



MAIN TAKEAWAY of the month

On the frontlines, this month was marked by a deadlock in the vicinity of Avdiivka, where early Russian offensive efforts were thwarted by Ukrainian troops. Ukraine targeted Russian airfields, registering successes especially through the newly-acquired ATACMS systems, while Russia maintained its attacks on Ukrainian port infrastructure. However, Ukrainian attacks on the Russian navy forced them to look for new, safer ports and bring reinforcements.

Regarding Ukrainian aid, uncertainties arose regarding future US packages due to the absence of a House Speaker for the majority of this month, while the newly-elected Speaker has not shown a clear openness to continuing aid and considers splitting Ukrainian from Israeli aid. However, important packages, mainly containing air defense capabilities, came from the US, Germany, Sweden, or Denmark, while other allied humanitarian packages were sent to increase winter resilience. When it comes to Ukrainian grain export, ship flow through Ukrainian ports continues to increase and new routes are being conceived by Kyiv's Baltic and Balkan allies.

Within Russia, after revoking a nuclear test ban treaty, a complex nuclear strike test was conducted. Meanwhile, a new autumn recruitment campaign has commenced in the country, while soldiers complain about ammunition shortages and about inhumane punitive measures, including execution as punishment for retreat. Economically, the ruble continues to depreciate, while internationally, Moscow enhanced its collaboration in terms of military procurement with North Korea and Iran. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin increased his relations with some Central Asian nations, traveled to Beijing to enhance cooperation with China and hosted a Hamas delegation in Moscow after the October 7 attacks in Israel, increasing tensions with Tel Aviv.

In the Republic of Moldova, negotiations regarding EU accession are bound to start by the end of this year. Meanwhile, Chisinau distances itself from Moscow, blocking Russian propaganda sites, assuring energy sufficiency for the upcoming winter and denouncing CIS agreements. Tensions arose between the Russian Orthodox Church leadership and its Moldovan subordinate, while Chisinau-Bucharest collaboration continues in the economic and military fields.

This month's elections in Central Europe were marked by the rise of a populist government in Slovakia that opposes Ukraine aid, as new Prime Minister Robert Fico blocked an EU-wide Ukraine aid package, alongside Hungarian leader Viktor Orban. Meanwhile, in the Polish elections, while the right-wing Law and Justice Party won first place, it will not form another government, as pro-European opposition parties secured an overall majority, implying a better Warsaw-Brussels future relationship.

In the Balkan region, after continued accusations of Serbian involvement in the September Banjska shootings from Kosovo authorities, NATO forces enhanced their peacekeeping mission. Meanwhile, Turkish company BAYKAR prepares a \$100 million investment in Ukraine, as Ankara creates a Black Sea demining mission with Romania and Bulgaria. The Sofia government is attempting to reduce dependence on Russian energy through new US-backed nuclear projects. In Serbia, elections are prepared for December and Belgrade is increasing its diplomatic and military cooperation with Beijing.

In the first part of the month, Ukraine conducted attacks on a [Kh-59 production plant](#) and on an [S-400 system](#) located on Russian territory. This was followed by extensive [drone strikes against Russia](#) in the border regions of Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk, but also against [naval targets](#) near the Sevastopol region. These strikes on naval capabilities forced Moscow to move its ships to other naval bases located in [Feodosia and Novorossiysk](#). Creating a [permanent naval base in the separatist region of Abkhazia](#), *de jure* Georgian territory, was also put on the table by the Kremlin. Meanwhile, Russia attempted counterattacks on the Southern front, on the [Robotyne-Tokmak route](#), coupled by [extensive mining operations](#) in the whole Zaporizhzhya region. Russian forces continued their drone strikes in Southern Ukraine, especially in the Odessa region, targeting both [civilian infrastructure](#) and [grain facilities](#) located near Ukrainian ports. Onyx supersonic rockets were utilized in the aforementioned attack as well. Furthermore, one of the most devastating Russian attacks on civilians occurred in early October, as an airstrike hit a civilian building, leading to [52 deaths](#).

Both sides made new appointments to key military positions. It is speculated that the Russian MOD removed lieutenant-general Andrey Sychevoy from his position as commander of the Bakhmut operations for his [weak performances in Avdiivka and Klichivka](#), while Ukraine [replaced its Ground Forces commander](#), Ihor Tantsyura, with Anatoliy Barhylevych, previously chief of troops operating in Eastern Ukraine. Additionally, General Viktor Afzalov [has been designated Commander-in-Chief of Russia's Air and Space Forces](#), succeeding Sergei Surovikin. Later, a concerning outlook for Ukraine emerged after NATO Chief of the Military Committee, [Rob Bauer](#), stated regarding ammunition delivered by the Alliance to Kyiv that "the bottom of the barrel is now visible".

