



NIAS Area Studies EUROPE MONITOR

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

About Europe Monitor

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

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

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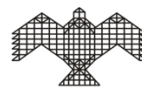
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The objective is to nurture a broad base of scholars, managers and leaders who would respond to the complex challenges that face contemporary India and global society, with insight, sensitivity, confidence and dedication.



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

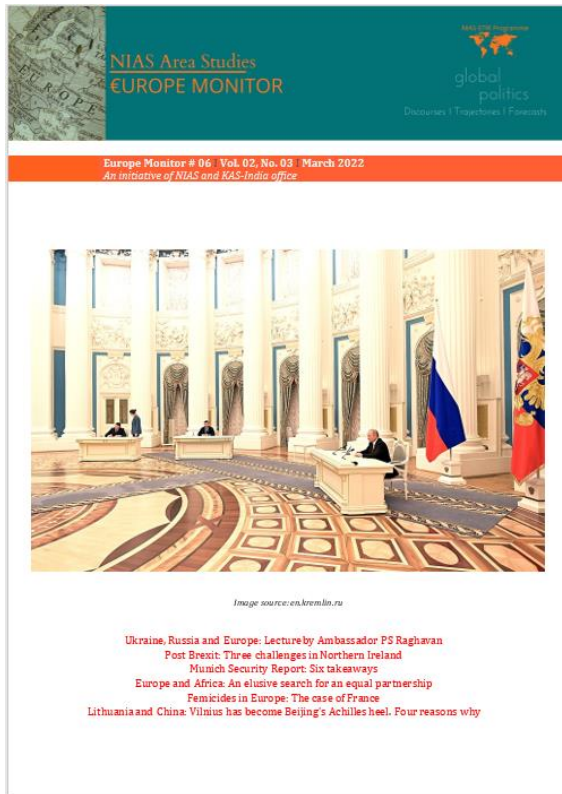
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Europe Monitor

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COMMENT

Ukraine, Russia and Europe: Report on lecture by Ambassador PS Raghavan

By Ashwin Immanuel Dhanabalan

On 22 February, a lecture on Ukraine was organized by the National Institute of Advanced Studies in partnership with Kristu Jayanti College, as a part of the Europe Lecture series. Ambassador (ret'd) PS Raghavan, who had served as India's ambassador to Russia, delivered the lecture. His lecture focused on the possibilities of how the recent escalations were not solely due to historical reasons but were about Russia and the US jostling for position, and about a possible European security architecture. His lecture addressed the following six significant themes.

First, how would the West react to the salami-slicing?

The West, especially the US, discussed harsh sanctions and their implementation if Russia attacked Ukraine. However, the question arises: What are these sanctions, and how would they hurt Russia? Apart from that, we also need to look at the implications of sanctions in Europe as sanctions against Russia could backfire and even hurt energy-dependent European economies. Russia is a significant exporter of aluminum, copper, nickel, platinum, oil, and gas.

Since 2014, Russia's trade with France, Germany, and Italy had only increased with sanctions in place. Therefore, sanctions are not effective, nor do they achieve the desired impact; instead of at times, they backfire. Furthermore, the Europeans were apprehensive of the US since Trump had withdrawn from the JCPOA and were also divided on his policies in Syria. Likewise, Trump's withdrawal from the intermediate-range nuclear treaty (INF) was the last straw as Russia had stationed those intermediate-range missiles endangering Europe, this increased Europe's security threat. Therefore Europe, NATO, and the US are likely not to be united in terms of sanctions.

Second, Geostrategic locations of eastern Ukraine and Crimea

Geographically it is located east of the Dnieper river, and it has a vast Russian-speaking population with ethnocultural links. Even Crimea was of geostrategic importance as a great power like Russia needed an all-weather port. The prospects of Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO would make the black sea into the military bloc's lake. Moreover, Georgia shares a direct border with the restive north Caucasus region of Russia, which leaves them vulnerable on that flank if it joins NATO. Therefore, Russia's interests in Crimea, Georgia, and Eastern Ukraine can be seen as a great power acting to safeguard its interests.

Third, Russia's historical consciousness

Ukraine is situated on the European plains. It shares a long border with Russia; these European plains are flatlands that have historically provided excellent ground for invading armies moving towards Moscow. Thus, Russia has historically seen armies from the West through the Ukrainian plains. The Polish, Swedes, Napoleon, and even Hitler had used the same geographically favorable stretch for their campaigns against Russia. Additionally, the border of Russia with Ukraine is porous, which increases its vulnerability to attacks. Moreover, Russia's concerns were aroused by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia and further highlighted in 2008 when NATO recognized the aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia for membership.

Fourth, Ethnocultural links & the importance of Sevastopol port

The other consideration is the ethnocultural links of Russia with Eastern Ukraine. The Russian-speaking population is now vast, especially in eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and

Odesa. The Sevastopol port is currently Russia's only all-weather port. Moreover, this port enables Russia to reach the Mediterranean Sea. Russia aspires to be a maritime power, and therefore it is willing to do whatever it needs to safeguard Crimea for its national interests. Thus, applying moral considerations is pointless as Putin did what was best for his country and for the people with similar ethnocultural links.

Fifth, the importance of the Minsk agreement

The Minsk agreement was introduced to check Russian-backed separatists' expansion and bring a ceasefire in the Donbas region. Under the agreement, there were lines of control and contacts, and artillery and heavy machinery would move some distance away from those lines creating a demilitarized zone. The significant part of the agreement was how it was decided that Ukraine would change its constitution and grant autonomous status to the Donbas area. It was further decided that there would be local elections in the region after the regional government got a federal status within Ukraine. The Russians saw the agreement as a medium for a buffer zone in Ukraine on Moscow's borders. France and Germany brokered the agreement with Russia and Ukraine, but the agreement was

not implemented. The agreement was said to undermine the sovereignty of Ukraine as it would give the region more power under the federal structure.

Sixth, the grievances of Russia

The failure to implement the Minsk agreement was one of the reasons why Russia had declared the two regions in eastern Ukraine as autonomous. Apart from that since 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bloc rapidly moved to include most of the countries in Europe under its security umbrella. This contrasted with the promises that western leaders had made to Gorbachev in 1990. Besides, Russia is also concerned about how the European countries were testing and developing more lethal and far-ranging weaponry that was also being used in NATO. This up-gradation of weapons had directly accelerated Russia's arms race.

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COMMENT

Post Brexit: Three challenges in Northern Ireland

By Padmashree Anandhan

Domestic power-sharing, Irish backstop, and people's stance are likely to remain primary challenges for the UK.

Recent developments

On 3 February, the First Minister of Northern Ireland Paul Givan from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) resigned objecting to the trade protocol signed during Brexit. The resignation comes opposing the EU checks in the Irish Sea on the goods transported from the UK. He said: "They have been impacted by the agreement made by the United Kingdom government and the European Union, which created the Northern Ireland Protocol."

The situation arose due to the party's Agricultural Minister stopping the inspection of goods coming from the UK, subject to checking as per the protocol. The DUP has been against the Northern Ireland protocol since it was signed; the party views the protocol as compromising its position. Because of the protocol, the DUP has to meet the rules of the EU at the border checkpoints.

According to the power-sharing system in Northern Ireland, the Deputy First Minister, Michelle O'Neill (who belongs to the Nationalist Party Sinn Fein) will, by default have to give up her leadership. The leader of both parties called for elections to prevent political instability.

Three challenges in Northern Ireland: Domestic power-sharing, Irish backstop, and people's stance

First, the problem of power-sharing. In Northern Ireland, the First Minister must be from the Democratic Unionist party and the Deputy First Minister from the nationalist party. This arrangement serves as the base of the political chaos in the region. The polls for the upcoming elections 2022, indicate the pro-Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein taking over the DUP, threatening the DUP's position as the First Minister. On the other side, the pro-British Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

has constantly threatened to devolve the government over the Brexit Protocol, and the leader has resigned now. Unless both parties sign an agreement, political stability will remain.

Second, the Irish backstop or Northern Ireland Protocol. The problem between the UK and the EU is another challenge in establishing peace in the region. Former UK Prime Minister Theresa May's proposal of the Irish backstop aimed at avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland but at the cost of the UK coming under EU customs territory. Until an open border is attained, the UK will not vary its tariff rates and follow the single market regulation even after Brexit. The backstop triggered debate and arguments. Later, the current Prime Minister Boris Johnson proposed the Northern Ireland Protocol. Under the protocol, both the UK and the EU agreed to keep the UK outside the economic bounds of the EU. Instead, it was decided to install checkpoints on goods entering from the UK. The agreement brought peace only to the powers outside (the UK and the EU), but the DUP did not accept the deal.

"Brexit has not taken place within Northern Ireland. The UK still has not let go of its interest in being engaged in the region's politics, economy, and people."

Third, the people's stance. In terms of economy and standard of life, the Irish backstop allowed the people of Northern Ireland to connect for trade and job opportunities with the rest of Ireland, the UK, and the EU market. The relations

between the DUP and the UK have been strained since the 2019 Protocol. The handling of the domestic issues is biased regarding the sectarian killings and divide, which still persists in the region at various levels. The UK has failed to address this; under the Good Friday Agreement 1998, a provision was given where the constitutional status of Northern Ireland can change with the future polls from the people. With the worsening living conditions of the Irish, a protest is expected to call for a united Ireland poll.

To conclude, the major actors in the Northern Ireland issue have been the UK, the EU, pro-British unionists, and pro-Irish nationalists who have been conflicting over their exercise of power. While the Unionists want to maintain their political links and economic trade with the UK, the nationalists aim to unite Ireland under the EU. In the case of the UK, its objective is to ensure the Good Friday Agreement is followed, which will lead to the separation of Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland. However, the EU, which aims to achieve an open border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, failed to play a dominant role in convincing the UK to sign the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Brexit has not taken place within Northern Ireland. The UK still has not let go of its interest in being engaged in the region's politics, economy, and people. Northern Ireland is the major importer of UK goods, which is beneficial for the UK's economy. Still, its ties with the DUP and the party's bad governance keep the Northern Island from uniting with Ireland. It should either direct the DUP towards good governance or, as per the Good Friday agreement, it must recognize the majority of people voting for a united Ireland.

Therefore, to install peace, economic and political stability in the region. The protocol needs to be re-visited by both the UK and the EU to redraw the framework with the objective toward uniting Ireland rather than separating powers.

Padmashree Anandhan is a Research Assistant at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS, Bangalore. Her areas of interest include Western Europe and Maritime Studies.

COMMENT

Munich Security Report: Six takeaways

By Padmashree Anandhan

The report covers various security challenges at societal, regional, and issue-based but forecasts only the impact on Europe and transatlantic countries.

On 14 February, the Munich Security report was released as a precursor to the annual Munich Security Conference. The report covered various issues from the rise of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, worsening security in Mali and the Sahel region, conflict in the Red Sea, the gap in supply chains, and the growing global inequality. As per the report: "There can be no doubt about it: 2021 could not in any way be characterized as a year of geopolitical optimism. New crises hit the headlines on a more-or-less monthly basis, contributing to the sensation that a growing wave of crises was threatening to overwhelm us." Overall, the report highlights the "collective helplessness." The stated issues have threatened the existence of liberal democracies and how the international community fails to address the challenges despite the availability of resources.

The following six takeaways could be identified from the report.

First, the retreat of the US from Afghanistan. The withdrawal has resulted in the emergence of new challenges and a repeat of previous problems in Afghanistan. The political, social, and economic conditions have become uncertain, leading to the rise of humanitarian crises and civil liberties. The neighbouring countries and Europe face the after-effects, including the threat of terrorism, drug trafficking, and forced migration. The report draws three critical lessons from Afghanistan. One, despite the costly efforts of the US, peace has not been achieved, and the process of nation-building remains a complexity. Two, the rise of security challenges for Europe and transatlantic countries. Three, the geopolitical effects of intrusion and withdrawal from one country.

Second, the challenge of the international community in Mali and the Sahel. There has been increased involvement of international actors in Mali. However, the uncooperative government and the deployment of Russian mercenaries have stirred the fear of instability. To prevent the escalation of violence and terrorism in the Sahel, the report urges the external actors to invent new approaches to place security at the forefront, draft provisions for cooperation, human rights, better governance and the rule of law.

Third, the Red Sea as a conflict hotspot. The Red Sea region is the centre of global trade; with an increase in the engagement of regional and international actors, it has become the centre of the crisis. Developments in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Gulf and the rise of conflicts in Ethiopia and Yemen have questioned the West's capacity. In the fight against piracy, the West has been able to win, but the larger question of installing democracy and ensuring security in the extended Europe region is impossible. Conflict in the region and the inability of the West to involve deeply into the crisis shows that certain conflicts are out of reach.

Fourth, the crisis in eastern Europe. The report analyzed the stance of Russia, NATO and the EU in addressing the security threat. It established the Russian desire to bring back its lost superpower status in the post-cold-war period. Its target was to make the international powers recognize the Russian sphere of influence. Through this, it will result in setting off the European security order and drawing it last for an individual country to decide its security plan. This will break the EU shield and enable Russia to annex its lost territories. The report recommended to deal with the Russian

aggression, opting for a “dual-track approach” would be beneficial as it combines both policies of strength and commitment to dialogue. The report concludes with the current situation by saying the threat seems to have increased and the possibility of aggression is more than ever.

“A major trigger for these protests has been the partial lockdown of public spaces such as restaurants and theatres, the government's inability to provide effective treatment and the imposing of the vaccine mandate on the working population.”

Fifth, the vulnerability in supply chains. The nature of supply chains is complicated with various choke points and specialization. It is essential for any country as it sets the base for economy, security and technology. In COVID-19, the supply chains have become the spots for tussle and manipulation. With competition amongst the US, China, Europe, and other countries brimming, it has become a risky sector, as countries exploit its vulnerabilities. From observing the risk factor present in supply chains, the report suggests cooperation amongst high-performing economies to strengthen and make them more viable.

Sixth, the issue of global inequality. After the problem of supply chains, the increase in the income gaps amongst countries is another pandemic-induced challenge for the global community. The tier system explicitly shows the existence of income inequality and with the pandemic, it has only worsened human living conditions. When it comes to addressing global inequality, the international community fails, and this is aggravated to disturb societal peace and security. The pandemic exposed the income gaps as countries were forced to face the global threats of Covid-19 and climate change. The report warned that it is a huge challenge in controlling such threats at present of income disparity. With the continuity of the pandemic in such vulnerable countries and the inability of the developing countries to use low-carbon methods, such global threats will be a challenge for the rest of the world. Hence, meeting income inequality will be the first challenge to address this global threat. Finally, the report recommends reworking the SDG of goals, which involves “renewing domestic social contracts and initiating a global economic transformation toward sustainable and inclusive global growth. Getting back on track to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals would be the first important step.”

COMMENT

Europe and Africa: An elusive search for an equal partnership

By Joana Cera Matthews

The EU-AU summit in February 2022 saw an effort to transcend the bilateral relationship to a partnership of equals from the colonial era donor-recipient trend.

On 17 February, Brussels hosted the sixth edition of the European Union- African Union (EU-AU) summit. The two-day conference had been delayed by 16 months due to the pandemic. It was attended by the heads of 27 EU member states and 55 AU

states. They gathered to deliberate and chalk up solutions for the current crises and other matters of common concern in and around Africa. The conference also attempted to forge a partnership of equals evolving from the colonial era donor-recipient equation.

A brief background: Who wants what?

Ahead of the conference, the AU's Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division Head Fred Ngoga Gateretse stated: "What you want from Africa, you should also expect Africa to want from you." The summit's agenda involved combining the Global Gateway Strategy with the EUR 1 trillion-worth European Green Deal. Along this line, the conference concluded by allocating EUR 150 billion Global Gateway Investment Package for Africa; it includes EU investment in three sectors - infrastructure, digitalization and telecommunications, and health.

The conference agenda was focused on "A Joint Vision for 2030." Issues discussed included migration, security situation, continuing conflicts, climate change, and the pandemic crisis. The request to waive the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) on the COVID-19 vaccines' technology was another major discussion that concluded with a commitment from the EU to continue negotiating on "intellectual property-related aspects".

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen was strategic in presenting the EU as the best option for the AU and the African continent. She stated that "investing in infrastructure and the people" was the best and most sensible of investments as an allotment of EUR 150 billion for the next seven years was provided to the continent.

In retrospect: What did the summit achieve?

First, climate action. Investing in the infrastructural development of the continent, the primary goal of the EU in this sector is to create a path that would enable the smooth transition to renewable energy. Given Africa's potential for solar, wind, and hydropower energy creation, the EU's help would be required to develop the African Free Trade Area - inevitably connecting energy, electricity, and transport. Von der Leyen added that the "Global gateway is here to invest in the talent of Africa," ensuring that a digital transition is the need of the hour given the issue of accessibility to telecommunication services the continent's

youth face. Additionally, the bloc is considering extending this infrastructural development to transport corridors of roads, waterways, and airways.

Second, health beyond the pandemic. The infrastructural development of the health sector was a leap in preparing for events in advance. Looking beyond the pandemic, long-term measures are being opted for short-term ones, such as the provision of COVID-19 vaccines and its associated technology. Building on "the capacity of Africa," von der Leyen expressed that the continent had a long way to go but was infinitely backed by the EU in this effort. However, Germany and the European Commission denied the request for sharing technologies after waiving the existing intellectual property rights. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa expressed his disappointment: "... governments that are really serious about ensuring that the world has access to vaccines should ensure that we approve the TRIPS [Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights] waiver as we've put forward." Meanwhile, the mRNA technology used to build the COVID-19 vaccines is currently being used to develop vaccines against diseases that have plagued Africa, such as malaria and tuberculosis.

"Africa continues to be dependent on EU funds; the goal of an equal partnership will be realized only when this dependency is removed."

Third, the EU's attempt to be Africa's 'chosen one'. The latest summit occurred post the realization that Europe and the EU are no longer the lone players in the field that is Africa. Multiple countries have been investing in the continent which they once monopolized. Although the US investments were welcomed, the EU is wary of the increasing Chinese investments. The summit witnessed a sincere effort by the EU to woo Africa for choosing the bloc as their "trusted partner". Von der Leyen did not shy away from stating exactly this. Citing history she stated: "The European Union is the first trading partner and the first investor in Africa. And therefore, it is no coincidence

that the first regional plan under our big investment strategy, Global Gateway, is the Africa-Europe plan.” Apart from China that met the African leaders via the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) framework, the EU is concerned about competition from Russia, Japan, Turkey, etc.

The search for equal partnership: Will the AU and EU be equal partners?

Von der Leyen concluded her speech by quoting the African proverb: “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together. Let us embark on that journey together.” However, there lie several hurdles before one achieves this. The reality of the pandemic showcased the double standards in place. The “vaccine apartheid” ensured limited inoculation rates; while new variants rose worldwide, European countries prohibited travel only from Africa adversely affecting its economy. Free trade has destroyed the livelihoods of 54 per cent of Africa’s agriculture-relying workforce with imports. European imports are heavily subsidized compared to the local produce,

implying no ground for competition. The European goods influx has caused the closure of farms and companies leading to widespread unemployment. The increased unemployment implies a search for jobs and leads to the next issue of migration. Although 80 per cent of movement occurs within the continent, the rest risk their lives travelling via land and sea to reach the EU. The EU’s efforts to limit this has only led to disappointment and multiple human rights violations.

Instead of fighting the effects, the EU should address the root causes. The Sahel region alone has witnessed four coups in 2021 indicating poor leadership, poverty and insecurity. Africa continues to be dependent on EU funds; the goal of an equal partnership will be realized only when this dependency is removed.

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

COMMENT

Femicides in Europe: The case of France

By Ashwin Immanuel Dhanabalan

Errors in data analysis, government inaction, and a weak response have increased femicide cases in France.

In early January 2022, feminist groups in France called for the government to take stringent action against the rising violence against women. Their comments highlight the issues of femicide in France, as three women were allegedly killed by their partners/ex-partners on 1 January. The new year’s killings have brought the rising cases of femicide to the forefront of France and Europe. In France, in 2020, there was a drop in femicide cases; 90 were killed, compared to 146 in 2019. Though the statistics seem optimistic, UN data from September 2020 suggested otherwise; France saw a 30 per

cent increase in calls and reports on domestic violence.

This commentary looks into the reasons behind the rise and also looks at whether France is a unique case.

Data error

The 30 per cent increase in calls and reports on domestic violence should have been alarming, but it was not considered to be significant as, at the same time, there was a drop in femicide cases. The feminists in France have played a crucial role in highlighting the errors. Feminist groups also

took up the discrepancy with the UN data. The groups further talked about how awareness about the issue was still in its beginner stages as until 2014 the term femicide was not known by many. Only in recent years was it taken up by politicians and groups as an issue to discuss during their political campaigns. The problem of increasing cases of femicide has been consistent in Europe, as even Greece recorded 17 instances of femicides in 2021. However, the Greek government had not yet accepted the amendment regarding the institutional recognition of the term 'femicide.'

Government inaction

Chahinez Daoud's case is an example of the government's inaction. She was brutally murdered by her ex-husband, who was already convicted of domestic violence against her. She even had complained against him months before the attack, but she lost her life because of the government's dormancy. Eight months after the incident, six police officers were facing disciplinary hearings as they were accused of "administrative failings."

Feminist groups played a critical role as they called out the government for failing to protect women against domestic violence. The feminist group #NousToutes accused Macron's government of "scandalously" remaining silent on the recent killings. The group further stated that they denounced: "the silence of Emmanuel Macron and the government in the face of sexist and sexual violence in France." Furthermore, #NousToutes alleged a disparity in measures adopted earlier as they were not implemented correctly, for example, the use of electronic bracelets to prevent crimes. Electronic bracelets alert the individual and the police when their violent partner is around, this had reduced the number of femicide killings in 2020, but its implementation had dropped recently.

“Spain has taken a revolutionary step in dealing with the rise of femicide and domestic violence by including it in the official statistics.”

In November 2021, large-scale protests took place across France, calling on the government to prevent violence against women. The demonstrations were a part of a more extensive week of action worldwide to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November. The equality minister Elisabeth Moreno then defended the government's stance on the issues by mentioning the current policies. For example, the government had increased emergency accommodation places by 60 per cent, introduced emergency telephonic services for victims of violence, and introduced training for police officers. However, the measures were not implemented well enough to stop the killings.

