

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE



BROKEN DREAMS

**The return home
of migrants from
the EU**



November 2023

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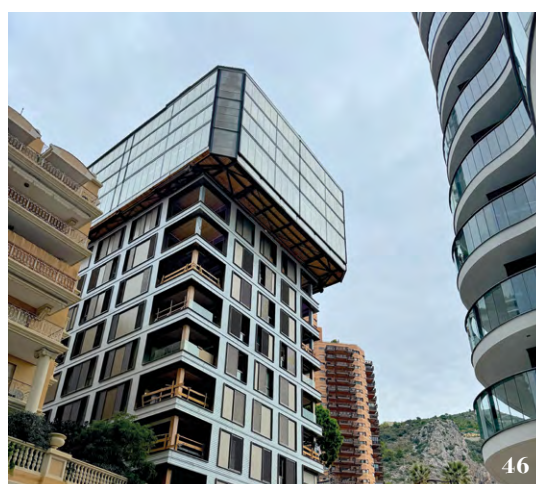
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IN THIS ISSUE

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6 HOMEWARD BOUND?

Why and how the EU sends some would-be migrants home

13 NEWS IN BRIEF:

From around the World

20 YEVGENY PRIGOZHIN'S LEGACY

The scramble for his empire

26 WHOSE FISH?

How China's vast and growing armada of fishing vessels is robbing the world of its fish

34 FLAUNTING IT

How rich Russians show off their ill-gotten wealth, trying to tempt Muslims to sin

40 FAITH AND SOVEREIGNTY

The religion dimension of microstates

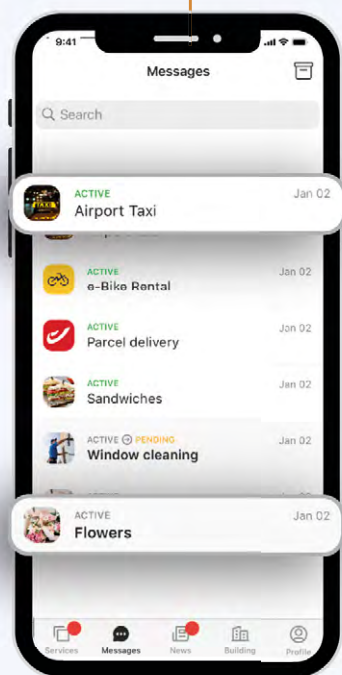
46 A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

50 TIMELESS CHIC



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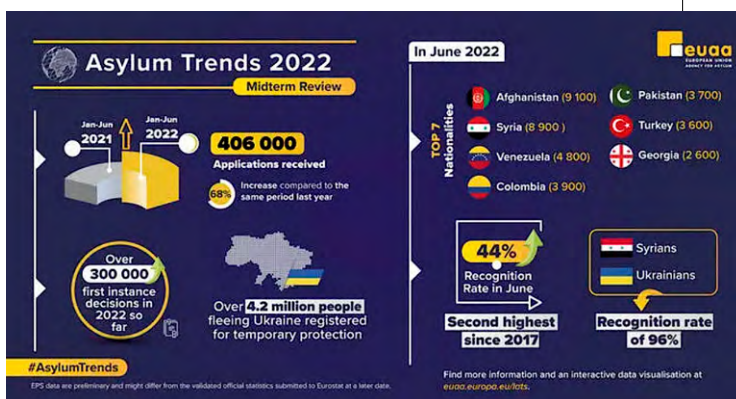
Nikola Hendrickx

HOMeward BOUND?

Why and how
the EU sends
some would-be
migrants home



Europe is a pretty good place to live: a variety of towns, cities and villages, varied types of work, a good range of shops and places of entertainment, any type of scenery you fancy and lots of things to do, sporting or otherwise. It's a good place to simply relax, too. That's probably why it has an in-built population of some 450-million people. Not all of them are European in origin, of course: almost 24-million are non-EU citizens, which amounts to 5.3% of the overall population. 38-million people were born outside the EU, according to the European Commission, while more and more people from all around the world are coming with the hope of staying, at least for a while, if not for the remainder of their lives. Even so, bearing in mind its vast size – 4,422,773 km² – there is a limit to how many people can live in it. That's why the EU is obliged to turn away some of those who would like to move here, with or without their families.



So back they go, homeward bound, whether they want to go or not. In some cases, it's not so much "homeward bound" as "homewards, bound", depending on the willingness of the migrant concerned to depart back to wherever they came from. There are various ways in which it can happen. The return can be voluntary, based on the migrant's own decision. I won't bother to go into the details of other forms of involuntary home-going, such as "spontaneous return", "assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR)" or "voluntary humanitarian return", because the names are fairly self-explanatory and in the case of the last of those it may represent a life-saving measure for migrants who are stranded or being held in detention, for some reason. Then again, there's also "forced return", which has been described as "a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion". It's not something anybody would choose to go through, according to the United Nations' International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

In June 2023, the EU received more than 83,000 migration applications. The largest group were Syrian nationals, followed by Afghans and then Venezuelans and Columbians. Some of this data may surprise you; it certainly surprised me. There was a surge in applications from Ukraine immediately following Russia's unprovoked military invasion, rising from 2,100 in February 2022 to 12,185 in March 2022, but that has subsided somewhat in the months that followed, down to 1,065 in June 2023, mainly because those fleeing Ukraine as a result of Russian aggression get temporary protection. Meanwhile, the European Parliament has been discussing ways of welcoming Ukraine into the fold, just as soon as it settles its diplomatic disagreements with Poland and Hungary. But it's generally agreed that for that to happen, the EU will have to change, too. One can easily

understand why so many people are keen to leave Ukraine and move out of the range of Russian guns, but where are they going? Just as in other recent months, in June 2023, the highest number of would-be migrants tried to get into Germany which received 23,190 applications. Next came Spain with 16,075, France, with 12,475, and lastly Italy with 10,730 applicants. Those four continued to receive the highest number of first-time asylum applicants, accounting in total for 75% of all first-time asylum applicants in the EU.

In 2022, 420,100 asylum applicants were ordered to leave the EU, a 23% increase on the 340,500 ordered to leave the previous year. In 2022, 77,500 non-EU citizens were returned to a non-EU country corresponding to 18.5% of all return decisions issued during the year. That's a decrease from 20% in 2021. For those hoping to begin a new life within the EU, it's not all bad news: In 2022, nearly 1,700 Member States' consulates received 7.6 million short stay visa applications lodged by non-EU citizens, which is an increase from 2.9 million in 2021 but still 55% fewer than in 2019. In total, 5.9 million short stay visas were issued and 1.3 million were refused, amounting to an EU-wide refusal rate of 17.9%. That's an increase of 13.4% over 2021.



Return procedure explained by Frontex

I Why leave?

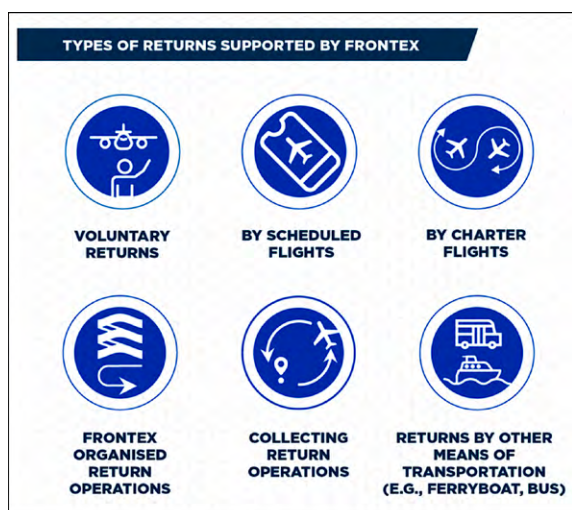
In many cases the refusals stem from a lack of the proper documentation, but it's hard to monitor it all accurately because the data are scattered across a number of different sources of recorded information and many of them are, at best, incomplete. The EU is currently trying to correct this oversight, although different countries use different definitions and different methods, and furthermore not all of the data is properly tracked. Millions of people every year are returned to their countries of origin, but not all of them are recorded at all, let alone accurately. According to the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM), record-keeping was severely interrupted

(as were many things, of course) by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns, travel restrictions, limited consular services and a number of other factors severely disrupted migration, along with record-keeping of cross-border movement. The IOM says that many countries lifted their various travel restrictions in 2021, but neither migration itself nor return-migration have returned to their pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, the numbers benefitting from the IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) rose by 24% from 43,428 in 2021 to 54,001 in 2022, while the numbers making use of the voluntary humanitarian return service went up by an impressive (if slightly worrying) 139% from 6,367 in 2021 to 15,281 in 2022.



A Romanian coastguard during a Frontex Multipurpose Maritime Operation exercise

During the pandemic itself, the European Union Border and Coastguard Agency, Frontex, reported that travel restrictions and the reduction in consular services had impacted badly on return migration. Some 291,000 irregular migrants were given a "return decision" by EU member states in 2020, but only 61,951 people were actually returned, whether voluntarily or under compulsion, according to Frontex. In 2022, the number of people returned home with the support of Frontex in 2022, came to 24,850. The figures for the UK, which had just left the EU, are slightly odd. In 2021, 9,508 people left Britain in either an enforced or voluntary return, the lowest annual departure figure since 2012, which tends to suggest that those politicians and newspapers who argued that leaving the EU would reduce the number of migrants getting to the UK were simply wrong, as they have since been proved to have been about so many other things.



This is a restless world, where those hungry for control seek to take over regions or even whole countries, while citizens are batted between the warring parties like shuttlecocks in some kind of ghastly game of badminton. Look at Nagorno-Karabakh, for instance. It's a territory extending to an area of around 4,400 square kilometres that is disputed between Armenia (which has the support of Russia) and Azerbaijan (supported by Turkey), both of which claim sovereignty. It was, of course, part of the old Soviet Union. The majority of its citizens identify as Armenian and now 28,000 or so of those living in Nagorno-Karabakh have fled as migrants towards Armenia, their supposed homeland. The ambitions of the few inevitably lead to the redistribution of the many, with all it involves in terms of lost lives, destroyed homes, deserted towns, killings, and hatred. It is, as always, a terrible business, but at least one can say, I suppose, that those currently fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh towards Armenia identify as ethnic Armenians and what's more they're not trying to get to poor overcrowded Lampedusa. It seems that the more powerful and ruthless world leaders simply can't leave things alone, where borders and ethnicities are concerned.



Civilians shelter in basements overnight to escape violence during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Looking again at Europe's problems with migration, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed, including the search for jobs. In 2022, 9.93 million non-EU citizens were employed in the EU labour market, out of 193.5 million persons aged from 20 to 64, corresponding to 5.1% of the total. The employment rate in the EU in the working-age population was higher for EU citizens (77.1%), than for non-EU citizens (61.9%) in 2022. The range of occupations taken by migrants to Europe makes interesting reading. We must not forget the issue of language, of course, that ever-lasting barrier to communication. Among non-EU citizens, some 11.4% work as cleaners and helpers, compared with just 2.9% of born-and-bred EU citizens. Another 7.3% of the non-EU citizens work in the personal services sector, while just 4.1% of native EU citizens do such work. You'll find around 6.1% of migrants in building and related

trades (but not as electricians) with a further 6% carrying out labouring work (unskilled) in mining, construction, manufacturing, and the transport sector. They tend to be under-represented in the fields of public administration, defence, social security, education and in work described as “professional, scientific and technical”, compared with native EU citizens.

Where are we going?



Suella Braverman

So how about the choice of home country for those restless souls who travel the world? Oddly, the country that has taken in the highest percentage of foreigners is Switzerland, with 30.2%, with Australia coming a close second at 29.2%. Strangely, Turkey comes last on that list with only 3.7% of its residents not being ethnically Turkish. Strange, that: Turkey is a very friendly and attractive country. But there are a great many conflicts in the world that inevitably lead to people seeking a new life somewhere safer, for themselves and for their families. According to official figures, at the end of 2021, less than 10% of all the world's refugees and only a fraction of internally displaced persons were living in the EU. By mid-2022, as a result of the war in Ukraine, the share of refugees living in the EU increased to more than 20%.

For those people who oppose migration completely (the UK's Home Secretary, Suella Braverman springs to mind here; her condemnation of the UN's relatively compassionate rules on immigration and the treatment of migrants has come in for condemnation by many at the UN itself and earned the headline in the Guardian newspaper: “Smirking Suella trashes seventy years of human rights in thirty minutes”), please remember that without migration, the European population would have shrunk by half a million in 2019, given that 4.2 million children were born and 4.7 million people died in the EU; a sad

statistic but none-the-less true. In 2020 and 2021, EU population actually shrank, due to a combination of fewer births, more deaths and less net migration. Europe could well be shrinking.

There is a further complication in relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan: most Armenians living in Armenia are members of one of the very oldest sects of Christianity: the Armenian Apostolic Church, founded in the first century and becoming, in 301 AD, the first branch of Christianity to be adopted as an official state religion. The picture in Azerbaijan is more complicated and nuanced, with 80% of the population adhering in principle to Shia Islam, giving the country the world's second largest Shia population. Shia Islam was made the state religion in the 16th century, but its enforcement caused a rift with the Sunni Muslim community, and many Sunnis left the country. Perhaps I should explain that while Shia Muslims believe the Prophet Mohammad appointed a successor, Sunnis believe he did not. The two branches of Islam have been in conflict with one another for centuries with no possible settlement in sight. People in some parts of Azerbaijan, making up just 3% of the population, follow Orthodox Christianity, but even there you can find a schism: the Russian Orthodox Church was established following the Russo-Persian war in the 19th century, but there is also the Georgian Orthodox church, most of whose followers were converted from Islam. Adherents of all and any religion were persecuted, and their faiths suppressed during the Soviet era. And just in case that is not sufficiently complicated for you, Azerbaijan is reckoned to be one of the least religious Muslim countries in the world, with most citizens attaching little or no importance to religion and therefore not worshipping at all. There are other Christian groups to be found, including Armenian apostolic, Roman Catholic and Protestant, although even counting them all together they only make up some 1% of the population. A few other religious groups who make up only a tiny minority of the population, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Jews and members of the so-called Assemblies of God total only some 1,000 adherents. They have accused the Azerbaijani government of denying them the rights to worship in their own ways. There is no official state religion and 2% of the population are self-declared atheists. The two sides have met for talks in a bid to end the violence and settle Nagorno-Karabakh's future but at the time of writing it's by no means certain that any real progress was made. Azerbaijan's representative told the meeting that Nagorno-Karabakh is now completely under their control, while their official news agency would only say that the talks had ended, not how nor with what conclusion.



Refugees arrive at Skala Sykamas Lesvos Greece



Migrants arriving on the Island of Lampedusa

But Nagorno Karabakh is not the region that is giving European leaders nightmares. It may have many citizens seeking a new life elsewhere among people they believe to be more like themselves and possibly even welcoming (if they're lucky), but it won't involve a lot of unseaworthy small boats, piloted by money-grubbing villains and crooks, trying to make their way across an increasingly unsafe Mediterranean on their way to Lampedusa and then on to Italy. There are three main routes used by migrants. The Western Mediterranean route takes migrants both by sea and land to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Northern Africa. The migrants travel through Morocco and Algeria to reach their destination. Frontex tries to help Spain keep out those that should not be admitted. Migrants and asylum seekers also use the Central Mediterranean route to enter the EU on an irregular basis. They embark on long, dangerous journeys from North Africa and Turkey, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy, and to a much lesser extent also Malta. Clearly this cannot go on for ever, so The EU established a joint migration task force with the African Union and the UN in November 2017, which aimed to pool efforts and enhance cooperation to respond to the many migration challenges in Africa and in particular in Libya.

