

# EURASIA DIGEST

*Monthly Compilation of News from Russia, Central Asia & Europe*

Vol 4 | Issue 3 | March 2024



- **President Putin Said Russia Cannot be Defeated in Ukraine**
- **Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny is Dead**
- **Russia Halted Annual Payments to Arctic Council**
- **Several Global Banks Limit Transactions with Russia**
- **Russia-Venezuela Strengthened Bilateral Partnership**
- **Armenian And Azeri Leaders Met in Munich**
- **President of Tajikistan Meets Russian President in Kazan**
- **Armenia Freezes Participation in Collective Security Treaty Organisation**
- **Indian Ambassador to Turkmenistan Appointed**
- **Kazakhstan to Dispatch Peacekeeping Forces to Golan Heights**
- **3rd EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum was Held**
- **60th Munich Security Conference (MSC) Was Held**
- **Greek Prime Minister Visited India**
- **Hungary Approved Sweden's Bid to Join NATO**
- **Macron on Western Boots on Ground in Ukraine**
- **France And Germany Signed Bilateral Security Agreement**

## **President Putin Said Russia Cannot be Defeated in Ukraine**

President Vladimir Putin [said](#) in an interview with U.S. journalist Tucker Carlson that the West should understand it is "impossible" to defeat Russia in Ukraine and that [events](#) on the battlefield in Ukraine are a matter of "life and death" for Russia which could determine its fate. He aimed the message at the U.S. Congress stating "if you really want to stop fighting, you need to stop supplying weapons". "We have no interest in Poland, Latvia or anywhere else. Why would we do that?" It was the first one-on-one interview of Putin by someone from the Western media since 2019.

## **Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny is Dead**

Alexei Navalny, the most prominent opposition leader in Russia, [died](#) in a Russian prison on 17 February 2024. At the time of his death, Navalny was serving a 19-year sentence. He was known for his online anti-corruption campaign. His death is unlikely to alter the political landscape of Russia.

## **Russia Halted Annual Payments to Arctic Council**

Russia's Foreign Ministry has [said](#) that Russia's annual contributions to the Arctic Council's budget have been "suspended for the time being, pending the resumption of pragmatic work with the participation of all member countries". It has been reported that one-third of the Council's 130 projects have been paused amidst tensions with Russia, which covers 45 per cent of the geographical Arctic. For now the ministry has ruled out Russia's full exit from the Council, which was established in 1996 to

deal with issues of international cooperation.

## **Several Global Banks Limit Transactions with Russia**

Several lenders in Turkey, [UAE](#) and [China](#) have begun closing bank accounts belonging to Russian nationals and limiting settlements with Russia following threats of secondary sanctions from the United States. Elvira Nabiullina, who heads Russia's Central Bank, said that foreign trade settlements were "deteriorating". Meanwhile, the Central Bank held its key interest rate unchanged at 16 per cent, warning about price rises and intense labour shortages.

## **Russia-Venezuela Strengthened Bilateral Partnership**

During Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's [visit](#) to Caracas, Russia and Venezuela vowed to boost cooperation in oil and gas production, agriculture, medicine and pharmaceuticals, and, "peaceful use of nuclear energy". Lavrov had also railed against "blackmail, ultimatums, threats" by the United States. Venezuela has long been a key ally of Moscow with President Maduro repeatedly expressing his support for Russia in the Ukrainian war. Russia, for its part, has supported Caracas in the face of U.S. sanctions.

## **Armenian And Azeri Leaders Met in Munich**

On 17 February, Armenian Prime Minister Nicol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilhan Aliyev [met](#) in Munich for talks hosted by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The primary purpose was to continue working towards a peace treaty. Chancellor Scholz

stated that both sides agreed to resolve issues without new violence, reaffirming Germany and the European Union's readiness for peace efforts. These talks follow the reports from Armenia of Azeri aggression into the Syunik district. The German Chancellor also held separate bilateral meetings with the two leaders.

### **President of Tajikistan Meets Russian President in Kazan**

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon [met](#) with Russia's President Vladimir Putin on 21 February in Kazan, Russia. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the state of the relationship and prospects for cooperation. Various topics including cooperation in energy, agriculture, migration, education and the investment sector were discussed.