Prime minister Jean Castex mentioned that the government had taken measures to tackle the issues of femicide and further said: "This includes setting up a 24/7 emergency hotline and sensitivity training for 90,000 police officers to improve the handling of mistreatment complaints from women." The French government has revealed that the government was spending EUR one billion on measures to fight domestic violence. He also announced an "equality week" in schools on international women's day to spread awareness on femicide.

Is France the one case of rising femicide in Europe?

France, Turkey, Austria, and Spain have all started campaigning against the rise of femicide cases and increased violence against women. Nevertheless, their reasons for the rise in cases are not so similar to France. Women in Austria have been facing issues due to the income gap between men and women. As a result, women undergoing domestic violence continue living or engaging with their partners for economic dependence.

While in Turkey, there are some similarities with France as the President of Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals, Mehmet Akarca downsized the issue of femicide in the country even though 280 women were killed in 2021. At the same time, Spain has taken a

revolutionary step in dealing with the rise of femicide and domestic violence by including it in the official statistics. Spain's equality minister has promised that it would "be the first country in Europe to officially count all femicides." Nonetheless, compared to

France, Spain's role in implementing the law that holistically covers femicide would help deal with the issues better than leading to errors in statistical data.

COMMENT

Lithuania and China: Vilnius has become Beijing's Achilles heel. Four reasons why

By Ashwin Immanuel Dhanabalan

China undermined the initial tremors of contention with Lithuania; now the issues have now spilled over to Europe with global consequences for China.

On 21 March 2021, Lithuania withdrew from the China-CEEC 17+1 group. It felt the grouping undermined the EU's role in the region. The withdrawal was partially driven by China's countermeasures over the bloc's accusations against Beijing's Xinjiang policy.

According to China's Ministry of Commerce, China-Lithuania trade was USD 1.35 billion in 2019, placing China in 22 places for the export market and ten places for sourcing imports. According to Chinese experts, the Global Times reported: "The withdrawal of countries like Lithuania could also be the opportunity to improve China-CEEC cooperation mechanism." Back then, Beijing felt a small country like Lithuania withdrawing from the cooperation would have little to no impact on China's influence in the region. Yet, one sees a wave of anti-China positions across Europe in countries like Slovenia, Germany, France. One could see a similar sentiment in the US, UK, and Australia across the globe after its diplomatic debacle with Lithuania.

Why is this happening now?

Since the French Parliament passed a resolution that officially recognized China's treatment of Uyghurs as genocide, the resolution formally recognized the violence perpetrated by China as crimes against humanity and genocide. The non-binding resolution also calls on the French government to protect the interests of the minority groups in China and to take and to

take the necessary foreign policy measures toward the People's Republic of China. At the same time, the European Parliament also adopted a resolution on the violation of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, and Sudan. The Parliament condemned the deteriorating fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong as the government had imposed severe restrictions on various facets of human rights.

Lithuania's pullout from the China-CEEC 17+1 group did create an impact as Slovenia confirmed setting up trade offices with Taiwan on 18 January. Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša announced his support for Taiwan's "sovereign decision." He also commented on the Lithuanian issue and said that most EU member countries had representative offices with Taiwan. Thus, Lithuania could have one as well. However, unlike Lithuania, Slovenia will continue to be a part of the group led by Beijing.

Lithuania has become China's Achilles heel: Four reasons why

First, the EU launched an official dispute with China on behalf of Lithuania with the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The arbitration would have significant implications that can be seen in terms of economic and diplomatic contentions. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said: "We also remind the EU to distinguish right from wrong and be alert of Lithuania's attempt to kidnap China-EU

relations." He further denied the allegations of violations of WTO norms and clearly stated these issues were more political than economic. China warned the EU not to escalate the bilateral dispute with Kyiv because Beijing said it only practiced business preference on Lithuanian supplies.

Second, a revival of the EU's anti-coercion instrument. EU's anti-coercion instrument has not been enacted yet, and it will not be implemented until an agreement is reached. The Lithuania-China issue is a prime example of how the EU can hold a larger country accountable for clamping down on smaller countries within the EU to safeguard their interests. Furthermore, China's weaponization of European value chains could lead to the EU and regional countries stepping up their Indo-Pacific strategy to secure their economic interests.

“the EU is likely to take a stand against China on many matters. Lithuanian trade boycott, the genocide in the Xinjiang region, and the curb of fundamental violations in Hong Kong are the primary cause of discontentment between the two regions.”

Third, a shift in the EU's foreign policy of strategic economy. The recent tensions would affect the EU's push for a strategic economy, as it depended on closer economic ties with China. China was initially seen as a critical player in shifting its traditional dependence on the US. The EU had also hoped to play a crucial role between the US and China to bridge relations between the two countries in the case of diplomatic tensions. Under President Macron's EU Presidency, France had supported the idea of pushing for a strategic economy. Yet, with the recent debacle and the French Parliament's judgment on China's treatment of Uyghurs as genocide, it would make Paris reconsider its stand.

Fourth, Europe versus China has taken a global turn with the EU approaching the WTO. Australia has requested to join the consultations regarding the trade dispute between the EU and China. Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan said: "Australia has a substantial interest in the issues raised in the dispute brought by the European Union against China ... and will request to join these consultations." As Australia and China had their contentions in 2018 when Canberra banned Huawei, Canberra recently filed two cases with the WTO regarding China's import duties.

On 26 January, the US House of Representatives passed the America Competes Act of 2022, which approved Washington to rename its Taiwan embassy. The bill also authorises the change from Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office to Taiwan Representative Office in the United States. The act cleared the speculations reported by Global Times on 22 January, which suggested that the US diplomats had pressured Lithuania to consider changing the name of the Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius.

Thus, keeping in mind the events leading to the escalation and the recent issues, the EU is likely to take a stand against China on many matters. Lithuanian trade boycott, the genocide in the Xinjiang region, and the curb of fundamental violations in Hong Kong are the primary cause of discontentment between the two regions. But, with the Ukraine-Russia tensions, the issues would not escalate to a more considerable extent. Regarding the Anti-coercion strategy and the strategic autonomy, there will be a shift as the change will affect the EU's strategy and foreign policy. However, the US' adoption of the new Act and Australia's interest in the WTO litigation would back the EU's stand against China.

EM Short Notes¹



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ITALY

Italy: Return of President Mattarella – Short term stability, long term challenges

By Ashwin Dhanabalan

On 30 January, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, who was due for retirement, withdrew his plans. He won at the end of the eight-round voting, with 759 counts, more than the 505 needed. The turnaround indicated that Italy wanted him to stay. Italy held presidential elections after Mattarella announced that he did not intend to continue for a second term. However, the political and economic circumstances made him call off his retirement, emerging victorious. After being reelected, Mattarella said: “I had other plans, but if needed, I am at your disposition.”

The political stalemate and the elections

Italy saw eight rounds of voting before the party heads urged Mattarella to change his mind. Mattarella had already prepared to

move out of his Presidential Quirinale Palace to a new apartment in Rome. However, he had to recall his decision in the wake of a potential power vacuum; Italy saw six days of inconclusive voting, with around 1,009 lawmakers and regional representatives voting only for it to end in a political stalemate.

Incumbent Prime Minister Mario Draghi was the prominent candidate for the post. However, Parliament members equated Draghi’s victory with political instability, and therefore in no round, was he able to secure more than five votes from the 1000+ voters. Besides Draghi, the Nationalist League leader Matteo Salvini on the fifth day declared that the centre-right bloc would vote towards the conservative Senate President Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati. However, Casellati failed as she received only 382 votes instead of the required 505.

The call for unity

With Sergio Mattarella at the helm for a second term, he called on all Italians to pull together and support Italy’s recovery from

¹ EM Short Notes are notes published along with Daily Focus on Europe, every evening by the NIAS Europe Monitor team. The short notes provide a brief overview of the latest developments in Europe, and provides the sources from which they are compiled. Visit <https://globalpolitics.in/europe/> to read them everyday.

the COVID-19 pandemic. Mattarella, a figure of respect in Italy because of his calm ways of handling crises, also said: "We still need to work together to strengthen Italy, beyond the current difficulties." Mattarella, as the President, had an influential role to play since it is he who appoints the Prime Minister and who is often called on to resolve the country's political crisis all the while protecting the Italian constitution.

Short term stability, long term challenges

Italy will see stability, however short-lived, as the recent election left a lot of ambiguity for future elections. But Italy can continue on its path to pandemic recovery, and Draghi can now focus on governing the coalition and avoid destabilizing the country into early Prime Ministerial elections. The political stalemate had highlighted the deep divisions within Draghi's ruling coalition as the voting went on for eight rounds before concluding. Lawmakers had also agreed on calling back Mattarella to stabilize the government while securing their jobs and pensions; a Draghi-led government implied a dissolution of the administration formed under him.

The elections also showed how Italy's right-wing unity was collapsing. The whole week revealed how the right-wing bloc was split into factions, with a few agreeing to back Mattarella while the rest disagreed. One could also see a rise in leadership battles within the 5Star Movement. As a result, even the current grand alliances will soon see ideological differences while discussing the programs of reforms, pensions, and taxes in the assembly.

Italy can now be back on its path of rapid economic growth with two of its best leaders at Rome's helm. This could also be seen as an opportunity to kickstart the economy by unlocking the European recovery funds and bringing in structural reforms before the Prime Ministerial elections in June 2023.

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THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK: Boris Johnson and the Partygate scandal

By Ashwin Dhanabalan

According to reports by *France24* and the *BBC*, about 10-16 parties were held by the UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, while the country was under lockdowns. Held during the period of 15 May 2020 to 16 April 2021, these parties broke multiple laws that would be severely penalized if it was committed by an ordinary individual.

The party on 15 May 2020 showed Johnson at the Downing Street garden with bottles of wine, surrounded by his staff and his wife. Johnson justified the gathering calling it a work-related event, but laws then were stringent, and one could not even leave their house without a strong reason. The other case was on 16 April 2021, when the UK was mourning the death of Prince Philip. During this time, restrictions in London were eased, however, indoor-socializing with people from other households was strictly prohibited. Nonetheless, the night before Prince Philip's funeral saw two parties being held at Downing Street. But, the evidence noted that Johnson did not attend either of the two parties.

Role of Sue Gray's report and Johnson's response

Sue Gray is a senior civil servant who led the ethics team for six years, which advised the

government's divisions. Gray leads the investigation into the alleged COVID-19 laws broken at Downing Street; her report, to be presented to the Parliament, was a compilation of factual accounts on the gatherings and the laws broken. Even former officials at the Cabinet office praised her, saying: "Sue has been there for so long, she knows everything that anybody has ever done wrong."

Her investigation in 2017 had forced Senior Minister Damian Green to step down; her reports had found inaccurate statements over claims in the case. The recent report did find "failures of leadership and judgment." However, the report failed to live up to its expectations since it provided limited information about the 16 parties held. Additionally, there was a jurisdictional issue as 12 parties were not held in government buildings and were to be investigated by London's Metropolitan Police as a subject of a criminal investigation.

Johnson responded to the report and its findings, saying: "I get it, and I will fix it." He further promised to reorganize Downing Street and assured the Parliament: "It's whether this government can be trusted to deliver. And I say, Mr. Speaker, yes, we can be trusted."

The Parliament's reaction

Many Parliament members had reached a boiling point with the partygate scandals. MP Theresa May said that the people "had a right to expect their prime minister to have read the rules, to understand the meaning of the rules" and "set an example." MP Aaron Bell also expressed his disappointment in not being able to attend his grandmother's funeral in May 2020 due to the restrictions; he was not able to hug his siblings or parents. Feeling let down by the numerous parties held while many were mourning their losses, Bell added: "Does the prime minister think I'm a fool?" MP Angella Richardson, who decided to resign from her post in protest, felt that Johnson had taken too long to acknowledge his mistakes. The situation may favour Prime Minister Johnson for now, but once the police submit the report, there will be further investigations.

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REGIONAL

The Normandy format: A profile

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 10 February, an advisory level meeting was held between Germany, France, Ukraine, and Russia in Berlin. The meeting, similar to the previous meet in January, was conducted amidst the US warning of a possible Russian invasion into Ukraine. The meeting aimed to resurrect the 2015 Minsk agreement, essentially stopping the war tensions in eastern Ukraine. Since none of the parties agreed to the negotiations made, no motion was passed. The Kremlin envoy Dmitry Kozak said: "Unfortunately, almost nine hours of negotiations ended without any visible, tangible results expressed in documents."

On 26 January, representatives from Germany, France, Ukraine, and Russia held talks under the Normandy Format at the Elysee Palace in Paris. After the talks, Ukraine's Presidential Adviser Andriy Yermak welcomed the dialogue terming it a positive engagement.

Normandy format: A profile

The Normandy format was devised to regulate a four-way talk aiming to end the armed conflict between the Ukraine government and the pro-Russian separatists

in eastern Ukraine. The parties to the format include France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia. The first such talk occurred in 2014 at Normandy after Russia had annexed Crimea leading to the infiltration of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Until 2019, the Normandy talks were paused. The invitation to other states such as Belarus, Italy and the United Kingdom was also extended, but there has been no participation.

Strengths

First, the timing. The Normandy format talks started at a crucial point. In 2014, it had served as a quick barricade to further escalation of the conflict. It helped to reduce the intensity of the conflict after Russia annexed Crimea.

Second, the format. The four-way format is the best approach to diplomacy. It allows Russia, a powerful country, to put forth its demands. In the same way, it also provides Ukraine, which is comparatively a weaker one, a protective stage to voice its concerns. Apart from the conflicting parties, the format also sets the stage for the region's top countries, France and Germany, to oversee and engage in negotiation.

Third, Europe as mediator. Instead of involving external powers to mediate an internal issue, the format allows for solving regional interactions, which is an advantage if one intends to avoid escalations while reducing tensions.

Weakness

First, convincing Russia. France and Germany's renewed attempts to negotiate with Russia under the Normandy format do show their tactical approach but are yet to bear fruit. The demand of Russia and the needs of Ukraine are at two extreme points, making it a challenge for France and Germany to establish a common ground.

Second, failure to install peace in eastern Ukraine. The purpose of forming the Normandy format in 2014 was to attain peace in the region. Although a ceasefire was achieved through the Minsk agreements, Russia still operates the region through its separatist group. This has even reached a point where Ukraine's national security is

now being threatened. Therefore, it shows the ineffectiveness of the format because its existence since 2014 failed to foresee an imminent threat.

Third, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is out of focus. A controversial pipeline that involves Ukraine, Germany, and Russia is not on the discussion agenda. Despite the deal, Germany continues to have reservations over engaging with Russia on the pipeline. This has further led to mistrust between Ukraine and Germany which is bound to create a crack in the proceedings of the Normandy talks.

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Besides Ukraine, the Baltic is also apprehensive of Russia. Four reasons why

By Joeana Cera Matthews

Besides Ukraine, the Baltic states also are apprehensive about the threat posed by Russia. Why do the Baltic states fear Russia?

The Baltic states and Russia

One of the primary security concerns of the Baltic states is the possibility of the long-term presence of Russian troops stationed in Belarus for the United Resolve 2022 military drills. *The Guardian* had earlier cited Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė expressing concern over the "security landscape if Russian forces were to indefinitely remain in Belarus." The increased troops stationed along the Belarusian borders also indicate the balance of power tilting toward Russia, making for a successful invasion of the east by the Kremlin. This adds to the growing apprehension of the Baltics regarding the status quo in eastern Europe.

Second, the demography of the Baltic states. The Baltic states have a substantial Russian-speaking or ethnic Russian population. A quarter of Estonia's population is ethnic Russian; despite integration, most ethnic Russians' children attend Russian-language schools and consume Russian media. Analysts consider Estonia's third-largest city Narva, consisting of 80 per cent ethnic Russians, as the most likely target for Moscow if the Kremlin intends to invade. Meanwhile, 15 per cent of Lithuania's population is also ethnic Russian.

Third, the geography. The Suwalki Gap, a 40-mile stretch along the Polish-Lithuanian border, connects Europe and the Baltic states. On the one hand, it links the NATO allies via land, while on the other, it separates Belarus from Russia's Kaliningrad. If the Suwalki Gap is captured and Kaliningrad linked with Belarus, the Baltics will be cut off from NATO with no land route to receive reinforcements. As the Permanent Secretary of the Estonian Ministry of Defense Kusti Salm stated, the seizure of the Gap would transform the Baltics from a peninsula to an island. This Gap is also expected to cause an economic and military conflict between Russia and NATO if further escalation occurs in the Ukraine standoff.

Fourth, the role of history. The Baltics face a greater threat than the other European countries due to their shared history. Nonetheless, the former USSR republics are at the forefront of those calling for a vehement response against Russian aggression. Their past experience of Russian occupation has led Baltic citizens to fear a similar future. As Estonia's Foreign Affairs Minister Eva Maria Liimets said: "Our understanding is more realistic. We really sense the threat here because of our history and our experience." They had made a conscious choice when they left the USSR and are sticking to the same. A commentary by historian Karolina Wigura and political analyst Jarosław Kuisz expressed: "The Russian military menace to Ukraine reawakens old traumas and, paradoxically, not only those generated from the east. Another angst is, to put it bluntly, that the West will again abandon us... Many citizens of central and eastern Europe have clear

memories of living under Moscow's rule. For them, 30 years of independence is not long enough to banish the worry that we are trapped in a cycle of ever-repeating history."

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Ukraine: Questions and responses over German ambiguity

By Joeana Cera Matthews

Germany's stance on Ukraine and its recent actions or 'inaction,' has led to concerns being raised about the German leadership and the country's ability to remain united with its allies – the US and NATO. Additionally, it has been dubbed as the "weakest link in the West" vis-a-vis the Ukraine conflict.

What is Germany doing and why? What are the questions?

First, the denial of weapons export. Germany is Europe's largest arms exporter and the world's fourth-largest; despite this, Berlin's refusal of military assistance to Kyiv via weapons supply questions its "support".

Germany has a longstanding policy of not providing lethal weapons to conflict zones; although this has been breached in the past, they refuse to budge citing historical reasons referring to the Second World War. This is further backed by their motto of "never again". Nonetheless, the Scholz-led government supplied Ukraine with 5,000

military helmets and funded a field hospital; however, Germany blocked Estonia from exporting nine D-30 howitzers that required its authorization garnering substantial criticism.

Second, an incoherent Russian policy. Germany, unlike the US and NATO, has not spelt out its action if there is a Russian invasion. Germany's ambiguity surrounding potential sanctions on Russia concerns allies, as the Kremlin benefits the most from this. However, the Scholz administration claims the unclear policy is a strategy that ensures Russia faces difficulty while preparing for consequences – a justification as flawed as it is criticized. Meanwhile, Germany acting against Russia would adversely affect its own economy. Critics, acknowledging this, have accused Berlin of placing its own interests before those of European interests. The incoherence also puts the European and German credibility and reliability at stake.

Third, the Nord Stream 2 (NS2). The natural gas pipeline, by default rather than design, is a major tool of negotiation in the conflict as the US and NATO consider imposing sanctions on it to deter Russia. Although Scholz has reiterated the irrelevancy of the NS2 to the Ukraine conflict given its “purely commercial nature,” the pipeline is equally important for Germany and Russia. German energy needs pose a vulnerability risk to Russian threats as it phases out coal, depending on Russian gas reserves. The US and other European countries have been constantly wary of the pipeline and its implied energy dependence.

Fourth, internal differences within Germany. The escalation along Ukraine happens as Germany undergoes a transition from Merkel to Scholz. The seven-week-old government is being ruthlessly compared with the 16-year administration of Merkel. Worsening things, the Scholz-led coalition is rather fragile over the situation as the perspectives of the three constituent parties differ substantially over foreign policy.

From Germany, what are the responses?

First, emphasis on diplomacy to de-escalation. Germans believe that diplomacy is the best solution for de-escalation, not

weapons supplies. They realize that exporting weapons to Kyiv will not impact the military imbalance but will only contribute to a crisis escalation. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock believes financial support is more worthwhile.

Second, emphasis on being an unbiased mediator. Germany's reiteration of this argument points to the Normandy format; providing weapons to one of the parties while mediating a diplomatic solution directs to a crisis escalation rather than de-escalation.

Third, history. Germans are yet to get over the horrors of WWII; the possibility of more Russian soldiers dying by German weapons is appalling. Baerbock has said: “We have a duty to all countries of the former Soviet Union because of the terrible suffering we inflicted on millions of people there in the past.”

Fourth, economic reasons. Besides the energy sector, Germany has a substantial interest in economic ties with Russia. Being Europe's largest exporter and biggest economy, the imposition of additional sanctions on Russia will negatively impact Germany, more than any other country. Thus, Germany has the most to lose.

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Maastricht Treaty: Thirty years after

By Joeana Cera Matthews

On 07 February, Europe celebrated 30 years of the Maastricht treaty. The foreign and finance ministers of 12 member states of the

European Community (EC) met in the Dutch city of Maastricht in 1992 and ratified the treaty. The 12 member states of the EC involved Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK.

What is the Maastricht Treaty?

The treaty laid out plans for converting the EC into an economic union, paving the way for the EU and the single currency – the Euro. The original treaty prescribed the roles to be played by the European Parliament and the Council as the EU's co-legislators. In 2009, the Lisbon treaty simplified the Maastricht treaty, making it more efficient and easier to implement.

Meanwhile, the treaty absorbed the former EC into a single union dealing in those areas Brussels excelled in – customs union, fisheries, agricultural policy, etc. Due to the sensitive nature of matters being discussed via the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), unanimous decision-making was decided upon. Neither the European Commission nor the European Parliament had a primary role in this. The feature of unanimity remains until this day. The final part of the treaty focused on cooperation between the police and judicial systems. This outlook became all the more significant after the 1985 Schengen agreement.

What is the background?

The Maastricht Treaty followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the USSR and the increasing popularity of liberal democracies. Such a situation helped the EC to lay the stepping stones for the creation of the EU. The provision of EU citizenship gave European citizens a feeling of belonging. This attraction added to the ability to live and move “freely” within the bloc.

The Euro

The treaty also set out instructions for the European Central Bank (ECB); making it adhere to the “Maastricht Criteria”. These criteria called for maintaining price stability alongside other requirements necessary for those attempting to accede to the bloc and its single currency. One among these was the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), which put limits on the public deficits and government

debts of member states; although widely criticized, the pact remains one among the treaty's greatest contributions.