In the middle part of October, Russia commenced [offensive operations in Avdiivka](#), in what was attempted to be one of the most extensive Russian attacks in the last month. However, Ukrainian military officials claimed that they are [maintaining their positions and repelling the attacks](#), a fact that was later confirmed by Russian military bloggers. The bloggers also claimed that their optimism on a successful Russian advancement lowered, with Vladimir Putin later naming the operation an "[active defense](#)". Moreover, Russia continued its [drone attacks](#) against Southern Ukrainian regions, with Kyiv responding with [attacks on energy infrastructure in Belgorod](#) and with drone strikes on a [Russian airbase in the Kursk region](#), which allegedly caused significant material damage. This was followed by an airstrike on the occupied cities of Bryansk and Lugansk, which destroyed [9 attack helicopters and other types of important Russian equipment](#).

However, Ukraine faces a significant problem resulting from around [707.000 explosive devices](#) identified on its territory by Ukrainian sappers. In the case of Russia, one issue that was identified is the [decreasing mental health of its forces](#), due to a lack of appropriate rotation and recovery procedures.

Russia has also been suspected of [sabotaging an underwater gas pipeline](#), Balticconnector, connecting Finland and Estonia. The incident is also connected to the damage caused to an [undersea telecom cable located between Estonia and Sweden](#), with all three countries collaborating on the investigation. Preliminary findings show that Estonia's probe into a broken telecoms cable in the Baltic Sea will focus on [the acts of a Chinese-owned vessel](#). The Hong Kong-flagged NewNew Polar Bear cargo ship has been recognized as the primary suspect by Finnish authorities. To add to that, it was reported that two vessels, NewNew Polar Bear and Russia-flagged Sevmorput, were present at all three sites around the time of the damage. While this incident is monitored in the Baltic Sea, Russia has been reinforcing its presence in the Black Sea, by [bringing two new Kalibr-carrying frigates and a submarine](#), coupled with patrolling MiG-31 jets equipped with hypersonic Kinzhal missiles.

In the latter parts of this month, [Ukraine attempted raids on Kherson](#) through amphibious operations, crossing on the Russian-controlled eastern bank of the Dnieper river. These missions had more of a recon and sabotage purpose. This was coupled with a Ukrainian drone attack on a [Russian oil refinery](#). Russia's offensive operations in Avdiivka continued to lead to [considerable personnel and equipment losses](#), with little frontline achievements registered. As a result, Moscow reduced ground attacks in Avdiivka, but [increased air operations](#) and drone strikes, which recently started including an [increasing number of Russian-produced drones](#), most likely to be used in combined attacks with Shahed drones in the future.

Furthermore, Moscow city authorities announced [the construction of a new production facility in the capital](#), dedicated to anti-air missiles, bound to start activity until October 2024. Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops found a way to [convert air-to-air AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles into ground-air capacities](#), underlining Kyiv's adaptability. However, Russia showed its capabilities to acquire Western tech, as [components for recently-found Kinzhal missiles](#) originate from Western logistics and manufacturing companies.

Later, in the context of Black Sea tensions, Russian authorities claimed that they [intercepted three British planes in alleged Russian airspace](#), who later retreated. This incident might be related to the [protection Royal Air Force planes offer to the Ukrainian grain corridor](#) since last month.

When it comes to aid for Ukraine's war effort, the United States has been in the spotlight. The US Congress has been struggling to find a new speaker after former speaker [Kevin McCarthy was ousted in early October](#), hampering any legislation meant to provide aid to Ukraine. While Republicans [continued to propose new speaker nominees](#), new means to appease hardline GOP members and unblock future aid for Ukraine have been considered. One of them is an all-encompassing [\\$105 billion military aid package](#) proposed by president Joe Biden, that would provide \$61.4 billion in aid for Ukraine, \$14.3 billion in aid for Israel, \$7.4 billion in funding for Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific region and \$13.6 billion to address security at the US-Mexico border, the latter being a top issue on the Republican agenda. It can be argued that Republicans would much rather prefer one large package now instead of smaller packages next year, thus avoiding making Ukraine aid an electoral issue. Eventually, after almost a month of infighting, the [US Congress elected a new speaker, Mike Johnson](#) (R-Louisiana), but his previous stances and opposition to continued funding for Ukraine might be a significant drawback for Kyiv. Despite this, following his election, when asked [whether he supports additional aid for Ukraine](#), Johnson replied: "We all do. [...] We are going to have conditions on that so we're working through". Later, Johnson stated that funding for Ukraine and Israel [should be treated separately, implying that he would not back](#) President Joe Biden's \$106 billion aid proposal. In that sense, Johnson said of Ukraine funding: "We want to know what the object is there, what is the endgame in Ukraine. The White House has not provided that." In a later remark, Johnson stated that he supports a [standalone bill for Israel aid](#), thus emphasizing further his opposition towards a package that encompassed more countries and implying possible further delays to Ukraine aid.

