

INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY

№08 01.05.2024-15.05.2024

Topics:

- Ukraine – European Union
- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war

CONTENT

■ UKRAINE - EUROPEAN UNION

Theme Analysis: Europe Day instead of Victory Day: what prospects and challenges does Ukraine face on its way to the EU? _____ 3

■ FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY OF UKRAINE

Theme Analysis: What did Blinken bring to Kyiv: changing the slogan "Ukraine must not lose the war" to "Ukraine must not win" or real help for such a victory?__7

■ THE COURSE OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Changes at the front _____ 9
Military assistance _____ 10
Russia: External and internal challenges _____ 11

Ukraine – European Union

- *THEME ANALYSIS: Europe Day instead of Victory Day: what prospects and challenges does Ukraine face on its way to the EU?*



Photo: Reuters

"Europe Day, which our country celebrates for the second time together with the European Union on 9 May, is the embodiment of the most important aspirations - unity and peace. On its European integration path, Ukraine has consistently demonstrated its commitment to these goals.¹

Ukraine, as a full member of the EU, will definitely become stronger, there is no doubt about it." - said Olga Stefanishyna, Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, about Europe Day. Indeed, many steps towards Ukraine's integration have been taken since then. For example, in January, a Ukrainian delegation took part in a kick-off meeting in Brussels to launch the screening process, an important process of assessing Ukrainian legislation for compliance with EU law that precedes formal accession negotiations. In preparation for these negotiations, Ukraine will develop roadmaps in the areas of rule of law, freedom of movement of persons (justice, freedom, security) and public administration reform. During the meeting, the European side presented the stages of the official screening process. The EU, for its part, has drawn up a schedule of meetings between representatives of Ukrainian ministries and the European Commission as part of this process. This effectively marked the first stage before the start of the accession negotiations.

And on 2 March, the European Commission presented proposals to the EU Council on a draft negotiation framework for Ukraine and Moldova. Their text was almost identical to the text of the framework for the two Balkan candidates, Albania and North Macedonia, except for certain provisions.

In addition, it provided for changes in voting procedures. For Ukraine (as well as Albania, North Macedonia and Moldova), voting on the recommendation to suspend negotiations will be "simplified" - by a reverse qualified majority. This means that the European Commission's

¹ Український вимір Дня Європи. Чому наша країна важлива для Європейського Союзу. 09.04.2024.
<https://www.euointegration.com.ua/experts/2024/05/9/7185595/>

recommendation will be adopted automatically if the EU Council does not challenge it with a qualified majority within 90 days. This creates additional challenges in counteracting negative conclusions of the Commission, as they are quite difficult to challenge.

In general, the framework is guided by a system of benchmarks and attaches particular importance to "**Fundamental Issues**". Benchmarks are binding conditions set for each negotiating chapter. The EU Council sets benchmarks for the opening (if necessary) and temporary closure of each negotiating chapter. Interim benchmarks will be set for Chapters 23 and 24 of the Fundamental Issues cluster, which relate to the judiciary and the rule of law. Until Ukraine meets them, no other negotiating chapters can be closed, even if progress has already been made.

The next step is to start accession negotiations. In general, President Zelensky is optimistic about the chances of a quick start to EU membership negotiations and notes progress in rapprochement with "difficult partners". The press service of the President's Office quotes Zelensky as saying that Ukraine has completed all the necessary procedures to start negotiations, and now only the political part remains: "Instrumentally and operationally, we have done everything to open negotiations with the EU in June. I think everything will work out. Even difficult partners have become a little easier today. We have been actively working with them," he said.²

Ukraine's European integration is needed not only by Kyiv, but also by Brussels. The key, of course, is the security sector. After Ukraine joins the EU, Europe will have one of the largest armies with practical experience in countering full-scale aggression by a country that is far superior in terms of numbers, resources and finances. *Ukraine will strengthen the EU with its many years of experience in effective self-defence against Russia*, which is known for fuelling regional conflicts and spreading propaganda around the world.

