



NIAS Area Studies EUROPE MONITOR

NIAS-STIR Programme



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An initiative of NIAS and KAS-India office

Recent terror attacks in Europe: Five trends from England to Norway



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Poland, the EU, and a Complicated Poxxit

The Belarusian strategy to push migrants into Europe

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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*.

About NIAS Europe Studies

As a part of pursuing global politics, the programme has started area studies. Europe is a part of the NIAS area studies initiative. With an aim to nurture a pool of scholars working on issues related to Europe, the scope of the studies would range from regional/sub-regional cooperation to new technology and innovations and include gender studies, migration issues, and climate change.

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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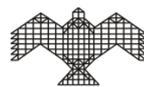
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National Institute of
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About NIAS

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.



About KAS India Office

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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COVER STORY

Recent terror attacks in Europe: Five trends from England to Norway

By Sourina Bej

Trends have been suggestive that the stabbings and the attacks could likely be viewed and contextualized as expressions of a more significant socio-political climate that is gradually transitioning towards a more bipolar, rigid, and stark standpoint

During October 2021, two stabbing incidents and the memorialization event of the French school teacher Samuel Paty have laid bare the societal fear against lone-actor attacks and radicalization in Western Europe. On 13 October, a 37-year-old Danish man killed five people with a bow and arrow in Norway. A police investigation later revealed that the attacker had converted to Islam. Similarly, on 15 October, a British Conservative parliamentarian, Sir David Amess, was stabbed to death by a British man of Somali heritage during a constituency meeting in England. In both the incidents, attackers have been identified earlier by the state as ones harboring radical views and suffering from mental illness.

While these attacks brought back memories of terrorist incidents, such as the 2011 Utøya attacks in Norway and the 2016 murder of the Labour minister Jo Cox in Britain, it also coincided with mourning in France for the beheaded teacher. On 16 October, the French Prime Minister commemorated Samuel Paty, who was beheaded by a Chechen origin individual after Paty exhibited cartoons of Prophet Muhammad as part of his history lessons on free speech.

While at the outset, the stabbing incidents and the memorial appear as isolated incidents, the overlapping nature of the attackers indicates common trends behind these terror attacks baffling Western Europe.

A geographic expansion of lone-actor stabbings

In Europe, France had been hit the hardest by the stabbing incidents, which the state security services have designated as fallouts of religious radicalization. Since 2014, 264 people have been killed in France and another 1,200 injured. The latest attack occurred on 28 May 2021 when a French ex-prisoner stabbed a policewoman in western France. On 25

September 2020, a 25-year-old Pakistani immigrant stabbed two outside the Charlie Hebdo magazine office. Following a similar pattern, on 02 November 2020, a dual Austrian-North Macedonian national, went on a shooting spree, killing four in central Vienna.

In the UK, knife attacks have occurred almost every year in the past five years. A single person's act of terror could be identified as homegrown, not associated with any terrorist groups, or already claimed by any terrorist groups. Along with the attackers being lone, the process of radicalization is also lone with a transnational ideological influence.

Modus operandi through internet and homegrown radicals

The reasons for an individual to commit an act of violence are complex, with no clear paths to radicalization. However, a common trend towards decentralized and digital radicalization could be found among the lone attackers. France described it as an "endogenous threat" from individuals radicalized alone, notably on the Internet and with greater autonomy vis-à-vis terrorist organizations.

“The rise of the far-right in European politics is adding to the discussion around terror attacks. Far-right political ideology triggering Islamophobia and alienation of the religious minority community have gone hand-in-hand with lone actors' terror attacks”

Several news reports on the police investigations into the 2020 attack in Vienna

and the current stabbing incidents have equally revealed a dependency on the internet for ideological dissemination. A strong security crackdown on digital content such as the collaboration between Telegram and Europol had drastically reduced an individual's ability to disseminate their message, but this has also led to newer platforms and language to spread the extreme religious ideology.

From religious radicalism to ethnic racism, an ideological expansion

While, on one hand, religious radicalization has motivated terror attacks, there has been an equal increase in Western Europe of racist behavior spurring ethnic demarcations. The rise of the far-right in European politics is adding to the discussion around terror attacks. Far-right political ideology triggering Islamophobia and alienation of the religious minority community have gone hand-in-hand with lone actors' terror attacks. France battled to identify radicalized individuals from its minority Muslim immigrant community; Germany faced a lone-actor white extremist attack in February 2020. The political and social subcultures have intertwined and oscillated between anger against immigration to the anger of an immigrant stemming from their perceived sense of insult to their religion in secular Western society.

Widening social fault lines

The ideological expansion has deepened social divisions in most Western European countries where factions echoing far-right ideology have attempted to legitimize racist discourses within mainstream politics. As Europe continues to receive migrants from its regional neighbourhood, a multi-ethnic and pluralistic society confounds the countries. Political parties like AfD in Germany and National Rally in France have gained ground through racial identity politics, perceived xenophobic fear of the majority, and a slow integration process.

Further, the internal security programme such as deradicalization strategy in the UK and anti-separatism law in France has sought to identify and criminalize extremist religious ideology.

However, it does not restrict the inflow of digital content in order to safeguard the liberal value for the right to information. Hence, the cycle where homegrown lone-actor radicals mushroom continues to challenge these countries.

Violence continues to erode the democratic values

The latest stabbing in the UK marks a direct onslaught on representative democracy. It has marked normalcy in a democracy where sustained interaction between the leader and the constituents exists. However, harassment and threats against government officials are no longer the exceptions but a norm. Along with Europe, a similar trend has been visible in the US; in October 2020, five men were put on trial for plotting to kidnap the Michigan governor. It is not just Presidents or civil rights activists who have faced assassination attempts. However, the sheer number and frequency of such attacks have instilled a sense of fear amongst anyone propagating free movement and free speech.

To conclude, the trends have been suggestive that the stabbings and the attacks could likely be viewed and contextualized as expressions of a more significant socio-political climate that is gradually transitioning towards a more bipolar, rigid, and stark standpoint.

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.

COVER STORY

Poland, EU and Poxexit. It is complicated, for three reasons

By Joeana Cera Matthews

If a potential Poxexit is considered, it will definitely be nasty. The negotiations and the aftermath of such an event would be a Herculean effort to contain.

On 12 October, a Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruling that declared the primacy of Polish law over the EU law came into force. Poland and the EU have had a long-standing feud over EU values. Against this backdrop, the highly-criticized Constitutional Tribunal passed the ruling that challenged the rule of law and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) supremacy. This stunt of questioning the critical features of being an EU member has infuriated the bloc.

Poxexit: A brief note

Similar to Brexit, 'Poxexit' as a term has been coined to refer to Poland's potential exit from the bloc. Post the controversial Tribunal ruling, the ECJ does not have supremacy over Polish law. This triggered the possibility of a Poxexit.

If a potential Poxexit is considered, it will definitely be nasty. The negotiations and the aftermath of such an event would be a Herculean effort to contain. Why?

However, unlike Brexit, there will not be a Poxexit. Three reasons why

First the geography. The UK, being an island, was already cut off from mainland Europe. Post-Brexit, the issue that persists is primarily regarding Northern Ireland remaining within the EU's single market. Every other issue was negotiated and dealt with during the mediation. Poland's exit is not going to be half as smooth. This is because, unlike the UK, Poland is very much a part of mainland Europe. It is, in fact, in the heart of Europe and, thus, landlocked. Cutting off from the EU would inevitably imply losing all trade routes and depending on other means of importing goods. Trade would be severely affected.

The Polish economy, if Poxexit happens, is destined to fail. Even if Poxexit happens, Poland will continue to be surrounded by countries that are still members of the bloc; this means extensive border checks and customs

procedures for goods coming in and out of Poland. For the current Polish government, this crisis would create multidimensional problems. The economic crisis would lead to further humanitarian and socio-economic problems, which will all be too hard for Poland to contain and would only contribute to further chaos.

Second, the public opinion in Poland is against the exit. Unlike the British, the Poles do not back the exit; in UK, the idea had popular support prior to the exit as they voted in favour of leaving the bloc. As rumour mills began of an imminent Poxexit, the Poles began to panic. Polish citizens repel the very thought of leaving the bloc. They intend to remain within, enjoying all the benefits of being an EU member. As staunch supporters of the EU, Poles are too accustomed to the benefits of being an EU insider.

Third, an unpopular state opinion. Fortunately for the citizens, the Polish government is not keen on leaving the bloc either and has reiterated this on multiple occasions. Even Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki himself, assured that there would not be a scenario in which Poland was to leave the EU. He said: "We are here, we belong here and we are not going anywhere." Therefore, Poxexit becoming a reality without the backing of the government is highly unlikely.

What about the EU on Poxexit? Are there restrictions in Brussels?

The EU's retaliatory action to the Polish ruling has been complicated and prolonged. Sanctioning a member state is a significant move, and the bloc has delayed any action against Poland due to the more significant implications it holds. Nonetheless, the bloc has decided on 'concrete actions' if Poland fails to bend' and revert the ruling. The first tool is a legal challenge to the ruling via triggering Article 7 of the EU treaty. Article 7 deprives

member states of breaching the EU law of the 14 rights provided to them.

“The Polish economy, if Polesxit happens, is destined to fail. Even if Polesxit happens, Poland will continue to be surrounded by countries that are still members of the bloc; this means extensive border checks and customs procedures for goods coming in and out of Poland.”

The second measure that the EU is expected to resort to is the 'rule of law conditionality' mechanism. This mechanism aims at providing increased transparency to the handling of the EU budget while promoting anti-corruption and judicial independence. Poland has, however, disagreed with the extended definition and stated that the mechanism does not concern Poland as corruption is not an issue faced by them. The EU has hit back at Warsaw, stating that the application of the mechanism according to their preferred definition would ultimately occur. They lack an independent judicial system, and such an absence, the EU claims, will result in corruption.

The third tool is likely to hurt Poland the most. The EU believes that financially choking the Polish economy will ensure the ruling's withdrawal. The EU withholds Poland's pandemic recovery funds amounting to nearly EUR 24 billion. The failure to receive this money will impact Polish society more than it does the government. The lack of funds has already affected several provinces in such a severe manner that they have backtracked on their conservative ideologies to receive the EU funds. Several provinces were reported to have repealed their 'LGBT-ideology free zones' status, after the EU refused to forward the funds owing to their continued violation of the EU values. In its latest efforts, the EU ordered Poland to pay a daily fine of EUR 1 million in addition to the existing fine of EUR 500,000. Poland, however, refused to make any such payment. The EU, concerned about their money reaching the rebellious state of Poland, now requires it to convince the European Commission that the reconstruction funds, if

provided, would be used following the EU laws. As a French MEP stated: "(the) Polish 'political choice comes with consequences attached."

The EU's lack of practical mechanisms to punish Poland despite its values being risked has irked the bloc. The Tribunal questioned the legal order of the EU, causing legal and political uncertainty. It cannot remove or sanction its members without garnering widespread criticisms. Even if the EU can find a solution that favours their values dearly upheld, it would imply risking its agenda. Every major policy decision requires the bloc's unanimous vote; upsetting Poland will not help. An event wherein the EU budes on Poland's challenge is when the bloc will see its end – the supremacy of the rule of law is the bloc's foundation. Despite the MEPs' promise of 'not allowing commission values to be put at risk,' the union currently lacks a structure that would ensure this. Thus, the EU cannot afford to go into battle with one of its own.

What is Poland's Endgame?

Unlike Britain, the problem with Poland is not that it wants to leave; the problem is that it intends to stay. Its adamantness about remaining a member with no intention to wholly abide by the bloc's laws frustrates the EU leadership. Poland is already set on a path where the EU law is gradually deteriorating and poses the risk of reaching nil. Poland 'chose' to emphasize its national law over the EU law, thus, failing to recognize the bloc's characteristic separation of powers. Morawiecki also accused the EU of 'mission creep', a situation characterized by the EU taking a project and politicizing it – essentially, overstressing its competence. The Polish judiciary's gradual transition to a political body suggests the government's autocratic tendencies risking democracy. This would ultimately create a region of disorder – what is approved in other member states is not applicable here. The only thing such an imbalance promises is trouble. Second, the Hungarian 'ride or die.' Both Hungary and Poland have ruling parties with similar ideologies. This is just one of the many similarities that the duo has. They are both in conflict with the EU values and constantly provoke the Commission. When either of the two is attacked, they make it a point to back the other – especially during Parliament sessions.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was Poland's primary advocate when Poland was recently being condemned. He questioned the need for imposing sanctions on "one of the best European countries." An article 7 trigger threat was already issued to Poland. However, it delays materialization as Poland is inevitably backed by Hungary in the European Parliament.

Third, a convenience-based law adherent. Opponents accuse Poland of going back on commitments freely made during their accession, essentially "picking and choosing" when to abide by laws. Poland passed legislation that effectively challenged the EU primacy and its competence, yet when they are targeted, they resort to terming their critics to be in 'violation of the EU values and beliefs.' Morawiecki recently blamed the EU for singling out Poland by 'unjustly' discriminating against them and said that they would not 'back down' in the face of 'bullying and threats.' Nonetheless, a valid point brought about by Poland was the existence of double standards within the bloc. They questioned the EU values and beliefs that Germany's Nord Stream 2 construction defied and its failure to garner a vehement opposition like Poland.

Poland has to make a choice. It cannot have the cake and eat it too

The unfortunate reality of the situation is that it is an unwinnable one, and both parties are aware of this unpleasant truth. Almost every member state has questioned the supremacy of the EU law; Poland is being targeted as it voiced out its disapproval by passing legislation. The larger question the rift poses is whether the EU's days of being a harmoniously united single bloc are over?

Despite the strong language Poland garnered, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's stance was to choose dialogue over confrontation. She would know the consequences a hasty decision follows, given her upbringing in a divided Europe. Poland is, in reality, faced with a binary decision: leave the bloc or stay within by adhering to the rules. The sooner they decide on this uncertainty, the better it is for them. There is a choice to be made. Poland cannot 'have the cake and eat it too.'

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France24's 'The Debate' on "Europe's values on the line? Poland in showdown over rule of law"

21 October 2021

Excerpts by Joeana Cera Matthews

"On 21 October, France24's The Debate discussed the controversial Polish ruling and the reaction it garnered at the European Council summit. The talk show hosted French MEP from Renew Europe Nathalie Loiseau, Executive Director of the Geostrategic Business Group from EY France Framke Krumbuller, the Polish Telewizja Polska's Brussels correspondent Dominika Cosic, and German MEP from the Group of the Greens/EFA Daniel Freund. The debate covered the following.

Redefining the Polish Constitutional Tribunal (PCT) ruling

In an attempt to avoid further confusion, Cosic explained what the ruling meant from a Polish perspective. According to the ruling, Poland will continue respecting laws originating from the EU treaties. However, these treaties are not all-inclusive; decisions on issues like abortion and gay rights remain under the purview of the member states. If the European Court of Justice (ECJ) rules on such an issue, it implies the predominance of the EU over national governments. Cosic maintained that in reference to such issues, the national law takes primacy over the EU law. She also expressed her surprise over the controversy surrounding the Law and Justice (PiS) party-backed legislation since this was not the first time such a ruling was passed; similar rulings were passed in 2005 and 2010, under the Civic Platform's governments. In response to this, French MEP Loiseau stated that the PCT's ruling was different as it brought about a change in the interpretation of the EU treaties.

The Issue of Primacy

Loiseau agreed to national constitutions being the "prominent legal text" across the EU, however, being a member implied the constitutions evolved with the EU law since countries sovereignly agree to abide by the ECJ when they accede into the bloc. The requirement of uniform interpretations across member states suggests national courts enforce laws under the ECJ's supervision. German MEP Freund said that Poland had 'chosen' to emphasize its nation,

law over the EU law, thus, failing to recognize the bloc's characteristic separation of powers. When questioned on whether Brussels was 'playing guard with Poland's domestic affairs,' he disagreed stating that the deal accepted by every country joining the bloc was that common rules existed and funds were shared; if they failed to abide by the same rules, funds would not be shared.

Battle for EU values

Both the MEPs claimed that the Polish judiciary's transition to a political body suggested the government's autocratic tendencies risking democracy. The Tribunal, labelled as an 'illegitimate disciplinary chamber' by the ECJ, questioned the legal order of the EU, causing legal and political uncertainty. Citing the Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen's promise of 'not allowing commission values to be put at risk,' the MEPs declared their aim to maintain the EU's legal order and protect its taxpayers' interests. Nonetheless, Cosic hit back at the double standards within the bloc questioning the EU values and beliefs that Germany's Nord Stream 2 construction defied, and its failure to garner a vehement opposition like Poland.

Poland backtracking on commitments?

Poland was accused of going back on commitments freely made by them during their accession, essentially "picking and choosing" when to abide by laws. Loiseau reminded the panel of Poland's beginnings in the bloc being rooted in hope and submission as they wanted to rid themselves of the oppression and power ambiguity. Fast forward to the present the ruling's refusal to ECJ's 'oversight' implies that Poland de facto leaves the bloc's legal order. The increased politicization of the Tribunal is believed to have caused this backtracking.

EU's Mission Creep

The Polish government opines that the bloc is meddling with its legitimate reforms. Morawiecki accused the EU of 'mission creep', a situation characterized by the EU taking a project and politicizing it – overstressing its competence. While disagreeing with the regular expansion of EU's competence, he called for an end to decisions made behind 'closed doors'. Loiseau justified this by stating that prerogatives taken up by the EU were 'not out of ideology, but out of necessity'. The pandemic recovery package and the pooling of resources for the vaccinations were a necessity. However, when questioned on whether there was a return to the original system once this 'necessity' was dealt with, Loiseau replied evasively.

The Merkel stance

The French MEP resented Merkel's stance of continuing dialogue since inaction had led to the present crisis. Despite strong language Poland garnered, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's stance was to choose dialogue over confrontation. However, Merkel should be given the benefit of the doubt since her upbringing in a divided Europe gives her a better understanding of the consequences a hasty decision follows. Questioned on whether the potential German coalition would be tougher on Poland and Hungary than Merkel, Freund stated that a "more ambitious protection of rule of law can be expected."

Article 7

A legal challenge to the ruling via triggering Article 7 of the EU treaty would mean several hurdles to Poland. Article 7 deprives those member states that breach the EU law of the 14 rights provided to members. Though a trigger threat already been issued, it delays materialization as Poland is inevitably backed by Hungary in the European Parliament.

The 'rule of law conditionality' mechanism

The mechanism aims at providing increased transparency to the handling of the EU budget while promoting anti-corruption and judicial independence. However, Cosic denied such a definition, stating that the mechanism did not concern Poland as there was no corruption in Poland; it was an issue faced by countries like Bulgaria and Romania. To this, Freund responded that the lack of independent judges implied the mechanism applied to Poland.

Withholding pandemic recovery funds

The application of the mechanism suggests EU money at stake. Thus, Poland would have to convince the Commission that the funds, if provided, would be used in accordance with EU laws. The failure to receive money would disastrously affect the local citizenry and the larger Polish society. The Polish 'political choice comes with consequences attached'.

Points of Concern

Other issues discussed included the refugee crisis witnessed at the Polish- Belarusian border. One panellist indicated the ease with which the EU unity was attacked, especially on policies requiring unanimous decisions. The domestic response of the Poles was also discussed wherein Loiseau stated that 80 per cent of the Poles favoured the EU. Though Poles themselves remain divided over the ruling, they are relieved by the government's objection to a Polexit.

What now?

The EU realizes the need to unite the bloc in the face of an assertive China and an aggressive Russia. Despite this realization, they believe that the time for action is now. It is Poland's decision to leave the legal order or not, to aid its citizens or not. The sooner they fix this uncertainty, the better. There is a choice to be made as Poland cannot have the cake and eat it too."

COMMENT

Belarus's strategy to push migrants: Europe will find it difficult to respond. Four reasons why

By Joeana Cera Matthews

EU's weak position in dealing with the issue is another factor, that strengthens Belarus's strategy in pushing the migrants into Europe.

Refugees from various parts of the Middle East are flown into Belarus, then pushed into the EU via Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Left to fend for themselves in a no-man's land, these migrants struggle to survive with the Belarusian troops pushing them into the bloc while Polish and the Baltic forces fight to keep them out.

The following four points encompass the Belarusian agenda and why the EU cannot stabilize the situation.

Belarus's attempts to push migrants into Europe is state-sponsored for multiple reasons

In May 2020, the EU imposed sanctions on Belarus over its disputed presidential election. In 2021, additional sanctions were imposed post the Ryanair-landing incident, which further aggravated Minsk. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko promised to retaliate against the EU's imposition of sanctions on them. Led by Lukashenko, Belarus has been successfully exploiting the bloc's commitment to refugee rights, ever since.

For Belarus, it is also a strategy to force the EU to reconsider the sanctions. The idea seems to be that if they establish themselves as a threat and keep pushing in migrants, the EU will eventually budge and reconsider its decision to impose sanctions. Apart from the EU sanctions, there is a Poland angle to the Belarusian agenda. Poland has been harboring critics of Lukashenko since the 2020 controversial presidential elections.

It is not only Belarus but also Turkey that engages in a similar instrumentalization of refugees. The EU needs to be wary of Belarus' larger agenda; it does not seem to

end with migrants. Soon enough, it shall begin cashing in on other weaknesses.

In this context, Belarus's size does not matter. Minsk seems to have proved Mark Twain's "it's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog" right. Lukashenko in May 2020, did vow to retaliate against the EU sanctions by flooding the EU with 'migrants and drugs'. The EU took this threat lightly.

However, Belarus' strategy has raised substantial concerns regarding the terrible conditions faced by migrants on its borders. It also raises the question of whether illiberal regimes with their state-sponsored warfare techniques are what lies in store for the future.

Russia's guiding hand against Europe

Rumors exist of Russia's backing of Belarus and being an accomplice to the numerous human rights violations being committed at the Belarusian borders. Reports claim that during the 2015 migrant crisis, Russia's FSB helped smuggle hundreds of migrants into Norway every week. Similar allegations were made by the government of Finland, as well.