These drawbacks faced by the United States in its legislative process are worsened by a [Pentagon announcement](#), stating that it has only \$5 billion left in its coffers, which could be sufficient only for the next few months. Nevertheless, for now, US authorities have found other ways to send packages to Kyiv, mainly through the remaining reserves of different executive authorities. Washington sent [\\$200 million dollars worth of air defense weapons, including HIMARS artillery shells](#) and also managed to transfer [confiscated Iranian weaponry and over 1 million ammunition rounds](#) to Ukraine. The White House is also preparing an initial [\\$2 billion package](#) including military assistance for both Ukraine and Israel. Furthermore, president Zelensky confirmed Ukrainian forces [started using US-sent ATACMS](#), long-range ballistic missile systems. This delivery was heavily [criticized by Vladimir Putin](#), calling it "another mistake" on the US side, while [Ukrainian authorities lauded their efficiency](#) which was detrimental in the destruction of the aforementioned Russian attack helicopters in Berdyansk and Lugansk. Lastly, in the latter parts of October, an additional security [assistance package worth up to \\$150 million for Ukraine](#) was sent, comprising, among other things, extra anti-aircraft weaponry, artillery ammunition and anti-tank weapons.

Meanwhile, the European Union will most likely [fall short of its goal of supplying Ukraine with one million artillery ammunition](#) by March 2024. In May, the EU committed to delivering this quantity of projectiles, first from current inventories and later by enhancing domestic production capability. However, barely 30% of the planned missiles have been delivered after six months, worrying Kyiv about future aid outlooks.

All the while, other countries aimed to meet Ukraine's demands for countermeasures to Russian missiles and drone strikes. Germany provided [IRIS-T air defense systems](#) with a total value of 1 billion euros and accepted the transfer of [150.000 artillery shells](#) to Ukraine from Rheinmetall. In similar circumstances, the German government bought from [Rheinmetall mobile drone surveillance systems](#), in the "two-digit million-euro range", as part of a future transfer to Ukraine. Furthermore, Spain sent to Kyiv [air defense and anti-drone systems](#) for the protection of its energy and port infrastructure, followed by a package containing [6 launchers for HAWK anti-aircraft missile systems](#), corresponding ammunition and machine guns meant to deter drones. Lithuania sent [NASAMS](#) air defense systems,

along with 155mm artillery shells. Vilnius has also pledged to collaborate with Berlin on a defense industry initiative meant to [restore Leopard tanks used by Kyiv](#).

Other packages include [Sweden's \\$199 million aid](#), consisting of artillery shells, spare parts and communication equipment, while [Finland](#) sent a 96 million euro military package. Denmark backs a [\\$21 billion military fund](#) for military aid for a 4-year period through the European Peace Facility. Copenhagen also sent a [\\$520 million package](#) including T-72EA tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, artillery shells, drones and small arms.

Among other actors involved in helping Ukraine's war effort, German manufacturing company [Rheinmetall created a joint venture with a Ukrainian state company](#) involved in arms production, Ukroboronprom, for the maintenance and subsequent manufacture of armored vehicles. Moreover, the Ukrainian army received more than [800 new drones](#) (500 Mavic drones, 300 FPV Phoenix 03 Heavy and 40 Vampire attack drones) through the "The Army of Drones", a Ukrainian inter-ministerial initiative. Ukraine's internal military production capacity was reflected in Oleksandr Kamyshin's, Minister of Strategic Industries, speech at the NATO Industrial Summit in Stockholm, which [stated that while Howitzer production in Ukraine has expanded](#) significantly, Kyiv still relies heavily on supply from allies. The Minister also stated that several international companies engaging in Ukraine's defense industry have begun with maintenance, repair, and other services before moving on to production. Kamyshin believes that more firms will build offices in Ukraine by the end of the year, and that the first equipment [will be delivered to Ukraine](#) the following year. Lastly, regarding the reinforcement of the Eastern Flank, Romania's parliament approved the [purchase of 32 F-35s](#) and improvements have been implemented to the [anti-drone systems in the Danube Delta](#), where drones fell extensively, especially in September 2023.

Referring to humanitarian aid, it has mainly focused on ensuring energy security for Ukraine before the upcoming winter, when Russian airstrikes on critical infrastructure are bound to increase. In that sense, the United States sent [\\$522 million](#) for Ukraine to buy energy equipment that assures infrastructural security. The UK provided a £500 million loan for [humanitarian winter civil financial assistance](#). [Finland provided 92 million euros](#) for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to cover any needs in the energy, healthcare and transport sectors.

Furthermore, thus far, in the April-October 2023 period, [3 billion cubic meters of gas](#) were transported to Ukraine through the EU and the Republic of Moldova, 7 times more than in the same period in 2022, which entails both a significant energy contribution to Ukraine's stability and a deeper integration within the European energy sector. This was followed by a [1.5 billion euro package from the European Union](#), meant to assure that Ukraine can pay for essential public services and maintain economic stability. Later, [British Army engineers](#) finished a training program with Ukrainian counterparts on defending and repairing critical energy infrastructure. When it comes to the issue of explosive mines in Ukraine, the UK allocated [\\$122 million for demining and vehicle maintenance](#) and [Croatia](#) pledged to help with such operations with the transfer of technical expertise and special safety equipment.