The large majority of the migrants transit through Libya on their journey towards Europe. This has contributed to the development of well-established and disturbingly resilient smuggling and trafficking networks in Libya. However, the establishment of that joint migration task force with the African Union and the UN has made it possible to launch major assisted voluntary humanitarian return programmes and evacuation operations. The task force is currently exploring new measures and updated terms of reference to improve its effectiveness, including the expansion of its mandate and geographical coverage.

Even so, there have been tragedies, almost always avoidable. In June 2023, for instance, when the overcrowded trawler, *Adriana*, carrying some 750 migrants from Libya, was seen from a Frontex patrol plane to be in difficulties. Frontex informed the Greek and Italian authorities but no rescue teams were dispatched for eleven hours. Survivors (and there weren't many) claimed that the Greek coastguard tried to take the *Adriana* under tow, causing it to capsize and sink, although the Greek authorities deny this. We'll never know for sure because although some of those on board tried to film what was happening, the Greeks confiscated all mobile phones. Frontex had been ordered out of the zone by Greece, so can neither corroborate nor deny the story, although it's not the first time that Frontex assets have been ordered away from a potential tragedy, with Frontex staff kept away from viewing so-called "push-backs". In the case of the *Adriana* only 104 of the 750 passengers survived. That same month, Frontex released a formal statement, saying it was "shocked and saddened" by the shipwreck and offering



Migrants at an immigration holding centre on the island of Lampedusa

its condolences to the families of the dead. It also stated that Frontex had been redirected to a distant part of the Aegean and that no Frontex facilities had therefore been on hand to help with a rescue, although it did not condemn anything Greece did (or did not do).

I Are we there yet?

In June 2018, EU leaders called for further measures to reduce irregular migration on the Central Mediterranean route. They agreed, amongst other things, to: intensify their efforts to stop smugglers operating out of Libya or elsewhere, whilst continuing to support Italy and other frontline EU countries, increasing their support for the Libyan coastguard, creating humane reception conditions and the voluntary return to countries of origin of those migrants stranded in Libya. They also agreed to enhance cooperation with other countries of origin and transit, and on resettlement. In July 2019 the EU approved five new migration-related programmes in North Africa costing in total €61.5-million. The projects include protection and assistance for refugees and for vulnerable migrants, improvement of the living conditions and resilience of the poor beleaguered Libyans and the fostering of labour migration and mobility. These programmes have been adopted under the EU emergency trust fund (EUTF) for Africa, which was established in November 2015 to address the root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration and to contribute to the better management of migration. The large overall budget for the fund comes to



more than €5-billion. In November 2022, due to the significant increase in migratory pressure on the route, the European Commission presented an EU Action Plan on the Central Mediterranean to address the many challenges migrants will face along the route. The Action Plan proposes twenty measures designed to reduce irregular and unsafe migration, providing

solutions to the emerging challenges in the area of search and rescue and reinforcing solidarity, balanced against responsibility shared between member states.

The European Commission has long been concerned about migrants trying to escape from hardship or danger in their home countries who would like to get themselves and their families into the European Union. The Commission itself has announced six particular objectives, although they're not exhaustive. Firstly, the Commission wants to protect those needing shelter. It would like to curb irregular migration. It considers it important to save lives at sea but also to secure the EU's external borders; I'm not sure those two are mutually compatible. It wants to guarantee the free movement of people within the Schengen area. In order to help the migrants, the Commission wants to see better organisation of legal migration and also the better integration of non-EU nationals into EU society. It's a tall order for any group of countries. In order to achieve this ambitious end, the Commission wants to ensure that all EU member states fully implement the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It would like to reduce the incentives for irregular migration, which would involve fighting against people smuggling and increasing the effectiveness of sensible return policies in order to send some of the applicants safely home. Its rush to strike a deal with Tunisia is not without its critics, however: the Left in the European Parliament argue that Tunisia is not a safe place for its own citizens, let alone the migrants passing through. The Left argue that there is no legal basis for any sort of deal and is, in a way, a blank cheque for an undemocratic government to ignore human rights. The Commission believes the EU's external borders should be better protected with increased funding and a more prominent rôle for the borders agency, Frontex. The Commission wants better safeguarding of the border-free internal Schengen zone, and to promote the legal migration of those with skills Europe needs. It also believes that the EU should cooperate more closely with non-EU countries in repatriating irregular migrants that fail to meet to conditions for legal entry.

Can it be done? It's difficult to say, but it shouldn't be impossible as long as European politicians respect the rules governing asylum and continue to make welcome those who qualify for entry. Europe needs skilled people; it doesn't need smugglers who endanger lives to make money. If everyone followed the rules, Europe would acquire a valuable labour force with new skills. Politicians must stop viewing all migrants as dangerous criminals to be repulsed. That way, lives would be enriched and there would be no place for smugglers. Sadly, that looks very unlikely to happen.

T.Kingsley Brooks

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NEWS IN BRIEF

CHINA SEEKS TO RECRUIT BRITISH CITIZENS IN SENSITIVE POSITIONS

The British government has issued a warning about the targeting of British officials in key political, defence and business positions by Chinese spies. This is part of an increasingly sophisticated espionage operation aimed at obtaining secret information.

In response to a July parliamentary report criticising the government's inadequate response to the Chinese threat, the government emphasised the "prolific" scale of Chinese espionage. The government said that Chinese recruitment programmes have made efforts to place British and allied nationals in positions of influence with sensitive knowledge and experience.



Ken McCallum

Ken McCallum, the head of Britain's counterintelligence service MI5, also noted that people working on cutting-edge technology are of interest to geopolitics, even if they are not interested in geopolitics themselves. He added that more than 20,000 people in the UK had been secretly contacted online by Chinese spies.

Concern about Chinese activities in the UK has increased, especially after the recent revelation that a parliamentary researcher was arrested in March on suspicion of spying for China. The arrest of the young researcher, who denied being a spy, has led to calls by British members of parliament for a tougher stance. The Chinese foreign ministry called the spying claims "entirely groundless".

Improvements needed

In a highly critical report, the Intelligence and Security Committee pointed out that Beijing had successfully infiltrated every sector of the UK economy and that the government had been slow to address the threat. The committee's four-year enquiry concluded that China is undertaking an all-out assault

on Britain and that the government is responding poorly, prioritising short-term economic interests. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak acknowledged the report's findings and stressed that improvements were needed in the areas mentioned.

To address the escalating situation, MI5 has significantly expanded its investigations into Chinese activities and is now conducting seven times as many investigations as it did in 2018, with plans to expand further. The government has set up a special unit to protect elections from foreign interference. Last year, MI5 issued a rare security alert informing members of parliament about a suspected Chinese spy involved in political interference activities in the UK. In addition, a newspaper report in October revealed that MI5 had warned the ruling party about two potential candidates suspected of being Chinese spies.

The government assured that civil servants are regularly vetted and has introduced software to detect fake profiles on social media platforms. More than 25,000 people have used the "Think Before You Link" app, launched last year, to report suspicious approaches by people, including those suspected of being linked to Chinese intelligence services.

NATO'S DOG HANDLERS

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) dog handlers from across Allied countries gathered in **Lithuania** to carry out **practical training** together as part of **exercise Engineer Thunder 23**.

The dogs were presented with **challenging scenarios** to **test their sense of sight and smell**. **Military working dogs** are an indispensable part of NATO's forces, playing crucial roles in Allied **military police, engineer and special operations units**.



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Organised and hosted by the **Lithuanian Army's Colonel Juozas Vitkus Engineering Battalion**, the multinational exercise Engineer Thunder 23 featured the participation by **over 1,000 troops from 11 NATO Allies**.

« The work from a dog is with this nose, and that can't be achieved in my point of view with the machine. And that's for me the biggest difference between a machine and a dog. And

also, like I said before, you have a connection with your dog. And I like more this type of job because you can play with them. With the machine, you can't play, you do your job, you put it in a box and it's finished but here, you're never finished. You're always busy with your dog. And that's what I like about it. » says dog handler 1st Corporal Francis from the Belgian Army.

NEW REPORT EXPLORES LINKS BETWEEN DRUG MARKETS AND GUN VIOLENCE IN THE EU



The links between drug markets and gun violence in the EU are explored in a new report from the EMCDDA and the Flemish Peace Institute. The analysis responds to a need for further research into the issue, at a time of rising drug-related violence in Europe.

On average, over a quarter (28%) of the firearms seizures in Europe are estimated to have occurred in the context of drug trafficking, with this figure close to a half (44%) in some EU Member States (UNODC). The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs has emphasised the need to address the links between the illicit trafficking in drugs and firearms. In Resolution 65/2, it encouraged states to take appropriate measures to prevent and combat these links, by enhancing border control management, information exchange and international operational cooperation.

The report identifies the Balkan route as a key transit route for firearms and drugs into the EU. Weapons and drugs are often smuggled along this route as part of multi-commodity transfers, or hidden in vehicles. The Western Balkans are an important source region of firearms trafficking into the EU. The arms moved from this region are often 'conflict legacy weapons' (e.g. from conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the Albanian civil war). Firearms are often smuggled together with drugs by the same criminal networks or, at least, along well-established drug-trafficking routes.

The analysis shows how firearm traffickers have significantly exploited legal loopholes over the past 20 years to legally acquire weapons unable to fire live ammunition (e.g. alarm weapons, deactivated acoustic expansion weapons, small-calibre firearms) and convert them into live-firing weapons. The ease with which these weapons can be legally purchased and converted has strongly impacted the criminal availability of firearms in several EU countries. In various Member States, a higher availability of trafficked firearms on the illicit market has triggered drug-related gun violence.

In 2019, the EMCDDA and Europol noted that the criminal

use of firearms by organised crime groups (OCGs) involved in European drug markets appeared to be increasing. Europol found that the use of drug-related violence has escalated in recent years, particularly linked to the cannabis and cocaine trade (SOCTA, 2021).

The report takes an in-depth look at the use of gun violence at the wholesale level of the drug distribution chain and the local consumer market. Violence appears generally less evident at the production and wholesale level than the consumer level of the drug market. Most of the drug-related gun violence at wholesale level in Europe is connected to cocaine. The recent shift from a few large networks dominating the cocaine market to a larger number of smaller competing networks may explain the upsurge in violence.

The local consumer market accounts for most of the visible drug-related gun violence. Many actors involved in this violence are young adults using guns as a means to advance their criminal career. Open drug markets — where buyers can purchase products without prior introduction to the seller — are more prone to violence than closed markets, which are built on relationships of trust between buyer and seller.

Finally, the report looks at the broader impact of firearms trafficking and associated violence in the drug trade on society as a whole. Residents or individuals working in the community may be threatened or extorted. Drug criminals may target innocent victims through cases of mistaken identity. And there may be spill-over effects, when violence moves beyond the criminal milieu (e.g. to Ministers, journalists).

The report underlines the need for sound intelligence on these security phenomena, including better ballistics data, law enforcement information and intelligence on firearms trafficking and criminal shootings. Such data and information are crucial to adequately inform evidence-based initiatives, support targeted law enforcement actions and evaluate policies.

EIB BACKS €6.6 BILLION ENERGY, BUSINESS, TRANSPORT AND HEALTH INVESTMENT AROUND THE WORLD

- **EIB Board of Directors approves €2.1 billion for climate action and clean energy**
- **Another €2.2 billion for sustainable transport, €1.9 billion for business investment and €403 million for education and regional development also approved in October's meeting**



Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank

The Board of Directors of the European Investment Bank (EIB) today approved €6.6 billion of new financing to support energy and climate action investment and impact driven business financing, transform sustainable transport, improve education, and strengthen health and regional development in Europe and around the world.

“Today the EIB confirmed new support for investment to improve economic opportunities, transform sustainable transport and local services, and continue delivering on climate action. At a time of high interest rates and tightening financial conditions the EIB is playing a crucial counter-cyclical role amid an economic slowdown fuelled by geopolitical instability, war, and energy price volatility,” said Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank.

Renewable energy and water

The EIB Board of Directors approved new financing to increase renewable energy generation and upgrade water infrastructure.

This includes backing construction of two large scale photovoltaic plants in south-western Spain with more than 250,000 solar panels producing 375 MWh of electricity a year.

Streamlined project financing for utility scale renewable energy plans in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and France, and financing for small-scale solar photovoltaic and wind power plants across France was also approved.

The EIB will finance new investment to reinforce and expand electricity transmission and distribution, as well as improving electricity connections to energy intensive battery manufacturing facilities across Hungary.

Water networks and wastewater treatment in Italy and the Czech Republic will be upgraded, and storm water drainage in towns transformed across the west African country of Benin by new EIB backed investment approved today.

The EIB Board also approved technical support for a new initiative to decarbonise electricity supply on the Greek islands.

Regional transport and electric vehicles

Sustainable passenger transport will benefit from EIB financing for new battery-powered trains for routes in southern Germany and new electric trains and modernisation of rail lines and depots in central France.

The EIB will also back upgrading of 90km track of the railway between Kosciierzyna and Gdynia in Poland, and electrification of the 88km line railway in north Macedonia between Kumanovo and the Bulgarian border.

Electric car use in Spain will also be facilitated by new support for 1,800 new electric vehicle charging points across Spain.

Corporate innovation and business investment

New financing to support business investment in Austria, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania will be enhanced by lending programmes agreed with local financing partners.

The EIB will also finance corporate innovation to improve mobile data networks and advanced manufacturing of microelectronic components.

Access to equity finance by high-growth companies across Africa and debt finance by smaller companies supporting renewable energy generation in emerging markets will also be strengthened by new initiatives approved today at the meeting of the EIB's Board of Directors.

Education and regional development

The EIB will support construction of a new university medical school and research centre Krakow in Poland.

Urban development to improve cultural facilities in the Czech Republic and investment to improve local transport, energy efficiency in public buildings and parks in the Croatian city of Dubrovnik will also be supported.

FRONTEX INITIATES FIRST-LINE BORDER CHECKS OUTSIDE EU



Frontex marked a significant milestone in international border cooperation as the agency's officers, for the first time, carried out first-line border checks at a border outside the European Union. The event occurred at the Palanca border crossing point, located between Moldova and Ukraine, where Frontex officers began performing border checks alongside Moldovan colleagues.

Frontex Executive Director, Hans Leijtens, attended the launch ceremony along with Diana Salcutan, Deputy Head of the Moldovan Border Police, and Serhii Deineko, Head of the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service.

“This is a historic moment. For the first time, we are cooperating with countries outside the EU to perform our primary job—securing borders, in this case, the Moldovan borders. In these difficult times, I extend my heartfelt sympathies to the Ukrainian people. I also offer my steadfast commitment to aiding Ukraine as much as possible,” Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijtens said.

The launch is part of Frontex Executive Director's wider visit to Moldova, which included a meeting with Adrian Efros, the Moldovan Minister of Internal Affairs. During the meeting, Moldova and Frontex signed a Memorandum of Understanding, focusing on a complaints mechanism, which aims to address any allegations of breaches of fundamental rights during operational activities.

Hans Leijtens noted, “Moldova sets an example in its cooperation with Frontex, and we are fully committed to providing ongoing support to our partners here.”

Adrian Efros, Moldovan Minister of Interior, expressed his gratitude for the model cooperation with Frontex. This partnership has been instrumental in fighting various forms of cross-border crime, including smuggling of firearms, illicit goods, child trafficking, and migrant smuggling.

