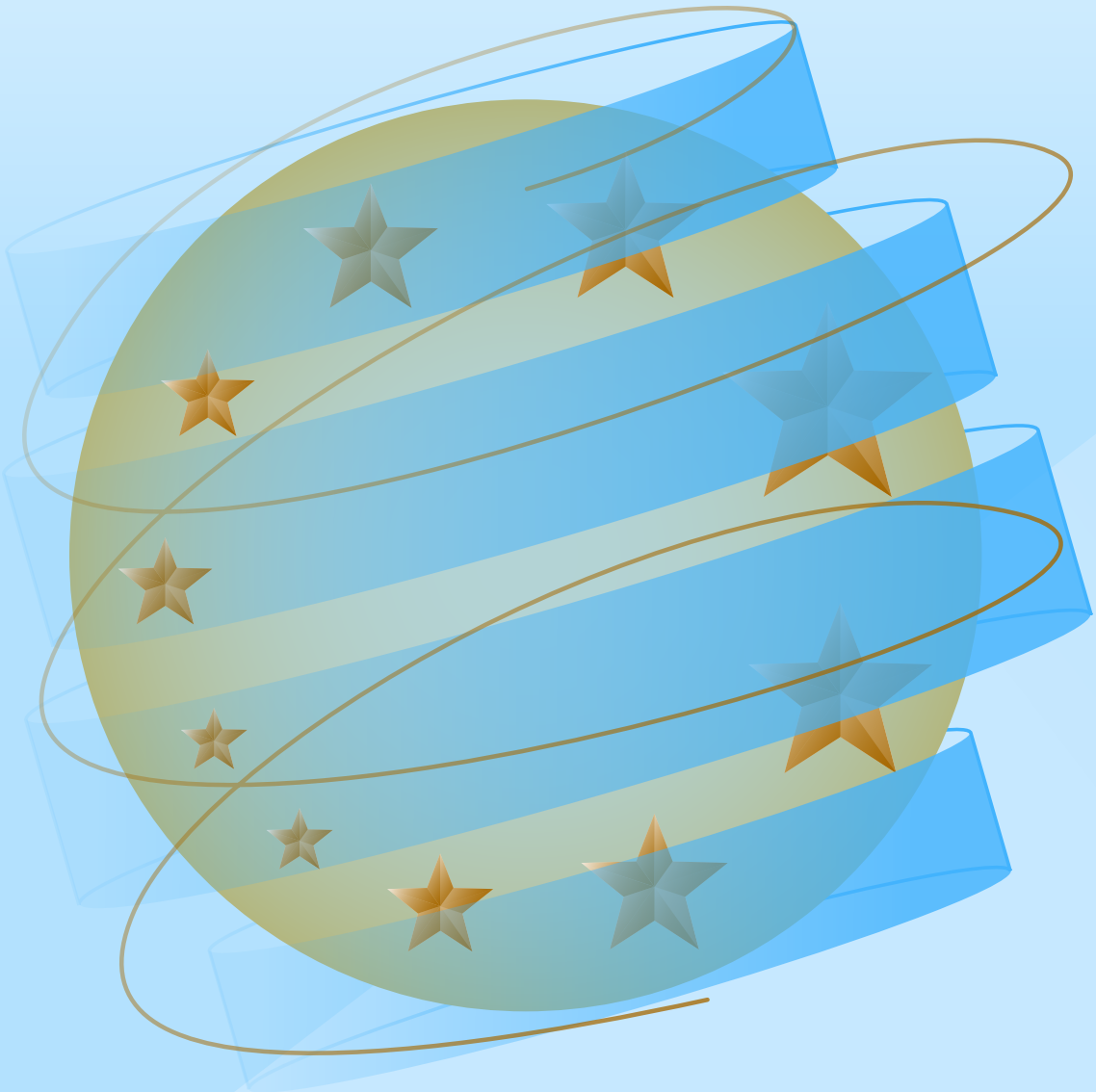
FUTURE EUROPE

2024-2029 SPECIAL AGENDA

ISSUE #05

Defending Europe

Geopolitics, Innovation, Democracy



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Issue #05 – July 2024

ISSUE #05

2024-2029
SPECIAL AGENDA

Defending Europe

Geopolitics, Innovation, Democracy

JULY 2024

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elf
European
Liberal Forum

Defending Europe: Geopolitics, Innovation, Democracy

PUBLISHER
European Liberal Forum
Rue d'Idalie 11-13, boite 6
1050 Ixelles, Brussels

Co-funded by the European Parliament

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ISBN
978-2-39067-069-8

DOI
10.53121/ELFFEUJ5

ISSN
2790-3354 (Online)
2790-3346 (Printed)

DESIGN
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July 2024

ABOUT

The Publishers

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 57 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different EU stakeholders.

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EDITORIAL

The Liberal Agenda for the New Mandate: No Security Without Democracy

DR MARIA ALESINA
European Liberal Forum

DR MARIA ALESINA

The task of this term's legislators is to bring up uneasy, controversial debates and find practical solutions that will lay the foundation of Europe's security for the decades to come.

We are publishing this issue of the *Future Europe Journal* in the first days of the new legislative term. With the world changing at the speed of light and new challenges and threats emerging daily, only time will tell what issues and projects will mark these upcoming five years of the EU's history. However, one thing is clear as day: defence and security have never been higher on the EU priorities list.

The past few years have put an end to all illusions. The initial shock and far-reaching repercussions of Russia's aggression in Ukraine have caused wake-up moments and U-turns on both the national and European levels. The previous EU mandate has thus firmly brought the long-overdue issue of defence back to the discussion table. Yet, it is the task of this term's

legislators to set this agenda into motion: bring up uneasy controversial debates and find practical solutions that will lay the foundation of Europe's security for the decades to come.

By now, the need to enhance Europe's defence capabilities is largely acknowledged across the increasingly fragmented political spectrum. However, there is one key element of security that should not be overlooked or underplayed: defending Europe requires more than just military might. It also necessitates a reinforced imperative of safeguarding democracy and freedom on the continent. The very institutional underpinning of European unity and ability to act is conditioned upon well-functioning democratic institutions and a values-based common approach to collective decision-making.

Here is where the division lies between the liberals and the increased illiberal segment of the European political ecosystem. Security and defence traditionally form a quintessential part of the liberals' agenda. It is no coincidence that the key positions in this domain are occupied by members of the liberal family, from Mark Rutte, the Secretary General of NATO, to the liberals chairing the SEDE Subcommittee on Security and Defence at the European Parliament. There is no security and peace without freedom. It is the special task of the liberals to safeguard this fundamental link between the two underlying pillars of the European project.

Anticipating the forthcoming debates on defence and security, this special issue aims to provide liberals with a go-to reference point on some of the most pressing dilemmas in these domains. For this, we have brought together some of the best expertise from across Europe to share reflections on the geopolitical, economic, and societal aspects of European security and defence.

The first bloc of contributions concerns the questions of strategy and geopolitics: how to better support Ukraine in winning the devastating and unequal battle while simultaneously making Europe a better fit for modern security challenges? In the first section, leading experts from the EU, NATO, and Ukraine share their vision of Europe's security strategy for the future: from the EU's role in transatlantic security governance to an institutional setup that would correspond to the new realities.

The second section addresses the practicalities of defending Europe. The basis of the continent's security is a well-integrated European defence market facilitated by an adequate policy framework on the EU level. Contributions in this section focus on the specifics and needs of the defence industry as well as relevant policy measures to meet them. Articles by academics and civil society experts are complemented by notes from the key European industries, presenting a two-sided perspective on strengthening this strategic sector of the European economy.

There is no security and peace without freedom. It is the special task of the liberals to safeguard this fundamental link between the two underlying pillars of the European project.

The third section uncovers the implications of democratic decline and illiberal tendencies for the continent's security. From populism and disinformation to corruption and breaches of the rule of law, socio-political trends and phenomena both in the EU and in its neighbourhood are reshaping the security landscape of Europe. How can we preserve freedom and democracy and thus safeguard Europe from internal threats to peace and stability? The articles by experts and intellectuals from across the continent shed light on what the EU should do for long-term success in this fundamental area.

The upcoming five years present a litmus test for Europe's ability to defend itself from the outside as well as from within. This collection of papers should give European liberals enough food for thought at the start of this new and very important era in European history.

SECTION 1

European Defence in New Geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

Treaties Wanted: For the Defence of Europe and European Defence

–
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Independent foreign policy and public diplomacy advisor

Abstract

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 opened a new era in European foreign and security policy. Three key debates are happening at the same time: one is about the immediate security and operational emergency of the war in Ukraine. The second debate is about what optimal conditions to set in the coming years for European defence capabilities to grow fast enough to defend the continent. The third debate is about finding the appropriate international legal framework to negotiate the new terms of European security in the longer run. This article, in dialogue with the contributing authors to this special issue on Defence, calls for the negotiation of new multilateral treaties on European security and the defence of Europe, combining a firm pro-democracy stance, NATO and UK involvement, nuclear deterrence, as well as EU strategic, industrial and financial commitments.

Intro

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 opened a new era in European foreign and security policy. It has pushed the EU and its Member States to dramatically revise their positions and thoughts on defence, which is becoming one of the most dynamic EU policy agendas. The defence of Europe (Pavel Fischer, France culture, 2024b) has become an immediate imperative. It has re-launched common defence policies, leading, when the European Council decides so, to a 'common defence' (TEU, 2009).

This introduction is in dialogue with the other articles comprising this special issue.

In the aftermath of the European elections, let's prioritise debates by their level of urgency. It seems three key debates are happening at the same time, yet with three different time frames. One debate is about the immediate emergency of the war in Ukraine. The second debate is about what optimal conditions to set in the coming years for European defence capabilities to grow fast enough to defend the continent. The third debate is about finding the appropriate international legal framework to negotiate the new terms of European security in the longer run.

The articles in this journal all deal with these three debates and analyse them from a variety of angles, from spyware to the defence market, from strategic priorities to transatlantic relations, institutional innovations, and the defence of democracy in Europe.

The three debates are obviously intertwined and interdependent: long-term prospects and views determine immediate decisions, mid-term constraints influence current decisions, and emergencies draw most of our immediate attention. The European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) Regulation proposal states that it aims to 'reconcile the urgent with the long-term' (European Commission, 2024).

In this article, I argue for the launch of a negotiation process leading to the adoption of treaties on European security and defence that would include the EU and its Member States as signatories, complementing NATO. Such treaties would contribute to the defence of Europe. As international commitments from heads of state and governments reiterating shared democratic values, they would also consolidate the democratic positioning of the EU as a political bloc, by adequately balancing human rights imperatives with security concerns, to counterbalance the influence of illiberal and populist forces in the new European Parliament.

Ukraine now

The Ukrainian conflict is here to stay. Experts agree that it will drag on for many years and influence several generations of Europeans (France culture, 2024 a and c). With this conflict, a paradigm shift has taken place in the way Europeans think about the defence of Europe, and in the way they are acting to pursue it.

In the short term, direct support to Ukraine has become a testing ground of renewed cooperation formats on strategic, political, operational, and technological levels.

Operational talks on direct support to Ukraine take place within the Ramstein format, outside NATO and outside the EU. Political talks take place in all suitable formats. For instance, NATO's 2023 Vilnius Summit was instrumental in launching multilateral and bilateral agreements as urgent temporary frameworks (Klein & Major, 2023). Diplomatic conferences such as the February 2024 Paris conference in support of Ukraine take place in ad hoc formats. The G7 format has also been used, leading to important commitments from its members to sign bilateral treaties with Ukraine.

At the operational level, coalition members have made new efforts in the following areas, mentioned in the Paris conference communiqué: cyber defence, co-production of weapons in Ukraine, the defence of Ukraine's immediate neighbours who are non-NATO members (such as Moldova), support to Ukraine at its border with Belarus (possibly with a specific non-military crisis management operation), the strengthening of the EU military assistance mission to Ukraine, and demining.

At the technological level, the Ukraine front has become a laboratory for European defence stakeholders in the areas of artificial intelligence, drones, counter-disinformation, protection of critical infrastructure, ground based -air defence, and so forth

Last but not least, the war in Ukraine has led to historical announcements about plans to transform the European defence market and its industrial base. They have included, in the short term, joint procurement of ammunition (including joint imports from extra-EU producers), reimbursement schemes for EU members that had given military equipment to Ukraine, joint transportation schemes and

At the end of the day, the consequences of these debates will impact the European economy and politics far beyond the duration of electoral mandates. Who will pay for these structural reforms of the defence sectors? How can they be combined with other reform imperatives to tackle climate change and strive for sustainable development? Who is ready to commit huge resources to decades-long joint industrial programmes? The new European security context raises structural questions that only new treaties, as durable political and legal frameworks, will be able to answer.

intra-European assets mobility, joint planning, and information sharing on increased manufacturing. Some articles in this special issue go into detail on that matter. In 2024 a new batch of measures was taken, focusing on even more structural transformations for the European defence sector and market.

The medium term

At the strategic level, the war in Ukraine, combined with the prospects of the United States withdrawing its security protection, and the confirmation of the alignment of several authoritarian powers (China, Iran, North Korea) with President Vladimir Putin's regime, have produced tectonic shocks with a range of follow-on effects in a variety of areas relevant to European defence (Grevi, 2024).

Firstly, the EU is now viewed seriously by almost all its Member States as a potentially credible security actor (France culture, 2024b). This is new. Estonia, traditionally very Atlanticist, has initiated a joint EU ammunition procurement scheme. Czechia, under its new leadership, has been at the forefront of joint procurement initiatives for ammunition. Poland, with former EU Council President Donald Tusk, has made dramatically new statements on the EU as a military power while re-launching the Weimar Triangle with Germany and France (Caulcutt, von der Burchard, & Angelos, 2024).

Secondly, at the operational level, the EU can still play a role, for instance in the training of Ukrainian soldiers, or in the deployment of crisis management operations (from monitoring to military assistance, security sector reform, and the protection of cultural heritage).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the EU is now envisaging a deep industrial and trade transformation in the field of defence, partly due to a shift in position by the German leadership. Shortly after uniting to support Ukraine, European governments shifted from a weapons delivery logic to a production and co-production logic (France culture, 2024a). In 2024, they have shifted towards an investment logic. For the first time in its history, the European Investment Bank is being requested to launch a dedicated lending and blending initiative to 'de-risk' investment in the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) (European Commission, 2024: 7, 29; and page 6 of its Financial Statement joint annex). This may be a game changer, because it will Europeanise the paradigm of defence investments that have until now been kept under the remit of national sovereignty.

This industrial and regulatory transformation comes with a new legal interpretation of EU competences and obligations, at the request of Member States. In that regard, the legal arguments put forward by the newly proposed EDIP regulation deserve particular attention. The text argues for a reinterpretation of the subsidiarity principles and legitimises the EU level to take action in the field of defence industry and the internal market (European Commission, 2024: 6). It also relies on four legal bases already existing as articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU to justify groundbreaking measures. Article 173 will be used to strengthen the EDTIB's competitiveness. Article 114 relates to the European Defence Equipment Market (EDEM) and is the reference to justify the harmonisation of defence equipment standards at EU level as well as the widening or even re-opening of certain defence contracts to other Member States (European Commission, 2024: 5).

Old debates have been revived but new paradigms are emerging and will remain high on the agenda in the coming years. This includes European military socialisation and training to work towards converging strategic and security cultures; scaled-up interoperability thanks to the harmonisation of technical standards; and increased national and collective military spending.

The debate on Member States' GDP percentage going to defence has burgeoned and new arguments are now being made. Various calculation methods are being used: individual national figures are now used side by side with aggregated figures combining collective spending figures of all EU states. Some authors in this special edition also suggest including EU spending, on top of national expenditures, in the GDP percentage. The collective spending approach would probably suit France, which is often called out by defence experts for its unconvincing expenditures efforts (Dempsey, 2024). Other stakeholders, such as Pavel Fischer, president of the Czech Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee, call for new, more ambitious targets, much higher than the NATO-related 2 per cent, underlining that this objective was only relevant during peaceful times (which now belong to the past).

The 'Buy European' debate has also been revived and will occupy defence stakeholders at least in the next few years. It is also partly connected with the 'Made in Europe' debate, which presupposes the willingness of European industrial partners to engage in the very long term. It is not clear how the French view of 'European preference' (Élysée, 2024), which President Emmanuel Macron wishes to see anchored in future treaties, will materialise in the near future.

Yet critics, such as Michael Shurkin, still consider that Europeans are good at talking and promising structural change without really walking the talk (France culture, 2024b). Other analysts suspect Europeans will really take bold action only when the likelihood of a new Trump presidency is confirmed (France culture, 2024a) and may even go back to business as usual if it is not (Dempsey, 2024).

Photo by Olha Ruskykh on Pexels

What will or would such a treaty look like? It should refer to the compendium of existing bilateral and multilateral treaties, while adding a series of articles and protocols comprising new provisions on mutual assistance, deterrence, financing, industry, trade, and joint operations. A series of opt-outs will also have to negotiated with individual signatory states wishing to be outside certain protocols.

At the end of the day, the consequences of these debates will impact the European economy and politics far beyond the duration of electoral mandates. Who will pay for these structural reforms of the defence sectors? How can they be combined with other reform imperatives to tackle climate change and strive for sustainable development? Who is ready to commit huge resources to decades-long joint industrial programmes? The new European security context raises structural questions that only new treaties, as durable political and legal frameworks, will be able to answer.

The long term

Europeans at last seem to have found what 'binds them together', to use the words of Habermas and Derrida (2003), who were calling for an autonomous European foreign policy in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq back in 2003.[1]

The foundations of the European pillars on which the future defence of Europe will rely are now in place. They consist of a myriad of efforts to reinforce security and defence cooperation and guarantees between individual states in Europe: bilateral treaties, dialogue, joint work, networks, ad hoc (EU) mechanisms and institutions, and reforms of national defence and military systems (Koenig et al., 2023). Bit by bit, they are all contributing to shaping a common understanding and a community gathered around the same fears, the same principles, and the same priorities. Every day a brick is added, and the pillars are being strengthened creatively, even though no single unique grand design is being used as a reference.

