

WORLD

ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Editor's note: As Feb 24 marks the one-year anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, China Daily is reviewing how it has reshaped geopolitics, impacted the global economy and aggravated the energy crisis.

Commitment on military support to Ukraine by country
(Jan 24, 2022, to Jan 15, 2023)
Unit: \$ billion

Caught up in conflict yet again, Europe weighs its future

Putin: Army guarantor of stability

By REN QI in Moscow and JONATHAN POWELL in London

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday called Russia's army a guarantor of national stability, promising to boost arms production. "A modern, efficient army and navy are a guarantee of the country's security and sovereignty, a guarantee of its stable development and its future," Putin said in a video address on the occasion of the annual Defender of the Fatherland Day holiday in Russia.

Putin also committed to Russia strengthening its nuclear triad and a military force structure capable of launching three types of nuclear weapons.

Russia's Foreign Ministry has said the country will still observe limits imposed by the New START nuclear weapons treaty. Earlier Russia said it was suspending its participation in the treaty.

European Union countries failed to reach an agreement on Wednesday on new sanctions against Russia, and planned more talks, Reuters quoted diplomats as saying.

More talks among representatives of EU members were due on Thursday afternoon, said the sources.

Talks between Sweden, Finland and Türkiye would resume in mid-March, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told local media on Wednesday night.

Türkiye has postponed a trilateral meeting with Sweden and Finland on their NATO bids slated for February.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Key moments

Some of the main events:

2022 Feb 24: Russian President Vladimir Putin launches special military operation in Ukraine.

May 18: Finland and Sweden submit their official applications to join NATO.

July 22: Russia and Ukraine separately signed a deal with Türkiye and the UN on grain exports.

Sept 26: Nord Stream pipeline explosions occur off the Baltic island of Bornholm.

Oct 8: A truck laden with explosives blows up on the bridge linking Crimea to Russia's mainland.

Dec 21: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visits the US, meeting US leader Joe Biden.

2023 Feb 20: Biden makes a surprise visit to Kyiv.
Feb 21: Putin delivers an annual address to the Federal Assembly.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

The Russia-Ukraine crisis has presented EU decision-makers with a pile of policy challenges

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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The Ukrainian flag of two horizontal bands, yellow over blue, has appeared in many corners of European cities over the past year, including being illuminated on the facade of the Berlaymont building that houses the European Commission in Brussels, to demonstrate support for Kyiv in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The conflict, which began a year ago, and for which no end is in sight, has resulted in tremendous changes in the security, political and economic landscape of the European Union and its 27 member states, experts say.

Ding Chun, director of the Center for European Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said: "The conflict has broken the peace, tranquillity and security structure in the EU and dealt a blow to its economic growth and social stability, spoiling its pandemic recovery efforts."

"The EU and its member states, which overall support Ukraine and are against Russia, have been engaged in an unprecedented seesaw battle of sanctions and counter-sanctions with Russia, plunging the EU into a situation of killing 1,000 of its enemies but losing 800 of its own soldiers," Ding said, citing a Chinese idiom.

The European Commission has urged member states to endorse its proposed 10th round of sanctions against Russia by Friday, but some are raising questions about what the sanctions, which were supposed to be crippling, have achieved.

The Russian economy shrank a modest 2.2 percent last year, the International Monetary Fund says, in sharp contrast to the 10-15 percent fall that Western financial houses had predicted. The IMF also forecast Russian economic growth of 0.3 percent this year and 2.1 percent next year.

Germany, the largest EU economy, is forecast to grow only 0.1 percent this year and 1.4 percent next year, and the 20-member eurozone by 0.7 percent this year and 1.6 percent next year.

In the EU, high energy prices are biting hard. An analysis by the think tank Bruegel in Brussels says EU states have earmarked or allocated 681 billion euros (\$726 billion) to help households and companies tackle the energy crisis.

While the EU reduced its imports of Russian energy, the United States has ramped up its fossil fuel sales to the bloc and will become its largest energy supplier this year.

Last year the US exported nearly 10 million cubic meters of LNG to the EU a month, 137 percent more than in 2021, providing about half of all of Europe's imported LNG.

France's Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire and Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck have both accused the US of profiting from the Ukraine conflict and energy crisis and making Europe dependent on its LNG.

Qin Yan, a carbon analyst in Oslo with the financial data provider Refinitiv, said the US, as a major energy exporter, has no doubt secured large windfall profits as a result of rising European demand for non-Russian fossil fuels.

The EU energy crisis is far from over despite the recent drop in gas prices and a relatively mild winter, she said. "With the global gas market already being tight and the economic recovery boosting energy demand, European countries need to bid higher for LNG prices to attract deliveries."

Washington has also benefited from increasing its arms sales last year as European countries rushed to buy US weapons because of the conflict.

Early last month the US State Depart-



Destroyed buildings in Borodyanka, north of Kyiv, on Wednesday. THIBAUT CAMUS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Ding Chun, director of the Center for European Studies at Fudan University

ment said US weapons sales to Europe rose by 49 percent last year from \$34.8 billion in 2021.

