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The Endgame

Belarus-Poland Migrant Crisis



Image source: www.Aljazeera.com

The European Union, Google, and the antitrust bill

"Her heart beats too": Poland's anti-abortion protests continue

The US-EU Steel and Aluminium Trade Deal: Five Takeaways

The Impact of Climate Change on the European Wine Industry

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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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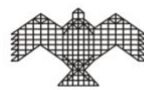
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About NIAS

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.



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

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

COMMENTS



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Europe Monitor

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COVER STORY

Belarus-Poland Migrant Crisis: The Endgame

By Harini Madhusudan and Joeana Cera Matthews

The complicated migrant crisis on the Belarusian border is a systemic failure by all actors involved.

Introduction

On 26 November, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko was at the border crossing in Bruzgi near Poland and stated that his government would help in the repatriation of some of the irregular migrants at the borders. He said: "I would like you to know that we are not going to detain you, push you onto planes and send you back home if you do not want to do that." During the last week of November, many of the migrants who had spent weeks trapped at the borders have begun returning to their respective countries, majorly to the Middle East. It is believed that almost 400 migrants have returned to Iraq, and over 600 people returned to Kurdistan's capital of Erbil. Migrants have been stranded at the Belarusian border for many months with the border troops guarding the territory. According to data from the Belarusian side, over 2,000 people have been stranded on the border with Poland, primarily from the Middle East.

On 19 November, in an exclusive interview with *BBC's* Steve Rosenberg, Lukashenko said: "We're Slavs. We have hearts. Our troops know the migrants are going to Germany." He told the interviewer that it is "absolutely possible" for his forces to help the migrants cross the borders while denying that they were invited. He also added: "Maybe someone helped them. I won't even look into this." As a response, the spokesperson for Poland's special services ministry said: "Lukashenko's regime still controls the migrants and is organizing attacks on the border," while the Lithuanian authorities warned that they would be obligated to close the border with Belarus if the situation does not improve. The migrant crisis in the Baltics has turned into a political ploy between the countries in the region at the cost of the security and safety of the people migrating.

The government in Belarus is accused of orchestrating a hybrid war in response to

the sanctions placed on their regime by the European Union (EU). Starting May 2021, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia have consistently complained of a rise in the number of migrants crossing into their country. Belarus is accused of artificially creating the crisis where they have been using Belarusian resources to bring people to their borders with a promise of easy access for crossing into the bloc. Aid groups have revealed that, on both sides of the border at least 11 to 13 asylum seekers and refugees have died through the several months of the crisis which raises concerns over the real numbers of casualties. NATO foreign ministers are expected to meet on 30 November in Latvia to discuss the issue. Below are the various actors in the recent crisis and their approach to the migrant situation at the Belarusian borders.

Primary Actor: Belarus

As the primary actor, Belarus has been accused of orchestrating the migrant situation at its borders. There has been a surge in the illegal border crossings at the Belarusian borders with Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. This has been a Belarusian attempt in response to the sanctions imposed by the EU following the controversial 2020 presidential elections that brought Lukashenko to power. Belarus has been backing migrants from the Middle East and Africa in their efforts to cross over into the bloc by falsely promising Belarusian support. This strategy is being called "hybrid warfare" (some call it a "hybrid lawfare") which has been taken from the act of Russia doing the same against the Nordic states in 2015. The end goal of the current stance is to ensure Belarus gains recognition to the ruling government while getting the EU sanctions lifted.

Poland hosts the highest number of Belarusian opposition leaders who are in exile post the controversial elections. The country is also a refuge to many critics of the regime who stood up against its injustice and

unfair practices. Similarly, Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya lives in exile in Lithuania. This could be another dimension of the larger Belarusian agenda for having initiated the migrant crisis.

Initially, Lukashenko had been on the defensive with the accusations aimed at him; however, he recently admitted to the possibility of having helped the migrants amass at the borders. Lukashenko even requested Germany to accommodate up to 2,000 migrants who did not wish to return as they “really want to live in Germany”. On 11 November, at the peak of the global energy crisis, Lukashenko threatened to cut off the natural gas pipeline exports to Europe that transits via Belarus. Putin intervened and said blocking access would be a violation of their gas transit contract.

Regional Actors: Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia *Poland*

Belarus and Poland share a border of almost 416 kilometers. On 08 November, there was a dramatic deterioration at the border between Belarus, and Poland, Latvia, Lithuania. Despite being stopped by law enforcement for trying to break through the fences, several thousand migrants approached the borders and set up camps. By 16 November, the migrants broke through the fences and threw logs and stones at Polish soldiers. As a response, the Polish troops used stun grenades along with water cannons.

“Specifically, in the case of Poland, it has seen the largest numbers of crossings and has stopped the migrants from moving across the borders while maintaining a strong response against the actions of the Belarusian government.”

Specifically, in the case of Poland, it has seen the largest numbers of crossings and has stopped the migrants from moving across the borders while maintaining a strong

response against the actions of the Belarusian government. An estimated 30,000 people are known to have attempted to cross the Polish-Belarusian border. The Polish government, however, have used a potential threat from the migrants, to shore up a defense bill to encourage arms deals with the EU member states and more than double the size of their existing armed forces.

Warsaw after declaring a state of emergency, announced that it would build a strong barbed-wire-fence at its border. In recent months, both Belarus and Poland have increased the troop presence at their borders; the Belarus force is estimated at 10,000 servicemen while Poland’s approximates up to 12,000. Poland is said to be using this opportunity to lay a fortified border, equipped with sensors, measuring five meters in height.

Latvia and Lithuania

Belarus shares a border of 680 kilometers with Lithuania and of 173 kilometers with Latvia. The two Baltic countries are not primary victims of the inflow as migrants trying to reach their destination of Germany use Poland as a transit route instead of these countries. Even though the numbers are limited, migrants still use this route to trespass into the bloc. Both countries have taken active measures to deter the entry of migrants into their respective countries. Strong accusations exist against the right-wing actors in Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania for using the migrant crisis as a platform to forward their interests of securing/fortifying the borders.

Lithuania, by early November, had already installed laser walls against the migrant influx. In August 2021, Latvia declared a state of emergency to tackle the rising migrant inflow while deploying an additional 3,000 troops at its borders. Unlike Poland, which has been very vocal about their disapproval, their actions, and their inactions, Latvia and Lithuania have silently fenced their borders, imposed emergencies, and undertaken other measures of deterrence. The two Baltic states had requested the intervention of the EU which implied the backing of the EU’s border

control force Frontex and its police force Europol. The presence of the EU forces at their borders seems to have further helped reduce the impact of the inflow in both these countries.

In August 2021, the migrants sought immediate relief for “food, water, clothing, adequate medical care, and temporary shelter” by complaining to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The court declared that Poland and Latvia had to possibly provide adequate medical care and shelter but chose to uphold the Polish and Latvian right to control entry into their countries. In the case of Lithuania, the court stated that it could not send migrants back to Belarus after they had crossed the borders.

The EU: Options and Strategies

First, overcoming the EU’s vulnerable migrant policy. The apprehension faced by the bloc regarding migrants is no secret. Russia’s Deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy even accused the Western countries of having “masochist inclinations” as they “bravely raised a topic that was of total shame to the EU”. However, the formal acknowledgement of the same by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen herself should be considered a strategy adopted by the bloc to turn their evident vulnerability into a strength. On 27 August, Germany’s Federal Employment Agency Head Detlef Scheele stated that the country’s ageing population required a force of 400,000 workers to fill the labour market requirements. The suggested solution was to encourage or at least permit immigration. The EU needs to make the best out of the situation they are in.

Second, the age-old tactic of sanctions. The EU is set to adopt a fresh package of sanctions in coordination with the US, Canada, and the UK. Expected to be implemented in December, the new set of sanctions would penalize Belarusian airlines and officials; hints at possible blacklisting of third-country airlines facilitating the “hybrid attack” also exist. Although the present situation was arrived at due to the initial set of sanctions directed at Belarus, the only immediate action that the bloc can take up to deter the Belarusian agenda is the

imposition of sanctions. To those who argue the ineffectiveness of sanctions, the European Commission spokesperson Peter Stano argues that the reason behind Belarus acting like a “gangster regime” owes to the increasing pressure faced under the imposed sanctions. Adding to this pressure seems to be the only rational measure the EU can adopt at this point.

Third, fortification. Until recently, the EU vehemently opposed building walls along its borders since such a move would violate the idea of a unified and single Europe. It would also imply a deviation from the bloc’s general principles and ethos. However, the European Council President Charles Michel recently suggested the possibility of the bloc funding border barriers due to the escalating border tensions. Although this is a highly criticized and controversial strategy, it is widely considered an “effective measure” against migrant inflow.

Fourth, self-sufficiency. The EU’s dependency on third countries to stem the inflow is proving detrimental to the bloc. The EU should consider taking things into its own hands as the third countries are evidently failing at achieving expected results. Although, a farfetched solution, the weak migrant policy of the bloc could be reworked in such a manner so as to accommodate the issues currently being faced by the bloc. A consensus on the migrant policy would imply that middle ground is achieved in an otherwise extremely divisive subject.

Fifth, the de-escalation attempt. Despite widespread condemnation from the bloc, German Chancellor Angela Merkel initiated dialogue and offered a hand at reconciliation to Lukashenko. Despite his repeated denial of Belarus’ role in the crisis, he promised the migrants to be supplied with necessary provisions. Merkel had also conferred with Putin, requesting his intervention in the crisis to dampen Belarusian agendas.

Russia: The Aiding Factor?

At the outset, Kremlin blames the crisis at the Belarus and Poland borders on the EU’s inability to uphold its humanitarian values. The Polish leadership pointed towards Putin

and accused him of being the mastermind behind the “artificially” created migrant crisis. Russia is a key ally of Belarus and is the primary contributor to Lukashenko’s election success. Putin has consistently denied accusations of being involved in the migrant crisis. Poland and the EU accuse Russia of being a participant in the crisis by spearheading the artificial flow of people from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. There are also warnings that the migrant crisis may topple into the Ukrainian side in the coming weeks. Putin has urged for a dialogue between the European countries and Lukashenko and has offered to facilitate it. Moscow also suggests the EU respond to the current situation as it did with Turkey in 2016 due to its support for the European recognition of the Lukashenko regime along with the lifting of sanctions.

The Humanitarian Crisis

On 11 November, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki commented on the border standoff stating that the “new kind of war” had civilians as “ammunition”. Refugees are flown in from different parts of war-struck areas across the globe. Cashing in on the readiness of the migrants to reach Europe, Lukashenko is said to have orchestrated the crisis. Arriving from the Middle Eastern and African countries such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya, these migrants arrive in vulnerable conditions after being lured out in the hopes of a ‘promised land’. A false sense of hope is provided to these people who are already traumatized by the regional conflicts they left. Stranded in terrible and unsafe conditions, they feel betrayed after being promised a better life and an entry into the European region. The migrants are seen struggling every day in an effort to survive. They keep fending for their lives in a no man’s land while troops push them in and out from either side of the borders. Quite a few of those helpless at the borders have died due to hypothermia and hunger. The ultimate issue that the standoff will and is achieving is definitely the humanitarian crisis.

International Responses: Silence Speaks

The international response to the migrant crisis has largely been quiet. However, there

have been indications of the migrant crisis spilling into the energy crisis in Europe. Many international criticisms are directed at the actions of Belarus but fail to recognize the failure of leadership on the other side of the narratives. The silent international response to the migrant crisis should be seen as alarming. The EU leaders have been in contact with the countries where the migrants are said to be travelling from. It is likely that the active engagement between these countries has enabled the migrants to return to their respective regions in the last few days of November.

Conclusion

The crisis at the border of Belarus has two distinct layers to it.

First, it is a humanitarian crisis that requires a sensitive and quick response by the parties involved. Second, it is a political crisis that holds the potential of placing the parties involved in a sticky diplomatic situation. And so far, the region has failed in both ways. The approach of the countries towards those migrants attempting to cross the borders has been terribly cold. The migrants have had to stay in dangerous and cold weather conditions for long periods of time and were deprived of food, water, and shelter. The political approach of every party involved has been nothing but selfish and short-sighted. Every party has tried to politically leverage the situation to their advantage. This includes the construction of fences in the European zone that allows free movement, and the display of the need to push back the migrants in a region where the policy promises free entryway.

November 2021 marks six months into the migrant crisis. Though much is being spoken about, very little has changed at the borders to ensure the safety of the people. The pace of crisis escalation and the military tensions at the border are likely to slow down with the migrants returning to their countries. However, the complicated migrant crisis on the Belarusian border is a systemic failure by all actors involved. There are signs of significant failure of existing political and legal systems, signs of deliberate failure in some cases, that helped worsen the situation. Europe faces a larger migration crisis, especially after the economic impact

of the pandemic. There seems to be no end to the impasse, at least anytime soon. Despite the measures available to end the crisis, the EU continues to be at a standstill with regard to the practical measures they are capable of implementing. It is imperative to ensure fewer deaths of migrating

individuals and provide respectable access to entry for the migrants.

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COMMENT

The European Union, Google, and the antitrust bill

By Harini Madhusudan

Google's abuse of power and the EU's efforts at regulating big tech.

On 10 November, the Alphabet unit of Google lost an appeal against the European Union (EU). The company lost EUR 2.42 billion to the European antitrust bill after the General Court upheld a 2017 order. The court ordered that the European Commission was right in fining Google for the breach, while Alphabet-unit claimed that their ads have always helped people find the products quickly and easily and that they made a few changes back in 2017 to comply with the European Commission's decision. This ruling is being seen as a major victory for Europe's Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, in the first of three rulings that are at the core of the EU push to regulate big tech.

The 2017 antitrust bill

In 2017, Google was accused of favouring its own comparison-shopping services. While Google favoured its own services on the general results pages with favourable display and positioning, it was said to have relegated the results of competing services based on ranking algorithms. The court claims that the company departed from competition on merits, and hence placed a fine on it. As the dominant player in the search engine market, Google is said to have abused its power by promoting its own services while also demoting the competitors. The statement read: "By decision of 27 June 2017, the Commission found that Google had abused its dominant position on the market for online general search services in 13 countries in the European Economic Area, by favouring its

own comparison-shopping service, a specialized search service, over competing for comparison shopping services."

To a large extent, competitive traffic is the major contributor to the services offered by Comparison Shopping. Up to 90 percent of Google's revenue is generated from advertisements and this revenue generation depends on the traffic. More traffic causes more clicks, and this traffic is used to attract potential retailers to list with their services. In order to benefit from comparison shopping, in 2008, Google began to push its shopping services to be implemented in European Markets. Though market dominance is not illegal under the EU antitrust rules, Google was accused of exploiting its dominant position in internet search markets in all European Economic Area (EEA). However, Google could still appeal the new verdict and take the case to the EU's highest court, the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

The counterargument by Google

Google has denied the claims by the antitrust bill. The company made a statement and claimed that "its services had helped the region's digital economy grow". The company accused other market competitors of pushing the case against the dominant search engine, which included over-viewing and investigating Google's search page algorithm, PageRank, with the EU's Competition Commission monitoring the proceeds. In order to comply, Google separated its comparison-shopping service

to a different company after the fine and would run with its own revenues and profits which would effectively avoid further fines. While partly complying with the court decision, the company appealed the decision on the claims that the EU chair mistreated facts and did not show enough evidence that their services hurt the rival companies and asked for the ruling to either be reduced or overturned.

“The goal is to bring more privacy to EU consumers by restricting target advertisement.”

The appeal from Google was based on six points. The first two claimed that the court did not prove that Google placed its ads at the top search results to favour their services. The next two stated that the court mistreated the pieces of evidence and facts, and the last two points said that the fine amount worth almost 2.5 percent value of their 2016 revenues was unwarranted as a possible penalty.

The EU changes on Internet regulation

The shopping case is one of the three decisions that have raked up a total of EUR 8.2 billion in EU antitrust fines in the previous decade. Margrethe Vestager

subsequently took on Apple, and Facebook, where investigations are still ongoing. Google is expected to face two more defeats in appeals against rulings involving the Android mobile operating system and AdSense advertising service. This is on par with the EU introducing many changes in its technology policies to ensure they have control over the data generated in the region.

The European Union, from the past couple of years, has been looking to toughen its legislation to ensure fair competition across its 27 member countries. Additionally, the European Union has been looking at the practices of the big tech and other technology-related businesses and holding them accountable for their unsafe policies. The EU's decisions on the same issue would be an effective example for other countries to follow suit and secure safe access to resources. In this case, the legislators believe that smaller developers should be allowed the opportunity to showcase their work. The goal is to bring more privacy to EU consumers by restricting target advertisement.

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COMMENT

NATO-Russia relationship: Looking beyond the suspensions and expulsions

By Joana Cera Matthews

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.

On 18 October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced that Russia would be terminating its diplomatic mission to NATO. Lavrov claimed the suspension to be a retaliatory move against NATO expelling Russian mission members to the alliance.

On 21 October, opening the two-day NATO summit in Brussels, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg commented: “We are in the midst of a transformation of NATO. Over the

last years we have stepped up and refocused on our collective defence to protect our own territory.”

Three triggers of 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 to just ten members, giving no justification 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 the diplomats to leave their respective region 'for good'.

Third, the role of history. Relations between Russia and NATO have been strained since 2014. Following the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula along with the Moscow-backed Donbass region conflict, any existent working relationship between Russia and NATO ceased. The NATO-Russia Council, another forum the two used for interactions, has been dormant as well.

What does the suspension mean?

First, dwindling channels of communication. Russia is set to cancel NATO's accreditation on 01 November. Once this comes into force, the alliance is expected to contact Russia via the latter's envoy in 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. As the *New York Times* stated: "The decision will end a post-Cold War experiment, never very successful, in building trust between Russia and the Western alliance."

“However, the alliance has been at the receiving end of endless Russian provocations – from their ships being attacked at sea to routine encroachments into their

airspace; NATO is justified for being prepared beforehand.”

Second, the rhetoric of power-play. The Russian Foreign Ministry statement did not threaten to or eliminate the NATO diplomatic office, it only suspended the same. This is significant information to consider, given the fact that Russia had vehemently reacted to NATO suspending its members to the mission. When faced with a binary decision on whether to suspend the mission or wholly rid themselves of it, Russia chose that a suspension would suffice, at least for now. Taking a look at this perspective, it implies that Russia does not intend to cut all ties with NATO and that the present move is just a retaliatory measure against what the alliance did to their diplomats.

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 mass 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.

Third, Russia as a threat. On 21 October, NATO defense ministers gathered in Brussels to discuss Moscow and the threat it poses, among other things. Despite stating that Russia was not being seen as an immediate threat, the ministers addressed these concerns by forming a master plan designed to counter the Russian "offensive". Moscow, denying any untoward intention, accused NATO of sabotaging the unity and peace prevalent in the region with such provocative preparations. However, the

alliance has been at the receiving end of endless Russian provocations – from their ships being attacked at sea to routine encroachments into their airspace; NATO is justified for being prepared beforehand.

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COMMENT

France, Algeria, and the politics over an apology

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Far-right members like Marine Le Pen have criticized Macron's effort at apologizing, labeling it an attempt to trigger a "memory war" in France.

In October, French President Emmanuel Macron repeatedly apologized to Algeria to reconcile and strengthen bilateral ties with the region. In 2021, Macron launched the "Memories and Truth" commission to openly discuss France's role in Algeria, and to "look clearly at the wounds of the past".

Why is France apologizing? What has been the Algerian response? What difference does the apology make?

A brief background

During his election campaign, Macron had referred to colonization as a "crime against humanity". Unlike his predecessors, Macron acknowledged the murder of Maurice Audin and recognized the torture committed against Algeria. He also mentioned that France had unresolved "traumas" from its colonial past that needed attention.

In October, a French-Algerian spat erupted over the former's unilateral decision to impose visa restrictions on Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The visa limitations were in reaction to the latter's refusal to accept unauthorized migrants. In response, Algeria withdrew its French ambassador. Amidst rising tensions, 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.

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 inclusive of 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 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.

Following a diplomatic row over visas and remarks from Paris, the Algerian President demanded "total respect". The Algerian government responded by prohibiting French military planes from entering its airspace. The Algerian President Abdelmadjid 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 a "political-

military system governed Algeria". According to Macron, Algeria's official history has been rewritten to encourage anti-French sentiment. The newspaper also remarked that the comments were directed at Algeria's ruling elite rather than the Algerian society as a whole. 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 heavily criticized 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 affects security concerns. French military planes on locating jihadists in the Sahel region were required to travel through the Algerian airspace but could not do so because of the ban.

“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 affects security concerns.”

As relations strain over historical and contemporary differences, acknowledging the past by the political class is still dominating the narrative. Truth commissions are set to understand the "past pattern of human rights abuses," as explained by Priscilla Hayner. The investigations end with a report and recommendations. Such commissions attempt to rebuild relations and a form of reckoning and allow for distributive justice measures. France, however, seems late to the apology, amnesty, or even criminal justice. Despite the late apology, Algerians are keen on obtaining answers. The essential nature of the Algerian traumas has given relevance to the French apology.

In contrast, one could look at the event as elite colonists finally "bestowing" an acknowledgment of their past. Algeria is disappointed with the appointment of Stora over the presiding historical account provided by Algeria. France is home to a large Algerian immigrant population. As of July 2021, 505,587 Algerians reside in France. It is difficult to assess the impact of an apology, especially after it comes 60 years later, in a different demographic and political setup. The sincerity of the apology would be gauged after France formulates reparations and the promised policy efforts to help the Harki descendants and immigrants. However, the apology raises questions on the Algerian identity and self-assertion. Most immigrants interviewed on the question have stated reluctance to play the victim of French colonization, which could only be solved with an apology. One interviewee stated: "I wanted to both honor the past and assert my freedom from it." Thus, the question of truth bringing reckoning and reconciliation remains unanswered.

The politics of apology

For the French, the apology has created a new battleground in the upcoming elections. Far-right members like Marine Le Pen have criticized the effort labeling it an attempt to trigger a "memory war" in France. Echoing a similar sentiment, Eric Zemmour played on the past nostalgia and portrayed the cultural threat posed by African immigrants who may dissolve France into a global conglomerate, devoid of the real French culture. Thus, France remains divided over the issue of acknowledging its colonial past. On the other hand, the war talks serve as an excuse for radicals from former colonies to stay isolated. Some draw their justifications from the discomfort of banlieues and refuse to integrate into society. This, in turn, leads to criticisms of the Algerian response. For Algerian politics, Macron's speech on the authoritarian nature of the state may have garnered support from the citizens opposing the military influence in its politics. However, the larger part of the speech focused on remarks about Algeria sustaining itself with "memorial rent" and questioning its identity before the French rule. While this does not indicate a shift in Algerian politics,

Algeria's response remains cold. With statements contradicting actions on the French side, the French-Algerian divide may not heal immediately.

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COMMENT

The US-EU Steel and Aluminium Trade Deal: Five Takeaways

By Padmashree Anandhan

The deal that helped regain the transatlantic relations between the EU and the US

On 31 October, at the G20 Summit, the US agreed to sign the deal with the EU to end the standing steel and aluminium trade dispute. A dispute arose when former US President Donald Trump levied tariffs on the EU's steel and aluminium exports citing national security concerns. The US levied tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminium products from the EU. To counter this, the EU imposed tariffs on various US products like motorcycles, motorboats, jeans, whiskey, and orange juice. With the current US President Joe Biden's willingness to ease the relations with the EU and the latter's desperation to win back the US market for its steel industry, the deal was signed.

What is the deal about?

The deal will replace Section 232 with a new tariff rate quota (TRQ). The EU will be allowed to sell USD 6.7 billion of steel and aluminium to the US duty-free. Any sale above the given limit will be tariffed under Section 232. For the US to sign the deal it mandated that the EU must produce the steel originally "melted and poured" to qualify for free trade. This means steel produced in the EU must be entirely made from its own resource and not imported from China, Russia, or South Korea. The removal of tariff means a save of USD 1.5 billion for the EU and an extended benefit for its 3.6 million workers in the steel and aluminium industry.

The dispute

In 2018, Trump imposed tariffs on certain steel and aluminium products of the EU. It affected exports worth USD 7.2 billion leading to a 53 percent fall in the period from 2018 to 2020. As a countermeasure, the EU increased its duty from 10 percent to

50 percent (USD 3.3 billion) on its affected products from steel, aluminium, motorcycles, agricultural goods, and various other products. As a continuation, it is scheduled to double the tariff (USD 7.5 billion) by 01 December 2021 to rebalance the damage caused by the US restrictions. Later a dispute case was also filed by the EU against the US in WTO.

Relations began to smoothen this year after diplomatic steps were taken by the Biden administration. The announcement put an end to the 17-year dispute over aircraft subsidies, forming new partnerships in trade and technology, agreement on global minimum taxes, and lastly the deal to end the steel and aluminium trade dispute.

What does the US-EU deal mean?

The deal helped regain the transatlantic relations between the EU and the US. The five major takeaways are as follows:

"The steel prices have tripled in the past years as the demand soared in the post-pandemic period. This deal would mean lowering the costs and preventing an import surge which will economically impact the US labour unions and manufacturers."

First, the deal allows both parties to eliminate China's steel products. The US by persuading the EU to follow the "melted and poured" standard, positions the EU to become a global competitor in the steel industry. Thereby, the US not only prevents the EU from importing cheap quality steel

produced by China at low carbon standards, but it also sidelines China's global steel exports. For the EU, the deal helps it to move closer towards its climate goals, as it will now produce steel of low carbon emissions than importing those from China.

Second, protection of domestic industry. The US products that were subject to tariffs will be laid off. The deal also averts from the doubling up of tariffs which was scheduled from 01 December 2021. The US ensures competition in its domestic market through the shift into TRQ's, limiting the quantity of the EU exports and through conditions on the EU to produce quality steel originally. Thereby reducing the steel dump flowing into the US from other countries. In the case of the EU, whose steel exports fell below 50 percent (from 4.8 to 2.5 million metric tons), signing back the deal with the US will boost its exports and reputation in the international market. Hence the 3.6 million employees of the steel and aluminium industry of the EU are set to benefit.

Third, reduction of steel cost for the US manufacturers. The steel prices have tripled in the past years as the demand soared in the post-pandemic period. This deal would mean

lowering the costs and preventing an import surge which will economically impact the US labour unions and manufacturers.

Fourth, it is a backlash for other US allies like the UK, Japan, and South Korea as the EU gets first in line before the others to sign the deal. Hence, it gets to capture the US market for its steel and aluminium products before the competition begins.

Fifth, towards a global deal for green steel and aluminium production. According to the World Steel Association, the steel industry contributes seven to nine percent of global emissions. The US steel production is based on electric-arc furnaces which have lower carbon emissions than the coal-fuelled blast furnaces used by China. Therefore, the US necessitating the EU to produce steel on the same terms means setting a global green standard for steel production. This at large helps in forming a legal framework for other countries to follow the same to sustain their steel industries at the world market.

