editorial talked about the legacy of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is the first German premier to leave of her own accord. Calling her the 'doyenne of European politics', the article goes on to mention how Merkel's legacy is a complicated one to decipher. An equally praised and criticized politician who has been repeatedly termed as one of the most influential women of her time, her departure is expected to leave a political vacuum. The article mentions how Merkel's attempts to place Germany as the bridge between Eastern and Western Europe stems from her personal experiences. Further on, it also portrays her efficient leadership that helped battle the successive crises which struck Europe — from the late 2009 eurozone debt crisis to the recent pandemic. Though it divided Europe, her decision to open Germany to the Syrians during the 2015 migrant surge is considered to be her greatest achievement. Merkel's ability to separate the nefarious activities of China and Russia from interfering in trade and economic factors into her uniqueness. Marking the end of an era, the article concludes with one of Merkel's modest replies — she wants to go down in history as 'someone who tried'. (Loveday Morris, ["After 16 years, Germany's Merkel is stepping down. Here's how she built her legacy," *The Washington Post*, 13 September 2021](#))

RUSSIA

Russia: Foreign ministry threatens retaliation against YouTube

On 29 September, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that they would block YouTube in a 'retaliatory' move. On 28 September, YouTube had deleted state-sponsored Russia Today's (RT) German-language channels. The channels were removed after YouTube accused RT of having violated its COVID misinformation policy, which was not taken well by the Kremlin. The Russian media watchdog

Roskomnadzor has threatened for YouTube to reverse the decision at the earliest. ([“Russia threatens to block YouTube,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 29 September 2021)

Moscow: Election results protested

On 25 September, around a thousand people gathered in Moscow rejecting the election result. The demonstration was organized by the conservative Communist Party. Signs calling for a recount, releasing jailed Kremlin-critic Navalny, and other issues were also called for via the demonstration. The protest was heavily policed. ([“Russia: Hundreds protest in Moscow over election result,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 25 September 2021)

Russia: University shooting leaves six dead

On 20 September, six people succumbed to death after a student opened fire in a university. The university, which hosts 12,000 students, had 3,000 people on campus at the time. Russian authorities reported six dead and 28 injured among the 19-people shot at the university located in Perm. The authorities provided no further information other than mentioning that the shooter was a student. ([“Several killed in shooting on university campus in central Russia,”](#) *France24*, 20 September 2021)

Russia: Freedom of speech questioned over Moscow calling more media outlets “foreign Agents”

On 3 September, the Justice Ministry of Russia held down on four more media outlets deeming them as ‘foreign agents’. The authorities said: “The Justice Ministry of Russia entered the following legal entities into the register of foreign media performing the functions of a foreign agent: Altair 2021 LLC, Vega 2021 LLC, Editor-in-Chief 2021 LLC and Romashki Monolit LLC.” Crackdown on journalists has become a regular practice in Russia, raising concerns about the freedom of speech. (Vladislav Shatilo, [“Russia Names 4 More Independent Media Outlets ‘Foreign Agents,’”](#) *The Moscow Times*, 3 September 2021)

THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands: Ministerial resignations over Afghanistan crisis

On 17 September, Dutch Defence Minister Ank Bijleveld resigned after she lost a parliamentary no-confidence vote over her mishandling of refugee evacuation from Taliban-seized Afghanistan. This followed Dutch Foreign Minister Sigrid Kaag who resigned in a similar fashion on 16 September. Following the vote, they tendered their resignations; unlike Kaag, Bijleveld had initially refused to resign. During a parliamentary debate on 15 September, Kaag admitted that the government's response to the worsening Afghan situation had been slow; implying evacuation of a lot of Dutch citizens and other Dutch associates wasn't done in time. Kaag, who became foreign minister only in May of this year, intends to continue leading her D66 party. The Dutch ministers are believed to be the first western officials to resign over the chaos after the Taliban takeover. ([“Dutch foreign minister resigns over Afghan evacuation,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 16 September 2021; [“Second Dutch minister resigns over Afghan evacuation crisis,”](#) *The Guardian*, 17 September 2021)

POLAND

Poland: Council of Europe asks Warsaw to redefine rape, repeal media restrictions

