



## UK government talks tough on immigration - again



PRAGUE: Participants pose for a family photo as they attend the European Summit in Prague, Czech Republic, on October 6, 2022. Leaders from over 40 countries meet in order to launch the "European Political Community". —AFP

# EU 'community' meets in face of Russia's war

## Europe is facing its biggest crisis since Second World War with unity and resolve

**PRAGUE:** Leaders from Ukraine, Britain and Turkey joined their EU counterparts on Thursday for an inaugural summit of the "European Political Community" aimed at bringing the continent together in the face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The gathering in Prague—a brainchild of French President Emmanuel Macron—has been billed by Brussels as a "platform for political coordination" for the 44 nations attending.

But there are deep disagreements—and even open conflict—among some of the participants and scepticism that the one-day event will only be a photo opportunity. Those meeting in the historic Prague Castle also include the leaders of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Georgia, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Switzerland. "It sends first of all a message of unity," Macron said as he arrived for the summit. "The objective is first of all to share a common reading of the situation affecting our Europe and also to build a common strategy."

Russia, which is not invited, will loom over the meeting as discussions focus on the economic and security turmoil from its invasion of its pro-Western neighbour. "If you just look at the attendance here, you see the importance," said Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

"The whole European continent is here, except two countries, Belarus and Russia. So it shows how isolated those two countries are," Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelensky—currently overseeing a counter-offensive against Moscow's forces—was connecting via video link from Kyiv. His prime minister Denis Shmyhal was standing in for him in Prague.

"Europe is facing its biggest crisis since the Second World War with unity and resolve," British Prime Minister Liz Truss tweeted. "We must continue to stand firm to ensure that Ukraine wins this war, dealing with the strategic challenges that it has exposed."

Despite the rhetoric there are expected to be few concrete results from the summit. France said it hopes to define potential room for cooperation among the leaders on protecting critical European infrastructure such as pipelines, cybersecurity and energy supplies.

EU officials expect to agree to hold a follow-up gathering of the community in six months in a country outside the bloc, with Britain and Moldova both offering to host. While there are major questions over the usefulness of the enterprise, there will be a lot of activity on the sidelines as leaders hold bilateral talks.

### "Talking shop"

The gathering at least passed its first hurdle of convincing key European powers outside the EU to show up. Truss, a fierce supporter of Britain's independent path since Brexit, came on one of her first major trips abroad after taking office.

London was wary about the event being dominated by the European Union and reportedly wanted to change the name from "community" to "forum". Truss may be hoping for a respite from her woes at home after unleashing turmoil on Britain's economy. But she could face a tricky ride from EU counterparts over UK efforts to renegotiate the post-Brexit trade deal for Northern Ireland.

"I welcome the opportunity to work with leaders from across the continent in this new forum," Truss wrote in the Times newspaper. "But this must not cut across the G7 and NATO, and it must not be a talking shop."

The presence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had been a sore point for some. EU members Greece and Cyprus have long-standing disputes with Ankara and the unpredictable Turkish leader is proving a headache for Sweden and Finland as a threat to their bids to join NATO.

Even more fraught could be the attendance of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, whose troops continue bloody clashes along their volatile frontier. Armenia's prime minister has said he will meet Azerbaijan's president together with Macron and EU chief Charles Michel in Prague.

Those pushing to join the EU—Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and the Western Balkan nations—have welcomed the initiative, but are on their guard about it being an alternative to membership. "Please don't treat European political community as a substitute," said Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda. —AFP



CYTHIRA, Greece: This screen grab from a video made available on October 6, 2022 by the Hellenic Coast Guard, shows the rescue of migrants from a shipwreck off the island of Kythira, south of the Peloponnese peninsula. —AFP

## Greece migrant sinkings leave 18 dead, dozens missing

**ATHENS, Greece:** At least 18 people died, nearly all of them women, and about 30 more were still missing after two migrant boats sank in gale force winds off Greece, the coastguard said Thursday, with survivors dramatically winched to safety.

A vessel believed to be carrying around 40 people went down east of the island of Lesbos, coastguard spokesman Nikos Kokkalas told state TV ERT. The bodies of 16 women and a 15-year-old boy were recovered from the area, close to Turkey, he said.

Divers recovered an adult male body during the afternoon, the coastguard added. A few hours earlier, the coastguard had been alerted to a sailing boat in distress off Kythira island's Diakofli port, south of the Peloponnese peninsula. Around 95 people had been on board.

Some survivors made it to shore and dramatic footage released by the coastguard showed them being winched up the vertical face of a cliff, some barely managing to hold on amid battering waves. The fire service and police reported 80 asylum seekers from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan made it ashore during a major rescue operation.

Kythira mayor Stratos Harhalakis said the coastal spot was "the worst possible place on the island" for a ship to sink. "Nobody could approach (them) by sea, it was incredibly difficult."

