

# RUSSIA MONITOR

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SOURCE: XINHUAPHOTOSHOTREPORTER, EAST NEWS

11 November 2023

## UKRAINE ADVANCES LEGISLATION TO BAN MOSCOW-AFFILIATED ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Ukraine's parliament voted overwhelmingly (267-15) on Thursday, October 19 to advance legislation seen as effectively banning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church over its ties to Moscow. The bill requires further voting before it gets finalized and reaches the desk of President Volodymyr Zelensky. Ukraine's efforts to ban all Moscow-linked religious affiliation is yet another chapter in the historical split between the Orthodox churches in the two countries that generates thus political tensions.

Historically, the Russian Orthodox Church, or the Moscow Patriarchate, has exploited religious convergence to exert influence on

Ukraine. The Romanovs, for example, believed that a common Orthodox denomination of eastern Slavic nations could bring them

together under the banner of Great Rus'. Whereas the Soviet regime viewed religion as an obstacle, Vladimir Putin has regularly professed and used religious connections to the Orthodox Church for political gain.

Ukraine is an overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian nation, with 78 percent of adults identifying as Orthodox, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey. This is up from 31 percent of respondents who said they were Orthodox Christian in 1991, so the year the officially atheist Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine gained its independence. With roughly 35 million Orthodox Christians, Ukraine now has the third-largest Orthodox population in the world, after Russia and Ethiopia.

After the Euromaidan revolution in 2014, Kyiv began intensified efforts to split from the Russian Church. To break ties with the Russian Church, in 2019, former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced

the creation of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, marking a historic split from Russia. Independence, or autocephaly, was granted to the new church from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Bartholomew. Consequently, two major Orthodox denominations have been present in the country.

According to the OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, before the war, there were 11,500 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church and just 6,000 parishes of the newly-formed and newly-recognised Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Since the Russian invasion that began on February 24, 2022, many parishes have switched allegiance to the Ukrainian national church. The whole process is gaining momentum although some priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate say they disapprove of the actions of Patriarch Kirill and the Russian Federation. ■

13 November 2023

## UKRAINE'S COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ON THE WAR WITH RUSSIA IN THE INTERVIEW WITH THE ECONOMIST

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**The October escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of a series of crises characteristic of the 2020s. At the same time, there is a phenomenon typical of democratic societies, which is a focus on one event that attracts worldwide attention. Therefore, the protracted war in Ukraine becomes a side issue in the stream of information inundating public opinion from the conflicted Middle East.**

**D**espite the information smokescreen, an interview with General Valeriy Zaluzhny, Ukraine's commander-in-chief, and his essay "Modern Positional Warfare and How to Win It" in *The Economist* resonated widely among

experts. In the interview, Gen. Zaluzhny summarized another stage of the war, which has been characterized by a Ukrainian counteroffensive over the last five months. The description portrays an image of a new



SOURCE: YULIIA OVSIANNIKOVA, EAST NEWS

positional warfare, which in its form resembles the battles known from the western front of World War I. Despite prolonged struggles and the direct use of Western supplies, the Ukrainian army has been unable to break through the heavily fortified Russian defense lines. In this situation, even the Leopards and Abrams, in which significant hopes were placed, did not prove to be helpful. Gen. Zaluzhnyi points out that Ukraine's air superiority may be crucial for the outcome of the war, with hopes resting on Western F-16 aircraft.

The lack of a visible breakthrough and heightened expectations arising from the Kharkiv counteroffensive in September 2022 are reflected in a decrease in the morale of Ukrainian society and disappointment among Ukraine's Western allies. The key factor here is the position of the United States, where there has been a significant shift in public opinion towards Israel. Additionally, the strengthening position of the Republicans underscores the current involvement of the Western leader, which is a matter of concern.

Gen. Zaluzhnyi—as well as a group of military experts—emphasized the incorrect assessment of the attitudes of the Russian society. Initially, there were expectations that high casualties would lead to a scenario similar to the events of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan when the societal trauma accompanying the war ceased hostilities and thus contributed to the demise of the Soviet regime. Although Russia suffered ten times bigger losses than in Afghanistan, the Russian Federation still maintains operational capability and mobilization potential, which Vladimir Putin keeps exploiting in the run for the next term as president.

In his remarks, Gen. Zaluzhnyi reflected on the protracted war in Ukraine. The promised victory by the Ukrainian elites, which was supposed to be solidified through allied support, should not be taken for granted. Both geopolitical factors and the consolidation of the Russian army are giving a boost to the Kremlin. ■



SOURCE: RFERL.ORG

13 November 2023

## **RUSSIA WITHDRAWS FROM SECURITY TREATY, TRIGGERS RESPONSE FROM NATO**

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Russia has formally withdrawn from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), an agreement that sets limits on key categories of conventional military equipment. In response to Russia pulling out of the agreement, NATO froze operations for the treaty, saying it would not be feasible for the treaty to exist where allied parties abide by it and Russia does not. According to sources in the United States, a new reality will exert a positive impact on NATO's deterrence and defense capabilities.