On 16 September, Poland was criticized by European institutions for its various legal and human rights violations. The Council of Europe (CoE) — Europe's leading human rights organization — while reviewing Europe's implementation of the 2014 Istanbul Convention asked Warsaw to change its legal definition of rape from a ‘force-based act’ to include ‘all non-consensual sex’. Separately, the European Parliament voted largely in favour of a resolution concerning Poland's media freedom. The non-binding resolution mentioned other violations such as the reducing independence of the judiciary and legal silencing of critics. It also stated that the EU withheld funds as SRHR violations and discriminations against the LGBTQIA+ community continued in Poland. ([“Change rape definition, stop restricting media, Europe tells Poland,”](#) *Reuters*, 16 September 2021)

SPAIN

Europe Monitor

Catalonia: Carles Puigdemont freed after arrest

On 24 September, the former President of the Catalan state government Carles Puigdemont was released from detention after being arrested on 23 September in Sardinia after almost four years as a fugitive. Despite the release, he is to remain on the island until the end of his legal process. Puigdemont's lawyer said that the prosecutors did not request him to be detained. In 2017, Puigdemont along with three other Catalan ministers had fled the country following an independence referendum for Catalonia. The Spanish government declared the referendum to be illegal and Puigdemont was charged with sedition. Being a member of the EU, Puigdemont was protected; however, the European Parliament stripped him of his privileges in March. The Spanish government and courts have expressed deep reverence for the Italian justice system and asserted that the procedure would be the same for any individual who is answerable to the courts. The Catalanian President called the arrest a "persecution" and the region still witnesses a push for independence. Spain has pardoned separatists who were initially sentenced to long prison terms. ("Catalan separatist Carles Puigdemont arrested in Sardinia," *EU Today*, 24 September 2021; "Carles Puigdemont released after arrest in Sardinia," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 September 2021)

Canary Islands: La Palma's volcanic eruption leads to evacuations as lava endangers banana plantations

On 28 September, lava from the La Palma volcano finally reached the sea after much speculation regarding the same. The volcano located on La Palma — the fifth-largest island in Spain's Canary Islands—erupted on 19 September, following heightened seismic activity for over a week. Government spokesperson Isabel Rodriguez reported that 6,000 people from La Palma have been evacuated and 650 properties damaged. No casualties have been reported, however, there is much overwhelm about the situation. The citizens have been warned to maintain cleanliness in order to avoid the ingestion of the toxic ash looming in the sky. Seismologists maintain that the

duration of the eruption is unpredictable as previous eruptions lasted weeks to months. In light of the increased devastation of homes, the Islands' regional government has promised two housing developments purchases to provide for the homeless. Meanwhile, emergency shelters are being provided by Spanish banks. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez also visited the site and promised state support to La Palma. Spain has declared La Palma a disaster zone in order to assist the island's recovery via financial support. ("'Miracle house' engulfed as lava reaches sea off La Palma," *The Guardian*, 29 September 2021; Nacho Doce and Marco Trujillo, "Lava, smoke and ash cover La Palma as volcano threatens banana crop," *Reuters*, 23 September 2021; "Canary Islands volcano: New vent opens, more people flee," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 September 2021; "Canary Islands: Volcano eruption on La Palma destroys homes, no injuries," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 September 2021)

GREECE

Island of Crete: Earthquake leaves one dead and nine injured

On 27 September, an earthquake hit the island of Crete in Greece. Casualties included one death and nine injured while several damages to infrastructure were also reported. The Athens Geodynamic Institute reported the initial magnitude of the quake to be 5.8 with an epicenter of 246 kilometres (kms) southeast of Athens. The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) reported a magnitude of 6.5 with a depth of 2 kms. There have been variations regarding the magnitude of the quake across institutes. ("Greece: One dead after earthquake hits the island of Crete," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 September 2021)

BELARUS

Belarus: Maria Kolesnikova sentenced to 11 Years in prison

On 6 September, Maria Kolesnikova, a Belarusian activist and politician, was sentenced to 11 years in prison for leading a protest against President Alexander Lukashenko. Kolesnikova, along with colleague and leading opposition leader Maxim Znak, were charged with extremism and attempts to illegally seize power. Both of the accused have denied all allegations. (Valarie Hopkins, "Belarus Opposition

Leader Sentenced to 11 Years in Prison,”
The New York Times, 8 September 2021)