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COMMENT

The Impact of Climate Change on the European Wine Industry

By Joeana Cera Matthews

'Unfavourable climatic conditions' have been cited as the reason for the fall in the production volume of wine.

On 04 November, the International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV) released a statement predicting a potential fall in the production volume of wine in Italy, Spain, and France from the 2020 levels due to "late spring frost and overall unfavourable climatic conditions". It further added: "This would be the third consecutive year where the global production level is below average."

What is the issue?

Italy, Spain, and France – the three largest wine-producing countries account for 45 percent of the world's wine production and 79 percent of the EU's wine production. The

OIV statement, which collected data from 28 countries representing 85 percent of the world production in 2020, concluded that the 2021 world wine production would range between 247.1 mhl (millions of hectolitres) and 253.5 mhl. The European Union (EU), in particular, is estimated to produce 145 mhl of wine in 2021 — a 13 percent decline from 2020's production levels. (One hectolitre is equivalent to 133 standard bottles.)

What does climate change have to do with wine production?

First, the decline in production.

'Unfavourable climatic conditions' have been

cited as the reason for the fall in the production volume of wine. The past year's weather conditions were not kind, especially to Europe which hosts the majority of wine-producing countries. In comparison to the 2020 levels, Italy saw a drop of nine percent in its wine production as Spain witnessed a 14 percent drop. Switzerland's crops, too, were affected by frost followed by hail and then mildew. This contributed to the decline in its production volume which hit a 20-year-low at 0.8 mhl. France suffered a whopping 27 percent drop. Evidently, France was the hardest hit. According to the OIV's press release: "France bore the hardest brunt of a disastrous vintage with severe frost in April, followed by summer rain, hailstorms, and mildew." Austria, Greece, Slovakia, along with several other EU countries, also showcased a negative performance with respect to 2020.

Second, the impact on livelihoods. In France's Jura, a small wine region known for its natural wine, the winegrowers suffered losses owing to the 'extreme weather conditions'. Jura is only one among the numerous wine estates that have incurred losses. The inability to earn has led to increased reports of depression as well as suicide in winemakers. The growing demand for wine despite the limited crop returns have forced winegrowers to opt for alternatives in an effort to maintain production levels. Addressing these concerns, OIV's Director General Pau Roca called for considering "long-term solution(s)" involving "sustainable practices" to back the winemakers. He also pointed out the industry's need to adapt.

Third, the decline in quality. Unfortunately, it is not just the production volumes that saw a decline. According to biologist Elizabeth Wolkovich, the soaring temperatures have led to a change in the taste of the wine itself. The warmer temperatures create increased sugar and decreased acid in the berries – implying higher alcohol content and honey-like flavour. Roca commented on this, saying: "(wine growers are) confronting a much greater problem than the pandemic: climate change." Jura's wine receives its characteristic properties due to the 'semi-continental climate' of the region; the

warmer winters have led to premature blossoms. As Director of Fruitiere Vinicole Arbois Gabriel Dietrich said: "When the winters were cold, the vines would sleep through the frost, but now with the warmer winters, they wake too early and become vulnerable." Techniques to protect the produce from the winter frosts are also being experimented with by the winegrowers.

"The decline in wine production due to climate change is not an issue that is particular to Europe."

Fourth, not wholly 'detrimental'. The hotter summers facilitated the production of some varieties of wine, like the pinot noir. Facility Manager of Domaine Maire & Fils Jacques Hauler said: "... the challenge of global heating helped us a lot because we were able to make some pinot noir that won awards in the UK and France." Similarly, heavy rains in the UK helped create the 'perfect' conditions to produce sparkling wine.

What does this mean?

First, a global problem. The decline in wine production due to climate change is not an issue that is particular to Europe. The US, despite having an estimated six percent rise from 2020 levels, is expected to fall by three percent in the five-year average; the country's summer drought is being blamed for the same. Although the Southern Hemisphere saw a rise in production, this failed to compensate for Europe's loss.

Second, a 'here and now' crisis. As Roca stated, unlike the pandemic, there is no "vaccine" for climate change. To those of us who continue arguing that climate change is not a 'now' issue – this is an eye-opener. The erratic climatic conditions have begun impacting daily necessities. In order to avert huge distress to the global populace, we need to be more sensitive to the issue at hand and deal with it soon. Quoting *The Economist*: "There is no time to lose."

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COMMENT

“Her heart beats too”: Poland's anti-abortion protests continue

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Networks of actors that advocate for ‘conservative’ abortion policies are getting increasingly active across Poland and in the larger global context.

On a global and national level, reproductive health and abortion are highly politicized subjects that are constantly contested over issues of gender and equity, human rights, morality, religion, and cultural norms. Reproduction-related issues elicit strong feelings among social and political groupings and have high symbolic importance for governments. Every society exercises control over reproduction in some way, but the how and why differs. Networks of actors that advocate for ‘conservative’ abortion policies are getting increasingly active across Poland and in the larger global context. Intensive mobilization against abortion rights in the form of coordinated cross-country campaigns organized by groups like Agenda Europe, a conservative religious union of over a hundred organizations from 30 European countries, exists to help us understand the political, cultural, social, and religious implications of abortion laws in one's own country.

Mass demonstrations under the slogan of “Not one more” and candlelight vigils were held for the death of a 30-year-old mother, identified only as Izabela. She had succumbed to septic shock at a hospital in Pszczyna, in the south of Poland in October 2021. Although having passed away in September, her death was brought up by her family to “draw public attention to the situation of women and doctors in Poland and to lead to changes in the law”. The death, registered as possibly caused by medical error, has been referred to a regional prosecutor.

Official clarification

On 07 November, Poland's Health Minister Adam Niedzielski detailed the latest legislative restriction and medical recommendations on abortion. The clarification states that if a mother's life or

health is at risk, doctors “must not be afraid of making obvious decisions” about abortions. The guidance was scheduled amidst mass protests in Gdansk, Wroclaw, Szczecin, and Pszczyna, along with other major cities in Poland.

Poland, which is predominantly Catholic, already had one of Europe's strictest abortion laws, prohibiting the procedure in almost all circumstances except rape or incest, and if the woman's life or health was in danger. Izabela's death came after a contentious judgement by Poland's constitutional court last year that declared a 1993 statute allowing abortions in cases of serious foetal abnormalities illegal. The verdict, which triggered widespread protests across the country, intensified the EU's most draconian abortion rules, limiting abortion to only two scenarios: a threat to the mother's health or pregnancy caused by rape or incest. The tribunal's decision eliminated the option of having abortions if a woman's life was in danger, or if the foetus had incurable deformities. According to a lawyer representing the family, the doctors refused Izabela an abortion despite her foetus lacking amniotic fluid, which could cause uterine deformities or defects. Instead, she was told by medical personnel that she would only be treated after the foetus died. This is not the first time such an incident has occurred in Poland. *Tysiac v. Poland* and *A, B, & C v. Ireland* were two cases decided by the European Court in 2007 and 2010 that have constituted the foundation of its abortion laws. Despite acknowledging that applicants endured pain and suffering when denied access to an abortion, the Court failed to find a violation of Article 3 – “right to be free from torture and cruel or degrading treatment” – in both cases.

The need for clarification thus arises over the question of whether Izabela would still be alive if this occurred before the ruling?

Poland's official position on abortion

Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said: "If the life or health of the mother is threatened then an abortion is still possible, and here nothing has changed." However, attending the protest in Warsaw, former EU leader Donald Tusk expressed opposition to the recent ruling.

The hospital staff noted that they "did everything in their power" to help Izabela and the foetus. The *Associated Press* reported that all medical decisions were made in accordance with the legal provisions and standards of conduct in Poland. Rene Donadio of the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network noted: "If this had occurred before that ruling, Izabela would still probably be alive." Protest organizer Katarzyna Kotula referred to "the frozen effect" of the ruling which leaves medical professionals in limbo to perform abortions. Protestors noted that similar cases would continue to occur if there was no change.

The verdict was unrelated to Izabela's case, according to Weronika Przebieraa of the International Law Center Institute at Ordo Iuris, an ultraconservative Catholic legal organization that fought for the abortion limit.

Too little, too late for Poland?

As a devoutly Catholic country, this is not the first time Poland has seen protests over a conservative ruling. Poland is ranked 24th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, with 55.8 points out of a possible 100. Poland's score is 12.1 points lower than the average for the EU. Its score has barely risen by 0.3 points since 2010, with a slow increase of (+0.6 points) since 2017. In 2019, Poland's ruling party stoked the fires of public outrage instead of stepping down the abortion bill. The party openly claimed that "waging war against women" would pay dividends in domestic politics. Poland's de facto leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski said that the country was undergoing a "cultural civil war" and had encouraged people to defend

the church "at all costs" or Poland would be "devastated".

"Europe must not be a mute spectator while Poland blows up. The European Commission must take a stand... Poland cannot continue to publicly abuse, harass, and intimidate people who want to uphold the rule of law."

Poland in the past few months has made controversial legal updates surrounding the ban of pride parades and a court appeal that overpowers Polish national law over EU law. Despite threats from the EU over increased sanctions, Poland's ruling party "thrives on fear-mongering". Notably, domestic politics seem more important than international commitments for the PiS. The conservative values' pitch by the party resonates strongly among the right and radical voters stroking far-right nationalistic sentiments. A few of these supporters had even made a human shield around a church in 2019 against females protesting over the abortion laws.

The ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) is presenting the demonstrations as an attack on a cornerstone of Polish society and, by extension, an offensive on "the people" by framing the struggle as one centered on the church. PiS has constructed a false contrast between itself and political opponents who are pro-LGBTQ rights or pro-migration and so ostensibly aiming to "undermine the Polish way of life". The party's polling success demonstrates that a segment of the electorate reacts positively to these techniques. The "us versus them" narrative has also allowed the government to shift the blame of mishandling the pandemic and attributing the rise of COVID-19 cases to all the protest gatherings.

Europe must not be a mute spectator while Poland blows up. The European Commission must take a stand. It must not only criticize restrictions on women's access to safe and legal abortion and attacks on children's right to sex education, but it must also take a far stricter position on Poland's deteriorating rule of law. Poland cannot continue to

publicly abuse, harass, and intimidate people who want to uphold the rule of law. 2021 has seen intense legal reforms over abortion laws. However, most of these laws have seen a regressive pattern. The consequences of the directed constitutional reform are borne by groups disadvantaged in the legal and

political battle. It will be interesting to observe how the international community reacts to such statutes.

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COMMENT

COVID-19 Protests: The Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria

By Padmashree Anandhan, Vaishnavi Iyer, and Joana Cera Matthews

The authorities need to speed up and expand their vaccinations in countries with low vaccination rates to avoid mistrust or dissatisfaction in certain groups of people. Larger the difference, larger the scope for protests and surge in cases

Recent developments

The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) in Netherlands reported 153,957 positive coronavirus tests, where 69 percent belonged to the unvaccinated group. With the number of new cases doubling, the government imposed partial lockdown measures for three weeks and mandated the green pass, social distancing, and vaccination drives. The rise of infections in the Netherlands comes as a surprise as 84 percent of the population are vaccinated. Following the imposition of stringent COVID-19 restrictions, protestors gathered in Rotterdam, the Hague, and Amsterdam. Denying the levied restrictions, they threw rocks at the police and used fireworks. The government also issued an emergency order in the eastern state of Enschede due to continued protests. On 22 November, the Netherlands police shot four people and arrested 28 people; the four who were shot sustained life-threatening injuries.

On 22 November, Austria declared its fourth nationwide lockdown – the first full lockdown imposed by an EU country this winter. This move essentially forced 8.9 million Austrians to be home-bound except for reasons such as going to work, exercising, and procuring necessities. Following the declaration, Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said: "It's a problem for the whole society because even those that are vaccinated, if they don't have access to an intensive care unit because they're blocked by those who are not vaccinated and got sick, so then they are affected as well." The fourth

wave of the pandemic led to the imposition of tighter restrictions across Europe. This attempt to curb the surge triggered large-scale protests all over the continent. Austria is one of the most affected countries – both in terms of the increasing cases and the violent protests.

On 21 November, thousands of people marched through central Brussels to denounce the Belgian government's COVID-19 regulations, introduced in response to the surge in coronavirus cases. According to police, 35,000 people gathered in Brussels to protest the COVID-19 Safe Pass app, which shows the immunization and recovery status required to enter bars and restaurants. Protestors wished to express their displeasure with the strengthened COVID-19 limitations which were a response to an increase in the cases.

On 20 November, around 40,000 people gathered in central Vienna in a demonstration against the Austrian government's decision to impose a partial lockdown. The protestors held banners with slogans that read "no to vaccination" and "enough is enough".

On 18 November, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Europe the epicentre of the epidemic, the only region where COVID-19 mortality is on the rise. In many Central and Eastern European countries, including Ukraine, Russia, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, the autumn rush of diseases overloaded

hospitals. As a result, measures were initiated to make immunizations mandatory for health care employees. For example, all healthcare employees in Belgium must be vaccinated as of 01 January or fear being laid off, if they decline.

On 04 November, World Health Organization (WHO) officials reported a resurgence of new COVID-19 cases across Europe. According to the WHO Director Dr Hans Kluge: "We are at another critical point of pandemic resurgence; Europe is back at the epicentre of the pandemic where we were one year ago." The reason behind the surge is believed to be the spread of the Delta variant affecting individuals of all age groups. Eastern European countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland have been the most affected, with a spike in deaths. While tracing the spread of infection, it was prevalent in countries with low vaccination rates and those fully vaccinated, such as Italy.

What are the factors that play into these protests? Who are the actors? What are their reasons?

The multiple actors

The primary groups protesting the newly imposed restrictions include far-right parties, anti-vaccine and anti-mask groups, along with apolitical groups who are vaccine-hesitant. There is also no specific restraint in the sphere of religion. Far-right fringe organizations, soccer fanatics, libertarians from both sides of the political spectrum, and citizens fearful of vaccines due to a barrage of misinformation are among them. The diverse crowd is united by their common discontent towards the government – especially regarding the management of COVID-19.

Despite these being the general actors in play, there exists a demographic divide. Although there does not exist a consistent trend in the protestors' demographic affiliation, both youth and adults are a part of the protests. Meanwhile, the vulnerable groups of the population refrain from participating in protests; this can be attributed to the fact that there is a higher rate of inoculation in these groups compared

to the rest of the population. According to Alix Kroeger, Europe's vaccine-hesitant crowd tend to cluster in the south-eastern parts, in countries that were once divided by the Iron Curtain and where citizens shared a common distrust of communist governments and authorities even when it came to health issues.

In Austria, local media reported far-right extremists spouting anti-vaccine conspiracies and antisemitism, as well as apolitical people resisting vaccination, including families, to have been among those who attended the march. The signs in the group ranged from far-right emblems to rainbow flags of the LGBTQ community. In Brussels, protesters gathered around a large banner reading "Together for Freedom" and advanced to the European Union offices, shouting "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!" while also chanting the anti-fascist hymn "Bella Ciao".

The multiple reasons

On 19 November, Austria declared that the COVID-19 vaccinations would be a legal requirement from February 2022. This only strengthens the argument for those who advocate the slogan of 'my body, my choice' since forcing people into inoculation violates an individual's freedom and are increasingly termed as a "restriction of human rights". Meanwhile, the Austrian government was called a 'coronavirus dictatorship' since its coercion tactic to increase the declining immunity was considered to be a desperate measure. The economic factor is another concern seen in both Austria and the Netherlands. Protesters, primarily consist of small businessmen whose daily lives are being affected by the tough restrictions. Along with the haphazardly implemented lockdowns, these do not help ease the blow suffered due to supply chain challenges and revenue loss.

There also exists anger amongst the studying youth. Apart from the worry of delinking their social lives, many youths have started studying in the course of the pandemic. As per the statistics of the Netherlands, the pass percentage was very high as the final exams were cancelled. With a gap of one year, many opted to study, increasing joint student debt.

The debt increased to EUR 24.4 billion at the start of 2021, which was seven per cent more than the previous year. However, those students with rich parents were able to financially sustain themselves while students with unsound financial backgrounds could not afford their education.

In addition, the COVID-19 vaccine is the second vaccine to be declared mandatory, following the polio vaccine. The Belgian government has stringent laws against polio anti-vaxxers, but the number of polio anti-vaxxers in the country remain high. As a result, the COVID-19 vaccination is not the only vaccine that the public has rejected. While anti-vaxxers resort to violence, the same skepticism may be useful in measuring the success of herd immunity.

The people's distrust in the government is another reason. COVID-19 protests held in Austria and the Netherlands can be attributed to the people's distrust in the present governments. However, the reasons behind this differs. In Austria, the distrust seems to be emerging due to the provocation about deworming remedies by the Freedom Party (FPÖ). While in the Netherlands, neglecting the Code Black situation, the government's dependency on German facilities and the overall poor handling of the COVID-19 crisis by the government seems to have instigated the protests. Both the governments, despite taking measures to build confidence amongst the public, are unable to quell the protests.

Governmental measures

Italy, which has the highest vaccination rate of 72 percent, also saw the emergence of new cases in its unvaccinated residents. As a result, it imposed severe rules to vaccinate the remaining and mainly the worker population. One such rule was the "Green Pass," a QR code to confirm an individual's vaccination and negative status. Individuals were required to show this at restaurants, cinemas, gyms, and trains. This provoked anti-vaccine protests in the city of Trieste. According to one of the protestors: "... the health pass sidelined the unvaccinated from the country's workforce and rendered vaccine skeptics socially dead." They have

warned the government that the anti-health pass movement would spread everywhere on the continuity of such rules.

“The situation inside Europe is becoming more challenging and complex to counter the virus spread as the difference widens among the countries in administering the pandemic proactively.”

In Hungary, the infection rate multiplied over the past few weeks. As a result, the government mandated vaccination at the state institutions, urging people to get vaccinated. It also asked private companies to necessitate its workers to get jabbed. Nonetheless, there are no new laws or measures to meet the immediate rise in the cases. In the cases of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, toughened restrictions include mask-wearing, showing vaccination certificates in public spaces, and testing children in schools where cases are peaking. Along with the above rules, Poland also limited theatre-seating capacities to 75 percent.

However, the governments are largely helpless. The vaccine take-up in Austria is 65 percent, which is less than the EU average. Despite the widespread protests, there is only so much the government can do to quell the protests. The measures are repetitive and uncomfortable; however, the only way to curb the larger health crisis is by resorting to radical measures.

Response from politicians

After a nonviolent demonstration against coronavirus regulations became deadly in Brussels, Belgian politicians strongly condemned the violence in the protests. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo denounced mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations as a "false good idea", claiming that persuasion would be more difficult in practice and that it would be "more effective to persuade people". Belgium's Home Affairs Minister Annelies Verlinden said: "A mature democracy respects the opinion of a minority but does not accept that a few

abuse their protest vote by force. Vaccinated or not: it is important that we continue to follow the measures." The violence rekindled the debate in Belgium about mandatory vaccination, an issue that has split the government coalition's seven parties. The Socialist Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Pierre-Yves Dermagne, supporting the need to open the debate, stated: "We must have this debate because we know that we are going to live with this virus for months and even years. We cannot limit ourselves to short-term measures." The government is already receiving criticism for requiring healthcare workers to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

In perspective

First, there is a lack of unified action across the region to close the difference between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated population. Till now, only 47 percent of people count as fully-vaccinated. The authorities need to speed up and expand their vaccinations in countries with low vaccination rates to avoid mistrust or dissatisfaction in certain groups of people. The situation inside Europe is becoming more challenging and complex to counter the virus spread as the difference widens among the countries in administering the pandemic proactively. Larger the difference, larger the scope for protests and surge in cases.

Second, restrictions in public spaces. Social measures such as mask-wearing, social distancing, frequent testing, and inoculation need to be in place as a preventive measure. They cannot be eased – essentially, neglecting the presence of the virus. This was the case in the Netherlands and Denmark, which did not consider the infection critical. Such negligence needs to stop.

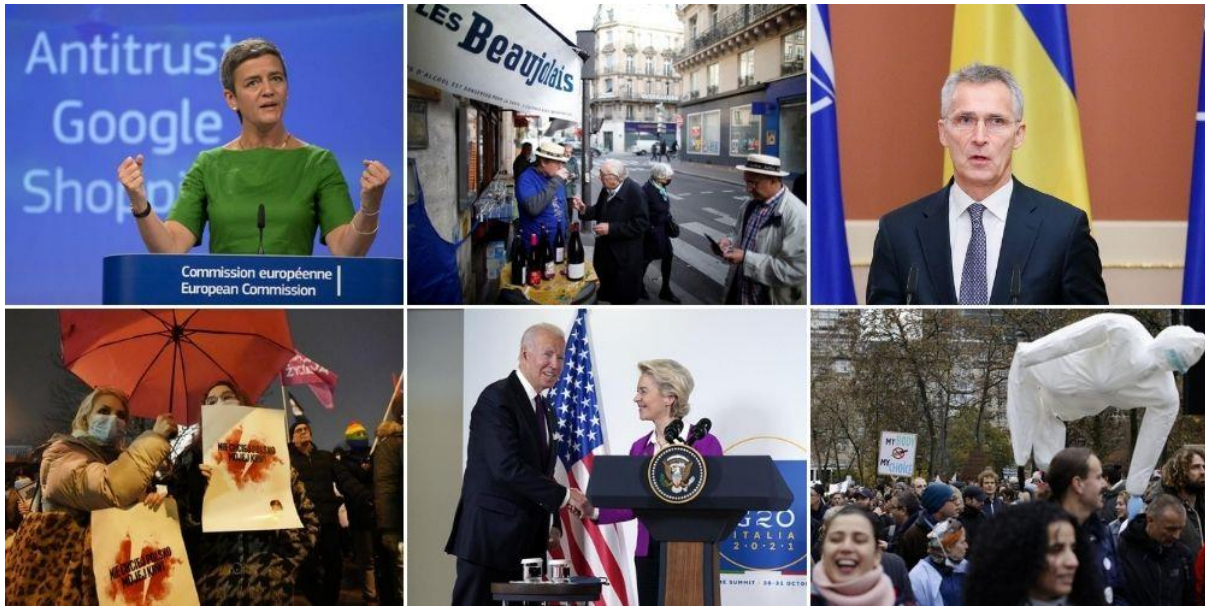
Third, the mandate of COVID-19 passports. These were implemented to boost the intake of vaccines. But the follow-up of this rule has been poor. Taking Slovenia as an example, it

is one of the least vaccinated members of the EU. The rule of the COVID-19 passport worked well in the initial stages as it increased the vaccination rate, however, once the constitutional court ruled out the COVID-19 pass for public sector workers, the execution of the rule became irregular, and inspection was no more effective. However, in Italy and France, where the rule is followed strictly, it has led to anti-vax protests.

Fifth, the issue of rights and increased awareness. Dealing with that segment of the population which decline vaccinations has become a significant policy problem for governments attempting to balance civil liberties along with preserving societal needs. For any liberal democracy, this is dangerous territory. While libertarian reasons cannot override the necessity for social solidarity in the face of a pandemic, statutory discrimination against the unvaccinated must be accompanied by more robust efforts to explain and convince the hesitant crowd. This is especially true in parts of the population where public trust is at an all-time low, and civic disengagement is already rampant. If permitted to remain for any time, a two-tier COVID-19 society will become a boon to far-right groups looking for fertile ground. Austria's Freedom Party exploits anti-vaccination protests as a form of rehabilitation after being tarnished by a corruption scandal that saw its popularity drop. In Germany, a contentious debate is raging over whether making vaccination compulsory would infringe the constitutionally protected right to "bodily integrity." It is critical to find a more cooperative path in these lines.

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EUROPE SHORT NOTES



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

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Dodik and his Threats of Separatism

By Vaishnavi Iyer

Since taking power in 2006, the President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik has vowed to organize referendums on several issues. These range from the Serb entity's territorial split to the authority of the Bosnian state judiciary, as well as one on the national holiday. His party's policy explicitly intended to call an "independence referendum" in 2018. In October, the secessionist leader announced creating a breakaway Serb army, boycotting central institutions and a withdrawal from Bosnian Serb central institutions. The pledge for the same began consequently after the passing of a law in July that banned the denial of the Srebrenica genocide of 1995. While Dodik has been threatening the bloc for the past decade, is he really serious or is this an attempt to maintain power?

What is the background?

After the war and massacre in the 1990s, led by the US, the countries signed the Dayton Accords on 14 December 1995. Owing to the same, Bosnia and Herzegovina were split into two subnational administrative units: -

Republika Srpska, inhabited mainly by the Serbs and the Bosniak and Croat-majority Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both regions have their own governments and legislatures, which are managed by state-level umbrella organizations. The country elects its leaders based on ethnic quotas and its constitution is part of the agreement.

Attempts to dramatically change this delicate equilibrium have the potential to destabilize the country as a whole. According to the International High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Christian Schmidt, such attempts are an "existential threat" to the country. The Serb leader, however, stated that he did not recognize the High Representative and remained indifferent to the prospects of division and conflict.

On 07 November, the US special envoy to the Western Balkans Gabriel Escobar reached Bosnia and Herzegovina in an effort to mitigate the tensions. The two-day visit focused on ensuring the territorial integrity of Bosnia with Escobar saying: "One of the things we want to make sure of is that Bosnia remains independent, sovereign and territorially whole." The visit followed the EU's restrained approach to Bosnia's looming crisis. Escobar emphasized on

preserving “peace and stability” in the region after meeting with the other leaders of the tripartite presidency, Sefik Dzaferovic and Zeljko Komsic. Last week, Escobar accused Dodik of inciting a fresh crisis to “protect his power and his money” in an interview with Radio Free Europe. Nonetheless, Escobar emphasized on the Western Balkan membership in the EU to play a key role in the crisis.

Attempt to unilaterally change the Dayton accords or nationalism?

For more than two decades, Dodik has been a crucial figure in Serb politics, uniting ultra-nationalist followers by downplaying the Bosnian Serb army's crimes throughout the conflict. Most controversially, he disputed that the massacre of 8,000 Bosniaks at Srebrenica during the conflict was genocide, an assertion that has put him at odds with the country's laws. While Dodik insists he does not seek conflict, he has continued to utilize divisive language, particularly in regards to the country's Muslim Bosniak majority.

Dodik's inflammatory rhetoric is similar to those of other European right-wing populists. Prior to Escobar's arrival, he met with Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban; the two leaders resonated with Dodik's position on Muslims. Talking to Escobar, Dodik claimed his conversation with Janša was centred on the EU's inadequate efforts in the region, including ambitions to bring former Yugoslav republics to the group. Dodik's rhetoric is engrained in nationalism. While this may not be his first attempt to unilaterally redefine the Accords, Dodik seems to want to put pressure on the EU and ascertain his power over the region.

Will this be non-consequential? What role do others have to play?