The current war in Ukraine is the largest in Europe since the Second World War. The Ukrainian military has practical experience of working in combat conditions with a variety of tools and equipment that no other country has, not only in Europe but in the world. Ukrainian IT specialists can already be extremely useful to the EU in the field of cyber defence and the application of the latest technologies. Ukrainian strategic communications experts have unique knowledge in countering Russian propaganda and ongoing information and psychological operations. For example, NATO is already changing its approaches and adapting its strategy in line with Ukraine's combat experience, and the European Union is rethinking its strategy and tasks for the defence and security sector. Thus, the EU-Ukraine Defence Industry Forum was held in Brussels. As a result, a decision was made to use the European Peace Facility to compensate EU countries for the costs of purchasing weapons for the Ukrainian Defence Forces from Ukrainian manufacturers.

Ukraine is also a major transport hub. Its accession will provide the EU with a new transport hub within the Europe-Asia transport corridors. In particular, maritime transport is extremely important for the European economy. Ukraine's accession to the EU's Single Market will help to realise Ukraine's potential as a transit country.

In agriculture, *Ukraine has a large market on the continent outside the EU.* Therefore, it has significant potential to develop its processing industry and create new production facilities. Its integration will have a positive impact on the EU's food security and strengthen the Union's position in global agricultural trade. Ukraine's accession to the EU will significantly strengthen the enlarged EU's independence from third-country agricultural supplies and enhance food security in both Ukraine and the EU.

In addition, *Ukraine is a guarantor of food security in Africa and the Middle East*, which are heavily dependent on its relatively cheap products to avoid hunger. Continued grain exports from Ukraine to these countries, which are already part of the EU, will make the EU

² Зеленський оптимістичний щодо переговорів з ЄС: "Навіть складні партнери стали простішими". 17.05.2024. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2024/05/17/7186187/>

itself a guarantor of food security in these regions. This will have a significant impact on security within the Union (reducing the number of migrants from poor countries) and on the growth of its influence in the international arena.

But there are also many obstacles on this path. For example, Ukraine's planned accession may require an increase in the EU budget by about 20%. At the same time, all this is unlikely to change the current positions of the EU member states, both as recipients of EU funds and as payers. In addition, the Western Balkan countries may stand in the way of Ukraine's membership aspirations. For example, in March 2024, the European Council gave the green light to start accession talks with Bosnia and Herzegovina, provided certain requirements are met. In addition to Bosnia, four other Balkan countries have candidate status, and Kosovo has the status of a potential candidate with a recognised European perspective. Although most attention is currently focused on Ukraine and Moldova, which are united in a single "package", our countries are newcomers that have rapidly broken into the company of the old candidates. This causes different reactions to Kyiv's claims of a fast track to membership.

Until recently, there was no consensus in the EU on how to proceed with further enlargement. Some members of the bloc (including Austria, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia) supported the idea of Ukraine and Moldova's European integration alongside the progress of the Balkan countries. For Ukraine's friends, this option is unacceptable, as it would depend not only on the progress of Moldova, but also of the Balkan countries, none of which is currently showing significant progress in this area, and as for Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are doubts about its political will to negotiate.

However, the main approach remains the principle of progress based on the achievements of each candidate (merit-based principle). This approach envisages individual progress of each candidate country on the way to accession, without codependence. Recent communications from the European Commission indicate a willingness to assess Ukraine's progress individually and independently of other candidates. This could, however, be negative news, as less friendly countries may insist that Ukraine should not overtake the Balkan states, some of which have been waiting in the wings for more than 20 years. This could lead to delays in the accession process.³

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has led to massive emigration of Ukrainians to the European Union, which has created economic problems for EU states, including rising inflation in 2022. Although the European economy improved in 2023, inflation in the service sector remained high.