The drawbacks

Despite the huge success of the single currency, the bloc is yet to establish a fiscal union. The initially homogeneous and 12-membered bloc is now largely heterogeneous and enlarged. This has led to member states struggling to find common ground. Meanwhile, the unanimity requirement has turned out to be the Achilles' heel of the CFSP's decision-making process. Unlike the rule of the majority, the need for unanimity proved to be a hindrance to real progress. This sentiment was expressed by Belgian MEP Guy Verhofstadt as he said: “30 years ago the Maastricht treaty was signed... but never delivered its full potential, neither in common foreign and security policy nor in justice and home affairs. Unanimity and vetoes often blocked any progress.”

Moreover, the unity of the bloc is diminishing. In terms of the Ukraine conflict, the EU which is supposed to portray a strong and united opposition can be witnessed falling apart from within. The stances of the Baltics, Germany, and Hungary vary so starkly that an external actor is not required to divide and rule the EU, the member states will do it themselves.

Time for reforms?

The long-overdue reforms found their voice via the pandemic; the outbreak of COVID-19 led to an extremely vulnerable economy accompanied by an ever-growing public debt. Calls for amends that would enable increased flexibility are being led by Italy, France and Spain. Meanwhile, these calls are strongly opposed by the Frugal Four – Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden – and a few other countries who opine that rules should not change according to situations. There also exist plans to implement the defense white paper called the Strategic Compass in March 2022.

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CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The One Ocean Summit 2022: EU's pledges and Four takeaways

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 11 February, leaders and representatives from 100 countries attended the One Ocean summit. Hosting the summit, French President Emmanuel Macron said: "... a decisive year, and we should take here, in Brest, clear and firm commitments." The Brest summit brought out ways to deal with the threats to the ocean, such as overfishing, plastic pollution, use of carbon-intensive fuels, and how countries can commit to the measures to preserve the ocean.

Addressing the summit, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted three critical areas of cooperation to conserve the oceans. She said: "... a new international coalition to protect biodiversity on high seas, which constitute 95 per cent of the ocean; a major computing project allowing researchers to digitally simulate the world's oceans; and the EU's research mission to restore our ocean and waters by 2030."

On the same day, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay announced two pledges of the UNESCO. He stated: "How can we succeed in protecting the ocean when we know so little about it? Only 20 per cent of the seabed is mapped. We need to go further and mobilize the international community so that at least 80 per cent of the seabed is mapped by 2030." Adding on, Azoulay said: "The international community must make education one of the pillars of its action for the ocean. Because if we want to protect it

better, we must teach it better. On the occasion of the One Ocean Summit, I am setting a common objective for our 193 Member States: to include ocean education in school curricula by 2025."

Some of the major pledges include the following:

- Pledge for conservation of biodiversity. 27 member States of the EU have committed to the proposed treaty on "High Ambition Coalition on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction" (BBNJ), marking the 40th anniversary of the UNCLOS. The treaty targets sustainable use of marine resources beyond national jurisdiction.
- Pledge to deploy navies to increase surveillance of unregulated fishing under the European Regulation of 2008.
- Pledge to the new Green Marine Europe label. Till now, 22 European shipowners have promised to take concrete measures towards "underwater noise, pollutant air emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, aquatic invasive species, residues, oily discharge and ship recycling."
- Pledge to reduce atmospheric pollution from docked ships. 18 European ports have agreed to ensure a speedy electricity supply to the port-chained ships to reduce greenhouse emissions. In addition, the EU along with other countries, France, Spain, Italy, and Monaco, have committed to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to create a "low sulphur emission zone" and a "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" to protect cetaceans.
- Pledge of France and Colombia for blue carbon. An initiative to bring national and multilateral actors to fund the restoration of coastal ecosystems.

Four major takeaways

First, the focus on ocean health. For the first time, an attempt has been made by the EU to draft a framework towards ocean biodiversity and marine life conservation. There have been many individual laws governing the seas, shipping standards, and marine environment, but through this summit, all the factors affecting the ocean's health have been addressed.

Second, synonymous goals of UNESCO and the EU. UNESCO has promised to work

towards the lag in sea bed mapping and the absence of ocean education in the school curriculum. The EU has proposed the European Digital Twin Ocean and EU4Ocean coalition on the same lines. These plans promise to fill the gaps in linking technology-environmental assessment and create a knowledge base for ocean literacy.

Third, reduced participation. Both the US and Germany seem to be out of the picture at the summit. In the statement released by the White House, the US recognized the aspect of pollution from plastics; otherwise, it has given only a general statement reiterating its stance to protect the environment, essentially backing France. Germany, a leader of climate change in Europe, was largely absent in the summit, failing to make any commitment or recommendations on improving ocean life.

Fourth, uncertainty in meeting the pledges. The EU as a regional player bringing all member states to follow the BBNJ with a target for 2030 seems to be a high-end goal. However, the question of fulfilment of the committed pledges by the EU will remain uncertain until real progress is witnessed.

What does this mean?

First, the EU's role. Under its EU Presidency, France's initiative to provide a deeper analysis of the ocean's problems shows the seriousness and capability of the EU member as a global climate leader. It also managed to lay out a framework to address these problems from the national to the international level.

Second, a united push. With the EU setting an example to make its member countries commit to the measures towards protecting the ocean and marine life, it acts as a booster for other countries to unite in pledging toward ocean safety. This is the need of the hour.

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ECONOMY

Germany's hike in inflation rate: What does it mean for the Eurozone?

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 06 January, the German Federal Statistical Office released preliminary data regarding Germany's inflation rate. It was reported to be at 5.3 per cent, marking the second time since the rate crossed the five per cent mark since reunification.

On the same day, it also disclosed the 3.1 per cent increase in consumer prices in Germany for 2021, which marked the highest inflation rate since 1993.

On 03 February, the tighter restrictions to control the spread of the Omicron variant in January had an immediate effect on the service industry, impacting the economic growth of the Eurozone.

Driving factors of high inflation rates

First, rising energy prices. Once the pandemic restrictions were lifted in 2021, the demand for fuel and gas increased. OPEC, instead of meeting the rising demand, restricted the full supply; it opted for a step-by-step increase to meet the fuel demands. As a result, the price of the limited supplies grew high.

Second, reduction of VAT and end of a temporary VAT cut. The VAT rate applies for two-thirds of the goods under the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). All energy-related, industrial, services, food, and drink come under HICP. With the reduction in VAT by 15 per cent the HICP inflation rate was expected to decrease by 1.8 per cent, but as per the recent data, the reduction in the inflation rate was lower than expected. The prices of food, non-energy industrial goods, and services fell only by a small margin due to recovery

methods opted by these industries over the losses incurred during the pandemic. With the VAT rate back to 19 per cent it is the end of the temporary VAT cut from 2021. The inflation will only push it further above by one per cent leading to a 2.5 per cent increase by mid-year.

Third, choking the supply chain. The entire globe suffered as the supply chains stalled due to the pandemic. Ships that were supposed to deliver manufactured, seasonal, and promotional goods never reached their destination due to constant lockdowns. As a result, the freight charges soared high, affecting supermarkets and the car industry. With a surge in the demands and shortage of supply, consumer prices increased. The chokepoints in the supply chain have specifically affected Germany mainly due to its nature, which is an “open and trade-integrated economy.”

Fourth, the other factors include the fall in mineral oil product prices, the introduction of CO2 pricing, and crisis-linked effects.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recommended the country be directly involved in increasing the real income of the poorer segment of people rather than engaging in VAT reduction strategies.

What does it mean for the Eurozone?

First, the inflation rates in Germany are expected to decrease by the second half of 2022. Still, the inflation in the Eurozone is bound to persist longer than in Germany, especially with the increase in energy rates. Although the European Central Bank (ECB) aims to keep the rate at two per cent, the January lockdowns and shutdown of various services and industries might lead to hyperinflation.

Second, purchasing power will drastically reduce due to rising consumer prices, and people would choose between essential products to unaffordability. Due to this, the consumers will become selective in spending their income on certain goods

Third, improved state response. Recently, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban addressed the inflation in consumer prices

and used a national cap to level the prices of sugar, food, and dietary products. Another way, as suggested by economists, is to increase the income of those in need through welfare assistance, which can balance inflation.

Fourth, unequal recovery path. While Germany is going through a slowdown in economic recovery other countries in the Eurozone, such as France, Spain, and Italy, show a faster recovery. This difference is due to revenue from the tourism industry, less dependency on industrial exports and higher vaccination rates.

A short explanation on Inflation, Eurozone and HICP

Inflation - Inflation is the decline of purchasing power of a given currency over time.

Eurozone - the Member States who have taken a step by replacing their national currencies with the single currency – the Euro, form the Eurozone. Denmark and Sweden are yet to be part.

HICP - The Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) is used to measure consumer price inflation internationally. That means the change over time in the prices of consumer goods and services purchased by euro area households.

Inflation target- The inflation target is defined as a medium-term average rather than as a rate (or band of rates) that must be held at all times. The inflation target is also, necessarily, forward-looking. This approach allows a role for monetary policy in dampening the fluctuations in output over the course of the cycle.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Cyber attacks in Ukraine: Four lessons

By Padmashree Anandhan

On 15 February, the banking sector of Ukraine was attacked using distributed denial of service (DDoS). The US, the UK and Australia have ascribed the attack to the Russian Main Intelligence (GRU). On 24 February, while the Russian forces moved into Ukraine waging warfare, Ukraine's government asked the underground hacker community to volunteer to involve in protecting the critical infrastructure of the country and also to run cyber missions to spy on the movement of Russian troops.

Cyber attacks on Ukraine: A brief note

The attacks aim to destabilize Ukraine. A new data wiping program found in the computers and systems of Ukraine has created a challenge for Ukrainian cyber firms. The damaging software is expected to have spread to numerous government agencies; they have targeted the Defense Ministry, foreign investments, government services, banking, energy, telecommunication and electricity grids. These attacks call for disabling governmental operations, cutting down signals and result in mayhem. Over the past few months, Ukraine's State Service of Special Communication spotted 113 cyberattacks in its system which continues to spike. Cyberwarfare has become a tool for Russia to bring instability to Ukraine. It will not be the first time as the "2017 NotPetya attack," considered to have been the most destructive Russian cyberattack on Ukraine's banks, transportation and energy, had a global impact costing USD 10 million.

The cyberattacks affect Ukraine's economy. The trade doubling between Ukraine and Germany in the post-pandemic period and a series of economic deals signed between Ukraine and France have pushed Russia to re-think its approach.

Outside Ukraine, cyberattacks have an impact on the global system. On investigating the recent cyber attack launched on Ukraine, Microsoft found that

the malware that was placed in the computer systems of Ukraine was critical and had the capacity to damage or spread to far targets. This implied that with Ukraine being the open outlet, Russia would be able to launch attacks to target other countries and their critical infrastructure. Similar to the "2017NotPetya attack" the US, the UK, France, Germany, and India might possibly face the impact of a cyberattack given its relations to Ukraine. Hence, there is a need for a collective approach to create a defense shield in cyberspace.

Cyber attacks on Ukraine: Four lessons

First, the inability to respond quickly. All parties have condemned and have threatened to impose sanctions on Russia, but this has failed to make an impact on the latter. Even post the recent attacks on Ukraine's Defense Ministry and the banks, the response of the US, the UK, and Australia was restricted to only condemning the attack rather than imposing sanctions or developing a cyber shield to protect Ukraine from potential threats.

Second, cyber defense versus cyber resources. Ukraine's existing cybersecurity system seems fragile and vulnerable to Russia's cyber-attacks. The attacks continue to disrupt Ukraine's infrastructure despite the technological support provided by the US, the EU and NATO. It shows the limitations and lack of willingness of the external powers in extending cyber resources to Ukraine. Hence, the gap between cyber defense and access to resources makes Ukraine's security system open to future attacks.

Third, the industrial risk. Ukraine's young population is well-known for its start-up businesses and due to continuous cyber-attacks, these businesses, their supply chains and the critical infrastructure are being repeatedly sabotaged. This will risk the regular functioning of the industry in the long run.

Fourth, the government's response. Ukraine has been assured that the EU-regulated Cyber Rapid Response Teams will track cyber-attacks, conduct forensic investigations and help mitigate potential

threats. When it comes to facing the attack, it is Ukraine's government and its critical infrastructure that is targeted. Ukraine's cyber-defense system is nowhere close to Russia's, but it has tried to use private companies, human resources in the form of underworld hackers and volunteers to operate on defensive and offensive levels. This shows that the government is still fighting with a youthful strategy and confidence to deter Russian cyber invasion to its best extent.

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INTERNATIONAL

Poland and China: President Duda's meeting with Xi

By Ashwin Dhanabalan

On 06 February, Poland's President Andrzej Duda met China's President Xi Jinping during the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022. The leaders discussed bilateral ties, potential Chinese investments in constructing a logistics hub in Poland, and the development of a China-Europe supply chain with Poland as a key nodal point. Duda's visit highlights the thawing Poland-China relations that withstood time and is essential for the following three reasons.

I) Poland is China's wild card in the CEEC cooperation

2022 marks the tenth anniversary of China-Poland relations. Xi hopes to establish a wholesale market for agricultural products in Poland. In April 2012, the China-CEEC cooperation – an economic and political agreement – was created with 16 Eastern European members and China; Warsaw was chosen as the cooperation capital.

But, Poland played a more significant role than just being the leader in the cooperation of the region as its centre is set up in Warsaw. It also endorsed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the area. China repeatedly turned to Poland whenever there was discontentment in the CEEC. When Lithuania had announced that it would limit its participation in the initiative in May 2021, China revived its diplomatic efforts in the region, especially with Poland, to control the spillover of Lithuania's decisions.

From the recent meeting, China's Foreign Affairs ministry said: "Poland will continue to play a positive role in promoting CEEC-China cooperation and EU-China relations, and will further step up communication with China to uphold international and regional peace and stability."

II) Bilateral trade: A Polish gateway for China to Europe

The bilateral trade relations between the two countries have been flourishing since 2014, when a direct train line between the city of Chengdu in China and Łódź, a town in Poland, was opened. This was in line with Xi's plans to revive the new silk road under the BRI initiative. In the recent meeting, Duda had thanked China for supplying critical medical supplies to Poland and spoke about the importance of Poland-China economic cooperation. Xi talked about China expanding its imports of "high-quality products, particularly agricultural products," and wanted Chinese businesses to invest more in Poland.

III) Geostrategic partnership

In 2016, besides endorsing the BRI, Poland signed an agreement on strategic cooperation with China, which mentioned the two countries as long-term and stable

strategic partners. Poland's sheer size and population support China's influence within the CEECs. Besides, Poland's strategic location on NATO's eastern flank, the EU, and its small border with the Russian Federation indicate its importance. Poland-US relations flourished under Trump, which may have been due to the ideological synergies with the ruling party in Poland. But, under the Biden administration, Warsaw found interest in expanding its relations with China.

To conclude, the two countries may have seen see-saw moments recently, but Duda's visit to Beijing could further strengthen bilateral cooperation and relations between them.

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Slovakia's defense agreement with the US: Three reasons why people are protesting

By Ashwin Dhanabalan

On 10 February, President Zuzana Čaputová ratified the Defense Cooperation Agreement with the US. Slovakia's Parliament had earlier approved the agreement and the usage of two Slovak air force bases for the next ten years. The deal was signed by the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Slovakia's Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad. Seventy-nine members approved the bill of the 150-member Slovakian Parliament.

The vote happened amid protests as the fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine remained high. The protestors rallied outside the Parliament and held up banners and flags that read: "Stop USA Army." Blinken mentioned how "nothing in [the] agreement creates permanent US bases or troop presence in Slovakia, and the agreement fully respects Slovakia's sovereignty and laws."

Nonetheless, there have been reservations about the agreement, for the following three reasons:

Intricacies of the agreement

The bilateral agreement has been in negotiation since 2018. But, it has remained a bone of contention in Slovakia even after receiving its mandate from the Parliament. A clause in the agreement allows the US to use the air force bases of Malacky-Kuchyňa and Sliac rent-free. One of the airports shares a short mountainous border with Ukraine and has raised concerns of its citizens, who are worried that the US would use this to undermine Slovakia's sovereignty and place nuclear weapons in the country. However, 23 NATO countries including Poland and Hungary have signed similar agreements with the US. However, the signing of agreements was not influenced by the recent tensions in Ukraine as they were signed before the issues began in Eastern Europe.

Opportunistic politics

Slovakia has been expanding links with the West. However, the opposition parties have used the agreement to play politics with Slovakia's security issues. The Smer party, under the leadership of former Prime Minister Robert Fico, had initiated the talks with the US in 2018. However, recently, he backtracked and accused the government of granting the US permission to deploy soldiers closer to Russian borders. Meanwhile, under Fico, the government had signed the USD 800 million Slovakia F-16 fighter jet contract and held multiple joint military training exercises with the US indicating a duality in his stance.

Slovakia's Prosecutor General Maroš Žilinka also had recently called for the complete scrapping of the agreement as he accused it

of being against Bratislava's constitution. At the same time, he flew to Russia to attend celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the Russian Prosecutor's Office. His comments received criticism as a Prosecutor General was not supposed to be involved in politics.

The Russian legacy

Slovakia has had cordial relations with Russia since 1993, and the latter has many sympathizers in Bratislava. However, according to the Russian News Agency TASS, the US' primary goal was to deploy troops closer to the Russian border. Fico reaffirmed TASS' speculations and further talked about the agreement saying: "This agreement [on military cooperation with the United States] betrays Slovakia's national interests."

Recent tensions with Ukraine have also expedited the defense agreement. Nevertheless, the issues are more contentious in Slovakia, as a recent opinion poll by *Reuters* stated that 44.1 per cent believed that NATO and the US were the cause of the geopolitical tensions in eastern Europe. In comparison, only 34.7 per cent held Russia responsible. The outcome of the polls indicated a mixed response from the people due to their shared legacy with Russia.

Thus, even though the agreement was signed, there were continuing protests by the people and opposition party members. Even after the agreement's ratification, Slovakian lawmakers were targeted with posters stuck outside their homes, calling them traitors. Slovak Deputy Miroslav Kollár called the recent developments "...reminiscent of the onset of fascism."

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Europe in March 2022



Source: Sputnik/Alexey Nikolsky/Kremlin via Reuters, Reuters/Dado Ruvic, Reuters, Reuters, Hannibal Hanschke/NY times, Reuters/Benoit Tessier

BELGIUM

Freedom convoy protests in Brussels

On 14 February, the “freedom convoy” protests that began in Paris against the vaccine mandate has slowly drifted to Brussels. The police in the Belgian capital ahead of the protests gathering blocked the main routes that led to the city and asked the vehicles to park in the outskirts. Despite such preventive measures, more than 150 protestors were found around the Arc de Triomphe at the city center and blocked the roads resulting in traffic jams. According to one of the protestors: “Freedom is swept aside, there's more and more poverty. Even when you work when the 15th of the month comes round, you haven't got enough to live on.” (“[Belgium: 'Freedom Convoy' protest reaches Brussels](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 14 February 2022)

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

EU leaders discuss tensions in Bosnia

On 21 February, Foreign Ministers of the EU met in Brussels to discuss the issues in

Bosnia. The meeting highlighted the political crisis, Bosnia is undergoing that could lead to a breakup. EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell said: “The nationalist and separatist rhetoric is increasing in Bosnia and Herzegovina and jeopardizing the stability and even the integrity of the country.” He also mentioned the role of the ministers to help prevent the country from splitting. The US has accused the Bosnian leader Milorad Dodik of corrupt activities and undermining the US-brokered Dayton Peace Agreement. (“[‘Critical situation’: EU ministers to discuss ways to prevent possible breakup of Bosnia](#),” *Euronews*, 21 February 2022)

BREXIT

CSO reports an increase in Northern Ireland exports to the Republic of Ireland

On 16 January, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) reported that the goods exported by Northern Island to the Republic of Ireland increased by 65 per cent since 2020. The value came up to EUR four billion in 2021 and likewise, Ireland’s exports to Northern

² EM Daily Focus are notes published every evening, by the NIAS Europe Monitor team on contemporary developments. Visit <https://globalpolitics.in/europe/> to read it everyday.

