



MAIN TAKEAWAY of the month

The Russia-Ukraine war was marked this month by repeated Russian attacks on the port and storage facilities in the Odessa region, respectively by Kyiv's attacks on the Crimean Peninsula, especially on the Russian Navy. On the frontlines, Ukraine advanced in the vicinity of Bakhmut and in Zaporizhzhya. Meanwhile, Russian drone pieces were found in Romanian territory and on the Bulgarian shoreline, increasing regional tensions. Internally, Kyiv appointed a new Defense Minister and made amendments to the national minorities law, as Washington revealed its short- and long-term demands for Kyiv in regards to internal reform that will determine future military aid. Regarding that, Ukraine received in September significant military and humanitarian assistance from the US, Germany, Denmark, Norway and the European Union.

The grain dispute between Ukraine and its neighboring allies continued and the Black Sea Grain Deal is still inactive, despite Turkish president Erdogan's efforts to convince Putin to revitalize it. While the EU-coordinated import ban expired on September 15, Poland and Hungary decided to maintain it, as Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia are actively renegotiating a new arrangement with Ukraine. Ukraine's complaint to the WTO against the two opposing countries led to a furious reaction from Warsaw, later retracted.

Allegations are growing within Russia of an increase in combat personnel, especially through the recruitment of foreign nationals, while a fresh mobilization appears to be ruled out for the time being. Meanwhile, Russia organized local elections, including in Ukrainian occupied territory, which were unrecognized by the International Community. Furthermore, a significant increase in weapon production capacities within Russia was reported, with Moscow finding alternatives to avoid Western technology sanctions. On the energy front, Russia continued to avoid the G7 oil price cap and temporarily ceased its diesel exports, affecting global markets.

Regarding Moscow's foreign policy, this month was marked by the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visit to Russia's Far East, which re-emphasized their mutual interest in increasing their military cooperation. Similar goals were expressed during the Russian and Iranian Defense Ministers' meeting in Tehran, as well as the Chinese Foreign Minister's visit to Russia. Finally, Azerbaijan's invasion in Nagorno Karabakh resulted in the deaths of Russian "peacekeeping forces," while Russia's lack of response was widely criticized by Armenia, which indicated plans to dramatically change its position toward Moscow.

In the Republic of Moldova, this month was marked by the visits of NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana and French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu. Furthermore, Romanian agency Transgaz will start the operation, exploitation, dispatch and transportation of the country's natural gas network, signaling a significant distancing in the energy field from Russia. Meanwhile, Chisinau extended its state of emergency for another 60 days, being the target of both loose missiles and of cyberattacks this month.

In the Balkans, ethnic clashes have re-erupted in Kosovo, as tensions mount after Kosovar authorities accuse Kosovo Serbian political forces and Belgrade itself for its involvement in a shooting that led to four deaths in the town of Banjska. Meanwhile, Bulgaria and Croatia continue aiding Ukraine in grain transportation, despite the threats Sofia has received from Moscow, including the breach of their Exclusive Economic Zone in the Black Sea and the explosive drone reaching the Black Sea town of Tyulenovo.

In the early part of the month, Russia attempted to intimidate Kyiv and its allies by declaring that the [Sarmat](#) intercontinental missiles are “on combat duty”. In the same period, Russia was also the target of continued [Ukrainian drone attacks](#) within its territory. On the frontlines, the Ukrainian army made small advancements [in the vicinity of Bakhmut](#), while also managing to reach the “[third and final](#)” [layer of Russian defense in the Zaporizhzhya region](#). While Ukrainian advancements are ongoing, military officials such as [US General Mark Milley](#) point out that Kyiv, due to weather conditions, only has around 30-45 days left to conduct their counteroffensive, after which the terrain conditions will become unfavorable.

Moscow conducted extensive missile and drone strikes on the Odessa region, especially on the Danube ports of [Ismail and Reni](#). These attacks were recurrent and mainly targeted the [port and agricultural storage infrastructure](#). The strikes in the Southern Odessa region were bound to represent a potential danger for NATO member states Romania and Bulgaria.