Regarding the reconstruction of Ukraine, the most recent effort comes from the European Parliament, which endorsed a proposal for a €50 billion facility to support [Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and modernization](#) from 2024.

Another dilemma on the agenda of Ukraine's allies is finding new means of using Russian frozen assets to fund Ukraine. Thus far, [Belgium started redirecting to Ukraine tax money resulting from said assets](#), resulting in 1.7 billion euros in aid thus far. Besides that, the Estonian government approved [a draft law that will allow frozen assets to be transferred to Ukraine](#), but it still needs to pass through parliament. Lastly, although no clear legislative solutions for this issue have been found yet, the [G7 vouched to maintain Russia's assets](#) frozen for the duration of the war. However, European Union leaders [have recently backed plans to spend billions of euros in earnings from frozen Russian assets](#) to assist Ukraine, with the European Commission scheduled to present legal measures in early December. This move is also tied to the [European Central Bank's warning of potential hazards to the Euro](#) in accessing these earnings, warning that it could push other central banks to forsake euro-denominated assets, weakening the currency. Nevertheless, EU leaders have endorsed plans to use earnings from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine.

Regarding Ukrainian grain exports, cargo vessels continue to navigate, as between September 16 and October 21, [42 ships](#) passed through Ukraine's temporary corridors to the Odessa region ports. Around [3.6 million tons of grain were shipped from Ukraine in September](#), but the Minister of

Agriculture clarifies that around 6 million a month would be the appropriate quantity in order to maintain agriculture as a key contributor to the Ukrainian economy. Looking at the provided aid in the agricultural field, at the moment, almost [60% of the total volume of Ukrainian grains transits through Romania](#) and plans are underway to double the transit capacity of Romanian ports. Other allied nations seeking to aid Ukraine with its agricultural exports are Lithuania, who announced this month the opening of a [grain corridor towards Baltic ports](#), or Greece, who discussed with its partners the possibility of a route through Romanian and Bulgarian railway towards the [Alexandroupolis and Thessaloniki ports](#). Moreover, any major tensions between Ukraine and Poland that manifested during September have now ceased, as [Warsaw eliminated border controls for Ukrainian grain](#). Regarding the [restoration of the previous Black Sea grain deal between Russia and Ukraine](#), facilitated by Türkiye and the United Nations, Turkish ambassador to Ukraine said that it is still possible, but certain concessions, such as accepting the re-entry of the Russian Agricultural Bank in the SWIFT financial system would be necessary, according to him.

RUSSIA - internal and external dynamics

Although the exact number of human losses suffered in the war in Ukraine is unknown, there is a continuous concern on the part of Russian authorities regarding finding various solutions to ensure a constant flow of human resources to the front. Therefore, from the beginning of October until December 31, [the autumn recruitment](#) will be taking place. According to the decree signed by Vladimir Putin, 130,000 people are expected to be conscripted during this recruitment campaign. According to the statement by Dmitri Medvedev, approximately [385,000 people](#) have been enlisted by the Ministry of Defense since the beginning of the year to participate in the war with Ukraine, and Russia currently has [no plans for additional mobilization](#), according to the Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu. However, according to estimates by British intelligence services, Russia's irrecoverable losses (deaths and severe injuries) since the beginning of the invasion range between [150,000 and 190,000 military personnel](#), and the total number of casualties, including those wounded who can return to the battlefield, reaches up to 290,000 individuals.

In the meantime, mobilized soldiers continue to complain about [the lack of ammunition](#) and [equipment](#) on the frontlines, as well as the absence of artillery support during assaults, leading to increased casualties among them. Ultimately, those who refuse to fight or carry out orders are apprehended and [punished in underground facilities](#). In an even more inhumane manner, according to the White House, Russia is killing soldiers who violate orders and is threatening entire units [with execution if they retreat in the face of Ukrainian artillery bombardment](#), a development that US national security officials say underscores Russia's morale concerns. Furthermore, [on social media](#), there is an increasing number of appeals from the relatives of Russian soldiers who are concerned about the fate of the mobilized individuals. They are [requesting leave for mobilized soldiers](#), although it is communicated to them directly that there will be no rotation, and they will remain on the front lines, if they survive, until the end of the war.

On the internal politics front, it has been notable that three of Alexei Navalny's lawyers – Igor Sergunin, Alexey Liptser, and Vadim Kobzev – [have been arrested](#), while another managed to leave the Russian Federation before being apprehended and accused of involvement in an "extremist organization." Additionally, in Russia, during the first half of 2023, the number of individuals convicted under the article related [to state treason has increased fourfold](#), and the number of those convicted under the article related to disclosing state secrets has increased by a quarter. Furthermore, [Vladimir Nekrasov](#), the president of the Russian company Lukoil, passed away suddenly at the age of 66. The company stated that he suffered from acute heart failure and declined to provide further details about his death. The previous head of Lukoil's board, Ravil Maganov, died in September 2022 after falling from a hospital window in Moscow.