The present scenario offers the US an opportunity to assert its position within the bloc. Given the absence of a reaction from the EU, Dodik seems to be banking on a non-consequential redefinition of the Dayton accords. The response from Escobar has been cited by Tanja Topić, a political analyst as “the harshest and most direct we've heard from any top Western official”. However,

Escobar seems to be taking control of the EU membership of the Western Balkans after the Kosovo-Serbia border tensions. More importantly, the envoy reiterated how sanctions could heavily affect Dodik and reminded the need of the EU to arrive at a consensus on the issue.

For the EU, the recent tensions with far-right leaders do not seem to see an end. While sanctions could possibly prevent Dodik's attempt to separate, the bloc needs the approval of all 27 countries which is a struggle. The current situation is not just an internal Bosnian issue but is crucial for the EU's security and unity. The EU may pay for waiting on a timely reaction having degraded the issue as internal strife. The EU needs to reintegrate strongly against rising demagogues and begin upholding its principles firmly on the international stage.

While a decade-long provocation has declined Dodik's credibility, the situation serves as a foundational operating base for Russia to step into the Balkans. Dodik has been confrontational with the US and has stated Russian help with the recent proposal as well. Russia has secured its military representative office inside the Serbian Ministry of Defense. As a result, the Russian Humanitarian Center from Ni (Serbia) has been relocated to Republika Srpska (BiH). The ongoing infrastructure building projects in Republika Srpska to meet Russia's interests are also being stepped up. We may witness a tussle between the Western ideology that created the Dayton Accords and the influence of Russian orthodox churches to soon dominate Republika Srpska.

Finally, the international actors must consider sanctions against Dodik's demands. Dodik has been promoting the same stance for nearly a decade. It is high time the actors involved shut down attempts made by leaders to promote their own interests over international security by using tactics through their political discourses. Such attempts dampen the existing social, economic, and political fabric of already volatile countries.

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BULGARIA

Despite three elections in 2021, more instability in store?

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 10 September, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev announced that the country would be holding its parliamentary elections on 14 November. The presidential elections were also scheduled for the same date. The elections' preliminary polls declared the 'We Continue the Change' (PP) party winning 26.3 percent of the votes while the ruling GERB party followed with 21.4 percent.

One year, three elections

This is Bulgaria's third general election in 2021. The previous two elections were held in April and July. These elections resulted in fragmented parliaments that could not prove a majority or build a successful coalition. The opinion polls for the November elections, as well, suggested an inconclusive verdict that had possibilities of swinging both ways. The centre-right GERB party was disestablished via a rule-of-law crisis in April. This began the electoral processes in Bulgaria.

Three Issues

First, the emergence of a new face. The November elections saw the emergence of a new centrist anti-graft party called the We Continue the Change (PP). A party recently founded by two Harvard graduates Kiril Petkov and Asen Vassilev. PP garnered quick support owing to its tough stance on corruption, and promises to bring about transparency along with reforms in the key sectors of the country's economy.

Second, the conflict of interests. There also exists quite a lot of internal differences among the political parties in Bulgaria. Protests were seen after allegations of corruption were made in opposition to

former Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov's government. The existence of a mafia more powerful than the law and the government is also a matter of concern.

Third, crucial elections. The latest elections were crucial given the worsening COVID-19 situation in the country and the waning economy. Being the least-vaccinated country in the EU, this election is key to retrieving Bulgaria's diminishing stability. It would also aid Bulgaria in figuring out a feasible solution for its COVID-19 problem. The surging energy prices also concern the Bulgarians.

The Road Ahead for Bulgaria

First, not yet a success. Petkov's win via the initial count implies that he will be provided with a mandate to form the new government. There is no surety of creating a successful coalition, especially given the fact that the partial results pointed towards an increase in the fragmentation.

Second, Petkov's hopes. Petkov hopes for a new Bulgaria. Addressing the media, he said: "Bulgaria is starting out on a new road and we will succeed in developing the full potential of this country." A successful result to the coalition talks is the only confirmation of a win. Interviewing with the *Dnevnik* newspaper, Petkov and Vassilev declared they had been nominated by the party for the posts of prime minister and finance minister respectively. The Democratic Bulgaria party, the There is Such a People, and the Socialists are presently being considered as potential coalition partners for the PP party.

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FRANCE

France to build new nuclear energy reactors: What does this mean?

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 09 November, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that France would build new nuclear reactors. The decision aims at reducing the country's dependency on a foreign power for energy supplies, meeting the climate goals and keeping the prices under control. This relaunch of building nuclear reactors has not occurred for decades in France. Hence, one needs to look into the background of France's nuclear energy and analyze what the relaunch means for France. Macron said: "it was meant to guarantee France's energy independence, to guarantee our country's electricity supply and achieve our objectives, in particular carbon neutrality in 2050."

The decision

The construction of six new pressurized-water reactors is expected to begin shortly as the announcement of relaunch comes from Macron. According to a report by *RTE*, it recommended that construction of 14 large reactors along with small modular reactors will be the cheapest way for France to reach its net-zero emissions target by 2050. The major factor that has accelerated the decision is the growing energy crisis in Europe. Second, the delay in completion of the project Flamanville, and third, to meet the climate change goals by producing renewable energies.

France's nuclear energy production

Across the globe, Europe heavily depends on global gas and oil producers. But within Europe, France is the most nuclear-dependent country with 56 operational reactors generating 70 percent of electricity from nuclear energy. Assessing its need, in 2007 it began a new third-generation European Pressurised Reactor (EPR), the world's largest nuclear reactor, project called Flamanville in Normandy. This project has become a setback due to technical and safety problems which have led to massive delays and excess cost. The French government had decided not to launch any

new nuclear projects until the completion of the reactor in Flamanville.

The former French President Francois Hollande had a different agenda in dealing with the share of nuclear energy in electricity generation. The target was to bring the 75 percent of power production to 50 percent and to shut down the oldest nuclear power plant (Fessenheim) by May 2017. Later the French Energy Transition for Green Growth Law that was adopted in 2015 called for the closing of older reactors only to open space for installing new reactors.

What does this relaunch mean?

First, the presidential polls. Macron's status of the presidency will be decided only after his re-elections in the upcoming presidential polls in April. Giving a solution to France's most urgent energy problem can upscale his reputation to win the elections. Macron had pledged to reduce the nuclear contribution to France's energy sector to 50 percent from 75 percent by 2035. With this going out of reach, showcasing nuclear energy as a probable solution shall be a bonus point.

Second, it has stirred debate in the region. The government has been criticized for opting for new nuclear energy construction with an existing one already in the backlog. While the opposition parties have condemned the announcement, on the other side the EPF has appreciated the move as it had proposed to build six new reactors.

Third, the climate question. Macron announced the relaunch of nuclear reactors at the end of COP26 meaning France was opting for nuclear energy for cleaner and renewable energies as a promise to meet its climate change goals. Nuclear energy which is relatively expensive emits lower than coal, oil and gas. However, the radioactive waste it produces takes tens of thousands of years to deplete. Hence, the question remains whether climate-friendly nuclear energy production is really climate-friendly or not.

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NORTH MACEDONIA

Four reasons why the PM stepped down after a local election

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 31 October, the Prime Minister of North Macedonia Zoran Zaev resigned early after the defeat of his Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) in the local elections. He stated: "I take responsibility for these developments. I resign from the post of prime minister and party president." In the local elections, the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE won 80 municipalities while SDSM got only 20. Many people refrained from voting as there was no confidence in either of the candidates. There are multiple factors that affected the SDSM's leader in the recent elections, since he had defeated the opposition by a huge margin in 2014.

First, the top officials' exits. Since 2013, members of SDSM have been exiting the party given Zaev's leadership and due to internal clashes. It is said that the intra-party division and the failure of the leader to balance the interests has led to the exit of essential party members.

Second, the EU membership. Since 2017, Zaev's efforts to lead the government towards achieving NATO and EU membership helped resolve Greece's problem, making it the 30th member of NATO. However, due to French and Bulgarian rejection, the membership of North Macedonia to the EU was denied. At the same time, the French vetoed, highlighting the issues in economic policy, human rights, anti-corruption measures, and the rule of law. The Bulgarians vetoed North Macedonia due to its discrimination against ethnic Bulgarians.

Third, the handling of the economy and COVID-19. According to the World Bank, the projected growth rate of North Macedonia is set to rebound faster than expected but in

terms of youth employment and economic transformation, it lags way behind.

Fourth, the role of SDSM mayors. The SDSM mayors did not improve social infrastructure, traffic management, water supplies, and sewage treatment. As a result, the party slowly lost its goodwill from its voters, risking the region's entry into a political crisis.

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PORTUGAL

The Looming Political Crisis

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 04 November, Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa announced the decision to conduct snap elections on 30 January 2022. Over a televised broadcast, de Sousa said: "In moments like this, we need a solution without fear and without making a drama... This is the only way for the Portuguese people to choose what they want in the coming years."

What is the background?

First, the budget refusal. The call for snap elections followed the failure of the 2022 budget proposal put forth by Prime Minister Antonio Costa's government. Since Portugal's transition into a democracy in 1974, such an event has not occurred. The budget, crucial in Portugal's pandemic recovery efforts, was rejected on 27 October by a rare coming together of the Communist Party (PCP) and the larger Left Bloc (BE). According to analysts, the 2022 draft budget was termed the 'most left-wing in years' as it involved free creches, fiscal progress, and stronger public services. However, the PCP and BE were unsatisfied with Costa ignoring their demands to protect workers, improve social security, and increase investment in health services.

Second, the looming political instability. Since 2015, Costa's Socialist Party (PS) has

been in power despite lacking a majority in the parliament. Nonetheless, Portugal has witnessed a relatively stable political scenario under Costa and his left-wing coalition. The snap elections are set to impact this sensitive equilibrium. The country is still recovering from the pandemic – both economically and in terms of its health system. As Costa stated: "the last thing Portugal needs, and the Portuguese deserve, is a political crisis at this moment." The first country to get the EU's Resilience and Recovery fund, Portugal expects to inject EUR 45 billion into its economy. However, the potential political instability is set to be a hindrance to this recovery.

Third, the fragmented internal politics. Since 2005, Portugal has not seen a single party win with an absolute majority. The ability to attain an obvious victory seems unrealistic given the increasing number of parties that point to more chaos. De Sousa had attempted to aid the parties in reaching a quicker consensus on the budget by warning them of dissolving the government if the draft failed. Despite this, the PCP joined hands with the larger BE to reject the proposal. Prior to this, the former partners held days of negotiations wherein they accused each other of blackmail and dishonesty while pointing out how the Portuguese poor had been left to fend for themselves.

Fourth, the timing of elections. The elections have been announced two years ahead of schedule and will see 230 lawmakers being elected to parliament. President de Sousa appears to have considered the rifts within political parties while deciding on a date for the elections. Scheduled for the end of January, sufficient time is provided for parties to change leadership via elections.

What does this mean?

First, the ignorance to alternatives. Although de Sousa consulted with the parties and his Council of State before making the announcement, he seems to have overlooked the alternatives. According to Lisbon University's Prof. Francisco Pereira Coutinho, the President could have suggested forming a new government or even opted for a technocrat-led government,

as in Italy, instead of dissolving the parliament and snap elections. The present decision will hamper the economic recovery since a new state budget proposal is not expected until April 2022.

Second, the expected outcome. PS is predicted to gain in the elections, although it would not receive a parliamentary majority. The hard-right Chega party is considered to be the only beneficiary of the elections, given its clear chances of a victory. However, the party is considered too dangerous a coalition partner. As Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva said: "This election ... will be a choice between the progressive and pro-European center and the center left on the one hand and, on the other, an unstable, divided and fragmented right which does not exclude reaching out to the far right."

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SPAIN

Sanchez versus the Spanish Sex Industry

By Joeana Cera Matthews

During his election campaign, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez had promised to eliminate the country's EUR 3.7 billion sex

industry claiming that the act of “prostitution enslaves women in our country.” However, this is a task easier said than done.

What is the Issue?

Spain’s sex industry is the largest in Europe and the third-largest in the world. The country also holds the title of being the ‘biggest consumer of prostitution’ in Europe.

According to a UN report, 39 percent of Spanish men have paid for sex in their lifetime, a statistic that outranks other European countries. These facts along with the questionable work conditions and mistreatment suffered by around 300,000 women who are employed in the industry, led to the political decision to eliminate the industry.

Legal Provisions

However, Spain is not devoid of laws that criminalize prostitution and uphold the rights of women. In 1995, legislation criminalizing prostitution was relaxed to make regulation of the sex trade easier. Following this, the industry saw a boom by drawing a major part of the customs from over the French border where the rules regarding the same are more stringent. Spain has outlawed pimping and according to a 2015 law, soliciting sex from vehicles is a sanctionable offense although such penalties are seldom applied. In July 2021, the Spanish parliament approved a bill that termed the absence of explicit consent in sexual acts as ‘rape’. The ‘Draft Organic Law for Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedoms’ bill, also called the ‘only yes is yes’ law includes measures on persecuting the pimp industry, as well.

The Hurdles faced by Sanchez

First, the economic factor. In 2016, the UN estimated the Spanish sex industry worth EUR 3.7 billion. The banning of a EUR 3.7 billion industry will definitely affect the larger economic standing of Spain. The revenue built and provided by the industry will not be easy to replace once it is eliminated.

Second, a matter of keeping one’s promises. Sanchez has been a poster boy for feminism and his pledge to abolish prostitution has been upheld right from his campaigning

days. Calls to reform the existing prostitution laws are numerous due to the increasing number of foreign women who are being trafficked into the trade. According to a National Police estimate: “More than 80 percent of prostituted women in Spain do so forcibly after being deceived in their country of origin by criminal groups that engage in human trafficking.”

Third, the consequences of a ban. As Secretary-General of the Sex Workers’ Organization (OTRAS) Concha Borrell stated: “When something is prohibited, mafias emerge.” The increased tendency to make money out of something that is considered illegal is extreme. This will further marginalize an industry that already works in the underground. Due to this, many consider the ban to be a non-viable option.

Plausible Solutions

First, the suggested proposal. The draft proposal forwarded by Sanchez’s government is an “all-encompassing law for the abolition of prostitution.” The parliament submission of the same is expected to occur before the end of the current legislature, implying by 2023. The party is yet to release further details regarding the legislation; however, it is predicted to involve a new fine system that would penalize those who pay for sex while imposing heavier sanctions on procurers and brothel owners.

Second, changing the immigration laws. Since the issue of trafficking is part of the larger problem, some sectors have suggested tightening immigration laws in order to reduce or wholly eliminate the human trafficking crisis. This would also contribute to an ‘effective reformation’ to the sex industry. However, this does not seem to be a favoured suggestion by Sanchez’s Socialist Workers’ Party.

Third, other solutions. Further punishment for those involved in the industry seems to be the third category of suggestions. All forms of pimping would be penalized and anyone demanding paid sex would be ‘tackled with severity’.

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REGIONAL

Ukraine: Russia's military mobilisation raise concerns

By Vaishnavi Iyer

On 23 November, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied rumours that Russia was planning an incursion after NATO accused Moscow of deploying troops near Ukraine's borders. His remarks came a day after the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated the US' concern about the Russian army's movement and attitude towards Ukraine. He added that the US was aware of the Russian excuse of citing fictitious aggression from Ukraine or other nations to cover Russian plans. Russia, again, denied allegations stating that they were being accused of unprecedented military action in Ukraine after the US withdrew from Afghanistan. "This hysteria is being intentionally whipped up," said Peskov. He demanded NATO to stop arming Ukraine, facilitating a disaster and a more significant problem for Europe.

On 24 November, US President Joe Biden pledged support for Ukraine, recalling the "deliberate" Stalinist famine that killed millions in Ukraine in the 1930s. He added: "The United States also reaffirms our commitment to the people of Ukraine today and our unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine." The US has demonstrated support in the Black Sea with navy manoeuvres and the delivery of patrol boats to the Ukrainian navy, enraging Russia. The Kremlin had previously accused the US of conducting nuclear bombing drills too close to its border. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu demanded strengthening the Russian

military, citing "increasing activities of NATO countries along Russia's borders."

On 25 November, Ukraine performed more military exercises along its borders, warning Russia of dire repercussions if it invaded. After a "special operation" at its border with Belarus, the Ukrainian military conducted tank drills in the eastern Donetsk area. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated that predicting what Russia planned was difficult but that Ukraine was doing everything to discourage Russia. He also warned that any aggression from the Russian side would result in an economic and political crisis, adding: "Moscow must clearly understand what political, economic and human losses it will suffer in case of a new phase of aggression. So, it's better not to do it."

With Russian forces threatening Ukraine and the US intelligence fearing an occupation, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal requested NATO to deploy warships in the Black Sea and increase reconnaissance flights around Russia's borders. Shmyhal said Ukraine concurred with the US intelligence assessments of increased Russian presence around Ukraine, in addition to the Belarus-Ukraine border backed by Lukashenko. According to the analysis, Russian President Vladimir Putin may aim to grab a sizeable share of Ukrainian territory to "build a land bridge between Russia and Crimea". Russian military efforts are associated with attempts to destabilize the EU and NATO members. The destabilization efforts are assumed to be aimed at taking advantage of a rise in global natural gas prices by limiting supply, causing concern in some European countries about not having enough fuel for the winter; adding to the expensive gas bills.

The Russian threats intend to disrupt Ukraine's measures to enhance its economic, political and security ties with the EU and NATO. The unclear nature of Russia's military mobilization has impeded NATO and Ukraine's reaction to the crisis. Russia has previously conducted a similar mobilization effort before Putin's run-up to the annual address. As tensions rose, the Russian military was withdrawn

immediately after the address with zero casualties. Shmyhal claimed that Russia was continually employing hybrid methods against Ukraine and the West, such as cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. As a consequence, he believes NATO countries should increase their military training missions in Ukraine.

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BREXIT

The UK-France fishing rights row

By Vaishnavi Iyer

A dispute has developed between the UK and France concerning post-Brexit fishing rights, with France warning that if the dispute remains unaddressed, British boats will be barred from docking. These fishing rights were, in fact, one of the principal issues in the EU-UK post-Brexit negotiations late last year. 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. Jersey was expected to continue working "closely" with the French, the UK, and the European Commission 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".

In an attempt to de-escalate the row, Jersey awarded an additional 49 licenses to French

vessels. However, at the G20 summit, French President Emmanuel Macron declared that Britain had to capitulate first or face "retaliation". However, on 01 November, Macron withdrew his threat to block UK exports and ban fisheries. Discussions resumed after he lifted threats and insisted on further communication to resolve the problem. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesperson indicated that British retaliation would be triggered through a "dispute mechanism". The European Commission met with officials from the UK, Jersey, and France to seek an agreement on the dispute. The Jersey Fishermen's Association (JFA) demanded a six-week ban on dredging and trawling and closing the whelk and scallop fisheries to French boats. On 04 November, the UK's Brexit secretary David Frost met the Secretary of State for European Affairs Clément Beaune in Paris to discuss the resolution of the crisis.

Beaune stated: "...in the next eight days or so, we will announce response measures, retaliation measures, if necessary, national or European, if we do not have concrete British signals on the issue of licences." France furthered its threat by warning to cut electricity supplies to Jersey and extend retaliation to the financial and research sectors.

What is the row about?

After becoming an "independent coast state" in 2020, Britain began demanding access to shared fishing grounds with the EU in a greater capacity. The bloc has, however, resisted the request. Brexit negotiations before January 2021 overlooked fishing rights ascertaining "other aspects of trade are simply much more important for the economies of both the UK and the EU".

The dispute was furthered by the French accusation of Britain granting lesser fishing licenses than stated. French Maritime Minister Annick Girardin tweeted: "The figure of 98 percent of licenses granted by the UK to Europeans is wrong. Only 90.3 percent were. Obviously, the missing 10 percent are for the French." The post-Brexit agreement provided for European fishermen to continue operating in British waters

provided they proved they were "fishing there before". Disputed fishing zones exist between the six to 12 miles off the Channel Islands and the British Coast. London and Jersey have granted 200 licenses, with the French demanding 44 more. "This is not a French problem... It is a European problem," Beaune said. France is mobilizing support from its European partners, especially Belgium and Ireland, who are concerned over the same issue.

France insists that all provisions within the Trade and Cooperation Agreement should ideally be met. Article 497 of the agreement states the party must communicate in "sufficient time", the list of vessels that wish to obtain authorizations and that the other party would issue authorizations to fish. However, France contests the UK's requirement of "proof of geolocation for vessels under 12 meters" stating that the provisions do not show up under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

What is the future?

France ascertains that the fleets seeking permission are small-scale fishing boats dependent on maritime zones. The fleets offer no possibility of any breaches, and the lack of permissions heavily affects their socio-economic future. Both countries met to reach a compromise with the British government spokesperson stating that discussions covered difficulties from the past agreements between the EU and the UK. They are said to have communicated their "positions and concerns". Further talks are set to take place next week. It seems that both the UK and France are unlikely to attain an early compromise given the AUKUS concerns. Moreover, Britain has stated that the retaliation would not be direct, but through other measures, in case the UK has to secede to French demands.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

UN COP26 Climate Summit 2021: What to expect?

By Padmashree Anandhan

The climate summit COP26 is scheduled to take place from 31 October to 12 November 2021 in Glasgow. Leaders of world countries will meet to negotiate on action to be taken to fight climate change and reach agreements that largely impact climate. According to the president of COP26: "It must be the forum where you put the world on track to deliver on climate. And that is down to leaders. It is leaders who made a promise for the world in Paris six years ago, and it is leaders that must honour it. Responsibility rests with each and every country, and we must all play our part because, on climate, the world will succeed or fail as one."

Purpose of COP26

The focus areas of COP26 range from reducing net emissions, ending usage of coal, reducing methane emissions, and most importantly formulating an agreement to help developing countries to mitigate climate change.

First, net-zero gas emissions. To achieve a net-zero means ending the processes that emit greenhouse gases like the burning of fossil fuels for energy needs. This refers to the removal of carbon from the atmosphere. If the element of carbon is removed from the atmosphere, then the remaining emissions are capable of being absorbed by the natural forests which work like "carbon sinks".

Second, ending usage of coal. The British Prime Minister Boris Johnson who is to host the COP26 has asked developed countries to stop using coal by the end of 2030 and for other countries to end the same by 2040. Earlier, when the same was insisted in the G7, it failed in terms of agreeing on a date to stop the usage. China and India, however, have resisted committing to the elimination of coal due to the energy crisis.

Third, reducing methane emissions. According to the UNEP Emission Gap Report 2021, methane emissions were critical to

humans and required quick climate action. When compared to the effect of carbon dioxide, methane was 80 times capable of increasing the earth's temperatures, although its lifespan is only 12 years. The report stated that this goal can be met via the usage of oil and gas in agriculture, and waste sectors at low or zero cost. Hence, if countries in COP26 come together to cut down methane emissions by at least 30 percent by 2030, it shall have a quicker impact on global warming.

Fourth, an agreement to finance developing countries to fight climate change. During the COP15 held in 2009, the developed countries promised that by 2020 it would give USD 100 billion to the poor and developing countries to deal with the effects of climate change via reduction of emissions. This now has taken centre stage as the developed nations are now being pushed to fulfill their promise. Developing nations that are not the large contributors to carbon emissions, face the effects due to the actions of developed nations. Therefore, to acclimatize they have demanded USD 100 billion each year to counter the deteriorating climate temperatures.

The question of outcome

With the above goals set for the COP26 climate summit, getting all the countries to commit to an agreement will be the challenge; however, the more overwhelming or seemingly ambitious attempt is the timeline promised for achieving the said goals. Time is essential when it comes to climate change as the clock ticks and actions not taken will only lead to the destruction of human life. In conclusion, COP26 is expected to push the developed countries one step forward towards climate action.

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COVID-19

Austria: The Emergence of Anti-lockdown Protests

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 19 November, Austria became the first country in western Europe to declare a full lockdown due to the surge in the COVID-19 cases. Along with the full lockdown measures, it has mandated that the entire Austrian population be vaccinated from 01 February 2022. These decisions have triggered anti-trust protests against the state by the people since the declarations made affect individual freedoms. More than tens of thousands of people gathered in Vienna carrying signboards with slogans saying "no to vaccination," "enough is enough," and "down with the fascist dictatorship". The reason behind the unrest is due to three reasons. One, scepticism amongst the Austrians to take vaccines. Two, the encouragement of the same cause by the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) which is the third-biggest force in Parliament. Three, the failure of leaders to take precautions before declaring stricter restrictions.

Developments in Protests

The demonstrations gained traction as many people, families, and far-right groups joined, increasing the crowd to 40,000. Protestors used drums and rang cowbells as a way to convey their disappointment on the declared COVID-19 restrictions. Later, the protests escalated when skirmishes broke between the police officers and protestors. According to one of the police officers: "At least five people were arrested, and several others were written up for violations involving failure to wear masks, or for displaying stars like those the Nazis forced Jews to wear during the Holocaust."

Earlier this week, Austria began with strict restrictions for its unvaccinated population, but declaring the same for the entire population has spread dissent. The opposition party's (FPÖ) leader Herbert Kickl stated: "As of today, Austria is a dictatorship." Recent surveys have reported that vaccination is turning to be the "most divisive" issue in Austrian society and the fear of further restrictions will lead to widening of this gap.

Protests in other parts of Europe

A series of protests have been witnessed all across Europe. Starting with the Netherlands, the government declared a three-week partial lockdown. Protests erupted with Rotterdam witnessing a violent turn to the same. Officials declared an emergency in the city and many have been said to be arrested and injured including police officers from the clashes. In Brussels, protests were held by those who oppose the COVID-19 passes as it restrains them from entering social spaces such as restaurants and bars. They were dealt with tear gas and water cannons by the police. The COVID-19 restrictions in Belgium include tightening of mask-wearing, working from home for four days a week till mid-December 2021, and mandatory vaccinations for health workers.

What does this mean?

First, with people disobeying the restrictions and marching against vaccination, controlling the chain of COVID-19 infections will be a task for both the police department and the government.

Second, the protests give scope for more people who are in dilemma of whether or not to get vaccinated since many of the protestors are anti-vaxxers. Therefore, it creates a conflict situation in the region.

Third, the reputation of the present government will take a toll as it will face criticism for not handling the COVID-19 situation with the right measures.

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MIGRATION

The English Channel migrant disaster

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 27 November, a statement released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) read: “the agency was deeply shocked and saddened by the

unprecedented tragedy that unfolded in the English Channel. In the absence of safer alternatives, people will continue to resort to such perilous journeys, and their desperation and vulnerabilities will continue to be preyed upon and exploited by ruthless smugglers.”