Belarus: Hacker group attacks government agencies to overthrow the regime

On 3 September, *Deutsche Welle* reported that a hacker group named ‘Belarusian Cyber Partisans’ attacked a government website aiming to overthrow the regime. The group of tech experts from the country have claimed responsibility for numerous other attacks on government databases. Claiming to have hacked into these websites to provide the population with crucial information, the group has allegedly hacked into police databases, the files of the Interior ministry, internal security plans, telephone numbers, etc. Following their investigation, the group also promised to release all the gathered information at a gradual pace. (“Belarusian Cyber Partisans want to overthrow the regime through hacking,” *Deutsche Welle*, 3 September 2021)

FRANCE

France: Sarkozy verdict over 2012 re-election campaign on 30 September

On 30 September, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy will hear the verdict regarding his massive overspending during his 2012 re-election campaigns. His campaign spending had crossed the legal limit and amounted to at least EUR 42.8 million. Sarkozy, who was voted out of parliament after a single term, has also been associated with multiple investigations. However, doubts loom as to Sarkozy appearing in court for the judgment. During his previous five-week trial, he had infuriated the prosecutors by attending just a single day of the hearings. (“Former French president Sarkozy faces verdict in campaign finance trial,” *France24*, 30 September 2021)

France: Health workers suspended over vaccine refusal

On 16 September, 3000 health workers across France were suspended without pay as they failed to comply with the French mandate of compulsory vaccinations which came into effect on 15 September. French Health Minister Olivier Veran, in a statement, said that the suspensions were

temporary and many of the people had realized that the mandate was a reality. The impact is limited as most of the suspended staff work in supporting roles. Critics have objected to the move as it forces people to get the jab. Other countries in the region like Italy, the Netherlands, and Britain are also considering similar measures to increase vaccination rates. (“France suspends 3,000 health staff as Europe targets vaccine refusal,” *Reuters*, 16 September 2021)

France: Paris attacks trial defendant blames France for attacks

On 15 September, Salah Abdeslam, the main defendant and the only surviving member of the Islamic State (IS) cell responsible for the November 2015 Paris attacks, justified the murder of 130 people as retaliation for French military action against IS jihadists. Relatives and survivors present in the courtroom were upset by this remark. Abdeslam also singled out former President François Hollande and said that the state-authorized airstrikes on IS militants in Syria which didn't distinguish between men, women, and children, made the militants want "France to go through the same pain". (“Paris attacks: accused says killings revenge for French airstrikes in Syria and Iraq,” *The Guardian*, 15 September 2021)

UKRAINE

Ukraine: Law on restricting oligarchs gains clear majority in parliament

On 23 September, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law curbing the political and economic influence of oligarchs in the country. The law, which passed the first reading in July, passed its second reading with a clear majority. It will now be forwarded to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for approval. The legislation would require top officials to declare dealings with individuals categorized as ‘oligarchs’. These ‘oligarchs’ are restricted from involvement in political financing and privatization of public assets. Zelenskyy expects these rules to protect Ukraine from corrupt and powerful business figures. Critics, however, claim this to be a move by the President to concentrate power. The decision came a day after Zelenskyy’s top aide survived an

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assassination attempt; government officials said that this could have been a response to the reform. ("Ukraine approves law to limit influence of oligarchs," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 September 2021)

ICELAND

Iceland: Elections witness almost historic women parliament overturned by recount

Around 33 women were elected into a 63-seat parliament in Iceland. Prior to the recount, the country celebrated brief hours of being the first European country to have a woman-dominated parliament. The recount indicated that it was only 30 women who were elected instead of the previous 33. However, Iceland still has the highest number of women lawmakers in any European parliament. The election results in Iceland remained unchanged with the ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir. The three-party coalition has governed Iceland for the past four years; Jakobsdottir's party suffered losses, it remains to be seen if the coalition sticks together. The coalition of the Green Movement, Progressive Party, and the Independence party held 37 out of the 63 seats.

Lenya Rum Karim running for the anti-establishment party saw her victory overturned with the recount. She would have been Iceland's youngest lawmaker at 21 years old. If not for the statistics before the recount, Iceland would have been among the list of countries with a women-majority parliament like those of Rwanda, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and the UAE. However, Sweden and Finland have 47 per cent and 46 per cent women's representation in the Parliament in Europe. Meanwhile, Iceland has been ranked as the most gender-equal country. While the recount reversed a landmark or a rather historic victory for gender equality; Iceland continues to strive to maintain its coalition and a stable government considering the last years being guided by scandals and political mistrusts.