As such, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oleh Nikolenko said in early September that Russian drones fell on Romanian territory, a claim which [Bucharest initially denied](#). Later, the Romanian Defense Ministry [admitted to having found Russian drone pieces in the village of Plauru](#), near the Ukrainian border. Around a week later, Romanian authorities found [other Russian drone fragments](#) on Romanian soil, this time [deeper within its territory](#), around 14 kilometers away from the border and 8 km from the city of Tulcea. As a result, [Romania extended flight restrictions along its border with Ukraine](#). Following these incidents, Romania would be faced with a maritime incident: the explosion and [sinking of a Togo-flagged ship near the Romanian Sulina port](#), which is speculated to have been caused by a landmine. Fortunately, the entire ship crew was evacuated. Bulgaria was faced with similar threats when they found a [drone with still-active explosives](#) on its Black Sea shore.

Within the Kyiv military administration, a significant shift was registered: defense minister Oleksii Reznikov resigned and was replaced by [Rustem Umerov](#), who previously played an important role in negotiating the Black Sea grain deal. In a cabinet shift, the new minister [would replace six deputy defense ministers](#), including Hanna Maliar, along with the State Secretary for the Defense Ministry.

The middle part of September was marked by Ukraine’s extensive attacks on Russian troops and facilities in occupied Crimea. Firstly, the [Ordzhonikidze shipyard](#) in Sevastopol was hit by [Storm Shadow cruise missiles](#), followed by an attack on a S-300/400 aerial defense system in the city of [Yevpatoria](#). Another relevant offensive occurred on the [Sevmorzavod naval site](#), which inflicted heavy damage on the *Minsk* landing ship and on the *Rostov-on-Don* submarine. On the frontlines, Ukraine recovered the towns of [Andriivka and Klischchiivka](#), located in Bakhmut’s Southern flank. Meanwhile, Russian missile and drone attacks [continued on the Odessa region](#), further destroying Ukraine’s grain stocking and transport capacities. [Drone attacks](#) have also extended to, among others, the Ukrainian regions of Sumy, Poltava, Kirovohrad, and Dnipropetrovsk. Meanwhile, as Ukraine continued its Southern advancement, Russia has been reinforcing its defensive lines near the city of [Tokmak, Zaporizhzhya region](#).

In the latter parts of this month, both sides continued their bombardment on their main targets: [Russia on the Odessa region](#), Ukraine on Crimea, namely damaging the [headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet](#) and [allegedly killing its commander](#), Viktor Sokolov (a statement that was [denied by Moscow](#) by showing the Admiral on Russian state television). These constant attacks on Crimea will, according to the British Defense Ministry, most likely [limit Russia’s ability to continue wider regional security patrols](#), while its capabilities to impose a *de facto* blockade of Ukrainian ports will be diminished. Ukrainian authorities reported that their [offensive continues towards Melitopol](#), as Russian defensive positions are bombarded in Tokmak. Furthermore, Kyiv resumed their drone attacks on [Russian regions, such as Kursk, Tula and Bryansk](#).

Among Ukraine’s achievements internally, one has to mention the Verkhovna Rada’s [modification of the law on national minorities](#), an initially controversial legislative piece that greatly affected both its relations with Romania and Hungary and its EU accession process. The new law allows the organization of public and cultural activities, as well as placing advertisements in the national minority language of the respective community. Still, Budapest’s protests continue, as Viktor Orban declared that [Hungary will not support Ukraine on any issue in international affairs](#) until Ukraine restores “the former rights for ethnic Hungarians on its territory”.

When it comes to other future reforms, [a White House document](#) reveals that the US wants Ukraine to follow different reforms that will condition its future military assistance. They vary based on the period of implementation (0-3 months, 3-6 months, 1 year, 18 months). Among the priorities to be accomplished three months from now, the document mentions: the need to strengthen the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office in line with IMF parameters, increase the number of investigators in the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) by at least 300, restore the obligation to disclose assets and financial information, ensure the independence and transparency of the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, and establish the Service of Disciplinary Inspectors in the High Court of Justice. Priorities for the next 3-6 months, most of which focus on the judiciary, include updating the procedures of the National Anti-Monopoly Committee of Ukraine or reviewing the integrity of the current Supreme Court judges. One-year priorities include reform of Ukraine's Constitutional Court, liberalization of natural gas and electricity tariffs, and reform of arms and military procurement practices to NATO standards to increase transparency and reduce corruption. Finally, the 18-month priorities mention reform of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), increasing the transparency of the National Police and the State Customs Service, and the introduction of inspectors general for reconstruction in every ministry dealing with Ukraine's reconstruction.