This time, allegations exist regarding Moscow and Minsk nationals entering the bloc, along with migrants, in an effort to spy, provoke, or simply create chaos. It is as though Putin's 'little green men' have donned a different disguise.

Another risk that a Belarus-aiding Russia poses is the more extensive manipulation of resources and exploitation of weaknesses. The European energy crisis is proof of this. Enabling migration into the Schengen Area creates social unrest in Europe. Such

exploitation of the EU's 'weak' border systems enables the Kremlin to push in Russian-backed criminal networks to Europe, creating challenges to the enforcement of the law.

“The EU's weak position in dealing with the issue is another factor that strengthens Belarus's strategy in pushing the migrants into Europe. The EU, on identifying human rights violations within Belarus, imposed sanctions on them. Evidently, the EU's plan has backfired.”

A helpless EU

The EU's weak position in dealing with the issue is another factor that strengthens Belarus's strategy in pushing the migrants into Europe. The EU, on identifying human rights violations within Belarus, imposed sanctions on them. Evidently, the EU's plan has backfired. The European Commission recently proposed tightening visa restrictions on members of the Belarusian government along with exploring additional sanctions against individuals and entities. The EU fails to recognize that the sanctions created the crisis in the first place; going down the same road will prove costly for the EU.

Second, there is an evident weakness in the EU's migration policy. It is no secret that the EU is apprehensive of migrants. Migration is a weak point in European policymaking. Despite the 2015 migrant crisis, the EU's migrant policy remains unreformed. Acknowledging this, von der Leyen said: "as long as we do not find common ground on how to manage migration, our opponents will continue to target that." Despite its desperate attempts at reducing migrant inflow, the EU's 'vulnerability' continues owing to its dependency on third nations, like Belarus and Turkey, to stem inflows.

Third, issues over fencing. Poles and Balts, after using barbed wire fences and declaring emergencies, are now considering the construction of a permanent wall at their borders, quite similar to Trump's ambitions at the US-Mexico border.

However, the EU does not intend to physically limit access to Belarus claiming it goes against the EU ideals and beliefs. Adding to the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's refusal to fund barriers at the border, French President Emmanuel Macron said: "... we should protect ourselves. But we should never do so by abandoning our values." As a result, Belarus now tears the acclaimed EU unity from within. The EU's ongoing rule of law conflict with Poland will only worsen the bloc's ability to unanimously decide on a migrant policy.

Migrants who want to reach Europe

For Belarus, the readiness of the migrants wanting to reach Europe is an advantage. Lukashenko has instrumentalized some of the world's most vulnerable people – those that escape war and persecution. On 22 October, the BBC published an article where Syrian migrants trying to reach Germany were interviewed. Idris, one among them, stated: "The route is a lot easier than going through Turkey and North Africa... We're crossing the borders illegally. We don't know what will happen. We can't trust anyone, not even our smuggler... Pray for us." As Bloomberg Quint stated: "running an international logistics racket that brings people from warzones to European forests is a new low."

Most of these refugees' preferred destination is Germany. However, by the time they get through Poland, some of them travel with no food and water, while others end up in detention or simply die. This creates a humanitarian crisis for Europe.

COMMENT

Europe's Energy Crisis and Gazprom

By Harini Madhusudan

Europe's hasty transition from traditional forms of baseload power sources, such as gas, coal, or nuclear, to renewable sources has pushed the governments to move away from long-term purchase agreements with the suppliers.

In October 2021, Europe experienced a surge in natural gas prices, seen as the world's greatest energy crisis since the 1970s. The past year has seen disruptions in energy supply chains and the supply of semiconductors, cars, metals, and even food during the pandemic. The cost is now six times higher than last year in Europe and four times higher than the past spring. With the prices continuing to increase and the crisis unlikely to abate before the spring, as a last-ditch effort, the European governments are seen scrambling to issue subsidies and cut taxes to protect their citizens from inflation.

What caused the energy crisis? Will the crisis prolong? What are the sources of energy supply to Europe? This commentary tries to answer the above question, with a particular reference to the role of Gazprom.

Europe's Energy Crisis: A brief note

Natural gas represents a fifth of Europe's electricity consumption and is primarily used for cooking and heating. An immediate reason for the unprecedented surge is the global increase in demand for natural gas, as countries restart their economies after the lockdowns.

The East Asian and European markets are primarily affected and are competing as the demand rises after the pandemic shock. The competition is intense due to the long winters in Europe and East Asia, which has led to the buyers pushing the prices up. Necessarily, unchecked issues on both the demand and supply side coupled with the attempts to phase out coal, increased usage of heaters due to the long winter, and the bad output of the wind production have all been causal factors that led to the crisis.

“A confluence of three significant factors lead to the energy crisis in Europe: rebounding domestic demand, and supply imbalance; the impact of global economic factors on the Chinese, US, and Russian suppliers; and the inconsistencies of the Green transition in Europe coupled with the Euro-area inflation.”

Europe has been working towards decreasing its domestic production of natural gas. According to the data from Gas Infrastructure Europe, the percentage of working gas storage in 2020 was 94 per cent. This has been reduced to 74 per cent by October 2021. With winter around the corner, the rising costs would cause a lot of homes/consumers who have not chosen fixed-price contracts to choose between feeding their families and keeping warm. Based on an EU-wide survey from 2019, 6.9 per cent of people could not keep their homes adequately warm.

The largest exporter of natural gas to the European Union in 2019 and 2020 was Russia, representing up to 40 per cent of imports to the European Union. Russia has been accused of market manipulation by using the situation in Europe to squeeze the supply of gas to Europe.

Due to other factors in China and East Asia, there was a forced reduction in coal production which caused shortages in electricity production, which spiraled into shortages in global supply chains. In the case of LNG producers, notably American spot market producers directed all their supplies to the demands in East Asia.

Consequently, Europe lost its standard spot market supplies of LNG while the spot prices skyrocketed by about twenty times.

A confluence of three significant factors lead to the energy crisis in Europe: rebounding domestic demand, and supply imbalance; the impact of global economic factors on the Chinese, US, and Russian suppliers; and the inconsistencies of the Green transition in Europe coupled with the Euro-area inflation.

Green Transition in Europe

As a part of their action against climate change, many countries in Europe have begun to take measures to reduce their reliance on non-renewable sources of energy. This is largely seen as the 'Green Transition,' and Europe has been trying to phase out fossil fuels and build up renewable energy capacity in the last couple of years. Given that various factors have caused the exceptionally high prices in Europe, the transitional shock of Europe's Green Plan would be one of the long-term factors of the price rise in Europe's energy crisis.

Following are considered as a primary reason by energy experts in Europe. The region's hasty transition from traditional forms of baseload power sources, such as gas, coal, or nuclear, to renewable sources has pushed the governments to move away from long-term purchase agreements with the suppliers. The carbon neutrality plans have introduced environmental taxes on some of these products, coupled with the short-term pricing models that have made the utility of these forms of energy more costly for the consumers. The consumers are left with the only option of seeking alternative and cheaper fuel sources- here is where the exporters from Qatar and Russia cash in.

Gazprom and the European Energy Crisis

Gazprom increased the price of its products in 2021. As the supplier for close to half of the quantity of natural gas imported by Europe, it revealed that their priority would

be to shore up its inventories, signaling that there would be an impact on the volumes it could ship to Europe. According to estimates of the company's investors, Gazprom has increased its price guidance for exports to Europe and Turkey from USD 295 to USD 330 per 1000 cubic meters. European experts say that the Kremlin has skillfully exploited the energy crisis in Europe, but Putin on-record has dismissed the claims of withholding supplies for profits. Moreover, the problem in Europe is also mainly about the storage of natural gas.

A statement from the Kremlin spokesperson in mid-September said the commissioning of the new pipeline would 'substantially balance,' the prices of natural gas in Europe. This raises suspicions if the Russian side would take up such a measure to add pressure on the European Commission to further their interests with the Nord Stream 2. Because they are the largest suppliers, Gazprom is made to be the center of the dispute and is expected to take additional measures to ease the price pain.

To conclude, though Gazprom has legally fulfilled its demands for the market, it would not be possible to increase supplies unless there are binding contracts to manage the additional supplies, which necessarily shows that the spot-market model is a problem in this equation. Switching back to long-term contracts could be a viable solution to address the current situation. However, signs of bad implementation would have to be addressed to ensure the burden does not fall on the consumers or have an irreversible impact on the collective economy. Europe has been a success story for its Green plans. This would stand as an example to the countries attempting to transition into renewable energy markets hastily.

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COMMENT

Europe's Energy Crisis: It could get worse. Five reasons why

By Chetna Vinay Bohra

Extreme weather conditions have flustered the energy demand. Repositioning of the market and its competition also has burdened the civilians as they are the ones who have to pay the price.

The United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany, and Italy have seen higher natural gas wholesale prices than at any other time in recent history. Household and business bills are on the rise, and they could soar even further.

Climate change and a low supply of petroleum and LNG have led to the unprecedented surge of energy prices in Europe. They are met with mixed responses across Europe.

Millions in Europe might not be able to use their heaters this winter as the gas and fuel prices continue to surge. The United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany, and Italy have seen higher natural gas wholesale prices than at any other time in recent history. Household and business bills are on the rise, and they could soar even further.

“According to the IPCC report, humans have caused unusual climatic conditions that are irreversible, therefore to expect quick transitions into a sustainable world is repugnant. Slow and steady-paced recovery plans and smooth transitions into the green forms of energy will help rebound the economy.”

First, the weather patterns and power generation in Europe. Heatwaves have dried up the water bodies for the generation of hydroelectricity, scarce winds have made it hard for the windmills to generate power, and freezing winters that last longer than usual have made it impossible for the solar cells to function.

Unprecedented weather conditions have depleted renewable sources of energy. The above has forced the region to buy natural gas and fossil fuels. This has created a scarcity of green energy, as only a few countries in the region are capable of green energy production.

Second, reorientation of the energy sector and Emissions Trading System (ETS). There have been several climate change conventions and protests that have negatively affected the industry. One of the main tools for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change is the ETS, one of the EU's climate and energy policies. It covers about 40 per cent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions. By 2030, the policy is expected to play a pivotal role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent, resulting in net-zero emissions by 2050. According to some analysts at Refinitiv, carbon prices should be at least twice as high as current levels to shift to renewables and clean energy.

The EU's Climate Chief Franz Timmermans, stated early this year that carbon prices must rise significantly for the bloc to reach its emission goals. Additionally, he requested that policymakers stay out of the carbon market, warning that it would tarnish the scheme's credibility. So, the countries are buying natural gas and fossil fuels to mitigate the crisis.

Third, the Border Tax adjustment scheme. The ETS has a loophole called carbon leakage, allowing businesses to transfer production and emissions elsewhere since it is expensive to pollute Europe. There is an anticipation that the Union might propose reforms to resolve it by implementing the

Carbon Border Adjustment mechanism in 2023. Imports would be subject to domestic carbon pricing, which will level the playing field on carbon emissions.

Fourth, different responses from different countries in Europe to the same problem. The Netherlands, one of the top gas producers in the region, began terminating its main gas field in Groningen in 2018. The volume of working gas in storage has dropped from 94 per cent in 2020 to 74 per cent this year. The slow pacing of the transition will enable new policies to replace outdated ones and reinstate climate policy. Spain and Portugal have tripled the prices since mid-2021, standing at EUR 175 per megawatt-hour. The price has soared to a staggering EUR 183.84 per megawatt-hour in the UK - the most expensive rate in Europe. Spain is pushing a "policy menu" for the EU to respond to price surges more quickly. In Greece, consumers have been promised subsidies. Poland has some of the highest energy prices due to its heavy coal dependence, as the country faces both hikes in gas prices and increasing CO2 permit prices under the EU's emissions trading scheme. Italy pumped roughly EUR 1.2 billion into its energy system over the summer to reduce energy bills. However, it is now thinking of reforming the billing system to boost renewable energy costs. A consumer support program worth EUR 4.5 billion is expected to be announced soon by Italian officials. France has announced to pay one-time payments of EUR 100 to 5.8 million households who struggle with energy bills. In Germany, wholesale power prices have spiked by 50 per cent, but

suppliers have capped prices to ensure sudden price surges do not hit consumers.

Fifth, the role of Russia. In 2019-20 Russia was the largest supplier of natural gas to the European Union. In recent months, a team of 40 members of the European Parliament was asked to investigate if Gazprom was hoarding natural gas to get approvals for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. But some experts argue that Gazprom is not violating the contract as it has to uphold the 40 per cent market share in Europe to keep the market competitive.

To conclude, extreme weather conditions have flustered the energy demand. Repositioning of the market and its competition also has burdened the civilians as they are the ones who have to pay the price.

According to the IPCC report, humans have caused unusual climatic conditions that are irreversible, therefore to expect quick transitions into a sustainable world is repugnant. Slow and steady-paced recovery plans and smooth transitions into the green forms of energy will help rebound the economy. The ETS has failed to gauge climate change, falling short on what is necessary to prevent a catastrophic climate breakdown. 2021 has experienced record-high prices of carbon in the futures market leading to an uneven commodities market.

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COMMENT

Facebook's Metaverse: Why it matters to Europe?

By Padmashree Anandhan

Rather than asking how Metaverse will turn out to be in the future, the more important question is to analyze how the virtual reality transformation will impact the EU.

On 28 October, Facebook renamed itself to "Meta" after its recent announcement of its five-year plan in the EU, a project named

"Metaverse." The project is a combination of virtual and augmented reality aimed to fill the gap of online interactions. While

Facebook has faced back-to-back criticisms from recent hackings, violating the EU's General Data Protection Regulation to the reveal of internal company documents of Facebook by whistle-blower Ms. Frances Haugen.

This commentary strives to analyze Facebook's Metaverse and its pitfalls, why it matters for the EU, and what's at stake.

The idea of Metaverse

The concept of Metaverse first originated in 1992 from Neal Stephenson's science fiction novel "Snow Crash." Since then, tech firms (Fortnite and Roblox) have been instrumenting it into games and have advanced in conducting virtual concerts and tournaments for people worldwide to interact. For example, Amorepacific, a South Korean Cosmetics company, engages with its customer through Metaverse, and Sony Music partnered with Roblox metaverse to hold concerts with top singers like Ariana Grande and Lil Nas X.

Facebook's Metaverse and its pitfalls

The Metaverse has been on Facebook's agenda for a long time and has invested heavily in virtual reality through building its Oculus headsets, VR apps for all use from hangouts, workplace to real-world interaction. Due to its investment strategy, other similar tech companies are at a loss. It claims to build the Metaverse responsibly through an investment of \$50m (£36.3m) in funding non-profit groups. One of its former data scientists has recently testified that Facebook's internal research shows that its platforms augmented hate, misinformation, and political unrest.

Despite the lack of technology and its history of being hacked, Facebook intends to go forward with the Metaverse. Hence proposing it now can be a cover to its recent fallout or to win back its name in the EU as the regulators have stressed more restrictions. It is also a warning to other tech giants such as Fortnite, Roblox, and Nvidia that have similar virtual platforms already in place.

“The Metaverse is said to affect lifestyle, work, business, including the functioning of governments. Human security in such a digital space will remain uncertain. Assessment of risks and challenges to human existence is more than imagination now.”

Why does it matter for the EU?

The CEO proposed to recruit 10,000 workers from the EU, the factors behind choosing the region are reach to emerging talent, large consumer market, and first-class universities. The company seeks to make the EU its playfield to draft or set new rules for the new internet revolution. This looks more like a lobbying effort of the company across the particular member states of the region as the European Commission plans to lay down strict restrictions on the Social Media companies. Earlier this year, MEPs discussed their relationship with freedom of speech, fundamental rights, the state of media freedom in the EU as well as online disinformation campaigns.

According to European Commission, Vice President Věra Jourová said that "the proposed Digital Services Act aims to increase the accountability of online platforms and clarify the rules about taking down illegal content, including hate speech and incitement to violence: We need to bring order to the digital expression of democracy and to end the digital Wild West."

Therefore, in the case of Metaverse, the company has agreed to abide by the European regulatory measures in terms of free speech and data privacy. On the other side, it has also warned the regulators against the strict rules stating that it might lead to loss of jobs. Facebook opting for the EU is benefitting in many ways, but the stand-out factor from the US or Asian countries is the labor force of the EU.

Many in the US are developers, but not all have the game engine experience. Especially in terms of legal support and experimenting, the European region will be better suited compared to other regions. This new virtual realm in Europe is set to impact in three ways. One, it will raise the bars of the internet. Two, it will create a new order of internet rules. Three, it will develop new talent.

So what is at stake?

Rather than asking how Metaverse will turn out to be in the future, the more important question is to analyze how the (virtual reality) VR transformation will impact the EU region? What effect will it have on human behavior? Will the response of tech giants lead to a digital virtuality war?

At the regional level, it may open up a new job market for virtual reality engineers in the EU, an inflow of investments, and create the potential for new start-up technologies. The EU's workforce will begin to differ at the international level, and a global internet order or legal setup for augmented reality shall emerge.

The Metaverse is said to affect lifestyle, work, business, including the functioning of governments. Human security in such a digital space will remain uncertain. Assessment of risks and challenges to human existence is more than imagination now.

Big tech companies like Nvidia Corp., Roblox Corp., Epic Games Inc., Microsoft Corp. have also built similar hardware and software for Metaverse and have created their virtual worlds. With Facebook joining the race with a stronger fist means the faster transformation of technology and the Internet. As this will instigate, the other big giants will develop their versions of the Metaverse. It will be a question of how countries compete using hypersonic missiles and how the tech giants will control the world in virtuality.

Similar to World Wars I and II, such high-end technologies are just beginning and will stay to transform and lead to digital colonization by the tech giants in the future.

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EUROPE SHORT NOTES



Source: Reuters/John Altdorfer, Alan Santos/PR, Wikimedia, Jon Nazca/Reuters, AP: Michael Sohn, Wikimedia

AUSTRIA

The Sebastian Kurz Scandal

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 06 October, Austria witnessed prosecutors raiding the chancellery, the foreign ministry, and the headquarters of the conservative People's Party (ÖVP). The raid was conducted after accusations by the Prosecutor's Office for Economic Affairs and Corruption claimed that funds from the Foreign Ministry were misused by the ÖVP. This was allegedly done by a tabloid newspaper – *Österreich* – between 2016 and 2018 to portray Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in a favourable light. The media house has repeatedly denied allegations against them, saying that they are "evidently serious misunderstandings", while Kurz has maintained that the claims are 'baseless'.

Sebastian Kurz's association with corruption charges is not something new. The continent's youngest leader back in 2017, Kurz has led the Austrian People's Party to victory, after which he became its head. Since then, he transitioned from foreign minister to finally become the Chancellor of Austria. However, over the

years, Kurz has been the target of a series of allegations; it raises the question of how he achieved the popularity that characterized him.

Since the corruption scandal, Kurz has reiterated his ignorance of any such propaganda and has refused to accept that he violated the law. Legal proceedings may drag on for years affecting his populist image.

Denial and 'chaos prevention'

After claims of corruption were charged, Kurz himself decided to step down and proposed that the Foreign Minister from 2019 – Alexander Schallenberg – take his place as Chancellor. Announcing his resignation, Kurz said: "What's required now is stability. To resolve the impasse I want to step aside to prevent chaos."

Threats from the party's junior coalition partner, the Greens, to dismantle the government or to back a 12 October no-confidence vote in the parliament, forced Kurz's resignation on 09 October. They requested ÖVP to nominate an "irreproachable person" to replace Kurz.

The coalition is expected to hold even after the transition.

The resignation, however, as *CGTN* pointed out, is one that is 'more a matter of form than substance in terms of policy'. Kurz intends to "disprove the allegations" against him while retaining power as head of the ruling party; implying his continuation in parliament. He is most likely to steer the coalition, as Schallenberg is a close ally of his. Schallenberg, who has already had talks with President Alexander Van der Bellen, was sworn into office on 11 October.

A larger European problem?

On 08 October, Van der Bellen addressed the nation and said that: "we have a crisis of government, not a crisis of state." The ÖVP-Greens coalition which came to power in 2020, has been dragged into several corruption scandals. The manipulation of the political system to produce favourable conditions for leaders is not a singular incident. Despite being well-established populist democracies, countries across Europe saw eminent leaders going down for allegations of corruption. From Nicolas Sarkozy in France to Andrej Babis in the Czech Republic, leaders in question had big reputations to go along with. As *The Economist* stated, Kurz's case proves that systemic corruption is not limited to formerly communist countries.

Although, the existence of corruption in itself points to the lack of a healthy democracy; if one were to see these incidents through rose-coloured glasses, the ability of the rule of law to remove or conduct trials on leaders despite their pristine (or otherwise) reputations could be considered as a sign of a healthy democracy.

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THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Elections 2021: Andrej Babis' defeat emboldens anti-populism

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Andrej Babis' ANO party lost the re-election bid. The billionaire Czech Prime Minister stood against two opposing coalitions. His ANO party was defeated by the liberal-conservative three-party 'Together' coalition. The coalition gathered 27.8 per cent of votes. Pirate Party and STAN coalition received 15.6 per cent making them third after Babis' ANO scoring 27.1 per cent votes. The groups declared that they would not work with Babis. The five opposition parties joined together to depose the anti-EU prime minister. Their policies differ significantly from Babis' and are more in line with those of the EU.

Holding office since December 2017, Mr Babis had sought another four years in power by pledging to further raise public sector wages and pensions, as well as criticizing the EU and migration. The recent Pandora Paper leaks contained Babis' name, to which he responded by saying that he has done nothing wrong or illegal. He insisted it was an attempt at manipulating voters. With Eurosceptic rhetoric, Babis' aggressive campaign focused on

denouncing EU carbon reduction targets and deploying anti-immigration policies. He also faced allegations of mismanaging the pandemic. Research by John Hopkins stated, the Czech Republic recorded 1.7 million infections and claimed 30,000 lives. This made it the country with the seventh-highest deaths per capita. The reasons for Babis' loss have not been clear. Some experts attribute it to younger voters, a possible backfiring of his Anti-EU and Anti-immigration campaign.