In a trilateral meeting with the heads of the Moldovan and Ukrainian Border Police, the discussion centred on how

Frontex can bolster operational cooperation to address both current and anticipated challenges.

Frontex Joint Operation Moldova is the first comprehensive operational activity in a non-EU country that includes land and air borders under the same coordination structure. Frontex currently has 90 EU border guards in Moldova for border checks and surveillance.

EIT INNOENERGY SUPPORTS HELIUP AND PARTICIPATES IN ITS INVESTMENT ROUND TO ACCELERATE ITS GROWTH

Heliup, the French start-up pioneer in lightweight photovoltaic panels, announces a EUR 10 million round of financing to transform the large roofs of existing buildings into a source of clean energy.



© HELIUP

Fundraising to launch their production line

This round is led by Starquest Capital and includes EIT InnoEnergy, BNP Paribas Développement and IDEC Group. The company is also backed by BPI France in the regions, the France 2030 investment plan and several banks to complete the financing.

This injection of funds will enable HELIUP to invest in a production line for lightweight solar panels in France and accelerate its commercial development. The industrial line, with an initial capacity of 500,000 m²/year, i.e. 100 MWp/year, will be operational during 2024 to meet the strong demand for solarisation of roofs currently poorly covered by existing solutions, as the weight of conventional panels is incompatible with the structure of buildings.

Cutting-edge technology

HELIUP's innovative photovoltaic panels are ultra-light, durable and highly efficient, making them ideal for solarizing large roofs on existing commercial, logistics and industrial buildings. Combined with a special integration system, they reduce the weight of the solar power plant by over 60%, with significant savings in installation time and cost.

At the end of the first industrial phase, the innovation developed will avoid more than 500,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and save more than 7,000 tonnes of aluminium, 14,000 tonnes of glass and 30,000 tonnes of steel compared with ground-mounted solar power plants. What's more, as the solution is deployed on rooftops, it helps preserve 350,000 hectares of land.

The technology is the result of more than three years' development by CEA-LITEN teams.

This injection of funds will enable HELIUP to invest in a production line for lightweight solar panels in France and accelerate its commercial development. The industrial line, with an initial capacity of 500,000 m²/year, i.e. 100 MWp/year, will be operational during 2024 to meet the strong demand for solarisation of roofs currently poorly covered by existing solutions, as the weight of conventional panels is incompatible with the structure of buildings.

International ambitions

This breakthrough will transform rooftops into clean energy sources, reducing the carbon footprint of buildings and contributing to the fight against climate change, in particular by promoting self-consumption as part of a sustainable development approach.

The challenge of deploying rooftop solar power is an international one, and HELIUP is initiating projects in Europe with the ambition of exporting its solutions beyond France's borders in the years to come.

FDA AWARDS HISTOSONICS CLEARANCE OF ITS FIRST-OF-A-KIND EDISON HISTOTRIPTY SYSTEM THAT USES SOUND WAVES TO DISINTEGRATE TUMORS



© HISTOSONICS

HistoSonics has announced the marketing authorization of its “Breakthrough” platform via the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) De Novo Classification Request process, a rigorous pre-market review pathway for medical devices with no existing predicate. Marketing authorization makes Edison the first and only histotripsy platform available in the United States.

FDA authorization was based, in part, on data from the #HOPE4LIVER Trials in 13 trial sites across the US and Europe. Data pooled from both the US and European/UK trials were used to assess the clinical safety and efficacy of histotripsy in destroying targeted primary and secondary liver tumors. Histotripsy was noted to have achieved both primary safety and efficacy endpoints in the pooled data where 44 subjects were evaluated for safety and 44 tumors treated were evaluated for efficacy. Important to note was the heterogeneity of the treated subjects, 18 of which had hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) tumors and 26 had metastatic tumors to the liver from the colon, rectum, breast, and other primary origins. As recently presented at the annual CIRSE Congress in Copenhagen, a technical success rate of 95.5% was achieved indicating that physicians can precisely target and destroy liver tissue and unresectable liver tumors. Also, only 3 procedures related CTCAE Grade 3 or higher adverse events through 30 days post-histotripsy were observed across all 44 subjects treated, representing a complication rate of 6.8% with each event being common to focal liver therapies and not specific to histotripsy.

The science of histotripsy uses focused sound energy to produce controlled acoustic cavitation that mechanically destroys and liquifies targeted liver tissue, including tumors, at sub-cellular levels. HistoSonics’ Edison System uses proprietary technology and advanced imaging to deliver personalized, non-invasive histotripsy treatments with precision and control. The company believes that the novel mechanism of action of their proprietary technology may provide significant advantages to patients, including the ability of the treatment site to recover and resorb quickly. Uniquely, the HistoSonics’ platform also provides physicians the ability to monitor the destruction of tissue under continuous real-time visualization and control, unlike any modality that exists today.

The Edison System is indicated for the non-invasive destruction of liver tumors, including unresectable liver tumors, using a non-thermal, mechanical process of focused ultrasound.

FATF-INTERPOL PARTNERSHIP: PUTTING TRILLIONS IN ILLICIT PROFITS BACK INTO LEGITIMATE ECONOMIES

Igniting global asset recovery

Two world leaders in tackling financial crime – INTERPOL and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – came together to help police around the world make better use of INTERPOL’s operational tools to track, freeze and seize criminals’ illegal property and money.

With global organized crime thought to generate USD trillions in illegal wealth every year, and as criminals get increasingly innovative in how they hide their illicit profits, police need sophisticated tools to detect and prevent criminals’ attempts at investment.

Since the launch in 2022 of INTERPOL’s Global Rapid Intervention of Payments (I-GRIP) stop-payment mechanism,

countries have intercepted more than USD 200 million, stemming largely from cyber-enabled fraud.



From left to right: Director of INTERPOL’s Financial Crime and Anti-Corruption Centre (IFCACC) Isaac Kehinde Oginni, Executive Director of INTERPOL Police Services Stephen Kavanagh, FATF President T. Raja Kumar, FATF Vice-President Jeremy Weil, FATF Executive Secretary Violaine Clerc.

Around 200 experts at the interactive conference showcased operational successes, discussed their challenges and how INTERPOL’s policing tools had helped them identify and track criminal assets globally. These assets range from luxury yachts, cars and racehorses to cryptocurrency investments and real estate.

One investigation that was showcased revealed how an organized crime syndicate in Asia responsible for INTERPOL impersonation scams across Europe had been identified, its illicit money followed, and the organization disrupted.

In another major success, a drug trafficking ring was taken down when police identified and traced its money laundering operations across Europe.

Experts at the two-day meeting learned how I-GRIP helps police submit and handle time-critical requests to trace, intercept or freeze illegal proceeds of crime across borders.

Designed to give an operational focus to the discussion on asset recovery, the FIRE event (19 and 20 September) at the INTERPOL headquarters brought law enforcement, financial intelligence, public policy and judicial officials as well as industry and academia under one roof to find ways to overcome challenges faced in asset recovery globally.

Through thematic panel discussions and real-life case studies, specialists with a diverse range of expertise, approaches and experience devised and examined effective ways to address contemporary financial crime threats and support law enforcement in detecting and disrupting criminal asset flows.

The FATF-INTERPOL alliance

Global challenges require global partnerships to achieve successful outcomes. FATF and INTERPOL have joined forces to address the threats posed by transnational crime by going after the lifeblood of criminal enterprise, namely the dirty money that funds crime.

This partnership has also included the EGMONT Group of Financial Intelligence Units.

The FATF sets international standards to ensure national authorities can go after illicit funds linked to drug trafficking,

human trafficking, cyber-enabled fraud, illicit arms trade, illegal wildlife trafficking, environmental crime and other serious crimes.

In partnership with INTERPOL, FATF works with national authorities to ensure that asset recovery is a key pillar of countries' approach to tackling money laundering, terrorist financing and the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

INTERPOL's asset recovery methods and tools allow officers in 195 countries to share information helping them to trace illegally obtained assets worldwide.

CONSTRUCTION OF PARTS FOR WORLDS FIRST ENERGY ISLAND: NORTH SEA PORT SUPPORTS ENERGY TRANSITION IN BELGIUM



Princess Elisabeth Island will be an energy hub 45 km off the Belgian coast connecting new wind farms and additional interconnectors (to the UK and Denmark) to Belgium's onshore power grid. Obtaining the permit is a key condition for building the world's first artificial energy island in the North Sea. North Sea Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne has approved the relevant environmental permit. In the meantime, Elia is putting the final touches on a nature-inclusive design for the island that will be submitted later this year. Construction will take around two years (March 2024 to August 2026).

Preparing the worksite in Vlissingen

A consortium comprising Belgian marine construction companies DEME and Jan De Nul has already started preparing the site in Vlissingen where it will build the caissons. That are the concrete foundations each of which is approximately 60 m long, 30 m wide and 30 m high. In late June 2023, an environmental permit was granted for the construction on the premises of Verbrugge Zeeland Terminals at Bijleveldhaven. On this location in North Sea Port the 23 concrete caissons () will be built, launched, stored and, in the summers of 2024 and 2025, towed to the offshore location and immersed. Afterwards the island will be sand fill reclaimed and prepared for the construction of the high-voltage electrical infrastructure.

Nature-inclusive design promotes marine biodiversity

For months now Elia has been working with experts from public and private institutions, universities and non-governmental organisations to optimally integrate the energy island's infrastructure into the marine environment. In opting for a nature-inclusive design, the island's potential for marine biodiversity has been fully exploited. Based on this research,

specific measures will be formulated that will then be submitted later this year and ultimately integrated into the island's design.

Princess Elisabeth Island

Princess Elisabeth Island will be the first artificial energy island in the world to combine both direct current (HVDC) and alternating current (HVAC). The high-voltage infrastructure on the island will bundle together the export cables from the wind farms in the new Princess Elisabeth Zone while also serving as a hub for future interconnectors with the United Kingdom (Nautilus) and Denmark (TritonLink). Not only will they handle power exchanges between countries, but they will also be connected to new offshore wind farms in the North Sea that will eventually supply Belgium with large quantities of renewable energy.

Located some 45 km off the coast and covering 6 hectares (12 football fields), in the middle of the Princess Elisabeth Zone, Princess Elisabeth Island will be built on concrete caissons filled with sand. The island will house almost exclusively transmission infrastructure used to connect new wind farms (up to 3.5 GW) as well as future interconnectors. There will also be a small harbour for maintenance crews and a helideck. Some 300 km of alternating current cables (HVAC) and 60 km of direct current cables (HVDC) will be installed around the island to connect all future offshore facilities to the Belgian high-voltage grid.

DANISH MULTINATIONAL ENERGY COMPANY ØRSTED ENTERS ITS FIRST UK SOLAR PROJECT

Generating clean, renewable electricity to power up to 200,000 homes



Ørsted has entered its first solar project in the UK. One Earth Solar Farm is a proposed 740 MW solar farm with associated battery storage, that will primarily be located in Nottinghamshire near the border of Lincolnshire and is being co-developed with PS Renewables.

Once operational, the 740 MW solar farm will generate enough clean, renewable electricity to power up to 200,000 homes, making it one of the largest solar farms in the country. Subject to local and stakeholder consultation, which will begin later this month as part of the process for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIP), a development consent order (DCO) submission is planned for 2025.

Ørsted is taking a phased ownership in the project with the achievement of key milestones. PS Renewables and Ørsted are targeting a commercial operation date for the One Earth

Solar Farm before 2030. The renewable electricity produced by the solar farm has several potential routes to market including contracts for difference and corporate power purchase agreements.

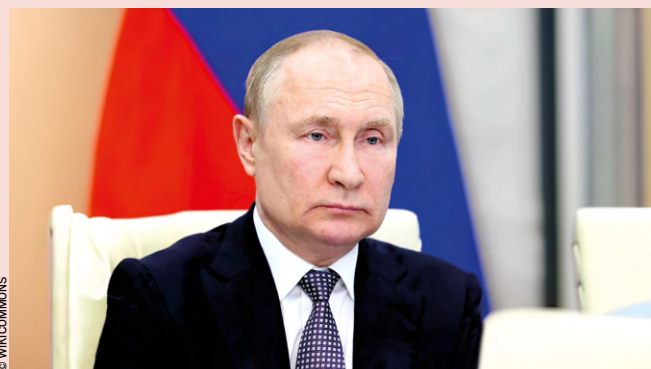
The project will contribute to Ørsted's global ambition of reaching 17.5 GW of onshore capacity by 2030. Ørsted currently has over 5.7 GW of onshore renewables in operation, under construction or consented across the United States and Europe. Solar energy is crucial to diversifying and balancing energy generation and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The UK government has set a clear target to increase solar capacity by nearly fivefold to 70 GW by 2035 as part of wider plans to power up Britain with cleaner, cheaper and more secure energy sources.

PUTIN REGIME DECLARED 'DE FACTO DICTATORSHIP'

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) has passed a resolution that denounced Russia as a dictatorship and urged the world to reject Vladimir Putin's claim to the presidency after 2024, when his current term expires.

The assembly's press service said that PACE also asked its member states to cut off all ties with Putin, "except for humanitarian contact and in the pursuit of peace."

The parliamentarians stated that "the Russian Federation has become a de facto dictatorship" due to "the overwhelming power of the president" who has been in office for a very long time without any "checks and balances" such as "a strong parliament, an independent judiciary, free media, and a vibrant civil society."



Russian President Vladimir Putin

Putin has been ruling Russia as president or prime minister since 2000. In July 2020, he changed the Russian Constitution to allow him to stay in power until 2036.

The resolution said that Russia's aggression against Ukraine showed that dictatorships "pose a threat to the international peace and security and to the sovereignty and independence of their neighbors."

The assembly also repeated its call for an international court "to hold the Russian leadership, including Putin," accountable for their crimes in Ukraine.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba praised the resolution on social platform X (formerly Twitter). He said that "crimes inside and outside the country" are the result of "over 20 years of unconstitutional one-man rule."

Lastly, the assembly repeated its call for an international court

"to hold the Russian leadership, including Putin," accountable for their crimes in Ukraine, starting with the unlawful annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas and the shooting down of flight MH17.

On 12 October, PACE also acknowledged the Holodomor or man-made famine that convulsed the Soviet republic of Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 as a genocide of the Ukrainian people and asked all member states to do the same.

U-BOAT WORX UNVEILS THE ALL-NEW SUPER SUB



The Super Sub displayed at the Monaco Yacht Show will be delivered to its client at the end of 2023, while the next unit is scheduled for delivery in October 2024 and is currently listed for sale. The starting price for this model is 5.2 million euros.

The Super Sub boasts an impressive 100 kW of thrust, enabling it to reach speeds of up to 10 knots. It can smoothly ascend and descend at inclines of up to 45 degrees while executing rapid banking turns, ensuring agile and swift underwater maneuverability. "The Super Sub's speed of 10 knots is 3-4 knots faster than the top cruising speed of a bottlenose dolphin and 7 knots faster than the average submersible," explained Roy Heijdra, Marketing Manager at U-Boat Worx. "Owners can glide behind a group of sea turtles, cruise alongside a school of sharks, dive and turn with a pod of dolphins, or swiftly navigate through the undercurrents with a powerful barracuda. The Super Sub is more than a ticket to an underwater theater; it's a backstage VIP pass that immerses guests in the heart of the action."