There was no official toll yet from the second sinking near Kythira, but Harhalakis said he had seen five bodies.

### 'Eradicate' smugglers

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis deplored the "tragic loss of life" and called for "much more substantial cooperation" to avoid such disasters. "Eradicate totally the smugglers who exploit innocent people, desperate people," he said.

The coastguard said 10 other women had been rescued in the Lesbos incident, while over a dozen people were believed to be missing. It was difficult to get more information from the survivors as they were "utterly panicked," spokesman Kokkalas said.

The survivors in Kythira include seven women and 18 children, a coastguard spokeswoman told AFP. Kokkalas said their boat had been "completely destroyed." Both rescue operations faced adverse weather. Off Kythira, winds were as high as 102 kilometres (63 miles) per hour, the coastguard said.

Greece has seen increased migration traffic this year, and accuses Turkey of failing to enforce a 2016 agreement with the EU to keep migrants from sailing on to Europe.

Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi tweeted after the two shipwrecks that Turkey should "take immediate action to prevent all irregular departures due to harsh weather conditions". "Already today many lives lost in the Aegean, people are drowning in unseaworthy vessels. EU must act," Mitarachi said. —AFP

## North Korea fires missiles, blames US for escalation

**SEOUL:** North Korea fired two ballistic missiles Thursday and flew warplanes, while claiming its recent blitz of sanctions-busting tests were necessary countermeasures against joint military drills by the United States and South Korea.

As the United Nations Security Council met to discuss Pyongyang's Tuesday launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile over Japan, North Korea blamed Washington for "escalating the military tensions on the Korean peninsula".

The recent launches — six in less than two weeks — were "the just counteraction measures of the Korean People's Army", Pyongyang's foreign ministry said in a statement Thursday. Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up joint military drills in recent weeks, and carried out fresh exercises Thursday involving a US navy destroyer from the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier's strike group.

The United States redeployed the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to waters east of South Korea as part of a broad-ranging military response to Pyongyang's Tuesday test, which also included joint bombing and missile drills.

The carrier's redeployment prompted an angry response from the North, with the foreign ministry saying it posed "a serious threat to the stability of the situation on the Korean peninsula". Seoul's military said it had scrambled 30 fighter jets Thursday after 12 North Korean warplanes staged a rare "formation flight north of the inter-Korean air boundary [and] conducted air-to-surface firing drills."

Early on Thursday, South Korea's military said it had detected two short-range ballistic missiles launched from the Samsok area in Pyongyang towards the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan. It appeared to be the first time North Korea has fired missiles from Samsok, an official from Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff told reporters.

He added that they look like a "different type of short-range ballistic missiles" from previous launches. Tokyo also confirmed the launches, with defence minister Yasukazu Hamada telling reporters that it was important not to "overlook the significant improvement of (North Korea's) missile technology".

Later Thursday, South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol spoke by phone to Japanese Prime Minister



SEOUL: A man walks past a television report showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on October 6, 2022. North Korea fired two ballistic missiles on October as it justified its recent blitz of sanctions-busting tests as necessary countermeasures against joint military drills by the United States and South Korea. —AFP

Fumio Kishida, with the pair agreeing that the North's "reckless provocation" must be stopped. They agreed on the need to "deliver a message to the North that consequences follow provocations", Seoul's presidential office said in a statement.

### China slams US

Pyongyang's Tuesday firing of what officials and analysts said was a Hwasong-12 that travelled likely the longest horizontal distance of any North Korean test, prompted the United States to call for the emergency Security Council meeting.

At the meeting, North Korea's longtime ally and economic benefactor China blamed Washington for provoking the spate of launches by Kim Jong Un's regime. Deputy Chinese ambassador to the UN Geng Shuang said North Korea's recent launches were "closely related" to military exercises in the region conducted by the United States and its allies.

Geng accused Washington of "poisoning the regional security environment". The launches are part of a record year of weapons tests by isolated North

Korea, which leader Kim has declared an "irreversible" nuclear power, effectively ending the possibility of denuclearisation talks.

US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield called for "strengthening" existing sanctions on North Korea, something China and Russia vetoed in May. The council has been divided on responding to Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions for months, with Russia and China on the sympathetic side and the rest of the council pushing for punishment.

Analysts say Pyongyang has seized the opportunity of stalemate at the UN to conduct ever more provocative weapons tests. Officials in Seoul and Washington have been warning for months that Pyongyang will also conduct another nuclear test, likely after China's Party Congress on October 16.

"At this point, for Kim to turn back and halt provocations would seem counterproductive to his interests, not to mention the amount of resources squandered to conduct these weapons tests," Soo Kim, an analyst at the RAND Corporation, told. —AFP