Changes in the EU's agricultural sector regulations (transition to a green economy) and the changing global environment led to protests by European farmers in Poland, France, the Czech Republic, and other countries. Some of them were inclined to shift the "blame" to Ukrainian imports, even when there were no grounds for this. These protests have already caused significant damage to Ukraine, but this is only the beginning of such actions. Nevertheless, there are reasonable expectations that the socio-economic situation, including the EU's agricultural sector, will soon stabilise. The European Commission's latest forecasts for GDP growth and inflation slowdown in 2024 are positive. The end by Polish farmers of the long-term blockade of the Polish-Ukrainian border, which was more of a political than an economic phenomenon, is an example of a successful resolution of the dispute at the level of governments and agricultural associations of the two countries. However, the sustainability of these improvements remains an open question, especially given Russian subversive activities, which are expected to increase in the coming months. In addition, farmers' protests are likely to continue. Their impact on our European integration should not be underestimated, as Ukraine's accession to the EU will undoubtedly affect the agricultural policy of the European Union itself.

³ Євроінтеграція з перешкодами: які зовнішні виклики чекають на Україну дорогою до вступу в ЄС. 10.05.2024. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2024/05/10/7185693/>

The very unstable internal situation in the EU is also a challenge for Ukraine. The need to reform the European Union has been discussed openly for a long time, both in capitals and in European institutions. In November, the European Parliament approved a report on the need for reforms, calling for, among other things, changes in decision-making processes. Until recently, the dominant view in the EU was that the reform process should precede enlargement, i.e., EU reform first, and then Ukraine's accession. Recently, however, the position within the EU has changed: ***enlargement before the reform is completed is seen as a realistic option.*** The European Commission's analysis shows that the EU is capable of enlargement within the existing model of treaties and rules, and thus our accession and the reform of the Union can move in parallel rather than sequential processes.

Despite the change in assessments of reform as a "precondition for Ukraine's accession", this does not change the fact that the lack of reform of the EU's decision-making mechanism is hampering our integration. After all, when even current procedural steps require finding consensus among member states, including those whose leaders use the topic of Ukraine's accession as a tool to achieve their own political goals, this can significantly harm the negotiation process.

That is why in the coming years, our European integration will largely depend on successful communication with both the EU institutions and individual member states whose governments may not support the idea of Ukraine's early membership. The factor of anti-Ukrainian agents in the EU, such as Hungary and Slovakia, should not be overlooked. It also remains unclear why the President of the European Commission postponed the approval of the negotiation framework for Ukraine until June, although there were no technical obstacles to its approval in the spring. However, the good news is that a further postponement is less likely. The rhetoric in Brussels and in the capitals is now clearly leaning towards approving the negotiation framework and starting negotiations in June.

In other words, the process of starting negotiations on accession and a new stage of European integration is really like a scale, where for every item in the bowl of positive prospects, one is weighed against the bowl of challenges. However, ***the bowl of positives still outweighs the bowl of negatives.*** Although this Europe Day is not a tribute to victory, it is definitely a positive event in Ukraine's historic process of joining the EU. It is therefore important for ***Kyiv not to miss the moment and to take into account all the threats and comments in order to really get to the June start of negotiations.***

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- **THEME ANALYSIS:** What did Blinken bring to Kyiv: changing the slogan "Ukraine must not lose the war" to "Ukraine must not win" or real help for such a victory?



Source: X

On 16 May 2024, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken ended a two-day visit to Kyiv. His visit, which was not announced in advance, took place against the backdrop of a Russian military offensive in the Kharkiv region. During his stay in Ukraine, Blinken held a number of official meetings, visited a bar where he played a rock ballad, and spoke at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, stressing the importance of fighting corruption. He also announced a new \$2 billion aid package from the United States.