Russia's foreign ministry said on November 6 Russia had formally withdrawn from the pact at midnight-- and that the treaty was now "history". "The CFE Treaty was concluded at the end of the Cold War, when the formation of a new architecture of global and European security based on cooperation seemed possible, and appropriate attempts were made," the ministry said. In addition, Russia blamed the United States, saying its push for enlargement of NATO had led to alliance countries openly circumventing the treaty's group restrictions. It added that Sweden's application into NATO also undermined security in Europe. "Even the formal preservation of the CFE Treaty has become unacceptable from the point of view of Russia's fundamental security interests," the ministry said. In 2007 Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree suspending

Russia's participation in the CFE treaty. In 2015, Russia dealt another symbolic blow to European security by halting active participation in the treaty.

Before Russia announced its intention to exit the treaty, NATO condemned the decision, saying it undermined Euro-Atlantic security. In June 2023, the military bloc said Russia had for many years not complied with its CFE obligations, claiming Moscow's war of aggression against Ukraine was contrary to the objectives of the treaty.

The CFE was a landmark arms control agreement signed on November 19, 1990, in Paris between sixteen NATO states and six Warsaw Pact countries. It mandated the destruction of excess weaponry. ■

14 November 2023

## **RUSSIA INCREASES AIR STRIKES AGAINST UKRAINE'S ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE**

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**Russia has attacked Ukrainian energy infrastructure 60 times in the last several weeks, Ukrainian officials have reported as winter approaches, driving up energy consumption. According to Ukraine's intelligence agency, Russia has already begun a campaign of attacks on the Ukrainian power grid. Last winter, thousands of Russian drones and missiles targeted Ukraine's power sector. After just six weeks of intense bombing of energy infrastructure in 2022, Russia has battered Ukraine to the brink of a humanitarian disaster as people lived in horrifying conditions without electricity, heat, or running water. Russian forces attacked a thermal power plant in eastern Ukraine. Electricity distribution networks in the Dnipropetrovsk region, the Donetsk region, the Kharkiv region, and the Kherson region were all also damaged due to Russian shelling. Ukrenergo said a total of 431 settlements were without electricity due to combat actions in different regions.**



SOURCE: WYBORCZA.PL

These attacks have not caused nationwide blackouts yet. The attacks prevent the power grid from being efficiently protected, thus Ukraine's energy infrastructure becomes an easy target. Ukraine said the help of partners for the Ukrainian energy sector was

very important to protect energy facilities. Ukraine has better air defenses this winter, but its energy system is more vulnerable to attacks. Kyiv anticipates that Moscow will once again intensify strikes on its energy sector as temperatures fall. ■

14 November 2023

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION PROPOSES OPENING EU ACCESSION TALKS FOR UKRAINE

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SOURCE: ATLANTIC COUNCIL

**In early November, the European Commission recommended opening EU accession negotiations with Ukraine once it meets final conditions. The decision was taken by the bloc as the Commission released its long-awaited annual enlargement report. For the first time, the European Union recommended opening EU membership negotiations with a country formally being at war.**

**I**n the report, attention was drawn to Ukraine's successes in implementing reforms related to media freedom, judiciary, constitutional tribunal, and combating the shadow economy. The talks should formally be launched once Kyiv satisfies the remaining conditions related to stepping up the fight against corruption. The European Commission expects the removal of the personnel limit at

the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and an increase in its operational capabilities. Ukraine should also adopt a law on lobbying in line with EU standards. Ukraine has also committed to respecting and strengthening the rights of national minorities.

EU leaders are expected to decide whether to endorse the recommendations at a summit in

Brussels in December. Neighboring Moldova as well as Georgia also received a similar message from Brussels. The EU is also ready to open accession negotiations with Bosnia-Herzegovina, once the necessary degree of compliance is achieved.

The commission's recommendation coincides with the setback of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, as outlined in an interview with General Valeriy Zaluzhny for "The Economist". In addition, the matter of Ukraine

was somewhat overshadowed by the Middle East conflict. In a nation where current support for EU membership exceeds 80 percent, the prospect of accession has a largely positive impact on society, boosting morale in the ongoing struggle against the invader. Within the EU, however, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban voiced objection to Ukraine's membership talks with the EU, criticizing Kyiv's treatment of Hungarian minorities in Transcarpathia. ■

15 November 2023

## POLISH TRUCKER PROTESTS POSE THREAT TO UKRAINIAN ECONOMY

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**While the new Polish parliament held its inaugural session, Polish truckers extended their blockade along the border with Ukraine to protest against competition from Ukrainian drivers. Queues are stretching on both sides of the border at several crossings.**

Polish protests on November 6 blocked three major Poland-Ukraine border crossings. Some 200 Polish truckers initiated a token strike on March 22, 2023, in Warsaw, but negotiations have all but failed. Polish truckers complain that the high number of Ukrainian drivers entering Poland are hauling goods from Poland to other countries under a deal that the European Union and Ukraine struck in June. As a result, the EU allowed Ukrainian carriers to move goods without obtaining permits for an easier and faster flow of shipments.

The EU's decision delivered a blow to truckers in the bloc's east, notably in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland. The deal sparked outcry in Poland, where transportation services account for 6 percent of the country's gross domestic product and employ thousands of transportation workers while being a vital pillar

of the Polish economy. The liberalization of freight transportation resulting from the war allows Ukrainian carriers privileged conditions compared to EU carriers, who are burdened by national and EU regulations such as the mobility package.

The protestors urged to reinstate permits to haul all goods, except for humanitarian and military cargoes, suspend permits for companies founded after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, and remove the electronic queue system in Ukraine. On November 16, Slovak carriers blocked the Vyshne Nemecke border checkpoint with Ukraine in protest against the cancellation of permits for Ukrainian carriers. In this way, Slovakia joined the Polish carriers who are also striking at the border with Ukraine.