On 24 November, a dinghy containing more than 30 migrants who were trying to cross the English Channel to enter the UK drowned in the beach of Calais located in northern France. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron got into a blame game accusing each other of their irresponsible behaviour. To resolve the developed tensions between both countries, Macron arranged a meeting with the UK Home Secretary Priti Patel, however, the latter denied the Calais meeting. This worsened the already tense relations. According to Macron, France expects the UK to cooperate fully, and abstain from instrumentalizing a tragic situation for political purposes.

Background to the English Channel Crossings

The number of migrants who crossed the Channel has scaled from 1,835 in 2020 to 26,560 in 2021. The main reason behind the increase is said to be the treatment of migrants in France. The government has evacuated migrant residing camps to allocate shelter but has failed to take any step in preventing the migrants from crossing the Channel. This has continued to be a problem for the UK despite its recommendation to France to install sensors and other technology that spots or deters migrants when they touch the shoreline.

From the migrants’ point of view, their default choice to settle has been the UK. For migrants coming from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Albania, or any of the North African countries, the UK is the obvious choice of destination. According to the International Health Journal survey taken from 402 migrants, 82 percent opted to settle in the UK. Apart from seeking better living conditions or escaping the hostile situation, there are larger reasons for the migrants to migrate. One, the flexible application process for asylum seekers. Two, recognition and benefits for refugees to

connect back to their historical family links and third, the lesser chance of being sent back to their home country. Once migrants cross the Channel and enter the UK, they are eligible to claim asylum, post which they have to prove the condition of non-return. At that point, they will be granted refugee status that lasts for five years and later this becomes the base for them to settle in the UK.

What does this mean?

First, absence of accountability in leaders. Both the leaders of the UK and France have not taken a strong stance to mitigate the migrant crisis. Instead, they only blamed each other for taking steps and missed to consider the humanitarian aspect of the migrants.

Second, tarnish of the EU's reputation. The EU has failed to tackle the issue of migration in the region. On one hand, while Poland-Belarus causes ruckus, the English Channel migrant crisis has blown the reputation of the regional administration at the international forum.

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UK and France sign agreement to prevent migration

By Vaishnavi Iyer

On 14 November, around 1,185 migrants arrived in the UK, crossing the English Channel in boats and kayaks. The arrival marked the highest single-day crossing record. The Home Office termed the new number crossings "unacceptable". Meanwhile, Whitehall sources accused France of "losing control of the situation".

On 15 November, France retaliated against British comments on migration, with French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin stating: "we don't have any lessons to take from the British." He further said, despite the British government's desire to blame the French, the French government was effectively managing the migrant issue in Calais and Dunkirk. On 16 November, France cleared the Dunkirk camps, evacuating 1,500 migrants and 35 people smugglers. The French police said that: "663 people had already been transported on 23 buses to a shelter." The actions have been described by French officials as an attempt to "shelter" refugees over the winter months.

France is expected to take the EU presidency next year. Politically, the issue of migrants would be important for French President Emmanuel Macron since far-right conservative parties would prefer to debate the issue during elections. Given the rising popularity of the opposition's Eric Zemmour, the issue of managing migration is crucial for French politics. With around 22,000 migrant crossings in the English Channel this year, Macron states: "We have the British, who oscillate between partnership and provocation. We need to further strengthen collaboration." He mentioned that the system must be addressed efficiently in case of illegal migrations.

The British response has been to blatantly blame France for mismanaging the migrant situation. The UK Home Secretary Priti Patel made aggressive remarks at the French incompetence in controlling the migrants at the border. She said: "I think it's fair to say they are overwhelmed," and that EU open borders were to blame for the "mass migration crisis" in the UK. She added the country's possible decline in finance allocated to maintain and provide for migrants. The French government assured Patel of employing enhanced technology at the northern beaches to make migration unviable. Darmanin, however, highlighted a change in data privacy and protection laws that would enable the government to monitor borders with drones and other surveillance systems. The law is also expected to facilitate a driving plate

recognition system to detect unloading boats for migrants.

Issues at large

First the number and nature of daily crossings. Over this year, nearly 23,000 people have reached the UK via France. Around 98 percent of migrants reaching the UK apply for asylum. The UK government has introduced a plan for immigration to dissolve criminal gangs that enable cross-channel migration. It has firmly maintained that migration journeys would soon be made unviable.

Second, a humanitarian perspective. As the countries push back against the migrants, they remain stranded between borders facing European winters, sexual abuse, and health hazards. The head of the Immigration Service Union in the UK mentioned that migrants slept on concrete floors, and more than 490 migrants shared two portable toilets for 24 hours. The UK regularly employs patrol dogs and carbon dioxide systems to detect the breathing of migrants in hiding. Most practices followed to restrict migrations are harsh and discriminatory.

In perspective

First, a European pattern. The EU has clarified for years that it will not allow migrants or refugees to cross its borders. This allows countries on the perimeter the ability to utilize refugees as "pawns". The EU has made concessions to Libya, Sudan, and Turkey to prevent refugees from entering Europe. This often entails grave human rights violations against refugees in order to deter them. The system broke this year.

Second, prevention of border entry. International law recognizes the right to seek asylum and the provision of an asylum option. The EU has made the journey more inaccessible, curtailing rescue and search operations and humanitarian aid.

Third, the difference with Belarus. Refugee numbers have lowered by two-thirds since 2015. However, the global crisis still remains. The EU has merely succeeded in transferring the crisis to poorer and more autocratic countries on its perimeter, thereby absolving itself of legal

responsibility and the burden of having to confront the significant human cost of its policies. The crisis has been exploited by dictators and right-wing parties that have made use of the situation to promote their anti-establishment and anti-immigration ideologies.

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Migration: EU's sanctions on Belarus airlines

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 17 November, the EU announced sanctions on airlines that were involved in the Poland-Belarus border crisis. After this announcement, various airlines along with aviation authorities such as the Lebanese Transport Ministry took a decision to allow only Belarusians and foreign citizens with permanent resident permits to fly into Belarus.

What happened?

Since July 2021, more than 600 planes from various Middle Eastern states have landed in Minsk. It is observed that most of the flights were operated by Belavia, a Belarusian state airline. Upon the rising concerns of the migrant crisis, the European Commission came up with a plan to levy strict sanctions on airlines that board migrants into the EU. The Commission carried out a round of negotiations with all the airlines including Fly Dubai, Turkish Airlines, Royal Air Maroc, Air Arabiya, Emirates, Qatar Airways, Etihad, MEA, Oman Air, Iraqi Airways, and Egypt Air. Later the Vice President of the European Commission Margaritis Schinas and European Transport Commissioner Adina

Velean had close communication with international aviation authorities such as IAT or the Arab Air Carriers. The negotiations led to a major number of airlines accepting the condition to halt the sale of one-way tickets to migrants travelling from the Middle East to Belarus or to cancel all the flights to Belarus. Turkish Airlines recently announced to stop flying passengers from Iraq, Syria, or Yemen to Belarus. A Syrian airline called Cham Wings was suspected to have directly flown people from Syria to Minsk under “expedited express entry visas” by the Belarusian embassy. This airline has also called in for the cancellation of flights.

According to the experts, the reason behind such transfer of people into Minsk by airlines were due to the covid driven financial difficulties and secondly, they simply neglected to get its business running.

In the background: Sanctions by the EU
In the round of negotiations, the EU threatened the airlines stating the overflight and landing rights will be withdrawn from those who indulge in transporting migrants. For the airlines, it is not only about its landing rights but risks losing the entire European aviation market. Another threat is the air transport agreements; these agreements regulate the way air traffic is organized between countries. In case of any breach of this agreement, it will result in the EU terminating the deal and creating a bad impact on the airlines of all countries. So far, the EU has closed its airspace and cancelled its air transport agreement with Belarus. It also implies that EU aircrafts will not cross the Belarusian airspace on long-distance flights. This means the regime in Minsk will not be able to collect the overflight fee. Apart from this, the EU has also imposed sanctions on tourism companies and others responsible for helping the refugees to cross the borders of the EU. With the regressive steps of cutting down the airlines, barring Minsk from collecting overflight fees and sanctions on tourism companies, the EU’s plan to bring Belarus-instigated migrant crisis under control seems to be taking shape.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Profile of the Digital Markets Act

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 25 November, the European ministers passed two important laws called the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Digital Services Act (DSA) during the competitiveness council meeting. These laws would help govern the digital competition and enable content moderation. The law comes into practice after exposure to detrimental exercises and anti-competitive exercises by the global big tech companies.

Who does the DMA target?

The DMA aims for the creation of a level-playing field for the EU businesses through regulating the big tech firms. This will establish a competitive and fair digital sector with a long-term agenda to bring innovation, high quality digital products, services and fair prices in the digital sector. The prime aim of this law is to target the large online platforms known as “gatekeepers” who intend to control the platform services from marketplace, app stores and online search engines. This includes Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Apple and Booking.com, and in future Zalando, Alibaba will also be considered.

The eight categories of core platform services the DMA targets are social media network, search engines, video platforms, communication services, intermediation services, cloud computing services, operating systems and advertising networks. Tech companies which fall under these will be subject to the regulation; the European commission terms them the “gatekeepers” since they control data flow from the entry point of the companies to the end point of users or consumers. Other conditions for companies to be categorized as gatekeepers include having sustained their company in the EU for three years, having 45 million monthly users, a global turnover of USD 7.9 billion or more and holding operations in three out of 27 EU member states.

Response of other countries

The French government expressed its confidence in coordinating with the EU nations by finding a common ground. According to France's Digital Secretary Cédric O: "There still work to do in terms of refining the names of the platforms, however there is a form of consensus for identifying the real gatekeepers." Outside the EU, the US government is not supportive of the laws since they feel the legislations are directed only towards its companies.

Shortfalls

First, the regulations provide the framework on who falls under the category of a gatekeeper and how they will be monitored under the act. But it fails to reserve the right to investigate those firms which do not fall under the gatekeeper group. This creates a void on deciding whether certain firms will be investigated or not for the specific service they offer.

Second, when it comes to monitoring the tech companies or the gatekeepers involved in digital competition and content moderation, the EU lacks in terms of resources in monitoring and inspecting the act.

Third, the members of the European Parliament have suggested forming a "European High-Level Group of Digital Regulators" to ensure a link between the Commission and the member states in order to implement decisions. Delegating the duties and regulations are important for the EU but any law that is connected with digital advancement must also have a rapid-fire committee to instantly modify the rules of law with the changing nature of the tech companies and their operations.

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INTERNATIONAL

Paris holds conference to facilitate Libyan elections

By Vaishnavi Iyer

On 12 November, Libyan officials pledged to hold presidential elections on December 24 at a major international summit in Paris, putting an end to months of uncertainty. Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, who intends to run for president, avoided committing to the December election by claiming the date would be determined by the electoral commission, despite current Libyan President Mohamed Menfi's unequivocal commitment to the date.

The conference's final report stressed: "We reiterate our commitment to the success of the Libyan political process ... and to the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021." However, whether or not the ballot will be held is to be seen. Major difficulties in the country's electoral and legal system and security issues still exist which could disrupt the process.

The summit was organized by French President Emmanuel Macron and co-chaired by the Libyan government, making it the first of its kind. Delegations present included Germany's Angela Merkel, Italy's Mario Draghi, and the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. In addition to Libya's African and European neighbours, the US Vice President Kamala Harris, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal were in attendance. Around 30 countries were present for the conference on Libya's electoral future. Macron gladly expressed gratitude to his European partners at the closing press conference. He said: "In this unprecedented format, and I thank Angela Merkel and Mario Draghi who co-chaired this conference with me, we showed a European will that is perfectly aligned and coordinated that allows us to go forward together on this issue." Despite persisting differences, France, Germany and Italy showed greater unity as compared to past summits. Both Draghi and Macron put on a cohesive stance, claiming that their

countries' positions were considerably closer than they had been a few years before.

What was the outcome?

Attending members of the conference firmly stated the use of sanctions against any of the parties would disrupt the elections. Guterres stated: "any party that deliberately undermines or sabotages peace must be held accountable."

The world powers expressed their desire for an "inclusive" election, which meant that all prospective candidates, including polarizing characters, as well as serving authorities, were allowed to run for elections. At the conclusion of the summit, Macron stated that eastern armies' pledge to remove 300 foreign mercenaries through a mechanism agreed upon by the eastern and western sides must be reinforced by Russia and Turkey withdrawing fighters as well. Turkey expressed reservations about the terminology used in the final announcement on the withdrawal of foreign forces. It has long emphasized the distinction between its troops in Libya who were invited by an UN-recognized administration and those who were brought in by other forces. Despite US assertions, Russia denies any ties to the Kremlin-linked militia Wagner Group, which has a foothold in Libya.

Algerian response

The summit held on Algeria's neighbour Libya's electoral future incited a diplomatic response. As opposed to the ongoing French-Algerian rift, Macron had invited Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. Algeria initially declined the invite. Macron's office expressed the "greatest respect" for Algeria and regretted the misunderstandings in previous communication. Owing to the same, Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra confirmed Algerian officials would attend the summit. He added that the statement from "Macron's office contained reasonable ideas that respect Algeria, its history, past and present, and respect Algeria's sovereignty". This indicates a potential softening in the French-Algerian issue.

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France and Australia: Continuing AUKUS echo

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 01 November, French President Emmanuel Macron accused Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison of purposefully deceiving France over the AUKUS pact with the US and Britain. Recent strife has begun between the two due to the leak of a text message from President Macron. Earlier, Australia which had a contract with France to buy the latter's diesel-electric submarines, called off the deal, creating tensions between the two. Morrison denied this, saying: "he had explained to the French president that conventional submarines would no longer meet Australia's needs." In addition, the Australian Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce stated: "It was a contract, contracts have terms and conditions, and one of those terms and conditions and propositions is that you might get out of the contract." On the other hand, US President Joe Biden stated that "the handling of the new pact had been clumsy", adding that he had thought "France had been informed of the contract cancellation before the pact was announced".

A contract with Australia to supply 12 conventionally powered submarines was a massive deal worth USD 90 billion for France. Calling off the deal meant a hit on the latter's finances and its economy. While the contract was blown out for France, Australia striking a similar deal with the US and the UK for more advanced technology meant a backlash to its diplomatic relations. Now that Australia has rejected the contract with the French for the conventional diesel-powered submarines, the percentage of states interested in the technology will reduce. This implies a loss of market for the French-produced submarines.

The question of whether France has a possibility of abandoning the submarine deal with Australia or signing another deal with AUKUS members is still uncertain as the tensions build. Recently at the Paris G20 summit, Morrison said that the steps to stabilize the relations have already started. This was a reference to the Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne meeting the French ambassador to Australia Jean-Pierre Thebault, in an attempt to initiate calming of relations. These efforts were said to have been dented by senior members of the government who played down the significance of Australia's decision. As far as France is considered, it strives for an alternative deal or action to fix the rift with the Australian government, but it will remain uncertain until there are some actual developments or exchanges taking place between the states.

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The US imposes further sanctions on a Russian shell company: Four reasons why

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 22 November, the US Department of State imposed sanctions on two additional vessels and a Russian-linked entity called Transadria Ltd in opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The sanctions will be levied under Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019 (PEESA) on the Russian shell company, and its vessel, the Marlin, will be classified as blocked property. According to the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken: "... today's report is in line with the United States' continuing opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and the US Government's continued compliance with PEESA. With today's action, the Administration has now sanctioned eight persons and identified 17 of their vessels as blocked property pursuant to PEESA in connection with Nord Stream 2."

What are the reasons behind the growing US opposition

First, the Ukraine issue. Ukraine was the most beneficial due to the Russian gas transit to Europe since the pipeline through Ukraine transported natural gas from Russia to Germany and central Europe; however, with the activation of Nord Stream 2 this route will no longer be needed. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline will directly transfer the gas to Germany and then the rest of Europe implying huge revenue losses for Ukraine. Meanwhile, the US made a deal to help Ukraine mitigate the losses along with Germany which has also agreed to invest in Ukraine to move towards cleaner energy. Ukraine has also been promised by Germany for a gas transit agreement with Moscow. Although the Moscow deal will be in place till 2024, it is uncertain as tensions exist between Russia and Ukraine since the Crimean annexation.

Second, the Freedom Gas. The US' plans to create a new route for its gas supplies to Europe is out of question now given the latter's engagement with Russia. If it has to make a difference, it must sanction the Swiss-based company rather than block its vessels. This is because the construction of the pipeline has been completed, and instead of charging its vessels, it will be better to sanction the company. In that way, Russia can be kept under check and can prevent the energy industry of the EU from getting exploited.

Third, reducing Russian involvement in the region. As part of its building back transatlantic relations, the US has been closely taking steps towards the EU in smoothening bilateral relations. Russia partnering with the EU for a huge gas pipeline implies a direct power threat to the US. It will not wish to lose its influence in the region or allow any other to cause trouble in exercising its relations.

Fourth, the Baltic States and Romania. Another primary reason is that many individual states within the EU, such as Poland, Slovakia, and other eastern European states, fear the growing

dependency and the impact Russia can cause if it decides to manipulate its power over gas supplies. This might be a huge threat to the energy sector of Europe. Given that this fear forwards US interests in the region, the US also stands in line with these states.

Germany's Stance

Like many European governments, Germany also sees this pipeline as a valid solution to its energy crisis. As the winter nears, it fears power outages and surges in gas prices. Hence, ensuring the supply of gas from Russia will maintain its cost and enable it to get through the crisis. Germany is wary of Russia's role in the sudden cutting off of oil supplies or Russian President Vladimir

Putin's threat of cutting off gas supplies. It has, thus, developed a backup deal with the US to take action on Russia if it 'weaponizes' energy to aggravate its relations with Ukraine or any other EU states.

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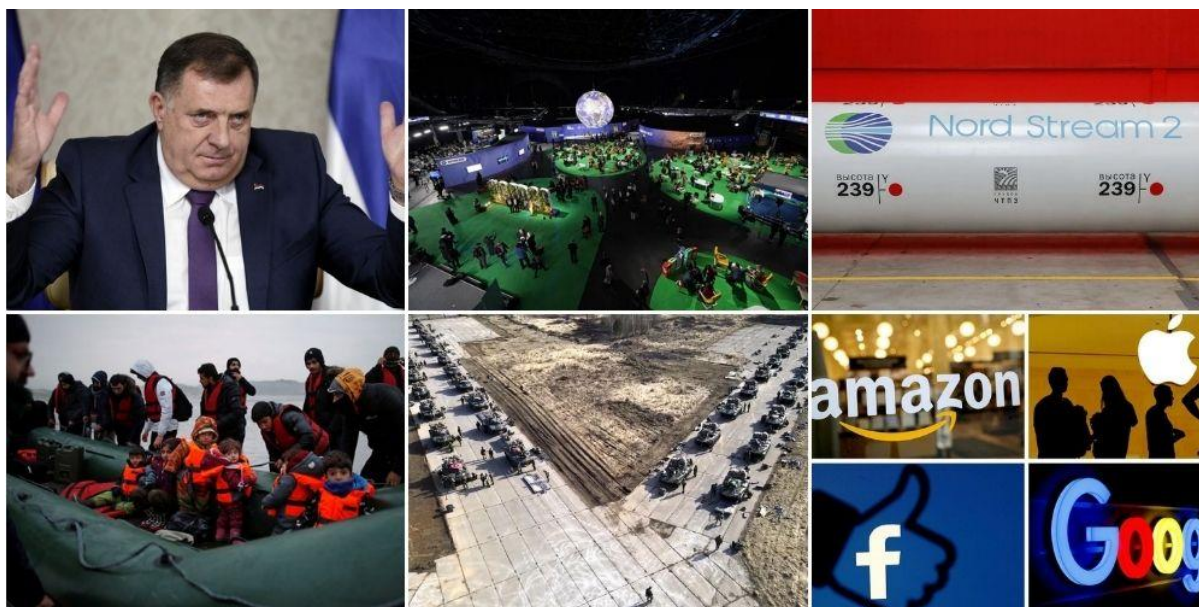
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EUROPE IN NOVEMBER 2021

by Joana 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

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN

Six Armenian soldiers killed in border clashes

On 19 November, the Armenian Defense Ministry announced the death of six Armenian soldiers after border clashes escalated with Azerbaijan. The deaths were reported to have occurred on 16 November. The Ministry added that the Azerbaijani soldiers had opened fire at the borders which was retaliated with a return fire from the Armenians. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan accused Armenia of having bombed their villages. The escalation of tensions follows a ceasefire supervised by Russia that was reached on 16 November. Azerbaijan had also declared the death of seven of its soldiers on the same day. The EU Foreign Affairs spokesperson Peter Stano expressed his concern over the border situation, saying: "(he was) deeply concerned over the recent violence along the Armenia-Azerbaijani border, which has regrettably led to loss of life." ("Armenia reports 6 soldiers killed in clashes with Azerbaijan," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 November 2021)

Armenian and Azerbaijani troops open fire over the agreed ceasefire

On 16 November, Armenian and Azerbaijani troops exchanged skirmishes breaking the Russian brokered ceasefire. The clash took place again rekindling the war against Nagorno-Karabakh region. After the intervention of the Russian Defense Minister, the fight came to a stop. The Armenia's Prime Minister has accused Azerbaijan for targeting its statehood, sovereignty, and Independence. Armenia has now appealed to its ally Russia to protect its territorial integrity. The Russian President Vladimir Putin has agreed on the same to "Continue Contracts." The French Foreign Ministry released a statement on the incident expressing "deep concern and called on all parties to respect the agreements that were reached in November 2020." ("Armenia-Azerbaijan ceasefire holds one day after deadly border clashes," *France24*, 17 November 2021)

AUSTRIA

Former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz stripped off his immunity

On 18 November, the immunity provided to former Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz was lifted by the parliament after his center-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) backed the decision. The removal of Kurz's

immunity provides easy investigation into his role in the corruption scandal that he has been implicated in. The move followed Kurz himself requesting to remove the immunity provided to him in order to facilitate the investigations into the scandal. The former Chancellor has been condemned for misusing government money in an effort to popularize his political image. ("Austria: Sebastian Kurz's immunity lifted for corruption probe," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2021)

Austrian climate minister opts for train travel to the UN climate summit

Leonore Gewessler, Austria's climate minister, chose to board a train to the UN climate conference, which was held in Glasgow. She stated that travel by train saved more than a tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent per person. Gewessler tweeted about needing strong railways after having opted for the same with her whole team. She tweeted that they were "excited and full of anticipation" over her recent investment promotion for trains. Further, she announced additional Austrian night trains to begin from 2025. According to the European Environment Agency assessments, train travel is the most environmentally friendly mode of transport in terms of emissions. In 2018, transportation accounted for around 25 percent of the EU emissions, with road transport accounting for the majority. ("Austria's climate minister takes train to COP26 to reduce emissions," *Euronews*, 09 November 2021)

BELARUS

Belarusian officials accused of 'crimes against humanity' by human rights organizations

On 01 November, six Belarusian security service members saw complaints filed against them accusing them of crimes against humanity. The complaint was filed in Germany by two human rights organizations - The World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) in Geneva and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) in Berlin. Germany's principle of universal jurisdiction led to the complaint of crimes against humanity being filed in the country. The organizations blamed the Belarusian officials for conducting 'mass

detentions, torture, disappearances, sexual violence, and political persecution'. The OMCT Secretary-General Gerald Staber stated: "There is clear evidence that torture was used intentionally and that it was widespread and systematic, thus reaching the threshold of crimes against humanity." The joint statement released also commented on the "worldwide phenomena, in which authoritarian states work to restrict the public realm of civic action". (Alex Berry, "Germany: Human rights groups file complaint against Belarusian officials," *Deutsche Welle*, 01 November 2021)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

UNFPA estimates an increase in emigration of youth from Bosnia and Herzegovina

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) released a survey report on the young people of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The report estimated a number of 22,300 and 23,700 people between 18 to 29 years to leave the country over a year's time. The survey covered the interviews of 5,000 young people and reported that close to 47 percent had decided on emigration. The country is not new to emigration but the rate has substantially increased in the last three decades. Reasons behind the migration were not restricted to seeking a better lifestyle or economic prospects alone but reduced levels of trust in public institutions amongst the youngsters. They believe that the government is "systematically corrupt" and the security needs are still unmet. The report concluded with few recommendations. It called for inclusiveness of youth policies, making public institutions accessible to youth and intuiting youth participation in decision making activities. (Alasdair Sandford, "Nearly half of young people thinking of emigrating from Bosnia, claims UN survey," *Euronews*, 17 November 2021)

US envoy arrives for a two-day visit

On 07 November, the US special envoy to the Western Balkans Gabriel Escobar reached Bosnia and Herzegovina to mitigate the increasing domestic tensions. Escobar arrived for a two-day visit and met the current Serb representative in the country's three-way presidency Milorad Dodik on 08 November. Escobar addressed journalists, saying: "One of the things we want to make

sure of is that Bosnia remains independent, sovereign and territorially whole." The visit follows the EU's restrained approach to Bosnia's looming crisis. Bosnian-Serb leader Milorad Dodik threatened to create a 'breakaway Serb army' among other separatist threats. However, Dodik did not seem pacified post his meeting with Escobar. He said: "...we would continue with our goal to send certain laws to the parliament of the Republica Srpska and withdraw our consent from issues such as the army, indirect taxation, the court system, and that we will draft new legislation in the next six months." Many have accused Dodik's threats to resemble 'calls for war'. The present escalation of tensions is being compared to the initial days of the Bosnian War of 1992 to 1995. (Una Hajdari, "In Bosnia, US overtakes EU as crisis boils," *POLITICO*, 09 November 2021)

UNSC extends European military mission mandate in Bosnia

On 03 November, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) extended the mandate of the EU's military mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). The UNSC vote came amidst rising speculation of separatist tendencies triggered by Bosnian-Serb leader Milorad Dodik. Overcoming the disagreements offered by a report suggesting a secession possibility in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the decision was arrived at unanimously. The UN's top envoy to Bosnia Christian Schmidt was prohibited by Russia from presenting a report on Bosnia-Herzegovina facing an 'existential threat' due to the increasing separatist threats. Russia commented on his report stating that it was an "extreme (ly) biased and anti-Serb document". The existence of a high representative post to Bosnia is also rejected by Russia. In response to such comments, France's UN ambassador Nicolas de Riviere highlighted the importance of the post, saying: "(it was an) essential role in support of Bosnia and Herzegovina." ("UN renews EU Bosnia military mission as separatism fears grow," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 November 2021)

Dodik threatens Bosnian separation

Bosnian-Serb leader Milorad Dodik has threatened to cut Serb territory off from national institutions like the tax authority,

the pharmaceuticals agency, and, most importantly, the military forces. Although it would not be considered secession, the resurgence of an ethnic Serb army is a terrifying prospect for many Bosnians. This would imply the further weakening of the already weak national government. Dodik's proposals, according to the International High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Christian Schmidt, are an "existential threat" to the country. The Serb leader stated that he did not recognize the High Representative and remained indifferent to the prospects of division and conflict. The decision by Dodik is not surprising for Bosnians as it follows a decade-long series of threats to the Bosnian integrity. (Guy Delauney, "Bosnian leader stokes fears of Balkan breakup," *BBC*, 03 November 2021)