In Kyiv, Anthony Blinken engaged in some unconventional diplomatic activities. In particular, he visited local Ukrainian establishments, such as Veterano Pizza and Barman Dictat, where he proclaimed that he understood the difficult times the Ukrainian people were going through. "The United States and the free world are with you," said Anthony Blinken in Kyiv, playing a political rock song, Rockin' in the Free World, on the stage of the Barman Dictat bar. According to William Pomerantz, director of the Kennan Institute at the Wilson Center, it was an attempt to communicate with Ukrainians informally and support them. Former US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor also believes that such communication was beneficial, as Ukrainians know from their own experience what it is like to live in a country at war and can tell an American official about it firsthand.

However, Melinda Haring, an expert at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Centre, believes that these efforts have failed, *as delays in US aid have led to frustration and anger among Ukrainians*. "This is an attempt to protect themselves from future accusations. The US hasn't sent weapons for 8 months because of a delay in Congress. There is a significant gap between the assurances: *"We will be with you for as long as it takes"* and the reality on the battlefield. There is this big problem of lack of synchronicity, and Washington needs to calibrate its policy," Haring said. In addition, the expert believes that Blinken's speech at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (KPI) was inappropriate, as Ukrainians expected him to show sympathy and understanding of the critical situation, but instead received a lecture on corruption. "Ukrainians are at war, and they are so exhausted that when the top diplomat of the United States spends precious time lecturing them about corruption, they are disappointed," she said.

John Herbst, senior director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Centre, assesses Blinken's visit as a failure, as he believes it was an attempt to demonstrate that Americans support Ukraine in its time of need. "There is an extremely destructive Russian air campaign going on right now, and Blinken didn't bring any news about what the US could provide to counter that - to at least partially offset the damage," the expert explains. Herbst believes that such assistance could be additional Patriot air defence systems, if the US could convince Spain or Greece to share them with Ukraine. In addition, Herbst believes that lifting the ban on the use of US weapons on Russian territory could help defence in the Kharkiv sector.

During his visit to Kyiv, US Secretary of State Anthony ***Blinken said that the US does not encourage Ukraine to strike targets inside Russia with US weapons***, but at the same time stressed that Kyiv should decide how to fight this war. Previously, the **Biden administration insisted that US-provided weapons could only be used to fight Russian aggression on the sovereign territory of Ukraine**. This position was explained by fears of a possible escalation of the conflict by Russia.

Politico reported that Ukraine is trying to convince the Biden administration to lift the ban. To this end, a group of Ukrainian MPs is in Washington to explain to the administration and lawmakers in Congress that the current policy, in particular, did not allow the Ukrainian military to attack Russian positions when they were preparing to attack Kharkiv from Russian territory. Ukrainian diplomats and lawmakers argue that allowing strikes on military targets inside Russia could strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities and deter further Russian aggression. They emphasise the need to adapt the arms supply policy to the real needs on the battlefield and the specifics of Russian aggression.

However, one of the main results of this trip is the announcement of a \$2 billion package that includes **three main components**: the purchase of necessary equipment in the United States, third countries, and investment in weapons production by Ukraine itself. This is the third aid package since the law was passed by Congress three weeks ago. William Pomerantz notes that if the United States can quickly provide these resources, Ukraine will be able to produce the necessary military equipment to support its efforts on the battlefield and not wait for help from other countries. According to John Herbst, **the main problem with Ukraine's relations with the US is the lack of a clear strategy for Kyiv's victory**. At the same time, the law on financing assistance to Ukraine requires the administration to present its strategy to Congress. The deadline for officials to do so is 8 June. *"I really want, as I think all Ukrainians do, to see what the Biden administration considers a victory. Are these the 1991 borders? Does it include Crimea? Is it NATO membership by the end of the war?"* These are the details that I think we are all waiting for answers to," concludes Melinda Haring.