As carriers continue to extend the Ukraine border blockade, a new government is now



SOURCE: BANKIER.PL

being formed in Warsaw. Efforts to end the blockade during this transitional period are challenging without solid governance in Poland. To make matters worse for Ukraine, Poland ranked first in 2022 in bilateral trade in goods between Ukraine and European states as it accounted for almost 25 percent of the total volume.

The Ukraine border standoff could be a catastrophe for Ukraine's defense efforts. The Ukrainian infrastructure ministry said Ukraine had offered to introduce separate lanes for empty trucks at the Yahodyn-Dorohusk border crossing as well as to update an electronic queue management system for freight vehicles.

Ukrainian authorities say they cannot meet all the demands outlined by the protestors. They also criticized the Polish government for taking insufficient steps to end the blockade.

The border blockade is another example of the deterioration in Polish-Ukrainian relations as the trade dispute has sparked tensions in both states. For instance, Ukrainian organizations have appealed to Ukraine's president to help unblock the border with Poland and sanction protesters and politicians in favor of the blockade. A key to tackling the crisis would be the joint efforts of the European Union and the Polish government. ■



SOURCE: USNEWS.COM

15 November 2023

## **RUSSIA, CHINA CEMENT MILITARY TIES**

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Russian President Vladimir Putin, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Zhang Youxia, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission and a close associate of Chinese President Xi Jinping, met on Wednesday, November 8, in Moscow for talks. It was the second meeting between senior Russian and Chinese officials since October 30 when they met in Beijing. At the summit, Chinese and Russian politicians detailed deepening military relations between the two nations and discussed the implementation of bilateral agreements.

Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized that “Russia and China are not building any military alliances based on Cold War pattern.” He also hailed mutually beneficial cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. Sergei Shoigu said that defense ties between Russia and China are not aimed at third countries. “Unlike certain aggressive Western countries, we are not creating a military bloc,” he said. The Russian defense ministry also criticized NATO and Western nations for destroying the energy market and fueling geopolitical tensions. Vladimir Putin emphasized the growing military cooperation between Russia and China on cutting-edge defense technologies. Both states regularly stage joint air force and navy drills.

General Zhang praised Putin for not caving into pressure from Western sanctions. The United States is concerned by greater alignment between China and Russia. Senior officials in Washington claim that the United States must prepare for possible simultaneous wars with Russia and China. Moscow and Beijing further boosted military cooperation after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In April, former Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu vowed that China was willing to work with Russia to make new contributions to the maintenance of world and regional security and stability. He also emphasized the special nature and strategic importance of Chinese–Russian bilateral ties. Many signs are that as tensions grow between Russia and the West, Russian–Chinese military cooperation will only gain momentum. ■

16 November 2023

## WILL NEW RUSSIAN GAS PIPELINE HELP MOSCOW RECOVER FROM SANCTIONS?

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**Following sanctions imposed amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and sabotage attacks on the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline, Russia sustained huge losses as much of the European market has been lost. Consequently, Russia’s alternative is to try to sell its gas to new markets-- also via the Power-of-Siberia-2 gas pipeline that could help Moscow double gas shipments to China and thus make up for some of the lost markets. The project is operated by Russian state-run gas firm Gazprom.**

The Power-of-Siberia-2 pipeline runs through northern Russia and into China’s northwestern Xinjiang province. The new route would possibly cut through Mongolia. The

2,600-km pipeline could carry 50 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas a year. According to Reuters, some analysts have put the cost at up to \$13.6 billion.



SOURCE: FINANCIALPOST.COM

The first Power-of-Siberia pipeline, which has been operational since 2019, runs for 3,000 km through Siberia and into China's northeastern Heilongjiang province. The pipeline could carry 61 bcm of gas a year. Gazprom already supplies 38 bcm of gas to China per year through the first Power-of-Siberia pipeline under a 30-year, \$400 billion deal, which was launched in 2014.

There are two major areas of risk for this project. In the first place, to what extent will the project be economically viable and what will the return

rate look like? Also, the project is undermined by extra costs related to the need to transport large volumes of gas.

Close energy partnership is another chapter of the growing bonhomie between Russia and China, who already have developed a robust military alliance. Xi Jinping himself openly speaks about his hope for the dynamic development of cooperation with the Russian Federation and progress regarding the Power-of-Siberia-2 project. ■



SOURCE: BUSINESSINSIDER.COM.PL

17 November 2023

## **RUSSIA'S WAGNER GROUP REPORTED TO HAND OVER WEAPONRY TO HEZBOLLAH, TRIGGERS RESPONSE FROM U.S.**

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According to intelligence sources and news outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, Wagner Group, the Russian paramilitary organization, plans to provide support to Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia, across the border with Israel in the north. Instead of deploying personnel, Wagner Group is poised to supply cutting-edge air-defense systems to the area.

Wagner Group will reportedly hand over short to medium-range Russian-made air-defense systems to Hezbollah, the Panstir-S1, known in the West as SA-22 Greyhound. It is a highly mobile system that offers point air defense against enemy aircraft. The amount of military hardware to be handed over to Hezbollah is not yet known, but the group's joining war against Israel could escalate tensions throughout the region. No information has been given about when or whether Hezbollah could get weapons.