The SHARC Controller ensures that the hydrofoils operate in unison with the powerful thruster systems, guaranteeing guests the most thrilling ride. The hydrofoils on the back of the submarine allow it to direct the thrust flow more effectively, enabling sharp turns and banking maneuvers. The Super Sub also features an auto-heading system. When activated, the submersible will automatically maintain its current heading, whether following a course

Safety is top priority. Like every other U-Boat Worx masterpiece, the DNV-certified Super Sub is equipped with state-of-the-art safety systems. For example, the 'maximum depth protection' feature prevents the pilot from descending beyond the submarine's maximum operating depth. If the submersible ever goes too deep, this safety feature will automatically raise the submersible until it is back within its certified depth. The Safety Buoy is a distinctive feature of U-Boat Worx submersibles. When released, it marks the submarine's position on the surface. A large drop weight can be manually released from within the vessel to increase buoyancy and assist in returning to the surface in case of an emergency. Additionally, each submarine, including the Super Sub, is equipped with a minimum of 96 hours of life support or approaching an object of interest. This function is part of the intelligent pilot assistance features.



Yevgeny Prigozhin and his Wagner Group fighters in Bakhmut

YEVGENY PRIGOZHIN'S LEGACY

**The scramble
for his empire**

The Russian tycoon and mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, who headed the Wagner Group, a private military company, perished in an air crash in August. His life was full of twists and turns, from being a former prisoner to a cook to a warlord to a rebel. He amassed a huge fortune, and on October 2, it was revealed that he had bequeathed almost all of it to his son.

According to some sources, his fortune could amount to several billion dollars and consist of various properties such as luxury villas, hotels and a large stash of gold and cash. Pavel Prigozhin, 25, is the designated heir to his father's empire and has *"already announced himself as Yevgeny Prigozhin's successor,"* a source close to the family told Russian investigative news portal VChK-OGPU. Prigozhin's daughters, Veronika, 18, and Polina, 31, will reportedly receive only *"a few things"*.

His widow, Lyubov Valentinovna Prigozhina, reportedly received money and property from her husband before his death, after he tried to lead his mercenaries in a doomed uprising against the Kremlin in late June. But what - and how much - will Pavel get? The answer, as with everything to do with Prigozhin, is opaque. The warlord, who was close to President Vladimir Putin as his personal chef, worked in the dark, using different passports and identities to travel around the world. The same goes for his wealth: earlier reports point to a complex - and deliberately opaque - network of shell companies that he used to hide his wealth from Western governments and especially from the sanctions



Lyubov Prigozhina, spouse of Yevgeny Prigozhin. She owns Agat LLC, a subsidiary of Concord Management

imposed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

One of the most credible sources of Prigozhin's wealth is President Putin himself, who revealed after the unsuccessful Wagner revolt that Prigozhin's mercenary army received almost \$1 billion from the Kremlin between May 2022 and May 2023.

Putin also mentioned that another catering company owned by Prigozhin received almost \$900 million during the same period. *"I want to emphasise, and I want everyone to be aware of*

this: the entire Wagner Group was fully supported by the state," Putin said. *"From the Ministry of Defence, from the state budget, we have fully financed this group."* Considering that the Wagner Group has been operating since 2014, the conclusion is obvious: Prigozhin's companies have earned several billion from the Kremlin's coffers alone.

Weapons, gold and diamonds



Wagner mercenaries providing security for a convoy of the president of the Central African Republic

It is evident that the payments from the Kremlin were not the only source of income for Prigozhin and his enterprises - and thus not the only source of the wealth that will now reportedly go to his son. How much of this wealth belonged to Prigozhin and his family is also difficult to estimate, with figures varying from the hundreds of millions to more than one billion dollars. Before he died, Wagner's mercenaries had spread their operations across different parts of the African continent, including in Mali, Sudan and the Central African Republic, offering their services as a hired shield against violence and local terrorist groups. Wagner often demanded payment in gold and diamonds, instead of cash or bank transfers; an effective way to hide their earnings. They also made money from activities other than security; over the years, Wagner has taken over assets such as oil concessions and gold mines - with profitable outcomes. The estimated \$250 million that Prigozhin made in this period from its mercenary-backed ventures and other non-security activities in countries such as Sudan and Syria helped it become a powerful ally of President Vladimir Putin in his full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

But Prigozhin's business empire also included sports hotels, restaurants, business centres, a gourmet grocery store, beer and vodka production, cutting timber, and much more.

He had a total of six active companies registered under his name that have not already been dissolved. Three of these companies are separate legal entities associated with the catering company Concord. Prigozhin is also a director of a real estate company responsible for the legal management of the PMC Wagner Centre. In addition, he owned 49 per cent of a film distribution company and 80 per cent of a real estate rental and management company.

Russian journalists have also uncovered links between Prigozhin and various companies not officially registered under his name and that made considerable profits in 2022.

One example is 'Russockapital', a company that supplies food to schools and hospitals in Moscow. Russockapital secured over 150 government contracts and made a profit of 760 million rubles (\$8.9 million). 'Verona' is another company linked to Prigozhin, which earned 750 million rubles (\$8.8 million) from catering contracts with Moscow schools.

And in 2021, a company called 'Megaline', informally linked to Prigozhin, entered into an agreement with the municipal investment committee, with the aim of building a maritime industrial complex near the city. Prigozhin had expressed his intention of investing a substantial amount of up to 300 billion rubles (\$3.5 billion) in improving St. Petersburg's infrastructure.

The cream of the crop

Thanks to their considerable wealth, the Prigozhin family enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle. According to various sources, his daughters are passionate riders who actively participated in numerous European show jumping competitions. In the years after 2014, they are said to have had their own horse collection, which was a personal stable.

Prigozhin's wife and two children had several assets registered in their names. One notable example is the ownership of land in a gated community called Lake Lakhta outside St. Petersburg. The Concord company oversaw the construction of 49 villas in this community, some of which belong to Prigozhin, his wife Lyubov, their son Pavel and their daughter Polina. In total, these properties cover an area of about 17,000 square metres.



The Trezzini Palace Hotel

In addition, Prigozhin's daughter Veronika is the registered founder of a The Trezzini Palace

Hotel near the Mariinsky Theatre, while Pavel Prigozhin has built a business centre on the Sinopskaya embankment. The family also owns other properties throughout St Petersburg. Some of these properties have a long history, such as a restaurant that opened in 1996 and was frequently used by Prigozhin to entertain and dine with the city's political elite.

In November 2022, following the revelation of Prigozhin's leadership role in the Wagner Group, the "PMC Wagner Centre" was established in St. Petersburg. The centre, housed in a 23-storey building on Zolnaya Street, had ambitions to become a sprawling centre for projects supporting the invasion effort. It declared its intention to provide free office space to "patriotic" creatives, designers and IT specialists.



The Wagner Centre building in Saint Petersburg, owned by Prigozhin

Over the next six months, the centre attracted many new users, including "Z-bloggers", a drone-flying school and the "Cyberfront-Z" movement, which coordinated the posting of pro-war comments on social media. Russian investigative journalists reported that a group within the centre was conducting "master classes" in military training for "orphans" and "troubled teenagers". It was also revealed that these classes involved "instructors" with established ties to neo-Nazi organisations.

It has been reported that Prigozhin maintained offices in St Petersburg at the Trezzini Palace Hotel, which he considers his own home. On 24 June, when Wagner forces were still en route to Moscow, police raided the hotel, seizing 4 billion rubles (\$46.8 million) in cash as well as cases of firearms, fake passports with his photographs, and five kilos of an unknown white powder. Prigozhin claimed that the money was intended for the Wagner Group soldiers.

But there are also more recent properties, such as a restaurant on the University Embankment, which was the site of a bomb attack in April 2023 that killed the Ukrainian-born Russian military blogger, Vladlen Tatarsky. After this tragic incident,

Prigozhin claimed to have handed over control of the café to the Cyberfront Z movement.

Wagner's uncertain future

In the midst of an uncertain future, Wagner itself is in the limelight. Prigozhin, the man behind it, has been associated with inflicting pain and suffering on many Ukrainians, Russians, Syrians and Africans. His propaganda organisations and troll farms have relentlessly targeted Russian journalists and opposition figures. Its forces are accused of heinous war crimes in Syria, massacres in various African countries and the torture of prisoners in Ukraine.



Maksim Shugalei in Kabul

Moreover, its mercenaries have failed to curb Islamist violence in the countries where they have been deployed, such as in Mali, where recent attacks tragically killed 49 civilians and 15 soldiers, according to the government report.

However, Prigozhin has also built a loyal following, including people such as Maksim Shugalei, a sociologist by profession, who was imprisoned in Libya for over a year while Prigozhin campaigned for his release. Shugalei, who lives in St Petersburg, dismissed the idea that the Russian government could take over Wagner completely or operate with the same level of effectiveness. He also mentioned Prigozhin's relatively unknown son Pavel as a possible heir to the Wagner empire.

"I think he's got to take on some of the problems," he said, referring to Pavel Prigozhin. "As far as I know, he's prepared to."

Some observers speculate that 25-year-old Pavel Prigozhin will try to take control of his father's company. Last year, he himself was the target of sanctions by the United States because of his involvement in three real estate companies in St Petersburg. In a statement last year, his father claimed that Pavel had taken

part in conflicts in Syria and had been constantly present in various volatile regions as part of the Wagner PMC. However, the veracity of these claims remains unverified.



СРОЧНО "I have taken command of the Wagner PMC and very soon Wagner's fighters will return to the North Military District zone and continue to exterminate the Nazis! There is no one except me to continue my father's work. There is no more time to grieve and grieve, but those responsible for the death of my father will be punished! In my channel I will publish all the news and events of PMC Wagner

 Pavel Prigozhin

It is possible that Pavel could keep part of his father's fortune in Russia. According to the independent Russian news magazine Agentstvo, these assets will fetch about \$800 million in 2022 at the current exchange rate. However, if Pavel wants to continue to operate internationally, he would likely need the Kremlin's approval. Governments seeking Moscow's geopolitical support, along with local militias, play an important role in the overseas market.



Pavel Prigozhin



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Interim President of Burkina Faso Ibrahim Traore and Russian President Vladimir Putin

I President Putin's pick

Recently, the Kremlin released photos and a short transcript of a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Andrei Troshev, Wagner's former chief of staff. After the failed mutiny of former leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, Putin appointed Troshev as the new head of the paramilitary organisation.

Towards the end of September, Putin publicly put Troshev in charge of leading "volunteer" units in various combat operations, including in Ukraine. A Kremlin spokesperson later described Troshev, who already has experience with Wagner operations in Syria, as an employee of the Russian Defence Ministry.

Andrei Troshev, a former military veteran, was one of the founding members and managing directors of the Wagner Group. Even before the attempted uprising in June that led to the split from the Wagner forces, he had a controversial past within the group. Troshev, whose call sign is "Siedoy" or "Grey Hair", served as Wagner commander during the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015.

In 2017, Troshev was found in a near-comatose state on a street in St. Petersburg and hospitalised. According to Russian media and police reports, he had 5 million roubles (\$78,448) and \$5,000 in cash on him at the time. He was also allegedly found with military maps of Syria, airline tickets and receipts for new weapons. A year later, Troshev was awarded the Hero of the Russian Federation, Russia's highest military title, for his service in Syria.

Troshev's decision not to take part in Wagner's attempted insurrection meant, of course, that he was not on board the

private jet that crashed on 23 August along with Prigozhin and other senior officers.



© KREMLIN.RU

Andrei Troshev

A complication arises, however, from the fact that Troshev was allegedly involved in getting other Wagner employees to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence during the time of the Wagner uprising. This information is based on an assessment by British military intelligence, which has supported Putin's faction in the

struggle over the future direction of the paramilitary organisation and its affiliations. The assessment, dated 30 September, suggests that many Wagner veterans may view Troshev as a traitor.

According to US officials, there are about twelve private companies that may become involved in paramilitary operations. Among them, PMC Redut is a prominent contender because of its close ties to military intelligence. However, a Telegram account linked to Wagner recently criticised PMC Redut for not fulfilling the “original contract terms” promised to its recruits.

In Africa’s most vulnerable countries, demand for Wagner’s main service which is regime protection, remains high. Interestingly, the fall of Prigozhin has only increased the interest of some African countries in a closer relationship with the Kremlin, especially those that were previously reluctant to engage Wagner, such as Burkina Faso.

When Yunus-bek Yevkurov, Russia’s Deputy Minister of Defence arrived there at the beginning of September, he was greeted by Capt. Ibrahim Traoré, the country’s 35-year-old leader, who seized power in a military coup last year. One of several West African leaders to sever ties with the former colonial power, France, in recent years, Traoré had held a warm meeting with Putin at a Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg in July where he said, “*Russia is part of Africa’s family.*”

Two Wagner funerals

By then, Prigozhin had been buried in St. Petersburg. The mercenary leader’s press service announced that the farewell ceremony for Yevgeny Viktorovich was held in closed session and those who wished to pay their last respects to him were directed to the Porokhovskoye cemetery.

According to a cemetery employee interviewed by the Russian news agency Agency News, about 30 people were present at the ceremony, made up entirely of relatives and close friends. According to reports, all the mourners attended in civilian clothes and not in uniform.

Meanwhile, in another cemetery less than five miles away, members and admirers of the Wagner Group gathered to mourn the loss of Valeriy Chekalov, who oversaw Prigozhin’s enterprises in Russia and Syria and who had also died in the crash.

However, funeral arrangements for Dmitry Utkin, a Wagner co-founder were not confirmed and remained uncertain.

Scores of mourners made their way to St. Petersburg’s Serafimovskoye cemetery, often used for high-profile military funerals, to pay their last respects to Chekalov. Before entering the cemetery, mourners had to pass through metal detectors and a drone was observed flying overhead. Among those present were members and supporters of the Wagner group, most of them in civilian clothes, with some wearing caps with the Wagner logo.



Dmitry Utkin, Wagner’s chief’s right-hand man and co-founder of the mercenary group was also killed in the crash

Neither Vladimir Putin nor other government or military officials were present at either funeral. The Kremlin said that it had not known about the funeral arrangements for Prigozhin and that the decision about the president’s presence had been taken by the deceased’s relatives and close associates.

According to Russian news sources, public mourning ceremonies for Prigozhin and other Wagner officials were banned because of fears of unrest among their supporters, which led to an increased presence of police and national guards at cemeteries in St Petersburg. As far as Prigozhin was concerned, the Kremlin was faced with the question of how to commemorate him, as he had previously been honoured with one of Russia’s highest awards, but was then denounced as a traitor by President Vladimir Putin after the June uprising.

Be that as it may, the deaths of Prigozhin and other top Wagner figures were widely attributed to Putin and the Kremlin.

The cemetery employee, who has over 30 years of experience in the funeral business, described Prigozhin’s burial as a routine VIP burial with nothing out of the ordinary.

He added that it was not the first burial of this kind and probably would not be the last.

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Chinese fishing vessel fleet

WHOSE
FISH?

How China's vast and growing armada of fishing vessels is robbing the world of its fish

“And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea.” That’s what it says in the Bible, in the book of Genesis. The Qur’an also talks enthusiastically about fish and fishing, such as in the Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 47, verse 10: “Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds like the fish of the Great Sea.” Fish were clearly very important to our ancestors (not just the prophets) as a vital source of food. In many parts of the world, they still are, whatever religious faith the locals happen to practise. Where I was brought up, along the banks of the River Tyne in North-East England, fishing was a very important industry and, as a child, I loved to see the seine netters, drifters, trawlers, and other boats chugging back up the River Tyne to the Fish Quay with their harvest. Relying on the sea for a living is (and always has been) a hazardous business, strewn with dangers. In December 1938 a small steam-powered trawler called the Jeanie Stewart sailed out of North Shields, on the north bank of the Tyne, intending to return to port later that same year, on Christmas Eve, the 24th of December. She and her 9-man crew were never seen again, and nor has any wreckage ever been found, despite searches being made right up the east coast of Scotland, although a life raft that turned up the following spring could have come from the vessel; it was unmarked so no-one could tell for sure.