Regarding military and humanitarian aid sent to Ukraine this month, the United States sent in early September a [\\$175 million package](#) which included anti-armor systems, tactical air navigation systems, additional ammunition for HIMARS, and the controversial depleted uranium ammunition. This was followed by a [\\$325 million package](#), including, among others, air defense capabilities, cluster munitions, and anti-tank weapons. Lastly, Washington declared that the [first M1 Abrams tanks have arrived in Ukraine](#), with a total of 31 to be sent in total.

Germany has also been a significant contributor throughout this month. It first sent the self-propelled anti-aircraft guns GEPARD, ammunition and small military vehicles, followed by [20 Marder infantry vehicles and reconnaissance equipment](#). Later, Berlin vowed to send ammunition, vehicles, clothing and energy generators valued at a total of [400 million euros](#), along with a package including [satellite communication equipment](#) and spare parts for demining tanks. However, there is an increasing worry regarding German equipment, especially older one, after Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock admitted that some [German weapons are outdated and "not really functioning"](#).

Meanwhile, [Denmark](#) sent its largest Ukraine aid to date, a \$830 million package, which also includes 45 tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and anti-aircraft guns. Other military contributions included France sending [150 Delair drones](#) and [Canada](#) donating short-and-medium range missiles amounting to around \$24 million. Also, to further coordinate the tackling of different industrial base challenges and future military aid to Ukraine, [National Armaments directors](#) from several EU and NATO countries met in Brussels in the latter parts of September. Lastly, Turkish drone manufacturing company [BAYKAR](#) pledged to invest \$100 million in Ukraine, a sum which includes the construction of a drone factory that is already underway.

Regarding the training of Ukrainian troops, a training programme on [Abrams tanks was finished by 200 soldiers](#), while Romanian, Dutch authorities, along with the US-based Lockheed Martin company, are intending to create a European [pilot training program for F-16s](#) in Romania.

When it comes to humanitarian and reconstruction aid, Washington, through the World Bank's Multi-Donor Trust Fund, will offer a \$1.25 billion grant for Ukrainian state budget expenditures (pensions, payments to state employees and medical workers etc.). The US and Ukraine also signed a [memorandum which will aim at improving Ukraine's energy resilience](#), as Washington intends to supply \$522 million in energy-related assistance. [Norway](#) also announced a package, amounting to roughly \$92.4 million, meant to offer access to shelter, food, water and sanitation, education, health care and psychosocial support to the most vulnerable demographics from Ukraine. Moreover, South Korea vouched to offer \$300 million to Ukraine in 2024, in the form of humanitarian aid, followed by a [\\$2 billion long-term loan](#) meant for the reconstruction of the country, to be commenced in 2025. Furthermore, the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#) expects to invest 3 billion euros in Ukraine over the next two years, while the [EU already transferred a 1.5 billion euro tranche](#), meant to maintain macroeconomic stability and reestablish critical infrastructure destroyed by Russian strikes.

Evolutions regarding Ukrainian grain exports

Despite Russia's mounting pressure on Ukraine's grain infrastructure, several ships managed to transport grain from Ukraine's ports, firstly [2 ships from the Pivdennyi port](#) on September 1st, and one from [Chornomorsk on September 19](#). Furthermore, it has been reported that a total of [7 vessels left](#)

[the Odessa](#) region thus far, 5 of which were already docked there before the start of the invasion. However, this number is still quite limited, as between September 1 and 24, 2023, [Ukraine has exported 51% less grains](#) than during the same period last year.

