

# EURASIA DIGEST

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### **Russian Lawmakers Pass Bill Paving Way to Remove Taliban from Terror List**

On 17 December, Russian lawmakers [passed](#) a bill that would give courts the power to remove groups from the country's list of terrorist organisations. The bill was submitted to the lower-house, State Duma last month. Russia's State Duma voted in favour of the bill, which outlines a legal mechanism for groups to be removed from the country's official list of outlawed "terrorist" groups. However, the Taliban's expected delisting from Russia's terrorist registry would not amount to a formal recognition of its government.

### **Slovak Prime Minister Visited Russia**

Russian President Vladimir Putin, on 22 December, held [talks](#) at the Kremlin with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. The visit by Fico, whose country is a NATO and European Union member, had not been previously announced. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it could be "presumed" that supplies of Russian gas would be discussed. Notably, Fico ended military aid to Ukraine when he became prime minister again in October 2023 and has called for peace talks. He also announced in November that he would go to Moscow in May 2025 for ceremonies to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II.

### **Azerbaijani Civilian Plane Crashed in Russia**

Russian President Vladimir Putin [said](#), on 28 December, that Russian air defence was working when an Azerbaijani Airlines plane tried to land in Grozny before crashing, as speculation mounted that Russia may have accidentally shot down the plane. The Russian leader called his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev, apologising for the incident that took place in Russian airspace while stopping short of saying

Russian air defence shot the plane. Baku, meanwhile, said Aliyev had "emphasised" to Putin that the aircraft was hit by external interference over Russia, saying it wanted those responsible to be "held accountable."

### **Moscow and Kyiv Conduct Latest Prisoners Exchange**

On 30 December, Moscow and Kyiv [swapped](#) more than 300 prisoners in an exchange brokered by the United Arab Emirates. The two sides have exchanged hundreds of captive soldiers since February 2022 in one of the few areas of cooperation between the warring countries. According to the officials, 150 Russian servicemen and 150 Ukrainian servicemen were exchanged at the latest exchange.

### **Uzbekistan to Create Free Trade Zone on Borders of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**

On 3 December, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev [announced](#) in a meeting that free trade zones would be established in the Besharyk district and the city of Kuvasay in Uzbekistan's Fergana region to ensure the region's socio-economic development. The Besharyk district borders Tajikistan, and Kuvasay borders Kyrgyzstan. The president stressed that this step will help focus on increasing investment and job creation.

### **Azerbaijan Elected Member of D-8 Organisation for Economic Cooperation**

On 8 December, Azerbaijan was [elected](#) as a member of the Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8) during the 11th summit of the group in Cairo, Egypt. This was the organisation's first expansion in nearly 30 years. As a new member, Baku eyes fostering security, stability, prosperity, and mutually beneficial collaboration across the broader region and enhancing partnerships in economic, trade, transport, communication, and other critical areas.

## **Armenia Chairs Meeting of Supreme Eurasian Economic Council**

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan [chaired](#) the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting in the Leningrad Region of Russia on 26 December as the council's chairman. During the meeting, the leader highlighted the priorities of the presidency under Armenia, which included key areas of economic cooperation, the creation of common markets in the energy sector, the elimination of barriers in the internal market of the Union, etc.

## **New Georgian President Sworn in Amidst Protests**

On 29 December, Mikheil Kavelashvili was [sworn](#) in as Georgia's new President amidst the political standoff between the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, and former President Salome Zurbishvili and her pro-European Union supporters. The former President has claimed that the incumbent's election, was illegitimate. The new president was elected on 14 December following a vote in which he garnered 224 votes from the Electoral College comprising all the Georgian Dream legislature and local councillors.

## **German Chancellor Olaf Scholz Loses Confidence Vote**

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz lost a [confidence](#) vote in parliament on 16 December, paving the way for its dissolution and fresh national elections on 23 February 2025. Olaf Scholz gained 207 votes in the 733-seat parliament to his name; he needed a 367-seat majority to remain in power. The German leader was widely expected to lose the vote, which was held after the government's acrimonious three-way coalition collapsed over deep divisions in fiscal policy.

## **Hungary's President Viktor Orban Meets Bulgaria's President Ruman Radev**

On 20 December, [during](#) his visit to Bulgaria, Hungary's President Viktor Orban met with President Ruman Radev. The two leaders discussed deepening bilateral relations, the security environment in the region and issues pertaining to the European Union agenda. Priority topics also included boosting European competitiveness, restoring the prosperity of European citizens, effectively tackling illegal migration, and strengthening Christian family values. The two countries plan to sign memorandums in the coming weeks to expand their cooperation in connectivity and transport, the use of the Black Sea ports of Varna and Burgas, the defence and security industries, and tourism.

## **Social Democrats Form Government in Iceland**

Iceland's president [presented](#) a new government on Saturday under Social Democratic Prime Minister Kristrun Frostadottir on 23 December. The new government aims to cut inflation and interest rates and hold a referendum on European Union membership by 2027. The party was the biggest winner in a snap election on 30 November and has agreed to form a coalition government with the centrist People's Party and the left-leaning, pro-European Reform Party.

## **French Prime Minister François Bayrou Announced the Latest Government**

French Prime Minister François Bayrou [announced](#) the country's fourth government of 2024 on 23 December. The new government comprises pro-Macron faces, long-serving allies, Bayrou confidants, ex-ministers, and a few established conservative faces. The government came into power after opposition passed a no-confidence motion that saw former Prime Minister Michel Barnier's government collapse in early December.