Populist leaders like Babis have seemed invincible in the past. This year too, the leader took an attempt for another four years. Such leaders have begun rising to power as a global trend. Most of Central and Eastern Europe are ruled by strongman leaders, defying democratic norms. This year, the opposition, with contrasting ideologies, joined to defeat Babis in an attempt to restore democracy. The wave is likely to spread around Europe to other regions of Hungary and Poland, where acts by similar leaders have threatened democracy. These leaders have reflected an anti-EU sentiment, forging unified countries. The Babis defeat indicates a "debatable" nature of the survival of populism.

Politically, it is impossible for the ANO to stay in power, to which the ANO formally declared that it was ready to move into opposition. Moreover, Babis' support of Viktor Orban seemed to bring a decline in the overall support with many voters fearing the Czech Republic being modelled like Hungary. Thus, the election also indicated a decline in the idea of "illiberal democracies" that was perpetuated by Babis and other populist leaders.

While the elections indicate a populist loss, the remaining five parties are likely to form a new right-wing government. LGBTQ+ rights have only been advocated by the Pirate Party, with four MPs. The new conservative majority might be a regression on the LGBTQ+ community. Christian democrats and the SPD, which is an openly queerphobic party, are unlikely to advocate for legislation in favour of the community.

The Czech Republic has withheld the EU push for depathologization.

The country continues the practice of forced sterilization of trans people. The new potential government seems unlikely to support hate crime laws, and access to healthcare for the LGBTQ+ community.

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FRANCE

France's New Face: Eric Zemmour

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Eric Zemmour, 63, is an anti-immigrant writer of Algerian-Jewish descent. He previously served as a TV commentator and is a popular figure in the opinion polls. Convicted twice for religious and racial provocation, he admires Trump and is a holocaust denier. He also believes the state protected the Jews during the Second World War. He has strong constraints towards immigration, Muslims, and feminism. He considers French education as being "infiltrated by Marxism, anti-racism, and LGBT ideologies," leading to the decline of the French state. In his anti-establishment campaign at Beziers, Zemmour's rise witnessed an overturn in French politics.

Earlier this week, one could predict a rematch in the second round between Macron and far-right leader Marine Le Pen. Polls also showcased a disappointed left-voting crowd that was devoid of alternatives. The opinion poll from Harris Interactive for Challenges magazine has noted the rise of Eric Zemmour to likely contest against Macron. While Macron led with 24 to 27 per cent, Zemmour gained 17 to 18 per cent. Both have not declared their candidacy. Zemmour's emergence is similar

to Macron's, where they both emerged unexpectedly and began outranking potential candidates.

While most voters seem unexcited at the prospects, Pascal Perrineau from Sciences Po commented: "The French want to upset a political order that hasn't won them over, and Éric Zemmour appears to be the bowling ball that's going to knock down all the pins."

Previously, Macron has focused on gaining support on the right and closing the second round with Le Pen being voted out. With the new polls, it is unclear whom Macron will go against in the second round. Macron supporters are reluctant to target Zemmour, fearing his prominence, while they are also curious about the ideology of a "declining France" that Zemmour has been promoting. Moreover, Zemmour has created the possibility of outflanking Le Pen. In the previous years, Le Pen spent substantial time to "detoxify" her xenophobic party; however, the efforts seem to be in vain given the challenge she faces against another far-right figure.

Zemmour has successfully brought back discussions on the reverse colonization of France, the rise of feminism, and the loss of virility. He also spoke about the "great replacement" — a theory that has been cited by many gunmen. His supporters include voters that are against the larger "wokisme" base. The voter bank for Zemmour would be people who believe in French colour-blind society, perceive the threat of an American-style vision for France, and the ill effects of the #MeToo movement. Zemmour plays on the past nostalgia and the threat to the existing culture posed by African immigrants who may dissolve France into a global conglomerate devoid of the "real" French culture. Younger voters are wary of Zemmour's statements on abolishing non-French first names, pointing a sniper rifle at the media, and commenting on the media's intention of ruining the French image. In the second run-off, Macron may be rejected more than Le Pen, but Zemmour could be more repulsive than Macron.

The Mayor of Beziers, where Zemmour organized his rally, advised Zemmour and Le Pen to collaborate to attain victory. Beziers has been Le Pen's vote bank, and Zemmour may require more support to win the area. France's far-right party, the Les Républicains, is yet to name their candidate. Despite the shift to the right in recent years, French politics remains divided. The traditional right has sometimes sought Zemmour's support to lure voters. Currently, politicians like Macron, Marine Le Pen, and now Zemmour are eager to carve out their own space in this divided political atmosphere. Many of the Les Républicains fear a similar fall to that of the Socialists in the previous elections. Most opponents of Zemmour are hoping his popularity wanes when he declares candidacy. Since he is an independent candidate, financing his campaign and getting the required 500 signatures from officials elected across France would also be a challenge to him. Eric Zemmour's rise is definitely paving a new road in French politics.

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GEORGIA

Municipal Elections 2021: Voting Fraud and Saakashvili

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 01 October, Georgia's ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili was arrested on returning from his exile abroad. He had returned to support the opposition party, United National Movement (UNM) party which he had founded.

Following Saakashvili's arrest, Georgia witnessed its municipal elections which saw

the ruling Georgian Dream Party leading with a commendable margin. On 3 October, the Election Administration of Georgia released the results of the weekend elections confirming the victory of the Georgian Dream Party. They won 46.7 per cent votes after 99.7 per cent of the votes were accounted for. The UNM party, however, won only 30.7 per cent votes.

Who is Mikheil Saakashvili?

Mikheil Saakashvili came to power via the 2003 Rose Revolution which was led by him. Though mocked by those in the ruling party, he is considered a role model by those in the opposition. In 2018, he was sentenced to prison in absentia for having abused power during his presidential term. He held office from 2004 to 2013.

The Return and Arrest of Saakashvili

Despite threats of arrest by authorities, Saakashvili secretly returned to Georgia after eight years in exile. He was arrested by the Georgian government officials upon return. The government, including President Salome Zourabichvili, has expressed no intention of releasing or pardoning Saakashvili. In fact, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said that Saakashvili would be serving his complete 6 years' term in prison. He is being held in Rustavi, southeast of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

TASS news agency cited Saakashvili's lawyer saying that he has been on a hunger strike since the arrest and intends to break it only when he is free. Georgia's internal politics have been marred with claims of Russian interference; the statement released by his lawyer included Saakashvili also saying that his arrest was influenced by false verdicts by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is a long-time foe of Saakashvili's. He also considers himself to be in 'political detention' and thus, a 'political prisoner'.

International response to the events in Georgia included the US State Department spokesperson Ned Price stating the US' close observation on Georgian developments. Stating his concern

regarding Saakashvili's treatment, Price hoped that the former President would be treated fairly. Saakashvili holds a Ukrainian passport and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has promised personal engagement to bring Saakashvili back to Ukraine.

The Elections: Fraud, Voting violations and more

Based on an agreement negotiated by the EU in April, the inability of Georgian Dream to garner at least 43 per cent of the votes would have implied conducting a snap parliamentary election. However, Georgia pulled out of the agreement in July. Despite this, the elections were of national significance after months of the political crisis in Georgia. Post-elections, observers from the OSCE have claimed that the elections involved large-scale voting violations from voter and candidate intimidation, vote-buying, and other fraud. The Georgian President, however, termed the elections to be 'safe, fair and calm'. Saakashvili had called on his supporters to stage a post-election street protest. Saakashvili's arrest had already angered his supporters. Thus, on 3 October, Saakashvili's supporters gathered in Rustavi, waving flags and protesting his arrest as well as the elections.

What does this mean?

Georgia has too often seen an issue of intimidation of voters and candidates. As the US Embassy in Georgia referred to in its statement, there is now an inevitability in the Georgian elections being marred by voting fraud and other election-related violations. Despite their commitment to upholding democratic values, the continuation of such a trend will certainly affect the ideals that the EU member states uphold.

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ITALY

The Matteo Salvini trial

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Matteo Salvini, Italy's former interior minister, is on trial for refusing to allow a migrant rescue ship to dock in August 2019. The leader of Italy's right-wing League party is accused of abducting 147 migrants stranded on the humanitarian ship Open Arms. For 18 days, the migrants were stranded on the boat. The ship carried twenty-three civilians, a Spanish NGO called Open Arms, and nine migrants. The indictment of Salvini was made possible by a Senate vote that removed the former minister's parliamentary immunity, allowing for a trial. If convicted, he may face up to 15 years in prison. Actor Richard Gere was onboard the ship and has agreed to appear as a witness. Luciana Lamorgese, Salvini's successor, and Luigi di Maio, the current foreign minister, are among the other witnesses. Giuseppe Conte has been called a witness in the trial by Salvini. To add to his defense, Salvini's argument in keeping migrants in Catania had previously been dismissed. However, the prosecution has rejected this, claiming that Salvini's actions in Catania were justified by government policy.

Activists are hopeful that the court case will create a legal precedent that will serve as a deterrent to nations that obstruct search-and-rescue activities in the Mediterranean. The trial might have enormous ramifications for Italian politics, either putting an end to Salvini's political career or providing a platform for him to reverse a polling fall and fend off far-right competitors.

Response from the defence and prosecution

Salvini responded that he was "protecting the country". He attributed his efforts of declining to dock the ship to his "closed ports" policy. He tweeted defending that it was the "sacred duty" of every citizen. "I'm going on trial for this, for having defended my country? I'll go with my head held high". "Now tell me how serious a trial is if Richard Gere comes from Hollywood to testify on how bad I am," he said. He condemned the trial, saying it was wanted by the left and supporters of illegal immigration. "You tell me how serious a trial it is," Salvini said outside the courthouse, "where Richard Gere will come from Hollywood to testify against my nastiness... I hope it lasts as short a time as possible because there are more important things to take care of."

The prosecution has accused Salvini of abuse of power, dereliction of duty, and kidnapping of the migrants even as the conditions on board worsened. The stated: "international conventions governing maritime rescue and, more generally, the protection of human life" were violated by Salvini. The minister also ignored orders from the PM's office directing him to allow disembarking of the ship.

What does this mean for Italian politics and Salvini's future?

First, the trial has not attracted much attention to the issue or Salvini's popularity. The public seems fatigued with an incident that happened two years ago. This also reflects Salvini's declining standing. After hoping to trigger a snap election, Salvini's leadership is in crisis after being taken over by another far right-wing - Brothers of Italy. Only in the event of a non-guilty verdict would Salvini be able to redeem his political fortunes.

Second, discussion of EU's migration policies. Both Open Arms and Salvini have spoken against harsh EU migration policy ahead of the proceedings. While Salvini appealed to the larger public sentiment of anti-immigration, Open Arms condemned the "deadly" EU migration policy that has cost many innocent lives in the Mediterranean. The minister also appealed

to the larger audience that feels “abandoned” by the EU and described humanitarian rescue ships as encouraging migrant traffickers in North Africa. More than 1 million refugees have entered Europe since 2015. The EU has entered into a pact with Turkey to limit migration and has called upon France to regulate entry at the English Channel. More attempts seem to be made to curb and limit migration than address the consequences of migration. Thus, the trial will serve a larger purpose of discussing policy implications and state response to migration.

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SPAIN

One month after the La Palma volcanic eruption

By Joeana Cera Matthews

A volcano located on La Palma – the fifth-largest island in Spain's Canary Islands – has been active for over a month now. The Canary Islands is home to the Teneguia volcano in the Cumbre Vieja national park. The last time a volcano erupted was in 1971; it was also the last time Spain witnessed a surface eruption. Considering recent developments, the protracted eruption sees no end.

Events across the past month

On 19 September, after a week of seismic activity, the volcano erupted. Harboring one of the most active volcanoes in the archipelago, more than 22,000 tremors of 3.8-magnitude on the Richter scale were initially measured. From the beginning, seismologists maintained that the duration

of the eruption would be unpredictable since previous records read such eruptions lasting from weeks to months. On 21 September, nearly 200 people fled their homes as the erupting volcano developed a new fissure. Following this fissure, four earthquakes hit the island. On 28 September, after much speculation on whether or not the lava would reach the Atlantic Ocean, the volcanic lava entered the waters. This was followed by the Spanish government declaring La Palma as a 'disaster zone'. On 17 October, almost a month since the eruption began, 42 seismic movements were recorded with the largest one scaling a magnitude of 4.3.

Government Response

Prior to the eruption, the government instructed people to prepare emergency kits in case of an evacuation. Soon after the eruption, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, delaying his trip to the UN summit, visited the site and promised state support to the region. The increased devastation of homes was also a matter of concern. The Islands' regional government promised two housing development purchases to provide for the homeless. Spanish banks were also providing emergency shelters. The 'disaster zone' declaration facilitated the effort to provide the financial assistance necessary for their recovery. Defence Minister Margarita Robles also visited the region and assured the support of the Spanish Navy in clearing out the volcanic ash that covered large parts of the region. On 17 October, President Angel Victor Torres, commented on the prolonged eruption: "There are no signs that an end of the eruption is imminent even though this is the greatest desire of everyone."

Local Impact: Evacuations galore and affected livelihood

Government spokesperson Isabel Rodriguez reported 7,000 of La Palma's 83,000 residents to have been evacuated and about 2,000 buildings to have suffered damages. The lava has submerged almost 800 hectares of land. On 27 September, Spanish property portal Idealista estimated the damages accounting to EUR 178 million. Experts claim that there lies a possibility of

continuing damage. No fatalities have been reported.

La Palma produces a quarter of the Canary Islands' famous bananas. Banana as a crop is a crucial economic-builder since it provides livelihood to the region's farmers. On 23 September, lava and smoke shot out of the volcano threatening the banana plantations. Several farms were affected, negatively impacting the annual banana production. One of the farmers was quoted as saying: "The volcano may not kill us directly, but it's going to make a lot of us go bankrupt." Another farmer, concerned about the prolonged eruption, said: "We don't know when it's going to stop, that's the problem. This is nature and we have to deal with it, it's bigger than us."

Impact on climate and health

On 21 September, just two days post-eruption, the Volcanological Institute of the Canary Islands (INVOLCAN) announced that the volcano had emitted 7,997 to 10,665 tonnes of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) per day into the atmosphere. This raised concerns as SO₂ runs the risk of reacting with oxygen and moisture in the atmosphere to create vog (volcanic smog) as well as acid rain. The citizens were warned to avoid the ingestion of the toxic ash looming in the sky.

The biggest threat, however, was the lava reaching the Atlantic Ocean. This would trigger the chemical reaction that resulted in the creation of 'laze' – a combination of lava and haze formed through hot lava boiling in the colder seawater. According to science journalist and volcanologist Dr Robin George Andrews: "It creates a steam of hydrochloric acid, water vapour and bits of ash." Laze causes irritation of the eye, lung, and skin. Explosions were also to be expected given the "pressure-cooker-situation" created by the lava in the sea. To reduce the risk of humans being affected by the same, marine authorities closed off around two nautical miles at sea where the lava was heading, terming it an 'exclusion zone'.

Moments of Awe

A 'miracle house' had become popular across the media as it remained the sole

survivor of the lava. However, on 28 September, it finally got consumed by the lava. Another moment that caught the attention of the world was when two dogs stranded in empty water tanks were rescued via a mysterious gang that termed themselves the 'A-team'. This gang had overtaken the drone operation initiated to save the animals.

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TURKEY

President Erdogan's Osman Kavala drama

By Padmashree Anandhan

What happened?

On 24 October, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan directed the foreign ministry to announce the 10 ambassadors from the US, Germany, France, and other NATO allies as "persona non grata." This means removal of diplomatic status which leads to expulsion.

Erdogan said that "the embassies had taken a step back from this slander against our country and our nation. I believe these ambassadors will be more careful in their statements regarding Turkey's sovereign rights" in the future." The statement was declared by the envoys, for the release of activist Osman Kavala but upon the warning of the diplomats and analysts, President Erdogan reversed his decision. He was warned that the decision to evict the ambassadors would result in "economic disaster and rupture in NATO alliance."

Ambassadors of the US, Canada, France, Finland, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden issued a joint statement on the fourth anniversary of Kavala's imprisonment. Osman Kavala is a businessman and a philanthropist who was charged by the government for supporting the protests in 2013 known as Gezi Park Protests. Even though not convicted he continues to be in prison since 2017. The questions that need to be answered are why is President Erdogan making a statement now? What were the reasons behind the sudden recall of the decision? What makes Kavala important for the leader and government?

Behind the Turkish President's game

First, the support to the ruling party Justice and Development Party (AKP) has now fallen to 30 per cent. The percentage held by opposition marks around 40 per cent now. With the growing number of anti-Erdogan parties, it is a great concern for president Erdogan to remain in power.

Hence keeping the external parties deviated from the internal affairs of Turkey with the issue of Kavala was a better option.

Second, the international task force against money laundering (FATF) recently placed Turkey on its grey list due to its failure to fight money laundering and financing to terrorism. This resulted in the collapse of foreign exchange rates and the value of the Turkish Lira has descended lower than ever. Adding to the existing inflation, imports have become expensive leading to an economic crisis. This situation until lessened will be pressure and challenge to Erdogan's administration.

Third, the release of Kavala continues to be an issue between the EU and Turkey. The existing administration sees the activist as a potential to carry out a coup attempt and invoke protests in the region. This will be the last thing the party wants to deal with an economic crisis, a deteriorating image of the leader within the country, and narrowed relations with the west.

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REGIONAL

The European Council Summit 2021: Key Highlights

By Padmashree Anandhan

The European Council Summit was held from 21 to 22 October 2021. The discussions focused on several aspects from the rule of law, energy prices, the instrumentalization of migrants via hybrid warfare, the pandemic, cyber security, international trade, digital policy, as well as climate change. Apart from these debates and discussions, the summit also witnessed the bloc leaders giving a farewell to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven.

Key Highlights of the Summit

First, the rule of law has been a recurring issue in the Council's agenda. In the previous summit, Hungary was at the centre of attention while this time Poland took over. Developments in Warsaw raised concerns among the bloc members. Discussions regarding the controversial Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruling stating certain EU treaties were discordant with the Polish Constitution. The issue of judicial independence was also challenged by Poland.

The EU leaders urged the European Commission to take necessary action in line with the rule-of-law conditionality legislation.

Second, discussion on energy prices. While countries like France and Spain expect the energy prices to hike further, the Netherlands assured that the price hike was temporary. The Prime Minister of Spain requested an analysis on price formation and monitoring speculative behaviour. Nuclear energy was not mentioned but was seen as a stable source that could be included in the green transition. Poland and Hungary used the energy price debate to call out for the "Fit for 55" package. The European Commission adopted the package to make the EU's climate, energy, land use, transport, and taxation policies fit for cutting down net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030.

Three, the debate on migration. The discussion covered various aspects such as the external dimension of migration, the non-acceptance of instrumentalizing of migrants for political purposes by third countries, and the increase in the inflow of migrants at the EU's borders. The leaders restated that such letting in of migrants across the EU borders the Belarusian regime was seen as a retaliation against EU sanctions and is intolerable. They proposed to the EU to build protective measures to respond steadfastly.

Four, EU leaders raised concerns on the rising new coronavirus cases in the many member states and the unmatched levels of vaccination. To fill the vaccination gap, the

European Council suggested fighting out disinformation, vaccine disparities across states and also emphasized the need for vaccination campaigns to tackle new variants.

Five, Digital Policy. The European Council's Digital Policy seeks for a digital transformation in Europe. Under the policy, it aims for "growth, job creation, competitiveness, and resilience."

The identified threats to the digital transformation were limited production capacity, high entry costs and lack of a level playing field in semiconductors are threatening the EU's capacity in digital transformation, also in light of persisting global shortages. The Commission launched the coalition on processors and semiconductors in July 2021 and proposed European Chips Act as a step towards the digital plan.

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REGIONAL

European Commission enhances its tech ecosystem post-TTC meet

By Vaishnavi Iyer

On 29 September 2021, the EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) held its inaugural meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The TTC is an initiative by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel, and US President Joe Biden. The United States Co-Chairs — Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, and United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai collaborated with EU Co-Chairs — European Commission Executive Vice Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis to upgrade common principles for "21st Century economy".

The summit discussed addressing non-market trade challenges and trade distortive practices. The countries intended to strengthen cooperation, transparency, and communication in semiconductor supply chains. They followed it by identifying existing gaps and vulnerabilities to advance R&D ecosystems to improve resilience. The partners sought to exchange information related to investment trends, transaction types, and the best practices related to analyzing risk. The investment screening discussion was focused on sensitive technologies and related data. Shared principles of cooperating to provide for capacity building of developing countries, including multilateral support to export control regimes, were agreed upon.

Additionally, the partners agreed to engage in implementing innovative and trustworthy AI systems, studying the impact of AI on the future, ensuring the developed technology respects shared democratic values and universal human rights. The committee appointed working groups to develop plans for critical areas. The critical areas consisted of SME access to digital tools, enhancing emerging technology standards, securing critical supply chains and introducing clean technology objectives, data governance, and addressing the misuse of technology to threaten human rights and security. Many stakeholders participated in the summit and promised enhanced and diverse engagement in meeting the goals of the TTC.

On 18 October, Europe invested GBP 227 million in tech start-ups. As an initiative of the European Commission's Europe Innovation Council (EIC) accelerator program, every company would directly receive GBP 17 million to upgrade technology for energy, healthcare, biotech, digital technologies, and space. The EIC selected up to 65 small companies and start-ups. Out of the 65 companies selected, 60 companies received GBP 227 million in equity, while the remainder received GBP 136 million in grants. French company UpMem working in developing processing in memory devices, noted: "The EIC support will allow our PIM technology to drastically

reduce the energy and hardware footprint of digital services and data centers." Other companies facilitated by the EIC funds are - Minima Processor, a Finland based company developing a low-power processor, Plant-e from Belgium providing for a plant-powered energy harvesting system for IoT systems, a Sweden based company called Oldecomm looks at LED-based LiFi communication technology needed for spacecraft and aerospace along with WI-charge developing a wireless power system allowing for device charging over a 10-meter air range with a power which is 100 times more than batteries.