References:

"Iceland election: Recount overturns historic results for women," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 September 2021.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK: Boris Johnson reshuffles cabinet to replace ministers under fire

On 15 September, after months of criticism of top ministers in his cabinet, British PM Boris Johnson began reshuffling the cabinet to align with his 'levelling up' agenda to boost the economies of England. Foreign Minister Dominic Raab, who was under fire for his handling of the Kabul fall was demoted to Justice Minister. Other reshufflings included that of the education secretary and the housing secretary. ("Reshuffle: Boris Johnson's new cabinet meets for first time," *BBC*, 17 September 2021)

REGIONAL

EU: Brexit-affected countries to receive emergency aid

On 28 September, EU governments approved an emergency aid of EUR 5.4 billion for those member states who were negatively impacted by Brexit. Ireland and France are expected to be the top recipients receiving EUR 1.1 billion and EUR 735 million, respectively. The funding provided will cover the costs and compensate for the financial losses incurred due to Brexit. After Brexit came into effect in January, trade has reduced significantly between the UK and the EU. The EU's fishing industry has been hit the most. ("EU approves relief funds for member states hurt by Brexit," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 September 2021)

France: EUR 3 billion defense deal signed with Greece; Macron asks Europe to 'not be naïve'

On 28 September, France signed a defense deal with Greece after the recent rift over AUKUS with Australia and the US. Under the France-Greece deal, Greece will be supplied with warships by France. Three Belharra frigates manufactured by the French will be given to Greece with the option of purchasing another. Following the meeting between French President Emmanuel Macron and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Macron stated that the AUKUS situation would not affect the French strategy regarding the Indo-Pacific. He also advised the Europeans to stop being naïve when pressured by powerful countries and instead to prove themselves by staging an efficient defense. ("France and Greece sign

multibillion-euro defense deal,” Deutsche Welle, 28 September 2021]

Ukraine: Ambassadors of Budapest and Kyiv summoned over Russian gas supply deal

On 28 September, Ukraine and Hungary summoned their respective ambassadors after Budapest signed a gas deal with Russia. Ukraine considers the new 15-year natural gas supply deal between Russia and Hungary as a threat. On 27 September, Hungary had accused Ukraine of intervening in its internal matters when Kyiv criticized Budapest regarding the same. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto justified the ambassador being summoned over attempts by Ukraine to block the gas deal while Ukraine’s foreign ministry said they summoned the Hungarian ambassador in a tit-for-tat move. (“Hungary, Ukraine summon ambassadors over Russian gas supply deal spat,” Reuters, 28 September 2021)

Kosovo: NATO deploys KFOR peacekeeping forces at Kosovo-Serbia border

On 27 September, The NATO peacekeeping forces - KFOR - increased their patrols on Serbia’s northern border. The rising tensions between Serbia and Kosovo attribute to the Serbian deployment of armored vehicles at a border crossing after Serbs protested a decision taken by the Kosovo government concerning licensing plates. This is an issue since Serbia does not recognize Kosovo nor its license plates. Due to this, drivers from Kosovo are required to remove their license plates and purchase temporary ones while travelling through Serbia. Kosovo decided to impose a similar measure which has soared tensions between the two countries. Citing the history of non-recognition, about 50,000 Serbians living in Kosovo have refused to obey the new orders in force from 20 September and blocked roads in protests. The police charged the protestors with armed riot gear and vehicles until the Kosovo Prime Minister said that the move was a retaliatory measure against Belgrade and not to harm drivers. (“NATO patrols Kosovo-Serbia border as tensions soar,” Deutsche Welle, 27 September 2021; “Serbs block roads in Kosovo in protest over

licence plate restrictions,” Reuters, 20 September 2021)

Russia: ECHR accuses Russia of Litvinenko murder

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has accused Russia of being involved in the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko. It said that Moscow was ‘beyond doubt’ involved in the assassination. Litvinenko worked with the Russian security forces before defecting and moving to the UK. He was given UK citizenship along with his now widowed wife. He was poisoned to death with a tea containing the radioactive substance Polonium-210. The probe found that the killing was guided by an operation of the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB). Russia, however, has claimed the ruling to be ‘unfounded’ and has continued denying its involvement with the murder. (“Russia was responsible for Litvinenko killing, European court rules,” Deutsche Welle, 21 September 2021)