Island have also increased to 54 per cent. In the post-Brexit, businesses in Northern Ireland have been affected by checkpoints and restrictions on the goods imported from the UK, as per the report the trade between the UK and Northern Ireland has decreased by EUR 2.4 billion. There is also a challenge as there is no current assessment to measure the trade exchange between Northern Ireland and the UK. ([“Brexit: Northern Ireland goods exports to Republic reached €4bn in 2021”](#), BBC, 16 January 2022)

Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots orders a halt of post-Brexit checks

On 02 February, the Northern Irish Minister of Agriculture Edwin Poots ordered a halt of post-Brexit checks on agricultural food products into the region that came from the UK. He said the checks imposed had gravely affected the businesses in the UK and led to a surge in trade between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Poots said: "The advice concluded that I can direct the (Sanitary and phytosanitary) checks to cease in the absence of executive approval. I have now issued a formal instruction to halt all checks that were not in place on 31 December 2020 from midnight tonight." Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill called the decision a political stunt as the region has elections due in May 2020. Neill said it was: "an attempt by the DUP to unlawfully interfere with domestic, and international law." (Ian Graham, ["N.Ireland minister orders halt to agri-food Brexit checks"](#), Reuters, 02 February 2022; ["Northern Irish minister orders end to post-Brexit controls"](#), Euronews, 02 February 2022)

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss meets with EU Maroš Šefčovič in London

On 12 February, the UK and EU stated that they would hold another round of intensive discussions after the recent negotiations between UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and EU Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič came to an end. Truss said: "Fixing the Northern Ireland Protocol is an absolute priority for me. We have a shared responsibility with the EU to work towards solutions as quickly as possible that delivers

for the people of Northern Ireland." (Jayne McCormack, [“Brexit: UK and EU to continue ‘intensive’ NI protocol talks”](#), BBC, 12 February 2022)

The UK and the EU soon to settle down the issue of the Northern Ireland Protocol

On 21 February, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič met to discuss bringing durable solutions for Northern Ireland issue. The statement said: "The joint bodies established by the Withdrawal Agreement should meet regularly, and agreed to discuss any point raised by the EU or the UK that is of relevance to the Withdrawal Agreement in general." The Northern Ireland Protocol has been a conflicting issue between the EU and the UK, the protocol was signed to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. But this has resulted in creating a new trade border between Northern Ireland and the UK. While the UK opted to exit being part of the EU's single market, it still aims for more flexibility in trade with Northern Ireland. (John Campbell, [“Brexit: UK and EU will find ‘durable’ solutions to protocol”](#), BBC, 22 February 2022)

FRANCE

Elections: Macron intentionally delays his Presidential candidacy

On 13 February, far-right candidate Marine Le Pen accused French President Emmanuel Macron of intentionally delaying his candidacy to use the COVID-19 related visits for furthering his political campaign. Pen said: "Is Emmanuel Macron using the health crisis to start campaigning? The answer is yes." The Republican party head Christian Jacob said he had reported the misuse of funds to the National Commission on Elections Financing. France has strict rules about financing presidential campaigns, where only EUR 16.8 million is allowed in the first round. Additionally, EUR 5.6 million is authorized for candidates who qualify for the run-off. ([“France: rivals claim foul play as Macron waits to declare presidential candidacy”](#), Euronews, 13 February 2022)

GERMANY

Germany: Declares direct military support to Ukraine again

On 28 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during an emergency parliamentary meeting declared an addition of USD 113 billion asserting the direct supply of arms to Ukraine. so far Germany was found to be different from other European countries when it came to transferring arms to Ukraine. The changed stance of Germany shows a drastic shift in Germany's foreign policy. This also shows the derail in the diplomatic approach of Germany in resolving the conflict between Russia-Ukraine. The main instigator to the quick move is due to increasing Russian attacks and the vulnerability of Ukraine. (Damien McGuinness "[Ukraine conflict: Putin's war prompts dramatic German U-turn](#)," *BBC*, 28 February 2022)

Investigation launched to look into the speed cross incident

On 09 February, German motorways are well-known for having no-speed limit stretches. Recently a Czech millionaire who owned a Bugatti Chiron was found to be crossing the limit of over 417km/hr. The video which was cast on YouTube was spotted by the police. An investigation has been launched after the incident was tracked in the German media. According to the police report: "According to the criminal code, a solo drive can still constitute an offense if the driver "moves at an inappropriate speed and in a manner that grossly violates the traffic code and is reckless." ("[Czech millionaire investigated over alleged 417km/h motorway drive in Germany](#)," *BBC*, 10 February)

GREECE

Agricultural Minister resigns over controversial comments

On 08 February, Greece's Agricultural Minister Spilios Livanos resigned after making unacceptable comments on compensation for natural disasters. According to a government statement, Livanos admitted his mistake and offered to resign. Euronews reported: "Footage appeared to show minister Spilios Livanos laughing after a local party official suggested that compensation payments for

natural disasters could help win votes." The Greek conservative government was called out for its inaction to prepare for the heavy snowfall that had disrupted power and left motorists stranded on the roads for several hours. ("[Unacceptable comments': Greek minister dismissed over natural disaster compensation remarks](#)," *Euronews*, 07 February 2022)

HUNGARY

Budapest declines additional NATO troops

On 10 February, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó stated that Hungary would not accept further NATO troops on its soil. Szijjártó said: "No, we have not agreed to that and we will not agree because we have already NATO's troops on the territory of the country, which is the Hungarian army...So we don't need additional troops on the territory of Hungary." His comments came after the US had sent additional troops to Poland and Romania. He also spoke about the rising tensions in Ukraine and said: "... We ask, we urge the international community to do its best to avoid the Cold War to return...whenever there is an East-West conflict, the countries of Central Europe lose and we don't want to be losers anymore." He further talked about the sanctions and their ineffectiveness as he said that sanctions had been regularly renewed since 2014 but they had no effects on Russia. ("[Ukraine crisis: Hungary won't accept more NATO troops on its soil, says foreign minister Szijjártó](#)," *Euronews*, 10 February 2022)

ICELAND

Ban on whale hunting by 2024

On 04 February, Iceland announced to ban whale hunting within two years. Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Svandís Svavarsdóttir said: "Why should Iceland take the risk of keeping up whaling, which has not brought any economic gain, in order to sell a product for which there is hardly any demand?" There has been a drop in demand as Iceland's primary buyer of whale meat Japan had resumed commercial whaling in 2019. Other factors have also impacted the industry, such as social distancing rules in meat production facilities and the extension of a no-fishing

coastal zone, which have shot up the price of whale hunting. (["Iceland whaling: Fisheries minister signals end from 2024," BBC, 04 February 2022](#))

IRELAND

Ireland government announces a scheme for migrants

On 31 January, the Ireland government introduced a scheme for undocumented migrants and their family members to attain Irish citizenship. The justice department estimated that more than 17,000 people lived in Ireland without documentation. According to the Irish justice minister, it is a "once in a generation scheme," which will allow applicants to work and proceed towards their citizenship. The scheme is scheduled to end by 31 July. (["Ireland gives undocumented migrants path to citizenship," BBC, 01 February 2022](#))

ITALY

Italian fashion brand announces to opt for eco-fur garments

On 31 January, Italian fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana released a statement along with the animal rights group, Humane Society International announcing the dropping out of animal fur from its collections. The production will henceforth use eco-fur garments and accessories. According to the company's communication and marketing officer: "The entire fashion system has a significant social responsibility role that must be promoted and encouraged. Dolce & Gabbana is working toward a more sustainable future that can't contemplate the use of animal fur." (["Luxury fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana will stop using fur," Deutsche Welle, 31 January 2022](#))

Rome adopts judicial system reforms

On 12 February, the Italian government approved a law that reformed the country's justice system. The law restricted magistrates in a judicial career trying to move to a political role and back. Italy initiated the reforms as the EU had mandated the changes for Rome to receive its share of the pandemic recovery funds. Justice Minister Marta Cartabia said: "We owe it to the citizens who have the right to

regain full trust in our magistrate system." He further stated that the reforms were implemented to put an end to "revolving door magistrates who take on a political post." (["Italy: Government reform to ban politicians from returning to judiciary roles," Euronews, 12 February 2022](#))

Euthanasia: Court thwarts referendum attempt

On 15 February, Italy's Constitutional Court prevented a potential referendum on decriminalizing euthanasia. In August, supporters for assisted suicide gathered 750,000 signatures which were more than the required limit. Via a press release, the court maintained that the referendum would deny the "minimum protection of human life in general, particularly with reference to weak and vulnerable persons." According to Italy's present law, individuals assisting suicides can be jailed for five to 12 years. Nonetheless, the blockade and the subject has caused a split in Italian political parties. (["Italy: Constitutional court blocks euthanasia referendum," Deutsche Welle, 16 February 2022](#))

LATVIA

Saeima passes Holocaust restitution law to compensate survivors with EUR 40 million

On 10 February, the Saeima (parliament) passed a bill that intends to repay the Jewish community over the property they lost after the end of World War II. Termed the "Law on the Compensation of Goodwill to the Latvian Jewish Community," the law would provide compensations of EUR 40 million over 10 years. The Chairman of the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities responded: "Finalizing this process demonstrates that even 77 years after the end of the Holocaust, it is never too late for justice." The negotiations, which began in 2005, involved the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the US, Israel, Latvian Jewish representatives and government authorities. (["Latvia: Parliament passes Holocaust restitution law," Deutsche Welle, 11 February 2022](#))

MONTENEGRO

Government ousted via a no-confidence motion

On 04 February, the parliament of Montenegro approved a no-confidence motion toppling the government. Led by Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic, the vote ended with 43 in favour of the motion while 11 voted against it. The conservative pro-Serbian government which came into power in 2020, had only been in power for 14 months. Krivokapic has been blamed for mismanaging the pandemic, creating an economic slowdown and delaying the integration process. Opposition leaders commented on the ousting: "This is not the day to be triumphant. We have serious work ahead to bring Montenegro out of a crisis." Montenegro's President Milo Djukanovic is expected to nominate a prime minister-designate soon. ("[Montenegro's government toppled in no-confidence vote](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 05 February 2022)

NORWAY

NATO Secretary-General to become the next Central Bank Governor of Norway

On 03 January, the Norwegian government announced that Jens Stoltenberg, currently the Secretary General of the NATO, will be positioned as the Central Bank Governor after his tenure ends. Stoltenberg said: "I am grateful for the trust and am looking forward to taking on the job." The Finance Minister welcomed the decision and praised his knowledge, background, and the management experience which would suit the best for the position. ("[NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg to lead Norway's central bank](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 February 2022)

POLAND

Warsaw: President Duda to propose bill closing down Supreme Court disciplinary chamber

On 03 February, Polish President Andrzej Duda proposed to submit a bill that would shut down the Supreme Court's disciplinary chamber. The move was an effort to end the clash with the EU. Duda said: "I propose that this chamber be abolished... I want to give the Polish government an instrument to end the dispute with the European Commission." Critics condemned the proposal, claiming that it was just "bogus

rebranding". The European Court of Justice (ECJ) had imposed a fine of EUR 1 million per day for the lack of Polish action regarding the chamber. ("[Poland: President seeks closure of court body to end EU row](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 February 2022)

PORTUGAL

Socialist party wins an absolute majority

On 30 January, Portugal held snap general elections, and Portugal's ruling socialist party secured an absolute majority. As reported by *Deutsche Welle*: "The Socialists, led by Prime Minister Antonio Costa, received 42% of the vote, the electoral commission said after counting 95% of the ballots." Costa said: "An absolute majority doesn't mean absolute power. It doesn't mean to govern alone. It's an increased responsibility, and it means to govern with and for all Portuguese." Even though one-tenth of the country had been isolated, they were requested to go in the final hours of the poll to vote. ("[Portugal's Socialists land parliamentary majority](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 31 January 2022)

CNE to delay the Socialist party from taking charge

On 17 February, the National Electoral Commission (CNE) delayed the positioning of the new Socialist government. It had asked the Portuguese citizens to vote again in March. The repeat of elections is due to recent court ruling against the agreement of political parties to remove the need to include identity of voters in the mail-in ballot. The court declared such votes to be illegal and invalid. With the court decision, the socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa who won with the majority, will not be able to take up the role as per schedule on 23 February. ("[Portuguese voters abroad to recast ballots after election mess-up](#)," *Reuters*, 17 January 2022)

RUSSIA

New charges against Alexei Navalny

On 16 February, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was put under a new trial. He was accused of stealing USD 4.7 million from the donations given to his political organizations. Navalny is currently serving

a two-and-a-half-year sentence. The accusations of the new frauds can keep him in jail for an additional ten years. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the charges seemed dubious and called on the Russian government to release Navalny and his associates as they were being, "targeted for their work to shine a light on official corruption." Navalny said: "You're going to increase my term indefinitely. What can we do about it?" ("[Putin critic Navalny put on trial again in Russia](#)," *BBC*, 16 February 2022)

Defense Ministry declares Putin to monitor military drills

On 18 February, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced that President Vladimir Putin would monitor the upcoming military exercises which would involve missile tests. The Russian Defense Ministry stated that Putin would "preside over a planned exercise of strategic deterrence forces... during which ballistic and cruise missiles will be launched". According to *Deutsche Welle*, Putin will supervise the drills from the defense ministry's situation control center. Peskov also commented on the possibility of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko attending the drills; he commented: "If they decide to be there together, then they will be there together. But it will depend on the decision of the heads of state." ("[Vladimir Putin to supervise Russian missile drills](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 February 2022)

SWITZERLAND

Switzerland to hold polls for public voting on four issues

On 11 February, Switzerland held a referendum for voting for four main issues: animal testing, tobacco advertising, media subsidies, and equity stamp taxes. On animal testing, voters will decide if Switzerland can impose a ban on animal and human experiments or not. As far as tobacco advertising is concerned, the vote was passed to ban any tobacco or electronic cigarette-related ads in a way that provokes young children and adolescents. The ban included press, posters, the internet, cinemas, and other events. On media

subsidies, the opponents of the law have argued that the financial aid of EUR 143 million sent to public funds only benefits wealthy publishers and will vote to whether keep or scrap the funding. In the case of the equity stamp taxes, the measure is decided on the taxes on businesses, where one per cent of equity stamp tax is to be repealed. The tax will be applicable only when the company equity raises more than EUR 950,000. (Joshua Berlinger, "[Swiss referendums: What are the four issues being put to the public this Sunday?](#)," *Euronews*, 11 February 2022)

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Sue Gray's report on the Boris Johnson Party scandal released

On 31 January, the Sue Gray report on the party gate scandal was published. As per the report, 16 events were conducted in the May and April months in the Cabinet Office and there were three critiques. Starting from how the party events had failed to observe the standards laid by the government, how the gatherings are difficult to be proven against the pandemic restrictions and how the leadership has failed by allowing such events to take place. The investigation into events have resulted in stifling chaos inside the party of the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and few ministers are expected to resign in the coming days. ("[Sue Gray party report: What are the findings?](#)," *BBC*, 31 January 2022)

Boris Johnson's comments on Sue Gray's report

On 02 January, Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the Parliament's weekly Prime Minister's question time (PMQs) said: "I will comply with the law." Johnson made those remarks as he was being questioned about the report by civil servant Sue Gray on the party gate scandals. But, as reported by *Euronews*: "But unlike in previous weeks, Partygate did not dominate the sitting of the house, with Labour leader Keir Starmer instead grilling Johnson about economic issues." Gray further said she found "failures of leadership and judgment" on Johnson's part. The police are still investigating the other 12 parties that were

held and were not covered by Gray's report. ("[I will comply with the law': Boris Johnson faces MPs after Gray report](#)," *Euronews*, 02 February 2022)

Queen Elizabeth II celebrates 70 years as monarch

On 06 February, Queen Elizabeth II celebrated the platinum jubilee of her being the monarch of the UK. The 95-year-old Queen came to power at 25 years on 06 February 1952. She is the first British monarch to remain in power for this long. On the eve of her platinum jubilee, the monarch announced that the Duchess of Cornwall Camilla would be called "Queen Consort," when her husband and heir-to-the-throne Prince Charles became king. This cleared up many doubts regarding the royal household's consideration of Camilla, who was long vilified for her role in breaking up Prince Charles' marriage with Princess Diana. The primary platinum jubilee celebrations will coincide with her coronation anniversary and are scheduled for early June 2022. ("[Elizabeth II marks Platinum Jubilee with 'Queen Camilla' announcement](#)," *France24*, 06 February 2022; "[Britain: Prince Charles' wife set to become 'Queen Camilla'](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 06 February 2022)

PM Johnson sent a questionnaire from the police

On 11 February, UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he received a legal questionnaire from the police due to his involvement in the party gate scandal. Johnson said he had seven days to respond to the email as the Metropolitan Police investigated the 12 parties held in Downing Street. These parties were not included in Sue Gray's report as they did not happen in government buildings. As reported by *The Guardian*: "The former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith has warned Boris Johnson it will be hard to cling to power if the Metropolitan police find he breached Covid rules." ("[Partygate': Boris Johnson sent a questionnaire from police](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 11 February 2022; Jem Bartholomew, "[Boris Johnson's position 'difficult' if Met](#)

[fines him, warns Iain Duncan Smith](#)," *The Guardian*, 12 February 2022)

UK to revise its golden visa scheme to mitigate corruption

On 17 February, the golden visa scheme offered by the UK government has come under review. The UK government is expected to announce the removal of the scheme despite pressure building over between the UK and Russia. Initially, the scheme was introduced in 2008 to draw investments into the UK from people outside the EU. Those who held the tier one visa spent GBP two million later were offered permanent residency through the scheme. They were also allowed to bring their families along. With the review in process, the Home Office has decided to modify the visa scheme to end corruption. ("[UK to scrap golden visa scheme for foreign investors](#)," *BBC*, 17 February 2022)

PM Johnson speculates a Russian invasion of Ukraine

On 20 February, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson talked about the possible repercussions of a Russian invasion of Ukraine which would "echo around the world." Johnson spoke at the security conference in Munich. He speculated an attack by Russian President Vladimir Putin and called on the leaders, saying: "... that is why we must stand strong together." His comments come when Western countries warned of a sudden invasion by Russia, with a 130,000 troop buildup at the Ukrainian border. Johnson also said if an invasion did transpire then, "we will witness the destruction of a democratic state, a country that has been free for a generation, with a proud history of elections." ("[Ukraine: Shock of invasion would echo around the world, Boris Johnson says](#)," *BBC*, 19 February 2022)

UKRAINE

Volodymyr Zelensky announces unity day on 16 February

On 14 February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced a day of unity on 16 February. Western media has been speculating of a Russian invasion,

which spared him to call on Ukraine's citizens to fly flags and sing the national anthem at 10 am on that day. Zelensky said: "They tell us 16 February will be the day of the attack. We will make it a day of unity." US' Pentagon Spokesperson John Kirby commented: "I won't get into a specific date, I don't think that would be smart. I would just tell you that it is entirely possible that he could move with little to no warning." Meanwhile, Ukrainian airspace steered clear as tensions had made airliner companies pull back their insurance coverage. Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, in response to the pullback, said Ukraine would assure a USD 592 million fund "to ensure flight safety in Ukraine for insurance and leasing companies." (Darya Korsunskaya and Natalia Zinets, "[Ukraine president calls for 'day of unity' for 16 February, day some believe Russia could invade](#)," *Reuters*, 15 February 2022; Mari Eccles, "[War worries cloud Ukraine's skies](#)," *POLITICO*, 14 February 2022)

Ukraine: Parliament approves 30-day state of emergency

On 23 February, the Ukrainian Parliament declared a 30-day state of emergency. This was a response to the Russian recognition of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk as "independent". Meanwhile, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is allegedly considering the possibilities for announcing a nationwide state of emergency as the fear of war with Russia looms large. The imposition of an emergency permits officials to take restrictive action "in the interests of national security and public order". ("[Ukraine requests an urgent meeting of UN Security Council — as it happened](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 February 2022)

President Zelenskyy announces general mobilization

On 24 February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ratified a decree ordering the general mobilization of the country's citizens. According to the Ukrainian Presidency's website, conscripts and reservists are expected to report over the next 90 days. During a video address,

Zelenskyy said: "We have been left alone to defend our state... Who is ready to fight alongside us? I don't see anyone. Who is ready to give Ukraine a guarantee of NATO membership? Everyone is afraid." The Ukrainian border guard ordered males of 18-60 years to not leave the country until the martial law is lifted. ("[Ukraine president orders general mobilization](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 February 2022)

Separatists group leader warns of a full-scale war

On 07 February, the head of the breakaway Donetsk People's Republic, Denis Pushilin said that his forces will turn in support in case of a full-scale war that might break out. The separatist group has been backed by Russia, but the leader indicated that in terms of weaponry, air defenses, and drones, the group lacked at large. He said: "First of all we rely on ourselves, but we do not rule out that we will be forced to turn to Russia if Ukraine, with the support of Western countries, passes a certain line." (Anton Zverev, "[Separatist leader says full-scale war in east Ukraine could break out any time](#)," *Reuters*, 07 February 2022)

REGIONAL

Boris Johnson meet Ukraine President to discuss diplomatic options

On 01 February, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to discuss viable diplomatic solutions to prevent direct conflict with Russia. Before Johnson arrived, the UK government declared GBP 88 million to Ukraine to endorse stable governance and to meet energy needs. Johnson said: "It is the right of every Ukrainian to determine how they are governed. As a friend and a democratic partner, the UK will continue to uphold Ukraine's sovereignty in the face of those who seek to destroy it." On the same day, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss declared new legislation to broaden the UK's sanctions targeting a wider range of individuals and businesses connected to Russia's President Vladimir Putin. ("[Boris Johnson visits Ukraine for talks as Russian invasion fears rise](#)," *BBC*, 01 January 2022; "[Ukraine-Russia tensions: UK threatens](#)

[tougher sanctions in event of aggression](#),”
BBC, 31 January 2022)

Ukraine: Putin responds to the standoff, expresses “disappointment”

On 01 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Moscow. The first in-person meeting since the escalation between Putin and an EU leader saw the former commenting on the standoff for the first time since 23 December 2021. Putin expressed that the Kremlin’s demands were simply “ignored”. He accused the US of being more interested in “containing Russian development” than being concerned about Ukraine’s security. There was a call by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for governments to adhere to the 1999 agreement, the violation of which was the basis of the Ukraine crisis.

Meanwhile, Orban ended the joint press conference stating the “substantial” differences could be bridged. (Natalia Zinets and Vladimir Soldatkin, [“Putin says West has ‘ignored’ Russia’s security concerns,”](#) *Reuters*, 02 February 2022)

Germany bans Russia Today channel over a license violation

On 02 February, Germany’s media regulator announced the ban of the German-language TV channel known as Russia Today (RT) belonging to the Russian State broadcaster. The Commission for Authorization and Supervision released a statement: “The organization and distribution of the TV program via live stream on the internet, via the mobile and smart TV app ‘RT News’ and satellite must be discontinued.” The officials have said that the RT did not hold the right license to broadcast in Germany and has previously tried to run its operations through a Serbian broadcasting license. The Russian Foreign Ministry has called the act unreasonable. ([“Germany bans Russian broadcaster RT’s German-language channel,”](#) *POLITICO*, 02 February 2022)

Poland: Agreement signed with the Czech Republic over Turow mine

On 03 February, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the Czech

Republic Prime Minister Petr Fiala met in Prague and signed an agreement regarding the Turow mine. The deal ends the long-drawn dispute over the lignite mine.

According to Morawiecki, the agreement allows the smooth functioning of both the Turow open-pit mine and the nearby power plant. During the joint press conference, Fiala said: “This deal undoubtedly brings advantages and benefits and results to communities affected (by Turow).” The agreement also calls for the Czech Republic to withdraw its complaint made to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). However, the daily fines of EUR 500,000 imposed on Poland by the European Commission are expected to continue until the official withdrawal. ([“Polish, Czech governments sign deal on contested mine,”](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 04 February 2022)

Ukraine: Former Chancellor Merkel’s Security Advisor calls for increased weapons provision to Kyiv

On 04 February, *Reuters* reported former German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Security Advisor Christoph Heusgen to have called on the country to increase its support for Ukraine. The future Chief of the Munich Security Conference, set to assume the post by 18 to 20 February, further stated that history could no longer be used as an excuse. Heusgen said: “We make it too easy on ourselves, to say we have always done it that way so we continue... We have to have a debate about a more active German role in foreign policy, and security policy and (arms exports policy) is part of it.”