U.S. officials believe that Wagner plans to supply weaponry to Hezbollah is a major threat to security. Pentagon Press Secretary Gen. Patrick

Ryder told journalists that a report that Wagner Group may supply air defense to Hezbollah, if true, was indeed very concerning. Wagner Group and Hezbollah militants have operated for years in Syria against the Syrian opposition.

Wagner fighters also spread antisemitism in Western European states. One example is France that has been the target of a Russian online destabilization campaign that used automated social media accounts to stir up controversy and confusion about spray-painted Stars of David that appeared on buildings throughout the country. Such propaganda seeks to spread disinformation in France, home to large Muslim and Jewish communities. ■

17 November 2023

## UKRAINE IN THE FACE OF MASS DEPOPULATION

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**The Russian invasion of Ukraine has aggravated the country's years-long challenges, notably its already extremely difficult demographic situation.**

In the report *Ukrainian refugees: how many are there, their intentions & return prospects*, the Centre for Economic Strategy stated that as of late June 2023, between 5.6 and 6.7 million people fled Ukraine due to ongoing hostilities. The majority of refugees are women, mostly aged 35-49 years, constituting around 18 percent of all refugees. In addition, many refugees are children. According to data from the Eurostat, as of May 2023, the largest proportions of Ukrainian refugees are based in Germany (27 percent) and Poland (24 percent). The report found that between 1.3 million and

3.3 million Ukrainians may remain abroad under various scenarios--0.4 - 0.6 million more individuals than estimated back in December 2022. This change is the result of the prolonged duration of war and the continued adaptation of refugees to life abroad.

According to the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies, Ukraine had a population of 51.5 million after gaining independence. Despite calls from the United Nations, since 2001, Ukraine has abandoned attempts to perform a census every ten years. In 2019, that is, when Volodymyr Zelensky was already president, a





© Czarek Sokolowski/AP Photo/pictu

SOURCE: POLSKIERADIO.PL

government task force compiled an electronic estimate (the so-called Dubilet census) using data from various sources, including mobile telephone operators. It estimated that Ukraine's population stood at roughly 37 million (excluding Crimea and those parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts which Kyiv does not control). The population of Ukraine has thus lowered by the size of the current population of Belgium. According to the estimates from the Centre for Economic Strategy, the population of Ukraine could now be between 30 and 32 million.

It is believed that the non-return of Ukrainians will significantly impact the Ukrainian economy,

which could lose between 2.7 percent and 6.9 percent of Ukraine's gross domestic product. To make matters worse, the birth rate has dramatically declined in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Institute for the Future reported that the fertility rate has already fallen below 1. The human factor is vital for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. With the current demographic trends, a potential post-war demographic "boom" seems unlikely to achieve generational replacement, where the fertility rate is 2.1 births per female. Consequently, efforts to rebuild Ukraine will resemble a laboratory of the twenty-first century, where the question how to rebuild and maintain a depopulated economy will eventually prevail. ■



SOURCE: BLOOMBERG.COM

18 November 2023

## THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR IMPACTS UKRAINE GLOBALLY

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**The Israel-Hamas war, which broke out in early October, is an efficient distraction from Ukraine. Furthermore, Western societies have begun to suffer from “Ukraine fatigue” amid the wave of populism and isolationism.**

The eruption of conflict between Israel and Hamas has distracted politicians and people worldwide. While in Western Europe, the main reason for shifting attention toward Israel is a sense of guilt over colonialism, the trauma of the Holocaust, and the growing influence of Islam, in the United States,

support for former President Donald Trump’s isolationism is on the rise. The decline in interest in the Ukraine war is also visible in Poland, where the border blockade is not the main topic of socio-political discourse, and the latest public debate regarding Ukraine is marked by negative emotions.

The war in Gaza has taken global attention and resources away from Ukraine's efforts to defend itself. According to polling from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, close to half of the U.S. public thinks the country is spending too much on aid to Ukraine. In November, 45 percent of respondents said the U.S. government was spending too much

on aid to Ukraine in the war against Russia. 59 percent of Republicans now say too much is spent on Ukraine aid--and they could be an ally of Donald Trump if he became the next U.S. president. A debate on the Israel-Hamas war is on in the United States, a factor that polarizes American society. ■

19 November 2023

## DESPITE FALL IN INDIA'S OIL IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA, NEW DELHI CONTINUES TO PURCHASE RUSSIAN CRUDE

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India saw a notable decrease in its crude oil imports from Russia in October amid soaring oil prices and a high supply from Middle Eastern states, notably Saudi Arabia. Oil prices climbed as oil-producing countries in the Middle East intentionally curbed output.

SOURCE: ENERGYINTEL.COM



The Russian invasion of Ukraine has permanently redirected the flows of crude oil, forcing Moscow to look for new markets. Russia has become the biggest oil supplier to India that benefitted from the discount bonanza from the Kremlin. Before Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Russia had been a minor energy partner for India, whose authorities concluded major crude deals with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. India is now the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer. India saved roughly \$2.7 billion by importing discounted Russian oil from January and October 2023 as well as reduced energy dependence on suppliers in the Middle East. India imported some 1.85 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil in the nine months before a drop in imports. In less than a year,

the government has saved an estimated \$3.5 billion by ramping up Russian oil imports. Analysts believe that the October decrease was just a one-off situation as many oil tankers docked in India in early November. A decline in Russian sales to India in October is likely to be compensated by increased purchases in November.

