EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

The show must go on

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the NATO and OSCE Member States have a busy week of meetings to discuss Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and the future of European security infrastructure.

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Tug-of-war

The first ministerial NATO-Ukraine Council took place Wednesday as a part of the NATO Foreign Affairs ministers meeting discussing the forfeits and prospects of Russia's ongoing war of aggression. Despite suffering heavy losses, estimated by the NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as "hundreds of planes, thousands of tanks and more than 300,000 in manpower", Russian objectives on the battlefield remain unchanged as it stockpiles missiles and ammunition in preparation for the winter attacks on the Ukrainian power grid and energy infrastructure, reports *Digi24*. Nevertheless, Stoltenberg also claimed that Ukraine has "advanced" on the front while Russia has been weakened "politically, militarily and economically", citing instability in the Caucasus and Central Asia and increasing dependency on China. As US Secretary of State Antony Blinken denied the allegations of Western fatigue and reaffirmed the support for Ukraine, chief Ukrainian diplomat Dmytro Kuleba reiterated the need to increase the production of weapons and ammunition in Europe, considering only about 300,000 of the approximately one million 155 mm shells promised to Ukraine by the EU were delivered. The reminder comes amidst discussions about the limited success of the counter-offensive and qualitative turn to the war of attrition on the ground, which requires large resources and technological superiority to break the stalemate.

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Icy enthusiasm

Sweden's wait to become a NATO member might soon be over, one year and a half after the start of the process. This is at least what NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is saying: he stated that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has recommended for the Turkish parliament to vote yes on Sweden's membership. Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström harbours similar hopes, according to *Politiken*. After meeting his Turkish counterpart on Tuesday, Billström told the Swedish press that Sweden could become a member within "a few weeks". A source at the US State Department concurred and added that it will happen before the end of the year. This would end the stalemate that Sweden has found itself in, considering that Turkey and Hungary are the only two countries that have yet to approve the country's membership bid. Billström made sure to remain cautiously optimistic: while he considers the recent news "gratifying", he does not take it for granted and is awaiting tangible results before celebrating fully.

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Elephant in the room

Echoing Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis' reminder that "we [Europe] need to protect ourselves from Russia, and not together with it", the foreign ministers of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine refused to join the OSCE meeting in North Macedonia with Sergei Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs in attendance. The Baltic states issued a joint declaration that condemned Lavrov's participation as it poses the risk of "legitimising aggressor Russia as a rightful member of our community of free nations, trivialising the atrocious crimes Russia has been committing" and will only provide it with another opportunity to spread propaganda. Similarly, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry warned that Russia "turned the organisation into a hostage of its whims and aggression." Indeed, *Delo* presumes that pragmatism and the need for consensus on key leadership and budgetary decisions for enabling the further functioning of the OSCE seem to have prevailed over principles. According to Lavrov, more than 57 member states of the organisation, "including Western ones," expressed interest in meeting representatives of the Russian delegation on the sidelines of the Council, although the meeting with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was not on the agenda.

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Fly in the ointment

OSCE has been facing a difficult period of late, opening this week's meeting without a chair for the first time in the organisation's history – not to mention hosting Russian diplomats amid notable boycotts. Estonia has applied for the empty chairmanship but has been blocked by Russia's veto. *FAZ* writes that geopolitical conflicts and considerations have been hampering the OSCE for some time. In a deadlock that mirrors the European Council's in recent years due to unanimity voting, only one veto is enough to block decisions, which Russia has proven willing and able to exercise. Tensions are threatening to spill into the OSCE's day-to-day operations as positions in key offices are due to open up soon, and offices are working with budgets on a month-to-month basis because the organisation has not managed to pass a new budget since 2021. Despite the structural issues, the OSCE's many secretariats have mostly managed to continue their regular work. Various ideas are floating about to ease the issue, but the fact that the decision to host the next presidency in Malta managed to pass is seen as a silver lining.

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