The trawler Jeanie Stewart which sailed out of North Shields on December 14, 1938

North Shields had a long history as a fishing port and even today it is England’s largest port for landing prawns. The ships we most looked forward to seeing when I was a boy were the enormous Southern Harvester and Southern Venturer. The Harvester is believed to be still docked at Aruba to this day. They were never seen together because they took turns on their missions, but they were whaling ships that mainly hunted in the southern hemisphere. Both vessels stank strongly, probably of dead whales. Back in those far-off days we didn’t realise how wrong it was to hunt whales, so we admired the big harpoon guns mounted on the deck. It gave an extra frisson to the Walt Disney film of Jules Verne’s 1870 novel about a rogue Captain, Nemo, with his submarine called “Nautilus”. The harpoonist in the book (and film), called Ned Land, was played by Kirk Douglas in the movie, but Disney did somewhat redesign the

Nautilus so that it looked very different (and rather more ominously animalistic) than it had in Jules Verne’s description. Still, my fellow junior school pals and I loved the book and the film, even if we didn’t like the smell the two whaling ships gave off on the days the westerly wind brought it over our school.



The English North-East seems less likely to face devastation because of Chinese over-fishing than the ports of southeast Asia, whatever the Bible and the Qur’an may say. In the People’s Republic, the concern is not so much for prophets as for profits, anyway. China stands accused of seriously overfishing the waters of Southeast Asia and the entire surrounding area. The world’s fisheries are said to be in crisis, with some observers accusing China of deliberately over-fishing to help fund the increased construction of long-range trawlers and also providing fleets with equipment to predict fish movements so that no fishing effort is wasted. Meanwhile, China is said to be adversely impacting on the marine environment in many parts of the world through plastic pollution, the destruction of forests and through emitting greenhouse gases on a massive scale.

China consumes one third of all the fish caught throughout the world, with a per capita annual consumption of some 38 kilos, which is many times as much as most developing and even highly developed countries, including the United States. Hong Kong consumes



A Hong Kong fish restaurant’s aquarium

spectacular volumes, too: some 70 kilos per person per year and almost three times the volume consumed even in the USA. As people used to say, there's clearly something fishy going on! Almost 40% of the wild-caught fish eaten in China come from imports, including two thirds of the fish consumed in Hong Kong. That includes threatened species, eaten without consideration for the fishes' survival. Expert observers note that it's very difficult to monitor fish catches and consumption in China because it deliberately seeks to obscure what it's doing. It is soundly believed, however, that China is certainly the biggest consumer of marine life. It's said to be the world's largest consumer as well as being the largest producer and exporter of fish, as well as the third largest importer.

More and more, but smaller

The dishonesty of the Chinese government over its fishing activities has drawn strong criticism from the Hong Kong Free Press. "The Chinese government promotes overfishing around the world," ran one article written by Paul G. Harris, "by helping to pay for the building of large long-range trawlers, providing fleets with forecasts of where and when certain species are likely to be most prevalent around the world, and providing tax exemptions and extensive subsidies, especially for fuel." All of this has provided the background music for a massive growth in China's piscatorial activities, which continue unabated despite the rapid declines in fish stocks worldwide. China's fisheries production rose substantially in the 1970s and the trade accelerated in the 1990s. China is known to under-report its fish catches, because it's certain to catch more fish than any other country, and probably at least 15% of the global total. For some species, its take is even greater, and it's said to be responsible for almost 70% of the total catches of squid. As a result of all this energetic exploitation of available marine life, the coastal waters of the South China Sea have witnessed a 90% reduction in biomass, despite the Chinese government's declared moratoria of summer fishing.

The fish that remain, when they're caught at all, are said to be a fraction of the size of their forebears, making them unfit for human consumption.



A chinese fishing vessel in the Indian Ocean



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Guardsmen from the cutter 'James' conducting a search on a fishing vessel in the eastern Pacific Ocean, 3 August, 2022

They are still harvested, however, as food for China's aquaculture industry. If you're breeding fish on a commercial scale they need to eat, too. By the way, China can now boast some 17,000 fishing vessels – a big increase on the 13 it owned in 1985. The US can only boast a distant-water fleet of fewer than 300 vessels.



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Guardsmen from the cutter 'James' (background, right) about to conduct a boarding of a fishing vessel in the eastern Pacific Ocean

The effect of China's seemingly insatiable appetite for seafood, largely through funding the construction of long-range boats, has so affected fisheries elsewhere in the world that one assessment concluded that "no major global fishery ecosystem is untouched by China's seafood economy." I would never have imagined such a thing when queuing for a piece of deep-fried cod and six penneth of chips (a slice of battered and deep-fried cod together with a portion of chips to the value of six old pre-decimalisation pennies and all wrapped up in newspaper) in Coleman's, my nearest fish-and-chip shop, all those many years ago.

There is another issue that would never have been raised in that old chip shop: sharks' fins. It's illegal to hunt them but China regularly ignores the law to meet demand, which is why shark populations worldwide are tumbling. Apart from the devastating effect on the shark population, it devastates stocks of the totoaba, an increasingly rare species found only in

Mexico's Sea of Cortez, because of the demand for the poor creature's swim bladder, which is used (for no known medical reason) in Chinese traditional medicine. The bladder of just one fish can fetch US\$100,000. Sadly, this leads to the drowning of vaquita porpoises, which are now nearing extinction. Some estimates suggest that only half a dozen or so remain alive. What's more, many of China's fishing vessels are bottom trawlers, which China has banned from its own waters because of the massive damage they cause, but which are still used where the law is harder to apply. Vessels from China and from Hong Kong (where bottom trawling is also banned) are responsible, it's said, for more than 25% of fish caught using this very destructive method.

In fact, China is thought to be the very worst source of illegal and unreported (or deliberately misreported) fishing activity, conducted in



Indonesia's Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry, in cooperation with the Navy and the National Police, blowing up and sinking a Chinese fishing vessel caught operating illegally in Indonesian territorial waters

defiance of regulations, especially off the coast of Africa and South America. The real figure is almost certainly worse than what has come to light so far. According to Spyglass, which maintains a database of criminal fishing, more than 20% of fishing offences from 2010 to 2019 were committed by Chinese ships. In the waters off North Korea, for instance (one of China's "friends?"), Chinese vessels have been

found to be conducting what's been called "the largest known case of illegal fishing perpetrated by a single industrial fleet operating in another nation's waters." One might expect better behaviour from one's "friends". The same report claims that Chinese vessels have been spotted fishing quite illegally for bluefin tuna as far from China as the Mediterranean Sea.

Chinese fishermen have met with opposition from the authorities for their illegal activities in the waters of Indonesia, Japan, North and South Korea and Vietnam. Attempts at arrest have often met with violence because the Chinese sailors are militarily trained, presumably because Beijing knows it's breaking international law and realises that the police of victim nations may try to stop them. One South Korean coast guard ship was even sunk after being rammed by the Chinese vessel it was trying to apprehend. Some seventy countries around the world have signed up to the Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. Unsurprisingly, they do not include China. But then a known burglar is unlikely to sign a petition calling for tougher police action against burglars.

Unity, like charity, begins at home

China puts great store by "unity". "This remains by far the most important question in China's political life," according to Martin Jacques in his book "When China Rules the World". But that means "unity" with other Chinese people



Jumping silver carps



A Chinese fishing boat after the South Korean coast guard fired a grenade

inside China. “The fact that China has spent so much of its history in varying degrees of disunity, and at such great cost, has taught the Chinese that unity is sacrosanct”.

They do not, of course, respect it among other nations, nor do they care much for the views of the people concerned. “The



A Chinese fishing vessel, equipped with an array of lights to attract squid at night, anchored in South Korean waters

Chinese government has attached the highest priority to the return of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan,” writes Jacques, “even though they passed out of Chinese Hands (in the case of Macao and Hong Kong) a very long time ago. Furthermore, little or no weight has been given to the preferences of the people who live there.” In other words, China is effectively a dictatorship. Do not try to argue against its decisions. They’re fixed and unshakeable. Xi Jinping, the general secretary of



the Chinese Communist Party and chairman of the Central Military Commission, and the paramount leader of China, would probably disagree, although China’s fleet of fishing vessels often operate in the territorial waters of very poor countries, taking away the marine produce upon which local people rely for food and income. That’s why China has been described as the “major predator”. Of almost 1,000 of China’s “distant water “ vessels, half are registered in Africa, with China’s West African fleet operating outside licensed waters, under-reporting and over-harvesting their catch. In 2020, hundreds of Chinese vessels were found illegally taking sharks from waters off the Galapagos islands with their identity transponders turned off to avoid being detected.

Another advantage for China is that its far-flung fishing vessels work as a kind of “maritime militia”, helping it to spread its influence far and wide. China admits that its distant-water vessels are “pseudo-military instruments”, and that their crews receive basic military training and are taught how to “safeguard Chinese sovereignty”. Does anyone remember those kung-fu films of the 1980s? In any case, armed Chinese fishing boats are frequently involved in attempts to harass vessels from other countries, rather as if China believes it has sovereign rights over all the waters of the world. The ships also relay information about the movements of other countries’ vessels. China tried to assert its sovereignty over various disputed waters, such as those off the Philippines, but despite that claim being rejected by the International Court of Arbitration, as many as hundreds of Chinese vessels have sought to occupy disputed waters (disputed but definitely not Chinese) to prevent other countries’ vessels from gaining access. China also seems to be trying to convert its distant radar stations, supposedly set up to monitor Chinese fishing activities, as military bases. China has made promises to restrain its distant-water operations, although it has shown no signs of honouring them.

China’s problem stems partly from the way it has depleted its own fish stocks so drastically. Having so few of its own fish left to catch, it is increasingly extending its range and is believed to be in possession of between 200,000 and 800,000 vessels. At the upper end, that’s almost half of all the fishing boats in the world. China admits to having some 2,600 vessels – quite a lot. But a study by the US Overseas Development Institute puts the number closer to 17,000, many of them not carrying transponders and therefore effectively invisible. Not entirely invisible, of course: satellite images revealed the



Ian Urbina



South Korean squid fishermen in the East Sea of Japan are forced farther off their own coast due to the influx of Chinese vessels

higher number in North Korean waters. The United States' own distant waters fleet numbers fewer than 300 vessels. The Chinese fleet is having to sail further and further afield to bring back its hoped-for harvest. It goes some way towards explaining the so-called "ghost boats": badly damaged old wooden vessels that washed up along the coast of Japan, bearing the corpses of North Korean fishermen who appear to have died of starvation.

China's tentacles everywhere

According to a report for the Yale School of the Environment by Ian Urbina, China is filling the waters with its own armada of industrial vessels to force out North Korean vessels, which are smaller, whilst drastically depleting the available stock of squid. Those found washed up on Japan's coast appear to be fishermen who ventured too far out in their hunt for squid. Some experts, such as Urbina, are at last starting to link China's expanding maritime activities with its "geopolitical aspirations"; it seems to want to rule the world. Its activities at sea are clearly helping in this regard. Attempts to police its activities are difficult because many of those working on the vessels are illiterate. This would have upset Chairman Mao Zedong because his campaign to teach literacy has made huge strides since it began in 1949. Literacy was the shining centrepiece of Mao's plan to educate the population and "sweep away illiteracy", as Stalin had done and was still doing in Russia. Clearly Xi is not the equal of Mao in many ways. As for

policing the fleet, it's not just the inability of many fishermen to read that gets in the way. Many of the vessels themselves are not properly licensed and also lack names or identifying numbers. China has so far refused to standardise the system or share information. It's been reported that Chinese fishing boats are often aggressive and are frequently shadowed by armed Chinese coastguard vessels. China seems to oppose any sort



Fishing vessels of the Tanka boat people in southern China

of law enforcement whilst favouring using its officials as bully-boys to intimidate others. While Urbina and his researchers were trying to film the activities of the Chinese vessels, one of them veered violently off course and forced Urbina's boat to swerve to avoid a collision. As it is, China's fishing vessels are often referred to as a "civilian militia", wrote Greg Poling in Foreign Policy magazine, "a non-uniformed unprofessional force without proper training and outside the frameworks of international maritime law, the military rules of engagement, or the multilateral mechanisms set up to prevent unsafe incidents at sea." Indeed, the Chinese seem determined to cause accidents at sea, which is illegal except in times of declared war.



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The Argentine Naval Prefecture intercepting the 'Jing Yuan 626', fishing illegally in its territorial waters

Old maps, deep ravines and poetry

Talking about fish should not, to the Chinese mind, inspire thoughts of war. Indeed, fishing has been a source of gentle poetical meditation for years. It was Bai Juyi, a poet working during the Tang dynasty (618–907AD) who wrote:

“Ocean water, mulberry orchards expect a change of seasons
Typhoon waves multiply to overturn and bubble away many people.

Whales swallow flood dragons, produces waves of blood
This little fish unaware of all of this inside a deep ravine.”

Or, if you prefer:

“海水桑田欲变时
风涛翻覆沸天池。
鲸吞蛟斗波成血
深涧游鱼乐不知。”

Presumably that little fish today would be actively working for the Chinese government and have little or no interest in flood dragons (whatever they are). And it may be radio-tracking any foreign vessels that might possibly be watching the Chinese boats with espionage in mind. Hiding in a deep ravine when the Chinese fleet gets near seems like a sensible idea.

Even so, tensions could be easing. According to the South China Morning Post, China and the United States have now set up joint working groups on finance and the economy after months of talks aimed at easing trade tensions. Does that include fish? The article doesn't say. Meanwhile, China's militarisation of the oceans continues a-pace. It has, for instance, erected artificial reefs and shoals in the waters off the Spratly Islands, a disputed archipelago in the South China Sea, composed of islands, islets, cays, and more than a hundred reefs, sometimes grouped in submerged old atolls. The archipelago lies off the coasts of the Philippines, Malaysia, and southern Vietnam but China

has been militarising them with airstrips, radar facilities and harbours, while Chinese fishing boats swarm over the entire zone, crowding out and deliberately intimidating any likely competitors. Back in 2018, China suddenly sent a fleet of more than ninety fishing boats to anchor within a few nautical miles of Thitu Island, which belongs to the Philippines. This act followed a modest upgrade to the island's infrastructure by the Philippine government. Whenever China seeks a justification for its acts of aggression, it resorts to what's called a “nine-dash line” argument, relying (as it does) on old maps of historic fishing grounds, using a line made up of nine dashes to enclose an area of sea China argues to be part of its historic waters. It's not a new trick: the United States and Europe have deployed similar arguments in the past, although it was said to be an invalid argument in a 2016 international court ruling.

It can be hazardous in the disputed waters. In March 2016, a Chinese ship that had been ordered to stop by the Argentine Coast Guards tried to escape into international waters until the Argentinian vessel fired a warning shot, at which point the Chinese vessel attempted to ram the coast guard ship, before it was capsized for its trouble. Some of the Chinese crew swam out to other Chinese boats while others were rescued (and held) by the coastguard. It all goes to show that China is engaged in a dangerous game in which it will inevitably be portrayed as the villain, attempting illegal activities to steal the food from other (often poorer) nations.