In an attempt to resume a normal agricultural trade process in the region, by revitalizing the Black Sea Grain Deal, [Turkish president Erdogan met with Putin](#) in the first part of September. This meeting has brought little results which are favorable for Kyiv though, Putin claiming that he will rejoin the Grain Initiative [only once European sanctions on Russian cereals and fertilizers are lifted](#). Later, Erdogan was critical of the non-application of the Black Sea grain deal, stating that the [world is now faced with a new crisis](#). He added that Turkey will send a million tons of grain to countries in dire need, probably hinting at the [provisional deal Ankara and Moscow](#) “accepted in principle”, regarding sending that exact quantity of grain to Africa.

Among the states that declared their future attempts to help Ukraine export its grains through alternative routes are [Latvia](#) and [Lithuania](#), who claim that Baltic States could re-export around 10 million tonnes of grain yearly. Furthermore, to offer enhanced protection to ships crossing Ukraine’s improvised Black Sea corridor, the [British Royal Air Force](#) announced the conducting of surveillance flights.

The regional dispute between Ukraine and neighboring Central/Eastern European countries continued, as the temporary import ban in these countries on Ukrainian grain, which was facilitated as a damage control tactic by the European Commission, was due to [end on September 15](#). However, due to pressure from farmers, who have been struggling with [increased competition and market bottlenecks](#), many of the countries decided before the deadline to extend it beyond that date, including [Hungary](#), [Poland](#) and [Slovakia](#). Meanwhile, [Bulgaria did not support prolonging the ban](#), while Romania said that it will respect the [European Commission’s decision, whatever that may be](#).

Thus, on 15 September, the European Commission [respected Kyiv’s demands](#) and allowed the temporary [ban on Ukrainian grain imports to expire](#), but some of the countries decided to individually continue pursuing it, despite Brussels’ urge to maintain a “[constructive attitude](#)”. Poland, Hungary and Slovakia continued their import ban and Ukraine responded through a [World Trade Organization complaint](#). All the while, Romania and Bulgaria, who did not pursue a ban extension, faced [internal pressure from farmers](#).

However, the situation de-escalated quite quickly in Romania and Bulgaria’s case. Bucharest appealed to calm and assured farmers that it is actively negotiating with Kyiv to find a mutually beneficial solution. The government later declared that Ukraine [accepted all of Romania’s demands](#), such as importing only on the basis of a license and the usage of the grains exclusively for animal feed or as raw material for the production of finished products. Furthermore, it was announced that over the next month, Romania will work with Ukraine on a [grain export control plan](#). Meanwhile, Sofia ended the farmer demonstrations it was facing and reached a deal. Later, [Slovakia would also start working on a grain licensing initiative](#), after which it would end its grain ban.

That left Hungary and Poland as the only countries to firmly maintain their bans. This would later devolve into a heated dispute between Kyiv and Warsaw, as Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki [threatened to stop supplying weapons to Ukraine](#). This came not only after the WTO complaint, but also after president Zelensky said in [his speech at the United Nations](#) that some of Ukraine’s allies, whose solidarity was merely “political theater” were, by restricting imports from Ukraine, “helping set the stage for a Moscow actor”. Poland was vehemently against the pressure Ukraine was putting on it in various international platforms. However, a short while after these declarations, [Warsaw authorities attempted to de-escalate the situation](#), stating it will continue delivering “previously agreed supplies of ammunition and armaments, including those resulting from the contracts signed with Ukraine,” according to the government. Furthermore, [Poland showed its openness in preparing transit corridors for Ukrainian grains](#), re-emphasizing that the ban is only internal, not for transit. Although the Kyiv-Warsaw dispute was de-escalated, it showcases the still-existing internal ruptures between Ukraine and its allies.

RUSSIA - internal and external dynamics

In the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis, Russia's domestic politics have recently focused on recruiting numbers, local and regional elections, holding traitors to the Putin regime accountable, and military and economic reforms.

Former President Dmitry Medvedev [stated that approximately 280,000 people will join](#) the Russian army as professional service personnel in 2022, but Russia had earlier announced [intentions to increase combat personnel by more than 30% to 1.5 million](#). Simultaneously, several Russian politicians have advocated a professional army of approximately seven million personnel, while the Russian government is [attempting to rebuild its armed forces by enlisting](#) foreign nationals to

participate in the war, most of them originating from Central Asia. The National Guard (Rosgvardia) [has also begun recruiting former Wagner inmates](#) who were pardoned after serving on the Ukrainian front. However, during the Eastern Economic Forum, Vladimir Putin [appeared to rule out the possibility of a new mobilization](#) among the population, stating that in the last 6-7 months, 270,000 people voluntarily signed contracts to serve in the Russian Federation's armed forces and volunteer units.