Germany was one of the biggest US arms buyers in Europe, ordering 35 F-35 fighter jets and munitions and equipment worth \$8.4 billion in July.

The conflict has prompted the EU to break its taboo of not providing arms to countries involved in military conflict and has prompted many member states to increase their defense budgets, Ding said.

"For quite a while the EU will give priority to hard military power, geopolitics and security over what it prided itself earlier: globalization and the green and digital revolution," Ding said.

EU autonomy setback

The conflict has resulted in a warming of trans-Atlantic relations, a dramatic revival of NATO and a setback for the EU's strategic autonomy, he said, referring to a concept pushed by France's President Emmanuel Macron since 2017.

Macron has described NATO as "brain dead", but last year Finland and Sweden submitted applications to join the alliance.

Roderick Parkes, research director of the German Council of Foreign Relations, wrote in a paper last month that the Ukraine conflict has accelerated a 15-year trend in Europe that has pushed political authority away from a Franco-German core toward the fringes and front-line states, "away from the north-south axis of Paris and Berlin toward an east-west one now bracketed by the UK and Poland".

Lai Suetyi, a researcher at the Center for European Studies at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in Guangzhou, said the conflict "brings Europe, as well as the world, back to the past, the Cold War past".

Such a large conflict in Europe reminds Europeans why they started the European integration project, she said.



People rally during a demonstration against war and the supply of weapons to Ukraine, in Cologne, Germany, on Sept 4. PHOTO VIA PANAMA PICTURES

Anti-war protesters take to streets over escalation fear

By XING YI in London
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As the US and its allies supply more weapons to Ukraine, peace activists have voiced their objections and are organizing demonstrations across Europe to call for a halt to the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Stop the War Coalition, an advocacy group in the United Kingdom, is mobilizing people to go to the streets in central London on Saturday to demand peace talks and oppose warmongering in the name of military support.

The coalition said the London demonstration will be part of a Europe-wide weekend of action, starting in Italy on Friday with a 24-kilometer march from Perugia to Assisi.

Rafaella Bolini of the Italian peace movement estimated that there will be protests in at least 100 towns and cities this weekend. "Feeling in Italy is running high against supplying arms to Ukraine. The movement is mobilizing everywhere," she said.

According to the coalition, demonstrations are planned for seven cities in Portugal. In Vienna, there is a protest on Saturday and another in Zurich on Sunday. Protests will be staged in 20 cities, including in Berlin, with action in Brussels on Sunday and protests across France throughout the weekend.

Lindsey German, a convener of the

coalition, said at an online rally ahead of the planned demonstrations that Europe is "sleepwalking" into a much wider conflict by sending more weapons to Ukraine.

The UK hosted a program to train Ukrainian soldiers, and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has announced that it will train Ukrainian jet pilots.

Opposition voiced

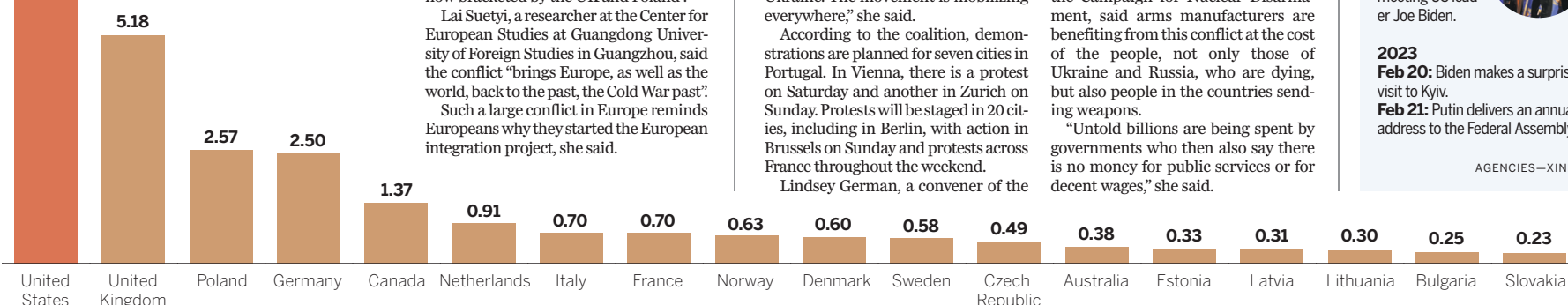
On the other side of the Atlantic, Medea Benjamin, founder of the peace group Codepink, has been on a 50-city speaking tour of the US, trying to stoke opposition to supplying weapons.

"What comes after that? Is it troops? Is that nuclear weapons? So-called leaders in the West are taking us directly into either a wider world war or a nuclear war," she said.

Many peace organizations are coming out to oppose the escalation of the conflict.

Kate Hudson, general secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, said arms manufacturers are benefiting from this conflict at the cost of the people, not only those of Ukraine and Russia, who are dying, but also people in the countries sending weapons.

"Untold billions are being spent by governments who then also say there is no money for public services or for decent wages," she said.



Source: Kiel Institute

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