India has remained steadfast in its defense, space, energy, and economic cooperation with Russia, which is a cornerstone of the strategic partnership between the two states. Oil prices are likely to increase soon. In particular, in terms of exporting energy resources to India, Russia will have to compete with Middle Eastern countries, mainly with Saudi Arabia, with whom India has numerous oil contracts. ■

19 November 2023

## **RUSSIAN-CHINESE TRADE EXPECTED TO REACH \$200 BILLION**

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**Trade turnover between the two states looks satisfactory compared to earlier years. China's trade with Russia soared by 27.7 percent, to \$196.48 billion, in the first ten months of 2023. Trade between the two countries in the first four months of 2023 increased by 41.3 percent compared to the same period last year. However, Chinese trade with the European Union and the United States dropped by 13.2 percent and 7.5 percent in 2023, respectively. Russia anticipates that its trade volume with China will surpass \$200 billion in 2023.**

The trade partnership between Beijing and Moscow has maintained a high position for over a decade, with China holding the leading

position in trade with Russia for many years. It is worth noting that both countries exist in an atmosphere of conflict or rivalry with the



SOURCE: RP.PL

United States, which significantly influences the deepening of their bilateral cooperation, not just in economic matters. Consequently, Russia and China made their currencies a preferential vehicle currency in the face of Western sanctions. Before Russia invaded Ukraine early last year, only 3 percent of Russian imports were invoiced in yuan, but by the end of 2022, the share grew to 20 percent, according to a study from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The use of the Chinese yuan is likely to jump considerably in Russian trade. However, India's reluctance to use Chinese yuan to buy Russian oil held up

cargo payments and Russia must come up with an adequate solution to this problem.

Economically, Moscow has gone to the wall and thus it desperately needs new customers as its fossil fuels and other products are shunned by the West. Russian and Chinese officials believe trade cooperation between the two states is flourishing while the government will strive to further deepen economic ties. However, much depends on the People's Republic of China, which is in a position to set certain conditions for Moscow. Chinese and Russian companies have recently signed a major food supply deal. ■



SOURCE: KYIVPOST.COM

21 November 2023

## **ZELENSKY'S APPROVAL RATINGS AMID UKRAINE'S FALL OFFENSIVE**

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**A protracted war in Ukraine has taken its toll on the approval ratings of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. While domestically the president is still associated with the national effort in the fight against the occupant, Ukraine's allies worldwide feel somewhat disappointed amid lengthy war efforts.**

**D**espite that, most of the Ukrainian population still speaks highly of the activities of Volodymyr Zelenskyy as the president of the country--back in April 2022, over 90 percent of respondents were confident in the Ukrainian leader. Similarly, along with the process of acclimatizing to the nationwide state of permanent war, criticism of the authorities

has become socially acceptable. There is a difference between now and 2022 when confidence in Zelensky was synonymous with the national interest. The Razumkov Center's poll as of October 11, 2023, demonstrated that 75 percent of respondents said they had confidence in Volodymyr Zelensky. Meanwhile, the president is weighing the pros and cons of

a March 2024 presidential vote. A debate about whether to hold a wartime election in a country that no longer controls some of its territory is a sign that some opposition groups to the president's office have emerged in Ukraine.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky's image has worsened worldwide, though. According to a July 2023 Pew Research Center poll, views are most positive in Europe, where most states have confidence in Zelensky. However, Hungary and some Mediterranean states indicate no confidence in the Ukrainian

leader. Those skeptical of Zelensky and Ukraine and authoritarian states and BRICS countries, but a setback of the Ukrainian counteroffensive has tarnished the president's reputation in Ukraine's allies. This is essentially about the United States where all eyes are now on the Israel-Hamas war. A July 2023 Gallup poll found that Zelensky's favorability rating with Republicans had declined to 51 percent, down 10 percent from March. Also in Poland, a country that has good ties with Ukraine, Zelensky's popularity has declined, notably among elites. ■

21 November 2023

## UAE, TURKEY PLAN TO RESTRICT RE-EXPORT TO RUSSIA

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**The United Arab Emirates has agreed to restrict the re-export to Russia of sensitive goods used for military purposes in Ukraine. Turkey is also considering a similar measure to limit certain re-exports.**

SOURCE: SHARJAH24.AE



According to the European Parliament, sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation are not sufficiently severe and adequately enforced. In a resolution adopted on November 9, the European Parliament voiced concern over existing loopholes in the EU's sanctions scheme against Russia. The resolution also highlights how critical Western components still find their way to Russia via countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and China. Lawmakers call on the EU and its member states to reinforce and centralize EU-level oversight of sanctions implementation and to develop a reliable mechanism for circumvention prevention and monitoring. EU lawmakers also seek to expand sanctions to include a full ban on the marketing and cutting of diamonds of

Russian origin or re-exported by Russia to the EU. They also urged the EU to strengthen coordination on the enforcement of existing sanctions on Russian oil exports, to properly close the EU market for Russian-origin fossil fuels.