The scheme also supports start-ups called 'Alice and Bob in France,' building the world's first fault-tolerant commercial quantum computers and Denmark's 'Sparrow Quantum,' looking at single-photon sources for photonic quantum computers. The EIC is harboring a new tech ecosystem by introducing "Horizon Europe," where start-ups can submit their ideas for a fast evaluation. Selected applicants are then invited to prepare a full plan with free business coaching. The same plans would be evaluated every 3 months at fixed 3-month intervals. Out of the 4,000 start-up ideas sent since March, 801 have already presented their full applications. A further 1,098 applications for October are now being evaluated. Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth noted: "With the European Innovation Council we aim to bring Europe to the forefront of innovation and new technologies, by investing in new solutions for the health, environmental and societal challenges we are facing."

On 20 October, The European Commission launched an online consultation platform known as Futurium in alignment with the TTC talks. Futurium collects views from various businesses, think tanks, unions, academics, not-for-profit and environmental organizations, and other stakeholders. Margrethe Vestager of the 'A Europe Fit for the Digital Age,' said: "Robust and regular engagement with all interested parties on both sides of the Atlantic is an absolute must for the success of the EU-US

Trade and Technology Council." Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for Trade Valdis Dombrovskis noted the initiative compounds a transatlantic leadership on topics of technology and cooperation. He added that the platform is an outreach activity, and as a part of the promised transparency on trade issues, they would be collaborating with civil societies through their "Civil Society Dialogues."

The European Parliament Press Kit for 21-22 October, under its Digital Transformation discussions, reviewed proposals on the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act. The voting for the drafts is scheduled for 08 November. Further, the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee called upon Frances Haugen, Facebook whistleblower, on 08 November for a hearing on "Whistleblowers' testimonies on the negative impact of big tech companies' products on users." As discussed in the TTC, the MEPs discussed the proposal of a rulebook aimed at Artificial Intelligence to set standards enabling trust and security. They focused on the ethical use of AI to safeguard citizens' fundamental rights and also on AI investment uptake. Finally, they hoped for a standard and balanced approach which would promote legal certainty for SMEs and encourage innovation in the EU. The next meeting of the TTC is planned for 2022.

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REGIONAL

The Balkans and the EU Summit

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 06 October, the EU's one-day summit in Slovenia came to an end. The summit attended by both the EU and Western Balkan leaders primarily discussed issues regarding EU accession and other problems faced by the region. The six Western Balkan leaders of Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with North Macedonia and Albania were present for the summit. The Western Balkan states are at different stages of accession.

Three issues: Timeline, Bulgaria's veto, and EU's internal differences

First, despite making promises to fasten the enlargement process and having elaborate talks on the same, the summit failed to bring a decisive timeline regarding the accession of the Western Balkan states. Along with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, several other EU leaders expressed their opinion against having a 'firm timeline' as it did not help with accession. Instead, they believe that it should take place only when the countries in question have achieved all the conditions of the EU accession.

Second, the veto rights blocking accession of the Western Balkan states. This is clearly seen when we consider the case of Albania and North Macedonia who, despite having met with the EU's reform demands, are yet to be invited for formal negotiations due to Bulgaria exercising its right to veto. Bulgaria has been against the countries' accession into the EU due to its long-established quarrel with North Macedonia. However, the bilateral dispute doesn't see an end unless Bulgaria's political crisis of not having a government is solved. Third, internal differences within the EU. The Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama said that they 'learnt the hard way not to expect anything'. The North Macedonian Prime Minister during his post-summit address also warned about the consequences of the EU's failure to 'materialize' their promises. He assured that the idea of 'European unity

and cooperation' would also be severely affected along with the immense disappointment.

The EU's management of the recent Serbia-Kosovo border dispute added to its falling credibility in the Western Balkan region. Its failure to admonish Serbia using its military strength to create fear amongst its neighbours has severely affected the region's trust in the EU.

Silver linings: New economic and investment plan

Despite many criticisms, the EU agreed on a new economic and investment plan for the six Western Balkan countries worth EUR nine billion. They also adopted a declaration reaffirming their support for the region along with initiatives to support green and digital transitions as well as to increase political and security cooperation.

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BREXIT

UK's Brexit-induced Labour Crisis and the Conservative Conference

By Joeana Cera Matthews

The Conservative Party Conference (CPC) 2021, which began on 3 October in Manchester will go on till 6 October. Amongst various issues being covered was the staff shortage affecting the UK and how this was an after-effect of Brexit.

The issue of staff shortage in the UK has been magnified by the subsequent supply chain disruption leading to a reduction in the availability of stock. Civilians have been severely affected by the same. Several firms have conveyed their inability to work at usual measures. Inflation is expected to be a major concern, especially around

Christmas, as companies want to increase prices given the reduced supply of goods. Facilities and services provided by firms have also been affecting their ability to serve due to the disruption.

The Problems: Multi-sectoral effects, failed employment efforts

The issue of staff shortage is not singular to a particular sector. It has affected multiple sectors across the UK. From supermarket giants like Tesco to the health sector including hospitals – the lack of workers has severely affected the businesses in the UK. Efforts by companies to employ staff have ended in vain as immigration rules become stricter. Firms have been trying to lure in staff by promising perks and increased wages given the limited availability of staff. Those companies having enough staff find it difficult to keep the staff put as sustaining the employees in their position also seems to be an issue.

Causes: Brexit and the Pandemic

Just like any other part of the world, the pandemic was a reason for the employee crisis. However, in the UK, this problem was worsened by Brexit. Both of these created the "perfect storm" for the UK. The immigration rules imposed via Brexit, have clearly put the UK in a fix more than it has the EU member states. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's move to issue emergency visas to reduce the impact of the crisis, at least temporarily, can be seen as a panicky move.

The Deflecting Blame Game

When asked about the staff shortage during the CPC 2021, Johnson preferred to deflect from Brexit being blamed for the crises at hand. He said: "When people voted for change in 2016, and when people voted for change in 2019, they voted for the end of a broken model of the UK economy that relied on low wages and low skill, and chronic low productivity. And we're moving away from that." This gives a clear indication that despite being under heavy pressure Johnson refuses to blame the speedy Brexit for the issues affecting the UK. In fact, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss stated that the crisis was not the problem of ministers and

that the businesses had to solve the crisis by themselves.

It is high time that those holding office in the UK took the after-effects of Brexit seriously. Dealing with the numerous crises at hand will help the UK in the long run. Instead of blaming the EU for being stringent on the Northern Ireland Protocol and other Brexit-related rules, the UK needs to consider how its civilians and the larger population are being affected by the same.

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ENERGY

Addressing the Energy prices in Europe: The new EU proposal

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 13 October, the European Union proposed a 'toolbox' that would address the energy price crisis that has left countries across Europe in a fix. The toolbox unveiled by the EU expects to reduce the impact of the inflating prices on consumers. The bloc members would, in this manner, be able to stabilize the energy rates. The EU Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson expressed his concern over the mounting prices which are affecting the bloc which is still only recovering from the pandemic.

What are the tools?

The proposal includes measures that would regard both immediate as well as medium-term ideas to manage the skyrocketing prices. Some of the immediate measures include: safeguarding electricity grids to avoid disconnections, provision of aid to companies and industries based on the EU law, and looking for anti-competitive behaviour. These measures aim to protect consumers and the businesses from growing prices. The medium-term measures focus on enhancing market

resilience while backing efforts to decarbonize. They involve exploring the possibility of members jointly procuring gas, establishing regional risk-analyzing groups to inspect cross-border gas transit, and forming energy storage capacities. Further negotiations on the same are expected to be held during an EU Summit on 21 and 22 October.

What is the need for these tools?

As Simson stated: "The current situation is exceptional, and the internal energy market has served us well for the past 20 years. But we need to be sure that it continues to do so in the future." The tools enable members to reduce prices without being worried about breaching strict competition rules. Few countries across the bloc have already shown initiative to implement the tools proposed by the EU. In an effort to curb prices, France assured a ceiling price along with plans to offer impoverished households financial support. Italy, meanwhile, had already planned on tax reductions to ease the economic strain on the consumers.

How effective are these tools?

According to a report by Clean Energy Wire, the German chemical industry claims that the toolbox may assist the consumers and protect them from 'energy poverty'; the businesses and energy-intensive companies will fail to be supported in a similar manner. Head of the Low Carbon and Circular Economy program at the Institute for European Environmental Policy, Tim Gore, commented that renewable energy is the only long-term solution in sight. In order to achieve this goal, he suggests there be tax cuts on electricity. According to Gore: "It would make most sense for governments to cut taxes on electricity, which would be in line with the longer-term reforms to energy taxation to support the electrification of the economy, which is vital for the green transition." Providing buyers with replacements to fossil fuels is another suggestion. The more apparent the transition to renewable energy becomes to the consumer, the faster it will occur.

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ENERGY

Europe's Energy Crisis

By Joeana Cera Matthews

From the UK to Germany, numerous European countries have been undergoing an energy crisis. Countries that supply gas are torn between their internal needs and the needs of those external countries that they supply to. According to *Euronews*, the gas cost in Europe is six times higher than last year.

Two major reasons: Search for cleaner fuel transition and the increasing reliance on natural gas

In an attempt to attain carbon neutrality, the large-scale transition from coal to cleaner fuel has already begun impacting Europe negatively; as a matter of fact, Europe seems to be the most affected – not just in its respective region but the rest of the world too. This can be attributed to their greater initiative to reach the climate goals that they have set for themselves.

Second, the economic dependency on natural gas. Natural gas-rich countries like Norway and Russia have reduced their supply to address their own needs. Factories in Europe have already begun shutting down while others have announced to follow a similar road. Warnings of blackouts are all over the news and media houses as well.

What does this mean?

First, the supply-demand disparity; despite the increased demand, suppliers have opted not to increase the production as they believe it would impact their profitability and reduce investments. Second, the falling energy supply along with the increasing gas

prices has already affected the farmers and will potentially lead to global food inflation. Third, implications on livelihood. Despite governments across Europe trying to ease the consumer load by providing subsidies and tax cuts, an energy crisis inevitably affects everyone's life. As Bloomberg Businessweek stated, 'as more gas goes abroad, less will be available at home' – which is the stark reality. Fifth, balancing the domestic and external markets. Countries supplying gas have to decide between providing for their own versus the external market. This is a tough choice to make since choosing the external countries would imply that the country does not care about the national policy and choosing to supply within the country would adversely impact the foreign policy.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Metaverse: Facebook unveils virtual five-year plan for the EU

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 18 October, Facebook announced its five-year plan in the EU, a project named "Metaverse." The project is a combination of virtual and augmented reality aimed to fill the gap of online interactions. This announcement has stirred debate in three ways. One, the announcement can be a cover to its recent fallout and to down its regulators from calling it to limit its influence. Two, it is a warning message to other tech giants such as Fortnite, Roblox, and Nvidia that have similar virtual platforms already in place. Three, this has given more awareness to new concepts like

cryptocurrency and non-fungible tokens. Although the CEO has promised to build the platform "responsibly", the long-term effects on human life are still unknown.

What is Metaverse?

The concept of metaverse first originated in 1992 from Neal Stephenson's science fiction novel "Snow Crash." Since then, tech firms (Fortnite and Roblox) have been instrumenting it into games and have advanced in conducting virtual concerts and tournaments for people worldwide to interact. In the metaverse, one needs just a headset to enter the virtual realm to connect to everything. From concerts, a movie with friends, wearing clothes, owning property, walking to working inside Facebook in the future. For example, a person taking a test drive to buy a car can simply 'metaverse' and experience it from a couch. The same can also be applied in buying dresses through digital trials.

Why the EU?

The CEO has proposed to recruit 10,000 workers from the EU, but the reason behind choosing the region is that the company aims to make the EU its playground to draft or to set new internet rules. Apart from this, the other factors are the emerging talent, large consumer market, and first-class universities. It added that: "European policymakers are leading the way in helping to embed European values like free expression, privacy, transparency and the rights of individuals into the day-to-day workings of the internet."

This new tech investment in Europe will either raise the bars of the internet or go downhill. On the one hand, the company has agreed to abide by the European regulatory measures regarding free speech and data privacy. On the other hand, it has also warned the regulators against the strict rules stating that it might lead to the loss of jobs. With the pandemic proving the possibility of a digital world, the latter seems to have its least chances.

What does the future hold?

For the metaverse project to reach its full potential, network building needs

advancement. First, a 4G or a 5G connection can only be a base. To make the metaverse a reality, a higher generation of the network is mandated. Two, such a shift into the virtual domain will have an unimaginable effect on society and humans. Three, this might lead to a digital colonization war between tech giants.

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SPORTS

FIFA versus EA: It is more than Football

By Padmashree Anandhan

Recently, EA (Electronic Arts) Sports announced that it was considering changing the name of FIFA, its famous soccer series. This has created confusion in the region as this involves a change in the game series and the gamers; creating a ripple economic effect. Being the home of football, the revenue generated from FIFA has been essential to Europe. The FIFA-EA split would imply prospects for other market competitors.

The genesis of the split

FIFA is an international governing body of association football headquartered in Switzerland while EA Sports is a division within the EA (Electronic Arts), an American company that deals with creating and publishing sport video games. Both signed a deal in 1993. In exchange for the licensed name "FIFA", the EA group agreed to develop a best-selling video game franchise. After decades of partnership, the parties decide to split ways due to various factors. While FIFA has called in for new developers and investors to fund its innovations and is trying to increase the occurrence of the World Cup to every two years; the EA company has already

registered two trademarks in the EU and Britain in the name of “EA Sports FC.”

FIFA versus EA Sports

The interests of FIFA and EA conflict in three areas. One, the vision of both parties seems to vary. FIFA aims to venture more into the esports market while EA wants it to go global, expanding itself into arena video game tournaments and digital products like non-fungible tokens (NFTs). Two, in terms of control; EA has utilized its FIFA license in entering agreements with other organizations like UEFA, the English Premier League, and other domestic play-offs, but FIFA, being a major income generator has had to oblige to the single party rules. FIFA has for decades been a licensor for EA Sports; it intends to innovate more along with new developers like Fortnite to step in for its growth in the esports market. Three, the financial hitch. As the duo’s game launch has only crossed an income of USD 20 billion in the last two decades, the license agreements are now affordable at just USD 150 million per year.

What does this mean for Europe?

The FIFA-EU partnership played a major role in Europe - as much to the footballers as it did to the video gamers. A split in this legendary partnership points to three outcomes. One, the outsourcing for new developers and investors via the FIFA esports venture implies more investment, innovation, and regional competition. Two, the EA expanded its licensing horizons beyond the EU and the UK to diversify its revenue growth. And third, the increasing significance of video gamers’ population factors into the determination of European revenue flow.

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INTERNATIONAL

EU-Taiwan bilateral relations intensify amid Chinese opposition

By Vaishnavi Iyer

The EU initiated its attempt to create a “common strategic culture” against the bipolarity between China and the U.S and the multipolar international system. On 21 October, in a landslide vote, the European Parliament adopted a report calling for closer relations with Taiwan. The Parliament in Strasbourg in a majority of 580 to 26 votes supported the non-binding resolution requesting an urgent “impact assessment, public consultation and scoping exercise on a bilateral investment agreement”. The lawmakers urged for the bloc’s trade office to be renamed “European Union office in Taiwan” in Taipei as opposed to the previous “European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan” to mark a broader scope for their bilateral ties. Following the listing of Taiwan as a trade partner in 2015, there was an indication of an upgraded mission to Taiwan. The members of parliament (MEPs) called for cooperation on semiconductor supplies. The MEPs also expressed “grave concern” over China’s “military belligerence, pressure, assault exercises, airspace violations and disinformation campaigns against Taiwan”. Rapporteur Charlie Weimers said: “The European Parliament’s first report on EU-Taiwan relations demonstrates that the EU is ready to upgrade its relationship with our key partner Taiwan”. He suggested the bloc intensify its trade relations with Taiwan within this year.

How did Taiwan and China respond?

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Wenbin expressed condemnation. He stated: “The EU parliament should immediately stop words and actions that undermine China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”. Earlier this month, China criticized French senator Alain Richard for calling Taiwan a ‘country’. China was “dissatisfied” over the Czech Republic and Slovakia hosting Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu and

urged European countries to not “undermine the political foundation of the bilateral relations,”.

Taiwanese officials expressed gratitude saying the resolution sets a “new milestone” for its relations with the bloc.

What is the background?

First, the meeting occurred at a critical geopolitical juncture. With both countries issuing sanctions in March, EU-China relations took a nosedive after the collapse of a long-negotiated investment plan in May. With Merkel stepping down, China loses an important and influential partner. The summit was held a day prior to the EU and the US announcing their collaboration with the Trade and Technology Council (TTC). The TTC is revered as an instrument to counter China. The statement by EU diplomat Josep Borrell in September defended the EU’s plans of expanding ties with Taiwan without any recognition of statehood”. The statement was issued amidst strained ties between China and Lithuania over Lithuania’s decision to authorize a “Taiwanese Representative Office” in Vilnius. Prior to voting on the agreement, the Chinese ambassador lobbied the parliament. The ambassador hoped the president would leverage their role to enable the parliament to respect the seriousness and the sensitivity of the Taiwan issue, to promote a stronger constructive role in building the political foundations of EU-China relations. The report raises larger concerns for China amidst the new AUKUS cooperation.

Second, amid a global chip shortage, the agreement is advantageous to Taiwan and the EU. As a tech powerhouse, Taiwan has been an attractive trade partner for the bloc.

However, military tensions and provocations have significantly increased between China and Taiwan. Taiwan predicts that China can potentially launch a “full-scale” invasion of the island by 2025.

Way forward

First, the question of statehood. The EU in multiple instances reassured China of indulging in trade with Taiwan without providing for the recognition of statehood. Second, challenge to the foundation of bilateral relations. Borrell hoped for continued China-EU cooperation over the joint construction of BRI and the EU's connectivity initiative. China supported strengthened vaccine, technological, innovation, finance, agriculture, and energy cooperation in the ‘strategic dialogue’ held in September. Considering the emphasis laid by the EU on the human rights situation in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and China, the countries now differ fundamentally on the foundation of their bilateral relations. While China is focused on reinforcing the previous agreement of the “One-China ” policy as the principle for the bilateral ties, the EU is demanding a more mature approach centered around addressing unresolved issues. China is disappointed with the EU's pursuit of relations with Taiwan. The EU and Taiwan have held open discussions about trade thus providing for an international space to Taiwan. It seems that there is a new multipolar challenge to China’s dominance in world affairs.

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INTERNATIONAL

NATO-Russia relationship: Looking beyond the suspensions and expulsions

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 18 October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced via a Foreign Ministry statement that Russia would be terminating its diplomatic mission to NATO. Lavrov claimed the suspension to be a retaliatory move to NATO's recent expulsion of its mission members to the alliance.

What triggered the suspension?

First, the immediate triggers. On 06 October, NATO banned eight Russian diplomats who were members of the Russian mission to the alliance. They were expelled on the grounds of being "undeclared intelligence officers" or simply put — spies. Alongside this expulsion, NATO halved the size of the Russian mission to its Brussels headquarters without justifying the need for the same. *Deutsche Welle* had then reported *Interfax* citing a senior Russian lawmaker's response; he said that Moscow "would retaliate, not necessarily in kind."

Second, the ripple effect of the expulsion. The NATO expulsion was followed by several eastern European countries, as well as those countries closely associated with the alliance, asking Russian envoys in their countries to leave, accusing them on grounds similar to those alleged by NATO. Moscow responded in kind — asking these diplomats to leave the respective region 'for good'.

Third, the role of history. Relations between Russia and NATO have been tense since 2014. Following the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula along with the Moscow-backed Donbass region conflict, any working relationship between Russia and NATO ceased. The NATO-Russia Council also has been dormant.

What does the suspension mean?

Russia is set to cancel NATO's accreditation on 01 November. Once this comes into force, NATO is expected to contact Russia via its envoy to Belgium, Alexander Tokovinin, in case of emergencies. Lavrov suggested that NATO too appoint a similar envoy in Moscow. However, the already strained relations imply the futility of such a facility. Since the suspension of practical cooperation in 2014, channels of communication remain open only for high-level military coordination talks.

Is there a possibility of reconciliation?

First, the incessant misunderstandings and blame games. Following the expulsion of the Russian diplomats, NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu stated that they had acted only in "defense and deterrence" and were still interested in having an "open and meaningful dialogue" with Moscow. However, Lavrov criticized the alliance for trying to "disintegrate the internal unity of the region" by creating stressful situations and being "unfriendly".

Second, the declining relationship. Responding to the Russian announcement, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said: "It's more than just regrettable, this decision taken by Moscow will seriously damage the relationship." Russia never replaced its latest ambassador to NATO, Alexander Grushko, who had returned to Moscow in January 2018. The deteriorating relationship between the two has been quite evident in the past few years; member countries regularly battle a noncooperative Russia either at sea or via media. The Russia-NATO relationship only saw signs of worsening given the fact that NATO's condition to return to normalcy was based on Russia leaving Crimea. A highly unlikely event, at least in the near future. Thus, the current scenario indicates the prolongation of tense relations.