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Dubai Skyline at night

FLAUNTING IT

**How rich Russians
show off their ill-gotten
wealth, trying to tempt
Muslims to sin.**

It is written in the book of Jonah in the Koran, “Say: ‘In the bounty of God, and His mercy – in that let them rejoice; it is better than that they amass.’” In other words, don’t put your faith in storing up gold and ostentatious wealth for yourself, because the gifts of God are much better for you. That is probably true, but everyone seems to love money, even if the granting of interest on investments is seen as “haram” (forbidden) under Islamic law. Fear of divine retribution has seldom, if ever, persuaded people to forego monetary rewards in this world, in my experience. That’s why Vladimir Putin, Russia’s paranoid president, decided to re-orientate his country’s trade away from the West towards Asia. The West, he considers, is not really his friend, despite the US House of Representatives deciding to stop giving cash aid to his enemy, Ukraine, even sacking its own speaker, Kevin McCarthy, to achieve this. It was a step no previous American government had taken, even if the motivation that prompted this drastic step, launched by a controversial Florida congressman, Matt Gaetz, may have been partly (according to some observers) to divert attention away from that man’s alleged sexual misdemeanours and his supposed misuse of official funds. But stopping funding from reaching Ukraine will be very bad news for Kiev and a generous gift to Putin, who may perhaps add Gaetz to his Christmas card list as a result. Complicated business, politics, especially in the United States. Fear of being ousted is what drives a lot of politicians, however, including Putin, who remains convinced that the USA wants to see him removed from power. Whatever gave him that idea? This is the same Putin, please note, who is convinced that Ukraine has no intention of joining NATO, nor ever will have.



President of the United Arab Emirates Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan meeting with President of Russia Vladimir Putin in Saint Petersburg, Russia in 2022

But I digress. What I am writing about today is the way in which Russia’s decision to switch its trade focus to Asia is benefitting the United Arab Emirates (UAE). To be honest, ties between Russia and the UAE have been strengthening since before Putin’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Between 2017 and 2022, the volume of overall trade between the two increased by nearly 68%, rising to a very impressive \$9-billion (€8.5-billion), while Russian exports to the UAE went up to \$8.5-billion (€8.03-billion), which represents an increase of 71%. Please note that the exchange rate from US dollars into euros is correct at the time of writing but can change very quickly. Impressive stuff, and ensuring that the UAE has become Russia’s most important trading partner among the Gulf states. Meanwhile, Russia continues to cheat over its

oil exports, pumping oil from one ancient tanker to another to avoid sanctions. Honesty may be (as the old saying has it) the best policy, but it has seldom been one employed by the Russians, and a difference in location of some four nautical miles can make all the difference in the world. That’s why Russia now boasts a vast fleet of “ghost tankers” that don’t officially exist.

As the Middle East Institute points out, the Gulf states are often overlooked in their benefitting from Russia’s energy war with Europe. It’s a war that predated, of course, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in a war Putin clearly expected to be brief and victorious. It has proved to be neither. But these sorts of commercial conflicts are seldom without the opportunity for profit for those willing to take a (very small) risk. Some Gulf states have engaged in arbitrage, substituting cheap Russian fuel oil for the home-produced variety in their power plants, thus freeing up more of their own oil to export to clients in Europe who are trying to reduce their dependence on Russian oil in any form. This is normally done by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and it’s very big business. A study conducted in October 2022 revealed that a large increase in fuel oil consumption throughout the summer of 2022 did not bring about a fall in oil exports because of the vast volume of Russian oil that was being imported and used for energy generation to replace the domestic product.

My piggy bank is too small

Meanwhile, Russian buyers are pushing up the price of real estate in the UAE, spending more than the locals can afford while rents are soaring. It seems that 72% of Russian ex-pats say they’ve bought property there during the last year. Property is always a good investment, it seems, and Russian ex-pats are increasingly choosing to settle in the Gulf. They’re spending more, too: while most locally-based purchasers spend an average of \$0.6-million (€0.57-million) on a property, Russians are spending an average of \$1.1-million (€1.04-million). Apparently they also prefer villas, rather than apartments, with



A villa valued at \$US 50 million, offered for sale to Russians in the UAE

67% of Russian ex-pats saying they've bought villas there. For them, the UAE offers a stable economy and political system, so it offers the super-rich a useful and luxurious safe haven, away from regions engaged in conflict, according to Akshay Jayaprakasan, a partner in Redseer property. After all, Russian citizens face sanctions in most Western countries. Oligarchs prefer places that are still open for business, but local property experts still think the Russian-fuelled boom will be short lived, at least relatively speaking. It looks as if they're buying second properties, too.

Research suggests that the average Russian buyer in the UAE is rich and looking to invest on a large scale. Russians spent – on average – 98% more on real estate than other purchasers from elsewhere. As the BBC puts it, the UAE has not put sanctions on Russia nor criticised its invasion of Ukraine. The BBC also mentions how the Gulf state is providing visas to non-sanctioned Russians while many Western countries have restricted them. There is an old English (or possibly American) saying, “home is where the heart is”, but in the case of wealthy Russians fleeing Western sanctions, home is more likely to be where they stashed the loot. It's a good bet to suggest that means the UAE.



The West is becoming ever-more dangerous. For instance, in March 2022 Spanish officials impounded an 85-metre yacht belonging to a Russian oligarch while it was moored in the port of Barcelona. That is why, it seems, that Virtuzone, a company that helps companies to set up operations in Dubai has seen its numbers of Russian clients skyrocket. The firm's chief executive, George Hojeige said the numbers of inquiries have surged to five times their previous level since Putin invaded Ukraine. “They are worried about an economic meltdown that's coming,” said Hojeige, “That is why they're moving here to secure their wealth.” Several of the real estate firms in the UAE have been obliged to take on Russian-speaking agents to deal with all the enquiries from Russians wanting to move without delay. “Russians who are coming down are not buying just for investment,” he said, “they are looking at Dubai as a second home.”

Several firms with bases in either Russia or Ukraine are relocating their operations to the UAE, which must be good news for the Gulf state. Several firms report having to move hundreds of their employees. “The war had a massive impact on our operations,” said Fuad Fatullaev, co-founded of the blockchain technology company WeWay, which had offices in both Russia and Ukraine, “We couldn't continue (as we were) as we had to move hundreds of people outside of Ukraine and Russia.” Fatullaev is a Russian citizen, by the way. But the UAE has played it safe with Putin's regime for a long

time. It was one of only three countries, along with China and India, to abstain in a United Nations Security Council vote condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It also abstained in a UN General Assembly vote in April 2023 to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. Putin knows who his friends are! As The Economic Times, an Indian publication, reports: “Russian banks, including VTB, Sberbank, and Gazprombank, are considering becoming foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to trade on Indian stock exchanges. VTB, Russia's second largest bank, has approached the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to obtain an FPI license. The proposal will also need approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).” Russia is India's biggest trading partner in the CIS Region, and its fifth largest trading partner globally (up 25 places from last year). It's a very old friendship, dating back more than seventy years; not only does Russia hold a prominent place among India's Foreign Direct Investment portfolio but it has also helped India to grow in a number of sectors, including defence, finance, politics and science and technology. Since Christmas 2015, they have been joint signatories of a protocol that sets a target of US\$30-billion (€28.38-billion) in trade by 2025.

Here's some oil; be my friend

Moscow has also been urging the Indian government to invest in Russia's sanction-hit oil



Alexander Novak, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia

and gas industry. It's keen to expand Russian sales networks in what is Asia's third largest economy. Russia's economy is facing its deepest crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

India has resisted the urgings of its western allies to condemn Russia for its aggression in Ukraine, while Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, Alexander Novak, claimed that his country's oil and petroleum products sales to India have almost reached \$1-billion (€0.94-billion). "We are interested," he said, "in further attracting Indian investment to the Russian oil and gas sector and expanding Russian companies' sales networks in India." Putin's interest in Ukraine is based on his strange belief that they are really one and the same country. In July 2021, he published a second of his articles on "history" (for which please read "fanciful fiction"), this one entitled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", this time to help prepare his own people for the coming war. The text itself was the work of Vladimir Medinsky, a professional publicist and a former minister of culture who has served as Putin's court historian. He writes what Putin wants people to read, not the historical truth. Medinsky disregards all the unpleasant facts of Russian history as "myths and slanders", invented by the West. In his brilliant new book, *War and Punishment*, Russian journalist Mikhail Zygar points out how – in his view, if nobody else's – Tsar Ivan the Terrible was really quite a nice chap and not a bloodthirsty tyrant, while all the gory details of his blood-soaked reign are, as he puts it, "Russophobic fiction".

Putin's article on Ukraine is in similar vein. He has instructed Medinsky to show that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, although he offers no proof or any kind of evidence to back up his claim. Among the wilder claims are one that Ukraine's border was created by Lenin, that Ukrainian nationalism was the invention of Austria-Hungary, that the Soviet Union never infringed the rights of Ukrainians (not many Ukrainians would share that view) and that Ukraine has been turned into "anti-Russia" by the Americans. When I was in Kyiv several years ago, the only American thing I saw was local Ukrainians dressed as Disney characters. I recall one young lady crossing a large square dressed up as Minnie Mouse, which I don't think



Vladimir Medinsky

counts as "anti-Russian". Nationalist uprisings in Ukraine and the Caucasus were brutally suppressed by the Tsar, although, writing in *Novaya Zhizn* in 1905, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin pointed out that "Tsarism is no longer able to suppress the Revolution; the Revolution is still unable to destroy Tsarism." That was the same year Lenin met Stalin for the first time. They attended the First All Russian Bolshevik Conference together in the Finnish city of Tammerfors (Tampere). It was later, in 1917, that plans were laid to drive the Germans and Austrians out of Ukraine, which they had occupied for two years. The first attempt failed. Lenin, of course, did not give up: he wanted to see a free Ukraine, which Putin, it seems, does not. Certainly when I was in Kyiv several years ago the anti-Russian sentiment was palpable.

Russia is hardly likely to be improving its



Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in July 2023

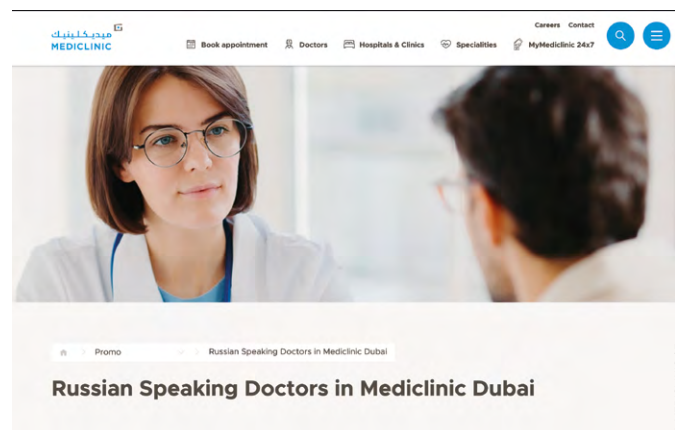
network of “friends” with its temporary ban on exports of oil-related products to all but four of the former Soviet states. This comes on top of Western sanctions on Russian fuel exports. Experts say that importers will have to seek out alternative sources. As if that wasn’t enough, Russian oil producers have also been hit by the rising cost of maintenance at its oil refineries, bottleneck on its railways and a weak rouble. The last thing Putin needs right now, with a Presidential election looming next March, is an avoidable fuel crisis.

Meanwhile, the Gulf states are looking increasingly self-confident. With Russia out of the running, the West is increasingly dependent on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait for its supplies of oil and natural gas. That, in turn, gives greater power to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which also includes Oman and Bahrain. Incidentally, the GCC has remained neutral on Russia’s assault on Ukraine, refusing to join in with sanctions. And, as Bloomberg points out, there’s more to the story: “Thanks in part to the historically high crude prices OPEC engineered in the 15 months since Russia launched its war, the region is not only swimming in petrodollars but increasingly has become the marginal supplier of investment capital to the world.” There are a lot of happy faces around the boardroom tables of the Gulf states. “Together, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, the Kuwait Investment Authority, the Saudi Public Investment Fund and the Qatar Investment Authority now manage almost \$3-trillion (€2.84-trillion), up 42% in the past two years, according to Global SWF.” You would need a very large piggy bank to hold all that.

I Healthy or not?

But on the surface, at least, the Russian oil and gas industry looks very healthy. The revenues from them increased by 15% from August to an impressive \$7.4-billion (which is 73.9-billion roubles or €7-billion) during September because of higher-than-expected budget proceeds from both extraction tax and export duties, according to Russia’s Finance Ministry. From January to September, on the other hand, Russia’s oil and gas revenues fell by 34.5% year-on-year to \$56-billion (just under €53-billion). That’s still a lot of money. However, there was a decline due to lower natural gas sales with most of Europe cut off from Russian gas, price caps on Russian crude, discounts at which Russia’s oil is being sold to Asian buyers, and the lower international oil prices so far this year compared to last year’s highs (when prices hit \$100 per barrel following the Russian invasion of Ukraine),

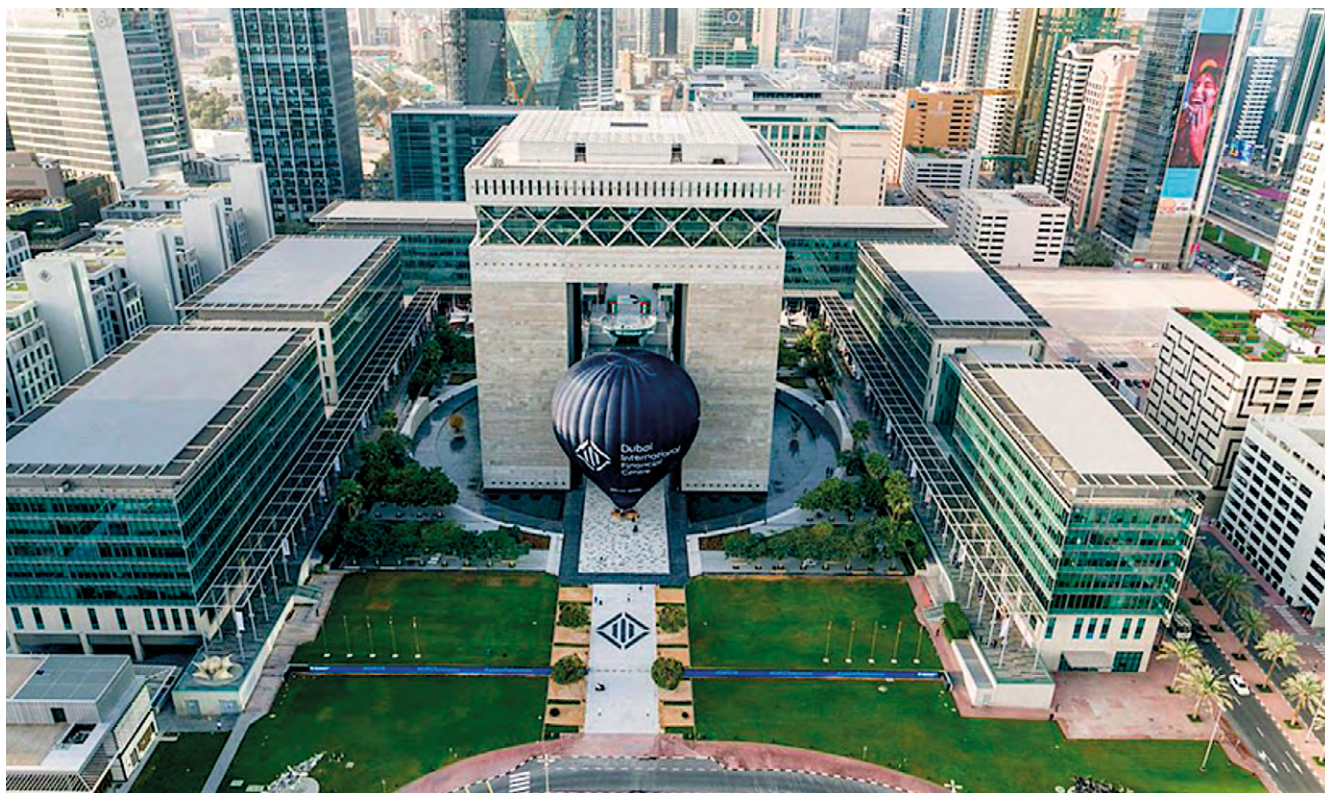
the average price of Russia’s flagship crude grade, Urals, averaged \$83.08 (€78.59) per barrel in September, higher than the average of \$68.25 (€64.56) a barrel in September 2022, according to the finance ministry. However, as Reuters reports, “The Russian state’s oil and gas revenues rose by around 15% in September, month-on-month, to \$7.44 billion or €7.33-billion, according to recent finance ministry data, thanks to a rise in proceeds from the mineral extraction tax. Every cloud, so they say, has a (literally) silver lining.