BULGARIA

Bulgarian President's remarks over Crimea spark US concern

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev described Crimea as "currently Russian" during a presidential debate in the week prior to 22 November. Radev urged Brussels to reopen lines of contact with Moscow and stated that he does not favour sanctions upon Moscow since he believes they are ineffective. Ukraine condemned his views on Crimea, as his domestic opponents retaliated. The US embassy expressed "deep concern" at the statement made by Bulgarian President. The embassy declared in a release that the EU and NATO were clear about Crimea belonging to Ukraine. At the Crimea Platform summit in August, several allies underlined that Crimea remains an integral part of Ukraine and will not recognize Russian efforts to legitimate its unlawful invasion and seizure of Crimea as stated by the US embassy. ("US 'deeply concerned' over Bulgarian president's Crimea remarks," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 November 2021)

Elections 2021: Radev's victory expected

On 21 November, Alpha Research and Gallup International released the exit polls of the elections; Bulgarian President Rumen Radev is predicted to stay in power for another term. His victory is expected to win with a whole two-thirds of the vote. Radev has joined hands with the newly founded "We

Continue the Change” party which won the recently conducted general elections. Radev was reported as saying: “Let’s not give the past a chance to undermine our future. Let us decide our destiny and our future ourselves, and not give others a chance to decide instead of us.” A staunch critic of the former Prime Minister Boko Borissov, Radev had managed to attain 49 percent of votes in the first round of the presidential elections while his opponent Anastas Gerdzhikov won a meagre 23 percent in the same. (“[Bulgaria exit polls: President Radev set for election victory](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 21 November 2021)

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Fiala gets nominated as the Prime Minister

On 28 November, Czech President Miloš Zeman nominated Petr Fiala as Prime Minister of the country following his October election victory. Zeman was isolated from Fiala by plexiglass, given the former having just left quarantine. Fiala, 57, is the leader of the three-party coalition Together (includes the Civic Democratic Party, Christian Democrats, and TOP 09), which received 27.8 percent of the vote in early October. Fiala with the support of left-wing parties ousted the ANO movement led by Babis. (“[Czech Republic: Petr Fiala named new prime minister](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 28 November 2021)

Miloš Zeman re-hospitalized hours after discharge

On 25 November, the Czech Republic's President Miloš Zeman was discharged after being hospitalized for over 46 days. However, he soon returned to the hospital on testing positive for COVID-19. The re-hospitalization affected the meeting Zeman was set to have with the prime ministerial candidate and leader of SPOLU Petr Fiala; Zeman has to appoint Fiala into power, without which the post-election limbo will continue. The move to postpone the meeting garnered social media condemnation as renewed calls to establish a constitutional provision permitting the parliament to declare the president “unfit to exercise his powers” emerged. The ailing President's foot-dragging has delayed Fiala from taking over. Zeman is expected to be discharged on 27 November and has scheduled to meet Fiala on 28 November. (Robert Tait, “[Covid](#)

[test returns Czech president to hospital hours after discharge](#),” *The Guardian*, 26 November 2021)

Fiala accepts the mandate to form a new government

The ailing Czech president Miloš Zeman invited the leader of the SPOLU (Together) Coalition Petr Fiala, to form a new government putting an end to the political uncertainty following the Czech elections. The mandate, which was made public in a press statement from Zeman's office, signalled the beginning of the ousting of Prime Minister Andrej Babis' turbulent term. On 09 November, Fiala accepted the mandate to form a new government, stating that he would begin negotiations with coalition partners. SPOLU won a victory over Babis' ANO party and signed a coalition agreement with the Pirates and STAN parties. After finalizing the new form of government, the three-party led coalition will have a majority of 108 MPs in the Chamber of Deputies. (Siegfried Mortkowitz, “[Czech president taps Petr Fiala to lead new government](#),” *POLITICO*, 09 November 2021)

Coalition talks reach agreement

On 02 November, center-right party alliance SPOLU (Together) leader Petr Fiala confirmed that the coalition parties had reached an agreement on talks. According to him, the majority coalition government is expected to ratify the said agreement on 08 November when the new parliament would be in session. Fiala, predicted to be the next Czech prime minister, stated that he would meet the ailing President Miloš Zeman once he recovered. Zeman has been hospitalized for over a month, and his inability to carry out duties implies that the Prime Minister and speakers of both the houses of parliament take de facto charge. Commenting on the 12-hour long talks, Fiala said: “We have gone through a long, whole day, but also successful negotiations.” (“[Czech parties reach agreement on coalition government](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 02 November 2021)

DENMARK

Six Inuit file case against the government demanding reparations for lost childhood

Six Inuit kidnapped from their Greenlandic homes and transferred to Denmark 70 years ago are suing the government for reimbursement for their lost childhood. Denmark abducted 22 children from its former colony in 1951, assuring a better standard of living and the opportunity to return to Greenland as a new Danish-educated elite. In a letter to Denmark's prime minister, six of the 22 survivors, now in their 70s, seek GBP 28,200 in reparations. Even though they had families, they were placed in orphanages when they returned to Greenland. Many of them had entirely lost contact with their relatives. Their lawyer, Mads Pramming, added: "They lost their families, their language, their culture, and their sense of belonging." According to Pramming, it was a breach of their "right to a private life, a family life" under the European Convention on Human Rights. He went on to say that he would give the prime minister's office two weeks to react before filing a lawsuit. ("Six Inuit snatched by Denmark 70 years ago demand compensation," *The Guardian*, 22 November 2021)

FRANCE

Football: Versailles court declares Karim Benzema guilty of blackmail

On 24 November, a Versailles court found French international footballer and Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema guilty of 'complicity in attempted blackmail'. The star footballer has received a one-year suspended jail sentence along with a fine of EUR 75,000. Implicated in a sex tape extortion scandal, Benzema is alleged to have blackmailed his French teammate Mathieu Valbuena. Benzema, who has reiterated his innocence, is set to appeal against the verdict, which his lawyer terms as "unfair and based on no proof". The trial for the scandal, which occurred in June 2015, took place in October. According to the judge: "(Benzema) personally got involved, with insistence, to try to convince Mathieu Valbuena to meet his trusted man." Last month, however, the French football federation stated that Benzema would not be restricted from playing even if found guilty. (Angelique Chrisafis, "French footballer Karim Benzema guilty in sex tape extortion scandal," *The Guardian*, 24 November 2021; "Karim Benzema: French footballer guilty in

sex tape blackmail case," *BBC*, 24 November 2021)

Protests witness calls for stringent measures on ending sexual violence

On 20 November, thousands of women took to French streets protesting against the widespread sexual violence and called on the government to bring an end to the same. The protests follow recent discussions relating to the topic that point out the death of a woman every three days at the hands of either their current or former partner. Protesters demanded President Emmanuel Macron's government to increase the expenditure on preventing violence against women from EUR 360 million to EUR one billion. However, the government's moves were defended by Equality Minister Elisabeth Moreno who pointed out the efficiency of the French government in dealing with the issue of sexual violence. The protest came as a part of the week of action in line with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women which falls on 25 November. ("France: Tens of thousands protest violence against women," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 November 2021)

Macron changes the blue of the French flag to a darker navy-blue shade

Local media reported that French President Emmanuel Macron had changed the colour of the official French flag to a deeper navy blue, replacing the former brighter hue. According to *Europe 1*, Macron intended to bring back the navy-blue flag as a symbol of the French Revolution. The colour has long been utilized by the French navy and numerous government buildings across the country. However, in 1976, under President Giscard d'Estaing, the French state changed the colour to a brighter blue to match the blue of the European flag. The change in flags at the Elysée Palace has not been publicly disclosed, and no instructions have been issued for other institutions to follow suit. Macron's return to navy blue was met with considerable opposition, with some claiming the new colour was unappealing and would clash with the EU flag, and some sentimental of the version before 1976. According to *Europe 1*, all parties involved say that the colour change is not intended to be regarded as an anti-EU gesture. In January, France will

assume the rotating EU presidency. Macron is also set to face presidential elections in April next year. ("Macron switches to using navy blue on France's flag - reports," *BBC*, 15 November 2021)

Couple wins legal fight over 'turbine syndrome'

On 08 November, *The Guardian* reported a judge in Toulouse to have compensated a French couple with EUR 110,000 after accepting that their health was affected due to a nearby windfarm. In the first judgement of its kind, Christel and Luc Fockaert were recognized to have been impacted by 'turbine syndrome' – essentially a sociological phenomenon, characteristically spread by terming the impact as 'vibro-acoustic disease' and 'wind turbine syndrome'. Six wind turbines located 700 metres from their residence at Fontrieu in the Tarn, southern France were alleged to have caused several health issues. After suffering from headaches, insomnia, heart irregularities, depression, dizziness, tinnitus and nausea for two years, the couple shifted. Christel said: "We didn't understand straight away, but little by little we realised the problem came from the turbines." The couple's lawyer Alice Terrasse stated: "It's an unusual case and as far as I know there has been no precedent... We already consider environmental issues and biodiversity, and occasionally the impact on landscapes, but not enough the issues of human health. This could create a jurisprudence and, above all, make the regulations evolve." (Kim Willsher, "French couple who said windfarm affected health win legal fight," *The Guardian*, 08 November 2021)

Conference of Bishops of France order church official to compensate victims

A day before the bishop's conference, France's bishops formally accepted that "the Catholic church bore an "institutional responsibility" in the many thousands of child abuse cases". It is said to have begun from the 1950's, affecting more than 200,000 minors. According to the President of the France's Conference of Bishops of France (CEF) Eric de Moulins-Beaufort: "The conference also acknowledged that the church had allowed the abuses to become

"systemic". The victims have expressed their concerns that justice needs to be given to them and demanded for the priests to be punished and defrocked. The decision to compensate the victims was given on the final day of the CEF conference. The CEF has asked church officials to set up an independent commission to evaluate the claims of the victims and to compensate by selling part of the church's extensive real estate holdings. ("French bishops kneel in penance over Catholic church's role in child abuse," *The Guardian*, 06 November 2021; "French Catholic Church to sell assets to compensate sex abuse victims," *France24*, 08 November 2021)

GEORGIA

Saakashvili ends hunger strike

On 20 November, jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili ended his seven-week hunger strike after his health deteriorated. He has been prisoned on charges of abusing power. The hunger strike had been initiated as a retaliatory measure on his allegedly 'political' arrest on 01 October. After the declaration of ending his 50-day hunger strike, Saakashvili's personal doctor Nokoloz Kipshidze said: "Saakashvili formally called off his hunger strike right after he was transferred to the Gori military hospital." ("Georgia: Jailed ex-President Saakashvili ends 7-week hunger strike," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 November 2021).

GERMANY

Nuremberg opera publishes open letter to relocate to former Nazi Party rally grounds

Historical societies have been outraged by proposals to temporarily relocate Nuremberg's opera house to the former Nazi Party rally grounds. The historic opera needs a new home since the current one is in desperate need of repair. The repair process for the Opera may take several years to complete. History for All, a non-profit that organizes tours on the grounds, claims that the decision jeopardizes education about Nazi Party doctrine and propaganda. In an open letter, the association stated that exposing visitors to the original Nazi structures was a method of promoting "fascist megalomania" as well as its final catastrophe. On December 15, the city council will pass a verdict on the location.

There are no other feasible possibilities, according to an open letter from the opera theatre's management. (John Silk, "Germany: Plan to use Nazi site for Nuremberg opera slammed," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 November 2021)

Olaf Scholz to head the three-party coalition replacing Angela Merkel

The coalition of the Social Democrat Party, the Greens, and business-friendly Free Democrats will be headed by Olaf Scholz. In the recently held conference, the three-party coalition announced its significant plans, starting with climate protection which forms the core deal of the coalition. It aims to phase out usage of coal by 2030 and wants 80 percent of its electricity to be renewable energy. The coalition's agenda also includes plans to legalize the sale of cannabis and the distribution of a drug in licensed premises. Mr Scholz highlighted the importance of Germany's relations with France and the US. With Europe facing its worst in the spread of COVID-19 infection, the coalition has promised to invest EUR one billion as bonus to its health workers and plans to mandate vaccines for the essential workers. In terms of taking a stance on Russia and China, it is believed that the coalition will take a tougher stance. (Katya Adler, "Germany's Team Scholz sweeps away 16 years of Merkel," *BBC*, 25 November 2021)

Challenges ahead for the new German coalition

Recently the traffic-light coalition published its political road map of a 178-page document called the "Dare to Make More Progress". There were many positive highlights in the document keeping climate change, bonus to health workers, digitalization, and reducing the voting age of youth from 18 to 16. The document also helped in identifying the challenges ahead. Two most important challenges will be handling the COVID-19 situation and the migrant crisis. According to Chancellor nominee Olaf Scholz: "We should make vaccination mandatory in places that care for particularly vulnerable groups." Apart from that, the frozen pension contributions and new debt moratorium are expected to be on hold. ("What are the key issues for

Germany's new government?," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 November, 2021)

HUNGARY

ECJ forbids disciplinary proceedings against judges seeking its guidance

On 23 November, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled a verdict that allowed for the bloc's national judges to solicit the guidance of the ECJ judges, in the endeavour of which they should not be stopped. This follows condemnation received by the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and his Fidesz party aiding the deterioration of judicial independence. The case in question was a criminal proceeding against a Swedish national being tried in Hungary's Pest Central District Court. The case was referred to the ECJ due to the lack of translators and interpreters at the court. The Hungarian Supreme Court deemed the appeal as unlawful and initiated disciplinary proceedings against the judge. The Luxembourg-based chamber maintained: "EU law precludes disciplinary proceedings from being brought against a national judge on the ground that he or she has made a reference for a preliminary ruling to the Court of Justice... The principle of the primacy of EU law requires the lower court to disregard the decision of the supreme court of the member state concerned." (Richard Connor, "ECJ rules Hungary can't punish judge for seeking EU court guidance," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 November 2021)

Hungary confesses to have used Pegasus Spyware

On 04 November, Hungary's ruling Fidesz party member and lawmaker Lajos Kosa admitted that Hungary's Interior Ministry had purchased Pegasus software from Israeli company NSO Group and had used its spyware. The spyware allows customers to control the smartphones of a targeted individual without them being aware. It is capable of gaining access to cameras, photos, and location as well as reading any data stored in the phone. Despite confirming the use, Kosa denied claims that it was used for spying on the Hungarians. Earlier in July, in the story released by the International Consortium of Journalists, Hungary was the only EU country listed as a client of the NSO Group. ("Hungary admits to using NSO

Group's Pegasus spyware," Deutsche Welle, 04 November 2021)

THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

"Contingency plans" underway fearing EU-UK trade war

On 09 November, Irish Deputy Prime Minister (Tánaiste) Leo Varadkar announced that Ireland was making 'contingency plans' in case the UK was to trigger Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Varadkar maintained that the EU would be forced to retort to "rebalancing measures" such as suspending the Brexit trade deal, if such an event were to take place. On 08 November, the Irish cabinet sub-committee discussed the said preparations. Considering the possibility of a trade war between the UK and the EU, Varadkar said: "I don't think anybody wants to see the European Union suspending the Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Britain." Stormont's Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill had previously requested the UK to back down on its threat to trigger Article 16. Following Varadkar's announcement, O'Neill said: "I warned the government against the language they're using... What we need to find is solutions and stability, certainly not another period of instability." The EU-UK negotiations are in their fourth week but a de-escalation of tensions is seen as unlikely. (Jayne McCormack, "Brexit: Ireland making contingency plans for UK move on Article 16," *BBC*, 09 November 2021; Shawn Pogatchnik, "Irish 'making preparations' for possible EU-UK trade war," *POLITICO*, 09 November 2021; Lisa O'Carroll, "Ireland starts making contingency plans for UK trade war with EU," *The Guardian*, 09 November 2021)

ITALY

Volcanic activity calls for island evacuation in Italy

Due to heightened volcanic activity and sulphurous emissions in the vicinity, the mayor of the island of Vulcano in Sicily's Aeolian archipelago has directed the evacuation of roughly 150 people and prohibited tourists. After a series of substantial changes in volcanic indicators, Italy's civil protection agency issued an amber alert for the island, roughly 15 miles north of Sicily. In October, various citizens

reported sickness in their pets due to volcanic activity. According to the Italian National Institute for Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV), heavy gases have increased, reducing the amount of oxygen in the air and causing respiratory problems that can be fatal. Local officials also established a "red zone" where the gas attributable to volcanic activity is more prevalent, with carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels exceeding the usual, and limited residents' mobility from their houses between 11 pm to 6 am. The island will be closed to visitors for a month. (Lorenzo Tondo, "Italian island of Vulcano orders partial evacuation after increased activity," *The Guardian*, 21 November 2021)

Italy provides stage for dissident art show by the "Chinese Banksy"

The northern Italian city of Brescia provided dissident artist Badiucao a stage for his solo exhibition. Despite threats from Chinese officials, the organizers continued with the show to promote "freedom of expression". The Chinese embassy sent a letter to Brescia with underlying threats. They deemed Badiucao's "anti-chinese lies" to have the potential to "jeopardize" relations between China and Italy. The exhibition was titled: "China is (not) near - Works of a dissident artist" and was displayed in the Santa Giulia Museum. The exhibition includes a hybrid image of Carrie Lam and Xi Jin Ping, as well as 64 paintings created with his own blood to reflect the timepieces issued to troops during the Tiananmen Square massacre. A rocking chair that was formerly used as a torture device is also on exhibit. The artist would be seated in the rocking chair, reading a journal given by a source in Wuhan, which had the COVID-19 pandemic's 100-day record. Badiucao is well-known for his critiques of Beijing. He is aware that he is a Chinese state adversary and had first kept his true identity hidden. He is presently based in Australia, where he works as an exile. ("Italian city opens Chinese dissident art show despite pressure from Beijing," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 November 2021)

Organized Crime: 70 'Ndragheta members pronounced guilty

On 06 November, Judge Claudio Paris condemned 70 members of the 'Ndragheta, a

prominent Italian mafia group. In the first stage of a massive trial, dubbed the 'maxi trial' which attempts to confront organized crime, 355 suspects are expected to be judged in the custom-built courtroom of Lamezia Terme, Calabria. Six of those convicted have been given 20-year sentences. These suspects have been charged with attempted murder, money laundering, usury, drug-dealing, extortion, and illegal weapons possession. The 'Ndragheta had replaced Italy's Cosa Nostra, as the wealthiest and most influential mafia group, after the latter was afflicted by a similar 'maxi trial' from 1986-1987. According to court officials, the current trial is speculated to last two years, maybe longer. (["Italy convicts first 70 'ndrangheta members in massive Mafia trial," Deutsche Welle, 07 November 2021;](#) ["Italian 'maxi trial' results in conviction of 70 'Ndrangheta suspects," The Guardian, 06 November 2021\)](#)

Italy ratifies law banning street advertisements

On 05 November, amidst opposition from anti-abortion groups and far-right politicians, Italy passed a law prohibiting advertisements on the streets stating it was either "sexist or discriminatory". The law bans advertisements on streets and all modes of transport which reflect ideas against women, gay, ethnic, religious and disabled people. This has triggered anger amongst the anti-abortion groups since it thwarts them from filling the streets against women who have abortions. But according to a women's rights activist: "The law doesn't specifically refer to abortion but it widens the measure in a very intelligent way, meaning there will be action taken to block this kind of publicity." She also added: "All the women's associations have been trying for years to stop this, this law could help to bring about a cultural change too." (Angela Giuffrida, ["Italian senate approves law banning sexist and discriminatory adverts," The Guardian, 05 November 2021\)](#)

NORWAY

Attacker carrying knife shot in Norway

Police in Norway have shot dead a man threatening passers-by with a knife. Senior Police Chief Egil Jørgen Brekke explained

that the incident had not been declared terror related yet. The police declared the act to be a stand-alone act. Although initial suggestions included injury to passers-by, the police later confirmed that only one police officer was slightly injured. Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said he understood the sentiments of the people in Oslo and described the city as a safe one among the other larger cities in Europe. After last month's bow and arrow attacks, this is the third stand-alone attempt at harming innocent passers-by. The police refrained from revealing more details owing to the customary investigation by the Norwegian Bureau for the Investigation of Police Affairs, when police officers using firearms are involved. (["Norway police shoot dead a knife-wielding man threatening passers-by in Oslo," ABC News, 10 November 2021\)](#)

POLAND

Morawiecki urges NATO to "connect dots"

On 30 November, Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stated that NATO members needed to "connect the dots" and "wake up" to Russian destabilization efforts in the region. He highlighted recent developments that revealed Kremlin and its supporters seeking to alter "the geopolitical system" and "disunite" the EU. He further highlighted a build-up of Russian soldiers near Ukraine, skyrocketing gas costs, and a situation in the Poland-Belarus border as examples. His remarks come ahead of a NATO ministerial meeting. Morawiecki believes Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko is the direct culprit of the border situation, but "he has his sponsor, he has his principal" in the Kremlin, alluding to Russian President Vladimir Putin. In his conclusion he said: "Bad things may happen in Ukraine for instance, or there could be another huge migration problem for the whole of Europe, All the pieces of the puzzle put together present not a very good picture." (["Poland PM urges 'wake up' to destabilisation by Russia and allies," BBC, 30 November 2021\)](#)

Poland revises schemes to assist households against inflation

On 25 November, a scheme worth up to GBP 2.14 billion was unveiled as cash transfers to

households. In 2022, these payments will be income-based and split into two instalments. The initiative is to facilitate financial security in dealing with the rising inflation. Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said: "The Polish government is acting to... ease, buffer against this inflation growth." Petrol taxes will also be reduced to EU standards. The scheme is to be operative from 20 December, for five months. In the months of January and March, the value-added tax (VAT) on gasoline will be reduced from 23 percent to 8 percent. Moreover, VAT on electricity will be reduced from 23 percent to 5 percent. The reductions follow revisions to Poland's tax system announced earlier this year, which the country's ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) dubbed the "Polish order". According to research released by the Polish government in September, nearly nine million Polish citizens will stop paying income tax in 2022, and 70 percent of retirees will pay no tax. ("[Poland to cut fuel and energy taxes in anti-inflation shield](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 November 2021).

Resolution passed against restrictive abortion ban

In a resolution passed with 374 against 124 votes and 55 absentees, MEP's condemned Poland's near abortion ban. They emphasized the illegitimate Tribunal's ruling imposing a near-total abortion ban. The recent draconian law was associated with the death of a 30-year-old woman, identified only as Isabella. The MEPs expressed their regret over the "restrictive legislation" that prevents women from seeking safe abortion including cases of fatal abnormalities. The resolution demanded the Polish government to ensure that no other death occurs due to the restrictive abortion law. ("[No more women should die': MEPs slam Poland's near-total abortion ban](#)," *Euronews*, 11 November 2021)

Poland's Independence march takes place despite ban

On 11 November, Poland celebrates its Independence Day since it gained freedom on this day after World War I. Although a court ban was in place, a long march took place on this day. Security forces were mobilized in the capital and cities to handle the rallies. Police troops were also assigned

in the borders with migrants trying to enter from Belarus. The previous year also saw the march amidst the pandemic. It differed from the present one as the supporters were treated by police with tear gas and rubber bullets. The focus on Belarus and the migrant issue is attributed for the difference. ("[Far-right Polish Independence Day march goes ahead despite court ban](#)," *Euronews*, 11 November 2021)

Health Ministry responds after protests against abortion law

On 07 November, the Polish Health Ministry released a statement that effectively brought modifications to the previous guidelines on when abortion was legal. It read: "It should be strongly emphasized that physicians must not be afraid to make obvious decisions, based on their experience and available medical knowledge." The statement followed nationwide protests on 06 November, as protesters gathered against the 'restrictive abortion law' which had caused the death of a 30-year-old pregnant woman. The doctors who denied the termination have been suspended as the probe into the same continues. The 2020 Constitutional Court ruling tightened the abortion law, providing the only ground for the legal termination of pregnancy to be when the life of the mother was being risked. (Amanda Rivkin, "[Poland's Health Ministry revisits abortion guidelines after protests](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 November 2021; "[Poles march against abortion ban after pregnant woman's death](#)," *BBC*, 06 November 2021)

PORTUGAL

Euthanasia legalized

On 05 November, Portugal's parliament approved a revised bill allowing euthanasia after addressing objections expressed by the Constitutional Court. The updated proposal, which outlines the circumstances under which doctors might aid patients with "grave, incurable, and irreversible" diseases who want to end their lives, was approved by lawmakers by a vote of 138 to 84 with five abstentions. The initial bill was blocked by judges in March because it was too vague. If the bill gets approved, there may not be many obstructions to adopt the law. However, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's veto could enforce another round of

parliamentary review. In this case, the review could be sent back to the Constitutional Court for evaluation. Another legal challenge the bill faces is a possible judicial review that could be requested by the Opposition. The bill is said to have cut through the left-right divide before the snap election due on 30 January, 2022. If the bill is approved, Portugal will join countries like Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Canada where euthanasia is legal. (Paul Ames, "[Portugal's parliament votes to legalize euthanasia, again](#)," *POLITICO*, 06 November 2021)

RUSSIA

More than 52 people succumb to fire at Russian coal mine

Following an apparent fire at a Russian coal mine, at least 52 people have died underground. Members of a rescue squad who died while searching for the missing miners are included in the total count. According to initial reports, the catastrophe seemed to have been caused by coal dust catching fire and filling the mine with smoke through the ventilation system. The early data showed the catastrophe to be a cause of a methane explosion, according to Deputy Prosecutor General Dmitry Demeshin. The tragedy resulted in the injuries of 49 individuals. According to the Emergencies Ministry, miners from the Listvyazhnaya coal mine in southern Siberia have been transported to the surface. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said President Vladimir Putin had offered his condolences to the relatives of those slain and hoped that those still missing may be rescued. In response to the occurrence, authorities proclaimed three days of mourning. The trapped miners have been assumed dead considering the perishable self-rescue system with oxygen and the absence of communication with the miners for more than 12 hours after the accident. ("[Russia: Over 50 people die in Siberian mine](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 November 2021)

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia issues apology to Roma women

The Slovakian government has apologized for the mistreatment and forceful sterilization of thousands of Roma women, a

practice that continued until 2004 despite the country's ratification of Roman rights. For decades, thousands of Roma women in Slovakia were forcefully sterilized. Issuing a formal apology, the Slovakian government criticized the maltreatment of the Roma ethnic minorities that began under the communist administration in 1966. The Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Dunja Mijatovic praised the "apology to victims of forced sterilisation as a first crucial step" in a statement on Twitter. The public apology came just a day before the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. (Alex Berry, "[Slovakia issues apology for forced sterilizations of Roma women](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 November 2021)