Critics rightly consider that this approach is not effective and fast enough. Others regret that defence prioritisation puts green transitions in jeopardy. As a matter of fact, winning the war in Ukraine means defeating anti-ecological forces that reject climate action. Of course, it would be better if the EU could channel all its resources primarily into green transformations. But Putin and his allies have not given us a choice. The EU's ability to lead on climate action will be determined by its victory in Ukraine.

Old taboos are now being discussed. Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons since 2022 have triggered a Western European response on nuclear deterrence (Trevelyan, 2024), opened a new debate in Germany about the need for nuclear deterrence (Kühn, 2024), and re-opened old ones among defence experts (France culture 2024a).

Ongoing joint European defence industrial programmes, such as the MGCS and the SCAF, both launched in 2017 (L'Express, 2024), will take at best a couple of decades to become a reality. This is also what happened to the Airbus A400, which had a long and bumpy journey before taking off commercially. These examples show that the joint projects being launched as part of the new EDIP will not help to win the war in Ukraine any time soon. Yet they may help Europeans catch up with the global arms race (Bezat, 2024). Whether this will be enough for the defence of Europe in the long run, only time will tell.

EU heads of states and governments have now made decisions to prioritise long-term defence investments in joint and unifying European industrial projects. They have demonstrated political will, the first ingredient of credibility. The success of long-term defence financing through the mobilisation of the banking sector and the European Investment Bank in particular will be European defence's second EU credibility factor. The third one will be the capacity of European states to agree on stronger mutual collective commitments to guarantee the defence of Europe, within an enabling political framework.

Towards a treaty on security and defence in Europe

In a 2023 analysis entitled 'Ensuring Ukraine's Security', Margarete Klein and Claudia Major wrote, after calling for efforts to implement the 2023 Vilnius agreements and for the weakening of Russia's offensive capabilities: 'The third work strand is about strengthening the resilience, defence and deterrence of the EU and NATO and securing long-term support for Ukraine.'

Until Ukraine becomes a NATO member, and as long as US politics remains potentially threatening or disappointing – as the stalemate on military assistance to Ukraine was –

there is a need to defend the European continent against major threats: a need for a Europe-wide equivalent of NATO article 5 and EU article 42.7, but including the United Kingdom and Ukraine as well as other willing and like-minded non-EU and non-NATO members. Because of these conditions, and because not all EU members share the same strategic view and the same strategic culture (Dempsey, 2024), a new political framework to defend Europe cannot be an EU treaty. It has to be something more, combining ongoing bilateral and multilateral treaties and bringing added value on the industrial dimension, and on nuclear deterrence. The industrial component is currently being developed by the EU. The deterrence component is a topic that France will have to negotiate with its EU, European and NATO allies, in an appropriate format (which, for Bruno Tertrais, must not be the EU) (France culture, 2024a).

President Macron's second Sorbonne speech on Europe on 25 April 2024 referred to existing bilateral treaties (including the Lancaster House treaty with the UK), and to the European political community as the right space to host such negotiations on a new security paradigm and on a common security and defence framework (Élysée, 2024).

What will or would such a treaty look like? It should refer to the compendium of existing bilateral and multilateral treaties, while adding a series of articles and protocols comprising new provisions on mutual assistance, deterrence, financing, industry, trade, and joint operations. A series of opt-outs will also have to negotiated with individual signatory states wishing to be outside certain protocols. The EU, bringing its industrial, market regulation, and trade competences, would also be a signatory as such. NATO could also be a signatory to ensure compliance with the Alliance's obligations and mutual responsibilities.

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ARTICLE

Unpacking the European Pillar in NATO

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Citation suggestion: Thierry Tardy, TT (2024). Unpacking the European Pillar in NATO. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 23–29.

Abstract

Academic and policy debates pertaining to the respective roles of the European Union (EU) and NATO in global security governance recurrently refer to the notion of the European pillar within NATO. Yet the meaning and scope of a European pillar in NATO have remained largely undefined. Whether the European pillar refers to European states being more active within the Atlantic Alliance or to the EU playing an increased role in the defence domain, in complementarity with NATO, is still unclear. Whether the European pillar is inclusive or exclusive of the EU is still to be understood, as are the possible consequences of an existing European pillar in NATO for the EU itself and its autonomy of decision and action.

This article aims to explore some of these questions. It starts with a genealogy of the term 'European pillar in NATO' before offering a conceptualisation of the term. It then aims to unpack what the pillar can possibly look like in practice, both from a political and from an operational perspective.

Academic and policy debates pertaining to the respective roles of the European Union (EU) and NATO in global security governance recurrently refer to the notion of the European pillar within NATO. Yet the meaning and scope of a European pillar in NATO have remained largely undefined. More specifically, whether the European pillar refers to European states being more active within the Atlantic Alliance or to the EU playing an increased role in the defence domain, in complementarity with NATO, is still unclear. Whether the European pillar is inclusive or exclusive of the EU is still to be understood, as are the possible consequences of an existing European pillar in NATO for the EU itself and its autonomy of decision and action.

This article aims to explore some of these questions. It starts with a genealogy of the term 'European pillar in NATO' before offering a conceptualisation of the term. It then aims to unpack what the pillar can possibly look like in practice, both from a political and from an operational perspective.

Genealogy of a concept

That the Atlantic Alliance was from the very beginning composed of two halves – one North American and one European – was consubstantial with the political geography of the organisation. The fact is that the Alliance has been, from its inception in 1949, composed on the one hand of two American states – the United States and Canada – with the United States as the main protector and on the other hand of a number of European states as the main beneficiaries of US protection. Yet the theorisation of such a construct has always been difficult, in part because of the need to make the Alliance a unitary endeavour which should not be undermined by any attempt to portray it as composed of two geographical or political entities.

The US approach towards Europe as a space that must simultaneously be protected, controlled, and empowered has also nurtured some ambiguity in the transatlantic bargain. US administrations since the 1950s have been committed to the defence of Europe and, to a degree, to the development of some European capacities, but this has always been constrained by the firm intent to remain in control of what Europeans would 'do together' in the security domain.

Conversely, most Europeans have been willing to develop intra-European links in defence but, with the exception of France, this has never been at the cost of loosening defence ties with the US or challenging their dominant position.

On 4 July 1962, President John F. Kennedy's declaration of interdependence posed the terms of the debate: 'We do not regard a strong and united Europe as a rival, but a partner', he said; he then added: 'To aid its progress has been the basic object of our foreign policy for 17 years' (European Community, 1962). These words go beyond defence as they also allude to the European integration process. Nonetheless, they imply a sense of equality and reciprocity in the to-be-built transatlantic partnership that was well received by the European Economic Community (European Community, 1962). Such an ambitious agenda was, however, constrained in the defence domain, largely as a result of the divide between the political and military might of the US on the one hand, and the relative weakness of the Europeans on the other.

Within NATO, a British initiative led to the establishment in 1968 of a Eurogroup composed of 11 NATO allies,[2] whose objective was to 'help to ensure a stronger and more cohesive European contribution to the common defence, and thus to strengthen the Alliance and the security in which its peoples live' (NATO Information Service, 1976: 9). At the same time, European NATO allies were having 'Euro-dinners' and 'Euro-teas', and the term 'European caucus' within the Alliance was in the air (all UK-led initiatives of which, *en passant*, France was not a part) (Wieslander, 2020).

Most interestingly, the US reaction to those initiatives was rather lukewarm, as revealed by a memo from the US representation to NATO to the State Department in 1969.[3] The memo first insists on '[o]ur traditional support for any manifestation of European unity which does not run contrary to US interests to the broader framework of Atlantic partnership' and acknowledges that '[t]here are certain subjects on which the Europeans could quite usefully come up with agreements among themselves.' Yet the rest of the text is bluntly critical of the very idea of a European caucus within the Alliance, described as a forum that most likely would discuss 'the wrong things' and turn into a 'non-institutional way to institutionalize European disunity'. Most importantly, the diplomatic memo contends that 'the system we have constructed, always linked to US national interests, is inherently and inescapably an Atlantic system and will remain so as long as the ultimate deterrent is the American strategic nuclear arsenal. This is to say that the Europeans probably could not agree among themselves on defense issues worth caucusing about.'

This says a lot not only about the US conception of the very notion of partnership but also about the difficulty of framing what a European grouping within NATO could entail. Already, then, the difficulty of reconciling European aspirations to play a constructive role in defence 'as Europeans' and the US conception of its own role – and interests – is apparent. The risk of decoupling of the two sides of the Atlantic is also implicit in the US position. Of interest (to the current debate) is also the triangular pattern by which European states would not think of their own defence in bilateral or multilateral European terms always factor in a US component, so that the system is 'inherently and inescapably' transatlantic.

The Eurogroup continued its activities until 1994, when its functions were transferred to the Western European Union (WEU). Likewise, in 1976 the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG) was established,[4] to which all European member countries of NATO (including France and Turkey) contributed. The IEPG aimed at fostering cooperation in research, development, and production of equipment. It met at the political level in 1984 but was then dissolved when the WEU took over (with the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG)) in 1992. Overall, these various initiatives did not produce many results, as the weak resolve among the Europeans to develop any substantive coordination mechanism was met by a reciprocal US reluctance to see it happen.

The European pillar, within or outside NATO

The notion of a European pillar in the Atlantic Alliance was revisited with the end of the Cold War as Europeans started to conceptualise their own defence ambitions. In the context

of the revitalisation of the WEU in the 1990s, the institution was explicitly presented as 'the defence component of the European Union and as the means to strengthen the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance'.[5]

This was endorsed by NATO at a time when Europeans were supposed to develop the so-called European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within the Atlantic Alliance 'to strengthen European participation in security matters while reinforcing transatlantic cooperation' (Chatham House, 2001). The WEU was to play an important role in making ESDI happen, notably through WEU-led military operations, at the time labelled 'Petersberg tasks'.

Assembled at their summit in Washington in 1999, NATO allies acknowledged that '[t]he key elements of a strong European security pillar within the Alliance are now in place, thus permitting the European Allies to carry out their own, WEU-led operations drawing on NATO's assets and capabilities', which will 'strengthen the transatlantic link and Alliance solidarity as a whole'.[6]

The WEU was not to be in itself the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance but rather was portrayed as 'the means to strengthen the European pillar'. Whether the 'pillar' was to be within the Alliance or outside it remained unspecified. The reference to the WEU seemed to suggest that it was outside, yet the fact that WEU-led operations would draw on NATO assets also implied an anchorage in NATO. In any case, by its defence role and inclusivity (notably vis-à-vis third states such as Turkey and Norway), the WEU probably came closest to the idea of a European pillar.

That being said, with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to be developed within the EU and the parallel fading away of the WEU in the late 1990s, the question emerged of the compatibility between what the EU would potentially do and transatlantic security. The fact that the former would inevitably strengthen the latter was questioned by the American administration (and by NATO), as expressed by then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright with the so-called '3Ds': 'The United States welcomes a more capable European partner, with modern, flexible military forces capable of putting out fires in Europe's own back yard', she said, yet '[a]ny initiative must avoid pre-empting Alliance decision-making by de-linking ESDI from NATO, avoid duplicating existing efforts, and avoid discriminating against non-EU members' (US Department of State, 1998).

Since that moment the debate on some sort of autonomous European military capacity has systematically revolved around the question of how (or whether) such capacity could reinforce or undermine the transatlantic link. And the idea of a European pillar in NATO was one answer to these questions. By anchoring European efforts to NATO, the European pillar would materialise the compatibility between the two institutions.

Yet the EU defence ambition also meant that European military capabilities could be used either by NATO or outside the Alliance. The 1998 Saint-Malo Declaration pointed out that 'the European Union will ... need to have recourse to suitable military means' then distinguished between 'European capabilities pre-designated within NATO's European pillar' and 'national or multinational European means outside the NATO framework'.[7] This led to the distinction between 'EU-led operations using NATO assets and capabilities' and 'EU-led operations without recourse to NATO assets and capabilities' (European Council, 1999). The notion of a European pillar in the latter situation was always more difficult to visualise, as exemplified by EU-led autonomous operations in Africa.

Whether the European pillar is inclusive or exclusive of the EU is still to be understood, as are the possible consequences of an existing European pillar in NATO for the EU itself and its autonomy of decision and action.

From strategic autonomy to the European pillar

The European pillar within NATO was revisited in the context of the debate on European strategic autonomy. At its core, strategic autonomy is about the EU being able to act in a broad range of domains

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without depending on others. The EU and its Member States 'must be able to contribute decisively to collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible' (European Council, 2016).

The need for some sort of strategic autonomy for Europe has been controversial, in particular in the defence domain. More specifically, the debate on autonomy could not ignore what 'acting autonomously' might mean for the transatlantic link. And while proponents of European strategic autonomy in defence were thinking of a strengthened European capacity largely to palliate a possible American absence, opponents were wary of European emancipation (or even a narrative about it) undermining transatlantic cohesion. One could not easily do away with the triangular – and US-centric – construct described in the above-cited 1969 US memo on the European Caucus. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg put it, '[a] European Union that spends more on defence, invests in new capabilities, and reduces the fragmentation of the European defence industry, is not only good for European security, it is also good for transatlantic security'. However, he added, 'the EU cannot defend Europe alone', and 'any attempt to divide Europe from North America, will not only weaken NATO, it will also divide Europe' (NATO, 2021). Similarly, successive US administrations – including under President Joe Biden – have supported the EU's defence initiatives but only insofar as they would contribute to a stronger European defence and complement NATO (Herszenhorn, 2021; Martin & Sinkkonen, 2022).

In this context, the war in Ukraine impacted the debate as it both reinforced the need for transatlantic unity and blatantly demonstrated the irreplaceable nature of US security guarantees for Europe. For strategic autonomy sceptics, the war in Ukraine has simply killed the idea as it showed how strong and indispensable transatlantic relations are (Davidson, 2022). For proponents of European strategic autonomy, the war in Ukraine has confirmed the dependency vis-à-vis the US and therefore the need to do more among Europeans, yet it has also showed the prevalence of NATO in the broad European defence architecture.

This is where the notion of the European pillar comes back. Prima facie, the term 'European pillar of NATO' implies a degree of subordination to NATO; it means being a part of something bigger, which is transatlantic security. As such, the notion of the European pillar carries some incompatibility with a certain conception of strategic autonomy, understood as a response to the dependency towards the US.

That said, what Ukraine simultaneously demonstrates is a) that Europe cannot guarantee its own security without the US and without NATO, and b) that the relative weakness of the Europeans in defence is to be remedied. One way in which one can reconcile the dependency vis-à-vis the US/NATO and the need to acquire some autonomy for Europe is to build bridges between the two. The European pillar is one of these bridges. It is the construct that can enable Europeans to work with the Americans for their mutual benefit. This was acknowledged by French President Emmanuel Macron when he stated at the GLOBSEC Forum that 'a Europe of Defence, a European pillar within NATO, is essential' as 'the only way to be credible for ourselves … to reduce our dependency and to shoulder our legitimate share of the burden' (Élysée, 2023). Whether by 'a European pillar within NATO' the French president meant a European group or caucus inside NATO or simply the more traditional French objective of Europeans needing to be stronger in defence is unclear. From the French perspective, however, the hypothesis that NATO would lose centrality as a result of a partial US withdrawal (with the two scenarios of a crisis in the Indo-Pacific and a new Trump or Trumpian administration) cannot be ruled out, which suggests that the European pillar cannot be totally disconnected from the notion of an alternative to NATO, in case this becomes inescapable.

Reconciling the broad and narrow European pillars

Questions therefore remain about how EU-led defence efforts can be best plugged in the broader transatlantic realm. In other words, the notion of a European pillar within NATO needs to answer the question of the role of the EU in this construct. This leads to two understandings of the European pillar, one narrow and one broad. The narrow understanding implies that Europeans act as Europeans within NATO, in a kind of European caucus. The broad understanding implies that Europeans do more on defence, and that is mainly taking place within the EU, with a close link with NATO. This means that the European pillar within NATO is also about EU–NATO relations, and about the degree of subordination to NATO that the EU can accept. From an EU perspective, such subordination is a priori difficult to accept. Yet it is inherent to the primacy of NATO in defence and to a degree codified in all EU texts and treaties, which consistently state that '[c]ommitments and cooperation' in the area of security and defence 'shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation' (art. 42.7 TEU).

With this in mind, the European pillar can be defined as a combination of the narrow and the broad approach, that is, a mix of European defence initiatives taking place inside NATO and European defence initiatives taking place outside NATO but unmistakeably contributing to stronger transatlantic security. The concept will thrive only if the two dimensions can be reconciled.

Europeans need to be protected, and if the European pillar within NATO can reconcile the narrow and broad approaches, it will be an essential political and operational component of the transatlantic security construct.

At least five components of this European pillar can then be identified:

Financial. European states spend more on defence, in line with the NATO Defence Investment Pledge and the EU collective commitments (including a proper EU Defence Pledge); they establish an EU defence budget in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034.

Politico-institutional. European states jointly develop their strategic culture and establish a 'European caucus' within NATO (common European views, contribution to policy-making in NATO committees and working groups), including with the UK whenever possible; the EU–NATO partnership is strengthened and operationalised, while the division of labour between the two institutions is clarified, both in the defence field and in the broader security arena.

Capabilities. European states contribute to capability development through collaborative projects, supported by the European Defence Fund, the Permanent Structured Cooperation, and other EU initiatives; capability development is done in close coordination with NATO and the capabilities can be used in various configurations (EU-led operations, NATO-led, multinational ad hoc) for crisis management and collective defence.