It is clear that, unfortunately, **this visit is not a positive event for Ukraine**. Yes, the US does not want Russia to win, but it does not want to do so on Ukraine's aspirations and conditions. *Rather, Washington's hope is to freeze the conflict, which is also reinforced by political instability within the US*. Before the election, Biden wants to strengthen his position, in particular by ending the war, citing the "victory" in the Ukrainian war, which he helped to bring about. In other words, **the American issue for Kyiv is still quite uncertain and shaky, but it is also a major risk factor**. Here, the Ukrainian government can only show its resilience and seek to influence the American leadership.⁴

⁴ Від «будемо з вами стільки, скільки потрібно» до «Україна переможе у війні»: підсумки візиту Блінкена до Києва. 16.05.2024. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/vizyt-blinken-pidsumky-zbroya-peremoha-hitara/32950047.html>



Source: Army FM

■ *Changes at the front*

Trend: *Russia opens a new front on Ukraine's northern border.*

Due to the opening of the Northern Front by the Russians, the intensity of hostilities has increased significantly in the ***Kharkiv direction***. Ukrainian forces repelled attacks by Russian troops in the area of Slobozhanske, Vovchansk, Starytsia and Liptsi. The situation was partially stabilised, and the northwestern outskirts of Vovchansk were cleared. The daily losses of the invaders in this area amounted to about 60 people and 19 pieces of weapons and military equipment.

Russians also continue to advance along almost the entire front line. It continues to focus its main efforts on the ***Pokrovske and Kupianske directions***. The defence forces are responding flexibly to the occupiers' actions and are taking the necessary measures to deplete the offensive potential of the Russian troops.

In the Kupyansk direction, there were about 30 clashes per day, in particular in the areas of Stelmakhivka, Synkivka, Ivanivka and Tverdokhlibove.

In the Lyman direction, Russian troops unsuccessfully tried to improve the tactical situation near Novosadove and Torske.

In the Siversky direction, Russian troops are advancing in the areas of Mykolaivka - Spirne, Berestove - Spirne, Yakovlivka - Rozdolivka, Soledar - Rozdolivka, Zolotarivka - Verkhnekamianske.

In the Kramatorsk direction, Russian troops are constantly attacking the positions of the Ukrainian Defence Forces.

In the Pokrovsk direction, Russian troops do not reduce the intensity of attacks. Most of them are in the areas of Novooleksandrivka and Netaylove. In this area, Russian troops made

their way in the direction of Ocheretyne - Novooleksandrivka, Ocheretyne - Kalynove, Arkhangel'ske - Novooleksandrivka, Solovyove - Sokil. Ukrainian forces did everything possible to prevent the advance of Russian troops.

In the Kurakhove direction, the Ukrainian Defence Forces continue to successfully repel enemy attacks.

In the Orikhivsk direction, Russian troops continue to conduct assault operations near Staromayorske and launched air strikes near Robotyne. Ukrainian soldiers are holding defensive lines and positions.

■ *Military assistance*

The USA. The United States Department of Defence has announced a new military assistance package for Ukraine, the total value of which is estimated at \$400 million. The US Department of Defence details what the package includes:

- Additional ammunition for Patriot air defence systems;
- Additional ammunition for NASAMS air defence systems;
- Stinger man-portable air defence systems;
- Equipment to integrate Western launchers, missiles and radars with Ukrainian systems;
- Additional HIMARS Highly Mobile Multiple Launch Rocket Systems and ammunition;
- 155-mm and 105-mm artillery shells;
- Bradley infantry fighting vehicles;
- M113 armoured personnel carriers;
- MRAP armoured vehicles;
- Trailers for transporting heavy equipment;
- TOW anti-tank missiles;
- Javelin anti-tank systems and AT-4 grenade launchers;
- High-precision aerial munitions;
- HARM anti-radar missiles;
- Small arms, small arms ammunition and grenades;
- Engineering ammunition and demining equipment;
- Coastal and river patrol boats;
- Protective equipment against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear damage;
- Spare parts, training ammunition, maintenance and other support equipment.