On the economic front, in the context of the ruble's devaluation, which has exceeded the [100 rubles per dollar mark this month](#), certain Russian export companies have been compelled by a decree signed by Vladimir Putin [to convert their foreign currency earnings into rubles](#). Russia's central bank [raised its interest rate 200 basis points higher than expected to 15%](#), raising borrowing costs for the fourth consecutive time in response to a weak ruble and persistent inflationary pressures. Since July, the central bank has raised rates by 750 basis points.

Furthermore, in an attempt to restrict the population's access to independent sources of information, the Russian authority responsible for overseeing communication and social media (Roskomnadzor) [intends to block virtual private networks](#) starting from March 1st, 2024.

Moreover, the Russian Parliament fulfilled President Vladimir Putin's request and passed, in its final reading, [the bill revoking Russia's ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#) (CTBT). Following this, Russia conducted a military exercise in which it successfully simulated "[a massive nuclear strike, on land, sea, and in the air](#)." Moscow had stated that it has no intention of conducting a nuclear explosion test in the future, but "[the possibility cannot be ruled out](#)."

On the international scene, immediately after Kim Jong-un's visit to Moscow last month, [a significant increase in freight train traffic](#) was observed at the border between North Korea and the Russian Federation through satellite imagery, indicating what appears to be an ammunition transfer. Subsequently, the [United States directly accused North Korea for the first time of providing equipment and ammunition to Russia](#) for the war in Ukraine. In this regard, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, during his visit to Pyongyang, expressed [his gratitude to North Korea for supporting Russia's "special military operation"](#) in Ukraine.

Following his visit to North Korea, the Russian foreign minister traveled to Tehran to participate in [a meeting of foreign ministers from Russia, Armenia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan](#) to discuss the regional issue in the South Caucasus and to mediate the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Additionally, Lavrov met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and held discussions with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian [regarding joint energy and logistics projects](#). Moreover, throughout this month, Vladimir Putin made his first foreign visits after receiving an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC). During his visit to Kyrgyzstan, the Russian president held meetings with his Kyrgyz counterpart, [Sadyr Japarov](#), as well as with Tajikistan's [Emomali Rahmon](#) and Azerbaijan's [Ilham Aliyev](#). He also participated in a meeting of the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with the aim of strengthening cooperation, particularly with the former Soviet states in Central Asia, which have maintained relatively good relations with the Russian Federation since the Ukraine invasion.

Furthermore, Vladimir Putin attended the "Belt & Road" summit in Beijing, where he had a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping [to enhance cooperation between the two countries](#). Although the Chinese president mentioned "[close and effective strategic coordination](#)" between the two nations, no major bilateral agreements were concluded at the end of the meeting, as [the construction project of the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline](#), which Moscow would like to use as a substitute to Nord Stream 2, shows no real progress.

During the same event in Beijing, Vladimir Putin met with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, where they [reaffirmed their "common commitment"](#) to maintaining close bilateral ties, despite international tensions related to the war in Ukraine. Additionally, in the past month, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto made his [fifth trip to Russia](#) since the beginning of the Russian military invasion in Ukraine.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu also traveled to Beijing, to attend the tenth Xiangshan Security Forum. In that context, he [argued that Western strategy threatens a nuclear arms race](#), accused Western countries of exploiting Ukraine as a "battering ram," and revealed that the United States' biological-military actions are gaining traction.

Over the past weeks, [Vladimir Putin had a meeting at the Kremlin with the Iraqi Prime Minister](#), Mohammed al-Sudani, during which he highlighted Russia's position on the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Putin characterized the situation as "[a clear example of the failure of American policy in the Middle East, where the interests of the Palestinian people have not been taken into account](#)." Furthermore, the Russian president advocates [for a two-state solution](#) for a long-term resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue and maintains [that the bloodshed in the region must cease](#), as failure to do so could lead to an escalation of the conflict beyond the Middle East.

Moscow's clear support for one side of the Israeli-Hamas over the other was showcased the most when a [Hamas delegation visited Moscow](#) for talks on the release of foreign hostages, including Russian citizens the group is currently holding in Gaza. Abu Marzouk, a senior Hamas member, was among those who attended the talks. The Palestinian group issued its own statement, in which it praised the efforts of President Vladimir Putin and the Russian foreign ministry to put an end to what it called "the crimes of Israel that are supported by the West." In contrast, the Russian Foreign Ministry's message said nothing about the [Russians who died during the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October](#). According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, 23 Russian citizens were killed and four

others are missing. [In response to the Moscow meeting, the Israeli Foreign Ministry said](#) that "Israel considers the invitation of Hamas leaders to Moscow an unworthy move, which provides an impetus for terror and legitimizes the atrocities of Hamas terrorists."