Mediclinic Middle East operates seven hospitals in the UAE with over 950+ inpatient beds, including the newly-opened Mediclinic Parkview Hospital in Dubai, as well as more than 24 clinics in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Al Dhafra

The Dubai-based lifestyle magazine Russian Emirates publishes a selection of the sorts of questions that it most often gets asked. According to Deutsche Welle (DW) these include things like where one can find Russian food, where one can find Russian-speaking doctors and the most popular one of all: can I obtain UAE citizenship? That one got 83,000 views. The number of hits on the magazine’s website almost doubled once Russia had invaded Ukraine. Observers expect that trend to continue as Russians seek ways to avoid sanctions and look for ways to escape the political situation at home. There have also been reports of private jets, belonging to Russian oligarchs, flying frequently between Moscow and Dubai, the suspicion being that they’re being used to ferry private property out of Russia. Other investigators have noted several “superyachts” moored in Dubai but registered in Russia. It’s one place, the owners seem to believe, where their maritime wealth won’t get seized.

DW also reports that: “There is increasing concern that Dubai will indeed become an even greater hub for Russian oligarchs’ money,” Jodi Vittori, a professor at Georgetown University in Washington and expert on corruption, illicit finance and state fragility, confirmed. Perhaps that’s the downside of being an energy billionaire: the authorities will keep trying to arrest your yacht. We’re unlikely ever to know the extent of the dirty money flowing through Dubai, however, because the UAE authorities don’t keep records. Dubai is now being monitored, however, by organisations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a money laundering watchdog that is increasingly suspicious of the UAE and the possibly shady goings on there. It’s not easy to keep pace: the UAE has 39 different company registries across its seven emirates. DW reports that there are also more than 40 of what are known as “free zones” in the UAE,



Dubai International Financial Centre

mostly in Dubai, where foreigners can locate (or relocate) companies. Sounds like manner from heaven for dubious Russian crooks.

DW reports how easy it is for foreigners to set up shop in the UAE. Buying property there is easy and paperwork is minimal, especially for those with cash. It's strange how we, in this age of electronic payments, still feel happier with cash. If you buy any real estate worth around €185,000, you get a 3-year visa, while investing €1,18-million turns it into a 5-year visa, which makes it a tempting destination for Russians keen to avoid losing their investment to the Russian state. Few ever bother to register their UAE properties back at home. Apparently, the UAE

is not alone in providing hidden cash boxes to foreigners. A number of possible hiding places for ill-gotten gains (and even for honestly-obtained gains) include Pakistan, South Sudan, the Cayman Islands, Yemen, Morocco and various others. One might have thought that at least some of these investors may have viewed the interest paid as "haram", to be avoided as "forbidden", and, of course, "sinful".

Even so, rich Russians are trying to shift a large proportion of their wealth from Europe to Dubai and other Gulf states to shield it from a tightening wave of Western sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, according to financial and legal sources. Dubai has long been a magnet for the globe's ultra-rich and this became even more important after the UAE's refusal to take sides between Western allies and Moscow. Dubai has let Russians know that their money is safe there, and the knowledge has turned this Gulf state into the world's biggest moneybox. I began this article with a quotation from the Quran, so I might as well end with one, too. This one comes from the opening lines of The Believers: "Prosperous are the believers, who in their prayers are humble and from idle talk turn away and at almsgiving are active and guard their private parts save from their wives and what their right hands own then being not blameworthy (but whomsoever seeks after more than that, those are the transgressors)." The verse goes on, but you've got the gist of it there. How many oligarchs, I wonder, can say – hand on heart – that they follow these instructions faithfully. I fear that doing so is not a condition for investing in the Islamic state of the United Arab Emirates. Tut, tut....

Robin Crow

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Aeroflot advertisement promoting flights to Dubai



© EDM

The altar of the Cathedral of Monaco

FAITH AND SOVEREIGNTY

The religious dimension of microstates

Religion has been an integral part of human history throughout the ages, and this holds true for Europe's microstates: Monaco, Andorra, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Malta and the Vatican.

Alternately exerting power and banished, acting as a vital determinant in public affairs and confined to the private domain, religion has shaped our history. The question then arises: how has religion influenced the so-called microstates?

Throughout history, political entities have consistently encompassed a multitude of local rulers, small kingdoms, principalities, duchies, local lordships and counties. These entities have often exhibited distinct characteristics such as close-knit, family-based, and even military structures.

Almost all of these organisations were gradually erased by the course of medieval history. However, a handful have managed to endure, and their remarkable age, resilience, and longevity is worthy of admiration. Against all odds, these minuscule economic and political entities have persevered throughout the ages, even though a mere backhanded blow from their larger neighbouring states could easily eradicate them from the European map indefinitely.

Rather than being hindered by their small size, these microstates appear to flourish, boasting robust economies and a notable level of well-being among their populace. To unravel this intriguing phenomenon, it is necessary to delve into the historical background of these diminutive nations and analyse the pivotal events that have shaped their medieval and modern eras.

Numerous observers assert that religion plays a significant role in the contemporary success of these nations. However, how have they navigated the social and economic transformations triggered by globalisation? Have they reaped benefits or incurred losses as a result? These inquiries prompt us to contemplate the future role of religion within the structure of these microstates.

Key events and dates



Principality of Monaco

- Constitutional monarchy since 1911 (formerly an absolute monarchy)
- 2 square kilometres.
- GDP: €7.27 billion in 2021 (+21% compared to 2020)

- Religion: Catholicism (Article 9 of the 1962 Constitution - the current Constitution - specifies that the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion is the religion of the Monegasque State, which therefore aligns itself with its principles, and makes them its own)
- 1215: Part of the city of Genoa (Italy) before the arrival of the Grimaldi family
- 1314: Recognition of the authority of the Grimaldi family
- 1861: Proclamation of independence
- 1962: Establishment of a new constitution
- 1993: Becomes a member of the UN
- 2004: Joins the Council of Europe
- 2005: Enthronement of Prince Albert II



Principality of Liechtenstein

- Constitutional monarchy since 1719
- 160 square kilometres
- GDP: €6,74 billion in 2019
- Religion: Catholicism (According to Article 37 of the constitution, the Catholic Church of Liechtenstein has the status of National Church, protected by the state. The exercise of other denominations is also guaranteed by the constitution. In a survey conducted in 2015, 73,4% of the population self-identified as Catholic, 8.2% as Protestant, 5.9% as Muslim, 1.5% as other Christian denominations, and 0.8% as belonging to another religion. 10.3% gave no opinion)
- 1719: Becomes a principality by decision of King Charles VI
- 1806: Independence recognised
- 1989: Enthronement of Prince Hans-Adam II
- 1992: Integrates the European Economic Area



Principality of Andorra

- Representative democracy since 1993
- 464 square kilometres
- GDP: €3.1 billion in 2022
- Religion: 89.5% of the inhabitants of Andorra are Christians, with Roman Catholics (88.2%) making up the majority. About 1.7% practice another religion, while some 8.8% declare themselves non-religious
- 1278: A treaty of paréage establishes a co-principality
- 1993: Recognition of a parliamentary, constitutional co-principality
- 1993: Becomes a member of the UN



Republic of Malta

- Parliamentary democratic republic since 1974

- 316 square kilometres
- GDP: €16.9 billion in 2022
- Religion: Catholicism is the state religion, but Malta's constitution provides for religious freedom
- 1798: Occupied by France
- 1814: Colonised by Britain
- 1974: Becomes a parliamentary republic
- 2004: Joins the EU

Each of these minuscule entities is located on the European continent.

I Principality of Monaco

Take Monaco as an example, where a certain degree of formal oversight can be exercised in the realm of international relations. Until 2022, the Minister of State, who leads Monaco's government was required to be a senior official of French nationality proposed by the French government. However, since the revision of the Monaco Constitution, it is now possible for the Minister of State to hold Monegasque nationality as well. Nevertheless, France retains the right of consultation in this regard.

Monaco's uniqueness lies in its measured yet pragmatic approach to adapting religion to socio-economic developments. This balanced perspective is made possible by a keen understanding of unfolding events. The small size of the state undoubtedly facilitates this precise analysis of reality.

On the other hand, Liechtenstein, under the leadership of Prince Alois III, finds itself in a notably different situation. The Protestant faith advocates for a more equitable ecumenical distribution and a reduction in the influence of the Catholic Church. Additionally, the Muslim community, estimated to comprise six percent of the population and with two "houses of prayer", is advocating for the introduction of Islamic instruction in primary schools.



Prince Albert of Monaco, Princess Charlene, Princess Caroline and Princess Stephanie attending the mass during the 2022 National Day

If the Monegasque population discreetly or strongly adheres to this system, it has a positive impact on the overall stability of the state, instilling confidence in its institutions

and enhancing the quality of its banking and fiduciary reputation. Therefore, religion serves as a foundational factor shaping the geopolitical landscape of the microstate due to its enduring nature over time.



Monaco Cathedral

However, what about religious freedoms? In general, the practice of religions other than the predominant one within the microstate is minimal, inconspicuous and non-proselytising.



The Holy Virgin, Monaco Cathedral

In Monaco, despite the Roman Catholic Apostolic faith being established as the state religion in the constitution, freedom of worship and its public practice are guaranteed. There are Anglican, Greek Orthodox and Romanian Orthodox communities, as well as a synagogue residing in Monaco. However, the Jehovah's Witnesses Association is not present, and Hinduism and Islam are not represented.

Following the 1962 Constitution, the Principality transitioned from a “monarchy by divine right” to a “constitutional, hereditary monarchy”.

Republic of San Marino

San Marino managed to evade Italian unification, while Andorra, Monaco and Liechtenstein also succeeded in preserving their independence. These states have maintained their political systems, which have existed for centuries, and they are predominantly principalities, except for San Marino, which holds the distinction of being the world’s oldest republic, with its border dating back to 1462.



Basilica di San Marino

However, there were instances where the existence of these states was temporarily interrupted. For example, the papal States

ceased to exist between 1870 and 1929, which marked the establishment of the Vatican through the Lateran Treaty. Similarly, Monaco experienced a period of disappearance during the French Revolution when it was annexed by France in 1793.

In San Marino, approximately 92.3 percent of the population identifies as Catholic, with only 3 percent identifying as non-denominational. The predominance of the Catholic Church is evident in the architectural landscape of the Republic, featuring numerous churches and a monumental basilica. The territory of the Republic falls under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of San Marino-Montefeltro, which also encompasses parts of neighbouring Italian provinces.

Vatican City and Malta

Vatican City occupies a distinct position of its own. With a population of only 825, it serves as the headquarters of the Catholic Church and the residence of the Pope. Due to the population primarily comprising individuals from ecclesiastical and diplomatic circles, the influence of global developments on the Vatican remains relatively limited. Conversely, the positions, opinions and views of the Pope on world affairs are closely analysed and scrutinised by journalists and political commentators. This widespread dissemination of Vatican messages is unparalleled, as the microstates do not possess the same level of influence in communication.

Cardinals during a consistory at the Vatican. From left to right Beniamino Stella, Dominique Mamberti, Pietro Parolin, Marc Ouellet, George Pell, Peter Turkson, Ennio Antonelli, Javier Lozano Barragán, Julián Herranz Casado, Jean-Louis Tauran

Malta, on the other hand, upholds religious freedom and safeguards this fundamental right. The legendary legacy of the Knights of the Order has long been intertwined with the history of Malta. While the Order was re-established in 1830, it now functions as a charitable organisation.

The “Order of Malta,” also known as the Order of the



Cardinals during a consistory at the Vatican. From left : Beniamino Stella, Dominique Mamberti, Pietro Parolin, Marc Ouellet, George Pell, Peter Turkson, Ennio Antonelli, Javier Lozano Barragán, Julián Herranz Casado, Jean-Louis Tauran

Knights of St John of Jerusalem, was established in 1113 to provide assistance to pilgrims in the Holy Land. Similar to the Knights Templar, it swiftly evolved into a military order with the purpose of defending the Latin states against the Muslim counter-offensive. Following the fall of St John of Acre in 1291, which marked the withdrawal of Christians from Palestine, the Hospitallers initially retreated to Cyprus and later settled in Rhodes in 1309. From that point onwards, they engaged in naval warfare against Islam, launching attacks on its coasts and ships throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.



Painting by Henri Delaborde (1844), depicting the Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem paying homage to the Armenian King, Gosdantin III (Constantine III), in 1347

In 1522, the Knights of St. John endured a challenging siege, resulting in the conquest of Rhodes by the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent. This event led to a prolonged period of displacement for the Knights until they found refuge in Malta. In 1530, Charles V, who was also the King of Sicily, granted the Knights a “noble and sovereign fief” in Malta.

Malta achieved independence from British rule in 1964; however, it chose to maintain Queen Elizabeth II as its sovereign. It wasn't until ten years later that Malta became a fully separate republic, distinct from Britain. The British military presence persisted until 1979. Presently, Malta is a member of the Commonwealth.

Upon joining the European Union in 2004, Malta received funding aimed at improving urban planning and preserving its rich historical heritage.

Today, Malta is renowned not only a popular tourist destination but also an attractive and discreet tax haven for numerous companies seeking confidentiality in their financial operations.

Since the 13th century, Andorra, which is the last remaining feudal state in Europe, has functioned as a co- principality governed by the Bishop of Urgell and the President of the French Republic, who serves as the successor to the French King, inheriting the authority of the Count of Foix. In 1993, Andorra established its constitution to assert its independence from French tutelage, reflecting the growing trend towards greater sovereignty among small states.

Catholicism is the predominant religion in the Principality of Andorra, with approximately 90 percent of the population identifying as Catholics. Nevertheless, the constitution guarantees religious freedom. With almost 2,000 North African immigrants, Islam represents the second most prevalent religion in the principality. The Catholic Church holds significant social influence of the church in this Catalan principality, which has translated



A view of Valetta, the capital of Malta



The Lichtenstein Castle

into public support and trust. Additionally, it is worth noting that the income tax rate in Andorra is notably low, at a reduced rate of 10%.

Religion plays a crucial role in ensuring stability within microstates due to their distinct characteristics. The allegiance of the population to their respective principality and its political system is closely linked to the size of the political entity. This correlation is particularly evident in microstates. In contrast, larger democracies with diverse population groups find it challenging to achieve religious unity, given the sheer size and diversity of their populations. However, this is precisely where microstates excel due to their smallness and homogeneity.