Industrial. European states encourage the building of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) while factoring in transatlantic defence industrial relations; this also takes stock of the various EU instruments established since 2017 and in the context of the war in Ukraine and leading to the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS); this is done in close coordination with NATO.

Operational. European states contribute more (relative to the US) to NATO-led activities/operations (New Force model, Enhanced Forward Presence, KFOR, etc.) and constitute European modular forces (Rapid Deployment Capacity, etc.) that can participate in broader operations.

Conclusion

The discussion on the European pillar within NATO has from the very beginning revolved around the question of how Europeans can best contribute to a US-dominated enterprise. While this debate has long been largely sterile, the current geostrategic environment has called for some new thinking about the division of tasks. This is about a series of bilateral relations (between the US and European states), about what Europeans do within NATO, about what the EU and NATO do together, and incidentally about what the EU and the US do together in defence. At these different levels, policies/institutions need to adapt so that the respective comparative advantages are maximised and the overall transatlantic security complex is strengthened. At the core of the matter, however, is the hypothesis of Europeans being left on their own in the face of a major threat , as could happen with a second Trump administration for example. This is indeed the scenario that makes the entire thinking about the European pillar necessary. Europeans need to be protected, and if the European pillar within NATO can reconcile the narrow and broad approaches, it will be an essential political and operational component of the transatlantic security construct.

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ARTICLE

Back to the future

of a European Defence Union – and European federalism

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Citation suggestion: Michael Emerson, ME (2024). Back to the future of a European Defence Union – and European federalism *Future Europe*, 5(1), 30–33.

Its time has come, at last, albeit overdue.

Advocates of the European Union becoming a military power have been fully aware of the strength of political commitments to retain pre-eminent national competences for defence - under a NATO umbrella. Only some almighty, unforeseeable geo-political shock could possible change this. Putin and Trump have together between them now delivered just this big Black Swan happening, even as if coordinated.

Putin has invaded another independent European state, Ukraine. He openly threatens even nuclear war if his objective of subjugating or wrecking this state is frustrated by Western military action, or political action such as NATO membership for Ukraine[8].

Trump admires Putin. He would pull out US support for Ukraine on day 1 if he gets re-elected in November, and says that Putin can do "what the hell he wants" in any NATO member state that is not paying enough for defence[9].

The 1952 European Defence Community

It has taken 72 years to reach this point, after France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux trio signed the European Defence Community (EDC) treaty in May 1952, but which was abandoned after France failed to ratify it. The impetus for the treaty had come in 1950 with speeches by Winston Churchill advocating "a European Army under a unified command" and René Pleven, prime minister of France "creation for the purpose of common defense, of a European Army tied to the political institutions of a united Europe", and a Resolution of the Council of Europe calling for "the immediate creation of a unified European army

subject to proper European democratic control"[10].

The signed EDC treaty was a full 85-page text detailing all institutional and decision-making provisions[11]. Its main features may be recalled in order to reflect on how far it still looks relevant, and whether some modernized variant might now be proposed.

The core proposal was for nationally homogenous 'Groupements' or 'basic units' of army, air force and naval forces to be integrated under the full wartime powers of command of the Supreme Commander of Nato. The treaty authors had however the foresight to imagine something like a Trump presidency of the US. "If Nato should cease to be in effect .... the member states shall by agreement among themselves decide upon the authority to which the command and employment of the European Defense Forces should be entrusted" (Article 18.4).

The institutional structure of the EDC anticipated that of the European Economic Community and subsequent European Union, with a Council, a parliamentary Assembly, a Commission ('Commissariat'), a Court of Justice and a common budget. Its decision-making provisions saw a three-layer system for actions requiring a simple majority, a qualified majority, or unanimity.

The EDC was to be responsible, beyond its integrated wartime command structure, for standardised military procurement and elaboration of common military doctrines and training, all directions in which today's European Defence Agency is seeking to go, with seminal but still only small steps only so far.

While the EDC treaty was signed by the six founding member states of the subsequent European Economic Community, it was to remain open for enlargement like today's European Union for the accession of any other European state.

Further anticipating contemporary conditions, the UK declined to join the proposed EDC because of its excessive (for the UK) supranational character. However a parallel treaty was prepared for mutual defense between the UK and the member states of the EDC.

The long and winding path of European federalisation

Defence is the missing link in any design for the EU to become a more or less recognizable federation, and effective actor on the world stage. The EU has often been viewed as a unique unidentified flying object in terms of its political system, with no final resting point in view. However in practice it has over the decades been moving gradually, with bumps along the road, along parallel paths of deepening in a federalizing direction with the single market and single currency, and widening with enlargement of its membership. But the EU is not unique in going down this parallel path.

The US long had its parallel processes of federalization and enlargement, starting with 13 founding states around 250 years ago, with progressive enlargements for new states taking place still in the 2Oth century with New Mexico and Arizona in 1912, and Alaska and Hawaiii in 1957. The US had to experience a terrible civil war ending only 159 years ago to resolve the competition between the confederal preferences in the south and federal preferences in the north, an analogous competition resonating in the EU today. The Federal Reserve Board as a proper central bank was only fully established in 1913 after a series of bank failures and panics. The foundations of US fiscal federalism were only created when the Great Depression of the 1930s triggered the New Deal and the beginnings of federal social benefits including unemployment compensation[12].

By comparison the European Union has evolved very fast over the last 68 years since the European Economic Community (EEC) was founded in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome, leading on to the merger in 1965 of the EEC with Euratom (founded also in 1957) and the Coal and Steel Community (founded earlier in 1951). The Customs Union was started in 1968. The first attempt at monetary union was the Werner Plan proposal of 1970.

When this collapsed there began deeper reflections on the need for fiscal underpinnings of an economic and monetary union. In 1977 a group of experts, chaired by Sir Donald MacDougall, reported 'On the role of public finance in European integration', concluding that based on the experience of mature federal monetary unions, a sustainable European monetary union would require expanding the budget from the then 0.7% of GDP to 2 to 2.5% with a capacity to handle major macroeconomic shocks and redistribute fiscal resources form rich to poorer states and regions[13]. This was to be for a purely civilian budget, whereas if there were to be a European competence for defence this would cost a further 2.5% to 3 % of GDP. The MacDougall report was royally ignored as irrelevant by ministers of finance and central bankers. The budget only began to grow beyond farm spending after Jacques Delors argued successfully that his plan to complete the single market by 1992 would only survive with a serious expansion of the Regional Fund to help weakest regions and states[14].

The first political leader to propose that the EU's budget would have to grow along the lines of the MacDougall report was Emanuel Marcon in his September 2017 speech at the Sorbonne shortly after he was first elected President of France. The major expansions of the EU budget and borrowing powers only then came with classic 'shocks', notably with €450 billion of funding to save the Eurozone in the wake of the 2008 global

financial crisis, and the €750 billion Recovery and Resilience Fund following the global Covid pandemic of 2019-2020. The latter saw the EU's budget ceiling raised 'temporarily' to 2% of GDP, although there are already voices suggesting that there will have to be a Recovery and Resilience Fund 2.0[15].

The time has come for a major European defense initiative, driven politically by the combination of threats expressed by Putin and Trump. Such an initiative, under the name of a European Defence Union, would be a key systemic development of the EU in a federal direction.

A European Defence Union

Inspiration may be taken from the attempted European Defence Community of 1952, but the future has to be something different and so let it be called the European Defence Union. Indeed the EU has got beyond talking about communities and thinks in terms of multiple unions (monetary, capital market, energy, digital etc.). A defence union would carry the EU another huge step deeper into federal territory.

The latest shock, Putin's war against Ukraine, for the first time opens up seriously the debate about the EU becoming a military power. EU member states have until recently been spending only 1.5% of GDP on average on defense[16]. This begins to change with Germany now raising its defence budget to the Nato 2% of GDP target. Trump's credible threat to oblige Europe pay for its own defense, and Putin's credible threat to Europe's strategic security (in Ukraine and beyond), looks like the EU needing to expand defence spending way beyond the NATO target of 2% of GDP, more likely to 3% (the US spends 3.5%). But then will arise the question of (?) how this burden will be shared between the EU and member state budgets.

The full development of a European defence force will be a hugely complex and progressive process (with some aspects addressed in other chapters of this volume.) For the present a few main issues are highlighted.

Procurement. The case for a major common, rationalised procurement effort is clear. The needed huge expansion of spending on defence capacities would have a major impact on the industrial-military sector: member states with the strongest industrial-military enterprises would provide the foundations to rely on for those with limited industrial-military capacities. Funding should therefore be at the European level, as would be the enhanced security benefits. Procurement is the immediate operational priority, to get EU-funded weapons and ammunitions from anywhere to Ukraine, with huge amplification and deepening of the European Peace Facility (EPF) and Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP)[17]. Since the war in Ukraine is for the EU a proxy war, without frontline military participation, it is also a plausible starting point, with important links to industrial policy and single market policies. Procurement can be scaled up rapidly, while working on the complex process of standardisation of weapons and restructuring of the industrial-military complex.

Dedicated forces and command structures. The 1952 European Defence Community proposal was radical, for total integration of armies, navies and air forces in integrated European defense forces. This proved too much politically in 1952, as it would still be today.

But the next move has to go way beyond the failing EU Battlegroups initiative. Its shortcomings have been well identified and analysed: the refusal of troop-contributing nations to meet their very minor commitments to contingents of 1,500 troops, the short-run 6-monthly duration of commitments, and more broadly the lack of military-operational, and adequate financial and political conditions in place[18]. The embryonic Battlegroups initiative has to be replaced by real integration of greatly increased and dedicated land, air and naval forces, with fully developed command and control structures.

The Strategic Compass documents of 2022[19] proposed a Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5,000 troops, taking over from the failing Battlegroups initiative. But this is still only small-scale incrementalism, whereas the realities of the war in Ukraine are demanding something on a different scale. A European Defence Union could see the permanent commitment of substantial parts of total military resources of member states. For example a

member state with total forces of 100,000 personnel might be called upon to commit 50,000 or half to the Union. There would be rotation of these forces in and outside the Union's force structure, still leaving also a margin for bilateral actions.

Budget and burden-sharing. The running expenses of the Union's committed forces including the procurements would be for the EU budget, in an amount of around 2% of GDP. The logic would be to allow flexibility for the scale of member states commitments, with a range between the strongest military powers in the EU to the smallest and militarily minimalist and even neutralist member states, while avoiding free-riding. There would be a multi-year adjustment period in which all member states (including the non-Nato member states) would be converging on the 2% of GDP spending target. Contributions to funding the European Defence Union would need to take account of the wide range of current national defense spending levels from 1.5% to 2.5% of GDP.

Institutional organisation. A primary choice would have to be made between an EU-level organisation, or something closer to the Eurozone or Schengen model for a coalition of the willing and able, to the exclusion for example of small neutral states (Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus, with Finland and Sweden as reminders of how these things can change). The EU level choice would have the advantage of avoiding free-riding as regards budgetary funding. On the other hand the Eurozone or Schengen model would facilitate decision-making reliant on the unanimity of participating states. The Schengen model has also the interesting feature of including some non-EU states, relevant maybe for non-EU Nato member states such as Norway and the UK.

Conclusions

The time has come for a major European defense initiative, driven politically by the combination of threats expressed by Putin and Trump. Such an initiative, under the name of a European Defence Union, would be a key systemic development of the EU in a federal direction, adding to the already effectively federal single market and single currency. The war in Ukraine shows this to be an urgent necessity, taking over from the EU's timid incrementalism so far in military affairs. The 1952 European Defence Community, which failed to be ratified, may still provide inspiration, although not all of its features are plausible for today or tomorrow. These are all issues to be debated and ultimately for democratic political choice, with a quintessential role for the European Parliament and its elections.

NATO often claims to be the most successful alliance in history. Whether this is so or not is for historians to assess. But undoubtedly, NATO is the most adaptable alliance in history. After 75 years in existence, 2024 is a good occasion to review how NATO has reinvented itself over these decades.

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ARTICLE

Reinvent Yourself!

75 Years of NATO's Strategic Evolution

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Citation suggestion: Gerlinde Niehus, GN (2024). Reinvent Yourself! 75 Years of NATO's Strategic Evolution. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 34–41.

NATO is often misleadingly labelled a *military* organisation and thus is typically associated with military might and, in the words of Joseph Nye, hard power. However, NATO is first and foremost a *political*-military organisation, with the primacy of politics at its core – and military strength as a means to an end, not an end it itself. Therefore, soft power and the ability to attract, co-opt, and persuade are key features of the organisation.

If you join me in a short journey through 75 years of NATO history, I will show you that over the more than seven decades of its existence, NATO has evolved through a series of combinations of soft and hard power components.

According to a famous quote from NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, NATO was created to 'keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'.

NATO's founding act as enshrined in the 1949 North Atlantic (or Washington) Treaty states in the Preamble that Alliance members are 'determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic Area.'

And in Article 2 the NATO nations commit 'to contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions for stability and well-being'.

Therefore, while from the outset NATO's essential and enduring purpose has been and is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members – in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter – this also meant, right from the start, doing so by political and military means – and by putting 'security' into a broader context of political, economic, and social systems, culture, and values.

NATO's activities have evolved over time, but it is important to stress that while the strategic environment changes, the basic tenets of cooperation within the Alliance remain true to the principles of the Washington Treaty: NATO is a politically led organisation of sovereign nations, striving jointly for collective deterrence and defence and for the peaceful resolution of disputes. It is by definition *defensive* in nature. These elements still characterise the organisation today.

The nature of hard and soft power in NATO has changed significantly over time, and their relative weight has evolved and fluctuated within a changing strategic international environment.

Since the birth of NATO, there have been four distinct periods during which its strategic thinking – and its use of soft and hard power – have evolved:

- the Cold War period;
- the immediate post-Cold War period;
- the security environment since 9/11, that is, the al-Qaida terrorist attack against the United States in 2001; and
- the period since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022.

From 1949 to the end of the Cold War

From 1949 to 1991, international relations were dominated by bipolar confrontation between East and West. The emphasis was more on mutual tension and confrontation than on dialogue and cooperation. This led to an often dangerous and expensive arms race.

While the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty had created the Allies, it had not created a military structure that could effectively coordinate their actions. This changed when growing worries about Soviet intentions culminated in the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950.

The effect upon the Alliance was dramatic. NATO soon gained a consolidated command structure with a military headquarters based in the Parisian suburb of Rocquencourt, near Versailles. This was Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, or SHAPE, with US General Dwight D. Eisenhower as the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe, or SACEUR. Soon afterward, the Allies established a permanent civilian secretariat in Paris and named NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay of the United Kingdom.

In these early days, NATO's key objective was to 'convince the USSR that war does not pay, and should war occur, to ensure a successful defence'.[20]

The nature of hard and soft power in NATO has changed significantly over time, and their relative weight has evolved and fluctuated within a changing strategic international environment.

This strong reliance on hard power components as means to achieve political and military goals was further accentuated in the 1950s following the invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces and the ensuing Korean War.

During this period, NATO adopted the strategic doctrine of 'massive retaliation'.[21] This meant, in a nutshell, that if the Soviet Union attacked, NATO would respond with nuclear weapons. The intended effect of this doctrine was to deter either side from risk-taking since any attack, however small, could have led to a full nuclear exchange. At the same time, 'massive retaliation' allowed Alliance members to focus their energies on economic growth rather than on maintaining large conventional armies.

While this clearly demonstrates a heavy reliance on hard power in its most extreme form, it also proves that hard (and by default soft) power is not good or bad per se, nor is hard power by definition less ethical or human than soft power.

The case can be made that NATO's hard military and strategic stance during this period ensured peace, security, and hence also stability and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area. In other words, it is the 'hard power components' which are there to protect elements typically associated with soft power: freedom, democracy, human rights, and prosperity.

This period also illustrates that even during the 'peak times' of the Cold War, NATO always developed its 'hard power' in tandem with its 'soft power' dimensions.

Since the Alliance's founding, the smaller Allies in particular had argued for greater non-military cooperation. The Suez Crisis in autumn 1956 then laid bare the lack of political consultation that divided some members. In addition, the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1956 shocked the Allies into greater scientific cooperation. A report delivered to the North Atlantic Council by the foreign ministers of Norway, Italy, and Canada – the 'Three Wise Men' – recommended more robust political consultation and cooperation in the areas of science, culture, and the information field. The report's conclusions led, *inter alia*, to the establishment of the NATO Science Programme.

The report reinforced NATO's political and non-military role and contributed to broadening the strategic framework of the Alliance. Many of the recommendations that were approved by NATO then remain as relevant as ever today:

> A sense of community must bind the people as well as the institutions of the Atlantic nations. This will exist only to the extent that there is a realization of their common cultural heritage and of the values of their free way of life and thought.[22]

Massive retaliation called into question

In the 1960s, this uneasy but stable status quo began to change. The 'massive retaliation' strategy relied heavily on the United States' nuclear capability and its will to defend European territory in the case of a Soviet nuclear attack. But Europeans started to doubt whether a US president would sacrifice an American city for a European city. In parallel, the USSR had developed its nuclear capability. As the USSR's nuclear potential increased, NATO's competitive advantage in nuclear deterrence diminished.

The outbreak of the second Berlin crisis (1958–1962), provoked by the Soviet Union, reinforced these doubts: how should NATO react to threats that were below the level of an all-out attack? NATO's nuclear deterrent had not stopped the Soviets from threatening the position of Western Allies in Berlin. So, what should be done?

