

Focus: Russia at the table to discuss the resolution of the Ukrainian crisis [EN](#) [EN](#)

2022 opens with the Ukraine new crisis still struggling to find a solution

A crisis has emerged at the end of 2021 following the gathering of Russian troops at the Ukrainian border. NATO accuses Russia of preparing an invasion of the country, while they justify it as a protection against NATO deployments and maneuvers so close to their borders.

After entering into dialogue, Russia exposed its requirements to NATO: to stop the extension of the Alliance, and to limit the military activities in countries that joined after 1997. While they were assessed unacceptable by NATO and the United States, both agreed to discuss legal guarantees from January 10th. It will be followed by a NATO-Russia reunion on the next Wednesday in Brussels, and then by a meeting of the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) on Thursday in Vienna, that will include the Europeans. During the first gathering on Monday, the American envoy, Wendy Sherman, clearly rejected the Russian propositions and called for de-escalation. Russia, however, claimed they were not threatening anyone and that it is in the Alliance's interest to make a gesture. He judged a settlement "possible", despite antagonist positions.

To its regrets, the European Union was not invited to this first round of negotiations, where Russia wants to speak as an equal with the Americans, despite the protests of French President Emmanuel Macron and EU Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen, together in Paris at the beginning of January. As sign of its priority in the EU's diplomatic agenda, Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, reserved its first trip abroad to Ukraine, where he visited the eastern border and reaffirmed the links between the security of Europe and Ukraine. However, Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, stated after January 7th NATO Foreign Ministers meeting that "there would be no discussions about European security without the Europeans at the table".

In the same address, Mr. Stoltenberg also stated NATO remains committed to its dual approach: strong deterrence combined with meaningful dialogue. However, he added that the risk of conflict was real, and that dialogue may fail, as Russia's demands are "inacceptable". The deterrence part would be mainly sanctions, as Ukraine is not part of the mutual assistance 5th article of NATO treaties, but could go as far as cutting Russia from the SWIFT global financial system or stopping the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

The crisis also worries countries such as Finland, which is not a part of NATO but is a member of the European Union, and shares a border with Russia. They however collaborate with NATO. In their New Year's address, both the President Sauli Niinisto and the Head of Government Sanna Marin said that Finland keeps the freedom to apply for an integration in NATO, should they choose to. Indeed, the spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister declared that the joining of Finland and Sweden in NATO would have "significant military and political consequences".

Industries

Demonstration of a cross-border RPAS air traffic integration [EN](#)

On December 13th, a MALE-type (Medium Altitude Long Endurance) RPAS (Remotely Piloted Aircraft System), operated by the French Air Force, crossed the Spanish border and then came back to France.

This was the first flight of such an aircraft to cross European borders in a non-segregated airspace of class A and C. In class-A airspaces, only flight by instruments aircrafts are permitted, while in class-C airspaces, flight at sight is allowed but control does not take responsibility for separating two aircrafts flying at sight.

It demonstrated the MALE RPAS's ability to perform seamless changes as required by the Air Traffic Control, and common procedures for safe cross-border operations.

This was supported by the groundwork led in 2018 by the European Defence Agency (EDA), which performed a safety analysis and methodology for RPAS integration in non-segregated airspaces (i.e. shared with other manned aircrafts). France offered the possibility to perform real flights as a test.

12/01/22

European Union military cooperation and external operations

France takes command of NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VRJTF) [EN](#)

France has taken for one year the command of the NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a quick reaction force.

This force of 5.000 men can be deployed in 2 days. It comes as a complement to and is part of the 40.000 men of the NATO Response Force (NRF). It was created in 2014 in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and is permanently available. Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, stated that this force is "a substantial contribution to our collective defence, and France's leadership is a strong display of commitment and capabilities". He also insisted on NATO's resolve to "stand together to defend and protect all Allies".

For 2022, the 3500-men Franco-German brigade will serve as the core of the force, alongside French units. The command is ensured with a rotation of 7 countries: Germany, Poland, the United-Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Turkey. France takes over from Turkey and will leave the floor to Germany in 2023.

Germany could move some of its forces from Mali to Niger for safety reasons [DE](#) [DE](#)

Germany has been deploying troops in Mali inside two frameworks: the EUTM Mali (European Union Training Mission) and the MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali). This sums up to around 1300 soldiers currently on Mali's ground (respectively 300 and 1000).

However, the recent turn-up of events in Mali, in particular the arrival of possible Wagner mercenaries, denied by the Malian authorities, and the report for several years of a regular presidential election, have raised a debate in Germany on the opportunity to vote a new mandate, due to expire on May 31st. And the newly appointed Defence Minister, Christine Lambrecht, declared in an interview with Bild am Sonntag that she will have to assess whether the training of the Malian Army could take place from a safer region, which could be Niger. Indeed, this is the most dangerous deployment for Germany, as 12 soldiers were wounded last June after a Kamikaze attack.

International relations

EU's position on current troubles in Kazakhstan [EN](#) [EN](#) [EN](#)

On January 8th, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, Josep Borrell, made a declaration on the situation in Kazakhstan. He expressed the concerns of the European Union about the violence that erupted in the country following peace protestations. He strongly condemned the use of violence and the violation of human rights. Kazakhstan is an "important partner for the EU, with an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in force, and for the stability of the region", he added.

Kazakhstan is currently experiencing a surge of violence as a response to authoritarian rules and low living standards, after gas prices raised. According to the Kazakh government, peaceful protests in Nur-Sultan have been hijacked by "terrorist, extremist and criminal groups trained abroad with combat experience from Islamist groups" (Euractiv). Russia has been involved in the crisis through military assistance and troops in the frame of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. As this raised concerns in the EU, Josep Borrell warned that "External military assistance brings back memories of situations to be avoided". However, the Kazakh President declared on January 11th that the Russian troops will start to withdraw on January 13th.

The French Secretary of State for Europe Clément Beaune declared that the question will be on the table during the next informal ministerial meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers on January 13th and 14th.

Coming meeting of Defence Ministers in Brest, France from January 12th to 14th [EN](#)

The first informal meeting of Defence Ministers will be held at the Ateliers des Capucins in Brest from January 12th to 14th. It will be followed by an informal meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers. This meeting will be an occasion for Defence Ministers to share orientations for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Discussions on European security will include EU-Ukraine, EU-China relations, the ongoing crisis in Kazakhstan, and contested strategic areas, the space field in particular.

The NATO Secretary General, the UN Secretary General or his representative and the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations are invited to attend the meeting.

As a reminder, the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union drives a particular attention to European Defence, especially through the Strategic Compass.