Religion serves as a diplomatic stronghold for microstates when navigating the power dynamics imposed by their larger neighboring states. It provides a form of “moral guarantee” in bilateral relationships, especially during discussions on integration processes within the European Union. Religion plays a significant role among the various factors that enable the existence and survival of microstates within the EU. It fosters mutual trust, draws from reassuring historical precedents, and promises stability for the system in the future.

While Vatican City is distinctly “theocentric” in religious terms, other microstates such as Monaco and Malta do not strictly adhere to the ecclesiastical policies of the Holy See. They exhibit a more liberal, less clerical, and less dogmatic approach. However, these microstates are progressively moving towards greater social integration within the European Union.

The discussion revolves around the preservation of local specificities such as the labour market, administrative regulations, taxes, and more. For microstates, a crucial

question arises: how can they maintain their historical religious roots within the Roman Catholic tradition while simultaneously integrating into a vast, secular community of 447 million people?

The success of this challenge lies in striking a balance between the local and the global, or the “micro and macro”, referred to as “urbi et orbi.” Microstates function akin to families or small clans within a larger global economic enterprise. Within the private sphere of the family, religion retains its significance. However, in the public and professional realms, its influence diminishes as it is overshadowed by the realities of global economic forces.

Overall, the enduring presence of the religious factor within microstates can be attributed to their perception of themselves as families with relative autonomy within a vast commercial and federal group. The size effect creates a sense of solidarity, serving as an anchor and historical landmark that remains impervious to the changes of the modern human condition.

The peaceful development and integration of microstates typically occurs when historical and religious traditions align harmoniously with political sovereignty. This harmony fosters social tranquility and garners public support for their longstanding systems.

David Laurent-Coppée

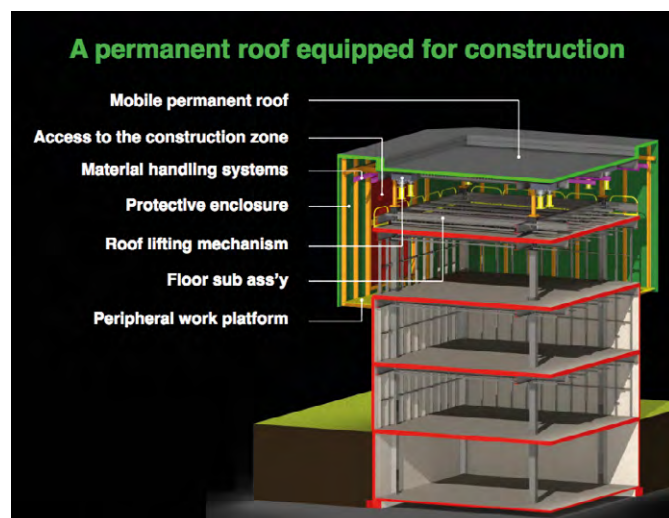
David Laurent-Coppée @europe-diplomatic.eu



Villa Carmelha

A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The construction industry is an important sector that has driven economic growth worldwide. However, it is not immune to difficulties, and recently the industry has faced a number of unprecedented challenges that have impacted contractors, construction project managers and the construction sector as a whole. From supply chain disruptions to productivity levels, labour shortages and rising material costs, to significant amounts of construction waste, low profit margins and frequent project delays...the challenges in the construction industry today are many and complex.



One effective approach to addressing these challenges facing is, of course, to introduce innovative technologies. Canadian company 3L-Innogénie, headquartered in Quebec has done precisely that. It has launched the UPBRELLA system on the world market, a revolutionary construction concept, particularly in terms of the process of raising the building, which is carried out without the use of cranes.

The patented UPBRELLA principle revolutionises the building process by starting with the roof. It uses an umbrella-like structure that is initially erected at ground level and then gradually raised as the building project progresses.

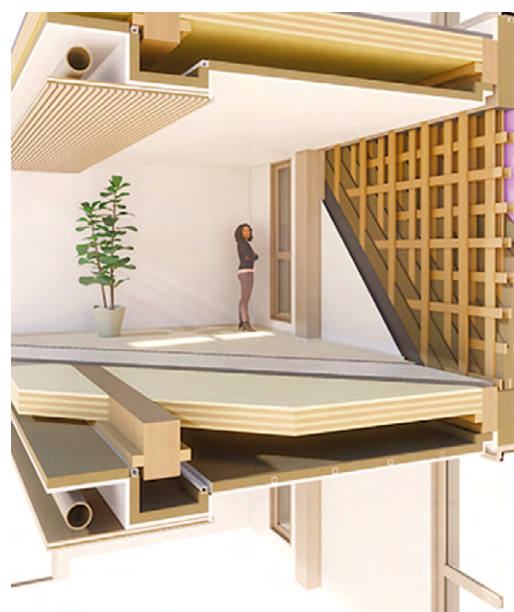
The process begins with the construction of a stable foundation and the installation of a circular base structure which serves as a support for the umbrella structure. The umbrella, in turn, consists of a central core and a series of radial arms that extend outwards. These arms are equipped with hydraulic cylinders that allow the structure to be raised and lowered in a controlled manner.

As construction progresses, the canopy is gradually raised to create a covered work area underneath. This sheltered area allows workers to continue with construction work, such as pouring concrete, installing building systems and finishing interior spaces, regardless of weather conditions.

UPBRELLA technology offers several advantages. First, it reduces the impact of weather-related delays on construction schedules by allowing work to continue even in bad weather. Second, it improves worker safety by providing a controlled and protected environment. It can also increase productivity by eliminating the need for temporary weather protection structures and minimising downtime. Once the roof is raised, the exterior walls are closed off in order to enclose

the storey. The interior walls are then erected until the floor is complete so that tenants can move into the finished space immediately. The roof is then raised one level and the process is repeated for the next floor.

In addition, UPBRELLA construction can be adapted to different building types and sizes, such as high-rise buildings, commercial buildings and residential complexes. It offers flexibility and can be adapted according to specific project requirements. What's more, the progressive nature of the UPBRELLA construction process also allows developers and builders to consider financing and selling incrementally, providing a simpler and less risky approach to urban development.



Gilles Larouche, together with his son Joey and his nephew Justin, are the driving forces behind this project. Innogénie arose from the fusion between innovation and génie (French for engineering). The 3L team consists not only of management and engineering experts, but also of specialists in innovation and product development. 3L has devised its own product development process to ensure maximum success in the development and marketing of innovative work, while giving free rein to the creativity required for technological revolutions.

A delicate balancing act

The government of Monaco has long faced a double challenge: that of addressing the housing shortage in the Principality while at



From left to right Justin Joey and Gilles Larouche

the same time taking into account the climate and environmental problems that characterise today's world.

The relationship between the housing sector and environmental quality is complicated and reciprocal. Housing activities have significant impacts on the environment, including land and materials use, energy consumption and transport. To mitigate these impacts, environmentally oriented policies aim to include environmental costs in housing prices. However, these measures often lead to affordability problems. Furthermore, housing policy itself can influence the environmental footprint of housing development.

The interaction between environmental policies and the housing market, as well as their impact, depends on the specific policies and the characteristics of the urban areas in which they are implemented. Achieving sustainability in the housing market requires a comprehensive approach that considers both housing affordability and the environmental and economic impacts of policies to promote social well-being.

A 'World First' in Monaco

As an important component of the National Housing Plan for Monegasques, the planned Villa Carmelha situated on the Boulevard d'Italie in the eastern part of Monaco, embodies this comprehensive approach. The project is led by Maud Le Strat, director of operations of the Public Works Department, who also serves as project manager on this ambitious

and groundbreaking project, comprising ten storeys and 25 state-owned apartments.

The building, which is scheduled for delivery in early 2024, is a truly innovative project from an ecological point of view, in which environmentally friendly requirements were already implemented in the design phase.

Innovation is the key word here, because a lot of wood was used for the structure, including for the lift shafts and the central staircase. Only the partially underground part of the structure facing the Boulevard d'Italie is made of concrete. Regarding fire safety, all the necessary precautions have been taken and furthermore, the construction teams have been working on a bioclimatic design that will limit the energy consumption of the completed structure.

To achieve these goals and to provide a building with the lowest possible energy consumption, several solutions have been found. Some of these are already being used elsewhere, such as the installation of photovoltaic and thermal solar panels on the roof to heat water and provide 25% of the building's electricity needs, and the use of seawater heat pump systems. And there are other solutions which represent significant innovations.

Among these is the fuel cell or "Smart Energy Hub". This innovative system is able to store surplus electricity generated by solar panels. "When we have a surplus of electricity from the photovoltaic panels on the roof, which can happen during the day and in the summer, this surplus can be stored in the form of hydrogen," explains Maud Le Strat. The hydrogen can then be converted again to generate electricity when it's needed. It's like a big battery".

For this electricity generating plant which is financed by the Principality's "Green Fund", increased maintenance is planned for two years after final acceptance, including training for local maintenance companies.

This is the first time that this system has been applied in the Principality. If the evaluation is positive after the completion of the construction work, the Public Works Department does not rule out using this system in future projects. At this stage, it seems that this system is suitable for extensive building extensions.

And to further minimise the impact of construction on local residents and reduce noise pollution, technical teams at Villa Carmelha are also resorting to off-site prefabrication; the building parts are prefabricated in advance and assembled on site.

In addition, the wooden construction requires less water compared to concrete, which further reduces the environmental impact.

I Future sustainability

To ensure the long-term viability of the project, the Monegasque government has integrated the concept of a circular economy through the service provider “Cycle Up”. Demolition waste is largely considered as worthless, and the aim of the circular economy is to find buyers or reuse the waste in the same project or in neighbouring projects.

As for future tenants, they will all receive a booklet, included with the lease, containing recommendations for implementing eco-responsible practices in their homes, such as the sorting of waste and temperature management. They will even have the option to choose an “absence” scenario, which will automatically limit energy consumption when they are not at home.

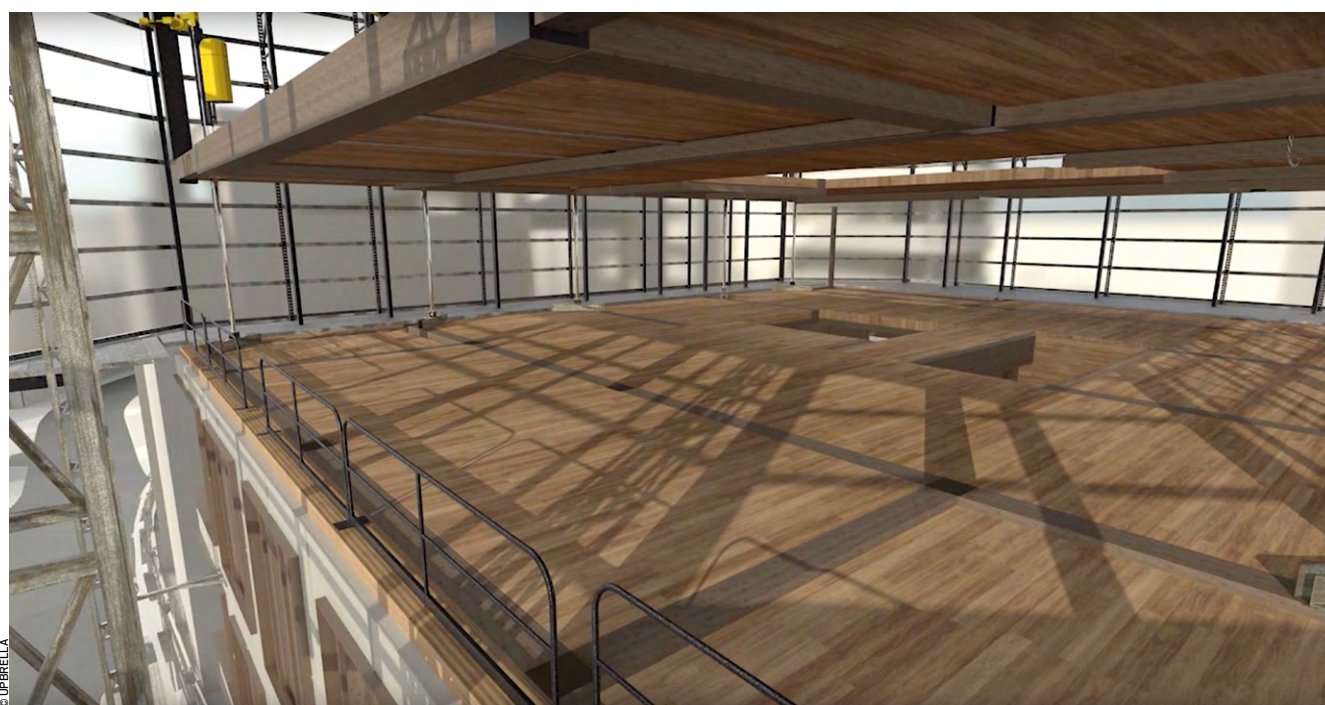
The Monegasque government will provide support during the first two years following delivery, including the BD2M process and commissioning to verify the performance of the technical installations and the building’s energy consumption.

Through innovative approaches such as bioclimatic design, renewable energy integration, and circular economy principles, the Principality is actively demonstrating its commitment to reducing its ecological footprint. These efforts not only contribute to the preservation of the



environment but also enhance the well-being and quality of life for its residents. By setting an example for sustainable construction practices, Monaco continues to pave the way towards a greener and more resilient future.

James Lookwood



Floor assembly

TIMELESS CHIC

STANDOUT FASHION AND BEAUTY TRENDS

THE TOP FIVE ADVENT CALENDARS YOU'LL WANT TO OPEN UP ASAP

Traditionally filled with chocolate treats, Advent calendars have evolved in recent years to include everything from items of jewellery to lipstick tubes. Here's our pick of calendars for beauty and fashion lovers.

| Happy 100!

Step into a magical world with the fascinating Advent calendar from Swarovski. Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Disney Company, this extraordinary calendar brings magic to life. Behind each of the 25 doors are enchanting surprises inspired by the beloved Disney characters. From whimsical ornaments to two dazzling necklaces and a playful collection of stickers, this calendar is a true feast of joy and wonder. (swarovski.com)



© SWAROVSKI

| Box of Wonders

An expert in the field, The Body Shop has designed its calendar like a beautiful pop-up construct. We won't spoil the surprise, but you can be certain that it's packed with some seriously good head-to-toe treats. From iconic Body Butters to rejuvenating face masks and a variety of invigorating body scrubs, this calendar is a treasure trove of pampering experiences all through this holiday season. (thebodyshop.com)



© THE BODY SHOP

| Embrace the magic

Embark on a journey filled with luck and delight as you unwrap Acqua di Parma's enchanting Advent calendar. Each day brings a new symbol of joy and prosperity, as the beautifully designed box showcases global charms of good fortune; With every window you open, a delightful surprise awaits, drawing from the beloved Colonia and Blu Mediterraneo lines, as well as the luxurious Signatures of the Sun and Home Collection, in full and travel sizes. (acquadiparma.com)



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| Bring the joy

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| Pandora's treasure trove

Experience the magic of Pandora's first-ever Advent calendar for 2023, filled with an abundance of dazzling jewellery. What treasures lie within? Discover key charm pendants, heart-shaped stud earrings, a stunning silver sliding bracelet, and a captivating chain necklace. Hurry and secure your limited edition Advent calendar before it runs out! (uk.pandora.net)



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