Evolutions in the Republic of MOLDOVA

In early October, the Republic of Moldova's European ambitions received [a boost from the European Parliament](#), which reaffirmed its commitment to the country's future accession to the European Union, with negotiations expected to be launched before the end of the year. The document was passed by a large majority: 448 votes "for", 45 "against" and 43 abstentions. Elsewhere, in a meeting with Dorin Recean, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, NATO's Secretary General declared that "Moscow continues to apply pressure on Moldova [...] including energy blackmail and disinformation with the aim of destabilizing your society and undermining the country's democracy." President Maia Sandu [held a press briefing after a meeting](#) of the Supreme Security Council, where she highlighted the biggest dangers that the Republic of Moldova faces: the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation against Moldova, politicians loyal to the Kremlin, oligarchs who have weakened the country and its institutions and the deeply entrenched corruption.

The government in Chişinău continued to distance itself from the Russian led institutions, denouncing [four other agreements concluded](#) on the CIS platform, including in the field of defense, intelligence, while also slashing funding which went towards the United Institute for Nuclear Research. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova [has again banned](#) former members of the Şor Party from running for public office in the next three years. The change was made possible through the modification of the Electoral Code, after the Constitutional Court had canceled the previous restrictions imposed on former party members. [20 Russian media websites](#) have been blocked, based on their role in the information warfare in the country. The decree, published online by the Republic of Moldova's Intelligence and Security Service, listed 22 Russian news resources to be blocked, including prominent ones such as Russia Today, NTV, Ren TV, state media holding VGTRK and others. This was followed by another ban on a further 31 sites and 6 TV channels who distort the media space, many of which are [directly controlled by the Russian government](#), as stated by Moldova's chief of the Intelligence Service.

A point of tension was also registered between Russian and Moldovan church authorities, as Metropolitan Bishop Vladimir [sent a critical letter to his hierarchical superior, Patriarch Kiril](#) of Moscow, in which he reproaches him for several things, including his support for Putin's war in Ukraine, Russia's "disrespectful" attitude towards Moldovans and the Russian Patriarchate's "abandonment" of the Moldovan Metropolitanate. The Moldovan Orthodox Church is directly subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate.

When contacted, the secretary of the Moldovan Metropolitanate, Vadim Cheibaş, confirmed the authenticity of the document, which is dated September 5, 2023. In the letter, Metropolitan Vladimir accuses Patriarch Kiril of abandoning him and of being unable to stop the rise of the Metropolitanate of Bessarabia, which is supported by the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian and Moldovan authorities. Moreover, the high prelate claims that the Republic of Moldova will soon unite with Romania. In the same note, he also reproaches Moscow for not understanding that Moldovans have Latin roots and wanted to assimilate them to the "Russian world", which "is alien to the aspirations and national values" of Moldovans, as well as for not responding to requests for funding and compensation for gas bills, which gave the Romanian state the opportunity to help the Metropolitanate of Bessarabia and attract the sympathy of priests.

In the energy sector, the Republic of Moldova is well poised to withstand the coming winter with no gas coming from Russia. The country's gas reserves are expected to cover its needs at least [until February](#), with 280,000,000 cubic meters in [storage](#).

Regarding Chisinau's relations with Bucharest, Romania is interested in [buying the free International port of Giurgiulesti](#), the government in Bucharest having already discussed the acquisition with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The planned acquisition will not cover the state-owned section of the port. Moreover, military personnel from the Republic of [Moldova and](#)

[Romania are taking part](#) in the international exercise "Joint Combined Exchange Training-2023" (JCET), organized at the Military Training Base of the Army of the Republic of Moldova from 23 October to 3 November.

Meanwhile, as its support from Moscow is decreasing, Transnistria is showing a friendlier face to Chisinau, since leader of the Transnistrian separatist region has called [for the resumption of negotiations](#) to resolve the Transnistrian conflict in the "5+2" format in a meeting with the head of the OSCE mission in Chisinau, Kelly Keiderling. He acknowledged that "at the moment, the negotiating tools are not being used effectively, the meetings often have no practical value, and the decisions taken not only do not solve the accumulated problems, but aggravate the situation".

—— **Central European Elections: Significance for Kyiv**

In light of recent trends among some EU member states to obstruct aid packages for Ukraine, Slovakia and Poland recently held national parliamentary elections in which political factions supporting these tendencies fared well. The populist SMER party [received 23.4% of the vote in Slovakia's national legislative elections on September 30](#), defeating the liberal Progressive Slovakia party (who received approximately 18% of the vote) by a considerable margin. The troubling aspect of this outcome is that Robert Fico, the winning party's leader, changed his political stance to appeal to the electorate, taking extreme positions such as opposing Ukraine's arming, supporting peace talks with Russia and aligning himself with Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban. Fico has also expressed alarm about the influx of migrants through Slovakia and has threatened to reject Ukraine's NATO membership as well as any economic sanctions on Russia.