In 1961, J.F. Kennedy arrived in the White House. He was concerned about the issue of limited warfare and the notion that a nuclear exchange could be started by accident or miscalculation. In the meantime, the Berlin crisis intensified, leading to the construction of the Berlin Wall, and in October 1962, the Cold War peaked with the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The United States started advocating a stronger non-nuclear posture for NATO and the need for a strategy of 'flexible response'. This eventually led in 1967/1968 to NATO adopting its new doctrine of 'flexible response'.[23]

There were two key features to the new strategy: flexibility and escalation:

> The deterrent concept of the Alliance is based on a flexibility that will prevent the potential aggressor from predicting with confidence NATO's specific response to aggression and which will lead him to conclude that an unacceptable degree of risk would be involved regardless of the nature of his attack.[24]

This evolution brings home another more generic observation: hard power is not static per se. If used in the context of a 'learning organisation', it changes and evolves with the changing strategic environment and is inherently capable of reforming itself.

While the 'Report of the Three Wise Men' diversified and reinforced the various forms of cooperation throughout the NATO structure, the next milestone in the genesis of 'hard and soft power' in NATO came with the so-called Harmel Report. This report, delivered by Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel, was adopted in 1967, with the experience and lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin crisis still fresh in everyone's minds. In essence, it recommended that NATO should have a new political pillar promoting dialogue and détente between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries.

> Military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory but complementary. Collective defence is a stabilising factor in world politics. It is the necessary condition for effective policies directed towards a greater relaxation of tensions. The way to peace and stability in Europe rests in particular on the use of the Alliance constructively in the interest of détente. The participation of the USSR and the USA will be necessary to achieve a settlement of the political problems in Europe.[25]

The report helped lay the foundation for the convening of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1973. Two years later, the conference led to the negotiation of the Helsinki Final Act. The Act bound its signatories – including the Soviet Union and members of the Warsaw Pact – to respect the fundamental freedom of their citizens, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief.

The Harmel Report illustrates that hard power can mutate into forms of soft power, and it clearly marks the reinforcement of 'soft power' approaches within NATO.

Photo by Marek Studzinski on Unsplash

Towards the end of the Cold War

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Soviet deployment of SS-20 *Saber* ballistic missiles in Europe led to the suspension of détente. To counter the Soviet deployment, the Allies made the 'dual track' decision to deploy nuclear-capable *Pershing* II and ground-launched cruise missiles in Western Europe while continuing negotiations with the Soviets.

The deployment was not scheduled to begin until 1983. In the meantime, the Allies hoped to achieve an arms control agreement that would eliminate the need for the weapons. Lacking the hoped-for agreement with the Soviets, NATO members suffered internal discord when deployment began in 1983.

Following the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet Premier in 1985, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987, eliminating all nuclear and ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with intermediate ranges. This is now regarded as an initial indication that the Cold War was coming to an end.

By the mid-1980s, most international observers believed that Soviet Communism had lost the intellectual battle with the West. Dissidents had dismantled the ideological supports of Communist regimes. In the late 1980s, the communist government of Poland found itself forced to negotiate with the formerly repressed independent trade union 'Solidarity' and its leader, Lech Wałęsa. Soon other democratic activists in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself would begin to demand those very same rights.

By this time, command economies in the Warsaw Pact were disintegrating. The Soviet Union was spending three times as much as the United States on defence with an economy that was one-third the size. Mikhail Gorbachev came to power with the intention of fundamentally reforming the communist system.

When the East German regime began to collapse in 1989, the Soviet Union did not intervene, reversing the Brezhnev Doctrine. This time, the Soviets chose long-term reform over short-term control that was increasingly beyond their capabilities, setting in motion a train of events that led to the break-up of the Warsaw Pact.

The immediate post-Cold War period

In 1991, a new era commenced. The formidable enemy that the Soviet Union had once been was dissolved. Russia, together with other former adversaries, became NATO partners and, in some cases, NATO members. For the Alliance, the period was characterised by dialogue and cooperation, as well as other new ways of contributing to peace and stability such as multinational crisis management operations.

During the entire Cold War period, NATO did not fire a single shot. Hard power was used as a policy and a military posture.

As enshrined in the 1991 and 1999 Strategic Concepts,[26] the Alliance maintained the security of its members as NATO's fundamental purpose,[27] but this was combined with two new dimensions.

Partnerships

From 1991 onwards, NATO was to be the foundation stone for a larger, pan-European security architecture. By establishing wide-ranging partnerships, cooperation, and dialogue with other countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, the Alliance aimed to increase transparency, mutual confidence, and eventually the capacity for joint action. This cooperation also invited and attracted former adversaries – *a significant new soft power dimension for NATO.*

The Yugoslav conflict – and other contemporaneous conflicts in the Caucasus and elsewhere – made clear that the post-Cold War power vacuum was a source of dangerous instability. Mechanisms for partnership had to be strengthened in a way that would allow non-NATO countries to cooperate with the Alliance to reform still-evolving democratic

and military institutions and to relieve their strategic isolation.

As part of this evolving effort, the Allies created the Partnership for Peace programme in 1994. The Partnership for Peace allowed non-NATO countries, or 'partners', to share information with NATO Allies and to modernise their militaries in line with modern democratic standards. Partners were encouraged to choose their own level of involvement with the Alliance. The path to full membership would remain open to those who decided to pursue it.

This process reached an important milestone at the 1999 Washington Summit when three former partners – Czechia, Hungary, and Poland – took their seats as full Alliance members following their completion of a political and military reform programme.

Through enlargement, NATO had played a crucial role in consolidating democracy and stability in Europe.

Over the decades, these partnerships were deepened and widened to include countries from the Mediterranean and the broader Middle East as well as some partners in Africa, Latin America, and the Indo-Pacific.

Crisis management

From the early 1990s, NATO's strategy also envisaged standing ready – case by case, by consensus, and in conformity with Article 7 of the NATO Treaty – to contribute to effective conflict prevention and to engage actively in crisis management and crisis response operations. This was the birth of an ever-growing range of NATO operations and missions. These operations represent the concrete application of a soft and hard power mix, or smart power, to use the term coined by Joseph Nye.

The collapse of Communism had given way to the rise of nationalism and ethnic violence, particularly in the Western Balkans. At first, the Allies hesitated to intervene in what was perceived as a civil war. Later, the conflict around Bosnia-Herzegovina came to be seen as a war of aggression and ethnic cleansing, and the Alliance decided to act.

Initially, NATO offered its full support to United Nations efforts to end war crimes, including direct military action in the form of a naval embargo. Soon the enforcement of a no-fly zone led to airstrikes against heavy weapons violating UN resolutions.

Finally, the Alliance carried out a nine-day air campaign in September 1995 that played a major role in ending the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict. In December of that year, NATO deployed a UN-mandated multinational force of 60,000 soldiers to help implement the Dayton Peace Agreement and to create the conditions for a self-sustaining peace.

Even before the new Allies joined NATO 1999 in Washington, however, a new crisis had already broken out.

By the end of 1998, over 300,000 Kosovar Albanians had fled their homes amid conflict between Albanian separatists in Kosovo and the Serbian military and police. Following the failure of intense international efforts to resolve the crisis, the Alliance conducted airstrikes for 78 days and flew 38,000 sorties. The goal was to allow a multinational peacekeeping force to enter Kosovo and put an end to ethnic cleansing in the region.

On 4 June 1999, NATO suspended its air campaign after confirming that a withdrawal of the Serbian army from Kosovo had begun, and the deployment of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) followed shortly thereafter. Today, KFOR troops are still deployed in Kosovo to help maintain a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin.

In the case of both Bosnia and Kosovo, the debate over whether NATO was to enforce a European peace was moot: events had forced the Alliance's hand.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO had been a static organisation whose mere existence was enough to deter the Soviet Union. With the Balkan interventions, the Alliance began to transform into a more dynamic and responsive organisation, ready to act, if necessary, beyond its traditional North Atlantic area.

In other words, during the entire Cold War period, NATO did not fire a single shot. Hard power was used as a policy and *a military posture*.

Since the end of the Cold War, and with growing engagements in operations and missions, NATO de facto has used *hard power tools as an instrument* – while at the same time the relevance of soft power has increased – be it as an essential component of crisis management or by activating NATO's soft power dimension via the constant growth of partnerships.

The security environment since 9/11

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon demonstrated to the Allies that political disorder in distant parts of the globe could have terrible consequences at home. For the first time in its history, NATO invoked its collective defence clause (Article 5).

Substate actors – in this case, the al-Qaida terrorist group – had used Afghanistan as a base to export instability to the industrialised world, using hijacked airliners as improvised weapons of mass destruction to kill thousands of civilians.

Subsequent attacks, including the Istanbul bombings in November 2003, the attack on the Madrid commuter train system on 11 March 2004, and one on the public transport system in London on 7 July 2005, made clear that violent extremists were determined to target civilian populations. NATO needed to protect its populations both at home and abroad.

In autumn 2001, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a coalition of countries – including many NATO Allies – intervened militarily in Afghanistan. The goal of the mission, *Operation Enduring Freedom,* was to deny al-Qaida a base of operations and to detain as many al-Qaida leaders as possible.

In December 2001, following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, UN Security Council Resolution 1386 authorised the deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a multilateral force in and around Kabul, to help stabilise the country and create the conditions for a self-sustaining peace. In August 2003, NATO took over command and coordination of ISAF.

Over nearly twenty years this was to become the single most important crisis management operation. It ended dramatically in August 2021 with the withdrawal of international troops, the collapse of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and the return to power of the Taliban.

Overall, NATO also proceeded to deepen and extend its partnerships and, essentially, accelerate its transformation to develop new political relationships and stronger operational capabilities to respond to an increasingly global and more challenging world.

These radical changes need to be reflected in NATO's strategic thinking.

> International security developments have an increasing impact on the lives of the citizens of Allied and other countries. Terrorism, increasingly global in scope and lethal in results, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction are likely to be the principal threats to the Alliance over the next 10 to 15 years. Instability due to failed or failing states, regional crises and conflicts, and their causes and effects, the growing availability of sophisticated conventional weaponry; the misuse of emerging technologies, and the disruption of the flow of vital resources are likely to be the main risks or challenges for the Alliance in that period.[28]

These developments led in 2010 to the adoption of the 2010 Strategic Concept 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence'. At the time, the Allies stated with confidence:

> Today, the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low. That is an historic success for the policies of robust defence, Euro-Atlantic integration and active partnership that have guided NATO for more than half a century.[29]

The Strategic Concept defined three core tasks for NATO – collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security – and it identified threats such as the proliferation of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, terrorism, and cyber attacks as fundamental threats to Euro-Atlantic security.

The main characteristics of NATO in this period are twofold:

- The Alliance said good-bye to the conception of a 'Euro-centric' Alliance and moved to become not a 'global' actor, but an actor in international global security matters.
- NATO moved from an Alliance with a nearly exclusive focus on territorial defence to an organisation with a strong if not dominant focus on crisis management and transnational security.

The latest rebalancing act – refocusing on hard power

In Afghanistan, as in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Allies have seen that military power (hard power) can contribute to resolving conflicts or ending wars, but it is not enough to ensure peace and stability.

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its unjustified and unprovoked attack on Ukraine are a sobering reminder of the importance of NATO's key purpose: to ensure the collective defence and security of all the Allies.

In fact, triggered by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO commenced the largest reinforcement of our collective defence in a generation.

Since 2022, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered the peace and gravely altered our security environment. In contrast to past decades, security can no longer be taken for granted.

These radical changes in the security environment led in 2022 to the adoption of NATO's most recent Strategic Concept. It gives a sobering assessment of the deterioration of the security environment:

> The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace. The Russian Federation has violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity. Strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks

> define our broader security environment. The threats we face are global and interconnected.[30]

As a consequence, we need to invest more in defence and overcome decades of atrophy in our defence forces. Interestingly, 77 per cent of the population in NATO nations agree on the need to maintain or increase defence spending. NATO's cooperation with the EU is more vital than ever. We need to stand together in an age of global competition.

At the Vilnius Summit in 2023, NATO leaders took further major steps to strengthen our deterrence and defence for the long term, across all domains and against all threats and challenges. NATO agreed the most comprehensive defence plans since the end of the Cold War, designed to counter the two main threats to the Alliance: Russia and terrorism. To execute the plans, NATO is putting 300,000 troops on higher readiness, backed by substantial air and naval power. We are also increasing our stockpiles of munitions and equipment, using our long-standing NATO Defence Planning Process to provide industry with the long-term demand signal needed to boost production. In Vilnius, NATO leaders endorsed a new Defence Production Action Plan to aggregate demand, boost capacity, and increase interoperability.

Most importantly, NATO shifted from using armed forces in crisis management abroad to deterrence and defence at home. All this sends a strong message to Russia that we will protect and defend every inch of Allied territory. At the same time, we shifted from deterrence by punishment to deterrence by denial.

This strong defence posture also enables NATO's Allies to provide an unprecedented level of support to Ukraine. This includes air defences, tanks, artillery, and training for Ukrainian soldiers. These contributions will help Ukrainian defend their country and retake occupied territory.

At the Washington Summit in July 2024, commemorating 75 years of NATO, we will take further steps to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence, resource our defence plans, bolster our support to Ukraine, and deepen our partnerships around the world. We are stronger and safer when we stand with like-minded partners to protect the rules-based international order.

Conclusions

Since its founding in 1949, the transatlantic Alliance's flexibility, embedded in its original Treaty, has allowed it to suit the different requirements of different times.

In the 1950s, the Alliance was a purely defensive organisation.

In the 1960s, NATO became a political instrument for détente.

In the 1990s, the Alliance was a tool for the stabilisation of Eastern Europe and Central Asia through the incorporation of new partners and Allies.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the centre of gravity of the Alliance and its partners revolved around crisis management.

Since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine began in 2022, NATO's focus has again shifted towards collective deterrence and defence.

Overall, NATO's evolution reinforces a number of conclusions:

Throughout its existence, the Alliance has evolved through a series of combinations of soft and hard power components.

Hard and soft power are not opposing poles but rather complementary components, a productive symbiosis ultimately used for the overall mission of the Alliance: peace and security.

The relative weight of hard power has diminished since the end of the Cold War, giving soft power components a stronger lead.

Since 2022 and the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, NATO's focus has again shifted towards its hard power dimension.

In the first half of the twenty-first century, NATO faces an ever-growing number of new threats. As the foundation stone of transatlantic peace and freedom, NATO must be ready to meet these challenges.

N.B. The views expressed in this op-ed are the author's own and should not be taken to reflect necessarily those of NATO or NATO Allies.

OP-ED

Make Russia Pay

How the Frozen Russian Assets Will Help Bring Victore over the Aggressor Closer

KIRA RUDIK
Member of the Parliament of Ukraine, Leader of the «Golos» Party,
Vice-President of the ALDE Party

War is very expensive. A prolonged war against an aggressor who outnumbers you in terms of resources and people is even more expensive. This is well known not only by Ukrainians but also by our partners. Since 24 February 2022, when the Russian Federation began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, according to ISW (2024), our state has received €138 billion from our partners.

KIRA RUDIK

At the same time, the preliminary amount of damages that Russia should cover, announced by the leaders of the G7 countries, reaches US$486 billion (G7, 2024). However, to receive these funds from the aggressor, we must first win the war. And while we are bringing this victory closer, the losses from missile attacks and hostilities will only increase, and more and more money will be needed from our partners for defence expenses.

Financing of armed aid for Ukraine

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian people and the Defence Forces have shown unprecedented heroism. However, let's be realistic – people's heroism alone cannot protect us from aggression or liberate our lands. Weapons and technologies are needed. Lots of weapons. Where will the West get the funds for this?

The security agreement that Ukraine signed with the EU provides €50 billion in support, which is included in the budget of the European Union for the next four years within the framework of the Ukraine Facility programme (President of Ukraine, 2024).[31] These funds have already started coming to Ukraine and are critically important for us (Kutielieva &

Pohorilov, 2024). After all, the existing challenges related to the war have not gone away, but new ones, as a result of Russian missiles attacks on the energy infrastructure of Ukraine, have been added (Zmina, 2024).

In addition, the number of NATO member countries that will set the level of their defence expenditures at 2 per cent of GDP is increasing. The number of such countries has reached 11, but, according to Jens Stoltenberg, this number will increase (Tidey, 2023).

Moreover, thanks to the agreement of the G7 countries, Ukraine will receive a loan of US$50 billion, which will be repaid at the expense of profits from the frozen Russian assets (Lukiv & Mackenzie, 2024). And Belgium has agreed to the transfer of income from such assets to Ukraine through a special fund (Schickler, 2024). Our partners have no reservations regarding the use of these funds, and therefore Kyiv will be able to spend the money it receives on its defence and weapons.

Who should really pay?

Russia is deliberately waging a war of attrition and is simply waiting for the world to tire of it or for aid to Ukraine to become too expensive for its partners. The aggressor plays on this in its hybrid information operations.

And it is really difficult for Western politicians to explain to their voters why their countries have had to allocate considerable funds for the defence of Ukraine for almost two and a half years. Populists often speculate negatively on these questions, and in some places they are successful (Chidi, 2024).

However, there is an answer to the question of who should pay both for Ukraine's recovery and for its current defence needs. It must be the aggressor, that is, the Russian Federation. The world has frozen Russian assets and they must be handed over to the victim of its aggression.

We already have a precedent for using the profits from frozen Russian assets, but the assets themselves are hundreds of times more. The amount of only those that are publicly known reaches approximately US$500 billion, that is, almost three times more than the aid that Ukraine has received from the collective West.

Win–win solution

Russia understands only strong and decisive actions; it perceives mild pressure as weakness. The sanctions imposed on the Kremlin work slowly and allow the aggressor to adapt to new realities: to look for new markets and export and import bypasses (in some places even frankly criminal ones).

Using Russian assets for the defence of Ukraine will put the aggressor in its place and send a clear signal to other non-democratic regimes about the consequences of their aggressive actions towards their smaller neighbours.

This will save the money of Western taxpayers and therefore undercut the arguments of populists who actively manipulate the topic of money for Ukraine.