Despite the fact that Russia does not fully control any of the four Ukrainian regions gained last year, Kremlin-installed authorities [held regional elections in the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine](#), as Moscow-elected governors sought a full mandate in the elections. Regional and municipal elections in Russia [were also held around the same time, with results showing](#) strong support for President Vladimir Putin and his party. United Russia party candidates [won government elections in 13 Russian regions and within the occupied territory elections](#), gaining more than 70 percent of the ballot in each territory, results that were heavily contested by the International Community. Not long after the fake elections took place, the Russian-installed leader in charge of the Donetsk region of Ukraine, annexed by Russia, Denis Pushilin, [has imposed a curfew](#), including control and censorship of communications, reiterating the authoritarian measures imposed in the occupied territories.

Corruption, betrayal and alleged espionage seemed to also be major issues for Putin's leadership this month. Major General Konstantin Ogienko, commander of the 1st Lenin Order's special-purpose air defense army in charge of Moscow's air defense, [has been detained for bribery](#). General Sergei Surovikin, who has been out of the public eye and was supposedly jailed following Yevgeny Prigozhin's insurrection in June, [has been released, but it is unclear whether the Russian authorities](#) have put any movement limits or other restraints on him. In addition, a [Russian court sentenced a Russian man](#) to 12 and a half years in prison for treason and 12 and a half years in prison for sending missile components to the United States at the request of US intelligence services, while Moscow [announced the expulsion of two US diplomats](#) accused of working with a Russian national charged with collaborating with a foreign state. Allegedly, the Russian man was asked by FSB staff to "collect information about Russia's war effort in Ukraine, its annexation of "new territories", its military mobilization and the 2024 presidential election".

Militarily, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu [has stated that Russia will not conduct](#) large military drills known as Zapad (West) this year, an exercise that took place last time in September 2021, since it focuses on its war in Ukraine. Additionally, the Belarusian foreign minister says [he cannot imagine his country joining the Russian military in the Ukraine conflict](#), showcasing certain limitations in the Moscow-Minsk relation.

Russia has also concentrated its efforts near its border with Finland, where [satellite pictures show that massive warehouses](#) used for military equipment maintenance and storage have been created at the Alakurtti and Petrozavodsk military sites. These initiatives are the first clear evidence that Russia has begun to reinvest in military bases near Finland in response to the country's NATO membership.

Russia managed to overcome the effects of the sanctions imposed against it, [now producing more missiles, tanks and ammunition than before the invasion of Ukraine began](#), while it is estimated that Russia now produces more ammunition than the United States and Europe combined. However, [new evidence indicates that sanctions have also pushed](#) Russia to convert from German-made engines to Chinese-made engines in military ships, as well as to utilize foreign-made parts in its missiles. In that regard, during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, millions of euros in [chips were transported from](#) Latvia to Russia, while [according to a document Kyiv delivered to its Western partners](#), Iranian kamikaze drones employed in recent strikes on Ukrainian cities are loaded with European components. Furthermore, Russia seems to be acquiring some of the Shahed drones from production facilities located in Russia, Iran and Syria, on which Ukrainian authorities commented that they should be attacked with missile strikes.