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INTERNATIONAL

The G20 Extraordinary Leaders' meeting on Afghanistan

By Vaishnavi Iyer

On 12 October, Italy hosted an emergency G20 virtual summit on the situation in Afghanistan. The meeting focused on Afghanistan's humanitarian, economic, and security situations. Leaders from all countries attended the meeting, except China and Russia, who sent their representatives. Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi said: "There has basically been a convergence of views on the need to address the humanitarian emergency." Draghi also highlighted the multilateral approach taken to resolve the crisis and said: "This was the first multilateral response to the Afghan crisis ... multilateralism is coming back, with difficulty, but it is coming back." Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting foreign minister of Afghanistan, insisted on cooperation from the international community. He made no comments on the secondary education for girls, which was discontinued. In a joint statement, the leaders urged the Taliban to address extremist organizations within the country. The safety of people wishing to leave Afghanistan and the situation of female education were also discussed. Most leaders expressed their wish to coordinate over the crisis. It was also confirmed that the Taliban government had not yet been officially recognized by the member countries. The Taliban, according to Erdogan, have not yet provided what was expected of them. Merkel underlined the international community's responsibility of providing help to stop the instability. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: "We must do all we can to avert a major humanitarian and socio-economic collapse in Afghanistan." Previously, French President Emmanuel

Macron had prompted the G20 members to send a "clear message" to the Taliban over its questions on international recognition, the status of women in the country, and international humanitarian assistance. He also emphasized combating Islamist terror groups.

The European Union pledged a USD 1.15 billion aid to address what it called a 'catastrophe'. The funds for humanitarian aid would be channelled through the United Nations, while a few countries would also provide for direct assistance. The EU pledge is substantial, exceeding its budget prior to the Taliban's control of Afghanistan. The EU declared that it would direct its aid to foreign groups working on the ground rather than the Taliban. Afghanistan was reliant on humanitarian aid, particularly from the United States, preceding the Taliban's control. With the takeover, the US halted most foreign aid and froze close to USD 10 billion in assets. At the United Nations Donor Conference, the US announced a smaller amount of USD 64 million. Draghi proposed that the US contribute USD 300 million at the G20 summit. The White House stated that the same sum has already been allocated for help this year. The statement from the White House said: "The United States remains committed to working closely with the international community and using diplomatic, humanitarian, and economic means to address the situation in Afghanistan and support the Afghan people".

Why are countries responding?

The European Union response pertains to tensions of spillover migration. Italy emphasized the Taliban's ability to limit foreign intervention in Afghanistan. Aid is "necessary" to avoid humanitarian disasters and prevent "uncontrolled migration flows from Afghanistan to neighbouring nations and beyond," according to an Italian government statement on the summit. The US has pledged to continue its counter-terrorism activities alongside ISIS-K threats and to assist people in safely evacuating.

The UK and US did not respond to China's proposal to ease sanctions on Afghanistan in the joint statement.

Did the responses differ country-wise?

The largest economies in the summit did not participate with measures substantial to counter the Afghan crisis. The member countries have been aligned in not providing the Taliban government an official recognition. The challenge lies in the management of preconditions for diplomatic recognition. Given their relations with the Taliban government, China and Russia would have a lower threshold as compared to Western countries to diplomatically recognize the Taliban government. Moreover, countries may diverge on issues relating to resuming international developmental aid to be given to the Taliban to counter the economic crisis. The joint statement declared: "The Taliban will be judged on their deeds." The international community needs to collaborate on the Afghan crisis and maintain standard protocols over the Taliban government recognition.

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INTERNATIONAL

The French-Algerian bilateral tensions

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Following a diplomatic row over visas and remarks from Paris, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune demanded "total respect" from France. Algeria had recalled its ambassador from Paris following "inadmissible" remarks by President Emmanuel Macron. Critical comments from

Macron surrounding Algerian history sparked tensions. The Algerian government responded by prohibiting French military planes from entering its airspace. Tebboune said: "We forget that it [Algeria] was once a French colony...History should not be falsified."

The comments mentioned in *Le Monde*, report Macron stating that Algeria was governed by a "political-military system". Algeria's official history has been rewritten, according to Macron, to encourage anti-French sentiment. According to the newspaper, the remarks were directed at Algeria's ruling elite rather than Algerian society as a whole.

The French-Algerian spat erupted over the French government's unilateral decision to impose visa restrictions on Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The visa limitations were imposed in reaction to the Algerian government's refusal to accept unauthorized migrants. In response, Algeria withdrew their French ambassador. Macron expressed his wish to have cordial relations with Algeria. Admitting France's mistreatment of Harkis, he asked for "forgiveness" from the families of Algerians who fought alongside the French. Around tens of thousands of Harkis were killed with the French evacuation. The Harkis were denied resettlement in France and were mostly ostracized. In his speech asking for forgiveness, Macron stated the French attempt to "bandage" wounds through "words of truth". His government pledged EUR 4.71 million with pension provisions and laws to protect the children of Harkis. The address elicited mixed responses. Media reports on Macron's address to the descendants of Algeria's 1954-1962 War of Independence were met with heavy criticisms, as Algeria reminded France of the "genocides" committed by French colonizers. The remarks made by Macron were seen as interfering in Algeria's internal affairs. The Algerian government insisted on the recognition of the shared colonial history of Algeria and France.

While Macron hopes for talks in the future, Algeria has declared that the return of its ambassador to France is contingent on

France paying "full respect" to Algeria. The bilateral relations between France and Algeria got complicated when Macron in 2020, tasked Benjamin Stora, a historian to prepare a report about France's colonial legacy in Algeria. The report was criticized heavily due to its biased nature and absence of recommendations to issue apologies or reparations to the victims. With Macron's speech, France is faced with challenges on the social justice front, by denying history to the oppressed. Moreover, the opportunity cost is not only social but even based on security concerns since French military planes located jihadists in the Sahel region through the Algerian airspace, which is now banned for France. As the relations of the countries strain over historical and contemporary differences, the French response is awaited.

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INTERNATIONAL

EU-US technological cooperation on AI, Semiconductors and Supply Chains

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Recently, the European Union and the United States convened for increased scientific and technology cooperation at the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC). The TTC is a new forum that aims to improve economic ties, digital policy, and the effective resolution of possible conflicts. The inaugural meeting of the council was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. EU Commissioners Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis were present, along with the US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Trade Representative Katherine

Tai, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Speaking about the meet, Blinken explained: "It's just a remarkable spirit of cooperation, collaboration and a desire between the United States, the European Union, to work very, very closely together."

Focus points: Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, China

With mostly economic and policy components, the summit emphasized technology as its central concern. Microchips, forced labour, counterfeit, cloud infrastructure, digitization of MSEs, robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and other subjects were discussed and strategies were declared at the summit. Human rights, regional peace, and climate change were also discussed by the committee. In the short term, joint efforts would involve collaborations in resolving supply chain challenges, with a long-term goal of strengthening semiconductor ecosystems and reducing chip overdependence on Asian countries.

Technology's influence and power were two significant questions raised throughout the summit. To govern online marketplaces, the European Commission passed the Digital Markets Act (DMA). The US views the EU's DMA to be an overreach that would contradict its very goal of providing customers with more choice to intrude on and overreach their security. The US was not in favour of intrusive legislation or being forced to comply with EU regulations. However, the Council has set basic standards for both parties to meet, including other foreign allies, on which they would collaborate. AI was a major topic on the agenda with partners vowing to defend fundamental rights and personal security; a legislation governing AI regulation was also introduced. To ensure its trustworthiness, accuracy, non-discrimination, and responsibility, they committed to building "a shared understanding" as well as uniform monitoring criteria.

The partners also focused on global issues surrounding the behaviour of "non-market economies." Though China was not mentioned, its presence was clearly felt as

they discussed market-distorting subsidies and unfair treatment of international enterprises, among other issues. The discussions centred on democratic values and technological engagement as well, with a focus on fundamental rights.

What was not addressed?

The summit failed to address issues that have exacerbated tensions between the EU and the US, such as the Trump administration's tariffs on steel and aluminium produced in the EU. In return, the European Union increased taxes on US imports, although it also postponed a planned increase in import tariffs in the event that the TTC allows for discussions to resolve the issues. Following the European Court of Justice's (ECJ) ruling to invalidate the Privacy Shield, the meeting did not include a discussion on the EU-US data flow. There was no discussion of a WTO reform or government subsidies. Despite the EU placing tariffs on digital companies, the bulk of which are based in the US, the partners did not discuss taxation. China cast an unspoken shadow over the summit, and both countries' diplomatic

responses differed. Recognizing China as a prospective rival, Brussels seeks to prevent cold wars by referring to China as a "cooperation partner, a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival." It is now up to the United States to decide whether or not to undertake the China rhetoric. However, given Beijing's technological prowess and political clout, we may soon see a Chinese reference at the next summit.

Due to the AUKUS tensions, France had attempted to postpone the meeting. However, many EU leaders objected to this, preferring to refer to the AUKUS dispute as a bilateral issue rather than a wider matter concerning the EU. The next TTC summit scheduled for March will be held in Europe with France assuming the EU presidency.

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EUROPE IN OCTOBER 2021

by Joena Cera Matthews, Vaishnavi Iyer, and Padmashree Anandhan



Source: AP News, Euronews, Reuters/Irakli Gedenidze/ Saakshavili, Antonio Parrinello/Reuters, Lisa Letner/AP, EPA-EFE/Shawn Thew

AUSTRIA

Government set to legalize assisted suicides

On 23 October, the Austrian federal chancellery released a statement announcing the government's submission of a draft law that would legalize assisted suicide for terminally ill adults. Last December, a Constitutional Court ruling had suggested that it was unconstitutional to ban assisted suicide since it violated a person's right to self-determination. The statement issued by the chancellery read: "Seriously ill people should have access to assisted suicide." According to the proposed law, the patient would require attestations from two consulting doctors, approving the decision-making capability of the patient. ("[Austrian government proposes law to legalise assisted suicide](#)," Reuters, 23 October 2021)

BELARUS

Belarus demands French Ambassador to depart over EU tensions

Authorities in Belarus expelled the French Ambassador Nicolas de Lacoste. The media noted that the Ambassador did not engage with Lukashenko to provide him with credential copies. France does not recognize

Lukashenko's disputed sixth presidential term. The Ambassador has been asked to leave before 18 October. Lukashenko has been cracking down on demonstrations and protests after EU sanctions on his continued presidency. The French Ambassador left the embassy on 18 October. ("[Belarus expels French ambassador amid tensions with EU](#)," *France24*, 18 October 2021)

FRANCE

"Middle class-indemnity" to be provided to low-income earners

On 21 October, French Prime Minister Jean Castex announced a new plan to support the consumers during the soaring energy price crisis Europe is struggling with. The plan includes the government aiming to provide a payment of EUR 100 to those earning less than a monthly income of EUR 2,000. The payment is expected to assist at least 38 million people in France. The complete details of the measure are yet to be released. The opposition did not waste much time before it termed the measure as 'insufficient. National Rally's Marine Le Pen called for the reduction of VAT for gas, electricity, and fuel which would aid French people more than the payment. ("[France to](#)

give citizens €100 payment to cope with rising energy prices," POLITICO, 22 October 2021)

Following clerical child sex abuse reports, Prime Minister meets the Pope

The French Prime Minister Jean Castex met with Pope Francis at the Vatican. The meeting involved an unusual gift - a signed Messi jersey that the PM gifted to the Pope along with an 1836 edition of "Notre Dame de Paris." The Pope accepted the gift, marking good relations between France and the Holy See. The gifts were followed by a private 35-minute talk at the Vatican. The trip was made following the devastating report of child abuse in the French Catholic Church. Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi is also set to join the meeting. Reacting to the findings of the report, the Pope commented: "my shame, our shame." Battling clerical abuse has been prioritized by the papacy. The battle intensified when Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, the head of the Bishops' Conference of France, noted that priests were not liable to report any confessions of sexual abuse. While the confession is "the strictest bond of the sacramental seal," the Vatican guidelines updated last year, require priests and clerics to report abuse. Moreover, the French legislation recognizes confidentiality but also requires reporting abuse in criminal cases against minors. ("French PM meets Pope Francis after devastating clerical child sex abuse report," France24, 19 October 2021)

France commemorates one year of Samuel Paty's assassination

On 16 October, France paid tribute to Samuel Paty. A 47-year-old middle-school teacher, Samuel Paty, was beheaded after being stabbed on 16 October 2020. As a homage to him, French leaders unveiled a plaque at the Education Ministry and renamed a square opposite Sorbonne University in Paris' Latin Quarter. Prime Minister Jean Castex remarked: "Here is a man who wanted to do his job, a demanding and sometimes thankless job, a man who only aspired to transmit the values of freedom, secularism, tolerance, free will." Other memorials took place in his

hometown and Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, where he taught; a statue and a mural were installed respectively. Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer, while speaking at a school, said: "We will not forget Samuel Paty." Paty was attacked by an 18-year-old Chechen extremist Abdullakh Anzorov who claimed to be taking revenge on Paty. The crime was committed after Paty used cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad to teach about free speech. Anzorov was later shot dead by French security services. The investigation into Paty's death still remains open. ("France marks 1 year since the assassination of Samuel Paty," Deutsche Welle, 16 October 2021)

Macron's EUR 30 billion worth Green Investment Plan

On 12 October, French President Emmanuel Macron unveiled his EUR 30 billion plan saying that France intends to be a green hydrogen leader, build low-carbon planes, and small nuclear reactors by 2030. Also called the 'France 2030', the plan would ensure French industrial decarbonization accompanied with greater innovation. The opposition was highly critical of the reveal, which comes only six months prior to the elections, terming it electoral campaigning. However, Macron denied such claims, maintaining that 'productive independence of Europe and France' was the priority; he intends to reduce French reliance on foreign imports. Criticisms came from all corners, with environmental group Greenpeace calling the plan "a festival of false solutions and wishful thinking." (Leigh Thomas and Benoit Van Overstraeten, "Macron unveils 30-bl n euro plan for innovation and industrial revival," Reuters, 12 October 2021; Giorgio Leali, "Macron's €30B end-of-term bet to make France great again," POLITICO, 12 October 2021)

Sarkozy Found guilty of overspending in 2012 campaign

On 30 September, a French judge declared ex-French President Nicolas Sarkozy to be guilty of mass overspending in the 2012 re-election campaigns. 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. (["France: ex-President Sarkozy found guilty of campaign fraud," Deutsche Welle, 30 September 2021](#); ["Former French president Sarkozy faces verdict in campaign finance trial," France24, 30 September 2021](#))

GEORGIA

Tbilisi: Thousands march in support of Saakashvili

On 14 October, approximately 50,000 demonstrators gathered in Tbilisi's Freedom Square and main thoroughfare Rustaveli Avenue. Calling on the release of Georgia's ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili, the protesters chanted his nickname 'Misha!' while waving national flags. Saakashvili is said to have declared a hunger strike as his doctors remain concerned about his diminishing health. Saakashvili, the founder of Georgia's opposition United National Movement, had asked his supporters to rally against his primary opponent Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is also the founder of the ruling Georgian Dream Party. Saakashvili's treatment by Georgian authorities has raised concerns in the West with the US considering sanctions against those officials causing democracy to deteriorate. (["Tens of thousands of Georgians rally for release of ex-president Saakashvili," France24, 14 October 2021](#))

GERMANY

EU's farewell to Chancellor Angela Merkel

On 22 October, German Chancellor Angela Merkel attended her supposedly last European Council summit. At the summit, Council President Charles Michel termed her to be a "monument" and said summits without the long-time chancellor would be like "Rome without the Vatican or Paris without the Eiffel Tower." She was complimented and praised by the leader of the EU for her extreme sobriety, simplicity, and how she kept the European Project on course. According to The European federalist and former British MEP Andrew Duff: "She prioritised EU unity over reform - and she leaves the Union more disunited than ever, with one man overboard." Merkel

will be memorialized in European history as a beacon of light that kept the EU building blocks even during its tough times. (Jessica Parker, ["EU leaders give Merkel an ovation at final summit," BBC, 23 October 2021](#); ["Angela Merkel receives fond farewell at final EU summit," Deutsche Welle, 22 October 2021](#))

Coalition talks decide to appoint Scholz as next Chancellor

On 21 October, three German parties — the SPD, the Greens, and the Free Democrats (FDP), proposed to form a coalition government. This is to finalize talks by November and to elect Social Democrat Olaf Scholz as Chancellor by 06 December 2021. Although the Greens and the SPD seem to share a progressive ideology, the FDP is much closer to the conservatives. This variance did not stop the parties from CEECs from creating a 12-page agreement of pledges on climate action, taxes, and a minimum wage that will be inputted in the final government programme. In the background, the last national elections projected Angela Merkel's block in second place even after the Chancellor chose not to compete. Merkel was known for her skilled corridor diplomacy, being at the vanguard to deal with any crisis in the eurozone. It is said that if the talks between the parties to form a coalition fails, it will be the turn for Merkel to come back to Brussels. (["German parties aim to make Scholz chancellor by early December," Reuters, 22 October 2021](#); Johnny Cotton, ["Auf Wiedersehen: Merkel attends her swan song EU summit – probably," Reuters, 21 October 2021](#))

Merkel's farewell visit to Turkey

On 16 October, outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Conducting her farewell visit in Istanbul, Merkel was commended by Erdogan for always having a "reasonable and solution-oriented approach." He also hoped that the successive German government would maintain cooperation with Turkey and wished them "every success." The talks between Merkel and Erdogan primarily focused on migration and the EU-Ankara refugee agreement. The EU-Turkey refugee

pact provides Ankara with financial aid while it harbours migrants, thus, minimizing the number of those that cross into the EU. Merkel was also reported to have appealed to Erdogan to reconsider accepting more Afghan refugees. However, Erdogan has denied the additional EUR three billion that the EU proposed for the same, refusing to take in additional refugees. ("Merkel meets Erdogan during farewell stop in Istanbul," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 October 2021)

Merkel makes her final trip to Israel

Angela Merkel made her final trip to Israel as Germany's Chancellor. This was her eighth trip to the country during her 16-year presidency. She stated that the security of Israel is the top priority for "every German government". Israel has received widespread support throughout her tenure. She paid a visit to Jerusalem's Holocaust memorial after meeting with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Laying a wreath at the memorial, she expressed her gratitude and support for the Jewish life that found "a home again in Germany" after the Holocaust atrocities. Bennet emphasized Germany's genuine friendship while praising Merkel's leadership. Israel also expressed its desire to enter into deeper bilateral ties with Germany in business relations, science, education, health, and security. During the visit, Merkle called for Russian and Chinese cooperation to address Iran's nuclear deal ("Merkel touts Germany-Israel relations at Bennett meeting," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 October 2021)

Government and NGO renegotiate Holocaust pension claimants at the Claims Conference

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims has negotiated payments for Holocaust survivors. In an attempt to symbolically honour "the dignity taken from survivors in their youth", the settlements amount up to monthly pensions of USD 435 from July. The last generation of 6,500 survivors will see an increase in their compensation. In the conference, known as the Claims Conference, attempts were made to negotiate the number of eligible people. The beneficiaries include 4,500 survivors of the

siege of Leningrad, along with 1,200 Jews and 800 French Jews from the Romanian war. (Amanda Rivkin, "More Holocaust survivors to receive pensions from German government," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 October 2021)

Steinmeier commemorates Holocaust victims in Ukraine

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier made visits to the sites of Nazi occupation in Ukraine. He began with the Ukrainian village of Koryukivka and proceeded to the site of the Babyn Yar Massacre. On the 80-year anniversary of the Babyn Yar Holocaust, he called it a "meticulously planned crime". In his speech, he also expressed grief over the conspiracies intensifying anti-Semitism that increased during the pandemic. He also added: "For us Germans, there can only be one response: never again!" He called for more efforts by the former Soviet Union to commemorate victims of the Holocaust. ("German President Steinmeier marks Nazi massacres in Ukraine," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 October 2021)

GREECE

Karpathos: Earthquake of magnitude 6.0 hits island

On 19 October, the Greek island of Karpathos was hit by an earthquake, the tremors of which were felt across the eastern Mediterranean region including several other Greek islands, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Egypt, as well as parts of Israel and Palestine. No casualties or fatalities have been reported. The US Geological Survey estimated the magnitude of the quake to be 6.0 while the depth of the same was 37.8 kilometers. A Greek seismologist has confirmed that the quake originated from an African fault and there were no aftershocks to be expected. ("Quake off Greece's Karpathos shakes eastern Mediterranean," *Reuters*, 19 October 2021; "Strong earthquake hits the eastern Mediterranean," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 October 2021)

Evia: After wildfires, floods and mudslides affect the island

The Greek Island of Evia is now being affected by storms and heavy rains after being devastated by wildfires. It was only a week ago when regions across Greece were being devoured by fires. According to the national observatory, a third of the fire-stricken area was in northern Evia. More than 200 homes have been destroyed over the weekend with roads blocked and mudslides flowing into the sea. The Guardian reported: "The Mediterranean has been singled out as a wildfire hotspot, with forest fires erupting from France to Turkey over the summer." The series of natural disasters affecting the country has left them likening the events to that of a biblical catastrophe. (Helena Smith, "[Fire-ravaged Greek island of Evia hit by floods and mudslides](#)," *The Guardian*, 14 October 2021)

HUNGARY

Peter Marki-Zay set to oppose Viktor Orban in elections

Peter Marki-Zay, a conservative regional mayor, has been elected to lead a unified opposition against Viktor Orban. Marki-Zay, who is unaffiliated with any political party, is expected to unseat Orban. "We don't simply want to replace Orban or his party; we want a better, cleaner, more honest Hungary," he was reported as saying. He will confront a unified opposition that includes former far-right, centre-right, and even socialist groups. Anti-immigration and anti-LGBTQ themes are at the forefront of his agenda. Marki-Zay has pledged to eliminate corruption and socioeconomic divides, saying: "We want to get rid of the big boys bullying the whole class." Fidesz has accused him of entering into a pact with the left to reclaim power and raise taxes. The party dubbed Marki-Zay a "career leftist". ("[Hungary: Mayor Marki-Zay wins run-off to challenge Orban](#)," *BBC*, 18 October 2021)

Hungary supports Polish court ruling

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban signed a resolution endorsing the Polish court ruling that gave Polish national law precedence over EU laws. The Hungarian

resolution accuses the EU of abusing its powers. According to Orban, the Hungarian resolution is the result of "bad practice by European institutions." Part of the resolution states: "Efforts are being made to deprive member states of powers they never ceded to the EU without amending the EU treaties and through creeping extensions of competences." ("[Hungary: Orban signs resolution supporting Polish court ruling](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 October 2021)