Therefore, the special funds from which aid to Ukraine comes should be filled primarily with frozen Russian money. And these must be sovereign assets. The aggressor must understand that democracies have teeth and are capable of biting.

Using Russian assets for the defence of Ukraine will put the aggressor in its place and send a clear signal to other non-democratic regimes about the consequences of their aggressive actions towards their smaller neighbours.

This will save the money of Western taxpayers and therefore undercut the arguments of populists who actively manipulate the topic of money for Ukraine.

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ARTICLE

Capability Coalitions

From Addressing Ukraine's Immediate Needs to a Long-Term Vision of Regional Cooperation

–
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Citation suggestion: Hennadiy Maksak, HM (2024). Capability Coalitions From Addressing Ukraine's Immediate Needs to a Long-Term Vision of Regional Cooperation. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 45–50.

Abstract

In April 2024, the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG), widely known as the 'Ramstein Coalition', will celebrate its second year of existence. Firstly, the already operational and future capability coalitions can provide valuable experience and insight into the type and scale of military equipment needed to win modern conventional wars. Secondly, Ukraine's capability coalitions have laid the groundwork for future defence cooperation in both the EU and NATO. Thirdly, the capability coalitions formed under UDCG, also known as the Ramstein Group, could be of interest to EU Member States in terms of implementing the European Defence Industrial Strategy and developing their defence potential.

In April 2024, the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG), widely known as the 'Ramstein Coalition', will celebrate its second year of existence. Since then, it has gone through several stages of development, both in terms of both the number of participating states and the philosophy behind its activities. Within the framework of "Ramstein", Ukraine has initiated capability coalitions with its partners, focusing not only on the immediate needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces on the battlefield, but also on the long-term perspective of defence planning and the projection of future military capability requirements.

Given that in 2022 EU Member States and NATO allies appeared unprepared for developments in 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale war in Ukraine, new sober and comprehensive approaches are essential at the strategic level as well as at the level of technological and military adaptations. From a strategic point of view, Ukraine offers battlefield-tested cases worth reassessing in EU and NATO capitals.

The already operational and future capability coalitions can provide valuable experience and insight into the type and scale of military equipment needed to win modern conventional wars. Ukraine's capability coalitions have laid the groundwork for future defence cooperation in both the EU and NATO.

Coalitions deliver

Despite the overwhelming courage and high morale shown by the Ukrainian people in defending their land and families, the Western military and financial support for Ukraine has played a critical role in preserving its ability to defend itself and push back against the Russian aggressor. In terms of political and diplomatic support for Ukraine, both the EU and NATO are major international actors.

In order to better streamline and complement the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces according to the national defence potential of the partners, separate coalitions emerged under the umbrella of the Ramstein Group in 2023.

The European Union rates as Ukraine's biggest partner in terms of financial, military, and humanitarian support. But when it comes solely to military support, despite good intentions, both NATO and the EU have become hostage to their decision-making processes. Since 2022, NATO has been providing Ukraine with urgent but non-lethal military support to reinforce the Ukrainian overall posture (NATO, 2024). The European Union has an ever-growing defence and military potential, but some initiatives are bogged down in endless discussions, while others have been blocked by individual EU Member States.

One of the manifestations of the cumbersome bureaucratic bottlenecks is the current situation with the European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU's off-budget instrument originally intended for non-lethal military assistance to third countries and support for Common Security and Defence Policy missions. Since February 2022, the EPF has become the main instrument for partially covering the financial expenditures of EU Member States for the supply of military equipment from national stockpiles. From February 2022 to May 2023, the EU approved seven tranches directed to reimburse EU members for military aid to Kyiv. In May 2023, Hungary blocked the eighth tranche of €500 million euros. As of April 2024, the Hungarian veto has not been lifted[32]. (Yemets & Oliynyk, 2024).

Against this backdrop, in addition to significant bilateral support from the United States in 2022–2023, Ukraine largely benefited from coalitions of willing partners with capabilities in specific areas of interest. Taking into consideration the complexities and sensitivities of decision-making in the EU and NATO, official Kyiv communicated its military requests via the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG), also known as the Ramstein Group. The group was set up in response to Russia's full-scale aggression. Initially, the US called on its close allies to join the UDCG.

The first meeting was held in April 2022 with 43 partners. Today, 54 states (including all 32 NATO allies) and representatives of the European Union and NATO are members of this platform. Active members of the UDCG have provided about $88 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since the start of the full-scale aggression (Ukrinform, 2024).

Previously, many initiatives by partner states to pool their resources and supply a particular type of military equipment were called coalitions. Coalitions of tanks, armour, or artillery entered the popular vocabulary in 2022. At the time, however, these initiatives were not comprehensively coordinated. Rather, participating nations looked at their military stocks and offered up available military equipment and ammunition. In order to better streamline and complement the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces according to the national defence potential of the partners, separate coalitions emerged under the umbrella of the Ramstein Group in 2023.

Thus, in February 2023, the Leopard Tank Coalition was announced at the UDCG meeting, uniting the partners in a joint search for a specific type of ground combat platform. At the tenth meeting of the 'Ramstein format', nine partners committed themselves to deliver around 150 Leopard tanks to Ukraine (Suspilne, 2023). Another successful attempt has been made in the area of air support for Ukraine. Since the beginning of 2023, Ukrainian officials have

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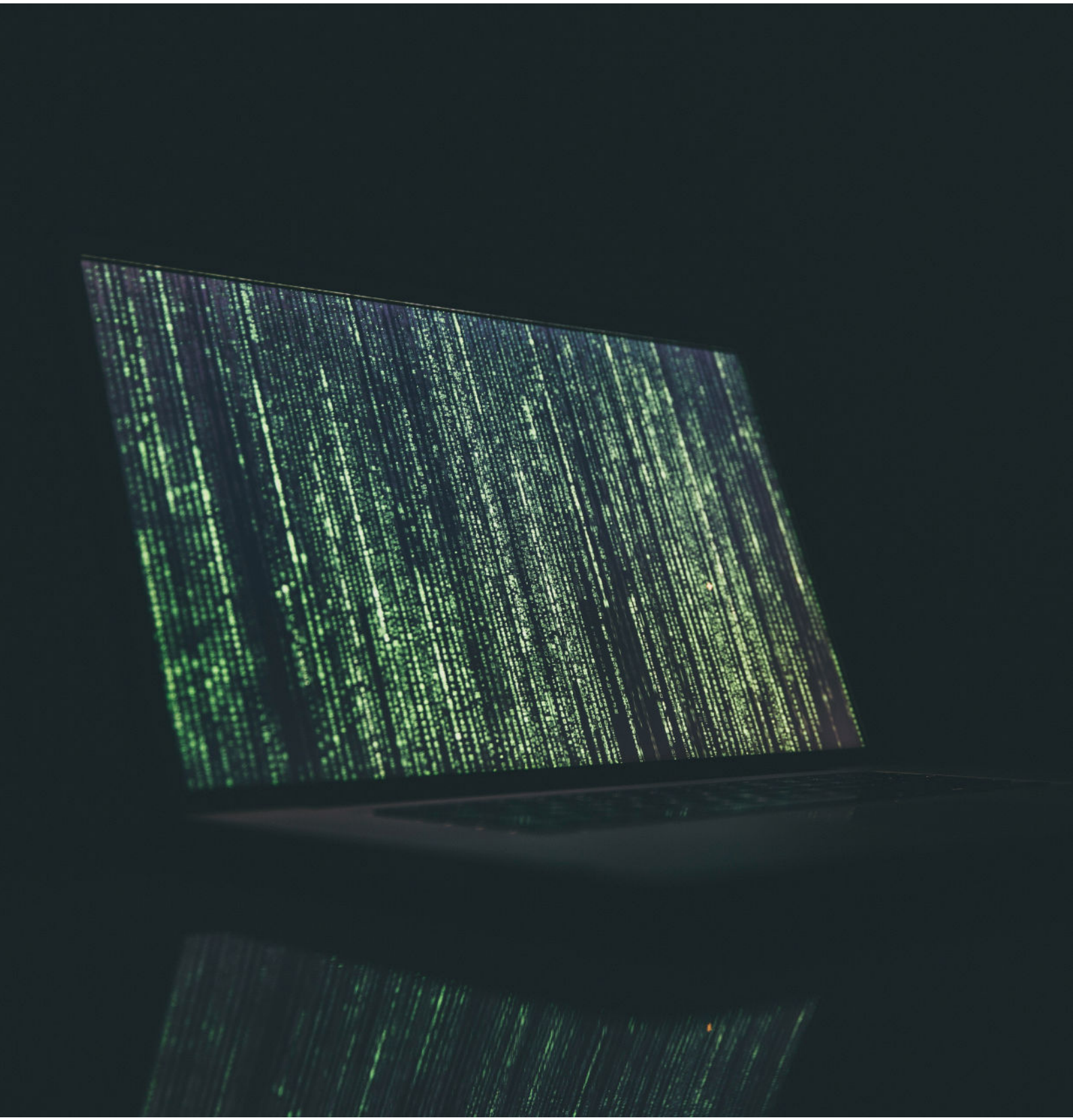

New cooperation frameworks for the development of a common capability aim to cooperate in the areas of procurement, acquisition, and maintenance of specific military equipment and ammunition. Such an approach also offers additional benefits to participating nations in the form of reduced common costs and increased interoperability.

been very vocal about the need for a fighter coalition. In July 2023, the F-16 Coalition was formed to streamline partners' efforts to train Ukrainian pilots and maintenance groups. In Vilnius, 11 states signed the memorandum, which outlines the training process for pilots, technicians, and support staff, as well as fully operational F-16 capabilities (Armyinform, 2023a).

Ramstein 2.0 and the Future Force Concept

Since autumn 2023, Ukraine has rearticulated its interests and expectations from military cooperation with partners within the framework of the UDCG. Previously, Ukraine focused on filling urgent gaps in military equipment and ammunition. From September 2023, Ukraine and its partners have also focused on a more concerted and long-term approach. This format is called 'Ramstein 2.0' (Armyinform, 2023b).

This format is in line with the Future Force Concept presented by the Head of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence (MoD), R. Umerov, during the International Defence Industry Forum in Ukraine. The core idea is to propose a vision of a new model of armed forces and defence sector in Ukraine after a comprehensive assessment of current capabilities in Ukraine, consultations with all branches of the armed forces, along with security guarantees, NATO standards, and so forth (Ukrinform, 2023).

The Future Force Concept has continued to evolve through the capability coalitions that operate under the UDCG framework. Some of the coalitions, launched in early 2023, have been complemented with long-term plans and visions, as well as the engagement of new members. New cooperation frameworks for the development of a common capability aim to cooperate in the areas of procurement, acquisition, and maintenance of specific military equipment and ammunition. Such an approach also offers additional benefits to participating nations in the form of reduced common costs and increased interoperability.

The Ramstein format currently has 30 nations participating in at least one capability coalition. In each coalition, there are two or sometimes three lead partner nations that steer efforts within the group to build one of the capability areas of the Ukrainian force (US Department of Defense, 2024). At the end of 2023, there were five capability coalitions: Air Force, Air Defence, Armaments, Information Technologies, and Maritime Security. In 2024, the capability coalitions received a new boost. In January, the Artillery Coalition was officially launched in Paris, with France and the US co-chairing the group. In February, the Drone Coalition was officially launched during the 19th UDCG meeting. The coalitions are gaining new members in a very dynamic way. In March, Germany and Poland announced their intention to activate the Armour Coalition, and Sweden, Italy, and the United Kingdom announced their intention to join (Kravchenko, 2024).

As of April 2024 there are eight collective arrangements between partners (see Table 1).

Each coalition is different in terms of its thematic focus, the number of willing members, and the leading nations. The leading states are responsible for steering the activities of the group and the involvement of new participants. They are also the first to react if the security situation for Ukraine in their area of responsibility deteriorates. Many have noted that following Russia's intensified missile attacks on Ukrainian cities in March and April, Germany, as co-leader of the Integrated Air and Missile Defence capabilities coalition, committed itself to seeking additional batteries of the Patriot air defence system not only among NATO allies but also in third countries (Militarnyi, 2024).

Coalition initiation does not require the agreement of all UDCG members, and it can take weeks or months to launch a new collective initiative in response to urgent needs expressed by Ukrainian counterparts. For example, an ad hoc coalition has been formed to secure financial support for the Czech-led initiative to purchase 155mm and Soviet-era ammunition for Ukraine from third parties. The Czech government is acting as an intermediary for Ukrainian partners willing to contribute to the purchase of 155mm ammunition. The initiative has already pooled financial resources from 18 countries (Interfax, 2024).

During the UDCG meetings, the partners also discuss practical arrangements and the potential for creating additional capability coalitions. These could complement the existing ones and also contribute to the design of the Future Force Concept. Partners have already expressed a proposal to launch a joint effort on long-range capabilities. A coalition on logistics and military mobility has also been discussed.

Table 1 Capability coalitions

Thematic orientation	Lead partners
Air Force capability	US, Denmark, and the Netherlands
Armour capability	Poland, Germany, and Italy
Artillery capability	France and the United States
De-mining coalition	Lithuania and Iceland
IT coalition	Estonia and Luxembourg
Drone capability	Latvia and the United Kingdom
Integrated Air and Missile Defence capabilities	Germany and France
Maritime Security coalition	United Kingdom and Norway

Lessons to share with the EU and Western partners

In early March 2024, the European Commission presented its long-awaited European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS). This document, once formally adopted, could complete the circle of strategic documents shaping the EU's defence and security landscape after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. A groundbreaking innovation of the EDIS is the invitation to Ukraine to participate in European defence programmes and initiatives on an equal footing with EU Member States and Norway. This was not the case before, despite Ukraine's interest. It is now self-evident that Ukrainian experience in fighting an enemy that is superior in manpower and materiel is of key importance to European partners in developing and scaling up future defence capabilities.

Capability coalitions represent a very efficient and promising format of collective military cooperation, where partners look for ways to increase Kyiv's efficiency on the battlefield and cut common costs. These multilateral arrangements make it possible to avoid the lengthy bureaucratic procedures of international organisations and at the same time focus on areas where the participating states have sufficient capabilities, relevant defence industrial bases or technologies, and financial resources.

It is a positive development that the European Commission (EC) has consulted with relevant Ukrainian public bodies in the preparation of the document. Additionally, as part of the acknowledgement of the crucial importance of mil-tech development in Ukraine, the EC is set to launch an Office for Defence Innovation in Kyiv (European Commission, 2024).

The capability coalitions formed under the UDCG could be of interest to EU Member States in terms of implementing the EDIS and developing their defence potential. The way in which capability conditions are structured and managed offers tangible opportunities for long-term cooperation between the EU and Ukraine.

- Firstly, coalitions of five to 20 members appear to be more manageable in terms of process and a result-oriented approach than the Union-wide initiatives.
- Secondly, provided that Ukraine is considered a full partner under the current version of the

EDIS, a predominant number of these coalitions can serve as a framework for new projects within existing and planned European defence programmes (EDIP, revised PESCO, EDF), proposing viable solutions for enhanced EU defence readiness.

- Thirdly, several of these eight coalitions reflect the EU Capability Development Priorities (CDP), updated by the European Defence Agency in 2023, in terms of thematic areas and combat-proven mil-tech innovations. Their effective activity in Ukraine will create the preconditions for well-considered approaches to EU Member States' defence capabilities, as well as joint initiatives under the Strategic Compass.

Conclusions and further developments

Capability coalitions represent a very efficient and promising format of collective military cooperation, where partners look for ways to increase Kyiv's efficiency on the battlefield and cut common costs. These multilateral arrangements make it possible to avoid the lengthy bureaucratic procedures of international organisations and at the same time focus on areas where the participating states have sufficient capabilities, relevant defence industrial bases or technologies, and financial resources.

Further developments can be observed in several directions. As noted above, *the number of capability coalitions may increase and include other priority areas* for capability development in Ukraine. At the same time, *the number of participants in existing coalitions will increase,* reflecting further allies' interest in keeping pace with evolving military technologies and teaming up with like-minded international partners.

Of course, when many nations are involved in the process, some inconsistencies may arise. To address the current shortcomings in 2024, further steps have been taken to deepen the coordination and interaction of capability coalitions. Over time, *the level of coordination of capability coalitions will be increased* to seek natural synergies in the supply of weapons, ammunition, and equipment to Ukraine.

Ukraine continuously invites partners to join those capability coalitions that reflect their military potential and strategic interests. Broader collective arrangements will benefit from joint defence investments, procurement, and adaptation of defence industry capacities to long-term defence planning.

At this stage, despite the huge amount of military assistance channelled through the "Ramstein format", Ukraine is not in a position to survive the war of attrition, let alone resume offensive operations. The modern, flexible format of cooperation must be backed up with the appropriate level of military and financial support.

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ENDNOTES

Section 1

1 The article was also published in the Frankfurter Algemeine Zeitung under the tile 'Nach dem Krieg: Die Wiedergeburt Europas' and in Libération as 'Europe: plaidoyer pour une politique extérieure commune'.

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20 'Strategic Guidance for North Atlantic Regional Planning' (MC 14), 28 March 1950.

21 'Overall Strategic Concept for the Defence of the NATO Area', issued on 23 May 1957.

22 Report of the Committee of Three, 1956, para 73.

23 It took several years to define this new strategic approach as NATO not only had to build internal consensus among the Allies, but progress had also been slowed down by the assassination of Kennedy and the US military involvement in Vietnam. 'Overall Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area' (MC14/3),16 January 1968.