Regarding evolutions in the social sphere, Russian schools [are massively purchasing](#) Kalashnikov assault rifles, grenades and other military equipment for basic military training courses, which are returning to the school curriculum for the first time since the end of the Soviet period.

when it comes to its economic evolution, Russia [intends to increase defense expenditure significantly](#) in 2024, citing the invasion of Ukraine as having a substantial impact on the country's economy and budgetary goals. According to draft budgets obtained by *Bloomberg News*, defense spending will account for 6% of Russia's GDP in 2024, up from 3.9% in 2023 and 2.7% in 2021. Moscow has also [avoided G7 sanctions on the majority of its oil exports](#), resulting in a shift in trade flows that will increase the Kremlin's income as petroleum reaches \$100 per barrel. Similarly, between February and July 2023, approximately 160,400 tonnes of coal worth \$14.3 million [were exported to Turkey](#)

[from Russian-annexed Ukrainian regions](#), as Turkey, unlike the US and the EU, has not restricted trade with Russia or to areas of Ukraine controlled by Moscow. Regionally, according to President Vladimir Putin's statement at the Eastern Economic Forum, [the development of the Far East is Russia's top priority](#) in the twenty-first century, with an additional focus on the Arctic area. Nationally, Russia [has temporarily prohibited diesel exports](#) in an attempt to stabilize domestic supplies, putting additional pressure on global fuel markets, and after an eight-year hiatus, Russian producers of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) have [resumed regular exports of propane and butane](#) through the port of Kerch in Crimea. Exports of LPG from Kerch were suspended in 2015, following more than a year of international sanctions against Russian companies and producers as a result of Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014. To further avoid such sanctions, since the start of the war, [Russian oligarchs have withdrawn](#) \$50 billion in assets from so-called "unfriendly" European countries in response to sanctions and pressure from the US and Russia.

On what concerns Moscow's foreign policy agenda, a special committee composed of experts and personalities from academia and research [prepared a secret report for Vladimir Putin, which presents an analysis of the mistakes and shortcomings](#) of foreign policy and domestic policies over the last 4-5 decades. Its key point was that Russia should hold talks with the World Majority leaders regarding the prospect (desirability, inevitability) of limited nuclear strikes against countries supporting the Ukrainian war, mainly NATO countries.

In the case of Ukraine, the report states that it is "fair" to annex the country's south-eastern provinces. On top of that, Russian President Vladimir Putin [has convened a meeting of Russia's Security Council](#) to discuss relations with Moscow's allies and neighbors, given that Russia's poor performance in Ukraine has weakened its position on the international stage, forcing major players such as Turkey, India, and even China to engage in diplomacy on both sides, while forcing it to rely on rogue states such as North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Syria, and Belarus.

This was especially showcased by the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un in Vladivostok/Russian Far East in the middle of September. Kim Jong-un [expressed strong interest in](#) missile technology and space exploration, while Putin emphasized the potential for military-technical collaboration with North Korea. As a result, Vladimir Putin [accepted Kim Jong Un's invitation to North Korea](#), fueling US suspicions that a Moscow-Pyongyang axis may bolster Russia's military in Ukraine and provide Kim with missile technology.

A day after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's six-day visit to Russia ended, [Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi paid a visit to the Russian Federation](#), where he met with Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev to discuss security issues, the situation in Ukraine, and [both countries' desire to strengthen](#) economic, military, and technological cooperation while jointly opposing US influence on the international stage.

In the same period, Russian Defense Minister [Sergei Shoigu paid a visit to Tehran](#). He spoke with senior Iranian officials as part of efforts to strengthen bilateral ties, notably in the military realm. Shoigu met with senior Iranian officials, including his Iranian counterpart, to discuss defense cooperation and regional issues.

The resumption of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a recent regional pressing issue for Russia, as [it urged all parties involved to adhere to prior ceasefire agreements](#), claiming it is in contact with Azerbaijan concerning its "anti-terrorist operations" in the breakaway area. A day later, on September 20, [a number of Russian servicemen were killed](#) when their vehicle was ambushed in Nagorno-Karabakh. The personnel were returning from the peacekeeping contingent's observation station near Janyatag when they were attacked with small weapon fire. Ivan Kovgan, the deputy commander of the peacekeeping contingent, was among those killed. On the same day, Vladimir Putin and his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, [discussed in a telephone conversation](#) the steps to be taken to stabilize the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Criticizing the situation, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian stated on September 24 that his country [can no longer rely on Russia's security](#) after the Azerbaijani army crushed ethnic Armenian forces in the Nagorno-Karabakh territory. Maria Zakharova, on the other hand, [accused Western powers of inflaming relations](#) with long-time ally Armenia and forcing the South Caucasus country to exit the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