ITALY

Climate: Catania experiences a rare Medigane

Marking the third day in a row, flooding triggered by a storm in Sicily has taken over the city of Catania. Experts believe Eastern Sicily has been hit by a unique Mediterranean hurricane called a 'Medigane'. Anthropogenic activities have caused extreme weather events this year, with forecasters issuing severe weather warnings for parts of Sicily and Calabria. The mayor allowed for essential shops to function while other businesses remained shut. The rare Medigane has claimed two lives and has led to a blackout in the city. Italy's Department for Civil Protection has warned of the risk to life and property from the consequential heavy rain, thunderstorms, and gale-force winds. ("[Catania: Two dead as rare storm floods streets of Sicilian city](#)," *BBC*, 27 October 2021)

Matteo Salvini goes to trial over 2019 denial of migrant ship docking

On 23 October, Former Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini's trial for preventing a migrant ship from docking began. Salvini has been accused of denying the Open Arms migrant rescue ship from docking at an Italian port in 2019 leading to around 147 people being stranded at sea for days. The charges against him include 'deprivation of liberty' and 'abuse of authority'; if convicted he could face prison time up to 15 years. He has, however, stated that his actions were motivated by national interests. ("[Italy: Former minister Matteo Salvini on trial for preventing migrant ship from docking](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 October

2021; Benjamin Dodman, "Salvini's moment has passed': Fading right-wing champion on trial for blocking migrants at sea," *France24*, 23 October 2021)

Rome: Anti-fascist protest gathers thousands

On 16 October, the streets of Rome were filled with thousands protesting the rising fascism in Italy. Various trade union members also participated as the protest comes a week after right-wing groups charged into trade union headquarters. Holding banners that read: "No more fascism: For work, participation and democracy." The number of people gathered, however, varied according to the sources; the organizers put it at 100,000 while the media estimated around 50,000 demonstrators. Heavy policing and deployment of security forces were also seen. ("Italy: Thousands descend on Rome for anti-fascist protest," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 October 2021)

Mandatory COVID pass for workers; a crisis of staff shortage looms

Italy is set to witness further unrest and market mayhem as it prepares to impose the mandatory requirement of COVID passes from 15 October. Termed the 'strictest vaccine mandate in Europe', the move is expected to create a crisis of staff shortages in several workplaces across Italy. The violation of the rule will see deviants being suspended as well as losing pay or being fined EUR 1,500; employers will be fined if they leave the staff unchecked for law compliance. The green pass is encouraged with the motive of boosting vaccination rates, reducing infections, and basically avoiding another lockdown. An estimated 2.5 million Italians are yet to be inoculated; most of these are above the age of 50. Critics of the pass prepare to protest against the ruling soon. (Angela Giuffrida, "Italy braced for unrest as Covid pass becomes mandatory for all workers," *The Guardian*, 14 October 2021)

Protests erupt over Italy's "green pass"

In Rome, more than 10,000 people gathered to protest the Italian "green pass." From 15 October, every employee in the private and

public sectors will be obliged to obtain a 'green pass,' which is certification. People must indicate that they have had at least one dose of COVID-19 immunization, that they have recovered from the disease, or that they have tested negative. The anti-vaccine demonstration quickly devolved into riots. ("Italy: Police arrest far-right leaders after anti-vaccine riots," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 October 2021)

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg becomes the first country in Europe to legalize Cannabis

Luxembourg has become the first European country to legalize the consumption and production of cannabis, allowing adults to grow up to four cannabis plants in their gardens or homes. Under the new laws, trade in the principal psychoactive constituent Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and seeds is permitted without limits on quantity or levels. Retail activities as well as import and export of seeds have also been legalized. The law provides for growing plants at homes for commercial purposes, however, the plans for the state-regulated and national chains got delayed due to the pandemic. (Daniel Boffey, "Luxembourg first in Europe to legalise growing and using cannabis," *The Guardian*, 23 October 2021)

MOLDOVA

Moldova remains positive amid gas crisis

On 25 October, Moldovan foreign minister Nicu Popescu created "history" by importing gas from Poland over Russia. The gas shipment from PGNiG was one million cubic meters. Until recently, Moldova imported 100 per cent of its gas from Russia. However, this contract expired at the end of September. Moldova has been unwilling to pay for the hiked gas prices by Gazprom. Consequently, Russia reduced gas supplies and accused Moldova of "provoking a crisis" and demanded payment of GBP 514 million of debt. (Steve Rosenberg, "Moldova: Russia threatens gas supply in Europe's poorest state," *BBC*, 27 October 2021)

NORWAY

Authorities allege stabbing as the cause of death in bow-and-arrow probe

On 13 October, the Norwegian security service said that they could not yet confirm the motives of the man who attacked the people of Kongsberg with a bow and arrows; alleging that the possibility of it being an 'act of terror' is not out of the question. Along with the bow and arrows, other weapons were also utilized. The suspect who has been previously flagged as a 'dangerous' Islamic extremist was identified as Espen Anderson Bråthen. Bråthen was to undergo a psychiatric evaluation upon police orders. Based on the updates, the attacker discarded his weapons. ("Norway attack victims stabbed not shot with arrows, say police," *The Guardian*, 18 October 2021; "Deaths in Norway attack came from stab wounds, not bow and arrow, police say," *Reuters*, 18 October 2021; "Norway attack: Killer held in medical custody amid mental health investigation," *BBC*, 16 October 2021; Jon Henley, "Norway bow-and-arrow attack 'appears to be act of terror'," *The Guardian*, 14 October 2021)

POLAND

Warsaw refuses to pay the ECJ's daily fine of EUR one million

On 27 October, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) announced an additional fine of EUR one million on Poland. This comes in addition to the existing EUR 500,000 fine, which was imposed in relation to the Turow coal mine. Poland still has seven more cases remaining to be settled by the ECJ. The opposition criticized the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) party, stating that it was not only ruining the independence of the judiciary but doing so with Polish money. The justice minister strongly denied the possibility of the fine being paid; in fact, he advised the payment not to be made. He stated: "(the) Polish state cannot bow to lawlessness... (Poland) cannot and should not pay a single zloty." Eurosceptic Poles recommended stopping payments to the EU, but this might backfire on Poland given the fact that Poland is one of the largest recipients of the EU funds. ("Poland vows

not to pay any EU court fines," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 October 2021)

Civic Platform elects Donald Tusk as party leader

On 24 October, the Polish opposition party Civic Platform announced former Prime Minister Donald Tusk to have been elected as their leader. The announcement followed party-wide elections over the weekend. The former European Council President and current chairman of the European People's Party (EPP) intend to defeat the ruling Law and Justice Party. Tusk has been the acting leader of Civic Platform since July; however, this election victory will imply greater support for the leader as he presents hope to Poles who want out of the clash with the EU over the rule of law. (Maia de La Baume, "Donald Tusk elected leader of Poland's Civic Platform," *POLITICO*, 24 October 2021)

Rallies over Polesit rumours

Polesit speculations sparked protests in Warsaw's historic square. Protesters chanted "we are staying!", "We are Europeans!" in a display of defiance. Thousands of people gathered to protest in Castel Square, which quickly extended to other parts of Poland. Donald Tusk has encouraged people to protest in response to a new Polish law that supersedes EU laws. Tusk told the Polish people that a "pseudo court" would decide to expel Poland from the EU, which would be against the Polish Constitution. "We want a free, law-abiding, democratic, and fair Poland," he stated. Analysts say there is widespread opposition to leaving the EU, but there is still no solution to the disputes over Poland's access to the EU funds. Following a warning from the EU Economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni that the court case could affect the disbursement of Poland's pandemic recovery funding, Warsaw has accused the EU of "blackmail." The money could be given next month, according to EU officials, but only under rigorous law conditions. ("Poles rally to defend EU membership amid fear of 'Polesit'" *Al Jazeera*, 10 October 2021)

Border tensions with Belarus intensify

On 08 October, the Polish soldiers patrolling the Belarusian border were allegedly fired at by the Belarusian border force according to Poland's foreign ministry spokesperson. Following this, Belarus' charge d'affaires was called for by the Polish government. PAP news agency quoted Border Guard spokeswoman Anna Michalska as saying that no one was hurt during the firing. However, the Belarusian charge d'affaires rejected the allegations made against Minsk's forces. The continued state of emergency declared at the border of Poland and Belarus condemns media coverage of the situation in the region. The EU, along with NGOs like Amnesty International have already criticized the Polish handling of migrants at the border. ("Poland claims Belarusian forces fired shots across border," *Deutsche Welle*, 08 October 2021)

Constitutional Court approves precedence of Polish law over EU law

On 08 October, the Polish constitutional tribunal ruled against the primacy of EU law over Polish law. The dispute on the same has been going on for a few months; the ruling followed a request by Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki to review the European Court of Justice's (ECJ) decision of giving primacy to EU law. The EU is of the opinion that the tribunal is illegal, given the fact that it is being politically influenced by the ruling Polish party. Due to this reason, the EU has withheld the post-pandemic reconstruction funds that would facilitate Poland's recovery. While ruling party leaders commended the ruling, comments from the opposition party included Borys Budka of the Civic Coalition saying: "Non-recognition of ECJ rulings is de facto the path to Polesxit." European Parliament President David Sassoli was just one among the many that the ruling angered from within the bloc. The European Commission in response to the judgement released a statement confirming that the EU law held "primacy over national law" as well as "constitutional provisions". ("Poland's top court rules against primacy of EU law," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 October 2021)

PORTUGAL

Parliament fails to pass 2022 state budget, triggering potential snap elections

On 27 October, the Portuguese parliament's 2022 state budget proposal got rejected with a margin of 117 votes to 108, with five abstentions. Responding to the event, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa said: "My conscience is clear... I did all I could to make this budget work without adding anything to it that would be to the country's detriment." The rejected proposal, which underwent serious negotiations, is expected to lead to a snap election. Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa had issued a warning which would call for an early election if the parliament failed to pass the budget. ("Portugal faces snap election as parliament rejects draft budget," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2021)

RUSSIA

Russia denies using gas as a weapon

Putin reassured the EU stating Russia was not using gas as a weapon. The country stepped in to stabilize Europe's gas prices amidst the gas crisis Europe is facing. The energy crunch has amplified the required tripling investment to steady the renewables market. Countries like China have boosted coal and fossil fuel exports. Russia offered to increase supplies in the European markets and denied any political interests. The European skepticism comes due to Russia's insistence on opening up Nord Stream 2 to facilitate a faster gas supply to Europe. ("Russia can help Europe, not using gas as a weapon says Putin," *Reuters*, 15 October 2021)

First film in Space: "The Challenge" set to be filmed in the orbit

A Russian crew of an actress and a director have been docked at the International Space Station by Russia to produce the first in-orbit film. The story revolves around a doctor who tries to save the life of a cosmonaut. Film director Klim Shipenko and actress Yulia Peresild boarded the Soyuz MS-19 rocket on 05 October. (Charles Maynes, "Russian crew docks with International Space Station to film 'The Challenge'," *NPR*, heard on Morning edition, 06 October 2021)

SPAIN

Economy: Highest inflation rate in 29 years recorded

According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), Spain has hit an inflation rate of 5.8 per cent, which is its highest in 29 years. This has resulted in a surge in energy costs, prices of vehicle fuels, electricity, lubricants, and holiday packages. The government, however, assures that the price hike is only temporary while economists believe it could have an effect on the wages and root off the corporate competency. According to Funcas, a think tank, the economic growth rate of Spain is expected to fall to 5.1 from 6.3 per cent. (Inti Landauro and Belén Carreño, "[Energy costs push Spain's inflation to 29-year high, threatening recovery](#)," *Reuters*, 28 October 2021)

Madrid: Crying room installation aims to rid mental health stigma

On 10 October, the World Mental Health Day, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez proposed a EUR 100 million mental healthcare drive which would include a 24-hour suicide helpline among other services. Speaking on the occasion, Sanchez commented on mental illness: "It is not a taboo, it is a public health problem that we must talk about, make visible and act accordingly." Also called the La Lloreria, Spain's Crying Room is an attempt to remove the taboo that looms around crying, seeking help, and basic mental health. Records prove that suicide is the second most common cause of death in Spain; 3,671 Spanish people died by suicide in 2019. (Michael Gore, "[Spain's 'Crying Room' seeks to banish mental health taboo](#)," *Reuters*, 18 October 2021)

Prime Minister pledges to criminalize prostitution

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has pledged to criminalize prostitution. He said the practice "enslaves" women. Despite being decriminalized in 1995, prostitution remains largely unregulated in Spain. There are no punishments for persons availing sex service; although acts of pimping or acting as a proxy for clients are illegal. Sanchez addressed the issue of outlawing prostitution at his Socialist Party's three-

day congress in Valencia. The 2019 manifesto of the Socialist Party contained pledges to criminalize prostitution, deeming it: "one of the cruellest aspects of the feminization of poverty and one of the worst forms of violence against women." There has been no legislation supporting the manifesto yet. The Spanish Police have identified an increased potential of women to be trafficked in Spain. ("[Pedro Sanchez: Spanish PM vows to outlaw prostitution](#)," *BBC*, 18 October 2021)

Biden mocked as Spain revels in its colonial past

On 11 October, marking the US Columbus Day holiday, US President Joe Biden said that Columbus' arrival led to a "wave of devastation" for the inhabitants of the land. He also called for instituting an Indigenous People's Day along with the existing Columbus Day. However, these comments were not taken well by the Spanish right-wing politicians. In fact, the leader of the conservative People's Party (PP) Pablo Casado took pride in Spain's colonial expansion and said that it was the "most important event in history after the Roman empire." The Vox party leader Santiago Abascal even called Biden "the lamentable president of the United States." (Guy Hedgecoe, "[Spanish right attacks Biden over Columbus and conquests](#)," *BBC*, 13 October 2021)

TURKEY

Tensions ease as Erdogan reverts the decision to ban ambassadors

On 23 October, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked for the 10 envoys who called for Osman Kavala's release to be declared 'persona non grata.' Declaration of 'persona non grata' revokes diplomatic immunity provided to ambassadors and is equivalent to being expelled. According to *TRTWorld*, Erdogan stated: "(they) should either understand or they should leave... (ambassadors) cannot dare come to the Turkish foreign ministry and give orders." Erdogan's move could have upset the West including significant partners. However, on 26 October, tensions between Turkey, the US, and other Western countries eased after the Turkish president Recep Tayyip

Erdogan's threat to ban ambassadors was taken back. The dispute sparked when the embassies of the US, Germany, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden issued a statement calling for the release of Osman Kavala. Erdogan reversed the decision after the statement. ("Turkey dispute with US eases after threat to expel envoys," *BBC*, 26 October 2021; "Turkey's Erdogan U-turns on threat to expel Western ambassadors," *France24*, 25 October 2021; Laurens Cerulus, "Turkey calls 10 western ambassadors 'persona non grata' over civil rights criticism," *POLITICO*, 23 October 2021; Erkan Arikan, "Opinion: Erdogan is fighting to stay in power | Opinion," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 October 2021; "Turkey moves to throw out US envoy and nine others," *BBC*, 24 October 2021)

Turkey's law on insulting president under scrutiny

A law regarding insulting the president of Turkey has come under scrutiny. Europe's Human Rights Court called on Turkey to reverse its law allowing for prosecutions of individuals who insult the president. The Court ruled that the detention of the prosecuted violates their freedom of speech. Around 1,000 have been arrested for the crime prescribed under the law within seven years of Erdogan becoming president. The Justice Ministry data have evaluated around 31,000 charges and filed 3,325 convictions in 2020. The year marking Erdogan's presidency saw 35,507 cases out of 160,169 investigations launched. (Ali Kucukgocmen, "Top European court says Turkey should change law on insulting president," *Reuters*, 19 October 2021)

UKRAINE

Dutch court rules for Ukraine to have control over artifacts from Crimea

Referring to the Netherlands' appeals court ruling as a "long-awaited victory", Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated: "we always return what is ours". He added that Ukraine would first "return Scythian gold" and then "return Crimea". Crimean officials have criticized the ruling as violating the right of the Crimean people

to access their cultural heritage. Russian officials have also condemned the ruling. The historical treasure consists of gold, ceremonial daggers, a golden helmet, jewelry, and a Chinese lacquered box among other treasures. The return of the exhibition was sought by Crimea after lending the artifacts to Amsterdam in 2014, which later came under Russian territory following the annexation. While disputes continue over the recognition of the annexed territory, the international loan remains one of the most important billed exhibitions in Ukrainian history. (Andrew Roth, "Ukraine has legal right to Crimean artefacts, Dutch court rules," *BBC*, 26 October 2021)

Ukraine: France24 commemorates 80 years since Babi Yar massacre

On 29 September, France24 wrote about commemorating 80 years of the Babi Yar ravine massacre. The Babi Yar ravine, located near Kyiv, witnessed one of the largest mass murders of the Holocaust. So many as 33,771 civilians, mostly Jews, were killed in the ravine in 1941. The numbers and the manner in which the slaughter took place are what made this massacre a turning point in the Holocaust. In an interview with France24, Dutch historian Karel Berkhoff spoke about the historical significance of the 'premeditated killing spree' which managed to wipe out a whole Jewish population from a large European city. Monuments have since been erected at the site of the massacre. ("The first major massacre in the 'Holocaust by bullets': Babi Yar, 80 years on," *France24*, 29 September 2021)

THE UNITED KINGDOM

David Amess murder: British Prosecutors authorize police to charge murder suspect

On 15 October, Sir David Amess, a conservative MP was stabbed in a constituency meeting in Leigh-on-Sea. Officers arrested a man and recovered a knife. They said they were "not looking for anyone else in connection to the incident". On 16 October, the killing of MP Sir David Amess was declared a terrorist incident by the Police. Police deem the attacker to have a potential link to Islamist extremism. The

police arrested the suspect Ali Harbi Ali, a British citizen living in London within hours and affirmed that the attack was a "terrorist incident." British prosecutors have given the authorization to police to charge the suspect with the murder. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is the authority that prosecutes criminal cases in England. According to Nick Price, head of the Crown Prosecution Service Special Crime and Counter-Terrorism Division "We will submit to the court that this murder has a terrorist connection, namely that it had both religious and ideological motivations." (Michael Holden, "[Man charged with UK lawmaker's murder, court hears he supported IS](#)," *Reuters*, 21 October 2021; "[UK police charge suspect with murder of MP David Amess](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 October 2021; Doug Faulkner and Alex Kleiderman, "[Sir David Amess killing was terrorism, police say](#)," *BBC*, 16 October 2021; "[Tory MP Sir David Amess dies after stabbing](#)," *BBC*, 15 October 2021)

EU research programme Horizon Europe funding affected

The ongoing dispute on the Northern Ireland protocol has led to scientists from the UK being "frozen out" of the GBP 80 billion EU research programme, Horizon Europe. The European Commission assured that the UK was being treated like a full associate member of Horizon, but was in effect being locked out because of funding for the UK participants. David Frost expressed his concern over Brussels' delay in ratifying the UK's participation in the research programme which was affecting their scientists' position in pan-European research endeavours. (Lisa O'Carroll, "[British scientists being 'frozen out' of EU research due to NI row, claims MP](#)," *The Guardian*, 25 October 2021; Lisa O'Carroll and Patrick Wintour, "[David Frost says EU close to breaching Brexit deal over science programme](#)," *The Guardian*, 25 October 2021)

Lord Frost unsatisfied with latest EU proposal

On 15 October, the UK's Brexit Minister David Frost accused the EU of not "yielding enough." He maintained: "All I can say is the governance issue needs to be addressed

seriously and if the EU is willing to have a conversation about that on which they move off existing positions obviously we will be happy to have that conversation." The UK's dissatisfaction arises from the EU's refusal to remove the European Court of Justice (ECJ) from the bilateral dealings. The UK rejects the ECJ rulings claiming that they no longer come under its purview and that it is biased. On 13 October, the EU released its proposal providing concessions on the previous deal. It included reduced customs checks and other paperwork on goods from the UK moving into Northern Ireland. (Nik Martin, "[UK Brexit minister: EU must yield more on Northern Ireland](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 October 2021)

EU to tone down on Northern Ireland border controls

On 13 October, the EU proposed to cut down on the extended checks done on goods coming into Northern Ireland from the UK. This decision comes after the European Commission Vice President Maros Šefčovič's visit to Northern Ireland earlier this month. The proposal addresses the concerns raised by Northern Ireland officials. Following the release of the proposal, Šefčovič said: "I have listened to and engaged with Northern Irish stakeholders. Today's proposals are our genuine response to their concerns." On 12 October, the UK's Brexit negotiator Lord Frost had proposed plans for a completely new protocol to replace the existing one calling it "a better way forward"; this garnered a lot of criticism. The UK government is said to be 'studying' the latest EU proposal; observers claim that the proposal will not satisfy the UK's expectations. The UK and EU are expected to have 'intensive talks' in the coming weeks regarding the same. (John Campbell and Colm Kelpie, "[Brexit: Most NI checks on British goods to be scrapped](#)," *BBC*, 14 October 2021; "[Brexit: EU proposes nixing most Northern Ireland checks](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 October 2021)

REGIONAL

France: French vessels granted licensing by the UK and European Commission

The officials of France, the UK, and the

European Commission met and granted licenses to 162 French vessels to fish in the territorial waters of Jersey. The operation of French boats in the UK and Jersey coastal waters has been a source of dispute for quite a while. Paris had responded to the UK's refusal to grant licenses by imposing checks on cross-Channel trade and pressurizing the UK's energy supply in an effort to persuade them into granting permits. According to the statement, Jersey is expected to continue working "closely" with the French, the UK, and the EU Commission so as to "ensure that vessels which are entitled to a permanent license can receive one and can continue fishing in Jersey's territorial waters under their historic track record." ("Jersey offers 162 fishing licences after French ultimatum," *BBC*, 28 October 2021; Daniel Boffey and Dan Sabbagh, "UK summons French ambassador as fishing rights row escalates," *The Guardian*, 28 October 2021)