### **Armenia Freezes Participation in Collective Security Treaty Organisation**

Armenian Prime Minister Nicol Pashinyan stated in an [interview](#) that his country had suspended its participation in practice in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). The main reason being CSTO's inability to fulfil its objectives vis-à-vis Armenia in 2021 and 2022. He also accused the Russian leadership of starting a coordinated propaganda campaign against his government. In response, the Kremlin denied having an official confirmation that Armenia was leaving the CSTO.

### **Indian Ambassador to Turkmenistan Appointed**

On February 20, Turkmenistan's President Serdar Berdimuhamedov received India's newly [appointed](#) Ambassador Madhumita Hazarika Bhagat. President Berdimuhamedov congratulated the

Ambassador on her appointment and sent greetings to the leadership of India. He also highlighted the dynamic, progressive nature of the bilateral partnership between the two countries, and emphasized on India as one of its important partners.

### **Kazakhstan to Dispatch Peacekeeping Forces to Golan Heights**

Kazakhstan is preparing to deploy its first independent peacekeeping [contingent](#) to the Golan Heights under the UN. Kazakh Ministry of Defense confirmed that "the first group of the contingent will leave for the Golan Heights through Damascus, on February 22." Kazakhstan's deployment of its first independent peacekeeping mission reflects its decades-long efforts to advocate for peace and stability on the international stage.

### **3rd EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum was Held**

The [3rd EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum](#) was held in Brussels on 2 February 2024. It was chaired by High Representative Josep Borrell. The year it was attended by 20 ministers from EU and 25 ministers from the Indo Pacific region. French and German foreign ministers were [absent](#). Pushed by the European External Action Service, it serves as an important tool for the EU to enhance its role in the Indo Pacific through the Coordinated Maritime Presence.

### **60th Munich Security Conference (MSC) Was Held**

The 60th MSC was organised from 16-18 February in [Germany](#). This annual event witnessed extensive discussions on the need to provide sustained support to Ukraine. The western leaders criticised President Putin for the death of his most

prominent critic, Alexei Navalny, whose wife, Yulia Navalnaya addressed the audience at MSC. This year Russia and Iran were not invited to the conference as the organisers believed that they were not "interested in meaningful dialogue". The event marked a record attendance of more than 900 participants including some 50 heads of state and government from around the world, 100 plus ministers amongst others.

### **Greek Prime Minister Visited India**

Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis was on a two day visit to India on 21-22 February. He was also the chief guest at the annual Raisina Dialogue. PM Mitsotakis was accompanied by senior officials and a high powered business delegation. India and Greece aim to finalize a migration and mobility agreement soon. Both countries have also [pledged](#) to double the trade by 2030. The defence industry cooperation has already been emphasized as a key priority in the [India-Greece Joint Statement 2024](#).

### **Hungary Approved Sweden's Bid to Join NATO**

The Hungarian parliament approved [Sweden's](#) bid to join NATO on 26 February, clearing the way for its accession to the alliance after almost two years of intense negotiations. Getting approval from Orban's government was the final hurdle for Stockholm joining NATO. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's visit to Budapest on 23 February resulted in discussions on defence and security cooperation, culminating in a deal that would see Hungary acquire four new Swedish-made Gripen fighter jets. Sweden will formally join the alliance after it submits its

instrument of accession to the US government, which is the depository of the North Atlantic Treaty.

### **Macron on Western Boots on Ground in Ukraine**

At a gathering of European leaders in Paris on 26 February, French President Emmanuel [Macron](#) stated that western boots on ground in Ukraine could not be "ruled out". He further clarified that "there's no consensus today to send in an official, endorsed manner troops on the ground. But in terms of dynamics, nothing can be ruled out.... We will do everything that we must so that Russia does not win." President Macron refused to disclose information about nations willing to send troops. Meanwhile, a White House official has denied any claims about sending American or NATO troops to fight in Ukraine.

### **France And Germany Signed Bilateral Security Agreement**

On 16 February France and Germany signed bilateral security arrangements with Ukraine. These are interim security arrangements which provide military support to Ukraine until it joins NATO. This comes almost a month after the UK-Ukraine security deal which was signed in January 2024. The [German security assurances](#) come with a term of 10 years and commit delivery of German military aid to Ukraine in compliance with the United Nations charter and International law. The main focus remains on capacity building. Similarly, the [French](#) arrangement also mentions an extendable 10-year period, assuring support to Ukraine as long as it is not a part of NATO.