([“Germany should send Ukraine weapons, says Munich Security Conference chief-designate,”](#) *Reuters*, 05 February 2022)

Russia: Deutsche Welle to shut down its operations in Moscow

On 04 February, Moscow announced the closure of *Deutsche Welle*’s Moscow office, withdrew its press accreditations and channel broadcasting in Russia. The steps taken were in retaliation for Berlin’s ban of the Russian broadcaster *RT News* in Germany. DW’s Russian service in Germany Irina Filatova said: “We clearly expected some measures after RT was banned in

Germany. But we never expected that these retaliatory measures by the Russian authorities would be so hard." Filatova further said: "The state of press freedom in Russia has drastically deteriorated over the last years. There's been a huge clampdown by Russian authorities on independent media." Her comments come as the Russian foreign authorities said they were considering placing DW on the list of foreign agents. (Farah Bahgat, "[DW's Moscow bureau closes after Russian ban](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 04 February 2022; "[German anger as Russia shuts international broadcaster Deutsche Welle](#)," *BBC*, 04 February 2022)

Ukraine: Former Defense Chief alleges Russian troop buildup sufficient for invasion

On 06 February, former Ukrainian Defense Chief Andriy Zagorodnyuk stated that Russia had amassed enough troops along the border to capture either Kyiv or any other city. During his interview with *The Guardian*, Zagorodnyuk said: "Russia could now seize any city in Ukraine. But we still don't see the 200,000 troops needed for a full-scale invasion." Estimates place the Russian troops along Ukraine's borders to be 135,000. (Luke Harding and Richard Luscombe, "[Russia has enough troops ready to take Kyiv, says former Ukraine defence chief](#)," *The Guardian*, 06 February 2022)

Maastricht Treaty turns 30

On 07 February, the Maastricht Treaty, also known as the Treaty on European Union, turned 30. The treaty was signed in Maastricht on 07 February 1992, which led to a significant step in European integration. The treaty states: "This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen." The treaty emerged at a crucial point in history, as reported by Euronews: "the Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Union had collapsed and liberal democracy had reached its peak of popularity." 30 years since the treaty was signed has brought light on the current challenges in Europe and the future of

European integration. ("[Maastricht Treaty at 30: Pandemic brings unanswered questions back to the fore](#)," *Euronews*, 07 February 2022)

The Eastern flank of NATO receives troops from Germany and the UK

On 07 February, Germany and the UK announced to send additional troops to reinforce NATO battle groups in Eastern Europe. German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht said: "The Bundeswehr is sending 350 additional soldiers to the battle group in Lithuania." She further commented: "We are thus strengthening our contribution in terms of forces on NATO's eastern flank and sending a clear signal of determination to our allies." The UK also sent a contingent of 350 soldiers to the battle group in Poland. The UK Defence Minister Ben Wallace said: "showing that we can work together and sending a strong signal that Britain and Poland stand side by side." ("[Ukraine crisis: Germany and UK send hundreds of extra soldiers to NATO's eastern flank](#)," *Euronews*, 07 February 2022)

Annalena Baerbock visits Ukraine again

On 07 February, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock traveled to Ukraine as tensions rose at the Ukrainian border. In the press conference, Baerbock said that Germany was in favour of paying a high economic price if sanctions were to be imposed on Russia. The visit highlighted the talks on arms exports and Germany's intent to levy sanctions on Russia, but only upon invasion. Germany has been constantly refusing the supply of weapons to Ukraine as it fears escalations of conflict. ("[Baerbock: Germany 'ready to pay high economic price' for Ukraine peace](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 February 2022)

Poland: EU to hold back Warsaw-bound funds over Turow coal mine

On 08 February, the European Commission announced that EUR 15 million would be cut from Poland's funding. The decision comes in the backdrop of Poland's unpaid fines of EUR 500,000 a day, imposed by the Commission over the Turow coal mine

dispute. Responding to the announcement, Poland's government spokesperson said that the country would appeal against the decision. Although the Czech Republic and Poland signed a dispute-ending agreement recently, the fines to be paid remain.

(["Turow coal mine: EU to withhold Poland funds over dispute," Deutsche Welle](#), 08 February 2022; Jennifer Rankin, ["EU to withhold funds from Poland over unpaid fine," The Guardian](#), 08 February 2022)

Germany hosts trilateral meeting on resolving the issue of Ukraine

On 08 February, a trilateral meeting was hosted by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz between the French President Emmanuel Macron and Polish President Andrzej Duda in Berlin. The meeting was held to ease the building tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The leaders called Russia for a de-escalation at the border and urged for a diplomatic dialogue taking European security into concern. Scholz said: "Our common goal is to avoid a war in Europe." Duda said: "We have to find a solution to avoid war, in my opinion, what's most important today is unity and solidarity." Macron said: "We must together find ways and means to engage in a demanding dialogue with Russia." (["Ukraine crisis: 'Our goal is to avoid a war in Europe,' says Germany's Scholz," Deutsche Welle](#), 07 February 2022)

Ukraine: Germany's Baerbock visits conflict-ridden Donbas region

On 08 February, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock during her trip to Kyiv visited eastern Ukraine which is the conflict front line. Baerbock, who spent around 40 minutes in the region, was briefed by a Ukrainian general about the situation in Donbas. She commented on the "depressing" views in the region and said: "(it would be impossible) to solve this aggression from the Russian side militarily, so I am doing everything I can to make sure that we move forward step by step at the negotiating table." Baerbock is also scheduled to meet with representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). (["Germany's](#)

[foreign minister visits front line in Ukraine," Deutsche Welle](#), 08 February 2022)

Pope Francis talks about Normandy format and the Ukrainian crisis

On 09 February, Pope Francis spoke about the Ukrainian crisis during his Wednesday general audience. Pope Francis hoped that the diplomatic processes would help avert an armed conflict and he mentioned: "war is insane." He also said: "Let us continue to implore the God of peace that tensions and threats of war be overcome through serious dialogue and that the 'Normandy Format' talks may also contribute to this." He also thanked the diplomats of the Normandy format talks for their efforts in negotiating peace. He lastly thanked the people for participating in the prayer for peace held in December 2021. (Joshua Berlinger, ["Pope Francis on potential conflict in Ukraine: 'War is insane'," Euronews](#), 08 February 2022)

Russia and Belarus to conduct joint military exercise

On 10 February, Russia and Belarus will begin joint military drills despite the growing tensions in Ukraine. In the drill, 30,000 Russian troops are set to take part in the drills along with Belarus. The US has said that the troop deployment will be the biggest since the cold war. In the case of Russia, it has still not accepted to look away from Ukraine, claiming its closer social and cultural ties with Ukraine. Belarus has come in between the tensions because of its close relations with Russia and sharing the longest border with Ukraine. The Russian EU Ambassador has assured the return of troops after the exercise. The repercussions of the military exercise are yet to be known. (["Ukraine tensions: Russia begins military drills with Belarus," BBC](#), 10 January 2022)

Ukraine: Multiple talks held over the standoff

On 10 February, Europe witnessed multiple countries from the region engaging in diplomacy to de-escalate tensions along the Ukrainian border. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met with leaders of the Baltic countries, stating that the efforts were towards "preventing a war in Europe".

Scholz will visit Kyiv and Moscow on 14 and 15 February. Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson met NATO Chief Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels following which he traveled to Poland. After the trip, Johnson warned: "I think today, 10 February 2022, we stand on the edge of a precipice and things are as dangerous as I have seen them in Europe for a very, very long time." The UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss also met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Lavrov commented: "I'm honestly disappointed that what we have is a conversation between a dumb and a deaf person. It's as if we listen but we don't hear." ("[Ukraine crisis: Don't underestimate West's resolve, Germany's Scholz tells Russia](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 February 2022; Dan Sabbagh and Andrew Roth, "[PM fears Europe on 'precipice' as Russia expands forces on Ukraine's borders](#)," *The Guardian*, 10 February 2022)

European Commission announces investment scheme in Africa

On 10 January, the European Commission to endorse Europe's Global Gateway investment scheme announced the Europe-Africa program. According to President Ursula von der Leyen: "It is the first regional plan under Global Gateway two months after the launch of the strategy." Where an investment of EUR 150 billion will be made in Africa to focus on green transition, renewable energy generation, and protection of biodiversity. The scheme also aims to create a sustainable agri-food system and job opportunities in the region. ("[EU reveals €150 billion investment plan for Africa](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 February 2022)

Ukraine via OSCE asks Russia to explain troop build-up

On 14 February, the Ukrainian government called for a meeting with Russia as tensions escalated between the two. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Russia had not informed about the recent troop build-up on the border and had not responded to the formal requests. Ukraine made a formal request through the Organisation for Security and Cooperation

in Europe (OSCE) to explain the military activities undertaken by Russia. OSCE members have the right to ask for information on another member's actions. Kuleba said: "If Russia is serious when it talks about the indivisibility of security in the OSCE space, it must fulfill its commitment to military transparency to de-escalate tensions and enhance security for all." ("[Ukraine seeks meeting with Russia within 48 hours to discuss build-up](#)," *BBC*, 14 February 2022)

Cybersecurity threats amidst geopolitical tensions in Europe

On 14 February, EU's cybersecurity agency ENISA and its cyber response team CERT-EU released a joint warning of a possible rise in cyber security threats. The statements mentioned "... a substantial increase of cybersecurity threats for both private and public organizations across the EU." The authorities "strongly encouraged all public and private sector organizations in the EU to adopt a minimum set of cybersecurity best practices" to avoid getting hacked." The EU's warning came after NATO and the US had sent out similar alerts on 12 February. The US warning stated: "The Russian government has used cyber as a key component of their force projection over the last decade, including previously in Ukraine." (Laurens Cerulus and Mark Scott, "[Cyber tensions rise as West fears invasion of Ukraine](#)," *POLITICO*, 15 February 2022)

Chancellor Olaf Scholz visits Kyiv

On 14 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv. As reported by *POLITICO*, "...Scholz and Zelensky played down the likelihood of Ukraine joining the military alliance in the foreseeable future." Zelensky said: "the future of the European security architecture will be decided in Ukraine." He also mentioned how Ukraine was ready to discuss "guarantees" that could de-escalate and ensure its territorial integrity. Even though Scholz had repeated what US President Joe Biden had said concerning "very far-reaching and effective sanctions," he still hoped for a peaceful

resolution. (Hans Von Der Burchard, "[Scholz, Zelensky play down talk of NATO membership for Ukraine](#)," *POLITICO*, 14 February 2022)

Munich Security Report released

On 14 February, the Munich Security Report was released at its annual Conference. The Munich Security Conference (MSC) is an annual event held since 1963 on international security policy. Although it is not part of the government, the informal discussion involves high-level participants from across the globe. The report brings out the advent of "collective helplessness" amidst the global challenges and brings out debate to overcome them. Longest-serving diplomat of MSC Wolfgang Ischinger's response to the Ukraine-Russia crisis was most-awaited. When question on the same, he said: "more needs to be done to make people aware of the importance of deterrence as a method of conflict prevention." ("[Munich Security Report: A grim analysis of a wave of global crises](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 14 February 2022)

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UK in trouble in identifying Russian Oligarch funds

On 15 February, the UK government announced that in event of a Russian invasion, strict sanctions will be imposed on

Russia. Previously British Foreign Secretary had warned that Russia will pay a heavy price for an invasion. Upon UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson visit, the sanction plans were set to target individuals close to Russian President Putin. With the reveal of "Londongrad" which contains the investment of Russian Oligarchs into the financial combining along with the UK's capital. In the present situation with tensions growing with Russia, the UK will face a challenge in uprooting the oligarchs. ("['Londongrad': UK's tough balancing act on Russian sanctions](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 February 2022)

Russia: Germany's Scholz meets with Putin

On 15 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met Russian President Vladimir Putin during his inaugural visit to Moscow. Engaging in diplomacy over the Ukraine crisis, Scholz stated that it was their responsibility to avoid an "escalation into war". Scholz added: "For Europeans, it is clear that lasting security cannot be achieved against Russia but only with Russia... Dialogue cannot end in a cul de sac, that would be a disaster for everyone." During the joint press conference, Putin expressed: "We are ready to work further together. We are ready to go down the negotiations track." ("[Ukraine crisis: 'We don't want war in Europe' Putin says in talks with Scholz](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 February 2022)

Ukraine: Russia's EU ambassador denies the possibility of imminent invasion

On 16 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported the Russian ambassador to the EU Vladimir Chizhov to have denied claims of an imminent Russian invasion. Chizhov's comments were published by *Die Welt*, which reported: "As far as Russia is concerned, I can assure you that there will be no attack this Wednesday." This was in reference to the allegations made by the West of the Kremlin invading Kyiv on 16 February. Chizhov added: "There will be no escalation in the coming week either, or in the week after that, or in the coming month." The ambassador maintained that accusations such as these needed to be

backed by evidence and that the West lacked this. ([“No Ukraine attack 'in the coming month' says Russia's EU ambassador,” Deutsche Welle](#), 16 February 2022)

ECJ rules out to cut funds for those states breaching democracy

On 16 February, the European Court of Justice announced that Brussels can decide to cut funds to countries that defy the rule of law standards. According to the court, the commission was mandated to follow the procedural requirements and was granted the power to withhold funds. The announcement comes after the appeal filed by Hungary and Poland. Both countries pleaded against the sanctions mechanism which targets countries that disregard the rule of law by blocking the EU funds. For which Brussels came with a measure to cut funding due to allegations in Warsaw and Budapest for undermining democratic standards. On the same, the Commission sent formal letters in November to Warsaw and Budapest. Both Hungary and Poland have been accused by the European Commission and Brussels for misuse of the EU funds and for not valuing the independence of the judges. Therefore, will the order from ECJ Brussels will now be able to cut funds to Poland and Warsaw, but for the Commission, it will need votes to go ahead with the sanction mechanism. ([“EU top court dismisses Hungary-Poland rule-of-law challenge,” Deutsche Welle](#), 16 February 2022)

New French-based military alliance to stand permanent for European Security

On 16 February, NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg reported that NATO continues to see enlarging military on the borders of Ukraine despite Russia's attempts to make them believe in the withdrawal of weaponry. Stoltenberg portrayed that NATO will be joining the French forces in Romania for a permanent European security group. He said: “The new normal is that Russia is willing to contest some fundamental principles of our security.” ([“NATO chief says European](#)

[security faces 'new normal',” Deutsche Welle](#), 16 February 2022)

Ukraine: Latvian Prime Minister expects long-term pressure from Russia

On 18 February, during an interview with *POLITICO* in Brussels, the Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš expressed that Russia would have a hold over Ukraine and Europe for an extended period of time. He said: “In the best-case scenario — best-case meaning no war — we will be facing long-term pressure from Putin on Ukraine and Europe as a whole... we have to be prepared for probably a long haul — not two weeks or two months or even two years.” (Jacopo Barigazzi, Andrew Gray and Cory Bennett, [“West must brace for years of Putin pressure on Ukraine, Latvian PM says,” POLITICO](#), 18 February 2022)

Fire on Euroferry Olympia near Corfu islands

On 18 February, a boat with 290 people on board the Euroferry Olympia was to be rescued as the ferry burst into flames. The incident happened near the Greek island of Corfu and was headed for the Italian port of Brindisi when a fire broke out on the car deck. The Greek coast guard said: “Most of the passengers were Italian nationals, according to Ionian islands governor Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, while the crew was both Greek and Italian.” 11 people were still missing, but the official still has to confirm the number of people who were able to leave the ferry when the orders to abandon the ship were given. ([Ferry fire: Eleven missing as hundreds rescued off Corfu](#), BBC, 18 February 2022)

Ukraine: Macron holds a telephonic conversation with Putin

On 20 February, French President Emmanuel Macron held a telephonic conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin over de-escalation attempts regarding the Ukraine crisis. The two leaders decided on pursuing “intensified diplomatic efforts” to solve the ongoing standoff. The Kremlin called on these to be undertaken via the Normandy Format of talks. Following Macron's call with Putin, he

conducted a phone conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the “need and possible ways of immediate de-escalation”. Meanwhile, the OSCE is expected to hold talks in Ukraine on 21 February. ([“Ukraine latest: Macron urges Putin to ‘avoid a major conflict’,” Deutsche Welle](#), 20 February 2022; [“Putin and Macron discuss need to step up Ukraine diplomacy, Kremlin says,” Reuters](#), 20 February 2022)

Belarus: Military drills with Russia to be extended

On 20 February, the Belarusian Defense Ministry announced that their bilateral military exercises with the Russian troops would be conducted beyond its scheduled deadline of 10 days. According to Defense Minister Victor Khrenin: “The presidents of Belarus and Russia decided to continue inspections of the readiness of Union State forces.” Previously, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had maintained that the drills would end on the planned date. ([“Ukraine: Belarus says military drills with Russia will continue,” Deutsche Welle](#), 20 February 2022)

Welsh leaders visit Ukraine amid increasing escalation

On 20 February, two Welsh politicians, Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price and Counsel General Mick Antoniw, visited Kyiv. Their visit was a show of solidarity with the people in Ukraine. Moreover, even though the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) had warned UK nationals to leave Ukraine, the two leaders said they wanted to “stand shoulder to shoulder” with the people. They have also planned to meet Ukrainian workers, LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minorities, and human rights defenders. Price said: “The more the Ukrainian people are threatened by Russian aggression and imperialism, the more urgent it becomes for socialists, democrats, and internationalists to stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with them - in defense of their right to national self-determination and in defiance of Putin’s warmongering.” ([“Ukraine: Adam Price and](#)

[Mick Antoniw arrive against advice.” BBC](#), 19 February 2022)

Putin recognizes Donestk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic

On 21 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into eastern Ukraine for peacekeeping duties. Russia’s deployment was a follow-up as it recognized two breakaway regions of the Donestk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic. The deployment was agreed in the text signed by the parties wherein the third article mentioned: “implementation of peacekeeping functions by the armed forces of the Russian Federation.” Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of wrecking peace talks and said they were still committed to peace and diplomacy. Putin said: “... take a long-overdue decision to immediately recognize the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic.” Nato’s Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg responded: “This further undermines Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, erodes efforts towards a resolution of the conflict, and violates the Minsk agreements, to which Russia is a party.” (Andrew Roth and Julian Borger, [“Putin orders troops into eastern Ukraine on ‘peacekeeping duties’,” The Guardian](#), 21 February 2022)

CRRT team formed to respond to cyber-attacks launched against Ukraine

On 23 February, a team of European countries have been formed a cyber rapid-response team (CRRT) to defend Ukraine from future cyber-attacks. The grouping that includes includes Lithuania, Croatia, Poland, Estonia, Romania, and the Netherlands formed after a series of Russian attacks launched on Ukraine’s banking sector. In a recent tweet of Lithuania Defense Ministry: “In response to Ukraine request, [we] are activating [a] Lithuanian-led cyber rapid-response team, which will help Ukrainian institutions to cope with growing cyber-threats. #StandWithUkraine.” The response team will look into various cyber-expertise,

forensics, vulnerability assessments to detect and respond to cyber-threats. (Joe Tidy, "[Ukraine: EU deploys cyber rapid-response team](#)," *BBC*, 23 February 2022)

EU slaps new sanctions on Putin's close aides

On 23 February, the European Union announced new sanctions against 27 high-ranking individuals and entities. Euronews reported: "They will all be subject to asset freezes: EU-based banks will be prohibited from making funds available to them, although this will depend on the degree of cooperation from the financial entities." The individuals will also be banned from entering or passing through EU territory. EU's diplomat Josep Borrell said: "This package of sanctions will hurt Russia, and it will hurt a lot." However, Putin himself has been excluded from the sanctions. ("[Commanders, ministers and bank chiefs: The EU goes after Putin's closest circle](#)," *Euronews*, 23 February 2022)

Ukraine: Russia's midnight invasion and thermobaric "vacuum bombs" launcher spotted in Belgorod

On 26 February, Russia's invasion of Ukraine from the region of Belgorod took the inhabitants by surprise as the troops started moving in at midnight. The offensive was initiated right after Russian President Vladimir Putin's call announcement of an offensive against Ukraine. A resident, Olga, said: "My sister called me at 5:30 in the morning and told me, 'Putin announced there would be war in Ukraine.' Half an hour later it all started. We were afraid, very afraid." At the same time, the TOS-1 or TOS-1A Multiple Rocket Launcher was spotted south of Belgorod. These weapons are called vacuum bombs as they suck oxygen and are filled with high-temperature, high-pressure explosives than conventional ammunition. ("[War in Ukraine: Invasion takes Russians near the border by surprise](#)," *France24*, 26 February 2022; Fred Pleitgen, Ivana Kottasová and Tim Lister, "[Russian thermobaric "vacuum bombs" launcher seen by CNN team in Ukraine](#)," *CNN*, 26 February 2022)

France seizes Russian cargo ship

On 26 February, a cargo ship called the 'Baltic Leader' was seized by French authorities as it was suspected to belong to Russian interests that had sanctions imposed on it. The ship was headed for St Petersburg but was eventually diverted to the port in northern France called Boulogne-sur-Mer. The US Treasury Department said the owner company had sanctions "for operating or having operated in the defense and related materiel and financial services sectors of the Russian Federation economy." However, the owner Promsvyazbank said, it no longer owned the ship as it was sold to a different entity before the sanctions were in place. ("[France seizes cargo vessel targeted by US sanctions on Russia](#)," *France24*, 26 February 2022)

Germany announces supply of weapons and equipment to Ukraine

On 26 February, Germany retracted its policy and assured Ukraine of a supply of military equipment in its fight against Russia. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said: "It threatens our entire post-war order. In this situation, we must do our utmost to support Ukraine in defending itself against Vladimir Putin's invading army. Germany stands closely by Ukraine's side." The German government assured the supply of 1,00 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger anti-aircraft defense systems. ("[Germany to send Ukraine weapons in historic shift on military aid](#)," *POLITICO*, 26 February 2022)

