

# EURASIA DIGEST

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### **Kremlin Calls EU plan to use frozen assets for Ukraine illegal**

The Kremlin [said](#), on 20 March, that the EU would be committing an ‘unprecedented violation’ of international law if it used frozen Russian assets worth 200 billion euros to help arm Ukraine. EU officials say their latest proposal could see an estimated three billion euros a year used to help Ukraine. Under the EU plan, 90 percent of the money taken from the earned interest would go to a fund used for supplying weapons to Ukraine. The remaining 10 percent would be funnelled into the EU's budget, which would help increase the capacity of Ukraine's defence industry.

### **Russian election officials declared Vladimir Putin the winner of the presidential race**

Russia's Central Election Committee (CEC), on 21 March, officially [declared](#) Vladimir Putin as the winner of the 2024 presidential election. With 76.27 million votes counted in his favour, Putin received 87.28 percent of the ballots cast in the March 15-17 election. Communist candidate Nikolai Kharitonov came second with 4.31 percent of the vote, followed by New People candidate Vladislav Davankov and nationalist Leonid Slutsky at 3.85 and 3.20 percent, respectively.

### **Major terrorist attack took place in Moscow**

An [attack](#) by at least four gunmen with Tajik origins on a Moscow suburban concert hall on 22 March left 139 dead and more than 200 injured. The Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for the attack. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that "radical Islamists" were behind the attack - but suggested that they were linked to

neighbouring Ukraine. Russia's FSB security service said some of the perpetrators had fled towards the Ukraine border, adding that the assailants had "appropriate contacts" in the country and were also supported by the US and UK.

### **Niger sought to deepen security cooperation with Russia**

The head of Niger's military regime General Abdourahamane Tiani, on 26 March, [spoke](#) to Russian President Vladimir Putin about ‘strengthening security cooperation’. The two countries had already agreed in January 2024 to strengthen military ties when Niger Prime Minister Ali Lamine Zeine led a delegation to Moscow. Notably, the new regime has denounced military cooperation with the West including shunning its colonial ties with France.

### **Kazakhstan, US strengthen partnership in geological exploration with AI**

On March 2, during his visit to Denver, Kanat Sharlapayev, the Minister of Industry and Construction, [expressed](#) Kazakhstan's intention to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into geological exploration processes. The initiative will help increase mineral search and extraction efficiency.

### **Tajik and Iranian Foreign Ministers meet in Jeddah**

On 5 March, the Tajik foreign minister, Sirojiddin Muhridin, [met](#) with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian, in Jeddah during an Extraordinary Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the prospects of future bilateral cooperation. Some of the avenues of cooperation highlighted during the meeting were

energy, transit, scientific and educational sectors. They also exchanged views on the situation in Gaza.

### **Armenia considering European Union membership**

On 8 March, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan [said](#) that Armenia would consider applying for membership in the European Union. The Foreign Minister, while participating in the Antalya Diplomatic Forum, stressed that Armenia has faced many challenges in the last 3-to 4 years, and therefore, new opportunities have arisen in the European Union. He also highlighted the peace initiatives brought out by the EU in the recent conflict.

### **Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to Install Transboundary Water Meters**

On March 19, the Kazakh Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation [announced](#) that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have agreed to install meters on each other's territory. This will allow them to measure the exact volume of water consumed by both countries. Discussions are underway to determine the locations for these water meters, with efforts being made to involve international organisations in the project.

### **EU's Future Defence Industrial Strategy**

European Commission presented the European [Defence](#) Industry Programme (EDIP) and the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) on 5 March. It is aimed at re-industrialising Europe's military-industrial complex and involves tax breaks and subsidies to help match supply and demand across the bloc. It recommends spending funds on building stockpiles, ready-for-use production lines, mapping bottlenecks and alike, giving the purchasing rights to the European Commission.

### **Sweden Joins NATO**

Sweden officially joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 7 March, and its accession was marked with a flag-raising ceremony at [NATO](#) Headquarters on 11 March. [Sweden](#) brings advanced capabilities, including a high-tech defence industry, fighter planes, naval corvettes and submarines designed specifically for the Baltic Sea. Sweden and Finland's membership opens up a key supply route for transiting more NATO troops to protect them faster and more effectively in case of attack.

### **India-EFTA Free Trade Agreement**

India signed a Trade and Economic partnership [agreement](#) with a group of four non-EU countries (Switzerland, Norway, Lichtenstein and Iceland) on 10 March. This is India's first FTA and paves the way for a 100 billion investment in India over the next 15 years. Under this deal, India will lift most import tariffs on industrial goods from the four countries in return for investments over 15 years.

### **Ukrainian Foreign Minister Visits India**

The Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, paid an [official](#) two-day visit to India on 28 March. During the visit, he also met with his Indian counterpart, Dr. S Jaishankar, and discussed fostering constructive dialogue and strengthening bilateral relations between India and Ukraine, including in areas such as trade and investment, science and technology, defence, agriculture, health, culture, and education. They also held discussions on matters related to the India- Ukraine Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, Industrial and Cultural Cooperation and its working groups. They also had a comprehensive discussion on the ongoing conflict.