 **Evolutions in the Republic of MOLDOVA**

In the military field, The Republic of Moldova announced the [acquisition of a new airspace radar](#), to be operational by the end of 2023. Furthermore, this month was marked by the [visit of the NATO](#)

[Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană](#), where he reiterated NATO's full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. He added that the country is [not under Russian military threat](#) thanks to Ukraine's war effort, but that it is under a hybrid war. Later during this month, [French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu](#) met in the Republic of Moldova with his Moldovan counterpart Anatolie Nosatfi. Nosatfi thanked Lecornu for his support for Moldova within the European Union's European Peace Facility and for its contribution to the NATO Defense Capabilities Initiative Fund. He also emphasized the fruitful collaboration with the French company THALES and signed a bilateral agreement to increase cooperation.

An important breakthrough regarding the Republic of Moldova's energy independence from Russia was achieved in September, when it was announced that the country's operation, exploitation, dispatch and transportation network of natural gas will be [taken over by Romanian state company Transgaz](#), in what will be a 5-year-long takeover process. All the while, Moldovan authorities recalculated the debt state company Moldovagaz owned to Gazprom. While Moscow stipulated it amounted to \$709 million, [Moldovan authorities calculated it to be in fact 8.6 million](#), as a result of an audit. The Moldovan energy minister proposed to pay this sum and end any further debt owed to Russia.

At an internal level, the Republic of Moldova [extended the state of emergency for another 60 days](#), due to possible disruptions to the Ukrainian energy supply caused by drone and missile strikes and to an increased risk in cyber and information security. This risk was evident only a few days after the decision was taken, when an [S-300 missile landed in the town of Chitcani](#), in a part of the Republic of Moldova controlled *de facto* by Transnistrian separatists, with no registered victims. Furthermore, as part of Russia's hybrid warfare, [Russian hackers launched DDOS attacks](#) on the sites of Moldovan ministries and on pro-European publications, but cybersecurity experts manage to "lower the impact of these actions", as the Government's spokesperson declared.

Among other developments, [Moldovan authorities broke up a criminal gang](#) who was paid thousands of dollars per Ukrainian man attempting to flee Ukraine and avoid the draft. Furthermore, to counter Russian propaganda, Moldovan authorities have also [deported the editor-in-chief of Sputnik Moldova](#), Vitaly Denisov, a decision that was drastically criticized by the Kremlin. Further harsh criticism from the Moscow authorities came after the publication of an investigation by *Radio Free Europe Moldova*, which revealed the [presence of 2 FSB agents among the 10 remaining Russian diplomatic staff](#) in Chisinau. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova [labeled the article as disinformation](#).

The Balkans

In the context of the recent evolutions within the war in Ukraine, the key worries in the Balkan region are related to Ukrainian grain transportation, Russia's activity threatening the stability of the Black Sea region, along with worries regarding the worsening Kosovo-Serbia relations.

Instability persists in Kosovo, as [clashes have erupted again](#), resulting in the bloodiest occurrence of its kind since inter-ethnic clashes in 2004. Despite the EU's efforts to mediate, a shooting in Kosovo between armed Serbs and police killed four people, including an ethnic Albanian police officer, causing Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic to urge caution.

A Kosovo prosecution file indicates that the three Serbs, whose detention infuriated Belgrade, will be remanded in custody for [30 days](#). The file also indicates that the three perpetrators unjustly held and tortured people in Vushtri/Vucitrn during the Kosovo war in 1999, which [could be a possible correlation to the event](#). In this regard, Brussels [has warned Kosovo and Serbia](#) that if their agreements are not implemented, they risk losing their means to proceed on their European path.

Later, the tensions mounted when Prishtina accused a [Belgrade-backed Kosovo Serb political party, Srpska Lista, of being behind the armed assault](#). A video posted by Kosovar Interior Minister Xhelal Svecla shows a dozen armed men in the town of Banjska, where the attack took place, along with deputy leader of the Srpska Lista Party, Milan Radoicic. This led Prishtina to directly accusing Belgrade for the organization of the attack, a claim which President Aleksandar Vucic denied. To clarify the circumstances of the crime, the [US Ambassador to Kosovo](#) said that the US will help the local authorities with the investigation.