President Zelenskyy appeals to accede into the EU

On 28 February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed an application requesting membership in the EU. The move followed the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's Euronews interview where she stated that Ukraine was one of them while adding that the bloc wanted them to be a member. The appeal is claimed to be a call "for the immediate accession of Ukraine via a new special procedure." However, EU officials denied the possibility of such a rapid accession. However, the EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell said: "We have to provide an answer

for the coming hours, not for the coming years... Ukraine has clearly a European perspective, but now we have to fight against an aggression." (["Ukraine: Kyiv demands Russian withdrawal as talks begin — live updates," Deutsche Welle, 28 February 2022](#))

Ukraine: Putin and Macron hold a telephonic conversation

On 28 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin engaged in a phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron. The two leaders discussed the Ukraine crisis in a call that lasted 90 minutes. Following the call, Paris maintained that Putin had reiterated his "willingness" to commit to putting an end to the civilian attacks providing a safe path for those attempting to leave Kyiv. In a separate statement, the Kremlin stated that Putin had reminded Macron of the demands to be met for a potential settlement. (["Ukraine: Kyiv demands Russian withdrawal as talks begin — live updates," Deutsche Welle, 28 February 2022](#))

Thousands protest in Berlin, Europe, and Russia against the invasion of Ukraine

On 27 February, more than 100,000 people joined in a rally against Russia's invasion at the center of Berlin while the government of Germany met to discuss the security situation. The protestors carried the signboards saying "No World War 3" and "Stop the killer." It was not just in Berlin, but protests were across Europe, from Baltic states, Switzerland, London, Paris, Rome, Brussels, Vienna, Madrid, and Sofia. Apart from these protests were also conducted inside Russia, but were arrested and banned from taking part by the Russian authorities. In a recent letter, Russian President Vladimir Putin said: "War is a humanitarian catastrophe that leads to pain and suffering, we consider violent solutions to political conflicts inhumane and call upon you to cease fire and begin negotiations." (["Anti-war rally draws at least 100,000 in Berlin," Deutsche Welle, 27 February 2022](#); Andreas Illmer, ["Ukraine: Protests, donations and solidarity grow across Europe," Deutsche Welle, 27 February 2022](#))

European Commission imposes a ban on Russian airlines from using the EU airspace

On 27 February, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen announced the blanket flight ban levied on Russian planes. She said: "We are shutting down EU airspace for Russian-owned, Russian-registered, or Russian-controlled aircraft." Due to the ban, any private jets, Russian airlines, Aeroflot, all such flights will be banned to land in any country in the EU. In response, Russian airlines have canceled all the flights flying to European countries. The ban largely targets state-owned companies, along with this the private companies have also taken measures to prevent using the airspace. (["Ukraine invasion: EU shuts airspace to Russian planes" BBC, 27 February 2022](#))

French President Macron visits Moscow

On 07 February, French President Emmanuel Macron met his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow to discuss tensions over Ukraine. Macron initiated the meeting, saying: "This discussion can make a start in the direction in which we need to go, which is toward a de-escalation." He further mentioned how Putin had assured him of continuing engagement diplomatically and indicated a desire to maintain the stability and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Putin commented: "A number of his ideas, proposals, which are probably still too early to talk about, I think it is quite possible to make the basis of our further joint steps." Putin also mentioned that he would call and speak to Macron after the latter visits Ukraine. (["Putin says some of Macron's ideas could form basis to move forward," Reuters, 08 February 2022](#); ["Ukraine crisis: Putin says Macron made 'realistic' proposals," Deutsche Welle, 07 February 2022](#))

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EU auditors warn high taxing of renewable energies over fossil fuels

On 31 January, external auditors of the EU reviewed the carbon pricing measures, energy taxation levels, and energy subsidies and warned that the taxing of the energy resources is in contrast to the climate goals

of the EU countries. The European Court of Auditors discovered that most polluting energy sources get the tax advantage compared to those working under carbon efficiency. Fossil fuels are being taxed less than the electricity which are produced at low-carbon sources. They also indicated that the subsidies to renewable energy have tripled from 2008 to 2019. ([“EU auditor: Fossil fuels get more tax breaks than renewables,” Euronews](#), 31 January 2022)

Portugal closes down hydroelectric dams due to water scarcity

On 02 February, Portugal authorities temporarily disabled the supply of water to a few hydropower dams to save it for civilian purposes. According to the Portuguese Institute of Meteorology (IPMA), Portugal, which was facing drought at a minimal level, had now deteriorated to extreme levels. So far, five hydroelectric dams in Portugal have been closed and irrigation has been stopped to ensure drinking water is available for at least the next two years. The move has raised worries amongst the farmers as they fear the drought conditions might affect their crops and cattle. ([“Portugal limits hydroelectric power amid unusual winter drought,” Euro News](#), 02 February 2022)

Tata Steel to be investigated by Dutch over excessive pollution complaints

On 02 February, Dutch opened a criminal investigation on Tata Steel. It will examine the pollution levels of the huge steelworks, to see whether it was intentional or unlawful. In the statement released: “introduction of hazardous substances into the air, soil and surface water” by Tata's plant in the port town of IJmuiden “could potentially place the public's health in danger.” In response, Tata has said that it will cooperate with the investigation. The reason behind the launch was due to complaints coming from 800 people living near the steel factory. ([“Tata Steel hit by Dutch criminal probe,” Deutsche Welle](#), 02 February 2022)

European Commission labels nuclear energy and gas as green under Taxonomy plans

On 02 February, the European Commission labeled nuclear energy and gas as green energy after a controversial divide amongst the European member states. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen has welcomed the European Green Deal. She said: “Europe's man on the moon moment, our European destiny.” Although critics raised concerns that the step can threaten the EU's target in becoming a climate-neutral region by 2050. Along with the critics, many environmental organizations are also not in favor of the Green Deal proposal. ([“European Commission declares nuclear and gas to be green,” Deutsche Welle](#), 02 February 2022)

Trawler incident leads to a bank of dead fish off the coast near France

On 04 February, a Dutch-owned trawler FV Margiris released over 100,000 dead fish into the Atlantic Ocean near France, this shedding of fish formed a floating carpet of carcasses. Pelagic Freezer trawler Association, which represents the vessel, claimed that a rupture in the trawler's net had caused the spill. Sea Shepherd, France's environmental organization, said the incident was not an accident but an intentional discharge of fish it did not want to process. This process of unwanted fish is called discharging bycatch which is banned under EU fishing rules. France's Maritime Minister Annick Girardin has asked the country's national fishing surveillance authority to launch an investigation into the accident. (Tassilo Hummel, [“Floating carpet of dead fish found off French coast after trawler incident,” Reuters](#), 04 February 2022; [“Huge bank of dead fish spotted off French Atlantic coast,” BBC](#), 04 February 2022)

France: Investigation declared over images of thousands of floating dead fish

On 05 February, *Deutsche Welle* reported a probe to have been declared by France and the EU following the photographs of thousands of dead fish floating in the Bay of Biscay emerged on Twitter. The images

were uploaded by an environmental group called Sea Shepherd. The photographs garnered immense shock with French Maritime Minister Annick Girardin calling on the National Center for Fishing Surveillance to investigate the incident. The Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association released a statement on 04 February stating that a tear in the trawler nets had caused the “involuntary release” of the fish into the sea. However, Sea Shepherd maintained that it was an attempt at discharging bycatch. Meanwhile, EU’s Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries Virginijus Sinkevicius said: “We are launching an inquiry to national authorities of the fishing area and presumed flag state of the vessel, to get exhaustive information and evidence about the case.” ([“France: Probe ordered after photos of masses of dead fish emerge,” Deutsche Welle](#), 05 February 2022)

Austria: Hundreds of avalanches cause nine deaths

On 07 February, *The Guardian* reported nine fatalities to have occurred due to more than 100 avalanches hitting the Western Tyrol region of Austria. The avalanches were caused due to the heavy snowfall being followed by warm weather leading to dangerous conditions. Although the pandemic helped reduced the number of deaths caused due to avalanches, Austria has witnessed deaths of around 20 individuals every year in recent years. ([“Nine killed in three days after more than 100 avalanches hit Austria,” The Guardian](#), 07 February 2022)

Spain and Portugal face extreme winter drought

On 13 February, as reported by *Euronews*: “Climate change-induced extreme winter drought devastates crops in Spain and Portugal.” In 2021, Spain had received 35 percent of its average rainfall in the last few months, and it has not seen any precipitation since then. This is the first time since 2005 when no rain was recorded for January and February. A farmer in Spain’s southern Almería Andrés Góngora said: “The past two, three years have been dry, with the tendency toward less and less

rain.” Spain’s government has decided to give over EUR 570 million of the pandemic funds to make its irrigation systems more efficient. Portugal has also been undergoing a similar situation with little rain since October 2021. National weather agency IPMA climatologist Vanda Pires said: “It’s part of the context of climate change.” ([“Climate change-induced extreme winter drought devastates crops in Spain and Portugal,” Euronews](#), 13 February 2022)

Storm Eunice batters the country

On 18 February, the government urged the people to stay indoors as storm Eunice battered the isles with record-breaking wind gusts. Britain’s meteorological agency said: “This is provisionally the highest gust ever record in England,” with winds up to 196 kilometres per hour. With the storm’s severity increasing, the government is expected to hold a COBRA emergency later today. A meteorologist at the University of Reading in England, Peter Inness, said: “A strong jet stream like this can act like a production line for storms, generating a new storm every day or two.” Mayor of London Sadiq Khan warned: “Please stay at home, do not take risks, and do not travel unless absolutely essential.” ([“O2 Arena damaged as deadly storm batters UK and heads for northern Europe,” Euronews](#), 18 February 2022)

100,000 dead fishes spotted floating around coast of France

On 21 February, the fishing industry group PFA released a statement accepting on the accident over release of 100,000 dead fish into the coast of France. The images of thousands of dead fish was captured by a campaign group called the Sea Shepherd in France. According to the head: “What we filmed yesterday is a huge patch of what we estimate to be about 100,000 fish, dead fish, that have been thrown overboard by the Margiris (super trawler).” The reason behind the accident is due to the usage of trawlers, despite continued criticism from environmentalists, the trawling method leads to the death of marine creatures and various ocean species. (Doloresz Katanich

["Shocking' footage shows more than 100,000 dead fish discarded off the coast of France," Euronews, 21\)](#)

Mount Etna blasts in the Italian Island

On 21 February, Mount Etna the tallest and most active volcano situated in the Italian Island was reported to have blasted to a height of 12 KM high. According to the scientists from the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV), the reason for the eruption was due to the buildup of magma and it was observed to have erupted 50 times in October 2021. The civil protection agency has not recorded any injuries or property damage yet, but the authorities issued a warning for flying off aircraft. (["Italy: New Etna eruption spews ash and closes airport," Deutsche Welle, 21 February 2022\)](#))

COVID-19

Vienna to implement mandatory vaccination

On 01 February, Austria implemented the mandatory inoculation law for anyone above the age of 18. Austrian Minister for the EU and the Constitution Karoline Edtstadler said: "We as politicians, have the responsibility to be sure that the healthcare system is still working, that society, as a whole, can live normally." She also talked about the vaccination interfering with human rights and argued: "But in this case, this interference can be justified." Individuals who refused to get inoculated would face fines that would range from EUR 600 to EUR 3,600, with the exceptions of pregnant women and those who have serious health conditions. Far-right leader Herbert Kickl commented on the vaccine mandate and said it: "paves the way to totalitarianism in Austria." (Bethany Bell, ["Austria's Covid vaccine law comes into force amid resistance," BBC, 01 February 2022\)](#))

Austria: Vaccine mandate comes into force

On 04 February, Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen ratified the legislation on the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. It will come into force on 05 February; however, the implementation of

the mandate will occur in phases. Those refusing the inoculation will be fined up to EUR 3,600. Austria is the first EU country to make vaccinations mandatory. (Philip Oltermann, ["Austria passes Covid vaccine mandate, but question marks linger over enforcement," The Guardian, 04 February 2022\)](#))

Freedom convoy protests in Paris were banned ahead.

On 10 January, following the trucker's protest in Canada, convoys from around cities of France were scheduled to protest similarly on 11 January. The authorities in Paris, citing the risk of public disturbance, have banned the protests and strictly ruled that any civilian or driver found to be hindering the roads will be subject to license cancellation, two-year imprisonment, or EUR 4500 as a penalty. The protests are happening against the show of vaccine pass to enter social spaces. Police of France has estimated that convoys are using the online platform to organize protests, through which a mix from different political and ideological groups shall participate. (["Freedom Convoy: Paris protest banned by police ahead of arrival," BBC, 10 January 2022\)](#))

CULTURE

Oscar nominees include classic 1960's movies for the category of Best Picture

On 16 February, in the Oscar nominees announced on 08 February, amongst the nominees, Stephen Spielberg's remake of "West Side Story," "Belfast," and other movies from various categories such as comedies, nostalgia, and foreign were presented. The Belfast story brings out the political turmoil of the working class in the Northern Irish capital in the 1960s. The last date to vote for the nominees has been scheduled as 03 March through Twitter and Oscars are set to be presented by 27 March in Los Angeles. (["2022 Oscars to include top film voted by Twitter users," Deutsche Welle, 16 February 2022\)](#))

ECONOMY

EUR 520 million fund allocated for continuation of flights

On 13 February, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal announced that the country had allotted UAH 16.6 billion (EUR 520 million) to guarantee the continuance of flights through its airspace. The announcement comes due to the rising fears of a Russian invasion. Shmygal said: "This decision will stabilize the situation on the market of passenger air transportation and will guarantee the return to Ukraine of our citizens who are currently abroad." Increased concern regarding the closure of airspace was expressed to be pointless by the Ukrainian President's Chief of Staff who said: "The most important point is that Ukraine itself sees no point in closing the sky. And, in my opinion, that would somewhat resemble a kind of partial blockade." ("[Ukraine promises funds to keep flights passing through its airspace](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2022)

Global Markets: Oil rates spike to a seven-year high

On 14 February, *The Guardian* reported global markets to have been adversely affected by the Russia-Ukraine standoff leading to a seven-year high in oil prices. Morning trading saw UK's FTSE 100 at 7,501 which fell by two per cent. Travel-related stocks were the most affected with IAG, the British Airways owner, seeing a fall of seven per cent. The price of oil has soared to 23 per cent more than it was when 2022 began; meanwhile, natural gas prices went up by 4.9 per cent. The falling European shares caused a sell-off in Asia. (Mark Sweney, "[Global markets tumble as Russia-Ukraine tensions hit shares](#)," *The Guardian*, 14 February 2022)

Ukraine: Gold rates spike to eight-month high; Euro falls

On 17 February, the rate of gold reached an eight-month high while safe-haven debt increased alongside. This was considered a result of the warning of an imminent Russian attack on Ukraine by US President Joe Biden. While the bonds of the US and

German governments witnessed a fall, the oil rates also saw a fall owing to Iran nuclear deal reaching its last stages. The Euro fell by 0.11 per cent to USD 1.1361 while the bitcoin fell by 8.2 per cent to USD 40,470.33. Meanwhile, Chief Investment Officer at Key Private Bank commented: "There's a lot of confusion right now and everybody's crystal ball is pretty cloudy... It's going to be a challenging year, but not a dire year. Expect some volatility this year, but don't abandon risk altogether, don't get super defensive. There's a lot of missed opportunities inside the market." (Herbert Lash, "[Gold jumps, stocks slide on Ukraine tensions mount](#)," *Reuters*, 18 February 2022)

Credit Suisse under probe after data leak reveal of secret fund accounts

On 20 February, an investigation into Credit Suisse after data leak revealed that 100 billion Swiss francs were held in secret accounts, which belonged to autocrats, drug dealers, war criminals, and human traffickers. The list also includes many leaders of governments such as Jordan's King Abdullah II, Iraq's former Deputy Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, ministries, oligarchs, and business people. The European People's Party (EPP) has urged the EU Commission to re-examine "Switzerland as a high-risk money-laundering country." In response, the Credit Suisse bank has denied the allegations stating the investigation was conducted on inaccurate and incomplete information which has led to misinterpretations. ("[Credit Suisse had autocrats, criminals as clients — report](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 February 2022)

Ukraine: Donations worth GBP 6.7 million received via Bitcoin

On 27 February, cryptocurrency analysts announced that approximately GBP 6.7 million worth of Bitcoin had been donated to Ukraine via anonymous donations. To secure funds, the Ukrainian government, NGOs, and volunteer groups had published their bitcoin wallet addresses online. The official Twitter handle of the Ukrainian government had requested users to "stand with the people of Ukraine". The

administration has indicated that it accepts donations via other cryptocurrencies including Ethereum and USDT. According to Tom Robinson, the founder of blockchain analysis company Elliptic: "... some crowdfunding and payments companies have refused to allow donations to be made to groups supporting the Ukrainian military, cryptocurrencies have emerged as a powerful alternative." ("[Ukraine live updates: Kyiv warned of toxic fumes after strike on oil depot](#)," *BBC*, 27 February 2022)

Petrol prices increase over fears of shortage of supply due to Ukraine crisis

On 22 February, with the fear of interruption of oil and gas supplies due to the Ukraine-Russia crisis, the prices of the fuels shot up. Despite the west's attempts to use economic sanctions and create a block for the Russian pipeline, as a result, the prices have then weakened. According to Manulife Investment Management, Sue Trinh: "Measures forcing the country to supply less crude or natural gas would have "substantial implications" on oil prices and the global economy." The warning on the increase of petrol prices was issued earlier citing the crisis situation. ("[Ukraine-Russia tensions: Oil surges on supply fears](#)," *BBC*, 23 February 2022)

ENERGY

Government approves lithium mining plans

On 05 February, the Portuguese government announced the approval of lithium mining plans in the country. But, the plans were met with discontentment from the municipality of Pinhel. Mayor of Fundão Paulo Fernandes said: "It will never be possible, I would say, for the municipalities, but also for the administration and even for the government, that mining will take place in what is one of the main assets of agricultural production where there is such large investment." Portugal has around 60,000 tons of known lithium reserves. The company Savannah Resources said that just the mine in Covas do Barroso could generate €1.3 billion and boost the country's economy. (Rebekah Daunt, "[Portugal's government approves lithium](#)

[mining despite growing concerns](#)," *Euronews*, 05 February 2022)

Germany suspends Russia's license to operate Nord Stream 2 pipeline

On 23 February, Germany announced to halt the approval of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline after Russian troops moved into Ukraine. Russia upon recognition of the separatist groups in eastern Ukraine, ordered for its troops to enter Ukraine. The US, the UK, Poland, and the rest of the European countries have condemned the move and have levied strict sanctions on Russia. In the case of Germany, which has withstood the pipeline going against other western powers has now taken a decision to suspend the licensing. Thereby Russia will not be able to operate until the reversal of the decision. ("[Ukraine crisis: Germany halts pipeline as nations sanction Russia](#)," *BBC*, 23 February 2022)

France reveals plan for nuclear reactor construction

On 10 January, French President Emmanuel Macron revealed France's energy plan. As a first step, he aims to construct six new nuclear reactors through state-run energy giant Electricite de France (EDF). Under the energy plan, "third-generation pressurized water reactors (EPR) facilities" are set to be constructed by 2050, and additional eight reactors are expected to be added. Macron, who has been in constant support of nuclear energy, is the viable and eco-friendly option. He said: "The time has come for a French nuclear renaissance." As far as EDF is concerned, it has been long in debt due to challenges in constructing the latest-generation EPR reactors for the UK, France, and Finland. Nuclear reactors involve more cost and complex technology. France has been less serious when it comes to financing reactor projects. ("[Macron calls for 'French nuclear renaissance](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 February 2022)

MIGRATION

12 bodies of migrants found near Turkey-Greece border

On 02 February, 12 bodies of refugees were found at the Turkish border near Ipsala. The refugees were believed to have frozen to

death and have caused issues between Turkey and Greece. Turkey has accused Greece of deliberately pushing the refugees back, leading them to be victims of the harsh cold conditions. Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu accused the Greek border patrols, saying: "They behave like thugs." Greece's Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi responded: "These specific migrants never made it to the border. Any suggestion they did, or indeed were pushed back into Turkey, is utter nonsense." Greece also accused Turkey of not keeping the March 2016 agreement where Ankara was supposed to deter refugees trying to cross the border via its north-eastern land frontier with Turkey. (Helena Smith, "[12 people found frozen to death near Turkey's border with Greece](#)," *The Guardian*, 02 February 2022; "[Twelve migrants found frozen to death near Greek border, Turkish authorities say](#)," *Euronews*, 02 February 2022)

France: Schengen Council created to address migration concerns

On 03 February, the interior ministers of the Schengen zone met at Lille in France to discuss the creation of a Schengen Council. Termed by *Deutsche Welle* as the "crisis council," it is expected to deliberate on the "questions of border and migration". According to French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, the Schengen Council's first meeting has been scheduled for 03 March. The decision comes in the backdrop of France's EU presidency and its aim to retrieve the Schengen zone's borderless movement, thus, facilitating reforms to the processing of migrants. ("[Europe: Schengen countries establish crisis council](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 February 2022)

Protestors condemn migrant deaths on the Greek-Turkey border

On 05 February, people in Istanbul took to the streets outside the Greek consulate to protest the deaths of migrants near the Greek-Turkish border. The demonstrations were organized by Turkish humanitarian groups and saw about 300 people holding up banners that said: "Close borders to racism, open to humanity." As reported by *Euronews*: "Turkish President Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan has pledged to raise the alleged ill-treatment of migrants by Greece during his meetings with world leaders." Greece's Migration minister Notis Mitarachi said the death of the migrants was tragic but denied the claim that Greek forces had pushed back the migrants from the border. ("['Left to die': Protesters in Istanbul condemn migrant deaths near border with Greece](#)," *Euronews*, 05 February 2022)

Austria: Police finds eight migrants being smuggled under a truck

On 09 February, Austrian police stated that they had found eight migrants hidden in a narrow box under a truck in December 2021. But, the police only publicized the incident on 09 February as the driver who smuggled the people in was arrested on 04 February. The police identified the migrants to be from Turkey and were being illegally smuggled, in life-threatening conditions. Austrian Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said: "This case shows once again how inhumane organized trafficking criminals act." According to the police reports, each migrant had to pay EUR 15,000 to 16,000 to be smuggled illegally. ("[Austrian police find migrants in 'horror box' under truck](#)," *Euronews*, 09 February 2022)