Poland: ECJ imposes fine on Warsaw over controversial coal mine

On 21 September, Poland was directed to pay EUR 500,000-a-day to Brussels by the ECJ over its failure to cease mining activities. The Turow mine in question is located southeast of Poland bordering the Czech Republic and Germany. In January, Germany had filed a claim over the same issue citing the harm to the communities over its borders. Prague had filed a case in March with the ECJ. In May, Poland was instructed to cease the extraction of brown coal. The Czech government reportedly filed the case owing to the failure of talks between Warsaw and Poland. Poland is likely to lose the EU’s EUR 17.5 billion “Just Transition” fund if it continues mining beyond 2030. The ECJ ordered Poland to pay the daily penalty until it obeys the interim order of the court. (“Poland ‘must pay €500,000-a-day fine’ over controversial coal mine, says ECJ,” Euronews, 21 September 2021)

Poland: Warsaw accuses Russia and Belarus of weaponizing migrants

On 20 September, four migrants were found dead on the Polish border. Poland has accused Russia and Belarus of orchestrating

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a mass weaponization of migrants across the border. Despite having anticipated cross-border migrations, the EU, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia were not prepared to host the wave of middle eastern migrants that have been seemingly “instrumentalized” by Belarus and Russia in the wake of the sanctions placed against Belarus. Up to 7000 migrants have been found on the border after being flown/pushed/driven away by Belarus. Though the EU has extended support to the ailing nations, experts want to see more. Poland has imposed a 30-day state emergency banning entry of non-residents and installed barbed wires on the borders. ([“After four found dead, Poland blames Belarus for migrant wave,” Al Jazeera](#), 20 September 2021)

‘HERA’: EU launches health crisis body

On 16 September, The European Commission launched its health crisis body - ‘HERA’, short for ‘Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority’. The body is expected to assess potential health threats, promote research as well as provide emergency funding in the face of a new health crisis. HERA has been created to avoid a repetition of the ad hoc measures that were taken by individual EU members when the coronavirus pandemic began. The European Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager said that HERA, though an addition to other EU health agencies, would be the primary instrument to coordinate preparedness and future response. It will be fully operational by early 2022. ([“EU launches health crisis body to prepare for a future pandemic,” Reuters](#), 16 September 2021)

Belarus: Lukashenko announces USD 1 billion arms deal plan with Russia

On 12 September, President Alexander Lukashenko visited the Zapad military exercises which were underway with Russia. He announced a plan to acquire USD 1 billion worth of weapons from Russia by 2025. Announcing that Belarus was prepared to counter the West’s ‘hybrid aggression’; the drill which unsettled Poland and Ukraine ended three days later on 15 September. Russian President, Putin oversaw the drills live and met the troops previously. ([“Belarus: Lukashenko eyes \\$1](#)

[billion arms deal with Russia,” Deutsche Welle](#), 12 September 2021)

Brexit: EU rejects further negotiations on Northern Ireland Protocol

On 10 September, The Guardian reported the EU to have rejected Britain’s demand of renegotiating the Northern Ireland trading protocol, asking the involved parties to resolve it. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson claimed that the protocol in place did not protect the Good Friday Peace agreement. He reiterated his government’s stance in the parliament, as well. On 15 September, the European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic also met with Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin suggesting possible solutions regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol. (Lisa O’Carroll, [“EU rejects UK’s demand to scrap Northern Ireland protocol,” The Guardian](#), 10 September 2021)

GENDER

Poland: ‘LGBT-ideology free zones’ repeal status

On 27 September, three more regional councils in Poland — Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, and Malopolskie — repealed their ‘LGBT- ideology-free zone’ status. On 22 September, following an extraordinary provincial assembly session, the province of Swietokrzyskie in southern Poland had also overturned its stature as an ‘LGBT ideology-free zone’. The repeals followed a similar vote in Krakow on 20 September. The declaration, accepted in 2019, was revoked after the EU denied pandemic-recovery funds to Poland. In Swietokrzyskie, the previous legislation was replaced with a new resolution that guarantees families the right to raise their children according to personal beliefs while providing equality and fair treatment for all. The EU wants Poland to undo the ‘LGBT-ideology free zones’ as it violates the EU law on non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Following the repeals, Poland’s LGBTQ rights activists expressed their gratitude for the decision. ([“Three Polish regions repeal ‘LGBT-free’ declarations,” Reuters](#), 27 September 2021; [“Polish province overturns ‘LGBT ideology free zone,’” Deutsche Welle](#), 23 September 2021)