The UAE and Turkey have maintained good ties with Moscow despite Western pressure to help isolate Russia over the invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022. They have not matched global sanctions imposed on Moscow and welcomed Russian oligarchs, which drew criticism from the United States. UAE officials added the UAE remained in close dialogue with international partners about the conflict in Ukraine and its implications for the global economy. ■

22 November 2023

## **RUSSIA TEST-FIRED MISSILE FROM A NEW NUCLEAR SUBMARINE**

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**In early November Russia reportedly carried out a successful test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile designed to carry nuclear warheads from a new nuclear submarine. It is designed to carry up to six nuclear warheads. The twelve-meter missile was launched from an underwater position in the White Sea off Russia's northern coast and hit a target eight thousand kilometers away on the Kamchatka peninsula.**

Launching a ballistic missile was the final test for the vessel, after which a decision should be made on its induction into the fleet. The Borei-class is a new-generation nuclear-powered missile submarine. The Borei-class submarine is armed with 16 ballistic missiles. The Russian navy currently has three Borei-class submarines in service, one more is finishing tests and three others are under

construction.

As for Russia's nuclear-related policies, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law revoking Russia's ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, or CTBT. The CTBT is an international treaty envisioning the banning of nuclear weapons tests and any other nuclear explosions. The treaty was signed on September





SOURCE: BUSINESSINSIDER.COM

24, 1996. However, the treaty has not entered into force, with China, India, or Israel having not ratified it. Russia indeed ratified the treaty, but canceled the ratification in November. In response, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Russian President Vladimir

Putin has made “the world more dangerous” by his decision to walk away from international nuclear agreements. As hostilities continue in Ukraine, Russia’s decision undermines international security. ■

23 November 2023

## **WAGNER GROUP MERCENARIES HAVE LIKELY BEEN FOLDED INTO RUSSIAN NATIONAL GUARD**

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**British intelligence said that large elements of Russia’s Wagner mercenary group have likely been reassigned to serve in the Russian National Guard, or the Rosgvardiya. An arm of Wagner within the Rosgvardiya is reportedly led by Pavel Prigozhin, son of the late Wagner owner Yevgeny Prigozhin.**



SOURCE: INTER-LAB-WOJNA-UKRAINA.UP.KRAKOW.PL

The National Guard was created by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2016 with the aim of bolstering security and defending the rights and freedoms of individuals. The National Guard now has 340,000 personnel in its ranks.

Wagner Group has resumed active recruitment, notably in Perm Krai and the Novosibirsk Oblast. Other groups of Wagner PMC are likely to have joined another Russian PMC, Redut, which has a total of 7,000 members. Some former Wagner mercenaries have signed a contract with the Akhmat group of Chechen special forces. British intelligence agencies believe that the Russian

Federation has been trying to increase its control over Wagner following the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin. This is why major elements of the Wagner have likely been assimilated into the Russian National Guard's command structure. Once folded into the National Guard, the mercenary group will be entitled to use its symbols and insignia. Reassigning Wagner mercenaries into the Rosgvardiya prompts a renewed involvement of the group in hostilities in Ukraine. As the Russian state is now exercising more direct control of Wagner Group activities, it could prevent any mutiny like the one back in June. ■



SOURCE: OSW.WAW.PL

26 November 2023

## **RUSSIA WITHDRAWING FROM KHERSON? IT HAS SHELLED THE CITY CENTER FOR THE TIME BEING**

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**On November 11, equally on the anniversary of the liberation of Kherson by Ukrainian forces, Russia struck the center of the city, shelling it with artillery. Further Russian plans for Kherson are unknown, while foreign media reports indicate that Moscow will slowly withdraw its troops.**

From November 10 to 11, Russian artillery fired nearly 700 shells into the Kherson region, which has been occupied since March. Two people were killed in the shelling, and several buildings and vehicles were destroyed. A year ago, in the west of this region, the Russians destroyed most of the bridges allowing the movement of military forces, mainly over branches of the Dnieper River. Such action was intended to make movement of Ukrainian troops as difficult as possible.

The Kremlin is likely planning a temporary withdrawal from important positions in the south of the Kherson region, according to a Russian media report, which, however, canceled the information shortly after publication. The purpose of such a redeployment of forces was to

move them to more convenient positions east of the left bank of the region, where the Ukrainian operation is currently underway. As a result of such a move, Russian commanders were likely planning to uproot some troops and move them to other fronts. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, the news of a possible troop withdrawal was a simple fake news item that was part of the Russian Federation's provocative actions. The reasons for the cancellation of the original announcement remain de facto unclear.

It is possible that in the future we can expect similar actions by the Russian army withdrawing forces and destroying transportation infrastructure in fear of a Ukrainian counteroffensive. ■

29 November 2023

## RUSSIAN GAS AS A CURE FOR UZBEKISTAN'S RESOURCE SHORTAGE

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**Uzbekistan's demand for gas is increasing due to the upcoming season requiring higher energy consumption and problems in developing domestic fields. Hence, in order to cover the shortage, Tashkent began importing the blue crude from Russia on October 7.**

The supply contract was concluded in June 2023 for a two-year period. Under its terms, Uzbekistan is to receive an average of 9 million cubic meters of gas per day, or about 2.8 billion cubic meters per year. In addition to Russian gas, Uzbekistan is also bound by

contracts with Turkmenistan, among others, from which it imported more than \$286 million worth of crude in September alone. Unfortunately, the amount of contracts with the Russian Federation was not disclosed. According to information provided by



SOURCE: TAIYANGNEWS.INFO

Dzhurabek Mirzamachmudov, Minister of Energy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, it appears that the parties (Russia and Uzbekistan) have agreed that there will be no restrictions on supplies.