SMER needed coalition partners to rule with a majority in the country's 150-seat Parliament. In that sense, [it signed an agreement with](#) the left-wing Hlas, or Voice, party, which finished third in the election and has 27 lawmakers in the new parliament, and the ultra-nationalist and pro-Russia Slovak National Party, which has 10 MPs. After the government was established, Fico [declared, in a manner reminiscent of Russian propaganda](#), that "today marks the end of the rule of political NGOs in Slovakia," adding that NGOs with foreign funding "must be labeled as foreign agents", similar to already-existing foreign agent laws in the Russian Federation. In this context, Fico [was threatened by European Socialist Party leader Stefan Löfven with expulsion from the EU group](#) to which his party is affiliated, but he stated that he would rather "pay the price" of exclusion than change his stance towards Ukraine. The SMER party's hostility to Ukraine has also put pressure on Slovak President Zuzana Caputova, [who refused to sign another assistance package drafted by the Ministry of Defence](#), claiming that the results of the elections, which are now leading to a coalition that is opposed to Ukrainian military aid, must be considered.

Robert Fico's positions were showcased again in an EU Summit, where he [blocked a 50 billion euro aid package for Ukraine](#), this time citing corruption as one of his main justifications. This only drew Fico closer to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who also chose to oppose this package. Considering Orban's handshake with Vladimir Putin at the aforementioned Summit in Beijing and the Hungarian Foreign Minister's visits to [Moscow](#) and [Minsk](#) this month, Budapest drew heavy criticism from its European counterparts. Regarding the funding blockage by Budapest, Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel said [Hungary should not hinder the EU decision-making process](#) on new financial assistance for Ukraine in an attempt to release its own frozen EU funds. Meanwhile, Orban claimed that he does not support the pathway chosen by EU's member states regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war, claiming that [their strategy "has failed"](#) and that the bloc should create a Plan B because the Ukrainians will not win on the front lines.

While Robert Fico's win signified a further move in Central Europe against political liberalism, the situation differed in Poland, where the ruling conservative Law and Justice (PiS) Party occupied the first place in the October 15 parliamentary elections, but will not be able to form a majority. [According to the final results](#), PiS received 35.4 percent of the vote, followed by the centrist Civic Coalition (30.7%), the center-right Third Way (14.4%), the Left (8.6%), and the far-right Confederation (7.2%). That implies Law and Justice will have 194 members in parliament, Civic Coalition will have 157, Third Way will have 65, the Left will have 26, and Confederation will have 18. This apparent success of PiS is offset by the fact that Poland's three most important opposition parties, all of which have more centrist positions, will be able to form a legislative majority. The outcome of these elections will

also have an impact on Poland-Ukraine ties, which have experienced diplomatic tensions in September. Historically, the PiS-led government has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression, providing both humanitarian and military assistance, despite certain tensions regarding grain importing, possibly fueled by PiS as a result of increasing Ukraine fatigue in Poland. This support for Ukraine will most likely be maintained thoroughly, while Warsaw will now most likely have a much more open and collaborative position towards Brussels.

The Balkans

In terms of regional tensions, the situation between Serbia and Kosovo has remained contentious, particularly since the September 24 Banjska shooting. Milan Radoicic, a controversial businessman who confessed to organizing the above-mentioned armed operation in north Kosovo with a group of Serbs that killed four people, [was arrested for obtaining and having an outstanding quantity of firearms](#). However, a Belgrade court [later rejected calls to arrest Milan Radoicic](#), but ordered him not to leave the country and confiscated his passport. On top of that, Prime Minister Albin Kurti [has accused a criminal gang from northern Serbia with government ties](#) of carrying out the attack. Belgrade promptly dismissed the claims as "blatant lies".

These events elicited international reactions as well, particularly after [Albania's Prime Minister, Edi Rama, who called for NATO's peacekeeping mission](#) in Kosovo to increase its presence in the region. Later, the United Kingdom [decided to deploy 200 additional troops to NATO's peacekeeping mission](#) in Kosovo, and Romania [reinforced its Kosovo Force peacekeeping mission](#) by more than 130 troops. However, NATO [has clearly stated that it has no intention of taking over policing](#) responsibilities in the Serb-majority north. Aside from that, Kosovo's Economy Minister, as a retaliatory measure against allegedly involvement of Serb majority party in Kosovo in last month's shooting, says [the government will not continue allocating state funds to cover energy bills in the Serb-majority north](#), where consumers have not paid for electricity since the 1999 Kosovo war ended. This action might respark interethnic tensions.

Additional tensions over freedom restrictions have recently been reported in Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity of Republika Srpska, where [the local government has begun public consultations on a controversial bill](#) that would prohibit non-profit organizations from engaging in "political activities," require their registration in a special registry, and subject them to increased legal oversight, measures that very much remind of Russia's foreign agent legislation.