24 Ibid.

25 The Future Tasks of the Alliance (Harmel Report), December 1967; para 5 thereof.

26 'This Strategic Concept reaffirms the defensive nature of the Alliance and the resolve of its members to safeguard their security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The Alliance's security policy is based on dialogue; co-operation; and effective collective defence as mutually reinforcing instruments for preserving the peace. Making full use of the new opportunities available, the Alliance will maintain security at the lowest possible level of forces consistent with the requirements of defence. In this way, the Alliance is making an essential contribution to promoting a lasting peaceful order.'

27 Both documents were also for the first time directly released to the public. All earlier Strategic Concepts have by now also been made public; however, this happened retroactively. Cf. www.nato.int/archives/

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SECTION 2

New Horizons for EU Defence Capabilities

ARTICLE

Strategic Domains

Developing the EU's Capabilities and Enablers for a Free and Secure Global Order

–
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Citation suggestion: Daniel Fiott, DF (2024). Strategic Domains. Developing the EU's Capabilities and Enablers for a Free and Secure Global Order. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 53–57.

Abstract

The deteriorating global security order is calling into question old certainties about how freely and securely Europe can access and use global commons such as the seas, air and space. The rise of authoritarian and revisionist powers will only make it more challenging for the European Union (EU) to play a global security role and ensure its security and defence. The risks and threats emerging in the maritime, space and air domains mean that the EU needs to invest in its defence capabilities and technologies. More than this, and while working with close partners, the EU needs to enhance its surveillance and intelligence capacities in the strategic domains. This Policy Paper shows how and why strategic domains are vital to European security, and, with a view to ensuring security in space, on the seas and in the air, it shares a number of policy recommendations for further EU action.

Introduction

On 23 May 2021, the Belarus government hijacked a civilian passenger aircraft while it was making its way from Athens to Vilnius. As the plane flew over Belarusian airspace, authorities demanded it land in Minsk for fears that a terrorist attack was imminent: the reality was that the aircraft contained a Belarussian opposition activist and a journalist.[33] Almost precisely two years later, evidence emerged that Russia was jamming rocket systems provided by Western governments for the defence of Ukraine: in fact, Russian forces have made a habit of jamming radio signals, drones and satellite communications during its illegal invasion of Ukraine[34]. Elsewhere, China's claim over the entire South China Sea means that it uses coastguards and merchant ships to harass and intimidate the states of Southeast Asia[35], as well as to undermine European

Photo by Pixabay on Pexels

interests in the Indo-Pacific. Closer to Europe, in late 2023 Iran-backed Houthi rebels started to launch missile and drone attacks from Yemen against ships in the Red Sea, which led to the EU deploying its latest naval operation – EUNAVFOR Aspides – to the region[36].

Such examples are emblematic of a deeper geopolitical shift: namely, that the sea, space and air commons that have supported and nurtured the global liberal order are under threat of disruption from authoritarian and revisionist powers[37]. States like Russia, China and Iran are using a mixture of low- and high-tech tools to interrupt communications, launch cyberattacks and disrupt maritime traffic. Such states are fully aware that the greatest strength of the liberal order – interconnectedness – is also its greatest vulnerability. Their pressures in the maritime, air and space domains are also combined with other risks such as the weaponisation of energy, food, raw materials and information. In this respect, the multilateral safeguards that once stood to ensure free, open and secure use of the global commons are increasingly undermined through unilateralism, power politics and a disregard for international norms.

In this Policy Paper, we look at the risks that are emerging in the maritime, space and air domains. It will show how and why these strategic domains are vital for European security and defence. As opposed to the understanding of the "global commons", which has traditionally referred to shared natural resources and environmental spaces[38], the idea of "strategic domains" relates to how geographical spaces can be used by states to pursue geopolitical and military objectives[39]. The Policy Paper will analyse ongoing European Union (EU) efforts to enhance security in the strategic domains, especially in terms of defence capabilities and strategies. Finally, it will conclude with six specific policy recommendations that are designed to enhance the Union's global role, presence and security.

The importance of strategic domains

Since at least the EU Global Strategy of 2016, the EU has understood that it needs to ensure its 'sustainable access to the global commons through open sea, land, air and space routes'[40]. This logic was taken further in the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, where it dedicates no less than an entire chapter to securing European interests in the maritime and space domains. As the Strategic Compass makes clear, 'the high seas, air, outer space and the cyber space are increasingly contested domains'[41]. This recognition echoes shifts in NATO too, where European governments have pushed for the alliance to pay greater attention to defence risks in outer space and for hybrid threats. While the Strategic Concept underlines that NATO should deter and defence across all domains, it states that China 'strives to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains'[42]. The Concept also underlines that Russia and China are 'mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order'[43].

The challenged posed to European security and interests in the strategic domains cannot be taken for granted. Space is a critical economic and defence enabler. Without space infrastructure it would be costly and difficult to ensure that Europe's militaries have Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. Without ISR capabilities it would be extremely challenging – if impossible – to maintain defence in Europe. For instance, defence capabilities such as jet fighters would be placed in danger without satellite systems, as they would be "left in the dark" with regard to positioning and timing. However, outer space is becoming a far more dangerous domain. Satellites are becoming smaller and an army of commercial operators are deploying satellites and sensors to space.[44] The risk posed by space debris, swarm satellites and space-based loitering technologies means that Europe's space infrastructure is at risk[45]. There are, for example, already well-documented cases of states such as China and Russia using Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASATs); in one case, Russia destroyed a Soviet-era satellite which resulted in 1,500 pieces of debris being dispersed in space (it even forced the International Space Station to make an emergency avoidance manoeuvre).[46]

Relatedly, the air domain is becoming increasingly congested and contested. Authoritarian states like China are rapidly increasing their anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in places such as East Asia, plus they are increasingly engaging in risky behaviour through air intercepts[47]. Russia, while failing to gain air supremacy over Ukraine, continues to field lethal assets such as the S-400 air defence system. Advances in hypersonic missiles and heavily fortified enclaves like Kaliningrad, continue to challenge freedom of manoeuvre in the skies[48]. We also know that Russia uses the air domain to intimidate European forces through intercepts and out of area surveillance (e.g. Russian bombers near Ireland's west coast in 2015, 2020 and 2023[49]). The 2014 downing of Flight MH17 at the hands of a Russian missile installation that directly led to the death of EU citizens is another not so recent example[50].

Finally, the maritime domain has increasingly become a risky environment and not just because of long-standing issues like piracy and crime. Middle powers such as Iran are able to use a combination of drones and special forces to seize and intimidate European flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran have more recently taken to activel seizing commercial vessels in the region[51]. China is also perfecting the art of hybrid maritime tactics including the use of merchant vessels to make and seize territorial claims[52]. The subsea domain has also become increasingly critical for Europe, as the case of the suspected sabotage of Nord Stream pipelines in 2022 and the Baltic Sea gas connecter in 2023 indicates[53]. In fact, the subsea domain has become critically important to ensure Europe's economic security, with both the European

Commission[54] and France[55] releasing strategies and guidance to protect subsea infrastructure such as energy and digital infrastructure.

The first major response has been a shift in mindset. For years, the EU has engaged in space and the maritime domains with a primarily economic strategic calculus. This is now changing.

Strategic enablers for Europe's security and defence

Given the risks facing Europe in the air, maritime and space domains, it is no surprise to learn that the EU has invested considerable political bandwidth and resources into protecting the strategic domains. The first major response has been a shift in mindset. For years, the EU has engaged in space and the maritime domains with a primarily economic strategic calculus. This is now changing. Successive revisions of the EU Maritime Security Strategy recognise the need for greater naval exercises, more EU port inspections, enhanced maritime surveillance activities, increased protection of at-sea infrastructure like energy and digital installations, and a desire to develop naval capabilities[56]. The first EU Strategy for Space, Security and Defence – released in 2023 – calls for the production of capabilities to ensure the protection of space assets, as well as insisting upon more exercises focused on space threats[57]. In the air domain, which is usually not considered an obvious aspect of EU policy, there is work ongoing to create the first air security concept[58].

Yet, strategies alone are not sufficient to ensure Europe's safe access to the strategic domains. Fortunately, the Union is also mobilising financial resources through mechanisms like the European Defence Fund (EDF) to help develop defence capabilities. Since its inception in 2021, the EDF has gone on to so far invest €240 million in space capabilities, €330 in naval and underwater capabilities, €200 million in air combat capabilities, €180 million in air and missile defence and €120 million in cyberdefence, among other technology areas[59]. Under the Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) initiative, 10 projects are dedicated to the naval domain, 13 to the air domain and 4 for space[60]. While many of these projects require time and investment to be implemented, they are a sign of how serious the EU is about developing the defence capabilities that are required to protect Europe's interests in the strategic domains.

Finally, the EU has understood that for it to really ensure free and secure access to the strategic domains it will require far greater Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capacities. Inevitably, much of these ISR capacities will come from space and the use of drones and advanced sensors. Just as important, however, is how the EU collects, fuses and uses the ISR information it gathers. So far, the Union has developed multiple maritime surveillance networks (e.g. CISE, CMP, MARSUR) and it relies on a range of space surveillance assets (e.g. EUSPA, EU SatCen). Yet, these tools and bodies are not centralised in any coherent way, meaning that the room for miscommunication and/or data gaps exists[61]. A unified command and control body that can simultaneously deal with military and civil ISR data now seems necessary to ensure the "space domain awareness" the the new EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence EU calls for.

Strategic domains: a way forward?

The good news is that the EU is starting to become serious about maintaining its security and defence interests in the strategic domains. For an economy the size of the EU to remain connected to global markets, there is no choice but to ensure free and secure access to the seas, outer space and skies. As authoritarian and revisionist powers become more aggressive, maintaining an open international order is increasingly challenging. The EU thus needs to build on existing initiatives and use the momentum that could come after the European elections to push ahead in the following areas.

- No coherent EU approach to safeguarding the strategic domains can occur without sustained and substantial investments and cooperation. The reality is that Europe's armed forces are still marked by 'waste, duplications, inefficient spending' and fragmentation[62]. Europe has

the financial heft to play a real security and defence role, but it is leaving this potential untapped. Despite the introduction of new financial incentives such as the EDF, the Union still punches below its weight in the strategic domains. In this sense, any future European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP) needs a sizeable financial envelop of hundreds of billions of euros[63].

- Investments are one thing, but there needs to be a solid system of capability prioritisation in place. If the EU is to invest any additional finances wisely, it needs to do so in such a way as to develop game-changing capabilities. In order to protect its presence in the strategic domains, investments should be geared towards naval assets, missile and air defence, next-generation aircraft and space assets. The EU will need to invest in the underlying technologies for each of these capabilities including emerging and disruptive technologies such as advanced sensors and AI-enabled cyberdefence.

- On top of these investments and capabilities, the EU needs to finally ensure institutional coherence for intelligence gathering and sharing. True, structures such as the EU Intelligence Centre can be empowered but what is required is more operational centralisation with an aim of creating credible command and control hubs for space, air and maritime security. Having the Union's surveillance architecture spread over different bodies and institutions undermines the Union's intelligence sharing potential.

- Should the EU Member States decide to put in place the right arrangements for investments, capabilities and institutions, it will also inevitably have to develop EU's operational approach and reach. The obvious way to ensure the EU's continued access to strategic domains is to have an operational presence through regular satellite launches, freedom of navigation operations and air patrols. To date, however, the Union has felt more comfortable with relatively low-level passing exercises with partners such as Japan and the United States but it should aim in the coming years to plug into or lead amphibious exercises based on realistic warfighting scenarios.

- Relatedly, in the space domain the EU can enhance its exercises beyond mere table-top crisis situations. Based on its well-established space programme and here is an opportunity for the EU to lead on space-based threat exercises and to nurture further EU-NATO cooperation in this domain. More specifically, the EU and NATO should jointly exercise on what would happen in case space infrastructure is disabled by an adversary. Here, there should also be scope to invite close partners such as Australia, Japan and South Korea to the table, especially if these exercises lead – as they should – to technology horizon scanning.

- Finally, although there may well be political turbulence in the transatlantic relationship after the next presidential elections in the United States, the EU should insist on closer transatlantic cooperation on maritime, air and space security. Today, the US and EU cooperate through PESCO and the European Defence Agency, but a more structured relationship with the Pentagon could help. Here, even if relations with the White House were to sour after the next US elections, the EU could try to maintain its staff working level links with the US Department of Defense. In particular, the US and EU should be regular partners on military exercises and Washington should be stern with Europeans in case they slack off on defence investments.

ARTICLE

Towards a European Single Defence Market?

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Citation suggestion: Alexandre Doré, AD (2024). Towards a European Single Defence Market? *Future Europe*, 5(1), 58–63.

Abstract

Integration in the field of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) faces a dilemma. On the one hand, increased cooperation between European defence firms would undeniably reduce costs of research and production. On the other hand, due to the sensitivity of defence matters, states have traditionally protected their sovereign control of their national defence market, de facto limiting cooperation opportunities. The European Union (EU) might appear as the obvious solution to promote cross-border cooperation. Considering the need for optimisation of European defence spending, this article analyses the viability of the creation of a European single defence market and the approach through which the EU might foster it.

Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, most European Union (EU) Member States more or less consciously adhered to the thesis of the 'End of History' (Fukuyama, 1992: 1) by strongly reducing their defence spending and capabilities. This belief was that the model of liberal democracy had emerged as the dominating ideology worldwide and that some form of stability of the international system would gradually impose itself (Fukuyama, 1992). However, with the continuous Russian aggressions against Ukraine since 2014, which culminated with the invasion of the country in 2022, large-scale conflict hit the continent again. Most EU Member States have responded economically, diplomatically, and militarily by supplying significant quantities of defensive material to Ukraine (Besch, 2022). This military support has put rearmament at the centre of many EU Member States' priorities. Most of this re-equipment, including a large part of Germany's '*Zeitenwende*' (Besch, 2022) commitment of €100 billion in support of Ukraine, is achieved by procuring (purchasing) weapons from the United States (Besch, 2022). This has been proven by the first major use of these funds being for the procurement of US-produced F35 fighter jets in a historic deal worth around €10 billion (DGAP, 2024). In contrast, this article analyses the prospects for increased EU cooperation in the production or procurement of material offers and how further integration may take place.

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In Europe and other democratic systems, national security is generally governed solely by the state, which is generally the only political authority directly monopolising, generating, and owning the tools of violence (Schilde, 2023). The EU Member States were, until the end of the twentieth century, no exception to this rule, each ensuring its defence needs either by procuring defensive hardware, producing it, or both. European governments strictly regulate the production and selling rights of their national defence firms. The European defence market was therefore best described as a set of independent national markets, each with a unique set of supply and demand arrangements with domestic defence firms. However, after the end of the Cold War, the combination of the process of greater European integration and the difficulty of sustaining indigenous defence industries led to an increased need for collaboration on a European level (Jones, 2018). These efforts first started between individual European countries, most notably with the creation of the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) in 1994. Since 2004 and the creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA), most of the collaboration has taken place inside European Union institutions and agencies. This article starts by explaining the states' decision-making and the obstacles to further cooperation. It then analyses the three ways in which the EU has attempted to facilitate cooperation and integration in the European defence sector. Finally, it delves into the potential of liberalising the European defence market.

An important step towards the achievement of a more liberal defence market would be a growth in domestic and political support for further cooperation on the EU level.

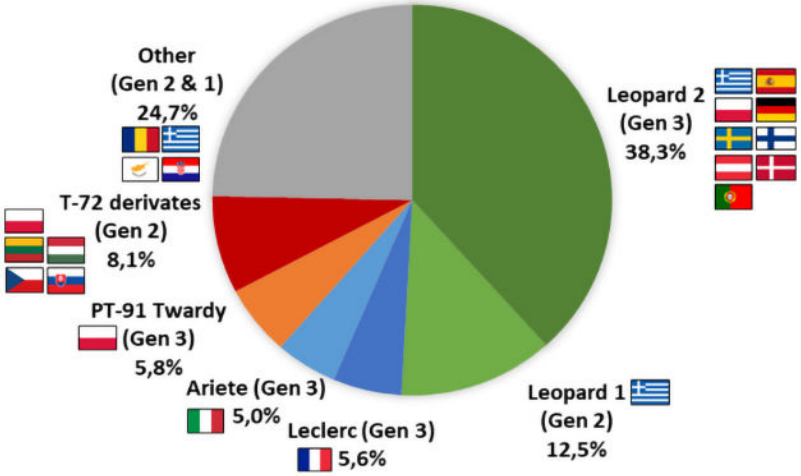
How to explain cooperation or the lack thereof

Today, the decision-making method used by Member States to rule the EU defence sector remains mainly intergovernmental. Under articles 173 and 182 of the Treaty for the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Commission is allowed to promote coordination, while the European Council and Parliament can establish measures necessary to implement further cooperation (Perotto, 2023). However, the scope of these articles, in which the European Commission is given considerable responsibilities, is limited by Article 372. This legislation grants states a derogation from the previously mentioned provisions and will be detailed later on. This article therefore analyses cooperation by explaining EU Member States' decision-making both politically and economically, arguing that for further cooperation to take place both economic benefits and limited political costs are required.

So far, cooperation between European defence firms has taken two forms: joint procurement and the creation of common projects, both of which require the EU Member States to approve or promote said cooperation. Firstly, joint procurement is the only form that truly presents short-term advantages economically. By pooling resources and coordinating to purchase goods as a group of states and not as individuals, states can achieve economies of scale. Putting resources in common allows states to leverage their high purchasing power to negotiate lower prices and reduce transaction costs. This approach requires high levels of coordination as states must communicate their needs and preferences in terms of material to one another. This method has been used to obtain ammunition to supply Ukraine. Most notably, in October 2023, the EDA (2023) reported that seven EU Member States ordered 155mm ammunition as a single order, openly reporting that such action would result in economies of scale (Caranta, 2023). Joint procurement is therefore relatively risk-free in terms of political costs, as states only need to communicate their needs to one another, making it an accessible solution to enhance cooperation.