SWEDEN

Andersson re-elected as first female Prime Minister

On 29 November, Magdalena Andersson was re-elected as Sweden's first female prime minister for the second time this week. She had previously been elected into the position for seven hours before a budget rejection and the exit of the Greens from Andersson's two-party coalition forced her to resign. She will take formal charge after an audience with Sweden's figurehead monarch King Carl XVI Gustav while her Cabinet is expected to be named on 30 November. Commenting on Andersson's appointment, Center Party leader Annie Loof addressed the parliament: "(a female prime minister) means a lot to many girls and women, to see this glass roof shattered. I am proud that (the Center Party) is involved and makes this possible." Sweden has planned its next general election for 11 September 2022. ([Sweden elects Andersson as first female PM for second time in a week](#), *France24*, 29 November 2021)

Magdalena Andersson resigns as Swedish Prime Minister within seven hours

On 24 November, Sweden's first female Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson resigned just hours after her appointment. The resignation came after her Social Democrat party's junior coalition partner, the Green Party chose to quit the government. The series of events were triggered following the parliament's rejection of the budget proposed by the

coalition government; it was voted down in favour of spending plans suggested by the opposition parties. Commenting on the resignation, Andersson said: "For me, it is about respect, but I also do not want to lead a government where there may be grounds to question its legitimacy... There is a constitutional practice that a coalition government should resign when one party quits." Expressing her hope to return to office, Andersson said: "I am ready to be prime minister in a single-party, Social Democrat government." The Green Party head Marta Stenevi, however, expressed her regret over the administrative crisis, and stated: "We have sought to be in government to deliver green policies, it is not our job to administer a budget negotiated by the Sweden Democrats." ("Sweden's first female prime minister resigns hours after appointment," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 November 2021; "Sweden's first female prime minister resigns after less than 12 hours," *The Guardian*, 24 November 2021; Charlie Duxbury and Ali Walker, "Swedish PM Magdalena Andersson resigns hours after taking job," *POLITICO*, 24 November 2021)

Magdalena Andersson becomes first female Swedish Prime Minister, only to resign shortly

On 24 November, following a parliamentary vote, Magdalena Andersson (54) was appointed as the Swedish Prime Minister – making her the first female to have held the post. She won the vote in a tight competition by a margin of a single vote. Andersson has earlier served as finance minister and is presently the leader of the Social Democrats. She is backed by the Social Democrats' coalition partner, the Greens. Prior to the vote, she had efficiently managed to bring the Left Party to her side by striking a deal with them. Other opposition parties preferred to let her win by abstaining from voting over opposing her. The outgoing Prime Minister Stefan Lofven had resigned on 10 November after he lost a parliamentary vote of confidence. Lofven, a Social Democrat too, had served seven years in office. ("Magdalena Andersson voted in as Sweden's first female prime minister," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 November 2021)

TURKEY

Legal proceedings against 30 individuals for tweets on Erdogan's death

On 03 November, an 'olmus' hashtag concerning Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan trended on the country's Twitter. The hashtag which roughly translates to 'is said to be dead,' triggered the authorities as they launched investigations into the 30 people who used this hashtag. A police statement declared the offenders to be accused of spreading 'disinformation and manipulative content' as well as of insulting the President. Lately, concerns regarding Erdogan's health have increased. His aides intend to dull down such speculation by releasing videos that show the President in the prime of his health - sometimes walking quite quickly, otherwise playing basketball. The latest round of speculations is expected to have risen due to Erdogan finding it difficult to walk in a video released on 29 November. He had also cancelled his trip to the Glasgow Summit claiming to have had security concerns. ("Turkey probes 30 for Twitter posts suggesting Erdogan died," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 November 2021; "Erdogan: Turkey investigates posts about president's health," *BBC*, 04 November 2021)

UKRAINE

President Zelenskyy warns of coup attempt in December

On 26 November, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed a press conference amidst which he claimed his authorities had discovered a potential coup attempt predicted for 01 December. He stated: "We have challenges not only from the Russian Federation and possible escalation - we have big internal challenges. I received information that a coup d'etat will take place in our country on December 1-2." The intelligence, which includes audio recordings, implicates the involvement of Russia and representatives of media oligarch and owner of football club Shakhtar Donetsk along with business and ex-parliamentarian Rinat Akhmetov. Zelenskyy has stated the possibility of Akhmetov being unaware of the plans and is expected to invite him to listen to the recordings. Despite no reference to Russian involvement, *Interfax* quoted Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov commenting on Zelenskyy's statement. He

said: "Russia had no plans to take part. And Russia never gets involved in such affairs." The allegations come in the backdrop of a recently-passed law that limits the influence of the wealthy elites in the country's politics. The press conference, which included only select media personnel, was held to mark the mid-way point of Zelenskyy's presidential term. Those journalists who failed to receive invitations to the same were also seen protesting. ("Ukraine president alleges 'coup plot' in media briefing," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 November 2021; Patrick Wintour, "Ukraine has uncovered Russian-linked coup plot, says president," *The Guardian*, 26 November 2021)

Ukraine sends guards to border to gather intelligence

On 12 November, Ukraine announced it was sending its guards and national officers to the border area which it shares with Poland. They were tasked with sharing intelligence and know-how to deal with the Belarusian migrant crisis. Belarus which has been under constant criticism from the EU and its neighbouring member states for causing the migrant crisis. Ukraine, which shares a southern border with Belarus, is very well prepared and has been helping Poland to resolve the crisis situation. According to a statement released by the Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyskiy: "We are ready to promptly consider any request from the Polish side to provide assistance in resolving the current situation." ("Ukraine says it sends officers to Polish border to share intel on migrant crisis," *Reuters*, 12 November 2021)

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Storm Arwen wreaks havoc in the UK

Leaving at least two people dead, and 55,000 without power, Storm Arwen has wreaked havoc in the UK. The Met Office issued a "red warning" owing to wind gusts of around 100 miles per hour. People have been asked to halt travel and avoid going near the coast. The Met Office also warned against the icy roads. Northern Powergrid, a regional power utility in the north of England, claimed 55,000 customers in Northumberland, County Durham. Attempts to restore power are taking place in England and Scotland. ("2

dead after Storm Arwen batters northern UK," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 November 2021)

Whistleblower exposes abuse of detainees at the Brook House

A BBC Panorama documentary revealed the abuse and ill-treatment of detainees in the Brook House removal centre. The centre houses foreign nationals having rejected asylum claims and immigrants who have served prison sentences. The capacity of the centre is up to 500 men with the security of a Category B prison. Callum Tulley, a former Brook House officer conducted a secret filming exposing the widespread harsh abuse, drug use and bullying by officers. The mental health of the detainees is a major concern among the inquiry to be conducted by the Counsel. Out of the 109 hours, four hours have been classified as "key evidence". Fourteen G4S members resigned or were dismissed upon the release of the documentary. The G4S contract system was unique in its nature of the Home Office providing for GBP one million worth of "penalty" for detainee escapes and suicides. Short-staffing was common with footage showing "bravado, mockery, macho behaviour and banter, which may have normalised disdain for and even violence towards detained persons". The second phase of inquiry is to be conducted in 2022 with a conclusion by spring. However, the immigration system is not under the ambit of the inquiry. (Tom Symonds, "Brook House detention centre whistleblower 'abuse' inquiry begins," *BBC*, 24 November 2021)

MP denied carrying baby in the parliament

After receiving an email from the private secretary to the chairman of the Ways and Means committee, Labour's Stella Creasy criticized the rules on "behaviour and courtesies". She tweeted about the Parliament's unacceptance of her "well behaved, 3-month old, sleeping baby". She also addressed the larger issue of maternity cover and the lack of similar decorum rules for "anyone who isn't a man of a certain age from a certain background". Contrary to the rules issued for Creasy, MP Alex Davies-Jones reported that she was granted permission to breastfeed her child in the chamber. Laing termed the rules set for the speaker and deputy speakers at the House of

Commons and Westminster Hall, to be "bad for our democracy". She requested a review of the rulebook and encouraged other mothers to participate in politics through her This Mum Votes campaign. She stated that mothers in the 'mother of all parliaments' had taken a backseat. She encouraged the parliament to facilitate more "mums at the table", stating: "I've had a baby, I haven't given up my brain or capacity to do things." (George Bowden, "No babies allowed in Commons, MP Stella Creasy told," *BBC*, 24 November 2021)

The UK bans using phones while driving

Drivers will be prohibited from using a smartphone to click photos or play games starting 2022, with violators facing a GBP 200 fine and six points on their licence. It would be easier to prosecute violators, according to the transportation secretary. The law was enacted to ensure that road users are protected. The Highway Code will be modified to reflect the new laws, as well as to state clearly to drivers that using a hand-held device at signals or in highway waits is prohibited. Drivers will be able to use hands-free gadgets such as a sat-nav or mobile phone while driving if they are fastened in a cradle. The new regulations will not apply to drivers who make a contactless payment using their device while immobile. The exception will apply only when payment is made with a card machine, such as when utilising a drive-through restaurant or a motorway toll barrier. Following a public consultation, it was discovered that 81 percent of respondents supported efforts to enhance the law. ("Drivers to be banned from using hand-held devices," *BBC*, 19 November 2021)

Yorkshire sees "rare treat" with Northern Lights

On 30 November, the Yorkshire coast witnessed a rare Aurora Borealis treat in Scarborough. Aurora Borealis, a phenomenon when atoms in Earth's high altitudes collide with energy particles from the sun, is a mix of green and purple haze. The spectacular weather phenomena were recorded in several parts of the US, Canada, and further north in Saltburn and Bamburgh, Northumberland. The geomagnetic storm was strong enough to push the rare

phenomenon far into the south. ("Northern Lights: 'Rare treat' as phenomenon seen from Yorkshire coast," *BBC*, 02 November 2021)

REGIONAL

Poland: Constitutional Tribunal rules ECHR's inability to review appointment of judges

On 24 November, Poland's Constitutional Tribunal declared the incompatibility of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) with the country's constitution. According to the ruling, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has no jurisdiction over reviewing and assessing the legitimacy of judicial appointments to Polish courts. The Tribunal's head Julia Przyłębska stated: "Article 6 of the Convention... as far as it includes the Constitutional Tribunal in its definition of a court, is not compatible." Polish opposition parties, however, condemned the ruling by blaming the government of facilitating Poland's removal from the convention. Expressing her concern over the ruling, the Council of Europe's Secretary-General Marija Pejcinovic Buric stated: "Today's judgment from the Polish Constitutional Tribunal is unprecedented and raises serious concerns. We will carefully assess the judgment's reasoning and its effects." ("Poland court says European rights pact 'incompatible' with constitution," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 November 2021)

France and Italy sign a deal to end years of stranded relations

The French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi signed a French-Italian Enhanced Cooperation Treaty towards the rapprochement of diplomatic relations. Both countries' relations got stranded when a governing coalition led by the anti-establishment 5-Star movement and far-right League held power in Italy. Draft of the treaty includes European affairs, migration, industry, justice, venture capital in start-ups and innovative businesses, macroeconomics, culture, youth and significant strategic sectors like 5G, AI, and the cloud. The deal also intends to develop space launchers Ariane 6 and Vega-c. According to Macron: "It was almost an anomaly not to have this Quirinal treaty before because so much unites us -- our histories, our cultures, our

artists." The treaty's success will depend on the outcome of the forthcoming elections, with both countries yet to see the presidential contest. (Sandrine Amiel, "[Quirinale treaty: Will a new French-Italian pact shift the balance of power in Europe?](#)" *Euronews*, 26 November 2021; Hannah Roberts and Giorgio Leali, "[Italy and France heal their rift with a treaty](#)," *POLITICO*, 24 November 2021)

European Commission drafts a law for users to identify paid political ads

On 25 November, the European Commission announced its plans to mandate online platforms to label their advertising as political or not. Big tech companies like Google and Facebook, and other social media giants will disclose the parties funding the ads and their methods of targeting the voters. European Commission Vice-President Vera Jourova said: "People must know why they are seeing an ad, who paid for it, how much, and what micro-targeting criteria were used. Digital advertising for political purposes is becoming an unchecked race of dirty and opaque methods." This rule is as a way to ensure online users are aware of the source of the advertisement while banning techniques used by political parties to use sensitive personal user data on social media. One exception will be to the posts published by politicians on their personal accounts. The rule is set to be finalized by 2023, which is a year before the European Parliament elections. ("[EU unveils plans to make political ads more transparent](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 November, 2021)

Tsikhankouskaya upset over Merkel-Lukashenko talks

On 22 November, exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhankouskaya decried acting German Chancellor Angela Merkel holding telephonic conversations with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in an effort to de-escalate the border tensions. She condemned the call on the grounds that any form of diplomatic dialogue between the EU leaders and him would imply providing him with the legitimacy he hopes to attain. Explaining her understanding of Merkel's intentions to be pure, she said: "From the side of the Belarusian people, it looked very strange."

Merkel, as a response to the criticism, held a conversation with Tsikhankouskaya over the phone where the Chancellor reiterated Germany's support for the upliftment of democratic processes in Belarus. Lukashenko's rule has been considered illegitimate since the country's 2020 presidential elections that were denounced as rigged. ("[Belarus opposition leader criticizes Merkel's 'strange' calls with Lukashenko](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 November 2021)

Britain to send 150 Royal Army to Poland borders

According to the defence secretary, about 150 British army Royal Engineers would be dispatched to help strengthen Poland's border to Belarus. The Royal Army is a component of the Army geared for building or constructing walls or roads or laying in infrastructure. The soldiers would not be combat forces but rather those with "the ability to build roads, checkpoints, and observation posts". During his visit Ben Wallace, Secretary of State for Defence of the UK paid a visit to British troops previously stationed in Poland as per NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. He also struck a deal to supply air defence weapons to Poland. He was concerned about human rights violations at the border, particularly against women and children. (Jonathan Beale and Doug Faulkner, "[Belarus migrant crisis: British army engineers to help at Polish border](#)," *BBC*, 19 November 2021)

Putin warns the West on presence of NATO's arms in Ukraine

On 19 November, the White House and Russia connected on a call to discuss de-escalating the tensions that had risen in Ukraine. The US expressed its concerns over Russian military activities and its troop build-up near Ukraine. Before the call Russian President Vladimir Putin asked the West "not to cross its red lines too lightly". He later said it was a response to the "provocative actions" taken by NATO as it has been deploying its arms inside Ukraine as a protective measure. ("[White House calls on Russia to de-escalate tensions with Ukraine](#)," *Reuters*, 19 November 2021)

ECB fears cutting on monetary policy as inflation hits Europe

On 17 November, the European Union's statistics office Eurostat confirmed that EuroZone inflation surged double the target of the European Central Bank (ECB) in October. The inflation in 19 countries has led the Euro to rise to 0.8 percent month on month and 4.1 percent year on year. The reason is said to be the hike in energy prices. With inflation shot up, the ECB will face the burden to stop its ultra-easy monetary policy. This will allow them to tackle the price rise which is affecting the purchase power of households. However, according to the ECB President Christine Lagarde: "But tightening monetary policy now could choke off the post-pandemic economic recovery." ("Euro zone Oct inflation confirmed at 4.1% y/y on energy spike," *Reuters*, 17 November 2021)

NATO warns Russia over military build-up on Ukrainian borders

On 15 November, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. Following the meeting, Stoltenberg warned Moscow: "NATO remains vigilant... Any further provocation or aggressive actions by Russia would be of serious concern. We call on Russia to be transparent about its military activities." According to estimates by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy about 100,000 Russian troops have amassed in the border area creating panic of a potential attack. Alongside the Eastern Partnership foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels, foreign ministers of France and Germany also issued a joint statement extending support to Ukraine. The statement called on Russia to restrict itself from creating chaos and be open about its military activities. According to the US State Department, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the same with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian on 14 November. A statement released post this discussion, saw the US suggesting that the Belarus-Poland border standoff was a distraction technique as "(Belarus' actions) threaten security, sow division, and aim to distract from Russia's activities on the border with Ukraine." British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, however, warned Europe,

saying that it was high time to choose sides since it would be difficult to rely on Russian gas while retaliating against Russian aggression in Ukraine. ("Ukraine: NATO alarmed by Russian troop buildup on border," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 November 2021; "US, France discuss Russian military activity in Ukraine," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 November 2021; Andrew Roth, "Nato chief warns Russia against 'further provocation' amid Ukraine tensions," *The Guardian*, 15 November 2021)

Russian diplomat found dead outside Berlin embassy

On 05 November, police found a Russian diplomat's body outside the Berlin embassy's compound. The German foreign ministry has confirmed the death but has denied providing further details. It is said that the Russian was second secretary of the Russian Embassy and the investigative website *Bellingcat* reported: "he was the son of the deputy director of the Second Service of Russia's FSB intelligence agency." The death has been linked to the previous murder of Georgian national who was also in second service. The embassy released a statement saying "procedures related to repatriating the diplomat's body... were promptly settled with responsible German law-enforcement and medical authorities in accordance with current practises." ("Russian diplomat found dead outside Berlin embassy," *BBC*, 05 November 2021)

Anti-discrimination campaign on hijab promotion receives backlash

On 04 November, multiple media houses reported the severe backlash received by an EU-funded anti-discrimination campaign promoting hijabs. The posters and advertisements on the same were eventually taken down. The online campaign initiated under the supervision of the Council of Europe's (CoE) anti-discrimination division, included members from the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations' (FEMYSO) along with other Muslim and non-Muslim groups. The campaign's content comprised of split-screen portraits and videos with women wearing hijabs on one side while the other side had women with uncovered hair and no hijabs. It also included slogans which read:

"Beauty is in diversity as freedom is in hijab." In response to the outrage, the CoE's secretary-general Marija Pejcinovic Buric said: "(the campaign) reflected individual statements from people who took part in one of the project's workshops and doesn't reflect the position of the Council of Europe." The campaign was primarily criticized by France, hosting Europe's largest Muslim population, that follows a strict compliance of secularism from all religions. The campaign, however, brought together the left and right wings of French politics. Refusing to agree that the hijab symbolized freedom, far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen tweeted: "It's when women take their veil off that they become free, not the other way around." (Jack Parrock, "[EU-funded hijab campaign sparks outrage](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 November 2021; "[Hijab campaign tweets pulled by Council of Europe after French backlash](#)," *BBC*, 04 November 2021)

Satellite images show Russian military build-up close to Ukrainian borders

On 01 November, satellite images released approved recent reports of Russia gathering troops near the Ukrainian borders. Armoured units, tanks and self-propelled artillery are part of the military build-up near the Russian town of Yelnya, which borders Belarus. Jane's satellite imagery analysis stated that Russia's 4th Tank Division had shifted its equipment closer to Bryansk and Kursk, near Ukraine's northern border. The report comes in the background of months of increasing tension between Russia and the West over Ukraine's bid to a NATO membership and Putin's denial regarding the same. Speaking on the issue, French MEP and Head of the Security and Defense subcommittee Nathalie Loiseau said: "There are different ways with which Russia is interfering with our neighbours, and indeed we are extremely concerned... You will always have Europeans seeing the Russian threat as a very immediate threat for our continent." (Betsy Woodruff Swan and Paul Mcleary, "[Satellite images show new Russian military buildup near Ukraine](#)," *POLITICO*, 01 November 2021)

BREXIT

The foreign officials of the UK and EU to negotiate on the Northern Ireland Protocol

The UK's Brexit Minister David Frost and his EU counterpart Maroš Šefčovič are scheduled to meet to negotiate on the Northern Ireland Protocol as disagreements arise between both. During the Brexit deal, all parties agreed to safeguard the 1998 Northern Ireland peace deal. The deal meant keeping the land border open without cameras or border posts to check the flow of goods. It was easier when the UK was part of the EU, but after Brexit, an arrangement had to be made to check certain goods coming from Northern Ireland. This arrangement was known as the Northern Ireland Protocol. Under this, Northern Ireland agreed to follow the EU standards for the products exported to the UK to avoid border checks. The goods that are entering from the UK will be checked instead. The UK and EU agreed to put this issue off in 2019 to prevent the rift, but the check inside Northern Ireland has aggravated, creating an Irish Sea Border. This serious check has caused difficulties for the UK with the government proposing to impose Article 16 as a solution. Article 16 is a provision which will bar parts of the protocol from being unilaterally suspended if problems arise. (John Campbell, "[Brexit: UK and EU to meet for more Northern Ireland Protocol talks](#)," *BBC*, 26 November 2021; Tom Edgington and Chris Morris, "[Brexit: What's the Northern Ireland Protocol?](#)" *BBC*, 08 November 2021)

French fishing crews stage "symbolic protests"

On 26 November, *The Guardian* reported French fishing crews to have staged "symbolic" protests at the Channel tunnel and three ports in northern France against the British government over the ongoing debate over French boat access in the Channel. The fishermen began their protest at the port of Saint-Malo with red flares, before moving on to Calais and the Channel tunnel in the afternoon. In a 90-minute demonstration, six fishing vessels blocked access to Calais port, the UK's principal gateway to Europe, with similar protests taking place in Ouistreham port and access roads to the Channel tunnel. They requested their licences in protest of the UK's inability to provide the French their full complement of fishing licences, threatening to increase their actions and "display more teeth" if the

protests persist. The protestors explained that there is a certain limit to professional patience and that they hoped the UK heeds to their "warning shot". The licence issue is not crucial on the European level, however it does play a significant role in its long-term relationship with the UK. (Lisa O'Carroll and agencies, "[French fishers block three ports and Channel tunnel access road](#)," *The Guardian*, 26 November 2021)

Šefčovič calls out Lord Frost on "political posturing"

On 21 November, the European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič while talking on the *BBC's* 'The Andrew Marr Show' blamed the UK's Brexit Minister Lord David Frost of "political posturing". On 21 November, Lord Frost had written an article in *The Mail* about the necessity of "urgent" measures from the EU for resolving the Northern Ireland Protocol issue. The solution suggested by Lord Frost was: "goods which both we and the EU agree aren't going to leave NI should not be treated as if they were moving from one country to another because they are not and goods going into Ireland should be checked in the Irish Sea to protect the EU's single market and avoid a hard border." Šefčovič, however, responded: "Sometimes I feel in our meetings I am the only one pushing for urgent solutions... If we would still be in the mode of political posturing and bringing new problems to the table, I don't think we will solve the most pressing issues for Northern Ireland and so we may be acting alone to ensure the Northern Ireland people have the medicines they need." ("[Šefčovič: EU accuses Lord Frost of 'political posturing'](#)," *BBC*, 21 November 2021)

The EU's 'retaliation package' if Britain suspends Northern Ireland Protocol

On 13 November, *POLITICO* reported that the European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič has announced a suggestive sanctions list to be discussed with EU member countries on 16 November. If the UK unilaterally suspends the Northern Ireland trade rules, this draft retaliation package enables the EU to impose tariffs on British exports within a month. Aligning with the imposition of sanctions, scrapping the BREXIT deal as a whole is also under

consideration. The retaliation package is seen as a measure that would thwart British threats of suspending the Northern Ireland protocol. (Hans von der Burchard, "[EU to review retaliation package in case Britain blows up Brexit deal](#)," *POLITICO*, 13 November 2021)

EU requests UK to engage "sincerely" over the Northern Ireland protocol issue

On 06 November, *The Guardian* reported that the European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič stated that there had been no sincere attempt from the UK's side to resolve the Northern Ireland issue and requested their 'sincere' participation. Northern Ireland effectively remains in the single market for goods under the Northern Ireland protocol, while products coming from the UK are subject to the EU customs rules. The EU has acknowledged that the implementation of these agreements has caused disturbances in Northern Ireland's political landscape. Both the EU and the UK have been engaging in talks to reach a compromise on the issue for the past three weeks. Previously, Britain threatened the implementation of article 16 which allows for either side to make unilateral "safeguard measures" to suspend aspects of the deal that affect socio-economic and environmental areas. The deadline set by the UK for the EU's proposal on the issue was 12 October. It is expected that the UK will make its decision on article 16 after the ongoing Cop26 summit. The EU has offered to cut customs procedures in half and health checks on animal and plant commodities going to retailers by 80 percent, but Šefčovič claims that the Brexit Minister David Frost has made little attempt to engage with the suggestions. He mentioned that triggering article 16 would have 'consequences'. The EU may choose to completely terminate the Trade and Cooperation agreement as a retaliatory move. (Daniel Boffey, "[Brexit: EU warns of 'serious consequences' if UK invokes article 16](#)," *The Guardian*, 06 November 2021)

UK Foreign Secretary warns France over fishing row issue

The UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has warned that the UK is now prepared to take action against France. The UK had previously

denied permits to French boats to operate in its territorial waters. Truss said to *BBC* that "France was acting "unfairly" in setting a deadline for issuing more fishing permits". While France has also threatened to stop British fishing boats from arriving at its ports, it will simultaneously increase border checks on UK goods. Officials of the European Commission, France, the UK, and the Channel Islands are expected to hold talks soon to bring a swift solution to the outstanding issue. (Kate Whannel, "[UK could take legal action against France over fishing row, says Liz Truss](#)," *BBC*, 01 November 2021)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Serbia: Mining laws trigger protests, clashes with police

On 27 November, Serbia witnessed streets being blocked as protestors gathered to condemn the new mining laws. The new laws provide mineral resources to foreign mining companies like China's Zijin copper miner and the Anglo-Austrian company Rio Tinto. This implies they receive sovereignty to proceed with projects that may be environmentally polluting to an extent there would be irreversible damage. The protestors, while criticizing President Alexander Vucic, chanted slogans expressing their concern over the latest news. Novi Sad witnessed a similar clash as demonstrations continued. Serbia is one of the most polluted countries in the EU. The recent reforms include polluting projects to proceed without any opposition from activists along with an expropriation law. ([Serbia: Protesters block roads over new mining laws](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 27 November 2021)

EU lawmakers approve reformed Common Agricultural Policy

EU lawmakers overlooked calls to vote down the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The bloc adopted the reformed policy, which will provide GBP 270 million in aid directly to European farmers. The deal will come into effect from 01 January 2023 and will continue till 2027. Covering a third of the EU budget, the deal is expected to meet the climate sustainability goals and rural development goals set by the bloc. However, the reforms have been met with backlash from the Green parties. The overall

sentiment of these parties is that the reform is neither in alignment with climate goals nor beneficial for the farmers. The deal, as proposed by most scientists, would not be meeting the EU's Green Deal goals and would further fuel the climate crisis. It is set to benefit only bigger farming consortiums. The CAP reform is set to have global consequences around the farming sector, food security trade, and biodiversity. Most MEPs applauded the reforms which are set to reward the farmers for their performance. Commissioner Wojciechowski stated: "The new CAP strikes the right balance between flexibility for the Member States and assurance on the CAP expenditure". Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg called for the EU to vote CAP down. (Priyanka Shankar, "[EU lawmakers pass Common Agricultural Policy deal — but green critics sound alarm](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 November 2021)