Seeking and expanding export opportunities for Russian blue fuel, Moscow has proposed a gas union to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which would allow them to tap into the transmission infrastructure there. This would benefit Gazprom by increasing export opportunities and thus generating more money from gas sales. However, this is not a major enough move

to significantly minimize the losses incurred in lost access to European markets after the invasion of Ukraine.

Uzbekistan's energy demand has increased compared to the previous year. Already for 10 months of 2023, about one million tons more of crude oil and petroleum products were imported than in 2022. The growing demand is due to the economic growth of the Tashkent-based country. Hence, we can only expect wider imports of energy resources in the coming years. ■



SOURCE: DAILYNEUSHUNGARY.COM

30 November 2023

## **RUSSIAN GAS STIRS DIPLOMATIC DISPUTE AMONG EU MEMBERS**

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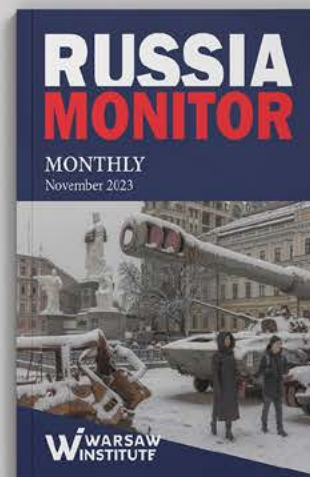
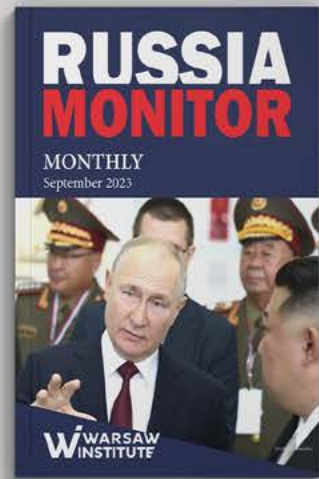
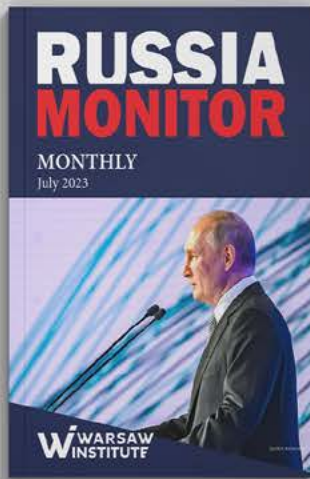
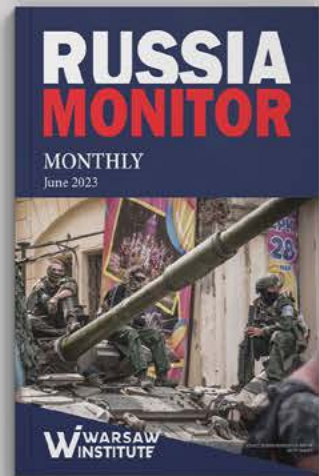
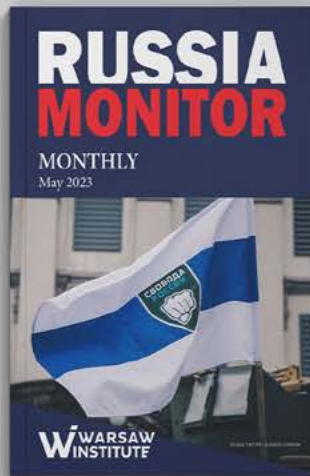
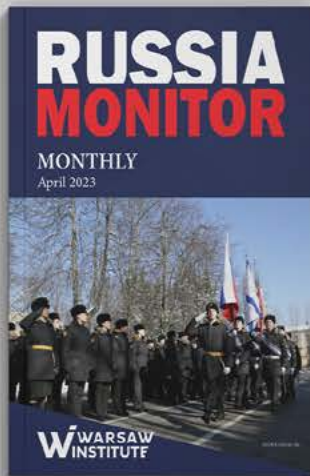
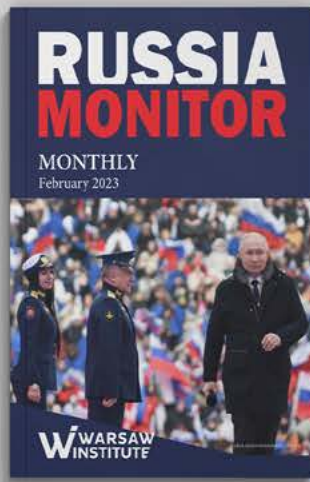
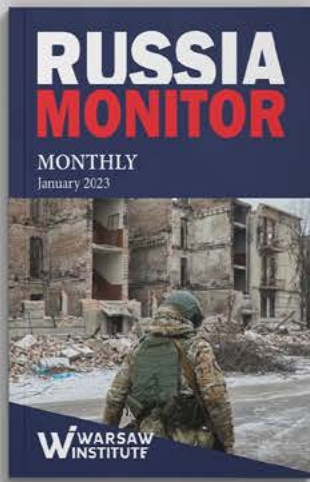
The presence of blue fuel flowing from Russia into the European Union continues to displease many member states and EU lawmakers. Bulgaria imposed a transit tax in October, which just included Russian gas. This was met with opposition from Hungary.