"These maps and evidence show that we are not dealing just with local groups but with a terrorist organization that is directed and ordered directly from Belgrade," [Svecla alleged](#), adding that in one of the confiscated vehicles were "a list of the weapons and official permits from Serbian institutions given to Milan Radoicic... the criminal who is also on the US blacklist... including the list of the weapons possessed by him." In response to the attack, ethnic Serbs from Northern Kosovo expressed

their worries and disbelief, one NGO leader from the area claiming that “there are fears that Kosovo police could now be even more brutal.”

Bulgaria was [the first country to refuse to prolong the European Commission's embargo](#) on Ukrainian cereal imports, claiming "solidarity with Ukraine," and the need to "guarantee food security on a global scale" as main reasons. Despite this, [farmers have protested the government's decision](#), claiming that it will result in reduced producer prices. Finally, they [achieved an agreement with the government on agricultural imports](#) from neighboring Ukraine, which included a temporary restriction on sunflower seed imports from Ukraine, as well as the implementation of limitations on grain imports from Ukraine. Simultaneously, Bulgaria [has begun equipping its coast guard with missiles to secure its Black Sea cities](#) and develop the necessary defense capabilities of its naval forces. The decision comes in a tense environment where [Russia has been using the Black Sea and Bulgaria's exclusive economic zone](#) for military exercises in recent months and where an [explosive drone landed](#) in the Black Sea town of Tyulenovo. In response to such naval threats, its neighbor, Romania, organized along with the American naval forces [the Sea Breeze 23.3 multinational exercise](#), especially focused on countering explosive ordnance, including sea mines. Similar to other Ukrainian allies, Croatia has [expressed an interest in](#) facilitating the export of Ukrainian grains through its ports, and has volunteered to aid Ukraine in demining and in investigating Russian war crimes.

In the meantime



[President Vladimir Putin plans to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping](#) in Beijing in October to deepen cooperation between the two countries as the West tries to constrain it. The talks will focus on strengthening their partnership and addressing the challenges they both face. China has refrained from condemning Russia's war against Ukraine, positioning itself as an ally. This has led to an increase in Sino-Russian trade and investment by Chinese companies in Russian projects. Russia is actively developing investments, including in gas and petrochemical projects, using Chinese technology.



Romania's Ministry of Defence has requested Parliament's approval to start the [programme to purchase 32 F-35 military aircraft from the US](#), according to a document sent to the legislature. The amount earmarked for the programme is \$6.5 billion. The decision to purchase the next-generation US aircraft was taken at the April meeting of the country's Supreme Defence Council (CSAT). The programme approved by the CSAT provides for two purchases of F-35 aircraft. In the first phase, two squadrons (32 aircraft) will be purchased, and in the second phase - one squadron (16 aircraft). Special air-to-air and air-to-ground ammunition is also included in this price.



Poland's hard-right Confederation Party kicked off their electoral campaign with a convention aimed at attracting more voters and distancing the party from extremist views within its ranks. It also aligned with other far-right parties in Europe opposing migration and COVID-19 restrictions. The potential coalition between Confederation and the governing Law and Justice Party [could shift Poland's political alignment, impacting their support for Ukraine](#) and alter the country's relationship with neighboring Ukraine.



Slovakia's former Prime Minister [Robert Fico](#) beat his progressive rivals in a parliamentary election after campaigning to end military aid to Ukraine, but he will need to win over allies to form the next government. The 59-year-old former prime minister's [SMER-SSD](#) party scored nearly 23% of Saturday's parliamentary poll. "We are not changing that we are prepared to help Ukraine in a humanitarian way," said Fico. "We are prepared to help with the reconstruction of the state but you know our opinion on arming Ukraine," he added at a news conference. Slovakia's liberal Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia, PS) party came second in Saturday's vote (September 30) with almost 18% of votes and wants to stay the course on backing Ukraine. So Fico may well look to the moderate leftist HLAS (Voice) party, which came third with nearly 15% of votes, as a partner along with the nationalist, pro-Russian Slovak National Party. He said coalition talks could take two weeks.