Pope urges younger generation to endure in climate safety efforts

According to the *Associated Press*, Pope Francis called on the younger generation to continue their action to preserve the environment. He made the remarks during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, commemorating World Youth Day in dioceses throughout the world, and thanking those who fought to assure "respect for the dignity of the vulnerable and spread the spirit of solidarity and sharing". He also mentioned that many young people had voiced their concerns about environmental pollution, adding that even in a society where people are more concerned with "immediate gain" and are more likely to destroy "great ideas", the younger generation had not forgotten "the ability to dream". Lately, he has begun to include social justice and environmental challenges as a part of his daily speeches. In August 2023, he also plans to meet with young people from across the world during the Catholic church's jamboree in Lisbon, Portugal. He was also heard requesting the youth to, "Be free and authentic, be the critical conscience of society". (Olafimihan Oshin, "[Pope calls on young people to protect environment](#)," *The Hill*, 21 November 2021)

Germany: Bottle disposing system turns climate friendly

As per the mechanism, a wholesaler transports empty bottles into the treatment facility. They are then sorted with other bottles of the same shape before being delivered to a producer who utilizes that particular type of bottle. The bottles are then cleaned, filled, and returned to a store shelf for repurchase. According to the German Environment Agency (UBA), a glass bottle can be refilled up to 50 times without losing quality. It gives a re-use rate of 25 for reusable plastic bottles. Single-use bottles, on the other hand, are taken to a recycling center, where they're shredded and transformed into pellets, which are then used to make new plastic bottles, textiles, and other plastic products like detergent containers. According to a UBA packaging specialist Gerhard Kotschik, the deposit system for both reusable and single-use bottles save raw materials, energy, and carbon dioxide emissions, primarily by reducing the fossil fuels used to manufacture new bottles. The system currently uses 70 percent less virgin PET material. Similar deposit schemes have been pushed by environmental groups for tetra packs and other packaging materials. The climate friendly option is soon set to be used in Spain. (Irene Banos Ruiz and Jeannette Cwienk, "How does Germany's bottle deposit scheme work?," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 November 2021)

EEA Report: Air pollution in the EU caused over 300,000 fatalities in 2019

On 15 November, the European Environment Agency (EEA) released a report which maintained that the EU had witnessed over 307,000 premature deaths due to air pollution in 2019. It also claimed that this number could have been cut in half with the World Health Organization's (WHO) new air quality guidelines. The fresh set of guidelines, published in 2021, could have reduced the premature death rate by 58 percent, thus, enabling the bloc to reach its 2030 goal of 55 percent fewer premature deaths. Commenting on the report, WHO's Regional Director for Europe Hans Henri Kluge said: "To breathe clean air should be a fundamental human right. It is a necessary condition for healthy and productive societies." The air quality, which is measured by the amount of fine particulate matter,

nitrogen dioxide and ground-level ozone present in the air, had seen an improvement from 2018 to 2019. In Europe, air pollution poses the 'biggest environmental risk to human health'. (Alex Barry, "Air pollution killed over 300,000 in EU in 2019 — report," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 November 2021)

The UK: Climate agreement declaring phasing out coal announced

The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the Downing Street press reported the climate agreement to have marked the "beginning of the death knell for coal power". The agreement urged countries to push their efforts to reduce coal consumption and fossil fuel subsidies. It was the first agreement to actually mention 'phasing down coal' and 'coal' in general. However, Johnson noted that this success was laced with "disappointment" adding that climate change is already a life-or-death issue for most individuals. Many campaigners have slammed the summit as having no actual intention of limiting global warming. Experts had low hopes for the UN meeting before it took place. Greenpeace's executive director Jennifer Morgan stated that the working of the agreement was "weak" however the ending of "coal era" was very significant to the climate pledge. ("UK says COP26 climate pact 'historic' but 'tinged with disappointment'," *Euronews*, 14 November 2021)

COP26 summit extended by one more night

On 12 November, *Euronews* reported the COP26 climate conference to have been extended another day and would conclude on 13 November to facilitate further negotiations. The key topics of discussion revolved around coal, cash and timing. Many climate leaders of countries made statements on the same. The President of the COP26 Alok Sharma stated that "he was taking part in "intensive consultations" with Groups and Parties". From the Climate Action Network International, Mohamed Adow argued that the UK's proposal to fund the developing nations in fighting climate change is more disappointing as it would become a rich world negotiation and poorer nations cannot accept that. The US Climate Envoy John Kerry made a statement on fossil fuels. He said: "it was a definition of insanity

that trillions were being spent to subsidise fossil fuels worldwide. We're allowing to feed the very problem we're here to try to cure. It doesn't make sense." (["COP26, scheduled to end Friday, will now continue on Saturday as key issues remain unresolved," Euronews](#), 12 November 2021)

Portugal: The European Commission to sue Lisbon for not controlling nitrogen emissions

On 12 November, *Reuters* reported the European Commission's decision to sue Portugal for not taking control measures despite the high emitting levels of nitrogen dioxide. The Commission released a statement which said: "Portugal has continually and persistently exceeded the annual nitrogen dioxide limit value in three air quality zones." Since May 2019, the Commission has been continuously warning Portugal, and its failure to address the issue has led to a legal suit. An earlier report by the European Environment Agency revealed that every European city had exposure to nitrogen oxide, out of which Lisbon and Porto ranked the highest. (["EU sues Portugal for poor air quality caused by nitrogen dioxide," Reuters](#), 12 November 2021)

The Netherlands: Joint Declaration to end overseas support to fossil fuels

On 08 November, the Netherlands at COP26 declared "to stop public financing for new fossil fuel projects abroad by the end of next year". It will join the declaration along with 23 countries to end its funding to fossil fuels overseas by the end of 2022. According to Oil Change International, the Netherlands' total funding per year towards fossil fuels was EUR 1.2 billion. Prime Minister Mark Rutte said: "The climate summit is now, so there is no use in postponing this decision." Previously, the Netherlands was not part of the deal, but change in their decision is seen due to pressure from the opposition parties and climate action groups criticizing the new government will be the same as the present one. (Karl Mathiesen, ["The Netherlands joins COP26 ban on international fossil fuel finance," POLITICO](#), 08 November 2021; ["Dutch join COP26 deal to end financing of fossil fuels abroad," Reuters](#), 08 November 2021)

COP26: Global protests erupt following lack of substantial measures

On 06 November, protests across the world witnessed climate activists gathering to point out the inefficient talks taking place at the UN's COP26 summit in Glasgow, Scotland. Protests were seen alongside the summit talks in Glasgow, while elsewhere in the world, similar protests occurred in Seoul, Sydney, Nairobi, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Paris, and London among other cities. The protesters were specific about what they protested in some regions, as Sydney and Melbourne saw the demonstrators dissenting the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's advocacy for the mining industry. The leaders were criticized for not taking 'immediate and serious' measures to reduce the carbon emissions. The lack of urgent measures to tackle climate change made a few of them deem it another 'blah blah blah' climate summit, quoting Greta Thunberg while others have gone to the extent of calling it a 'failure'. (["Climate activists rally outside COP26 in Glasgow," Deutsche Welle](#), 06 November 2021)

Bosnia: Flash floods wreak destruction

Wreaking havoc, severe flash floods and heavy rainfall hit Bosnia following a warm weather streak. The floods which began on 04 November, were followed by nursing home evacuations and school cancellations. The capital city, Sarajevo, faced a power outage while oxygen facilities for COVID-19 patients were cleared. The country's only licensed medical oxygen-refilling factory, part of the German Messer Group, was also evacuated. There remains a concern that Bosnian hospitals could run out of oxygen cylinders for COVID-19 patients unless activities are restored elsewhere. (["Flash flooding wreaks havoc in Bosnia," Deutsche Welle](#), 06 November 2021)

COVID-19

Switzerland: COVID-19 restrictions to be eased despite high infection rate

On 27 November, the Switzerland government took a reverse route, unlike the rest of Europe, through a vote for the complete removal of certain COVID-19 restrictions. The decision comes at an odd time as the new variant infections rise from

40 to 50 percent in a week; Switzerland is also one of the countries in Europe with a lowest vaccination rate. It is observed that since the pandemic, the Swiss government has been tactical in handling the controls measure towards COVID-19. If Switzerland faces a massive infection rate, one major challenge will be the shortage of essential health professionals, especially nurses. (Imogen Foulkes, "Covid: Swiss vote on ending restrictions while cases surge," *BBC*, 27 November 2021)

Renewed restrictions lead to protests across Europe

On 20 November, several European countries witnessed protests as a result of the new set of COVID-19 restrictions that have been imposed due to the surge in infections. The Netherlands witnessed its third consecutive day of demonstrations with protesters inflicting damage upon infrastructure. 26 arrests were confirmed in Rotterdam, the second-largest Dutch city. Brussels also saw large-scale demonstrations attended by around 35,000 people; however, most of the demonstrators had disbanded before things took a violent turn. The city saw 42 being detained and two arrested. In France's overseas island of Guadeloupe, property vandalization led to the arrests of 38 people after week-long protests to withdraw newly imposed restrictions. ("COVID: Protests against curbs rock Netherlands, Belgium," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 November 2021)

The Netherlands: Anti-lockdown protesters turn violent

On 19 November, a demonstration against the new restrictions imposed by the government on access to indoor venues was witnessed in Rotterdam. The demonstration took a violent turn with protesters setting fire to vehicles and engaging with the police force. According to police, seven were wounded while 12 were arrested due to the clash. They said: "We fired warning shots and there were also direct shots fired because the situation was life-threatening." Police personnel have also been reported as being wounded in the clash. Local political party Leefbaar Rotterdam responded to the incident via Twitter, tweeting: "Rotterdam is a city where you can disagree with things

that happen but violence is never, never, the solution." ("Rotterdam shaken by riots over planned coronavirus curbs," *Deutsche Welle*, 19 November 2021)

Austria: Unvaccinated to be under lockdown

On 14 November, Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg announced the government's decision to impose a nationwide lockdown targeting the unvaccinated. He said: "We must raise the vaccination rate. It is shamefully low... we have told one third of the population: you will not leave your (home) apart from for certain reasons." The decision, arrived via video conference with the governors of the nine Austrian provinces, is expected to affect around two million from Austria's nine million population. On 12 November, two provinces — Upper Austria and Salzburg — declared a similar decision, but Schallenberg's announcement expanded the same to the entire country. Only 65 percent of the Austrian population is fully vaccinated, which is one of the lowest rates in western Europe. The surge in infections is another reason for the declaration; on 13 November, more than 13,000 fresh cases were reported. Unlike the Netherlands which has imposed a three-week partial lockdown, Austria does not want to restrict those who have been fully vaccinated and has, thus, called for an initial lockdown of 10 days. ("Austria orders nationwide lockdown for those not fully vaccinated against Covid," *The Guardian*, 14 November 2021; Carlo Martuscelli, "Austria imposes lockdown on unvaccinated – POLITICO," *POLITICO*, 14 November 2021)

Austria: Unvaccinated to face severe restrictions upon surge in infections

On 12 November, the *BBC* reported a record of more than 11,000 COVID-19 infections to have been documented in Austria within the last 24 hours. Following the surge, the country's government is set to impose a national lockdown for the unvaccinated. Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said: "Two-thirds of people should not suffer because others were hesitant." Till now, upper Austria with a population of 1.5 million, has the highest infection rate but the lowest vaccination rates. Once the rule is passed, the unvaccinated people will be restricted from entering all the social spaces.

(“Covid: Austrians heading towards lockdown for unvaccinated,” BBC, 12 November 2021)

WHO issues warning as COVID-19 cases surge

On 05 October, WHO Europe head Hans Kluge, while attending a press conference, said that there is a surge in new cases in Europe. The organization estimates more than half a million deaths by February 2022. The WHO officials have blamed the low vaccination rates and relaxation of public measures as the major causes for the surge in the infection. It stated that Germany, Russia, and Ukraine which have the lowest vaccination rate to have recorded 27,000-37,000 new cases per day. Countries like Hungary, the Netherlands, and Italy which have high vaccination rates have also recorded 6,000 new cases. (“Covid: WHO warns Europe once again at epicentre of pandemic,” BBC, 05 November 2021; Jon Henley, “Europe once again at centre of Covid pandemic, says WHO,” The Guardian, 04 November 2021; Helen Collis, “WHO: Europe region ‘epicenter’ of coronavirus pandemic,” POLITICO, 04 November 2021))

The UK: First COVID-19 pill approved

On 04 November, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) announced that MSD (Merck & Co's international trade name) and partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics had won the UK's authorization on a new antiviral coronavirus cure. The oral pill molnupiravir which will be used to tend to adults suffering from mild-to-moderate cases of COVID-19, is the first to have successfully treated the disease. Termed by the MHRA as a "safe and effective" treatment, MSD's application for an 'emergency use authorization' for the pill is also under review at the US Food and Drug Administration. Announcing the approval, the UK's Health Secretary Sajid Javid said: "... we have become the first country in the world to approve an antiviral for COVID-19... (it is a) historic day for our country." (“COVID: UK greenlights Merck antiviral pill,” Deutsche Welle, 04 November 2021; Douglas Busvine, “UK approves first pill to treat COVID-19,” POLITICO, 04 November 2021))

ENERGY

Nord Stream 2: Pipeline certification suspended until transfer of resources

On 16 December, *Deutsche Welle* reported that the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project had been denied by the Germany's Federal Network Agency. The project aims to transit gas from Russia to Germany. The German regulator stated that "the subsidiary set to operate the German part of Nord Stream 2 does not meet the conditions to be an independent transmissions operator." The reason behind the decision is due to the Switzerland based company's plan to launch a subsidiary under German law solely for German section of the pipeline. The suspension to hold until the asset and human resources are transferred to the subsidiary. (“German agency suspends certification for Nord Stream 2 pipeline,” Deutsche Welle, 16 November, 2021)

North Macedonia: 30-day state of emergency declared due to energy shortage

On 09 November, the government of North Macedonia declared a 30-day state of emergency due to scarcity of fuel and electricity. It has decided to fund EUR 65 million to the state energy supplier MEPSO electricity company and other related enterprises. This funding will enable them to import needed supplies for production plants to meet the country's demand for power. This situation was flagged earlier by MEPSO's Director Kushtrim Ramadani, as he stated the energy consumption of North Macedonia was twice its production. According to the Economy Minister Kreshik Bekteshi: "the decision was due to "reduced domestic production capacities" and a global increase in electricity prices." (“North Macedonia declares 30-day state of emergency over energy crisis,” Euronews, 10 November 2021))

Nord Stream 2: The US Republicans propose further sanctions on pipeline

On 09 November, Republicans from the US Senate brought forth a legislation that would essentially impose further sanctions on Russian Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Their argument is built on fears of losing the regional allies of the US like Ukraine. Ohio Senator Rob Portman said: "(the sanctions are) crucial to supporting European

independence and energy security." This proposal is expected to be an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The passing of the same would compel the US President Joe Biden to impose a new set of sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG. Earlier this year, sanctions imposed on the pipeline were waived by Biden after he agreed to a deal with Germany's Angela Merkel. The pipeline has been completed and awaits approval in order to begin full-fledged gas transits from Russia to Germany. ("Nord Stream 2: US Republicans urge sanctions," *Deutsche Welle*, 09 November 2021)

Rolling Solar aims to create energy from roads

On 09 November, *Euronews* reported 'Rolling Solar' to be a European project that would strive to create energy in a cost-effective way from the road by using photovoltaics. It is said to have been inspired from the 800,000 kilometers road held by Germany, Belgium and Netherlands. The project cost is estimated to be EUR 5.7 million, out of which EUR 2.8 million will be funded by the European Cohesion Policy. With the help of its partner Heijmans (a real estate, construction and technology company) it has been testing three types of solar cells on the sound wall in Romalen, the Netherlands. According to the innovation manager of Heijmans: "(the project is) a very useful solution for the energy transition, because they make double use of land and space." The long-term goals of the project are to develop sustainable cross-border collaboration and share skills across research and industry sectors. (Aurora Velez, "Solar cells on roads, a new direction for Europe's energy transition," *Euronews*, 09 November 2021)

Poland: Miners protest against plans to phase out coal production

On 06 November, *Euronews* reported around 200 miners to have demonstrated outside the European Commission building in Warsaw, protesting the scheduled coal mine closures that would result in job losses and higher fuel prices. The Polish government offered the phase-out as part of its efforts to tackle global warming. Many citizens state that Polish electricity must continue to come

from coal. Solidarity party MP Janusk Kowalski affirmed that the citizens would not tolerate a drastic increase in energy prices. A petition has been handed over to the European Commission by the protestors. (Richard Good, "Miners protest in Warsaw against Polish government's plans to phase out coal production," *Euronews*, 06 November 2021)

GENDER

Switzerland: Amendment allowing marriage for same-sex couples passed

On 17 November, the Federal Council of Switzerland announced that same-sex couples could get married from 01 July 2022. In the voting process, two-thirds of the country were in favour of the nationwide referendum. This enabled the Justice and Police Minister Karin Keller-Sutter to put the vote to practice. The amendment implies that same-sex couples can now get married while those who already have registered their partnership can convert it to marriage. The only requirement is the submission of a joint declaration to the registrar aiding the conversion. The co-president of the Marriage for All campaign commented on the announcement: "We have been fighting for marriage equality for 30 years and the referendum result was a historic moment." (Thibault Spirlet, "Switzerland to implement same-sex marriage in July 2022," *POLITICO*, 17 November 2021)

Georgia: Conservative priest advocates for LGBT rights

On 04 November, *Euronews* reported a Tbilisi Baptist Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili to have been fighting for LGBT rights. He is a professor of comparative theology and religious ethics and is the leader of Georgia's Evangelical-Baptist Church. He was the Archbishop of Georgia's Baptist Church until he was forced to resign due to his support for gays and marginalized Muslim groups. His Peace church has been lobbying for the community in conservative Georgia. His congregation marched in support of the LGBT community when they faced violent protests and attacks in July, and also provided for the rent of transgender women during the pandemic. He mentioned that the church had lost donors owing to the open support for the community. However, he

believes that the injustice against the community must be addressed politically, culturally, and even religiously. Despite a loss in donors, the church continues to operate its social projects and helps immigrants, internally displaced people, and others in need. Songulashvili believes that anyone could change their views and help overcome injustice. (Emil Filtenborg and Stefan Weichert, "[Meet the baptist priest fighting for LGBT rights in conservative Georgia](#)," *Euronews*, 04 November 2021)

International Handball Federation changes women's uniform rules

On 01 November, the International Handball Federation (IHF) reformed its rules regarding women's uniforms. During July's European championship, the European Handball Federation had fined Norway's female beach handball team an amount of EUR 1,500 for being "improperly dressed," as they wore shorts instead of the prescribed bikini bottoms. This move was widely protested by players and European lawmakers from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as they called on the IHF to reform its rules "in accordance with gender equality". The new rules state: "Female athletes must wear tight pants with a close fit." It also allows them to wear "short tight pants" instead of bikinis. Despite the changes, the rules fail to abide by the International Olympic Committee directives to not overly sexualize female athletes. ("[Handball federation changes rules following women's bikini scandal](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 01 November 2021)

MIGRATION

France slams UK in a diplomatic spat over the migrant issue

In a diplomatic spat with France, following the deaths of 27 persons who drowned while attempting to cross the English Channel, the UK's invitation to the European officials meeting was cancelled. The UK Home Secretary Priti Patel described her absence from the Calais conference as "unfortunate". She claimed that she would be having separate and urgent consultations with European ministers this week. French President Emmanuel Macron responded fiercely to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's request for France to take back refugees.

Macron accused Johnson of demonstrating a lack of seriousness in a letter posted on Twitter. Johnson said: "This is an issue we have to fix together." The UK government asserted that the letter was genuine and encouraged France to reconsider its invitation. The discussions in Calais, which France convened to address the recent rise in the English Channel migrant crossings, were attended by Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and the European Commission. ("[Channel migrants: France wants 'serious' talks with UK](#)," *BBC*, 29 November 2021)

Poland-Belarus Migrant Crisis: Lukashenko visits migrant warehouse at border

On 26 November, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met with migrants at a warehouse at the Poland-Belarus border. Addressing the media, he backed the efforts of the migrants to cross into the EU. He said: "If anybody wants to go west – that is your right. We will try not to catch you, beat you, and hold you behind barbed wire... We will work with you to achieve your dream." The President's speech was largely appreciated by the migrants. Despite Belarus returning migrants back home via flights, Lukashenko urged Germany to accommodate a few more of them, saying: "Please take these people in. This number is not very big. They want to live in Germany – 2,000 people is not a big problem for Germany." However, Germany has denied the possibility of taking in any more migrants with German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer stating: "... it would mean implementing the very basis of this perfidious strategy." The situation at the border has urged the EU to resort to fresh sanctions which are expected to be implemented in early December. ("[Belarus' Lukashenko says migrants have 'right' to go west](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 November 2021)

First victim of the English Channel mass drowning identified

In the recent English Channel mass drowning, a 24-year Kurdish woman Maryam Nuri Mohamed Amin has been identified as the first victim. The victim's family members confirmed the same and stated that she had migrated in search of better living standards. As per the reports, she was one of the 27 who drowned in the

accident. The other two survivors who were found sinking were rescued, hospitalized and now have been discharged. ("Channel disaster: Kurdish woman is first victim identified," *BBC*, 27 November 2021)

More migrant boats arrive despite drownings in the English Channel

On 24 November, a fishing boat set off an alarm where 27 men and several women were dead in the English Channel. So far, 47,000 have attempted to cross the channel to enter the UK, but it was this time where the boats have sunk. The reason for the accident is unknown while rescue authorities claim the boat to have been in a fragile condition. Five people responsible for the incident have been arrested. The most concerning issue is that the crossing has not stopped despite the incident, as more boats seem to be arriving. The leaders of the UK and France have agreed to cooperate and take steps to prevent worsening the humanitarian situation. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that "he hoped the French would now find a renewed offer of joint patrols along the French Channel coast acceptable". Meanwhile French President Emmanuel Macron stated: "he was expecting the British to cooperate fully, and that they abstain from instrumentalizing a tragic situation for political purposes." (Dulcie Lee, "Channel deaths: More boats arrive after 27 people drown", *BBC*, 25 November 2021)

Poland-Belarus border standoff: EU set to impose coordinated sanctions on Belarus

On 23 November, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at a session of the European Parliament said that the EU stood in solidarity with its members of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Denying the existence of a 'migrant crisis', she reiterated: "This is not a migration crisis. This is the attempt of an authoritarian regime to try to destabilize its democratic neighbours." The latest plans include "blacklist(ing) all means and modes of transport involved in trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants." A new package of sanctions coordinated with the US, Canada, and the UK are being considered by the EU. Urging the necessity of the same, she commented: "We agreed that to counter this behaviour, it is

important to coordinate our sanctions and to work with countries of origin and the airlines that are transporting migrants to Minsk." ("Belarus: EU to target firms trafficking migrants with 'blacklist'," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 November 2021)

The UK: Priti Patel accused of mishandling the migrant crisis

After a record number of individuals arrived on British beaches in boats last week, UK's Labour Party has accused Home Secretary Priti Patel of "comprehensively failing" to limit the growing population crossing the Channel. The accusations follow claims that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is "exasperated" by his government's failure to slow the tide of arrivals, with concerns that no feasible proposal to lower the number of people arriving available. Shadow Home Secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds, stated Patel's incompetence on the matter to be hazardous. According to Chief Executive of the Refugee Council Enver Solomon, the government confronts a major problem. He says the government must keep its promise to manage the UK's borders and recognize the matter's complexity. Moreover, the issue needs an informed realistic approach and not empty rhetoric. Health Secretary Sajid Javid backed Patel stating that the new Nationality and Borders bill is set to make drastic changes to the migration issue. (Rajeev Syal, "Priti Patel accused of 'comprehensively failing' to curb small boat crossings," *The Guardian*, 21 November 2021)

Lukashenko says "absolutely possible" for Belarus to have facilitated migrants' Poland entry

On 19 November, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko told *BBC* in an exclusive interview that it was "absolutely possible" for his forces to have helped the migrants enter Poland but denied inviting them into Belarus. He stated in the interview: "I told them I'm not going to detain migrants on the border, hold them at the border, and if they keep coming from now on I still won't stop them, because they're not coming to my country, they're going to yours." In the past few months, many migrants from the Middle East have been entering into the EU via Belarus.