Greece: UNHCR's Grandi condemns "deplorable" acts against asylum seekers

On 21 February, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi expressed concern over Greece and other European governments "normalizing" unlawful acts against asylum seekers. Grandi said: "Violence, ill-treatment, and pushbacks continue to be regularly reported at multiple entry points at land and sea borders, within and beyond the European Union despite repeated calls ... to end such practices." Since 2020, the UNHCR has reports of an estimated 540 informal returns that were aided by Greece. Grandi called on European governments to make a concerted effort at "protecting human life, human rights and dignity". The "deplorable" acts committed by the European governments, Grandi said, was further contributing to the suffering of asylum seekers. ("[Greece: UN calls for end to](#)

[‘deplorable’ migrant pushbacks](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 21 February 2022)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Social media firms file suit against new laws by Germany

On 02 February, big social media companies Facebook (Meta), YouTube, Twitter and TikTok have come together to file suit against new rules in the Moderation law of Germany called NetzDG. The new rules aim to fasten the identification and prosecution of hate crimes after the far-right attacks in Halle. The tech companies have argued that this law will risk people’s privacy and rights. Recently, Germany has been in constant clash with the social media platforms, as the German politicians have been at the peak of online hatred and misinformation. Germany’s impasse with social media big firms also sends a signal to the EU which is reforming its Digital Services Act. ([“Big Tech takes on Germany,” POLITICO](#), 02 February 2022)

EU plans to reduce chip shortage with EUR 43 billion

On 08 February, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a EUR 43 billion plan to reduce the bloc’s dependency on Asian chip makers. The announcement comes amidst the global supply chain crisis. Von der Leyen stated: “Chips are at the centre of the global technological race. They are, of course, also the bedrock of our modern economies... The pandemic has also painfully exposed the vulnerability of its supply chains. We have seen that whole production lines came to a standstill. While the demand was increasing, we could not deliver as needed because of the lack of chips.” However, the plan is yet to be approved by the EU parliament and member states. (Martin Farrer, [“EU hopes €43bn plan will fix chip shortages as supply chain crisis bites,” The Guardian](#), 09 February 2022)

JET laboratory hit new record in nuclear fusion energy

On 09 February, the UK-based JET laboratory broke its own world record in developing practical nuclear fusion. It has hit a new record in the amount of energy

that can be extracted from combining two forms of hydrogen. The success of the mission depends on the recreation of nuclear fusion which can power up the supply of low-carbon and low radiation energy at unlimited levels. According to the head of operations at the reactor lab: “We’ve demonstrated that we can create a mini star inside of our machine and hold it there for five seconds and get high performance, which really takes us into a new realm.” (Jonathan Amos, [“Major breakthrough on nuclear fusion energy,” BBC](#), 09 February 2022)

New planet discovered close to Proxima Centauri

On 10 February, *The Guardian* reported astronomers to have discovered a new planet orbiting Proxima Centauri which is the closest star to the solar system. Researchers found the planet via observations from the European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope (VLT) in Chile. Named ‘Proxima d,’ this is the third and the lightest planet to be discovered around Proxima Centauri. According to the lead author of the study published in the *Astronomy and Astrophysics* journal, João Faria of Portugal’s Institute of Astrophysics and Space Sciences said: “This is a very low mass planet... It shows that these planets, similar to the Earth, maybe common in our galaxy, and just close by. And it makes us wonder about the possible conditions for habitability in these planet systems and if it’s possible for life to appear in other places in the universe.” (Ian Sample, [“Scientists discover new planet orbiting nearest star to solar system,” The Guardian](#), 10 February 2022)

Russian rocket carrying broadband satellite of OneWeb launched

On 10 January, a Russian Soyuz rocket lifted off from the Guiana Space Center located in French Guiana. The rocket carried 34 new broadband satellites for OneWeb the UK operator, which aims to provide commercial internet service at international level. There is a race emerging between private space tech companies in providing fast internet through satellites, SpaceX is the second top with 1,469 Starlink satellites

that were launched to facilitate global broadband. Amazon is also set to launch its first internet satellite by 2022. (["UK's OneWeb satellites hitch a ride on a Russian rocket," Deutsche Welle](#), 10 February 2022)

Defense ministry and state banks under cyber-attack once again

On 15 February, Ukraine reported a cyber-attack on its defense ministry and two state-owned banks. As per the statement given by Ukraine's Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security: "Privat assures that there is no threat to depositors' funds." It is suspected that the attack began on 15 February and was aggravated by 16 February. The Ukrainian government is yet to spot the suspect responsible for the attack, but it believes it to be Russia. Previously, the Ukrainian government experienced a website-defacing attack, which warned the Ukrainian citizens to expect the worst. (The Cube, ["Ukraine's defence ministry and two banks targeted in cyberattack," Euronews](#), 15 February 2022)

Russia on charges and bans various tech firms for illegal content display

On 24 February, Russia charged Google USD 98 million for not deleting content in its site that was considered illegal in Russia. However, the announcement did not mention the offensive content. In recent months Russian authorities have dualled the screening on tech firms on content display, similar to Google, Meta, and Twitter were also fined on the same basis. The skimming of tech giants comes due to President Vladimir Putin's push for "sovereign internet," through which he aims to control citizens' view and access to certain content relating to drugs, violence, and extremism. On the same, LinkedIn and Dailymotion have been blocked for denying to remove such data. Since 2022, Russia is observed to be on the spree to control content spread through tech apps and computers. (["Russia fines Google over illegal content breach," BBC](#), 24 February 2022)

Fossil of Pterosaur a flying reptile found in Scotland

On 24 February, researchers discovered a fossil on the Isle of Skye, Scotland. The area is well-known for its tropicality and rains, where reptiles were believed to be existing 170 million years ago. As per the researchers, the fossil belonged to a Pterosaur which was the largest in the middle Jurassic period found till now. The species was called Dearc sgiathanach, which means "winged reptile." Pterosaurs or pterodactyls were known as the first vertebrates to fly which evolved to Cretaceous until the asteroid wiped out life on earth. The fossil was first spotted by a PhD student in 2017 at the shores. (Esteban Pardo, ["Superlative' pterosaur, world's biggest mid-Jurassic flying animal, found in Scotland," Deutsche Welle](#), 24 February 2022)

Belgium to shut down seven controversial nuclear reactors

On 23 February, the Belgian government signed a deal between the ministries to shut down its seven old nuclear reactors in Doel and Tihange. The decision comes due to an increase in fears amongst the neighbourhood and on safety checks. According to the plan, the closing of the reactors will start by 2022 and will proceed to be destructed by 2045. The deal was not an easy task, as it was most debated between safe handling and energy shortage. (["Belgium agrees to close controversial ageing nuclear reactors," BBC](#), 23 February 2022)

EU Parliament discusses the use of Pegasus by member states

On 23 February, the European Parliament announced to set up a committee to inquire into the Pegasus spyware scandal. Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders condemned the use of spyware to access the illegal information of politicians. Hungarian opposition MP Anna Júlia Donáth said: "In the spring of 2022, there will be parliamentary elections in Hungary. The stakes in these elections are huge because, despite all the anti-democratic measures taken by the Hungarian ruling party, there is a real chance that Viktor Orbán will be replaced." After the committee completes its investigation, it will file a report to the

national governments and the European Commission. (Alberto De Filippis, "[EU parliament to investigate use of NSO Group's Pegasus spyware](#)," *Euronews*, 23 February 2022)

SPORTS

UEFA to reconsider game venue due to Ukraine crisis

On 22 February, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has said that the season's Champions League final game will not be held in St Petersburg due to the crisis between Ukraine and Russia. It said: "closely monitoring the situation" and "any decision would be made in due course if necessary." On the same, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson commented that football tournaments cannot conduct games in Russia, which has violated sovereignty. The European football governing body will decide based on the scenario and opt for another venue to hold the league match. (Simon Stone "[Ukraine crisis: Uefa likely to move Champions League final from St Petersburg in Russia](#)," *BBC*, 22 February 2022)

UEFA shifts the final game venue to Saint-Denis in France

On 25 February, the executive committee of UEFA announced the removal of hosting rights of Saint Petersburg to hold the Champions League final. It was decided that Stade de France in Saint-Denis will be the host to the final match. In recent weeks the discussion over shifting of the venue for the final league match took place as the situation in Ukraine escalated. Post the Russian invasion, the decision solidified. The link between UEFA and Russia was Gazprom. The Champion League's prime sponsor was Gazprom since 2012, and due to the conflict situation, it has been removed from the sponsoring of the player kits. (James Thorogood, "[Champions League final moved from Saint Petersburg after Russian invasion of Ukraine](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 February 2022)

Ukraine: Poland and Sweden back out of World Cup qualifiers against Russia

On 26 February, the Polish and Swedish Football Associations announced their refusal to play the World Cup qualifiers against Russia. The qualifiers to be held in March will be a precursor to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Poland's Football Association Chief Cezary Kulesza tweeted: "In light of the escalation of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, the Polish national team is not going to play a match against the Russian Republic. This is the only right decision. We're in talks with Swedish and Czech associations to present a common position to FIFA." Later, the Swedish Football Association Chairman Karl-Erik Nilsson said: "The illegal and deeply unjust invasion of Ukraine currently makes all football exchanges with Russia impossible." Earlier, on 22 February, Poland, Sweden, and the Czech Republic had released a joint statement requesting to ban Russia from hosting the playoffs in March. FIFA is yet to respond to the request. ("[Soccer-Poland, Sweden refuse to play World Cup match with Russia](#)," *Reuters*, 26 February 2022)

IOC denies disclosing the report on the anti-doping rule violation

On 10 February, the International Olympic Committee declined to provide details of the legal case on the awarding of medals to the figure skating team. The case was filed to detect the involved team or individual who failed in the drug test. Without any notification, the Russian Olympic Committee was awarded gold before the US and Japan. According to the spokesperson of the IOC, said that since the case was given at a short notice and had many legal implications, he refused to comment on the legal case. The International Testing Agency said: "Any announcement connected to these events would always be publicly issued on the ITA's website and not commented on otherwise. No such announcement has been published to date." (Anna Thompson "[Winter Olympics: IOC 'can't comment' on figure skating speculation](#)," *BBC Sport*, 10 February 2022)

INTERNATIONAL

Ukraine-Russia tensions spill over at the UNSC

On 31 January, The UNSC experienced a spillover of the tensions at the Ukrainian border as the countries accused each other of being provocative. At the UNSC council meeting, the US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said: "The threats of aggression on the border of Ukraine ... is provocative. Our recognition of the facts on the ground is not provocative." She further stated how: "The provocation's from Russia, not from us or other members of this council." Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia responded: "Our Western colleagues are talking about the need for de-escalation. However, first and foremost, they are whipping up tensions and rhetoric and are provoking escalation." Nebenzia also disputed the number of troops stationed at the border and said: "Where did you get the figure of 100,000 troops that are deployed as you said on the Russian Ukrainian border... we've never confirmed that figure." (David M. Herszenhorn, "[US, Russia clash over Ukraine at UN Security Council debate](#)," *POLITICO*, 31 January 2022; Michelle Nichols and Jonathan Landay, "[Russia, US clash at UN over Russian troop build-up near Ukraine](#)," *Reuters*, 31 January 2022)

France: Ambassador Meyer asked to leave Mali in 72 hours

On 31 January, Mali's military leaders summoned French Minister Joël Meyer and ordered him to leave the country within 72 hours. Meyer was asked to leave due to the French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian's comments on Mali's leadership calling them: "illegitimate...out of control". The military leader's action questions the French-led anti-terrorist military operation in Mali that the Malian leaders requested. The West is also concerned about Russia's involvement in the region. Le Drian also talked about the role of Russians, saying: "helping themselves to the country's resources in exchange for protecting the junta." Tensions have increased in Mali as the regime said they would hold power until 2025 instead of keeping their agreement on having elections in February. ("[French ambassador expelled from Mali](#)," *BBC*, 01 February 2022; "[Mali expels French](#)

[envoy over remarks by foreign minister](#)," *The Guardian*, 31 January 2022)

Ukraine: US troops to be deployed in eastern Europe

On 02 February, US President Joe Biden agreed to deploy troops in eastern Europe. While 2,000 soldiers are expected to be deployed to Poland and Germany, an additional 1,000 troops will be deployed from Germany to Romania. The Pentagon spokesperson said: "They are not permanent moves. They respond to current conditions." The Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak appreciated the decision, stating: "Strengthening the US presence in Poland by 1,700 troops is a strong signal of solidarity in response to possible Russian aggression against Ukraine." Eastern Europe already has 60,000 US troops deployed in the region. ("[US to send more troops to Germany, Poland](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 02 February 2022)

Ukraine: US and UK consider further sanctions on Russia

On 31 January, the US declared that if Russia were to invade Ukraine, the imposition of sanctions on the former would include those close to President Vladimir Putin. The White House spokesperson elaborated: "The individuals we have identified are in or near the inner circles of the Kremlin and play a role in government decision making or are at a minimum complicit in the Kremlin's destabilizing behavior." The UK's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss also warned of multiple deterrence measures being considered in the face of a Russian invasion. The Kremlin spokesperson responded to this: "It's not often you see or hear such direct threats to attack business," he said. "An attack by a given country on Russian business implies retaliatory measures, and these measures will be formulated based on our interests if necessary." ("[Ukraine-Russia crisis: US, UK threaten sanctions on Putin's friends](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 31 January 2022)

The US increases military presence in Europe

On 02 February, the US announced the redeployment of 1,000 troops along with an additional 2,000 troops to Poland, Germany, and Romania. The US has also reserved 8,500 soldiers on its mainland who are ready to be mobilized if NATO needs support. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko responded to the announcement saying: "... will only fuel military tensions and narrow the field for political decisions." This would lead to the total number of US troops deployed in Poland reaching 4,000. Meanwhile, NATO has 5,000 troops stationed in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania under their Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) units. NATO is scheduled to extend its EFP strategy to Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. ("[US to bolster positions in Europe with additional 3,000 troops](#)," *Euronews*, 02 February 2022; Phil Stewart, "[US sending nearly 3,000 troops to Eastern Europe in coming days](#)," *Reuters*, 02 February 2022)

Ukraine: US intelligence claims Russia to substantiate invasion by potential "fake attack"

On 03 February, the US revealed intelligence that stated the next Russian move over Ukraine would be the "fabrication of an invasion pretext". The Pentagon spokesperson said: "As part of this fake attack, we believe that Russia would produce a very graphic propaganda video, which would include corpses and actors that would be depicting mourners and images of destroyed locations." However, the US Deputy National Security Adviser Jonathan Finer pointed out the uncertainty of the claim. ("[US alleges Russian plot to fabricate Ukraine attack](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 03 February 2022)

Russia: Putin meets Chinese President Xi Jinping

On 04 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the inaugural day of the Winter Olympics. President Xi also extended the country's support to Russia over the Ukraine standoff, simultaneously declaring a "no limits" partnership. A joint statement released read: "Friendship between the two

States has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation." Meanwhile, the two countries signed a new gas deal worth USD 117.5 billion, which would grow Russia's Far East exports. The statement also called on the West to "abandon the ideologized approaches of the Cold War". This is the 38th time the two leaders are meeting since 2013. (Andrew Roth and Vincent Ni, "[Xi and Putin urge Nato to rule out expansion as Ukraine tensions rise](#)," *The Guardian*, 04 February 2022; Tony Munroe, Andrew Osborn and Humeyra Pamuk, "[China, Russia partner up against West at Olympics summit](#)," *Reuters*, 05 February 2022)

Poland receives US military equipment

On 04 February, Poland said it received US military equipment to reinforce NATO's eastern flank. Poland's Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said: "This is a clear signal of allied solidarity." His comments come after photos of soldiers unloading equipment from a C-130 Hercules transport plane surfaced on Twitter. The US had earlier also announced the deployment of nearly 3,000 American troops in eastern Europe amidst the standoff with Russia. (Alicja Ptak, "[Poland receives US army equipment in effort to bolster eastern flank against Russia](#)," *Reuters*, 04 February 2022)

President Macron visits his Russian counterpart in Moscow

On 07 February, French President Emmanuel Macron met with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow to try and de-escalate its tensions with Ukraine. *Reuters* reported: "He will follow up on Tuesday with a visit to Kyiv, staking a lot of political capital on a mission that could prove embarrassing if he returns empty-handed." France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian is also set to travel with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock to Kyiv on 07 February to reaffirm the EU's solidarity with Ukraine. Macron said he wanted to hold a joint press conference with the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz by the end of January so that no one should ever "give up the dialogue with Russia." (Barbara Wesel, "[Emmanuel Macron heads to Russia on mission to de-escalate](#),"

Deutsche Welle, 07 February 2022; Michel Rose, "[France's Macron flies to Moscow in high-risk diplomatic mission](#)," *Reuters*, 04 February 2022)

US troops arrive in Poland

On 05 February, the first set of 1,700-unit-strong US troop contingent arrived in Poland. The deployment comes as US President Joe Biden promised to send military support to Europe. Also, Russia sent two long-range nuclear-capable bombers on patrol over Belarus and called it a practice interaction with the Belarusian air force. Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin before the Beijing Olympics opening and reaffirmed his backing over Putin's standoff with the West. ("[Ukraine crisis: First US troops land in Poland as Xi backs Putin](#)," *Euronews*, 06 February 2022)

NATO aims to position military longer in Eastern Europe

On 07 February, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg disclosed the plans of NATO, which is looking to position its military on a longer-term in eastern Europe to keep up the defense. According to him: "We are considering more longer-term adjustments to our posture, our presence in the eastern part of the alliance. No final decision has been made on that but there is a process now going on within NATO." Recently, NATO defence ministers who will be meeting soon to converse on the reinforcements on 16 to 17 February. The western powers have pressured Russia to remove the troops from Ukraine. ("[NATO mulls longer-term military posture in eastern Europe, Stoltenberg says](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 February 2022)

Biden warns to bring the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to end if Russia invades

On 07 February, US President Joe Biden warned that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project will not advance if Russia launched an invasion. The warning comes after German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made his first visit to the US. When it comes to the pipeline, both the US and Germany have been in disagreement. Biden said: "There

will no longer be a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it. I promise you we'll be able to do that." According to Scholz: "We will take all necessary steps. You can be sure there won't be any measures on which we have a differing approach. We will act together jointly." ("[Biden promises no Nord Stream 2 if Russia invades Ukraine](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 07 February 2022)

Slovakia: Defence Cooperation Agreement with the US approved amid protests

On 09 February, Slovakia's Parliament approved the Defence Cooperation Agreement with the US to use two Slovak air force bases for the next ten years. The deal was signed between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Slovakian Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad. The bill was approved by 79 members of the 150 strong Slovakian Parliament. But, the bill is yet to be ratified by the President. The vote was approved amid protests as the fears of Russia invading Ukraine remained high. The protestors rallied outside the Parliament and held up banners and flags that said, "Stop USA Army." Blinken further mentioned how: "Nothing in [the] agreement creates permanent US bases or troop presence in Slovakia, and the agreement fully respects Slovakia's sovereignty and laws." ("[US troops set to use military bases in Slovakia after MPs approve controversial treaty](#)," *Euronews*, 09 February 2022)

Ukraine: Biden appeals to US citizens in Kyiv, "leave now"

On 11 February, *The Guardian* reported US President Joe Biden to have warned US citizens in Kyiv of an escalating situation regarding the standoff. During an interview with *NBC News*, Biden said: "American citizens should leave, should leave now... We're dealing with one of the largest armies in the world. This is a very different situation and things could go crazy quickly." This comment comes in the backdrop of the failure of multiple diplomatic efforts undertaken over the course of the week. Responding to whether the US would

deploy troops to Russia, Biden expressed: "That's a world war. When Americans and Russians start shooting one another, we're in a very different world." ("[Things could go crazy quickly.' Biden warns on Ukraine as talks in Berlin fail](#)," *The Guardian*, 11 February 2022)

Ukraine: Biden and Putin schedule phone conversation

On 12 February, *Reuters* reported the US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin to have scheduled telephonic talks. The call, requested by Putin, comes amidst escalating tensions in Ukraine. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken commented: "I continue to hope that he will not choose the path of renewed aggression and he'll chose the path of diplomacy and dialogue... But if he doesn't, we're prepared." TASS news agency also reported Putin to have scheduled talks with French President Emmanuel Macron on the same day. (Trevor Hunnicutt, "[Biden and Putin to speak as Ukraine warnings mount](#)," *Reuters*, 12 February 2022)

Ukraine: NATO expands troop deployment along the eastern flank

On 11 February, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg met with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis. Stoltenberg announced that the alliance would increase its military presence in eastern Ukraine while considering a long-term presence in the Black Sea region. He commented: "There is an ongoing strengthening of our NATO presence in the eastern part of the alliance... We've also increased the readiness of NATO's response force." He added: "On top of that we are considering more longer-term adjustments in our posture, and that includes establishing battlegroups in the southeast of the alliance, meaning Romania but also other countries around the Black Sea region." ("[NATO welcomes more U.S. forces to Romania, says reinforcing in east](#)," *Reuters*, 11 February 2022)

The UK and the US send advisories, asking citizens to leave Kyiv

On 11 February, the US and UK sent warnings to their citizens in Ukraine to

evacuate within 48 hours due to an imminent threat from Russia. Attempts to de-escalate tensions were continuing, but the US' statement has prompted other countries also to issue new advisories regarding Ukraine. UK ambassador to Ukraine Melinda Simmons said she would be staying with a core team of officials in Kyiv. White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said: "As we've said before, we are in the window when an invasion could begin at any time should Vladimir Putin decide to order it." The warnings led to the rise of the US dollar, and its oil crude futures also rose more than five percent to USD 94.66 a barrel. ("[Ukraine tensions: Russia invasion could begin any day, US warns](#)," *BBC*, 11 February 2022; Hannah Lang and Herbert Lash, "[Dollar gains as Ukraine tensions rise after US warning](#)," *Reuters*, 12 February 2022)

Ukraine: Biden and Zelenskyy hold a telephonic conversation

On 13 February, US President Joe Biden held a telephonic conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Following the call, the White House released a statement that maintained that the two leaders agreed that continuing deterrence and diplomacy against Russian aggression was important. Meanwhile, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan warned of an imminent escalation, saying: "We cannot perfectly predict the day, but we have now been saying for some time that we are in the window, and an invasion could begin — a major military action could begin — by Russia in Ukraine any day now. That includes this coming week before the end of the Olympics." ("[Germany's Scholz vows 'immediate' sanctions if Russia invades Ukraine](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2022)

International organizations relocating their staff out of Ukraine

On 15 February, The World Bank and International Monetary Fund announced temporarily relocating some of their staff in Ukraine. A memo released by the World Bank mentioned: "The World Bank Group's foremost priority is to keep our staff and their families safe. In line with our

evacuation policy, temporary relocation of staff is under way and enhanced security measures are in place." Nonetheless, business seems usual in Kyiv amid calls for evacuation. US President Joe Biden had advised its nationals to leave. However, the American Chamber of Commerce said: "We are constantly in touch with our members, Ukraine's government, and the US Embassy. This continuous dialogue and communication have been a strategic pillar of AmCham for the past 30 years in Ukraine." (David Lawder, "[World Bank, IMF relocate some staff from Ukraine, operations continue](#)," *Reuters*, 15 February 2022; "[Business as usual: Western firms in Ukraine resist calls for expats to leave](#)," *Euronews*, 14 February 2022)

Biden and Johnson discuss on call over the possibility of a democratic solution

On 15 February, US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson discussed the Ukraine crisis over a 40-minute phone call. After the call, the UK government released a statement saying, that there was still a "crucial window," for a diplomatic solution for Ukraine, a situation where Russia can draw back its military. The leaders stressed that in case of an incursion, Russia will fall into a prolonged crisis which will affect the rest of the world. In the coming days, Johnson will conduct a Cobra meeting to take the issue of Ukraine with his cabinet members and discuss how UK's response can be the situation. ("[Ukraine crisis: Biden and Johnson say still hope for diplomatic agreement](#)," *BBC*, 15 January 2022)

Ukraine: Biden states Russian withdrawal of troops "unverified"

On 15 February, US President Joe Biden responded to the footage of Russian troops withdrawing from the Ukrainian border. He warned that there still existed the possibility of a war. Meanwhile, few of the Russian soldiers stationed along the Ukrainian border returned to their bases following the completion of their exercises. The Kremlin spokesperson commented on this withdrawal: "We have always said that after the exercises are over ... troops would return to their permanent bases. There's nothing new here. This is a usual process."