Australia. Will provide Sentinel 830R boats to Ukraine. As part of the \$100 million military aid package in April, the Australian government announced the purchase of military-grade Sentinel 830R boats. Sentinel 830Rs are RHIBs, or rigid hull inflatable boats, manufactured by Sentinel Boats. They are suitable for performing tasks in both riverine and marine waters.

Canada will finance the purchase of anti-aircraft missiles for the Ukrainian Armed Forces' IRIS-T air defence systems. On 10 May, Canadian Defence Minister Bill Blair and his German counterpart Boris Pistorius signed a letter of intent in Ottawa. The Canadian government has allocated about 52 million euros to be spent on the purchase of anti-aircraft missiles needed to strengthen Ukraine's air defence.

Latvia. The Latvian government has donated communications equipment to Ukraine for use at the frontline. The equipment was transferred within the framework of the IT coalition, led by Estonia and **Luxembourg.** The value of this aid is estimated at 100 thousand euros. It will help improve the military's communication at the tactical level.

Germany. As part of its military aid, the German government has provided the Ukrainian military with helicopter defence systems. These are AMPS (Airborne Missile Protection System) on-board missile defence systems from Hensoldt. Germany plans to purchase three HIMARS rocket artillery systems for Ukraine. The weapons will be provided to the Ukrainian Armed Forces as part of military assistance. German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, on a working visit to Washington, said that the delivery of the systems would take place in cooperation with the United States.

Denmark. The Danish government informed the Foreign Policy Council of a new aid package to Ukraine worth DKK 5.6 billion (EUR 750 million). It is noted that DKK 2.4 billion (EUR 321 million) of this amount is reserved for air defence. Part of the funds will also be used to donate F-16 aircraft to Ukraine. In addition, Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said that as part of the package, the government is also allocating additional funds for direct investment in the Ukrainian defence industry. In addition, Ukraine will receive shells and anti-tank mines.

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *Changes in the Russian power bloc and changes at the front*

In May, unexpectedly for most, Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to replace Sergei Shoigu as Defence Minister with economist Andrei Belousov. Complaints about incompetence and corruption in the top echelons of the Russian army have been a constant concern for Vladimir Putin since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The need for change became apparent after the failures of Russian troops near Kyiv, in the Kharkiv region, and after Prigozhin's mercenaries marched on Moscow.

The New York Times reports that Putin has avoided any major public moves that could be perceived as acknowledging criticism until now. Now that the crisis on the battlefield appears to have subsided and Prigozhin is dead, Putin has decided to act. For the first time in more than 10 years, he has changed the minister of defence and made a series of corruption arrests of senior officials in the ministry. These actions indicate Putin's attempt to strengthen his control over the military leadership and clean up the armed forces, which have been plagued by corruption and incompetence. The move may be an attempt to restore confidence in the military system and improve the effectiveness of military operations that have previously failed.

The changes could also be intended to demonstrate to the public and the world that Putin is committed to turning things around and strengthening his power. However, given the deep-rooted corruption and systemic problems in the Russian military, achieving significant improvement may be difficult. ***Putin's recent moves most likely indicate that he has become more confident in his military prospects in Ukraine and in his political power.*** Russian troops are making gains in Ukraine, seizing territory around Kharkiv and in the Donbas, while Ukraine struggles with delays in US aid and shortages of ammunition and personnel. **Senior officials in the Kremlin are optimistic.** "Most likely, they believe the situation in the military is stable enough to punish some members of the military leadership for previous failures," says Michael Coffman, an expert on the Russian military and senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Putin's confidence may be based on a number of factors, including: domestic political stability, relative success on the frontline, and the ability to control the narrative around the war. However, stability on the front remains fragile as fighting continues and international support for Ukraine may change the dynamics of the conflict. The change of the defence minister and the arrests for corruption may be intended to demonstrate Putin's determination to reform and purge incompetent and corrupt elements from the military. It may also be an attempt to boost morale among the Russian military and society by showing that the leadership is taking steps to improve the effectiveness of the armed forces.