Lukashenko has been condemned by the EU, the US and NATO for allowing the migrant crossings. Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was forcefully sent out of Belarus after the controversial 2020 presidential elections, accused the *BBC* for the interview. She said "the *BBC* interview provided Mr Lukashenko with "a platform for lies and propaganda". (Steve Rosenberg, "Belarus's Lukashenko tells *BBC*: We may have helped migrants into EU," *BBC*, 20 November 2021)

Poland: 100 migrants detained

Flouting EU laws, Poland has detained around 100 migrants. The Polish Defense Ministry accused Belarus of facilitating border crossings by the migrants, triggering a confrontation at the barbed wire fences. Belarusian Spetsnaz, or special troops, conducted surveillance, according to the Polish government, and may have harmed the barbed wire fencing. The Polish ministry said: "Then the Belarusians forced the migrants to throw stones at Polish soldiers to distract them. The attempt to cross the border took place several hundred metres away." Some migrants attempting to enter the EU have had their circumstances improved, with some being housed in a warehouse in Belarus. Several others, on the other hand, are still out in the cold, facing incredibly difficult conditions. (Kieran Burke, "Belarus border crisis: Poland detains 100 migrants," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2021)

Greece: Search and rescue activists on trial for charges of human trafficking, espionage, money laundering

On 18 November, proceedings began against 24 humanitarian activists who were involved in aiding migrants reach Greece during 2016 to 2018. The Mytilene Misdemeanour Court on the Greek island of Lesbos has undertaken the case. The activists belong to a non-profit search and rescue team named the Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI). In response to the beginning of the trial, Associate Children's Rights Director at Human Rights Watch (HRW) Bill van Esveld said: "The Greek authorities' misuse of the criminal justice system to harass these humanitarian rescuers seems designed to

deter future rescue efforts, which will only put lives at risk." In an effort to maintain fair and legal proceedings, observers have been called on by HRW from foreign countries. They further added that "legitimate fundraising activity" was being mislabelled as "money laundering". The sentence for the activists, if they are found guilty, would be 25 years. ("Greece: Activists who helped migrants go on trial," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2021; "Greece: NGO workers could face prison for helping migrants," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2021)

Estonia: Government to carry out military exercise in the Polish-Belarusian border

On 17 November, the government in Tallinn said that new fences will be constructed across the border it shares with Russia. Till now, 1,700 guards were positioned as part of military exercises to install barricades due to migrant movement along the Polish-Belarusian border. According to the Estonian government: "the barriers will be erected in the border areas that have previously been used by organized crime to facilitate illegal migration." The military exercise in Estonia is said to take place till 25 November and has been modelled to assess the rapid response of the national defense chain of command. (Thibault Spirlet, "Estonia to build new barriers on Russian border," *POLITICO*, 17 November 2021)

France: Decathlon stops selling canoes in northern France to prevent migrant crossings

Recently the French police raided a migrant camp that held 1,000 people due to which close to 1,185 migrants crossed over the English Channel using small boats and canoes. The crossings have triggered tensions between London and Paris. Upon this the sports equipment retailer has stopped the sale of canoes in northern France as it believes it might be used by the migrants in the crossings to reach England. The French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has said that "Britain should stop using us as a punch-ball in their domestic politics." ("Decathlon stops selling canoes in northern France to prevent migrant crossings," *France24*, 17 November 2021)

Lukashenko agrees to negotiate the border issues with the EU

On 17 November, according to Belarus' state-run *Belta* news agency, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko agreed that the problem on the Belarus-Poland border must be resolved through negotiation between the EU and Belarusian authorities. Merkel's spokesperson Steffen Seibert, said that Merkel emphasized the importance of the UN and the EU in organizing humanitarian relief and repatriation facilities to assist the impacted people. The G7 foreign ministers had also issued a joint statement, urging Belarus to promptly stop the migration situation. (["Belarus: Lukashenko agrees to EU talks on ending migrant standoff," Deutsche Welle, 17 November 2021](#))

Poland-Belarus border standoff: Merkel's phone call with Lukashenko

On 15 November, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko held a telephonic conversation to discuss the ongoing migrant crisis at the Poland-Belarus border. German government spokesperson Steffen Seibert released a statement, saying: "The Chancellor and Mr. Lukashenko spoke about the difficult situation on the border between Belarus and the European Union - especially about the need for humanitarian aid for the refugees and migrants there." The phone call marked the first conversation between Lukashenko and any western leader after Belarus' controversial 2020 presidential election. However, German Chancellor-in-waiting Olaf Scholz did not hold Merkel's reconciliatory stance. He said: "First of all, it must be said clearly that this is a bad dictator there in Belarus. And there is nothing to gloss over, he has lost all legitimacy." In this backdrop, Lukashenko is said to have addressed Belarus' state-run *Belta* news agency. He said: "We are actively working on convincing these people to head home." (["Belarus crisis: Poland says migrants marching to border," Deutsche Welle, 15 November 2021](#))

EU partners and Russia debate the escalating crisis at the Belarusian and Polish border

The US, UK, France, Ireland, Norway, Estonia and Albania blamed Belarus for having put

lives in danger and orchestrating "instrumentalization" of refugees across borders at the UN Security Council. The Western nations deemed the Belarusian actions to divert attention from its human rights violations and having an aim of destabilizing the borders of neighbouring EU countries. Russia rebuked the allegations made by other countries at the UNSC. While the western countries deemed the situation as "unacceptable", Russia's deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy described the countries to have a "masochist" inclination for having brought up the situation in front of Russia and the international stage. He expressed that the EU had previously faced the same issues and must try to understand why people are leaving their homes and which countries are actually responsible for this displacement. Germany called for the international community and politicians to help with the crisis. Owing to the same, Turkey's Civil Aviation Authority (SHGM) declared that travellers from Iraq, Syria and Yemen would not be allowed to board or purchase tickets from Turkish airports to Belarus. They mentioned that the Belarusian authorities complied with the same. (["Belarus: Western nations, Russia debate migration conflict at UN," Deutsche Welle, 12 November 2021](#); ["Turkey bars some Middle Eastern nationals from flying to Belarus," Deutsche Welle, 12 November 2021](#); ["German politicians urge help for Belarus border migrants," Deutsche Welle, 14 November 2021](#))

Poland-Belarus Migrant Crisis: Calls for resolution and action

On 10 November, the European Council President Charles Michel met with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. Michel had landed in Warsaw to discuss the ongoing migrant crisis at the Polish border. In a show of solidarity, Michel lashed out at the Lukashenko regime calling it "authoritarian" and "cynical". During the joint press conference, he added: "It must stop, this hybrid attack against the EU — not just against Poland but also against the EU." Morawiecki, however, called for immediate action and said: "We want to implement extra sanctions, for example extra sanctions concerning airlines, including Belarusian airlines, but not only that." German Foreign

Minister Heiko Maas had also called for new EU sanctions against Belarus. The EU has been attempting to assist Poland by deploying their border protection agency Frontex and their police force Europol, near the borders; however, Poland refuses to invite help stating they are self-sufficient and are handling the crisis. There also exist increased allegations of Russian involvement in the migrant crisis. In light of this, Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel had a telephonic conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 10 November, asking him to find a solution to the ongoing crisis. Responding to this, Putin proposed initiating "direct contact between EU member states and Minsk." ("Belarus migrant crisis: EU Council chief visits Poland," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 November 2021; "Belarus migrant crisis: Germany calls for new EU sanctions," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 November 2021; "Merkel pressures Putin to act on Poland-Belarus standoff," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 November 2021)

EU blames Lukashenko of 'gangster-style' tactics; Morawiecki accuses Putin to be 'enabler'

On 09 November, Polish officials closed the border crossing after increased tensions at the Polish-Belarus border. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki tweeted: "Sealing the Polish border is our national interest. But today the stability and security of the entire EU is at stake." In an emergency session of the Polish parliament, Morawiecki accused Putin's involvement in the migrant crisis. He said: "This is the latest attack of Lukashenko, who is an executor, but has an enabler, and this enabler is in Moscow, this enabler is President Putin, which shows a determination to carry out the scenario of rebuilding the Russian empire, the scenario that we, all Poles, have to forcefully oppose." However, Belarus denied the allegations against them as Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated: "I am not a madman, I understand perfectly well where it can lead... We understand, we know our place. But we will not kneel." Russia also responded to the crisis with Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stating that their priority was the "lives and health" of the migrants while Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested that Belarus be financially

aided to stop the migrant inflow. Meanwhile, the European Commission is considering imposing further sanctions on Belarus. On 08 November, the member states also agreed on suspending an EU-Belarus visa facilitation agreement. ("Poland seals Belarus border crossing in migrant standoff," *Deutsche Welle*, 09 November 2021; Daniel Boffey and Andrew Roth, "EU condemns Belarus's 'gangster-style' tactics in Polish border crisis," *The Guardian*, 09 November 2021; Zosia Wanat, "Poland blames Putin for instigating border crisis," *POLITICO*, 09 November 2021)

Italy: More than 800 people rescued from the Mediterranean

Following days of waiting in the central Mediterranean, a ship carrying more than 800 migrants including 200 minors and five pregnant women was allowed to dock at Trapani, off the Sicilian coast. The German rescue vessel Sea-Eye 4 was allowed to dock after rejections from Lampedusa and Malta; by then a fellow charity ship had delivered food and blankets to the migrants. Negotiations will be pursued after docking but in an effort to ensure the safety of the crew and the migrants, hospitals performed routine check-ups. The Sea-Eye charity complained about the "appalling" state of the country's inability to provide for assistance. Another boat is set to arrive in Italy carrying over 314 migrants. ("Italy: 800 migrants on board German rescue ship reach Sicilian port," *Deutsche Welle*, 08 November 2021)

Poland-Belarus migrant crisis escalates; EU calls for further sanctions

On 08 November, Belarusian media released a video that showed Belarusian border guards escorting almost thousands of migrants to the Polish region of Podlaskie in order to let them cross into the EU. Following this, video reports saw Polish border guards pushing back the migrants with the use of tear gas as people attempted to knock down the fences and cut through the barbed wire. At this, the migrants were heard shouting "Germany!" European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for further sanctions to be imposed on the Belarusian regime and proposed to consider additional measures on "how to sanction, including through blacklisting,

third-country airlines that are active in human trafficking". (["EU's von der Leyen calls for new sanctions on Belarus over migrant influx," France24](#), 08 November 2021; Andrew Roth, ["Belarus escorts 1,000 migrants towards Polish border," The Guardian](#), 08 November 2021)

Spain: Suspicions of illegal migration after individuals flee post-emergency landing

12 individuals were arrested by police in Mallorca after fleeing a plane that had made an emergency landing. The landing is suspected to have been an attempt by the 12 Moroccans to illegally enter Spain. Those in suspicion include nine people who illegally exited the plane, a passenger who claimed to be sick, the passenger's companion, and a passenger who was jailed for fighting with a plane official. In total, 23 passengers are thought to have exited the plane when an ambulance was called to carry off an apparently ill passenger. The runways of the airport were then closed before some of them were caught. At least 11 migrants are still believed to be on the loose. They have all been accused of facilitating illegal immigrants to enter the country. (Daniel Bellamy, ["More than 20 suspected migrants flee from plane after it lands in Mallorca," Euronews](#), 06 November 2021)

Greece: Migrant ship finally allowed to dock at an Aegean Island

On 31 October, the Murat 729, a Turkish ship harbouring around 400 passengers – mostly Afghans, was allowed to dock at a Greek island. On 29 October, the ship had sent a distress signal after its engines failed. The Greek and Turkish authorities refused to allow docking of the ship in their territory. Greece appealed to the European Commission, asking them to hold Turkey accountable to the 2016 accord with the bloc. They held negotiations with Turkey regarding the fate of the vessel. Greece eventually budged, and the Aegean port of Kos saw around 375 passengers disembarking the ship in an attempt to apply for asylum. Greece's minister for migration and asylum policy, Notis Mitarachi said: "We have notified the EU that Turkey has refused to take their vessel back. Unlike Turkey and others that ignored the problem, Greece stepped up... But Greece cannot solve the

migration crisis alone." Called "an unusual and special case" by Greece's migration ministry, the cargo ship was a Turkish-flagged vessel. (Helena Smith, ["Greece lets boat packed with Afghan refugees dock after four days at sea," The Guardian](#), 31 October 2021; ["Turkish ship carrying Afghan migrants towed to Greek port," Deutsche Welle](#), 31 October 2021)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Apple and Amazon fined for breaching competition regulations

The tech giants Apple and Amazon have been charged EUR 200 million by Italy's competition watchdog for deliberately breaching competition regulations. The Italian competition authority has stated that the companies have violated both the EU rules and affected the pricing. It said: "It ordered the two companies to end the restrictions and give resellers access in a non-discriminatory manner." In response, both the companies have denied the charges and have planned to appeal. The spokesperson of Amazon said that: "We reject the suggestion that Amazon benefits by excluding sellers from our store, since our business model relies on their success." (["Italy fines Apple and Amazon over Beats headphones," BBC](#), 24 November 2021)

The UK: Cyber-flashing to be made illegal

The UK's Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries stated that "cyber-flashing" could potentially be included "within the scope" of the Online Safety Bill. Cyber-flashing occurs within public spaces with perpetrators using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth networks to send obscene pictures. Online platforms violating the privacy and security of customers will face criminal sanctions. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in recommendation by the Law Society demanded a specific offence be created for cyber-flashing. It is already a criminal offence in Scotland but is not yet illegal in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. (["Cyber-flashing likely to become a criminal offence - Dorries," BBC](#), 24 November 2021)

Germany: Merkel stresses on Chinese technological cooperation; warns of lacking progress

On 17 November, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that for the chip development and quantum computing industries to excel in Europe, each country would need state support. Merkel further stated that Europe should not break off research and development collaboration with China. Despite concerns about Chinese surveillance and technology theft at German universities, Merkel stated that China remained a significant contributor to research and business. Merkel noted that when it comes to protecting essential infrastructure, standards should stay high, and she referenced Germany's new IT security law. The IT Security Act 2.0 offers the government more authority over device manufacturers for next-generation telecommunications networks, such as Huawei of China. Admitting that Germany was naive concerning its partnerships over the years with China, she said: "We can learn a lot from each other. Total decoupling wouldn't be right in my view, it would be damaging for us." Germany, which has been top notch in the research field of building fast and powerful computers, now majorly lacks interest in quantum computing. The failure of the German companies in capitalizing the research has come as a shock to the outgoing Chancellor. Merkel also noted that the US and China were superior in innovation technology and that Europe must continue working towards larger domains of quantum computing and artificial intelligence. ("Germany's Merkel warns against Europe 'decoupling' from China," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 November 2021; Andreas Rinke, "EXCLUSIVE Europe must work together to stay at forefront of high-tech – Merkel," *Reuters*, 17 November 2021)

The US rebukes Russia over anti-satellite missile test

On 16 November, the US State Department spokesperson Ned Price accused Russia of having blown up a Russian satellite leading to the production of debris. The incident which occurred on 15 November, forced the seven-member International Space Station (ISS) crew to take shelter in capsules. He said: "Earlier today, the Russian Federation recklessly conducted a destructive satellite test of a direct ascent anti-satellite missile against one of its own satellites... so far

generated over 1,500 pieces of trackable orbital debris and hundreds of thousands of pieces of smaller orbital debris that now threatens the interests of all nations." The Russian Space Agency, however, underplayed the event, stating: "The orbit of the object, which forced the crew today to move into spacecraft according to standard procedures, has moved away from the ISS orbit." They added that the station was now in the "green zone". Price, infuriated by the incident, warned to work with "allies" to "respond to their irresponsible act". The debris is expected to risk satellites and human spaceflights in coming years since the velocities at which these particles move can dent or puncture the walls of modules. ("Russian anti-satellite missile test draws condemnation," *BBC*, 16 November 2021; Meghan Bartels, "Space debris forces astronauts on space station to take shelter in return ships," *Space.com*, 15 November 2021)

Big social media companies retract their controversial tech applications

The lawmakers of the European Parliament are concerned as big social media companies like Google, Facebook, and Online ad lobby are found guilty. It has decided to regulate targeted online advertising. Upon the decision, Facebook has said it shall remove its critiqued ad targeting service, which uses an indication of religion and sexual orientation to show ads. Google has also stepped to remove its third-party cookies, which track the user's online activity, and Apple has also begun moves to block similar tracker technologies. According to media company Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB), a ban on advertising would widen the gap between those who benefit from technological developments and those who do not. (Clothilde Goujard and Vincent Manancourt, "Big Tech scrambles as Europe ramps up crusade against online advertising," *POLITICO*, 12 November 2021)

SpaceX launches Falcon 9 to study on future deep space exploration

On 10 November, SpaceX launched the Falcon 9 rocket with four astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS). The highlight of the mission was its fourth crew member. Mathias Maurer, a German national

from the European Space Agency (ESA), is the 600th Space traveller in 60 years. After the take-off, NASA Chief Bill Nelson tweeted: “Godspeed, Crew-3 — I can’t wait to see all that you accomplish.” The crew is tasked with conducting research to help inform future deep space exploration. The experiments involved in the task include growing plants without soil and building optical fibres in microgravity — expected to be of better quality than the ones made on Earth. The crew is also said to upgrade the station’s solar panels to facilitate the two upcoming tourism missions. ([“SpaceX launch: Four astronauts, including one German, head to ISS,” Deutsche Welle](#), 11 November, 2021)

Two suspects of REvil cyberattacks arrested by Europol

The Romanian police, the US Department (DOJ), and the Europol recently announced a coordinated action against the REvil gang. The raids were carried out by the EU agency dealing with judicial cooperation (German, French, Romanian and Swiss) in both online and offline forms, leading to the arrest of two suspects who belonged to Romania and Ukraine. REvil has been behind major hacks on global businesses by disrupting meat production, hacking a foreign exchange of Travelex company and was also responsible for hacking a Florida-based software firm Kaseya. The Europol in a statement reported that “Suspected of about 7,000 infections, the arrested affiliates asked for more than EUR 200 million (USD 232 million) in ransom.” After the arrest, the US has announced that it has recovered USD 6 million in cryptocurrency from the gang. The operation of the police is seen as a success story to combat cyber criminals and is predicted that it will be the end of the REvil. ([“REvil: Day of reckoning for notorious cyber gang,” BBC](#), 09 November 2021; [“Suspected hackers arrested in European sting,” Deutsche Welle](#), 08 November 2021)

Facebook Whistleblower’s EU testimony

On 08 November, Facebook whistleblower Frances Huguen testified in the European Parliament. She said: “European lawmakers have a historic opportunity to set the global rules for social media.” The EU recently passed its Digital Services Act (DSA) which

looks at redrafting the restrictions on big tech companies on digital platforms, and considers the hearing to be an important opportunity. In the hearing, Huguen gave a warning against the creation of loopholes and suggested that news media should be exempt from the DSA. On the question of safety and democracy she has said that Facebook’s decisions are far away from them compared to other tech companies like Google, Pinterest and Yelp. According to her: “The choices being made by Facebook’s leadership are a huge problem — for children, for public safety, for democracy that is why I came forward... And let’s be clear: it doesn’t have to be this way.” There is a clash existing between the European Parliament, the European Commission and member countries on finalizing the contents of the DSA proposal. Hence, it is unclear if the testimony of Huguen will have an impact in the final draft. (Clothilde Goujard and Laura Kayali, [“5 takeaways from Facebook whistleblower’s EU Parliament testimony,” POLITICO](#), 08 November 2021)

The Netherlands: Tesla announces superchargers for other electric cars

Announcing a pilot programme in the Netherlands, Tesla has opened up superchargers for other electric vehicles. It announced testing stations available at 10 locations around the Netherlands. Non-Tesla electric vehicles would be able to access Tesla stations through the Tesla app. Due to extra site adjustments and accommodation costs, non-Tesla drivers may have to avail the services at an extra price. Tesla uses the Combined Charging System (CCS) standard in Europe, allowing a wide range of cars to charge in stations without an adapter that uses a similar connector. Superchargers can be used by BMW, Daimler, Volkswagen, and Ford – all of which use the CCS standard. ([“Tesla opens Superchargers to other electric cars for first time,” The Guardian](#), 02 November 2021; Alistair Charlton, [“Tesla Superchargers Can Now Be Used By Other Electric Cars: Here Is How It Works,” Forbes](#), 01 November 2021)

INTERNATIONAL

Italy: Israeli supreme court orders the return of Eitan Biran

The Israeli Supreme Court has ordered that a six-year-old child who was the lone survivor of a cable car tragedy in northern Italy be sent to his relatives by 12 December. Since the death of his parents in the Stresa-Mottarone aerial tramway tragedy in May 2021, Eitan has been at the core of a contentious custody struggle between relatives in Israel and Italy. His maternal grandfather, Shmuel Peleg, allegedly kidnapped him from his paternal aunt, Aya Biran-Nirko. Shortly after the cable car catastrophe, Biran-Nirko was awarded custody of the child. Biran-Nirko's lawyers said the verdict, which affirmed a lower court's decision from October 2021, marked the conclusion of a terrible incident. Meanwhile, the Peleg family has vowed to continue fighting for his return to Israel "in every legal way". The court declared: "(Peleg) did not provide a valid reason why the return to Italy could cause psychological or physical damage to the child." (Angela Giuffrida, "Eitan Biran: cable car fall survivor must be returned to Italy, Israeli court rules," *The Guardian*, 29 November 2021)

France: Hotel driver accused of facilitating Tutsi genocide undergoes trial

The trial of Claude Muhayimana, a former hotel driver accused of driving Hutu fighters to locations where they massacred Tutsis during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, commenced in Paris. Muhayimana stands accused of "complicity in genocide" and "crimes against humanity" for offering "aid and support" to the Hutus. It is the third similar trial in France of Rwandan genocide perpetrators, but the first of a "normal" civilian with no evident ties to the government or military. He stands accused of agreeing to drive the Hutu police and Interahamwe, around Lake Kivu. The case is complex, considering he hid Tutsis at "risk of death" and facilitated their escape. His wife was also a Tutsi. The case comes after two postponements and 10 years of proceedings. Fifty witnesses are expected to be present for the trial. Collective of Civil Parties for trials, Alexandre Kiabski said: "Muhayimana will be the first ordinary citizen to face trial. Before the genocide, Muhayimana was respectable all around." Muhayimana's attorneys held that he had little to no choice in obeying the Hutu authorities. The final

verdict is expected to be around 17 December. If convicted, Muhayimana could face life in prison. ("France puts driver accused of genocide complicity in Rwanda on trial," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 November 2021)

Italy: Israel halts the return of a six-year-old cable car victim

The repatriation of a six-year-old boy who survived a cable car tragedy in Italy to his relatives in Italy has been put on hold until Israel's supreme court determines whether to appeal the decision by family members in Israel. When a cable vehicle drove into a mountain in northern Italy in May, Eitan Biran's parents and younger sibling were among 14 lives lost. The court will determine whether or not to hear the appeal in coming weeks, and a hold on Biran's return to Italy has been issued. Last month, an Israeli court ordered Eitan to be sent back to Italy, calling it his "place of normal residence" and requested the grandfather, Shmuel Peleg, to pay 20,000 USD as attorney fees. Eitan's paternal relatives claim he was taken without their permission, and have launched a court lawsuit in Italy for his return. International arrest order for Peleg was issued by an Italian judge earlier this month. ("Israeli court halts return to Italy of boy who survived cable car crash," *The Guardian*, 17 November 2021)

Lithuania: Taiwan's de facto embassy opens in Vilnius

On 18 November, overriding China's threat to withdraw its ambassador from Lithuania, Vilnius saw Taiwan's first embassy in Europe under its own name. In the US and other European countries, Taiwan is identified as 'Taipei' to avoid referring to the island territory claimed by China. One among the 15 countries having diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Lithuania has also agreed to open its own representative office in Taiwan. However, the dates for the same are yet to be confirmed. The new Taiwanese office in Vilnius represents a scope for cooperation via semiconductor industries and other technologically-intensive industries. ("Taiwan opens representative office in Lithuania," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 November 2021)

France: Macron hosts world leaders for conference on Libya

On 12 November, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted world leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the US Vice President Kamala Harris in Paris for a conference on Libya. Since Dictator Moammar Gadhafi's fall in 2011, Libya has been in a chaotic state. The UN-backed conference decided on the Libyan presidential elections to be conducted on 24 December, as threats of sanctions were made on actors who intended to foil the plans. A statement released post-conference warned: "Persons or entities inside or outside Libya who attempt to obstruct, challenge, manipulate or tamper with the electoral process and political transition will be held accountable and may be subject to UN sanctions." Leaders from Libya, Egypt and Italy also attended the conference while Russia and Turkey were represented by low-level diplomats. This is attributed to Turkey being concerned about France seeking withdrawal of the Turkish forces from Libya while the Libyan National Army collaborates with Wagner group's Russian mercenaries. ("World powers call for support for December 24 elections in Libya," *Deutsche Welle*, 12 November 2021)

Ukraine: CIA director sent against Russian military build-up around Ukraine

On 10 November, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. The meeting was held amidst growing concerns of a Russian Military build-up around Ukraine. He warned Russia against using energy as a weapon stating that the US commitment to Ukrainian security is "ironclad". Russia had been accused of holding onto energy supplies to boost gas prices in Europe. As a part of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline deal, which adversely affects Ukraine's economy in gas transit fees, Germany vowed to respond to any Russian altercation against Ukraine. Previously, Kuleba insisted Germany use its "leverage" and provide a strong message against Russia. He stated that support from allies would surely deter Russia, which has already been weaponizing energy against Ukraine. The US dispatched CIA Director Bill Burns to monitor the Russian military build-up around the border,

sparkling tensions of an invasion into Ukraine. A 'Charter on Strategic Partnership' was also signed by the two leaders. ("Ukraine: US top diplomat warns Russia over military buildup," *Deutsche Welle*, 11 November 2021)

France: Kamala Harris meets Macron to fix rift in relations

On 10 November, the US Vice President Kamala Harris met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris in an attempt to fix the rift that developed from signing the AUKUS deal. France lost its submarine deal with Australia as it signed the AUKUS pact and since then there has been strong opposition from France to the parties to the deal. To smoothen the issue, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was earlier sent to Paris. However, this had not helped. With Harris in place, the re-establishment of good bilateral relation is expected. The two parties discussed healing the diplomatic rift, defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, military operations in Sahel, and space cooperation along with the global health issues. ("Macron: France and US starting 'new era' of relations after submarine row," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 November, 2021)

The European Commission: Ursula von der Leyen meets Biden

On 10 November, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met with the US President Joe Biden at the White House, Washington. The meeting sought to cover issues such as trans-Atlantic trade, the escalation of tensions in eastern Europe, and global warming. Prior to the meeting, White House spokesperson Emily Horne said: "President Biden will reaffirm his support for the European Union as a fundamental partner for the United States." The meeting also falls in line with the start of the new US-EU Trade and Technology Council. Talks regarding the conflicts in eastern Europe primarily focused on Ukraine, the Belarus migrant crisis, and Bosnia-Herzegovina's separatist tendencies. After von der Leyen's meeting with Biden, she addressed the reporters and announced: "(referencing the Belarus migrant crisis) At the beginning of next week, there will be a widening of sanctions... It is important that Lukashenko

understands that (the regime's) behaviour comes with a price." Von der Leyen further added that she and Biden shared "the same assessment" regarding the Belarus migrant crisis being a "hybrid attack" as well as the EU's position on the Northern Ireland Protocol. ("EU and US accuse Belarus of 'hybrid attack' at borders," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 November 2021; Daniel Boffey and Peter Walker, "Joe Biden supports EU position on Northern Ireland, says Von der Leyen," *The Guardian*, 10 November 2021)

Italy: Bolsonaro granted 'honorary citizenship' by Anguillara Veneta

On 01 November, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro visited the Italian town of Anguillara Veneta. During a ceremony in the northern Italian town, Bolsonaro was granted honorary citizenship by the town's mayor Alessandra Buoso. Bolsonaro is said to be descended from the town. According to ANSA, the President expressed his gratitude and joy in attending the ceremony hosted by the town. Despite being received by supporters, around 200 protesters also turned up at the event with banners reading 'No citizenship for dictators' and 'Anguillara loves Brazil but not Bolsonaro'. Speaking to AFP, city councilor Antonio Spada said: "It's okay for him to visit the city where his family comes from, but not for him to be

presented as a role model, granting him honorary citizenship." Buoso, however, stood by the decision claiming that the recognition was an acknowledgment of the Italians who had emigrated to Brazil and not a vote of confidence on Bolsonaro's political decisions. Bolsonaro had visited the town after participating in the G20 summit hosted by Rome. ("Brazil's Bolsonaro attends honors ceremony in Italy amid protests," *Deutsche Welle*, 01 November 2021; Angela Giuffrida, "Jair Bolsonaro booed and cheered as he is honoured by Italian town," *The Guardian*, 01 November 2021)

France: Indo-Pacific ties to be strengthened via India

On 30 October 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to enhance ties in the Indo-Pacific during the G20 summit. The office of Macron stated that France and India would initiate a "strategic dialogue" to set an agenda. They also added that France considered India as its main partner in the Indo-Pacific post the AUKUS deal. A meeting was conducted by Indonesian President Joko Widodo on similar lines, which was attended by Macron. ("France, India agree to boost Indo-Pacific ties," *Euronews*, 30 October 2021)

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