France seizes British boat amid fishing row

A British boat has been seized amid the French-UK fishing rights row. In September, the UK denied fishing licenses to French boats, a move that angered France. The rejection, according to France, is a violation of the Brexit agreement. The UK noted that blocking British boats was a violation of international law and trade agreements and asserted that European vessels have received 98 per cent of all license applications. France insisted on an agreement by 02 November threatening to target the Channel Island energy supplies. The UK is disappointed over the French decision while France is prepared to intensify sanctions with electricity cuts to Jersey and "target measures" which have been in effect since 26 October. Brexit minister David Frost is expecting further communication with France seeking clarification over the issue. (Joseph Lee, "Fishing rights row: French threats disappointing, says Frost," *BBC*, 28 October 2021)

Hungary: French leader Le Pen visits Orban

On a visit to Budapest, far-right leader Marine Le Pen expressed support for Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban. She

accused the European Union of "ideological brutality". Appreciating Orban's "courage" and "determination" she vowed stronger bilateral relations between Hungary and France if elected president the next year. She fondly remembered Hungarian "heroes" of the 1956 revolt against the Soviet Union. She refused to comment on the anti-LGBTQ law but accused the EU of endangering countries' sovereignty with its ideology. She also opposed the idea that EU legislation should take precedence over national laws. She criticized the "unusually violent" threats of the EU issuing sanctions over Poland and Hungary. Previously, Hungary supported the Polish reforms of Polish national laws gaining primacy over EU laws, a move largely criticized by France. ("France's far-right leader Le Pen backs Hungary's Orban, lambasts EU," *France 24*, 26 October 2021)

Poland: EU condemns Morawiecki's usage of World War terminology

On 25 October, the EU strongly criticized Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's remarks during an interview with the *Financial Times*. Morawiecki suggested that the EU withholding the pandemic recovery funds and imposing sanctions on Poland likened itself to a World War III situation. In response to this, the European Commission spokesperson Eric Mamer said: "(the EU) was a project that very successfully contributed to establishing a lasting peace among its member states... (there is) no place for rhetoric referring to war." Morawiecki's interview also had him reiterating that Poland was going to remain strong in the face of deadly opposition. He said: "If they start the third world war, we are going to defend our rights with any weapons which are at our disposal." However, the Polish government's spokesperson Piotr Muller appealed to not take Morawiecki's comments in its literal sense. ("EU calls out Polish 'war rhetoric' in dispute over judicial reforms," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 October 2021)

Kramp-Karrenbauer comments on EU-NATO security

On 21 October, German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said to her

European counterparts: "Forget your lofty ideas about the Continent defending itself and get real." Although some European leaders have professed the muddled US-led withdrawal from Afghanistan, it showed that Europe needed to function more independently in reference to its military. Kramp-Karrenbauer argued that the debacle demonstrated the need for closer and more effective military cooperation between Europe and the US. She also urged the ministers of NATO to engage in a debate on how the capabilities of the European allies could develop to be more effective. (Florian Eder and Laurenz Gehrke, "German defense minister warns Europeans: Don't detach from NATO," *POLITICO*, 21 October 2021; "EU defense ambitions should not 'duplicate' NATO: Stoltenberg," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 October 2021)

Brussels: European Council leaders discuss energy and rule of law

On 21 October, the European Council gathered at Brussels for a two-day summit. The main agenda included discussing the soaring energy prices; however, Poland's recent antics challenging the EU's rule of law overshadowed the summit's primary agenda. Other issues on the agenda include the resurfacing coronavirus hot spots, migration, etc. The summit saw 502 of the 671 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voting in favour of a resolution that calls for strict action against Poland in the form of withholding of funds and initiating Article 7. European Parliament President David Sassoli, who was absent for the summit, accused Poland of disputing "the legal bedrock" of the EU. Separately, commenting on the European energy price crisis, the EU Foreign Policy chief Josep Borrell said: "Energy prices today are the consequences of a big geopolitical game with a strong external dimension," which was most likely a reference to Russia. (Maia de La Baume, "European Council: Live blog - POLITICO," *POLITICO*, 21 October 2021)

Storm Aurore: Violent winds wreak havoc in western and northern Europe

On 21 October, powerful winds struck Germany, the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, and Belgium along with

Poland and the UK. Storm Aurore, the first of the autumn storms, caused severe damages to property and infrastructure leading to the suspension of trains, uprooting of trees, and collapsing of roofs. Meanwhile, the Netherlands reported four people as casualties as Poland witnessed four fatalities. In France, the gust of winds saw trees falling on power lines creating a power outage as 250,000 homes lacked electricity. Flash floods and thunderstorms were also witnessed in these regions. ("Strong winds blow out the power, disrupts trains in parts of western Europe," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 October 2021)

Poland-EU: European Parliament witnesses debate between Morawiecki and von der Leyen

On 19 October, a debate sparked between the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen over the recent ruling by the Polish court. The court ruled that "parts of the EU treaties are "incompatible" with the country's constitution and that the latter takes precedence." Poland's move is viewed as a direct challenge to the unity of the EU legal order. In the debate, the PM maintained that he rejected the rumors of a Poxexit. He asked for member nations to fight the common challenges such as energy shortage, migration, and the issue of Russia. Criticizing the EU for treating certain member states as "second-class," he stated that Poland would not stand for blackmails or financial threats. In response to Morawiecki's statements, von der Leyen mentioned the applicability of Article 7 in the case of member violations. She also said that the Commission continued to keenly assess the judgment and added "We cannot and will not allow our common values to be put at risk." ("Polish leader blasts EU over controversial rule of law dispute," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 October 2021; Maia De La Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, "Ursula von der Leyen, Mateusz Morawiecki clash in European Parliament," *POLITICO*, 19 October 2021)

Ukraine Conflict: Germany, France, Russia hopes to have talks

On 11 October, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron along with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy conversed via phone. Merkel and Macron expressed hopes of having talks, preferably in the Normandy format, to figure out solutions to the Donbass region conflict in eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin also showed interest in the same by calling for talks with Germany and France; however, nothing was mentioned about Ukraine's participation. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen along with the European Council President Charles Michel is expected to visit Kyiv on 12 October. ("Germany, France and Russia may hold summit on Ukraine conflict," *Deutsche Welle*, 12 October 2021)

Brexit: 14 EU member states issue threatening declaration against the UK

A joint statement against the UK, alleging them to have risked "significant economic and social damage" to fishing communities, is being prepared by 14 EU member states. Supposedly organized by the French minister for the seas Annick Giardin, the signatories to the declaration include France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Cyprus, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Malta, Lithuania, and Latvia. The statement of solidarity comes after the UK and Jersey governments angered the French by reducing the number of licenses provided to small boats fishing in coastal waters. The declaration is a veiled threat, providing a glimpse into what the future of EU-UK relations would resemble if Britain fails to reconsider its stance. (Daniel Boffey and Lisa O'Carroll, "EU member states to issue joint warning to UK over reduced fishing rights," *The Guardian*, 11 October 2021)

Russia: Alexander Novak says 'certification of Nord Stream 2 will help gas prices fall'

On 6 October, during a meeting of government officials and heads of energy companies, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said that the solution to the soaring gas prices in Europe could be the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The pipeline, which has been

completed, is yet to receive approval from the German government to begin gas transit. Novak also suggested an increase in the sales of Gazprom's electronic sales; this proposal was backed by Russian President Vladimir Putin who chaired the meeting. The increase in demand, especially from Asia, has peaked the gas prices when Europe experiences low storage levels. The rate of Dutch wholesale gas (a European benchmark) for November spiked by almost eightfold since the beginning of 2021. ("Nord Stream 2 approval may cool gas prices in Europe, says Russia," *The Guardian*, 7 October 2021; "Russia says Nord Stream 2 clearance may cool gas prices in Europe," *Reuters*, 6 October 2021)

The EU: Western Balkan states await membership confirmation from an indecisive EU

European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen at the summit in Slovenia stated: "impatience" and "frustration" at the delay of Western Balkan membership. She also expressed the difficulty which the EU would have to face in terms of its position and power in the region. While stressing on wanting the Western Balkans to be a part of the EU; there was no official progress made. The speech was rather an elaborate affirmation. She expanded on the need for improving the economy and anti-corruption measures to strengthen the position of the Western Balkans further. A few countries have been provided with a "candidate status" while others are at advanced levels in the process of membership. The EU heavily continues to invest in the region to prevent other powers from filling the void. However, the EU hasn't provided for any official declaration of permanent membership. Slovenia has requested the EU to commit to providing the Western Balkans membership by 2030. (Jessica Parker, "EU indecision 'jeopardising' its position in Balkans - Von der Leyen," *BBC*, 07 October 2021)

CLIMATE CHANGE

European Commission urges developed nations to close funding target gaps

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen urged wealthy countries of the

UN COP26 summit to bridge the shortfall in climate finance. The USD 100 billion contributions were set to be fulfilled by 2020; however, the pledge would not materialize till 2023. According to the assessment by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, developing countries would access funds to adapt to global heating both in public and private funds. The EU contributes USD 25 billion every year, with the US aiming to contribute USD 11.4 billion by 2024. Von der Leyen stated: "If you look at the global stage, Europe is the frontrunner without any question,"; nonetheless, she cautioned countries to continue working internally owing to the climate risks the world faces. Having committed to net zero emissions by 2050, von der Leyen is expected to join US President Joe Biden at the COP26 in launching an initiative to reduce methane emissions. (Jennifer Rankin, "Wealthy nations urged to meet \$100bn climate finance goal," *BBC*, 28 October 2021)

Survey: EIB poll reveals EU citizens' lack of faith in their governments

On 27 October, the European Investment Bank (EIB) released a climate survey that included respondents from across the bloc. The poll concluded that 58 per cent of the 27,700 respondents believed that their governments would be unable to reach the climate goals they had set for themselves. In particular, they were not convinced that their governments could cut the CO₂ emissions by 2050. 70 per cent of the respondents believed that action at the individual level could assist emission reduction. Commenting on the survey, EIB Vice-President Ambroise Fayolle said: "In the run-up to COP26, these demands from the public are a clear mandate for us to strengthen our efforts and accelerate the green transition." The COP26 summit is set to begin on 31 October in Glasgow, Scotland. (Kate Abnett, "Most Europeans think governments will miss climate goals, poll finds," *Reuters*, 27 October 2021)

In a bid to rethink climate policy, NGOs urge fossil fuel companies to be treated like the tobacco industry

A group of NGOs, on discovering that fossil

fuel producers enjoyed hundreds of meetings with Brussels' decision-makers since the Paris climate agreement, proposed that oil and gas companies should be treated like the tobacco industry and denied routine meetings with the EU officials. According to the researchers, 70 former government ministers and other public officials work for these oil and gas companies, which the NGOs say allows the energy firms to benefit from the "knowhow and contact books of insiders". Myriam Douo, a campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe, suggested that the policymakers must follow the World Health Organization's framework convention on tobacco control guidelines for the same. (Jennifer Rankin, "Shun fossil fuel firms by treating them like tobacco industry, EU urged," *The Guardian*, 25 October 2021)

Belgium: Brussels witnesses climate change protests

Climate protesters, some without masks, took to the streets of Belgium dressed as endangered animals. With banners in multiple languages, the demonstrators demanded climate justice. "Politicians die of old age, Rosa died of climate change," read a banner referring to the death of a child in Europe due to torrential rains and floods. Thousands of people attended the protests, representing over 80 different organizations. At least 25,000 marchers were estimated by police, while organizers put the number at 70,000. The demonstration was the largest in Brussels since the outbreak began. The protests took place as a result of youth activists and environmentalists believing that politicians will fail to propose climate-friendly policies at the COP26 summit. ("Thousands march in Brussels to demand climate justice," *Al Jazeera*, 10 October 2021)

Germany: World's first climate-friendly fuel plant unveiled

On 4 October, German officials unveiled the commercial plant that would produce synthetic kerosene which is considered to be climate-friendly fuel. The aviation sector accounts for 2.5 per cent of the worldwide emissions and the use of these 'e-fuels'

would help solve the problem. Since synthetic kerosene releases the same amount of carbon dioxide that was removed from the atmosphere for fuel production, the fuel is considered to be carbon-neutral. The maintenance of fuels helps in not bringing about significant technical changes to the aircraft. At the inaugural ceremony of the plant, the German environment minister Svenja Schulze said: "The era of burning coal, oil, and natural gas is drawing to a close." Synthetic kerosene will be far more expensive than regular jet fuel; however, the rate of the same to be provided to Germany's Lufthansa is yet to be revealed. ("First-ever commercial plant making clean jet fuel' opens in Germany," By AP for Euronews, 4 October 2021; Natalie Muller and Neil King, "Aviation: Germany opens world's first plant for clean jet fuel," *Deutsche Welle*, 4 October 2021)

Turkey ratifies the Paris agreement

In alignment with the next UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, the Turkish parliament has ratified the Paris Climate Change Agreement. It is the last G20 country to do so. Turkey has also requested the UN to have its name removed from the Annex one group of industrialized countries. The same proposal is set to be discussed at the COP26 Climate Change Conference. ("Turkey ratifies Paris climate change agreement as last G20 country," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 October 2021)

Denmark: Prime Minister prioritizes climate change solutions as top agenda

Mette Frederiksen, arriving in India marked the first visit by a government official since February 2020 and the pandemic. After having frozen ties since 2010 over an arms drop case involving Kim Davy Purulia, this was a historic visit. In relation to the "Green Strategic Partnership" initiative, Frederiksen discussed investment opportunities in Indian renewable technology and outlined India's climate change positions. The visit provided an opportunity to arrive at deeper bilateral ties with the implementation of the Green partnership. Her visit included interacting with students in think tanks with an agenda to announce the Danish financing and

technological support for projects. An example of this would be an "Energy Island" which would be built in Tamil Nadu with a proposal of USD 5-10 million dollars to the Stalin government. The talks also focused on other renewable energy model promotions and investments. (Sahasini Haidar, "Climate change action on top of agenda for Denmark PM visit on Saturday," *The Hindu*, 06 October 2021)

COVID-19

Europe experiences the fourth wave as infections surge; lockdowns imposed

The World Health Organization has reported a seven per cent increase in new coronavirus cases across Europe in the last week, being the only region to record new cases. Central and Eastern Europe have been affected due to low vaccination rates. Latvia, which had been off the pandemic radar, has now become the first country to announce a surge in infections. A similar situation persists in Poland and Slovakia while Belgium witnessed a hike of 53 per cent along with Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine. In Russia, however, the denial to impose a nationwide lockdown citing economic concerns has led them to announce a complete lockdown due to the surge in infections. Meanwhile, the UK and the Netherlands, which are heavily vaccinated countries, are also experiencing a surge of 44 per cent of new infections due to colder weather and poor restrictions. The hospitals in these countries have gone back to their old ways of cutting down regular health care to prioritize the unvaccinated cases. (Pjotr Sauer, "Latvia is first country to reimpose lockdown in Europe's new Covid wave," *The Guardian*, 20 October 2021; Pjotr Sauer, "Moscow announces one-week lockdown as Russia Covid deaths rise," *The Guardian*, 21 October 2021; Camille Gijs, "Belgium's fourth coronavirus wave has started, says health minister," *POLITICO*, 21 October 2021)

EU completes export of one billion COVID-19 vaccines

On 18 October, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU had successfully exported one billion COVID-19 vaccines. She further commented

on the occasion: "Very clearly, the European Union is the largest exporter of the COVID-19 vaccines." As von der Leyen stated, the EU is now the world's biggest vaccine exporter. It provided almost 90 million of its vaccines to WHO's COVAX initiative. Despite the large rollout of vaccines, vaccine inequality persists. Most of the jabs have reached developed countries like the UK, Japan, and Turkey while developing and under-developed countries struggle to increase their inoculation rates; they cannot due to the lack of available vaccines. Recognizing this dearth, the EU has promised a supply of 200 million doses to the most vulnerable countries. Disregarding the lack of vaccines in poorer countries, rich countries are now introducing booster shots. The WHO has warned against this "hoarding of vaccine supplies" and requested those countries in question to delay third shots until an equilibrium is reached in the global vaccine distribution. ("EU says it has exported over 1 billion COVID-19 vaccines," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 October 2021; Francesco Guarascio, "EU has exported over 1 bln COVID-19 vaccines, von der Leyen says," *Reuters*, 18 October 2021)

ENERGY

The concept of 'energy poverty' and its effect on Europe

On 17 October, the EU Labor Commissioner Nicolas Schmit cautioned that Europe was facing a crisis of 'energy poverty' that could worsen over the winter. 'Fuel poverty' or 'energy poverty' refers to a situation wherein a household is unable to afford adequate heating at reasonable costs. Despite explaining the European Commission's role in limiting the inflating prices for consumers within the EU, Schmit stated that implementation of measures to tackle the same needed to be taken by national governments. In September, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) had warned that more than 2.7 million people would be unable to bear the expense of heating their homes despite being employed. Countries like France and Germany have been taking up measures to ease the burden on their citizens. Prices of fuels have been escalating lately - natural gas and coal prices soared across the world

while the price of an oil barrel rose to more than USD 80. The pandemic has been held responsible for this price climb since manufacturers have been increasingly demanding electricity to account for global supply shortages facilitating post-pandemic economic recovery. (Nik Martin, "EU warns of fuel poverty due to energy price crunch," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 October 2021)

Gas prices fall after Russia boosts its supply

Announcing an increase in gas supply, Russia offset soaring gas prices in the UK by 257p. Russia stepped in to "calm the market" after the UK saw a rise of 37 per cent with a price of 400p for its gas trade. Lower gas reserves have created volatility and nervousness among most investors. The government was called to act on the surge in prices by the Energy Intensive Users Group. The previous unavailability of gas led to losses for industries, such as steel failing to produce output at times of "peak demand". Nine energy suppliers have already succumbed to the prices and have gone bust. While customers have been protected by an energy cap, revision in the same is likely to affect their affordability and bills. ("UK gas prices fall from record high after Russia steps in," *BBC*, 07 October 2021)

GENDER

Report highlights dismal gender equality rate in Europe

The Gender Equality Index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reported the EU to have scored 68 points out of a total of 100 in 2021. The improvement in gender equality has only increased by 0.6 points over the last year. The report acknowledges the dismal growth rate stating: "it will take nearly three generations to achieve gender parity at the current pace." The slow pace in time and health has been attributed to the pandemic, which triggered economic losses for women as well as decreased life expectancy in men. An overrepresentation of women in healthcare left more women vulnerable to infections while women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. During the lockdown, women expected to take care of childcare and share the unequal

burden of unpaid work suffered immensely. Countries leading in the Gender Index scale were Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, scoring 83.9, 77.8, and 75.9, respectively. Germany scored above average with 68.6 points while Greece was the last among the EU states with 52.5 points. Individually, Luxembourg, Italy, and Malta made the largest gains in equality, while Slovenia regressed in 2021 along with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. ("EU is 'three generations' away from gender equality — report," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 October 2021)

Poland: Parliament to discuss banning pride parades

Protests erupted over the new bill on banning pride parades, with more than 300 people gathering on the streets. The bill, originating from an outside anti-abortion rights pressure group called 'Life and Family Foundation', seeks to modify the rights of free assembly which could place Poland in further conflict with the EU. The amended right to assembly bill would entail denial of public gatherings that "question marriage as a relationship between a woman and a man" or "propagate the extension of marriage to persons of the same sex." The proposed ban is said to be a result of pride parades promoting a "sexual orientation other than heterosexual." In a speech deemed "most disgusting" by the opposing legislators from the left, right, and centre, a member from the pressure group, Krzysztof Kasprzak argued the LGBT movement to be a form of totalitarian and even equated it to Nazism. Moreover, he accused the movement of "overthrowing" the "natural order" and introducing "terror." The opposition labelled the speech to be inhumane, homophobic and in violation of the right to assemble. Given the origins, it remains unclear whether the bill is being approved or not. ("Poland: Parliament debates bill banning LGBTQ pride parades," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 October 2021)

Italy: Anti-homophobic bill repealed by Senate

On 27 October, the Italian senate cancelled a bill that safeguarded the rights of the

LGBTQIA+ community. The anti-homophobic bill aimed to classify violence against those from the LGBTQIA+ community, along with disabled people, as a hate crime. The debate on the bill was blocked after a showdown of 154 to 131 votes. A member of the Democratic Party (PD) of the European Parliament Pina Picierno stated: "one of the worst pages in the history of the Italian republic." Those of the far-right, who refused to accept the bill, claimed that the law would infringe upon one's right to freedom of expression while propagating "homosexual propaganda". (Lorenzo Tondo, "'Disgraceful': Italy's senate votes down anti-homophobic violence bill," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2021)

Spain: Gynaecologist diagnoses woman with 'homosexuality'; LGBT groups complain to the government

On 4 October, a 19-year-old visited the gynaecologist at a hospital in the city of Murcia. Following her examination, she was diagnosed with a paper that read: "current illness: homosexual." The woman had provided the doctor with details regarding her sexual orientation as he claimed to want to include it in the report. The incident was brought to the attention of Galactyco, a local LGBT collective, by the woman and her mother. Galactyco has since submitted formal complaints to the regional government in Murcia, and to both the health ministry and health service in the region. The collective further sought an explanation and an apology since the patient's legal rights were violated through the event. (Sam Jones, "Outrage after gay woman diagnosed at Spanish hospital with 'homosexuality'," *The Guardian*, 7 October 2021)

MIGRATION

The migrant issue gears tension amongst EU leaders

On 22 October, on the second day of the Brussels summit, 27 European Union leaders met to discuss the issue of refugees and migrants. The problem of migrants has become rather controversial since the inflow rate overtook the count of refugees from January to July especially through