Germany: Two transgender women elected to power in elections

On 27 September, two transgender women - Tessa Ganserer and Nyke Slavik, members of the Green party, won seats in the German parliamentary elections. Ganserer had been elected to Bavaria's regional parliament in 2013. She intends to create an easier procedure for ratifying gender change on identity documents as well as bring about legislative changes that would allow lesbian mothers to adopt. Slavik, on the other hand, intends to implement a nationwide action plan against homophobia and transphobia among other things. ("Two transgender women win seats in German parliament," *Reuters*, 28 September 2021)

Switzerland: Same-sex referendum on wins with an overwhelming majority

On 26 September, Switzerland conducted its referendum to legalize same-sex marriages. The vote which was won by a large margin would allow for same-sex couples to get married and adopt children. Results of the referendum showed that 64.1 per cent of the voters favoured the legalization while 36 per cent voted against the same. However, converting this result into law, like a bill, would require time because of Switzerland's administrative and legislative procedures. The vote was initiated by the country's conservatives. ("Swiss vote 'yes' to same-sex marriage," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 September 2021)

Ukraine: Kyiv's annual Pride march attended by over 7000

On 19 September, over 7000 people attended the annual March for Equality supporting the rights of the LGBTQ community in Kyiv. Concerns of violence loomed large as around 100 far-right activists counter-demonstrated in a nearby park. However, the country's tenth Pride rally occurred without any trouble. Carrying banners that read, 'Fight for right!', which referred to eight demands made to Ukrainian authorities, the marchers called for substantial changes to be made with regard to how they were treated. Last year's parade was cancelled due to the pandemic. ("Ukraine: Thousands march for LGBTQ

rights," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 September 2021)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Nestle, Portugal's Galp Energia, Shell pledge efforts to address physical risks of climate change

On 23 September, the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change concluded in research that companies involved in food and pharma, mining and energy, transportation, etc. are more exposed to physical climate risks of flooding, droughts, and extreme heat than any other sectors in their region. The group in a letter to the European, US, and Asian companies asked the firms to identify and provide adequate responses or policies to address the situation. The investor group also published a note of expectation to help companies build resilience towards these physical risks of climate change. Companies like Shell have planned to appeal an effort to cut carbon emissions in a new ruling, while energy companies like Centrica have pledged to look further into the issue and increase outputs on the same. Nestle mentioned its undertaking which was already in progress relating to physical impacts on their value chains and finally, Portugal's Galp Energia promised its commitment to be a leader in quality, transparency, and accuracy. (Carolyn Cohn and Nina Chestney, "Exclusive: Centrica, Nestle, Swatch among companies exposed to physical climate risks - investors," *Reuters*, 23 September 2021).

UK: Government introduces E10 petrol to reduce emissions

On 1 September, the UK government made a shift to E10 petrol. E10 petrol has been described to consist of lesser carbon when compared to other available alternatives. The fuel produced henceforth will derive its ethanol component from plants like wheat and corn. The proposal for the shift will help the UK reduce its carbon emissions by 7,50,000 tonnes every year. (Rosie Frost, "E10 petrol: Everything you need to know about the UK's new 'green' fuel," *Euronews Green*, 1 September 2021)

MIGRATION

Greece: Major fire at a migrant camp

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On 19 September, a major fire broke out in abandoned sheds on the western side of the Samos camp. The affected Vathy migrant camp's fire was brought under control by thirteen firefighters and six fire engines. The camp was evacuated entirely, previously housing 300 people awaiting their Monday transfer to a closed camp. 10 unaccompanied minors were transported to the closed Samos facility while the rest of the asylum seekers will be transferred on Monday as scheduled. ("Greece: Major fire breaks out at soon-to-be-closed migrant camp," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 September 2021)

Italy: Hundreds of migrants land in Lampedusa

On 28 September, the Italian Interior Ministry said that hundreds of migrants had arrived on the island of Lampedusa. 686 people arrived by a large boat while 67 others were brought to safety by rescue forces on smaller vessels. They will now be shifted to quarantine zones. According to the Interior Ministry's data, 44,800 migrants have landed on the Italian coast from the beginning of 2021 until 27 September which is a spike from the 23,517 amounted during the same period last year. ("Hundreds of migrants land in Italy's Lampedusa," *Reuters*, 28 September 2021)