Secondly, through collaborative projects, European Member States can save costs in production by reducing duplication. The European defence market is quite fragmented, which means that most states use different equipment. For example, the 27 Member States produce or use 12 different types of main battle tanks (Olsson, 2021), all of which have required unique research teams and industrial lines for their production and upgrades. Putting in place joint projects would save significant

Figure 1 Fragmentation of the European defence market in terms of main battle tanks (MBT) in 2021. The MBT market is relatively concentrated, especially when compared with others, but offers a good basis for comparison as most EU Member States use MBTs (Olsson, 2021).



costs by harmonising the material used and sharing the costs of its development. Indeed, Member States could pool their resources to create only one production line or one research project, whose results would be shared between all contributing states (Heuninckx, 2008). The best example of such coordination is the current development of the MALE RPAS or Eurodrone. All four European countries using Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drones procured them from either the United States or Israel (Kunertova, 2019). This is due to the important costs associated with the research and development of these military assets. In 2015, France, Italy, and Germany, later joined by Spain, agreed to develop a common drone together (Kunertova, 2019). This collaborative process offered many advantages. It allowed the Member States to share the costs of production between participating countries and to take advantage of the expertise of each firm involved (Schilde, 2023). The European corporation Airbus, the French Dassault, and the Italian Leonardo collaborated on this project by notably sharing tasks based on their respective expertise. While the production is not finished and is expected for 2028, each participating country bought between four and seven of these Eurodrones, showing their commitment to the project (Kunertova, 2019). This project is accompanied by other efforts such as the creation of a European Patrol Corvette and various other projects under the supervision of the EDA (2024). It is important to note that this logic only applies to the production of defensive materiel and not to future trade prospects, which can have varying effects on a state's economy depending on its specificities.

While these current efforts to cooperate can be explained by the economic benefits of defence industry cooperation, one must acknowledge the costs associated with it. One of the obstacles to further integration is said to be the reservations many EU member States have about further political cooperation, especially in the area of defence. This potential opposition is caused by the preference most EU member states have for maintaining sovereign control of their supply of defensive hardware. Of course, this observation is not universal and depends on both the domestic politics and the strategic culture of the Member State in question (Cornish & Edwards, 2005). For example, France has a history both of promoting European integration and of more interventionist foreign policy preferences, making it more prone to cooperate in this field (Kruijvert & Zandee, 2019). Smaller states, meanwhile, are more sceptical of defence collaboration, notably due to the importance of NATO for their security (Krupnick, 1996). Indeed, the growth in scepticism in the US concerning European defence cooperation, voiced notably by Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, makes certain EU Member States question the compatibility of EDTIB integration with NATO (GEG, 2021).

To convince doubtful Member States, NATO and the EU acknowledged the 'value of a stronger and more capable European defence' in 2023 in their third joint declaration (NATO, 2023: 1). This cooperation is understandable as both organisations promote capability development and interoperability between member states, making EDTIB integration a way of reaching NATO standards. These standards are formulated by the organisation and may be operational, administrative, and in this case material. For example, NATO dictates production codes of practice and recommends the use of certain defensive hardware to promote interoperability between different NATO members. For example, projects funded by the European Defence Fund (EDF) may be required

to fit NATO standards. This applies to projects related to the production of ammunition, which need to comply with STANAG 4439, a directive focused on the interoperability of ammunition between NATO allies. Additionally, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), a structure designed to enhance cooperation between Member States, started welcoming non-EU projects in 2020, after two years of only allowing European projects to be under its supervision (Moller & Rynning, 2021). Four third countries have been invited to take part in PESCO projects, all of which are NATO member states: Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States (EDA, 2024).

Market regulation as an integration and cooperation incentive?

The EU has played a significant role in fostering a more integrated European defence market. Firstly, the European Commission has promoted cooperation in defence production and procurement to unlock potential economic benefits. Its first approach was the use of normative tools. Such measures started in the 2005 Code of Conduct on Defence Procurement and the 2006 Code of Best Practice in the Supply Chain (Sabatino, 2022). Their principle is quite simple: to recommend cooperation as a policy choice in the state's own interest. Both codes described below outline objectives to reach and methods for states to use without being coercive. Secondly, the EU has attempted to put in place an approach based primarily on punishment. In 2009, the European Commission passed a directive on defence procurement that allowed it to start infringement procedures against states 'unduly' (Besch, 2022: 3) prioritising their national defence firms when taking part in procurement. Directive 2009/81/EC, as it is called, was widely recognised as ineffective. This failure can be explained by the special provisions present in the Consolidated version of the TFEU protecting a state's control of its defence industry. Most notably, article 346 of the TFEU acts as a form of veto (Randazzo, 2014), allowing Member States to 'take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munitions and war material' (Ibid: 2). This article guarantees that any measure related to EDTIB integration is non-binding. It was used 12 times between 1999 and 2014 in the European Court of Justice, including seven times in Community Custom Code cases (Ibid). To this day it remains a guarantee for states that they can maintain protectionist policies.

Thirdly, as a response to the failure of coercive tools, the EU has attempted to put in place an approach based on incentivising cooperation and making it more desirable for states. The most obvious examples of such measures are the various funds created by the EU which encourage cooperation. Of these the most important initiative is clearly the EDF, a programme proposed by the European Commission in 2017 (Csernatoni & Oliveira Martins, 2019). In principle, this fund rewards collaborative defence projects between three or more European defence firms and can be used to fund both the research and production phases of development. Admittedly other funds exist, such as the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the Joint Procurement Act (EDIRPA). However, the EDF has greater financial backing and strategic importance. Indeed, the EDF has to be used for the development of weapons and is not limited to procurement. It is worth €8 billion, compared with €300 million for the EDIRPA. Incentives for states to cooperate have also taken the form of structures created to reduce information and transaction costs and in general render cooperation more accessible. These include the creation of PESCO, which acts as a forum to facilitate coordination and cooperation between Member States.

Liberalising the European defence market

The efforts described above have been in many respects quite successful, as there are currently 68 projects developed through PESCO. However, further progress can be made to optimise Member States' spending in defence, notably through the gradual establishment of a single defence market. In principle, this would consist in applying the specificities of the EU single market to the defence sector. To do so the EU would need to 'harmonise internal market rules and taxation' (Schilde, 2023: 1260). It would also need to offer greater 'regulation on external market boundaries and monitoring of states' defence spending' (Schilde, 2023: 1260). As a result, the privileged situation in which states are both the regulator and main client would disappear. The EU would act as a regulator of the new European defence market without being the main client, which would be the Member States. In this hypothetical market, EU Member States would be less reliant on third states, and greater levels of joint procurement and collaborative production would take place. However, it would undeniably result in greater interdependence between EU states and a greater involvement of EU institutions in Member States' defence supply.

To achieve a 'liberalisation' of the European defence market, this article would recommend the continuation of the current incentive-based policy, which has proven to be more successful than the coercive approach mentioned previously. To do so, a greater part of the EU budget should be dedicated to VAT exemptions, grants, and loans to help match the supply and demand of the European defence market (Pugnet, 2024). These funds would be used to promote cooperation in the same vein as the EDF and EDIRPA but would be used to incentivise states to

break down the protectionist structure of their internal market. The newly published European Defence Industrial Strategy takes steps in this direction, notably by putting in place a VAT exemption for states taking part in joint procurement (Besch, 2024; European Commission, 2024: 12). However, the scope of these efforts should be broadened and their funding increased to further promote this liberalisation. Finally, this article has not focused on matters related to domestic politics, but rather on the role of EU institutions. However, cooperation remains dependent on the willingness of states to cooperate, notably due to the presence of article 346 of the TFEU. Therefore an important step towards the achievement of a more liberal defence market would be a growth in domestic and political support for further cooperation on the EU level. On this matter, the 2024 European elections are of high significance for the future of European defence.

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NOTE FROM THE INDUSTRY

'Hand in Glove'!

Industry and the EU shall work together towards Europe's defence

–

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Russia's war in Ukraine has demonstrated two key things. First, Europe's collective security is not guaranteed forever. Europe was underprepared for the war when it started.

Secondly, the EU has emerged as an increasingly viable player in global defence. It has mobilised its existing tools and it has developed new collective defence initiatives. By introducing new mechanisms for collaboration in this domain, the EU has demonstrated it can improve its existing capabilities.

Industry obviously plays a critical role in this evolving agenda. As the EU's largest defence company, and through its defence and space programs, Airbus is supporting a more coherent and unified EU approach to ensure our continent's security and defence. To achieve this objective, a pro-active EU-Industry relationship is therefore critical in three key areas: healthy defence investment, strong cooperation and the successful implementation of policies.

Healthy investment

Europe needs to take a more strategic approach to its defence industrial base by developing an ambitious investment strategy. At the time of Russia's invasion in 2022, just five EU countries (Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland) were spending above the NATO-required 2% GDP rate on their national defence capabilities. Over the last two decades, European militaries have lost 35% of their capabilities, while at the same time Russian defence spending grew by 227% and China's expanded by 566%. Defence spending remained comparatively flat over the same period in Europe, at around 22%. While spending in Europe has improved following the Ukraine war, witnessing "the largest annual increase in total European spending in the post-cold war era", it remains less than half of what is spent by the US (Sipri 2023). There is thus still more to be done.

To reach a collective 2% and fill existing national gaps, EU Member States could for instance decide to tap into EU funding in an effort to bolster the continent's defence investment. This would also strengthen and balance the EU's relationship with the US, who has for decades lobbied for higher European spending in this area.

When investing in defence, the EU shall take a more muscular financial approach to its own initiatives to support its defence industry. Recent mechanisms, like EDIRPA (European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act) and ASAP (Act in Support of Ammunition Production), are potential game changers but lack the substantial funding required to make a real impact. The challenges

of sustaining military assistance to Ukraine with sufficient stockpiles of weapons and spare parts have shown why European industrial capability planning should drive the development of its industrial base. The EU should also invest in domestic production of critical components, starting with semiconductors, to allow industry to purchase necessary materials more quickly, and cheaper.

Strong cooperation

For Airbus, a company resulting from cooperation between our four 'Home Nations' (France, Germany, Spain and the UK), the cooperative approach recently pushed by the EU is welcome and familiar. This is particularly true for the European Defence Fund, within which Airbus successfully coordinated key projects, such as the Defence Operational Collaborative Cloud or the Next Generation Rotorcraft Technologies. These projects will ultimately contribute to the defence agendas of the EU and its member states.

There is clearly a need to invest in the EU's industrial base to preserve the integrity of European 'strategic autonomy' and thereby to break free from dependence on other international defence actors. The continued expansion of EU defence initiatives and programs should aim at maximizing collaboration among the stakeholders of Europe's industrial base. Doing so shall drive competitive innovation, increase investment by defence companies and facilitate the exchange of ideas and expertise. Increased collaboration will also foster Member States' EU preference in their defence procurement policies.

This doesn't exclude the EU expanding its defence partnerships with like-minded allies, including the US and the UK, whose defence expertise would be a welcome addition to the EU's vision and to explore opportunities for enhanced interoperability.

Policy implementation

In this EU endeavor for defence, policy implementation matters. The EU's decision to publish a European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) is therefore more than welcome. By working closely with Member States and industrial stakeholders across the EU, the Commission has confirmed its intention to help building the EU's long-term defence capability and thereby to enhance Europe's defence preparedness.

To achieve this objective, five strong policy priorities should be agreed upon and properly implemented in Member States' procurement policies:

- EU preference: with the basic understanding that EU money shall be spent for the EU industry, the EU shall put in place regulatory or funding tools to incentivize, and maybe enforce, this "EU preference" principle through something like a "Buy EU Act".

- Joint procurement: experimented through EDIRPA, this approach shall encourage Member States to get together to jointly buy and use equipment, including platforms and services, through a one-stop-shop mechanism (what one may call a "EU FMS" – on the model of the US Foreign Military Sales).

- Building on EDF: to be useful, EDF R&D outputs shall feed follow-on collaborative programs. involving EU interested companies, through EU financing and/or regulatory tools supporting downstream collaboration making use of EDF results.

- Industrial investment: what is currently experienced with ASAP to help industry to overcome ammunition production bottlenecks is a critical breakthrough, with the EU supporting industry when taking investment risks to answer urgent purchase orders that haven not yet been fully processed an finalised. This requires an ASAP-like mechanism extended to other equipment production facilities.

- Procurement prioritization: to increase collaborative investment, there is a need for a joint EU procurement planning mechanism for shared military capacities providing industry with some clearly prioritsed and predictibile needs to focus on. Such mechanism, perhaps associated with EU funding, will ease collaborative industrial response to these agreed capacity priorities.

Everyone knows Bismarck's quote: "A diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments!". If the EU becomes serious about its common defence policy, it should now take defence investment and collaborative consolidation seriously. This is clearly what is at stake today.

ARTICLE

Bye Buy European?

A Liberal Take on European Preferences in EU Defence Instruments

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Citation suggestion: Jeroen Dobber, JD (2024). Bye Buy European? A Liberal Take on European Preferences in EU Defence Instruments. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 66–73.

Abstract

'Buy European' – in any European capital or across the pond, these two words evoke contrasting though similarly strong reactions from security and defence experts. Following a string of policy initiatives to strengthen the EU's industrial base over the past two years, the issue of a European preference for European defence equipment has been one of the most sensitive and contentious issues to date (Pugnet, 2024). This article analyses the EU's initiatives to strengthen its defence industrial base and considers the added value and possible caveats of 'Buy European' provisions from a liberal point of view.

Introduction

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU has developed a range of new ad hoc policy instruments to supply arms to Ukraine, to stimulate the joint procurement of armaments, and to ramp up production. These developments culminated in the launch of the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) in March 2024 (European Commission, 2024). The EDIS sets a long-term vision for 'defence industrial readiness' in the European Union.

An important new element in the strategy, which was already reflected in some of its precursors, is the so-called European preference, better known as 'Buy European'. This is closely related to discussions about European strategic sovereignty (Le Monde Editorial, 2022), which have touched on a broad range of domains, from technology to health, and trade to security.

The aim to have more sovereignty or autonomy is an important value in liberal theory, both on an

individual (Colburn, 2010) and on a societal level (Wellman, 2013). However, the protectionist ring of 'Buy European' seems to be at odds with the liberal belief in free choice, fair competition, and free trade. We will therefore analyse the 'Buy European' discussion from a liberal point of view, taking on board elements from other domains in Europe's quest for strategic sovereignty. In doing so, we will use the term strategic sovereignty instead of strategic autonomy, as this reflects a deeper notion of political authority, as opposed to the focus on political action in discussions on strategic autonomy (Fiott, 2021).

The problem with Europe's defence industrial base

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has had an enormous impact on Europe's security situation. As the continent experienced a new large-scale conflict, it became very clear that Europe was not prepared for conventional, high-intensity warfare. Decades of shrinking investments have led to underequipped armed forces and significant capability gaps across all domains. In addition, Europe is not able to provide sufficient military aid to Ukraine to enable it to make a decisive breakthrough (Moyer & Ocvirk, 2024). In the meantime, the Russian war economy is picking up steam (Snegovaya et al., 2024) and the longer Ukraine is not supplied with adequate equipment, the higher the chance of Russian advances in the future.

In part, this problem was caused by structural underspending on defence over the past few decades. After the end of the Cold War, European defence budgets dropped significantly, and this was exacerbated by the global financial crisis in 2008. As a result, European militaries have lost 35 per cent of their capabilities over the last two decades (Bergmann et al., 2022). At the same time, in the last decade the US, Russia, and China increased their military expenditure by 34.8 per cent, 80 per cent, and 23 per cent respectively, leading to a relative loss of Europe's military strength on the world stage (SIPRI, 2024).

From Europe's defence industry side, there has also been a shift towards fewer, precise and technologically advanced weapons systems from the 1990s onwards (Nones, 2024). This has occurred at the expense of mass production of less sophisticated items, such as artillery shells and ammunition. Consequently, production sites for low-tech solutions have suffered from underinvestment or have even closed down. Now that the Russia–Ukraine war is increasingly developing into an industrial-scale war of attrition, this is leading to shortcomings in production capacity.

An additional challenge is the high degree of fragmentation of the European defence industry (supply) and market (demand). Both Europe's defence industrial base and its market for defence equipment are still organised along national lines with heavy state involvement. On the industry side, governments continue to protect and isolate their national defence industries, despite a clear need for collaboration to meet Europe's security needs (Jones, 2018). This leads to reduced economies of scale and unnecessary duplications. On the market side, uncoordinated defence spending leads to additional duplications of purchased items, as well as capability gaps, especially for critical enablers. In short, the market may produce sufficiently for national demand, but not for the needs at the European level.

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EU initiatives to strengthen the defence industry

The watershed moment of Russia's aggression against Ukraine provided a new impetus to reckon with the structural shortcomings of Europe's defence industrial base.

The initial push for defence integration started with programmes in research and development, such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Permanent European Structured Cooperation (PESCO), both launched in 2017.[64] After February 2022, there was a new round of initiatives to accelerate the pace of these programmes. Just a month after the start of the war, the EU approved its Strategic Compass, in which Member States for the first time agreed on a common strategic vision for the EU's role in security and defence. Included in the document was a call for an innovative, competitive, and resilient European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) (Council of the European Union, 2022).

In the following year, the aim of a truly European defence industry was translated into several new policy initiatives for the production, procurement, and exportation of defence

equipment. Most notably, these include the European Peace Facility (EPF), the Ukraine Assistance Fund (UAF), the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (EDIPRA).

After the series of ad hoc interventions, the European Commission launched its first-ever European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) on 5 March 2024. The main goal of this ambitious document is to address the fragmentation of European defence by investing 'more, better, together and European'. It seeks to do this by raising the value of 'intra-EU defence trade' to 35 per cent of the overall value of the EU defence market by 2030. In the same year, the EDTIB is expected to amount to at least half of EU Member States' defence purchases. In addition, the EDIS sets a goal that Member States procure at least 40 per cent of their defence equipment collaboratively (up from the current 18 per cent).