The US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith expressed that the claim had yet to be verified. ("[Ukraine latest: Biden warns Russian attack still possible](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 15 February 2022)

France and EU to announce withdrawal from Mali

On 16 February, speculation arose of France and EU partners in Mali to announce a military withdrawal. France has about 15,000 peacekeeping troops, and the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) is set up in Mali. The speculations come after French government spokesperson Gabriel Attal said continuing in Mali is: "not possible in a very deteriorated context in Mali, with the seizure of power by a junta, the refusal to apply a timetable for the return to democratic order which had been announced and the use of a private Russian militia, Wagner, reputedly close to the Kremlin." Estonian Defence Minister Kalle Laanet also commented on the issue, saying the conditions were not conducive to continuing in the region, and all allies felt the same. ("[Mali: France and EU partners expected to announce military withdrawal](#)," *Euronews*, 16 February 2022)

EU pledges EUR 30 billion for Africa

On 16 February, European Banks and EU financial institutions announced to pledge EUR 30 billion for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The French Development Agency (AFD) said it would extend its support to the private sector and infrastructural development in loans and budget guarantees for the next four years from 2023-to 2027. AFD Director-General Rémy Rioux said: "It is a question of building a new alliance between our two continents, an alliance of all the actors of solidarity and sustainable investment, public and private." The money is a part of the Global Gateway plan and, as reported by *Euronews*: "is supposed to mobilize up to €300 billion in public and private funds by 2027 in infrastructure projects around the world, half of which to the African continent." ("[EU financial institutions pledge €30 billion for](#)

[Africa on eve of summit,](#) Euronews, 16 February 2022)

EU to discuss tensions in Ukraine before the Africa summit

On 16 February, EU leaders announced plans to discuss the troop buildup by Russia on the Ukrainian border before the EU-Africa summit. An EU official said: "The leaders are meeting in Brussels for the Africa summit and they wanted to meet and discuss the crisis on the Ukrainian border, get updated, exchange information and views." The meeting would be an informal discussion without any joint statements. The only worry of the EU leaders is that the discussion could overshadow the meeting with the African leaders. A diplomat mentioned: "The alternative, to cancel the summit with the AU [because of the tensions with Moscow], was worse than going ahead and then risking that the summit could be overshadowed." (Jacopo Batigazzi, "[EU leaders to meet on Thursday to discuss Russia,](#)" *POLITICO*, 16 February 2022; "[EU leaders to meet on Russia on Thursday - EU officials,](#)" *Reuters*, 16 February 2022)

Dutch Prime Minister apologizes to Indonesia for using extreme violence

On 17 February, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologized to Indonesia for the use of systematic and extreme violence against citizens during the 1945-49 war of independence. A recent study of three historic institutions found that in the archipelago nation's war of independence, Dutch armed forces, politicians, civil servants, and judges had engaged deliberately in a violent manner towards the public of Indonesia. According to the review: "'extrajudicial executions, ill-treatment and torture, detention under inhumane conditions, the torching of houses and villages, the theft and destruction of property and food supplies, disproportionate air raids and artillery shelling, and what were often random mass arrests and mass internment.'" ("[Netherlands apologizes to Indonesia over war crimes,](#)" *Deutsche Welle*, 17 February 2022)

Emmanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of troops from Mali

On 17 February, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of troops and allies in the European force from Mali. The French troops had been present in Mali to battle out Islamist militants since 2013 and the crack in the diplomatic relations has made the French to withdraw from the region. Macron said: "We cannot remain militarily engaged alongside de-facto authorities whose strategy and hidden aims we do not share." In response, a spokesperson from the Junta said: "terrorism engulfed the entire Malian territory." The start point to the break-in relation between France and Mali began when the army took over in a coup in 2020. ("[Mali conflict: Macron announces troops to leave after nine years,](#)" *BBC*, 17 January 2022)

Ukraine: Kyiv in talks with Washington over potential SDRs from IMF

On 17 February, Ukrainian Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko announced that the country is in talks with the US on the possibility of receiving the International Monetary Funds' (IMF) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). This facility would let countries transfer reserve assets to Kyiv. Marchenko stated: "We are discussing a very sophisticated tool which can help us with SDR allocation." This is an initiative undertaken by the Ukrainian government against the Russian gathering of troops along its border. Marchenko, hoping the US grant of USD 1 billion reaching the country soon, added: "U.S. guarantee means that we can borrow with a triple-A rating... We can top up necessary finance to finance our deficit, we'll be able to support our currency as well." (Karin Strohecker and Natalia Zinets, "[EXCLUSIVE Ukraine bids for SDR transfers in funding push, new IMF deal - FinMin,](#)" *Reuters*, 17 February 2022)

Ukraine: UN Political Affairs Chief calls for Minsk Protocol implementation

On 17 February, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo called for the implementation of the 2015 Minsk

agreements. Commenting on the ambiguous information being spread regarding the status of the Russian troops along the Ukraine border, DiCarlo stated: "Whatever one believes about the prospect of such a confrontation, the reality is that the current situation is extremely dangerous." She called on a de-escalation of the crisis using regional and other frameworks enabling increased diplomacy. ("[Ukraine crisis: UN political affairs chief calls for 'maximum restraint'](#)," *UN News*, 17 February 2022)

Eastern Ukraine: Shelling increases, continues for second day

On 18 February, *Reuters* reported eastern Ukraine to be witnessing increased shelling for the second day in a row. The West has termed this escalation as a potential Russian justification for an invasion. No deaths have been reported yet. The OSCE's mission in eastern Ukraine reported around 600 violations of the ceasefire agreements on 17 February alone. The Kremlin also commented on the escalation terming it as "dangerous". Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden commented: "We have reason to believe they are engaged in a false flag operation to have an excuse to go in." (Dmitry Antonov and Pavel Polityuk, "[Alarm as east Ukraine shelling enters second day](#)," *Reuters*, 18 February 2022)

Russia criticized for expelling the US diplomat

On 17 February, White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre while warning on the increasing tensions on Russian invasion, called the dismissal of the US Deputy Ambassador to Russia as "unprovoked." Jean Pierre criticized Russia's act to expel the Deputy Chief, stating the importance of diplomatic individuals at a crisis situation was important to exchange critical communication. On the same lines of President Joe Biden, she warned that the attack by Russia on Ukraine may occur at any moment. ("[Russia expulsion of U.S. deputy ambassador 'unprovoked' - White House](#)," *Reuters*, 17 January 2022)

Ukraine: Blinken to meet Lavrov soon

On 17 February, the US State Department announced Secretary of State Antony Blinken to have agreed to a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Previously, speaking at the UN Security Council meeting, Blinken expressed: "We don't know precisely how things will play out, but here's what the world can expect to see unfold... Russia may describe this event as ethnic cleansing, or a genocide, making a mockery of a concept that we in this chamber do not take lightly." (Julian Borger, Daniel Boffey and Dan Sabbagh, "[Ukraine crisis: Blinken and Lavrov agree to meeting as tensions reach 'moment of peril'](#)," *The Guardian*, 18 February 2022)

EU and African Union leaders meet in Brussels

On 18 February, EU and African leaders discussed reviving their relations that were hampered due to COVID-19. 40 African heads of government and state were expected to meet 27 EU leaders and the presidents of the Institution in Brussels. As reported by *Euronews*: "The joint summit is seen as an opportunity to turn the page on the last couple of years and open a new chapter to address common challenges, such as climate change, the energy transition, sustainable development, and the economic recovery." As a way to improve their relations, the EU officials have pledged a EUR 150 billion investment package that would be announced during the summit. ("[EU and African leaders meet in Brussels to reset relations after turbulent COVID years](#)," *Euronews*, 18 February 2022)

Antonio Guterres: "catastrophic" outcome is conflict in Eastern Europe escalates into war

On 18 February, UN N Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that if the Russia-Ukraine conflict escalates into a war, it would be catastrophic. He further said: "With a concentration of Russian troops around Ukraine, I am deeply concerned about heightened tensions and increased speculation about a military conflict in Europe. I still think it will not happen. But if it did, it would be catastrophic." Guterres made these remarks during the Munich

Security Conference and also said: "It's high time to seriously de-escalate." ("[UN chief says Russian invasion of Ukraine would be 'catastrophic'](#)," *BBC*, 18 February 2022)

Ukraine: G7 Foreign Ministers release statement

On 19 February, the G7 Foreign Ministers released a statement regarding the Ukraine crisis, expressing concern over the worsening conditions in the region. The joint statement released by the UK Foreign Ministry read: "We call on Russia to choose the path of diplomacy, to de-escalate tensions, to substantively withdraw military forces from the proximity of Ukraine's borders and to fully abide by international commitments... As a first step, we expect Russia to implement the announced reduction of its military activities along Ukraine's borders. We have seen no evidence of this reduction." ("[Ukraine latest: NATO chief says Russia planning 'full-scale attack'](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 20 February 2022)

Ukraine: Biden agrees to summit with Putin

On 21 February, the White House released a statement announcing that U.S. President Joe Biden agreed to a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin over the Ukraine crisis. However, the meeting has been agreed to only "in principle if an invasion hasn't happened". Further details are unclear. More information regarding the summit is expected to be chalked out during the meeting on 24 February between the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The proposed summit is unclear also on the role Ukraine will play in the same. ("[Biden agrees in principle to Ukraine summit with Putin](#)," *Reuters*, 21 February 2022)

The US warns of a list that Moscow has combined to target Ukrainians

On 20 February, the US Ambassador to the UN Bathsheba, Nell Crocker, mentioned a list of targeted Ukrainians, saying: "credible information...to be killed or sent to camps". She also said, "We also have credible information that Russian forces will likely use lethal measures to disperse peaceful protests or otherwise counter peaceful

exercises of perceived resistance from civilian populations." Kremlin refuted the allegations and said: "You do understand that this is an absolute fake, that it's a lie?" (Chloe Taylor, "[US warns that Moscow has compiled lists of Ukrainians to target after invasion](#)," *CNBC*, 21 February 2022)

Vice President Kamala Harris extends support to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

On 20 February, US Vice President Kamala Harris spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy regarding his defiant speech to the Munich Security Conference. Harris said: "His country is virtually surrounded by Russian troops. This is my belief, based on just my own assessment and speculation: He came here to make a very clear point that he does not stand alone." Her comments came after Zelenskyy's comments where he said: "We are going to protect our country with or without the support of our partners." (David Cohen, "[Harris offers support for defiant Ukrainian president](#)," *POLITICO*, 20 February 2022)

Kremlin calls Putin-Biden talks as "premature"

On 21 February, Kremlin released a statement on the discussion of a Putin-Biden summit. Kremlin said a meeting at this point with the crisis at the Ukrainian border would be premature. Their comments come as Ukraine had called for sanctions against Russia even if it did not invade. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "there is an agreement on the fact that we must continue the dialogue at the level of (foreign) ministers. Talking about concrete plans to hold summits is premature." ("[Ukraine crisis: Kremlin says 'premature' to discuss Putin-Biden summit](#)," *Euronews*, 21 February 2022)

Condemnation by US, UK, and the UN on Russia's recognition of breakaway regions

On 21 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared to recognize the independence of the two breakaway regions of Eastern Ukraine as independent entities. Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk

People's Republic's recognition were met with new sanctions from the US and Europe. White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said: "We will also soon announce additional measures related to today's blatant violation of Russia's international commitments." The UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said sanctions by the UK would come on Tuesday "in response to their breach of international law and attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity." Even the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: "a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the charter of the UN." (Julian Borger, Daniel Boffey and Angelique Chrisafis, "[Dismay and condemnation as west begins to impose sanctions on Russia](#)," *The Guardian*, 21 February 2022)

Ukraine: Blinken cancels meeting with Russian counterpart Lavrov

On 22 February, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that his scheduled meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had been cancelled. The meeting planned for 24 February, was called off due to the escalation in eastern Ukraine. Blinken, during a joint press conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, said: "Now that we see the invasion is beginning, and Russia has made clear its wholesale rejection of diplomacy, it does not make sense to go forward with that meeting at this time." However, Blinken maintained that there was a possibility of the meeting occurring if Russia did not deploy troops into Ukrainian territory. Separately, the White House also announced that a potential meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, suggested by French President Emmanuel Macron, was unlikely. a diplomatic path to resolving the crisis. ("[Ukraine latest: Blinken calls off meeting with Lavrov over Russian troop deployment](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 February 2022; Emma Graham-Harrison, "[Ukraine president calls up reservists as sanctions coalition against Russia grows](#)," *The Guardian*, 23 February 2022; Andrew Roth, Emma Graham-Harrison and Julian Borger, "[Likelihood of war escalates as Putin](#)

[promises to support proxy Ukraine states](#)," *The Guardian*, 22 February 2022)

Ukraine: Russia responds to international sanctions

On 23 February, Russia's US ambassador Anatoly Antonov downplayed the sanctions imposed by US President Joe Biden against Russia on 22 February. The initial set of sanctions targeted Russian banks such as the VEB and Promsvyazbank along with Russian sovereign debt. Antonov said: "I don't remember a single day when our country lived without any restrictions from the western world. We learned how to work in such conditions. And not only survive, but also develop our state." The next set of sanctions by the US is expected to hit the Russian elites and their families. Announcing the sanctions, Biden declared: "Who in the Lord's name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called countries?... This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine." However, Biden added that he expected that diplomacy was still possible. Meanwhile, other countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada and Japan along with the EU also announced sanctions against Russia. ("[Ukraine crisis: Biden announces sanctions on Russia](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 February 2022; "[Ukraine crisis: EU agrees to Russia sanctions package](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 February 2022; Emma Graham-Harrison, "[Ukraine president calls up reservists as sanctions coalition against Russia grows](#)," *The Guardian*, 23 February 2022)

Ukraine: UN Secretary-General condemns Russian recognition of separatist regions

On 22 February, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed concern over the Russian incursion into eastern Ukraine while calling out "the perversion of the concept of peacekeeping". Guterres was responding to the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as republics by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the subsequent deployment of Russian troops into the region for "peacekeeping" purposes. Guterres said: "When troops of one country enter the territory of another country without its

consent, they are not impartial peacekeepers. They are not peacekeepers at all." Guterres added that Russia was violating "the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine". (["Ukraine crisis: Biden announces sanctions on Russia,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 22 February 2022)

Ukraine: Foreign Minister Kuleba requests emergency UNSC meeting

On 23 February, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba requested an emergency session of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to be held. Kuleba tweeted: "Ukraine has requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council due to the appeal by Russian occupation administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk to Russia with a request to provide them with military assistance, which is a further escalation of the security situation." The second meeting in three days is expected to be held at 0230 GMT on 24 February. The request followed a failed attempt by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to hold talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Via a Telegram post, Zelenskyy said: "I initiated a telephone call with the president of the Russian federation. Result: silence." Zelenskyy added that the Russian troops along the Ukrainian borders had reached 200,000. (["Ukraine requests urgent meeting of UN Security Council — as it happened,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 24 February 2022)

Ukraine: UN Secretary-General Guterres calls Russian invasion "a moment of peril"

On 23 February, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres addressed the UN General Assembly on the Ukraine crisis. The UN Chief warned that the world was "facing a moment of peril". Guterres called for a de-escalation and added: "If the conflict in Ukraine expands, the world could see a scale and severity of need unseen for many years." Speaking at the General Assembly, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said: "Active diplomacy, strong political messages, tough economic sanctions and strengthening Ukraine can still force Moscow to abandon aggressive plans." Meanwhile, Russia's UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia cautioned that severe action would be taken against those violating the peace in eastern Ukraine. (["Ukraine](#)

[requests urgent meeting of UN Security Council — as it happened,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 24 February 2022)

European Commission's new laws on supply chain

On 23 February, the European Commission received a new draft law that mentioned hefty fines for companies that fail to crack down on human rights and environmental abuses. European Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders said: "The proposal covers two groups of companies, with limited liability. Those with more than 500 employees and a turnover of at least €150 million worldwide." European Coalition for Corporate Justice director Claudia Saller said: "The point would be really to enable the 'Davids' - in this case - to step up and claim their rights and minimise the power of the Goliaths and to come to a world where business doesn't mean violating human rights." (["Brussels unveils supply chain law to guard against human rights abuses,"](#) *Euronews*, 23 February 2022)

Imran visits Russia midst of the invasion

On 23 February, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and Russian President Vladimir Putin met midst of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the statement released by the Russian Government, the meet focused on bilateral cooperation, regional topics such as developments in South Asia and reaching a deal on energy gas pipeline as Pakistan faces an energy crisis. The meet was condemned by the west, but both parties have denied the meeting to link with the Ukraine invasion. According to Brussels-based Pakistani journalist: "Regardless of what he says, by going to Moscow, Khan has conveyed a message to Europe and the US that he has decided to side with Russia in the Ukraine conflict." (Shamil Shams, ["Ukraine crisis: Why Imran Khan's Russia trip will further isolate Pakistan,"](#) *Deutsche Welle*, 25 February 2022)

Ukraine: Protests erupt condemning Russian aggression

On 24 February, citizens across the world took to the streets condemning the Russian

invasion of Ukraine. Demonstrations were witnessed by Ukrainians living in Japan, Germany, and the Czech Republic. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz responded to the growing concern of the Ukrainian security situation: "Putin is endangering the lives of countless innocent people and the peace order on our continent. This is Putin's war." In Moscow, a few citizens who protested outside the Ukrainian embassy were arrested while Turkey and Spain witnessed protesters crowding outside the Russian consulates in their respective capital cities. (Claudia Dehn, "[Standing up for Ukraine: Anti-war protests around the world](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 February 2022)

France and China sign cooperation deal over infrastructure projects in Africa

On 24 February, France and China announced a joint plan to construct seven infrastructure projects worth USD 1.9 billion in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. The pact will be the first third-party intergovernmental cooperation, including projects in infrastructure, environmental protection and new energy. As per the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC): "French enterprises have a unique advantage in advanced manufacturing, environmental protection and engineering construction, while Chinese firms have accumulated rich experience in basic infrastructure construction, energy, equipment building and the internet. Enterprises from both countries are complementary, and have a huge potential for third-party market cooperation." A recent study suggests that foreign investments in China are found to be corrosive in nature across Eastern and Central Europe. Out of which Hungary has the highest cut, seconded by Poland in railway transit, Slovakia and Czech Republic where its investments have grown to the extent of influencing the internal communication networks. Whereas France's economic relations with Africa declined to seven per cent, while Chinese FDI grew in 2020. (Jo Harper, "[France and China link up in global infrastructure](#)

[projects](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 February 2022)

Ukraine: Third round of Western sanctions ban key Russian banks from SWIFT

On 26 February, major Russian banks were taken off the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) messaging system. The secure network permits rapid cross-border payments facilitating foreign trade. The third round of sanctions from the West also saw threats to Russia's central bank. The joint statement released by the US, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, the UK and the European Commission read: "As Russian forces unleash their assault on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities, we are resolved to continue imposing costs on Russia that will further isolate Russia from the international financial system and our economies." The move was previously termed as a "financial nuclear weapon" by the French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire due to its potentially devastating impact on the Russian economy. (Maria Tsvetkova and Aleksandar Vasovic, "[Western allies to expel key Russian banks from global system; Ukraine vows to fight on](#)," *Reuters*, 26 February 2022)

Ukraine: Ukrainian ambassador to the UN says international peace depends on Ukraine

On 28 February, the Ukrainian ambassador to the UN Sergiy Kyslytsya cautioned the UN General Assembly (UNGA) that the survival of international peace was dependent on that of Ukraine. He said: "If Ukraine does not survive, international peace will not survive. If Ukraine does not survive, the United Nations will not survive... If Ukraine does not survive, we cannot be surprised if democracy fails." The ambassador added that Russia was committing war crimes by attacking civilian infrastructure. He further called on the UNGA to demand Russia to stop its aggression towards Ukraine. ("[Ukraine: Kyiv demands Russian withdrawal as talks begin — live updates](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, 28 February 2022)

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