The UK: Britain plans to return illegal migrant boats to France

On 9 September, the UK government announced its plans to send back illegal boats coming from France. The decision comes amidst toughening relations between France and the UK as they try to prevent people from crossing the Channel. The UK Home Secretary Priti Patel expressed that stopping the migrant boats was her number one priority. Earlier, she had mentioned that the UK could restrict the flow of USD 75 million to France which was being provided for increased patrolling. In response, the French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin tweeted: "France will not accept any practice that goes against maritime law, nor financial blackmail." However, on 17 September, more than 400 migrants had crossed the English Channel as reported by the Home Office since 14 September. More than 15,100 people have crossed to reach the UK in small boats. The French

authorities stopped around 267 people from crossing in nine boats. The total crossings stand four times greater than in 2019 with a total of 8,400 in 2020. ("UK threatens to send migrant boats back to France," *Reuters*, 9 September 2021; "Migrant crossings: More than 400 people cross Channel in three days," *BBC*, 17 September 2021)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The EU: In a blow to Apple, EU to impose universal smartphone charger

On 23 September, the EU proposed switching to a standard USB-C cable, allowing a universal charger for smartphones across the bloc. The proposal, if implemented, would terribly affect the tech giant Apple as well as the global smartphone market. The decision comes after the present situation of three main charger options was considered to be "inconvenient" by Brussels. The EU's internal market commissioner Thierry Breton said that the imposition of a standard charger would bring an end to the sale of non-interchangeable and unnecessary chargers. The failure of the industry to come up with an alternative has been claimed to be behind the legislative action. ("EU proposes universal charging plug for all smartphones," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 September 2021)

Lithuania asks citizens to rid themselves of Chinese phones

On 22 September, Xiaome's 10T 5G in Lithuania was reported to contain built-in sensors which censor and detect phrases such as "Free Tibet", "Long live Taiwan independence" and "democracy movement". The government has advised people to "throw away their Chinese smartphones". The phones sold in Lithuania come with a disabled content filtering option but censor keyword lists would appear periodically. The government expressed data protection concerns, with the user encrypted data being sent to Singapore where GDPR rules of the EU are not applicable. ("Lithuania says throw away Chinese phones due to censorship concerns," *Reuters*, 22 September 2021)

INTERNATIONAL

Russia: Foreign minister at the UNGA

On 25 September, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov addressed the United Nations General Assembly. Speaking at the UNGA, he criticized actions of various countries that were threatening internal sovereignty and territorial integrity. He called out France denying Russian mercenaries from entering Mali and the US troops withdrawing from Afghanistan in haste without considering the consequences. Lavrov also talked about the US-China tensions which were stirring and called out Germany and France asking for an 'Alliance For Multilateralism'. He questioned what could be more multilateral than the United Nations itself. ("Russia roasts West over Mali, Afghanistan pullout," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 September 2021)

Black Sea: Russian navy practises while Ukraine-US joint military drills underway

On 23 September, the Russian navy practiced target firing using its Bastion coastal missile defence system in the Black Sea. The Bastion system is an advanced mobile anti-ship and surface-to-surface defence system. According to Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, the system is capable of hitting sea targets and land targets at a distance of 219 miles and 281 miles, respectively. The target testing came amidst the US-Ukraine joint military exercise taking place in the region. Ukraine's joint exercises with US and other NATO troops will continue till 1 October. ("Russian navy practises striking Black Sea targets as Ukraine, U.S. hold drills," *Reuters*, 23 September 2021)

Hungary: Budapest Demographic Summit sees conservatives condemn migration, LGBTQ as supporting 'family values'

On 23 September, conservatives from all over the world met in Hungary to address and defend the 'notion of family' at the Budapest Demographic Summit. Participants of the summit included Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, former US Vice President Mike Pence, and French far-right commentator Eric Zemmour. The two-day conference witnessed speakers condemning migration and the LGBTQ community while asking Christian couples to enlarge their families by having more children. Appreciating Orban prior to the conference, Zemmour

said that Orban "defends the identity of his country and therefore that of Europe." Separately, on 23 September, Orban with prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia, endorsed a joint declaration advocating immigration to not be the solution for the EU's falling birth rate. ("Hungary: Leaders slam migration, LGBTQ at 'family values' summit," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 September 2021)

IEA intervenes to push increased Russian gas exports to Europe

On 21 September, the International Energy Agency called on Russia to boost its gas exports to Europe amid increasing prices. The intervention was to help Europe reach adequate levels of gas preparation for the coming winter seasons. Most governments across Europe are looking towards energy policies and discussions on global gas shortages. Gas prices have risen by 250 per cent this year. Governments all across Europe - Spain, France, Italy, and Germany are capping off prices to avoid higher bills. An energy meeting has been set up to address the issue. This marks an important point for Russia to establish itself as a reliable gas supplier to the EU markets. (Jillian Ambrose, "IEA calls on Russia to send more gas to Europe before winter," *The Guardian*, 21 September 2021)