In Serbia, in terms of domestic policy, President Aleksandar Vucic [has confirmed that urgent parliamentary elections, as well as local elections](#) in the capital Belgrade and Vojvodina province will be held on December 17, thus capitalizing on the opposition's demand for elections and hoping for a better result for his ruling Serbian Progressive Party, SNS. While solely local elections in Belgrade and Vojvodina, as initially planned, would have most likely resulted in a defeat for Vucic, who is unpopular in those regions, nationwide parliamentary elections favor him, according to Serbian analysts. Foreign policy-wise, President Vucic met with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing, as [Xi Jinping](#) pointed out how their collaboration in „fields such as infrastructure development and production capacity has yielded fruitful results“. In that context, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Milos Vucevic [stated that Chinese military equipment has significantly strengthened his country's armed forces](#), citing the FK-3 medium-range anti-aircraft missile system (similar to Russia's S-300 or the US Patriot) and the CH-95 and CH-92A drones as among the most important defensive systems acquired by Serbia.

Apart from distinct ethnic tensions and supportive acts made towards Ukraine in the context of Russia's full-fledged invasion, recent events relating to the Hamas-Israel war have also reverberated across the Balkans region. Protests in support of both Israel or Palestine [have been held in cities across the Balkans and Central Europe, highlighting divisions](#) over the recent Middle Eastern confrontation and over who is to blame. While demonstrators in Turkey, Greece, and Bosnia supported Palestine, governments in Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, and Croatia supported Israel. The Israeli-Hamas war was not a significant topic in Serbian politics or society. However, in the predominantly Muslim Sandzak district of Serbia's southwest, locals in Novi Pazar organized a protest calling for an end to violence against Palestine. Despite these divisions, all [Balkan nations are evacuating their citizens from Israel](#), as governments denounce Hamas's attacks.

Turkey is the region's most (pro)active actor in the Ukraine conflict, maintaining dialogue with both parts of the war. Turkish company BAYKAR [would invest \\$100 million in Ukraine](#), including a plant, service center, and headquarters. Additionally, Turkey [is preparing to host the third international meeting of national security advisers](#) to drum up support for a peace summit Ukraine wants to hold later this year, and, together with Romania and Bulgaria, [discusses the creation of a joint force to remove any mines that end up in their waters](#) as a result of Russia's war on Ukraine. Furthermore, on October 10, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin [discussed the Israeli war, concentrating on an early ceasefire and the restart of negotiations](#).

Bulgaria [has also joined the entry ban on cars with Russian license plates](#). While it was the only EU country permitted to continue receiving Russian oil by sea, following the EU embargo imposed in December, [as part of its efforts to minimize Russian energy purchases](#) and plans to phase out Russian oil fully by October 2024, it increased oil imports from other countries in October this year. Additionally, Sofia [has also started constructing Unit 7 at the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant](#), using US technology that is unique to Europe, and with an initial government investment of €250 million.

In the meantime



Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo says that negotiations between the [European Union and Ukraine regarding EU membership](#) would begin as early as December. "In my view, Ukraine has made considerable progress in meeting the requirements set before it," said Orpo, referring to Ukraine's potential accession into the European Union. The Finnish government leader added that a report would be prepared within a week (from October 30 onwards) on how candidate countries have advanced in meeting the criteria for EU accession.



Russia and China signed the [largest grain supply contract](#) worth around \$25.7 billion, leader of the New Overland Grain Corridor initiative Karen Ovsepyan told *TASS*. "We are definitely more than replacing the lost volumes of Ukrainian exports thanks to Siberia and the Far East," Ovsepyan noted. According to him, the New Overland Grain Corridor initiative would be launched soon. "At the end of November - beginning of December, at a meeting of the heads of government of Russia and China, an intergovernmental agreement on the initiative will be signed," he said.



Former Wagner Group mercenaries are [joining Chechnya's Akhmat battalion](#) and heading to the war in Ukraine, Akhmat Battalion Commander Aпти Alaudinov told *RIA Novosti*, calling it a "mass influx." Alaudinov said he believes Wagner Group fighters choose the Akhmat battalion due to a "similar ethos between the commanders and fighters in the unit, a high level of training, and Akhmat's provision of everything necessary for combat operations."



The Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina set November 22 as the date for a [hearing into the case of Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik](#), who faces charges related to his efforts to ignore decisions by an international envoy. Dodik, the leader of the Republika Srpska region of Bosnia and Herzegovina and an ally of Vladimir Putin on the international arena, refused to enter a plea at an initial hearing on October 16, calling the proceedings "a circus." Dodik, along with the the head of Republika Srpska's official legal gazette, Milos Lukic, is charged with criminal offenses in connection with efforts to ignore decisions by Bosnia's Constitutional Court and by the international High Representative Christian Schmidt.