On the other hand, **Ukraine faces challenges** in maintaining its military capabilities and obtaining international assistance. Delays in the supply of ammunition and weapons, as well as problems with personnel, affect Ukraine's ability to conduct effective counter-offensives and hold its positions. This puts additional pressure on the Ukrainian leadership and increases its dependence on Western support. Given these factors, the situation remains complex and unpredictable, and Putin's further steps could both strengthen his position and lead to new challenges both domestically and internationally.

The Russian leader seems to be turning against the very officials whom Prigozhin attacked. The first harbinger of change was the arrest of Timur Ivanov, Shoigu's protégé and deputy defence minister, who was accused of taking a large bribe. He denies any wrongdoing. Ivanov had previously attracted the attention of Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation due to his lavish lifestyle. The Kremlin then announced that it had replaced Shoigu with Andrei Belousov, and Shoigu was transferred to the Russian Security Council, where he has access to the president but no control over money. Belousov has no military experience, but boasts a relatively clean image and a clean career in government. Maria Engqvist, deputy head of Russia and Eurasia research at the Swedish Defence Research Agency, said that if Putin wants to win the war, corruption is not what he needs. She called high-level corruption in Russia "a feature, not a bug".

At the same time, arrests in the Russian Defence Ministry are gaining momentum, with four more senior generals and officials detained on corruption charges, accompanied by promises to increase financial and social benefits for soldiers in an attempt to improve morale and appease critics. Putin's moves are likely aimed at strengthening his control and improving the efficiency of military operations, as well as demonstrating a fight against corruption, which remains a key problem in the Russian army. At the same time, it may be part of a broader strategy to improve the image of the Russian leadership both domestically and internationally.

The arrests of high-ranking officials in the Russian Ministry of Defence are unlikely to eradicate the widespread corruption that is **a systemic problem**. However, as Dara Massicotte, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, notes, they may make senior officials think twice before engaging in large-scale corruption schemes, at least for a while. These anti-corruption measures are not only intended to show the public that the government is fighting corruption, but also serve as an internal disciplinary measure for the military leadership. However, as it turned out, some arrests may have political overtones and be used to settle personal scores. An example of this is the detention of Major General Ivan Popov, a senior Russian military commander who led the forces that held back the Ukrainian counter-offensive. Popov was charged with fraud after he openly criticised the Russian military leadership. According to his lawyer, Popov denies any wrongdoing.

Thus, **while anti-corruption measures may temporarily deter individual officials from participating in large-scale corruption schemes, they can also be used for political repression and the removal of undesirable individuals from the military leadership.**⁵The Kremlin is likely using corruption allegations as a pretext to hide the real reasons for the dismissal of certain individuals from the Ministry of Defence who have fallen out of favour, as experts at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) described the events.

According to analysts, these high-level reshuffles after the pseudo-presidential elections in Russia clearly show that **Putin is taking significant steps to mobilise the Russian economy and defence industry to support the protracted war in Ukraine and possibly prepare for a future confrontation with NATO.**

Experts add that Belousov's almost decade-long tenure as Minister of Economy in the Russian federal government and his recent involvement in managing various domestic innovative projects in the field of defence industry and drones have prepared him well to lead the staff of the struggling Russian Ministry of Defence. "Belousov has a strong reputation as an effective technocrat, and insider sources say he also has a positive relationship with Putin," the report says.⁶

British intelligence suggested that Andrei Belousov was appointed Russian Defence Minister to ensure greater efficiency in defence spending and closer coordination between the

⁵ Путін рішуче взявся за чистки у своєму Міноборони: NYT пояснило причини. 26.05.2024. <https://www.unian.ua/world/putin-rishuche-vzyavsya-za-chistki-u-svoyemu-minoboroni-nyt-poyasnilo-prichini-12647163.html>