The Budapest-based government is demanding a strong reaction from the European Union and legal action against Bulgaria over the latest tax on Russian crude. The tax applies only to gas flowing strictly through Bulgarian territory and is about 10 euros per megawatt hour. Hungary's main accusation is that Sofia's actions were not consulted with Budapest and its neighbors, which is expected to significantly violate EU customs and trade regulations. The country's representatives point out that such a situation poses a threat not only to the country's energy security, but also to the entire region. In addition to Hungary, Serbia, which also relies in part on the TurkStream gas pipeline, has also raised its voice in opposition.

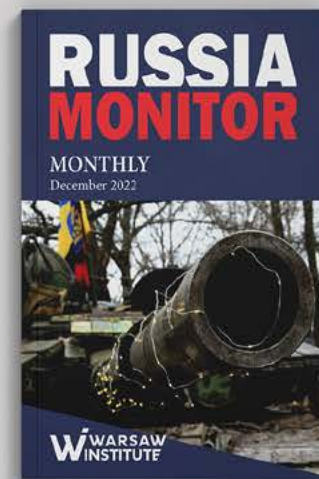
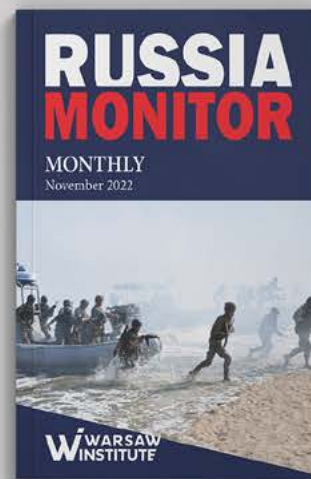
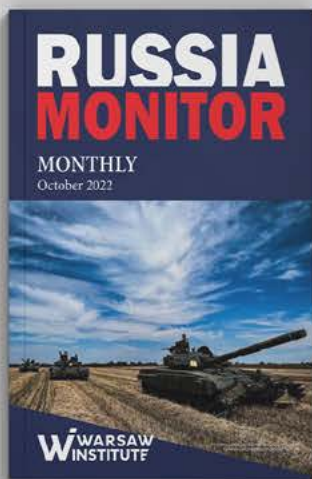
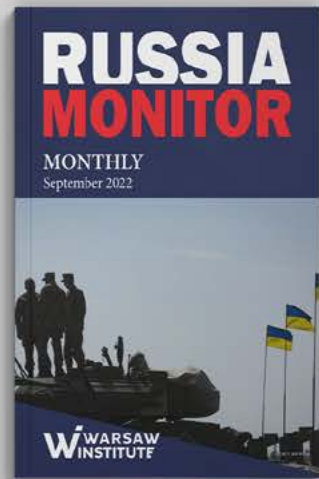
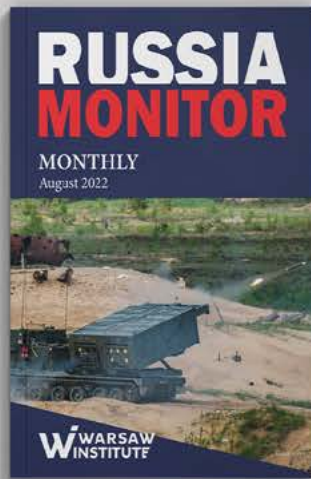
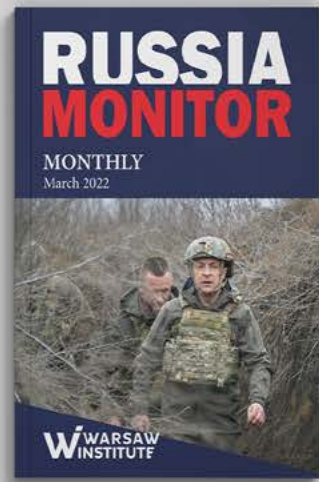
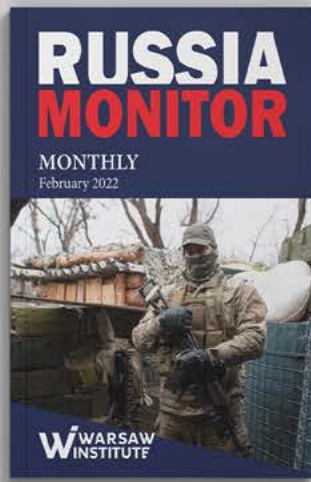
Bulgarian authorities explain that the guiding purpose of the taxation is to directly hit Gazprom, which is trying with its last strength to maintain its influence in the Southeast European region. It is worth noting that after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria no longer formally accepts supplies from Russia,

while it has allowed gas to continue to be sent through TurkStream, which runs through its territory. Bulgarian rulers have stated that as a result of the tax, the price of raw material for Hungary or Serbia should not go up drastically, and the state's only intention was to act against Russia's Gazprom.

It is worth pointing out that the Bulgarian tax was already debated at the EU in October, while no formal decision on the matter was made at the time. The European Commission recently confirmed that it is in the process of considering the Hungarian complaint. Hungary is not giving the Commission much time, as it has announced that in the absence of a concrete decision before the end of the year it will take the highest court route with Bulgaria. The European Union is acting as a mediator in this matter, with the goal of settling the dispute as soon as possible, as any internal friction and divergence within the EU, especially on Russian issues, is to the Kremlin's advantage. ■







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