Belarus. The leaders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia have blamed the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko for causing instability in the region and urged the EU to fence the borders of Belarus. In contrast, the European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen responded: "no one's life should be used to put political pressure on the European Union." So far, the EU has proposed to tighten visa restrictions on Belarus but no actual plan has materialized. (["EU leaders call for tougher migration controls amid border surge," Deutsche Welle](#), 22 October 2021)

Deutsche Welle reports asylum-seekers' prime choice as Germany; Belarus route proves bothersome

On 17 October, *Deutsche Welle* reported that according to Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), 2021 witnessed a record rate of asylum applications - 100,278 (as of 30 September). Comparing figures with the same duration last year, this accounts for a rise of 35.2 per cent. First-time asylum-seekers hailed from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq; with applications from Afghanistan seeing a dramatic increase by September end. However, the increased migration via Belarus which has seen an evident spike this last year has raised concerns for the EU. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's 'weaponization' of migrants to retaliate the EU sanctions has left the bloc members tackling a deteriorating migrant crisis. (Nik Martin, ["Germany still top destination for asylum-seekers in Europe," Deutsche Welle](#), 17 October 2021)

Smugglers create increased migration within the Channel

Described as playing chess, border patrol authorities noted the wastage of resources to counter smugglers outfoxing France and the UK at the Channel. Despite heavy investment from both countries, more than 18,000 people have managed to cross borders this year. Most migrant boats have been successfully crossing the Channel. The smugglers are prone to diversion, given their potential to extend operations through different routes. The UK had promised to boost security along the coast, providing

USD 75 million in funding. The smugglers have been reported to use security forces along the coastline. They also threaten the migrants who talk to the media. The network uses bigger boats and a larger number of migrants. Authorities reported trouble in controlling larger crowds, given some migrants turned aggressive. France is facing increased pressure from the UK to safeguard its borders and take up the effort to tackle the problem. (Lucy Williamson, ["Channel smugglers step up risks to outfox France and UK," BBC](#), 16 October 2021)

English Channel Crossing sees 364 more reach Kent

On 10 October, eleven boats containing 324 migrants arrived at Kent. This follows around 1,115 crossing across the English Channel on 7 and 8 October. French authorities also stopped around 500 migrants in 16 vessels, attempting to cross over. There have been 300 arrests and 65 convictions related to small-boat crossing this year alone, according to the Home Office. (["Migrant crossings: Channel boats bring 364 more people," BBC](#), 12 October 2021)

Afghan resettlement: The EU fails to pledge complete allegiance to UNHCR request

On 07 October, the European Commission shot down a United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) request to resettle 42,500 Afghans for the next five years. Following an EU-hosted online forum, the European Commissioner for Migration Ylva Johansson said that despite the "doable" nature of the demand, it still required commitment from the member states. The EU was asked to protect half the number of total Afghans at risk by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. The forum also included the EU Commission proposing a "multi-annual support scheme for Afghans at risk", the details of which weren't revealed. Johansson also reaffirmed that there would be regular talks conducted on Afghan resettlement given the "dire" situation of the country. (["UN targets on Afghan resettlements 'doable' says EU, but without commitments," Deutsche Welle](#), 07 October 2021)

Croatia: Report reveals migrant violence along Croatia-Bosnia border

On 06 October, a report of a special investigation conducted over a period of nine months by German public broadcaster ARD and other European media houses was published. Footage released alongside included Croatian police using violent methods to mercilessly push back migrants attempting to cross over from Bosnia to Croatia, an EU member state. Nicknamed "Operation Corridor" by officials, there exist claims that the pushback by the "intervention police" had been ordered by the Croatian government. Footage regarding the same was obtained via drones as well as by disguised journalists. The report also includes that the operation was partly funded by the EU as Zagreb has received EUR 177 million since 2014 for "migration management"; however, the EU Commission maintains its ignorance regarding the same. EU's Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson found the report to be "shocking" and expressed her concern about the same. (Amanda Rivkin, "Violent migrant 'pushbacks' at Croatian border exposed by media," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 October 2021)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

EU demands stronger regulations against Facebook

Margrethe Vestager, European Competition Commissioner demanded stringent actions against Facebook. The anti-trust official urged democracies to "stand together" against the tech giant. She admitted legal action could take time but requested urgent measures to curb any future damage. She insisted on stronger regulations over how Facebook runs its platforms, which not only has an immense influence on the mental health of the users but also on the development of democracies. She referred to the EU legislation of balancing freedom of speech and posts online that incite violence. technology called the "Robo Rabbi", is an algorithm that helps one to be their best version. This uses AI to understand the person, answer their question and also task them with a "personalised daily challenge." Through this, one does not have to reach out to a Rabbi to sort their issues as the

Acknowledging Facebook's security concerns, she hoped the new regulations allow for smaller businesses to avail markets and for Facebook to take responsibility for the harm caused. (Elizabeth Schumacher, "EU antitrust official Vestager: We must act now against Facebook," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 October 2021)

France: Communications satellite launched

On 24 October, France successfully launched a communications satellite that will enable quick communication of French armed forces across the globe. Named 'Syracuse 4A,' the satellite was launched via Ariane 5 rocket. According to French air and space force spokesperson Colonel Stephane: "(the satellite) is designed to resist military aggression from the ground and in space, as well as interference." The state-of-the-art satellite is capable of observing its close surroundings and escaping from attacks. A weapons proliferation expert at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy Marco Finaud said: "This is the final warning scenario, if deterrence fails." ("France successfully launches cutting-edge military communications satellite," *France24*, 24 October 2021)

AI is set to change the functioning of religion

Recently, a study was carried out by the *BBC Global Religion* team on whether artificial intelligence (AI) could transform religion. The study found that the AI machines like the Kannon (made to represent the god of mercy) present in a 400-year-old Buddhist temple of Japan and SanTo (first ever catholic robot) in Poland are at its very early stages. For now, it could be used in reciting prayers and answering questions from the bible or help in Catholic education. When it comes to connecting with people or replacing an actual priest it still needs time and advancement. Another technology can integrate very easily into human lives. The report concludes by saying that AI is set to alter the way religion works. ("God and robots: Will AI transform religion?" *BBC News*, 22 October 2021; Linda Kinstler, "Can Silicon Valley find God," *The New York Times*, 16 July 2021)

Russia and neighbouring countries responsible for UK cyber-attacks claims head of NCSC

During the Chatham House Cyber 2021 conference, the chief executive of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) Lindy Cameron said that ransomware attacks presented the "most immediate danger" to UK businesses. She went on to claim that Russian-based and neighbouring states' cyber-criminals caused the majority of the online extortion against the UK. The NCSC head also said that China presented significant issues in the subject as well. Cameron maintained that ransomware as a strategy would remain appealing as long as organizations continued to be weak and people agreed to pay; it would simply encourage such groups. In a defensive attempt, the UK has proposed several techniques and the establishment of the National Cyber Force, is just one among them. Cameron's remarks are one of the firmest yet to affirm Russian involvement in the series of online extortions. (Dan Sabbagh, "[Russia and neighbours are source of most ransomware, says UK cyber chief](#)," *The Guardian*, 11 October 2021; Gordon Corera, "[UK cyber head says Russia responsible for 'devastating' ransomware attacks](#)," *BBC*, 12 October 2021)

Footballers threaten data collection industry with 'letters before action'

850 players have initiated legal action against the data collection industry claiming that data was misused. The footballers, led by Cardiff City, Leyton Orient, and the Yeovil Town manager, have sought compensation since their performance data has been traded for the last 6 years. They

SPORTS

France: French sex tape scandal trial involving Karim Benzema begins

ail' for implicating his former teammate and footballer Mathieu Valbuena. Benzema, reportedly, pushed Valbuena to pay the racketeers by blackmailing him with a sex tape. According to the prosecutors, the blackmailers inducted the Real Madrid striker so that he would convince Valbuena

also expect to be paid an annual fee if their data is used in the future. 17 firms have been hit with 'letters before action', accusing them of breaching the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules. If the players intend to move forward with the legal action, it would imply a significant change for the data collection industry. (Nick Hartley, "[Professional footballers threaten data firms with GDPR legal action](#)," *BBC*, 12 October 2021)

Russia: Filmmakers return after 12 days of shooting in space

On 17 October, Russia's Soyuz space capsule returned to earth with a film crew post-shooting the first ever movie in space. The actors landed in Kazakhstan after leaving the International Space Station (ISS). The film called 'Challenge' was interrupted mid-filming when the thrusters glitched causing a tilt in the ISS, making them go off script. On returning, one of the actors commented on state television: "I'm feeling a bit sad today. It seemed that 12 days would be a lot, but I did not want to leave when everything was over." Apparently, the movie is rumoured to be in a 'space race' alongside a Tom Cruise-starrer Hollywood movie that involves filming-in-space backed by Nasa and Elon Musk's SpaceX. Seven astronauts continue on-board the space station. ("[Russian actor returns to Earth after shooting first movie in space](#)," *BBC*, 17 October 2021; "[Russian team back on Earth after filming first movie in space](#)," *BBC*, 17 October 2021; "[Russian filmmakers land back on Earth after 12-day shoot on ISS](#)," *France24*, 17 October 2021)

On 20 October, the three-day trial against French international footballer Karim Benzema commenced. Benzema has been charged with 'complicity in attempted blackmail to pay up. Post the 2015 scandal, Valbuena and Benzema lost their spots in the French team, despite Benzema confirming his innocence. Valbuena believes the scandal ended his international career: "I'd have preferred to be left out of the French team for sporting reasons... When you've always

been a good player and proudly worn the French shirt, it's always hard to accept... it's a wound that's difficult to get over." Benzema did not show up in the Versailles court and maintained that the charge," *The Guardian*, 20 October 2021)

INTERNATIONAL

EU countries advice Israel to stop settlement expansion

12 European countries urged Israel to reverse its settlement expansion plan. It expects to create 3000 settlements in the disputed West Bank region. The EU's joint statement read: "We call on both parties to build on steps taken in recent months to improve cooperation and reduce tensions." The countries participating were - Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden. ("European states urge Israel to stop settlement expansion," *Reuters*, 28 October 2021)

France: Macron calls for Australia to 'redefine' relationship

On 28 October, French President Emmanuel Macron held a phone conversation with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. This was the first time the leaders conversed since the AUKUS pact created diplomatic tensions between the two countries. The French President's office released a statement, post the conversation, where Macron repeated that Australia "had broken the relation of trust between the two countries". The statement also called upon Morrison's government to "propose concrete actions" in order to rebuild the lost trust. The diplomatic tensions arose after Australia chose the US' submarine-deal over its agreed deal with France — effectively cancelling out Paris from the equation. (Joseph Lee, "Australia must 'redefine' relations after submarine spat 'broke' trust, Macron says," *France24*, 28 October 2021)

The US condemns lack of reciprocity on staffing in Moscow Embassy

The US embassy warned Russia that its services would be cut off next year if a resolution on the visa dispute was not made. A senior US official requested that Russia make headway on boosting the

against him was a "masquerade". ("Karim Benzema: French sex tape blackmail case trial starts," *BBC*, 21 October 2021; Kim Willsher, "Real Madrid star Karim Benzema goes on trial in sex tape case" number of visas available to diplomats. Russians are flocking to the US embassy in Warsaw after the US halted visa processing in Moscow. He said the embassy lacks personnel to perform fundamental functions such as issuing diplomatic cables, opening and closing embassy gates, and other operative services. After Russia limited employing Russian or third-country workers in the missions, the US lost a substantial number of people — dropping from 1,200 to 120 by 2021. Tensions between the US and Russia remain high on several fronts. ("U.S. Warns Moscow Embassy Could Stop Functioning Due to Visa Row," *The Moscow Times*, 28 October 2021)

President Emmanuel Macron denounces Sudanese coup attempt

On 25 October, French President Emmanuel Macron denounced the coup attempt in Sudan and called for the immediate release of the Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, along with the Sovereign Council's civilian members and other government officials. The soldiers belonging to Sudan's cabinet have also been arrested. Hamdok was detained for not issuing a statement in support of the coup. In a statement sent to *Reuters*, Sudan's information ministry called on Sudanese "to block the military's movements to block the democratic transition." The EU's Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, after condemning Hamdok's arrest, stated: "We call on the security forces to immediately release those they have unlawfully detained." (Sabine Siebold, "EU demands immediate release of Sudanese leader, cabinet members," *Reuters*, 25 October 2021; "French President Macron calls for immediate release of Sudan Prime Minister," *Reuters*, 25 October 2021)

Russia: Moscow Conference on Afghanistan

On 20 October, Russia hosted talks in Moscow to discuss the Afghanistan crisis. The talk was attended by officials from 10

countries including China and Pakistan along with officials from the Taliban. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for an inclusive government in Afghanistan which prioritized human and women rights, as he explained the necessity of good governance in gaining recognition. Most importantly, the threat of ISIS in northern Afghanistan and drug trafficking was flagged by the Russians. So far, Taliban's request for recognition has been denied and Russia as a countermeasure has deployed a series of joint drills in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. (Emma Graham-Harrison, and agencies in Moscow, "[Russia holds high-profile Afghanistan talks with Taliban](#)," *The Guardian*, 20 October 2021; "[Taliban pleads for recognition at Moscow talks](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 October 2021)

The UK: Johnson signs trade deal with New Zealand

After 16 months of discussions, the Prime Ministers of the UK and New Zealand, Boris Johnson and Jacinda Ardern, signed a trade deal via a virtual meeting. The deal is aimed to shoot up New Zealand's economy by NZD one billion. This will occur through the elimination of tariffs on almost 97 per cent of goods including wine, butter, cheese, beef, and lamb. According to the UK ministers, this trade deal could be an alternate entry into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) post-Brexit. CPTPP entails 11 countries including Japan, Australia, Singapore, Mexico among others. ("[UK and New Zealand ink trade deal on wide range of goods](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 October 2021; Emilio Casalicchio, "[Historic UK snub to New Zealand put to bed with trade deal](#)," *POLITICO*, 20 October 2021)

EU adopts resolution to strengthen ties with Taiwan

On 21 October, The European Parliament ratified a non-binding resolution that would strengthen ties between the EU and Taiwan. The resolution essentially pushed for a new investment deal with Taiwan. The announcement comes amidst the increasing airspace violations and Chinese military presence in Taiwan. According to MEP Charlie Weimers: "The European

Parliament's first report on EU-Taiwan relations demonstrates that the EU is ready to upgrade its relationship with our key partner Taiwan." The investment agreement will engage both parties to cooperate on critical supplies like semiconductors. While the Chinese Foreign ministry has condemned the move, Taiwan sees it as a new milestone in its diplomatic relations. ("[EU lawmakers push to 'upgrade' ties with Taiwan](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 21 October 2021)

The EU and Iran: Nuclear deal talks hit pause

On 15 October, the EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell said that Iran had agreed to meet the EU officials at Brussels for nuclear talks but had denied the indirect talks with the US in Vienna. The advanced uranium capacity that Iran acquired during the Trump-approved US pull-out from the 2015 nuclear deal in 2018, created enormous pressure on the EU and the US. Since then, they have been trying to negotiate with Iran to restore the previous status quo as part of the nuclear deal. Iran, however, proposes to agree to the same in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions imposed on it. A senior EU diplomat predicted that the upcoming meet in Brussels could be a mere diversion and cannot match the indirect talks that could have happened between Iran, the US, and other parties. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken commented that "We will look at every option to deal with the challenge posed by Iran." (Arshad Mohammed, "[EU's Borrell says Iran wants to meet officials in Brussels over nuclear deal](#)," *Reuters*, 15 October 2021; Stephanie Liechtenstein, "[EU, US try to lure Iran back to nuclear talks as hopes fade](#)," *POLITICO*, 17 October 2021; "[EU denies nuclear talks with Iran in Brussels, contradicting Tehran](#)," *France24*, 18 October 2021)

Pentagon chief visits Black Sea countries

On 19 October, the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Ukraine with the motive of enhancing and strengthening defense cooperation. Commenting on Russia, he stated: "Let's be clear, that Russia started this war and Russia is the obstacle

to a peaceful resolution." Austin is on a visit to the Black Sea countries, having already visited Georgia on 18 October. He is set to visit Romania on 20 October. The idea behind the meetings is to assure that these countries have US support against Russian belligerence. The key focus of the visit to Georgia was to renew the military program that expires in December and to showcase its commitment to Tbilisi which has sought for NATO membership. Austin's visit intends to send a message to Russia, as its participation in the Black Sea region is turning into a challenge for NATO. ("US defense chief says Russia is an 'obstacle to peace,' *Deutsche Welle*, 19 October 2021; "Pentagon chief to hold military talks in Georgia on first stop of Black Sea visit," *France24*, 18 October 2021)

Greece: Beijing 2022 Winter Games begin despite protests

On 17 October, the initial ceremony for the Beijing 2022 Winter Games took place despite garnering a lot of opposition and dissent. Human rights protesters called out the Games being hosted by China owing to its track record regarding the Uyghur community, Hong Kong, and Tibet. Four demonstrators, identified as Tibetans, were taken into custody by the police; any disturbance to the ceremony was, thus, averted. In a separate event, three activists who disrupted the ceremony were arrested and will be presented in court on 18 October. The initial ceremony includes lighting the flame in ancient Olympia. Due to the pandemic guidelines, only a few guests witnessed the ceremony. The official handover of the Games will occur at Panathenaic Stadium on 18 October wherein the first Olympic Games happened in 1896. The Winter Games are scheduled to take place in Beijing from 4 to 20 February 2022. Rights groups along with US lawmakers have been requesting the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for relocating the Games from China. ("Beijing Winter Games flame lit in Greece amid protests," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 October 2021; Nektaria Stamouli, "<https://www.politico.eu/article/greek-police-arrest-activists-olympic-ceremony-disruption-beijing-tibet->

protest/," *POLITICO*, 18 October 2021; "Beijing 2022: Protest staged at Winter Olympics torch lighting," *BBC*, 18 October 2021)

Eddie Jaku passes away

Imprisoned in four concentration camps, during the second world war, Eddie Jaku freed himself leading a daring train escape. The 101-year-old had dedicated his life to activism, and advocating peace and kindness. His memoir titled *The Happiest Man on Earth*, contained his extraordinary story of survival. He said: "I do not hate anyone. Hate is a disease which may destroy your enemy, but will also destroy you." Jaku had endured the trauma of the holocaust, and decided to live the rest of his life preaching forgiveness and peace. Jaku received the medal of the Order of Australia for serving the Jewish community. ("Eddie Jaku: Holocaust survivor and peace campaigner dies aged 101," *BBC*, 15 October 2021)

China warns UK Foreign Secretary over Taiwan statement

On 14 October, the new UK foreign secretary Liz Truss was warned by a Chinese spokesman to manage its "One China" stance "properly." The warning comes post a meeting UK had earlier in the week with China's primary aggravator Lithuania, and the other two Baltic states. China regards Lithuania to be its primary 'foe' considering its close ties with Taiwan. A joint statement released by them stated: "(we) remain principled on our shared values in the face of the systematic challenges posed by China." The Chinese embassy also commented on the developments: "China urges the UK to have a right understanding of the relevant issue, handle it properly, and refrain from creating new obstacles for the development of the China-UK relationship." (Stuart Lau, "China warns UK's Truss not to imperil ties over Taiwan spat," *POLITICO*, 14 October 2021)

Merkel's farewell call to Xi; "Merkel a friend of the Chinese" says Xi

On 13 October, outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel held a farewell video call

with Chinese President Xi Jinping. They covered ground on the pandemic, climate change, as well as human rights. According to the German government spokesperson, they also discussed the imminent G20 summit and the EU-China investment agreement. They also acknowledged the marking of 50 years of German-Chinese relations in 2022. According to *CGTN*, Xi called Merkel a "friend of the Chinese people," while inviting her to visit China once she left office. The phrase made her join others like ex-US President Richard Nixon and former Cuban leader Fidel Castro who were also termed to be friends of the Chinese. However, Merkel called on German firms to diversify their trade in the Asia-Pacific in a separate event, saying: "We should not overlook that the Asia-Pacific is more than just China." Despite this, Merkel has often been criticized for being too soft on China, especially regarding its alleged human rights abuses. ("Germany's Angela Merkel holds farewell call with Chinese President Xi," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 October 2021; Stuart Lau, "Merkel joins Castro, Nixon in ranks of China's 'old friends'," *POLITICO*, 13 October)

Eastern Sudan: 'End the ongoing blockades,' says the US, UK, and Norway

On 8 October, the Troika countries (the US along with the UK and Norway) released a statement calling for an end to the blockade in eastern Sudan. Led by eastern Sudan's Beja tribes, the blockade includes blocking roads and closing of ports and other transportation infrastructure. This has begun affecting civilian life, and will soon impact the Sudanese economy. The three countries also backed the transitional government in Sudan to reach an understanding and resolve the ongoing political crisis. ("US, UK, Norway urge end to blockades in eastern Sudan," *Reuters*, 8 October 2021)

AUKUS: France to return ambassador to Australia after rift

On 06 October, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian announced that the ambassador to Canberra, Jean-Pierre Thebault, would soon return to his post; he failed to mention a date regarding the same. On 07 October, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison welcomed this announcement while refusing to accept the need to mend relations with France stating that he believed Australia's alliance with France was "bigger than a contract". However, he added that French President Emmanuel Macron had not picked up his calls, confessing that there was no way the AUKUS deal would have occurred without France getting upset. Thebault is being sent over with specific goals in place: he is to work out an agreement that would "redefine the terms" of the France-Australia equation as well as "firmly defend" France's interests. ("Australia welcoming back French ambassador after sub row," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 October 2021)

Blinken visits President Macron amid the AUKUS row

The US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met French President Emmanuel Macron for the first time after the AUKUS row. Described as a move to restore the damage, Blinken was present in the OECD meeting. He also met with Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. The meeting concluded on a common agreement to "deepen and strengthen the coordination" with a lot of "hard work" that "remains to be done". The meeting lasted for 40 minutes and was in alignment with Biden's previous call to Macron over the AUKUS rift. ("Blinken, Macron meet in Paris amid AUKUS tensions," *Al Jazeera*, 06 October 2021.

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