⁶ Путін змінив Шойгу для підтримки затяжної війни в Україні – ISW. 13.05.2024

defence industries and the needs of the Russian Armed Forces: "This could prove to be an extremely difficult task for Belousov, given the high level of corruption in the Russian MoD and Armed Forces,"⁷ the British Defence Ministry said. Reuters noted that the appointment of Andrei Belousov as Russia's defence minister may indicate that **Vladimir Putin is preparing for a protracted war in Ukraine**. After all, during a war, the defence minister must control significant financial flows, as well as economic and industrial planning. Belousov has impressed Putin with his ability to raise about 300 billion rubles (\$3 billion) through a tax on excess corporate profits, which may be one of the reasons for his appointment. The appointment suggests to many that Putin is reshaping Russia for a prolonged war.

A government source who has worked with Belousov describes him as a "very organised, systematic and brutal" leader who likes to be in control. Meanwhile, some Russian government officials have criticised Belousov for being too state-oriented, which they say has sometimes been detrimental to private enterprises. The newspaper also estimates that ***Belousov's appointment could have both positive and negative consequences for Russia***. On the one hand, his organisation and tough approach could improve the efficiency of military resource management. On the other hand, his statesmanlike views could lead to conflicts with private enterprises and economic circles, which could complicate the economic situation in the country. It was also noted that not everyone in the government liked these personnel changes.⁸

But many Western media outlets also predict that Putin is pinning his main hopes on Belousov as an innovator for the armed forces. Thus, the appointment of Andrei Belousov as Russia's Defence Minister is aimed at modernising and innovating the army, which is in line with Vladimir Putin's aspirations. The French newspaper Le Figaro notes that Belousov, who has a scientific and economic background, was chosen to stimulate the defence industry to innovate and increase production, which is necessary to continue the military operations in Ukraine. The British newspaper Times points to a specific area where innovation is expected under Belousov's leadership, namely the production of drones. Weapons expert Samuel Bendett emphasises that Belousov has long supported the development of domestic unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and high-tech research and development. This is important because drones play a key role in modern warfare, especially in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Sources in Russian drone companies are positive about the change in leadership at the Ministry of Defence. They note that Sergei Shoigu did not pay enough attention to new technologies, while Belousov understands the importance of drones and electronic warfare technologies. It is expected that under his leadership, decision-making in this area will accelerate, allowing Russia to make up for losses and improve its position in military operations.⁹

Thus, Belousov's appointment could have a significant impact on Russia's defence industry and warfare strategy, which includes an emphasis on innovation and new technologies, including drones and electronic warfare. **This is not good news** for Ukraine, which has previously had a significant advantage in this area.

In general, these shifts in Russian domestic politics are indicative of several factors. ***Firstly***, there are indeed major internal conflicts within the Russian leadership, which can only grow. ***Secondly***, the fanatic Putin needs similar fanatics around him to support his plans for a protracted war and an attack on NATO. ***Thirdly***, we should expect Russia's line to

⁷ Британська розвідка припустила, чому Путін змінив міністра оборони. 17.05.2024. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-brytans%CA%B9ka-rozvidka-shoyhu-byelousov/32951509.html>

⁸ Жорстока, радянська людина: що західні ЗМІ пишуть про нового наступника Шойгу Белоусова. 14.05.2024. <https://tsn.ua/svit/zhorstoka-radyanska-lyudina-scho-zahidni-zmi-pishut-pro-novogo-nastupnika-shoygu-byelousova-2578352.html>

⁹ "Тепер війна – це назавжди". Що відомо про нового міністра оборони РФ Белоусова. 14.05.2024. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/crgyy9rzj1wo>

become even harder, and at the same time, there is a risk that it will acquire new technologies of warfare. **All of these risks should be carefully considered by Kyiv as it prepares to defend itself in the upcoming summer offensive.**