ECFR Survey: Emergence of Cold War between the US, China, and Russia

On 21 September, a survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations between 12 member states stated a new cold war emerging between the US, China, and Russia. The polling revealed that most voters hold the new leadership in Brussels responsible for the budding international conflict. The AUKUS alliance has already caused diplomatic rifts; the poll suggests the widening of differences between Brussels and the EU due to the disconnect between the policy ambitions of both states. This in turn will weaken the EU's response to any Russian or Chinese threat. About 15 percent of Europeans believed that they were in a cold war with China or Russia while 62 percent of the responders anticipated a new cold war between the US and China. The study also revealed that a "cold war" analogy was more likely to repel

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voters given that they didn't see this as an immediate threat. Thus, Brussels' "hawkishness" in its policies would not work in its favour; especially on the international front. (Guy Faulconbridge and Michael Holden, "[Russia was behind Litvinenko assassination, European court finds](#)," *Reuters*, 21 September 2021)

France: Emmanuel Macron asks veteran Algerians for forgiveness

President Emmanuel Macron asked veteran Algerians for forgiveness. The group known as the 'Harkis' suffered savage reprisals and denial of better living conditions after the French government refused to recognize their rights to stay in France. He expressed gratitude and forgiveness in hopes of straightening the relations between the countries that have been fraught since 1962. Recently in March, the French government had also accepted the tortured death of an Algerian activist more than 60 years ago. Macron highlighted plans for a commission into the squalid French camps where the children of the former fighters were forced to live. From the 200,00 Harkis that fought for France, only 42,000 were allowed to live in France in the wake of Algerian freedom. Despite previous apologies, the Harkis group reports the inadequate fund of USD 50 million announced 3 years ago. While Macron was heckled by a few interrupting with "empty promises" most of the audience welcomed his speech. ("[France's Emmanuel Macron heckled asking Algerian veterans for forgiveness](#)," *Reuters*, 20 September 2021)

Russia: Sputnik V approval process suspended by WHO over manufacturing breaches

On 20 September, the WHO suspended the approval process for Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine after a factory inspection. After the discovery of manufacturing infringements during the WHO inspection in May, Russia's emergency bid for vaccination authorization had been put on hold. A Pharmstandard factory in Russia had similar risks of cross contamination due to infringements; which was raised by the WHO. To further approve the Sputnik V would indulge in similar inspections of the facilities. ("[WHO](#)

[suspends Sputnik V approval process over 'manufacturing' concerns](#)," *Euronews*, 20 September 2021)

France: Macron claims to have killed Greater Saharan IS leader

On 16 September, French President Emmanuel Macron claimed that French military forces had killed an Islamic State (IS) leader in the Sahel region of West Africa. The historical IS leader Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, whose group targeted US soldiers in a 2017 attack in Niger, is said to have been killed. Apart from mentioning the casualties, no further details were provided via Macron's statement. If Sahrawi's death is confirmed, it will be a blow to the IS, but the recent series of victories may soften the blow. ("[France says it has killed Islamic State leader in Greater Sahara](#)," *The Guardian*, 16 September 2021)

Russia: US tech companies blamed for interference in Russian elections

On 10 September, the Russian Foreign Ministry claimed to have "irrefutable evidence" on the interference of US-based tech companies in the Russian elections. The statement failed to mention the companies and the violations they committed. In response, the US summoned their ambassador John Sullivan to meet with Russian Deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov, who expressed Russia's intolerance in the matter. ("[Russia blames U.S. tech giants for interference in election](#)," *Reuters*, 10 September 2021)

Italy: Alpi Aviation taken over by Chinese firms

On 3 September, managers of an Italian company producing military-grade drones for NATO reported that a Hong-Kong firm along with two state-owned Chinese companies had made a purchase and bought stakes in the company. Italian authorities are concerned about the stakes handed over to China and find that the takeover violates arms laws in the country. The company planning to move to Wuxi highlighted that the deal was transparent without any legal breaches. ("[Italy investigating sale of military drones group to Chinese investors - source](#)," *Reuters*, 3 September 2021)

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