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To achieve these aims, the EDIS is accompanied by the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP). This is the strategy's main funding instrument, which contains €1.5 billion for the period from 2025 to 2027 (the end of the EU's multiannual financial framework) (European Commission, 2024). Given the underwhelming size of the budget, the EDIS and the EDIP are not sufficient to address the immediate requirements of Ukraine and Europe's short-term capability gaps (Grand, 2024). However, they are a good signal of the EU's long-term ambitions to strengthen its defence industrial base.

Making sense of 'Buy European'

An underlying discussion across several of the EU's defence policy instruments, such as the EPF and EDIRPA, is the inclusion of 'Buy European' provisions. This refers to a European preference in procurement processes. This preference can have different forms, but the general aim is for EU Member States to make more purchases from the European defence industry.

When EU Member States buy new defence equipment that is not readily available from domestic or European producers, they have three options: national solutions, buying off the shelf, or cooperative development or procurement with other EU Member States. Some Member States invest in national capability development projects, but most also turn to buying off the shelf from abroad (Koenig & Schütte, 2023). To illustrate, between the start of Russia's war of aggression and June 2023, 78 per cent of defence purchases by Member States were made outside the EU. The US alone represented 63 per cent of these (European Commission, 2024).

To reduce the amount of imports and boost cooperative development with other EU Member States, the idea of 'Buy European' has gradually been taking hold. Several Member States, such as France, Greece, and Cyprus, have pushed for this as a way of boosting Europe's defence industrial base (Financial Times, 2024). Others, particularly those with strong defence industrial ties with third countries such as the US and the UK, are less enthusiastic. This group includes Sweden, Finland, Poland, and the Netherlands.

Positions on this issue are often determined by national factors, such as the size and orientation of the defence industry, but there are several recurring arguments in favour of introducing more European preferences in defence spending.

Strategic sovereignty

The first argument is that 'Buy European' would support Europe's aim to have more strategic sovereignty. This is a broader discussion around the need for Europe to develop a greater ability to act to pursue and protect its own geopolitical interests. This requires less dependence on third countries in areas of strategic interest. In the European security and defence context, the aim of achieving more sovereignty, or autonomy, entails responsibility for greater defence spending and more capacity to act in crisis situations (Fiott, 2021).

Photo by Pixabay on Pexels

With this in mind, there would be a strategic interest in developing, producing, and procuring armaments within Europe. This would limit the leverage of third countries on specific European interests, such as the availability of defence equipment in times of need, and enable the EU to make more independent decisions.

Protectionist reflexes

Pleas for 'Buy European' provisions can also be seen as a reaction to protectionist measures taken by the US and China. This is often related to similar initiatives in other spheres, such as trade, investments, and technology. Examples include the recent push for decoupling from China and European responses to the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which subsidises green industries. The latter led to the Commission calling for a European IRA in response to the American one (Von der Leyen, 2022) and President Emmanuel Macron calling for a 'Buy European Act'.

Justification for public spending

A last argument that is often used in favour of 'Buy European' is that European public money must first and foremost benefit the European economy (Giuliani, 2023). The idea is that it is difficult to justify spending money on the industries of third countries when the European defence industry so desperately needs this investment to increase its capacity. Spending European is seen to close the circle and feed the premiums back into the European economy.

Recent debates

Different forms of these arguments regularly come to the fore in the negotiations on the EU's defence instruments. So far, this mainly concerns the instruments on the demand side, so the defence market. Examples include certain parts of the EPF, particularly the UAF, EDIRPA, and the EDIS.

For the EPF, discussions about 'Buy European' provisions started when Member States ran out of existing stockpiles and had to start procuring new armaments. With insufficient production capacity, this has led some Member States to procure off-the-shelf products from outside the EU (for instance the US or South Korea) (Fiott & Simón, 2023). France in particular has strongly opposed this and argued that equipment bought with EU funding must be produced inside the EU.

Similar concerns were also reflected in the UAF, which includes many more restrictions against buying third-country equipment than the overarching EPF. The text mentions that the required defence equipment for Ukraine has to come from the European defence industry and Norway. However, there is flexibility in the supply chains to include operators from outside those countries. Interpreting this flexibility is left to Member States themselves, which eventually makes it a political decision.

During the negotiations on EDIRPA, the original Commission proposal also featured a procurement initiative with a 'Buy European' rationale, but this was eventually rejected by the Member States. The main reason for this was that the EU industry was not able to keep up with demand (Besch, 2022).

The EDIS and EDIP contain a set of softer nudges to push Member States towards buying more European equipment. A notable example is the proposal of a European Military Sales Mechanism, which would provide a common European catalogue of EU-produced defence equipment. This would make it easier for governments to see what is already available in European markets and could stimulate them to choose European options.

The EDIS also features an instrument for Member States to jointly own procured equipment, the Structure for European Armament Programme (SEAP), for which they can benefit from a VAT exemption. If countries can also agree on a common approach to exports, EDIP will provide a bonus for products that are developed and procured as part of SEAP.

The problem with 'Buy European'

So far, the actual practice of 'Buying European' is still in its infancy on the European defence market. However, it will likely gain traction, as the EDIS will be translated into more concrete policy instruments in the years to come. One of the difficulties in this process is that of defining what 'Buy European' means. Up to now, it means different things to different people, which makes it difficult to reach any form of consensus. The box provides an overview of some of the questions that 'Buy European' raises and some possible definitions.

A liberal take on 'Buy European' for EU defence initiatives

EDIP ends in 2027 and lawmakers in the next legislative mandate (2024–2029) will have to decide how the EDIS is translated into policy instruments from their election onwards. This will include the possible inclusion of 'Buy European' provisions – or not. The following section will give some ideas for liberal policy-makers to consider.

The goal of 'Buy European' provisions to achieve more strategic sovereignty is very much in line with liberal thinking.

Pieces of the 'Buy European' puzzle

What qualifies as 'European' origin?
- Produced in at least one Member State
- Produced in multiple Member States
- Produced as a result of a European project (e.g. PESCO/EDF)

How 'European' is the product?
- 100% of the product is produced in Europe
- A certain number of the components are produced in Europe
- A certain type of component is produced in Europe (e.g. high-tech elements or critical technology)
- Technology must be patented in Europe

Who is 'European'?
- EU Member States only
- European Economic Area countries (Norway is currently included in the UAF)
- United Kingdom (currently included in PESCO project on military mobility)
- Ukraine (currently included in the EDIS)

Who is the final recipient of the purchase?
- EU Member State(s)
- Ukraine or other supported country
- Partner countries

What financial incentive is provided?
- Subsidy
- Reimbursement
- VAT exemption
- What type of product is being procured?
- High-tech (e.g. radar equipment, fighter jets, air defence systems)
- Mass production (e.g. artillery shells and ammunition)

How urgent is the procurement?
- Short term
- Medium term
- Long term

This list is not exhaustive, but it provides an insight into the complexity and variety of situations covered by the 'Buy European' principle.

To liberals, sovereignty on an individual level means protection from arbitrary and capricious power and authority – in other words, self-ownership (Opello & Rosow, 1999). The same principles can be translated to other levels of governance as well. Self-ownership, protected by the rules-based, liberal world order, is key to modern statehood. This is one of the many reasons why liberals so strongly support Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in its fight against Russia's aggression.

Goal: No shortcut to strategic sovereignty

However laudable the quest for sovereignty may be, self-ownership does not translate into state ownership or state sponsorship. Strategic sovereignty is more concerned with having the ability (Groitl, 2021) or political authority (Fiott, 2021) to act, rather than being a fully independent and autarkic actor. In a world of networked interdependence, ability and influence are more important than control.

With this in mind, 'Buy European' is not a shortcut or an automatic guarantee of enhanced European sovereignty. It can be used as a tool to steer buyers' behaviour, but this will not automatically lead to Europe's armed forces acquiring better capabilities. In fact, it could decrease Europe's overall capabilities if it limits access to necessary technologies produced in third countries. If the aim is to have more strategic sovereignty in defence industrial production, the guiding principles should be the obtainment of military strategic capabilities, the development of intellectual property, and cost efficiency (Wolff, 2024). These are drivers for more influence in an interdependent world. It is not clear if priority spending on domestic industry helps to achieve these aims, or rather obstructs them.

Costs: Less bang for more buck

Having a European preference can be compared to imposing tariffs on foreign goods. It means that there are other, lower-cost suppliers on the world market and that governments will pay more for the same capabilities. It also risks potential efficiency losses for domestic industries through the loss of possible competition (Camporini et al., 2017). Introducing protectionist policies therefore risks wasteful competition between allies, and missed opportunities for fruitful collaboration (Sweeney, 2024). This is even more relevant if non-European allies, most notably the US, close off parts of their defence markets in retaliation for 'Buy European' policies. When discussing European preferences, it is important to keep this in mind as a price to pay.

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Effectiveness

This leads to an overarching question: is 'Buy European' really the most effective tool to foster a strong European defence industrial base?

As a general principle, it would deprive the defence industry and the defence market of choice and competition: choice because it excludes possible cooperation partners for producers and possible suppliers for purchasers, and competition because it takes away incentives to produce more efficiently and to buy more cost-efficiently. The European defence industry should aim not to produce pan-European products at any price, but rather to develop competitive products for the global and domestic markets.

Another risk is that the focus on 'Buy European' elements in the EU's defence initiatives distracts from more liberal ways of achieving the same aims. These include incentive structures, harmonising export controls (Vagt, 2018), and revising the national security exemption for defence procurement. The EDIS already contains very promising steps in terms of nudges and incentive structures, including the European Military Sales Mechanism, a VAT exemption, and a bonus for jointly owned equipment, and it is important that they get the time to show their potential.

That said, there could be instances where 'Buy European' policies can be tried to boost (or preserve) specific types of production of strategic importance, such as critical components, critical technologies, and critical enablers. However, before introducing such policies, it is important to first define their specific goals, formulate a specific form of 'Buy European' (see list of questions) that would help achieve them, and consider the costs. It should therefore, at most, be considered as a policy instrument with a limited scope, rather than a more general policy principle.

The EDIS is a step in the right direction and offers a good basis for continued and new policy instruments to strengthen Europe's defence industrial basis. Discussions about 'Buy European' provisions will certainly come up while negotiating these instruments, but policy-makers would be wise to critically question their merits.

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NOTE FROM THE INDUSTRY

Connectivity at the Heart of Security and Resilience

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The last five years have firmly cemented connectivity as a critical resource for citizens, societies, and economies. Large swathes of Europe's population adopted home working during the coronavirus pandemic. This spotlighted the importance of reliable digital connectivity in everyday life, as well as for our economies to function properly.

Today, Europe's geopolitical environment is changing rapidly. War on the continent is into its third year. Nation state threat actors and independent hacktivist groups are increasingly targeting European governments and public institutions. Narratives designed to split Europe's populations are spread across various platforms by malign actors. Dual-use technologies are developing at pace.

In response, the European Union, NATO, and the G7 are building out their security toolboxes with the aim of making their societies and economies more resilient to external shocks. This includes investment screening in key infrastructure sectors, better coordination and preparedness against cyber-attacks, and much more. Meanwhile, political leaders are urgently discussing Europe's security and its future as a competitive and geopolitical global actor.

With a heightened threat environment and a focus on securing critical sectors, what is the role of a telecoms sector that has not traditionally been within the scope of the defence industry?

Addressing today's security challenges together with industry

Recent political instability has highlighted the diverse and critically important role telecoms now plays across society. This ranges from enabling satellite communications to provide connectivity to those in conflict zones, to securing undersea communication cables that have become targets for sabotage. Cybersecurity providers have emerged as frontline actors in hybrid warfare, and cloud services have become critical to safeguarding governance systems under threat from bombing campaigns.

Today's security is defined by the resilience of critical infrastructure against cyber and hybrid threats, the ability to develop redundancies in communication and government systems, and robust strategies against disinformation campaigns. Unlike in earlier eras of instability, these capabilities are today largely owned and run by the private sector. Consequently, modern global dynamics have precipitated a more complex interface between the state and the private sector.

For providers of critical national infrastructure, security considerations are at the heart of operations. As such, new legislative initiatives, including the Cyber Resilience Act and NIS2, are necessary additions to both harmonise and clarify private sector responsibilities in a changing world.

Going forward, it is essential to engage the private sector early in the legislative process to harness the sector's technical expertise to help evolve and develop policy. This will also allow industry to plan and operate efficiently and effectively across the entire EU. New security requirements, as well as being formed in consultation with industry, must be risk-based, harmonised, and proportionate. These requirements must be coupled with incentives for investment that reflect the urgency and dynamism of the threat landscape and the shifting relationship and burden of responsibilities between the public and private sectors.

Cyber resilience needs a new cross-border approach

Cyber threats do not respect borders. Attacks are global, cutting across country boundaries. Responses need to be transnational, drawing upon a global understanding of the threat environment. That's why many multinational companies, such as Vodafone, rely on global capability building to ensure both effectiveness and efficiency in meeting emerging threats to the critical infrastructure.

But the growing trend of national reshoring, and the increasingly fragmenting security policy landscape, are undermining pan-European resilient security capabilities. To ensure compliance with security obligations, several EU Member States already require data to be localised and networks to be operated only within their countries.

When state-of-the-art facilities and skills cannot be used across borders, it leads to sub-scale solutions and reduces the ability of industry to leverage pan-EU capabilities to assist with cyber incidents or events in any single country. This is further compounded by a highly fragmented approach to cyber threat intelligence sharing, despite the benefits brought by centralised platforms that enable collaboration on complex challenges across stakeholders.

Instead of erecting barriers among friends, the EU and national governments should put stock in the phrase 'like-minded partners' and create harmonised security frameworks. Allies should work across the bloc and with NATO and the G7, building common standards and certification methods, and taking a coordinated position on secure and resilient supply chains. There is no denying that open trade is not simple today. But in an increasingly multipolar world, European resilience will require new ways of working. Europe needs to align with trusted allies and partners, building upon shared strengths in security, innovation, and defence, rather than following a path of isolationism.

Investing in Europe's national and economic security

For the EU, the G7, and NATO, security and economic interests are increasingly intertwined. With the EU Commission's Economic Security Strategy and accompanying proposals, for example, a security lens has been applied to trade, supply chains, and investment.

Resilience is not just about the security of critical infrastructure today. It is also about the ability to innovate, grow, and invest in the technologies and infrastructures of the future to face the challenges of tomorrow. This cannot be done without sustainable economic growth.

But Europe is facing a competitiveness challenge. Just 15 years ago, Europe's share of global GDP topped that of the United States and was nearly five times that of China. Today, the EU's economy is marginally smaller than China's and 44% smaller than that of the United States.

Europe cannot exercise its desired global geopolitical role if it does not address these issues of competitiveness. The EU's defence ambitions, for example, risk being hamstrung by limited funding. Similarly, Europe's role as the world's standard-setter on global trade and critical new areas such as data protection and artificial intelligence risk being undermined by the Union's diminishing economic muscle.

To tackle current and future security challenges, new mechanisms are needed to enable private finance to drive innovation, reduce barriers to trade, and increase the ability to operate at scale.

There is an innate tension within the concept of economic security, but governments must work with industry to understand the second-order consequences of applying a security lens to new areas of policy. Economic security and broader de-risking policies do not come without obligations and resource requirements on the industry in scope. Indeed, there is a risk that poorly designed, costly security obligations and complicated compliance frameworks risk undermining industry's ability to invest in resilience.

New fundamentals to security and resilience

Secure communications infrastructure, pan-European cyber resilience, and a comprehensive approach to economic security with like-minded partners are the essential pillars of a resilient and secure Europe today. For decades, the telecoms sector has safeguarded critical infrastructure. Today, it is at the very heart of geopolitics. As the external threat environment increases, responsibilities for security change, and the pace of technological change accelerates, it is time for a new framework of engagement between industry and governments.

Vodafone is a leading European and African telecoms company that provides mobile and fixed services to over 330 million customers in 15 countries and has one of the world's largest IoT platforms. It is a major player in submarine cable systems with current capacity of around 80 systems that reach 100 countries, totaling over 1 million km globally. Its purpose is to connect for a better future by using technology to improve lives, businesses and help progress inclusive sustainable societies.

ARTICLE

Striking the Balance between Privacy and Security

The Case of Spyware

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Citation suggestion: Hussam Erhayel, HE (2024). Striking the Balance between Privacy and Security. The Case of Spyware. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 76–80.

Abstract

In the digital age, privacy is crucial, yet national security often necessitates data access, creating tension. Policymakers must balance these needs, avoiding the false dichotomy of sacrificing privacy for security. Effective cybersecurity incorporates privacy protection. Spyware, client-side scanning, and similar technologies undermine system security and encryption, posing severe risks to democratic freedoms, including free speech and assembly. Spyware's misuse extends authoritarian regimes' influence, jeopardizing democratic processes. To counter these threats, the EU must enforce strict regulations, enhance coordination between national and EU bodies, and bolster international cooperation. The establishment of a permanent PEGA Committee, rigorous export controls, and increased scrutiny of EU funds are essential. Strengthening cybersecurity measures protects democracy, ensuring privacy and security coexist in the digital era.

Introduction

In the age of the digital revolution, the importance of privacy cannot be overstated. Privacy is a fundamental human right that underpins the freedom of individuals to live without unwarranted surveillance or intrusion. It is the cornerstone of democratic societies, ensuring that citizens can express themselves freely and

maintain autonomy over their personal information. However, the increasing emphasis on national security often creates tension with privacy, as governments and institutions seek greater access to data to protect against threats.

The challenge for policymakers is to strike a balance between ensuring national security and protecting the privacy rights of individuals.

It is a common misconception that privacy must be sacrificed for the sake of national security. This binary thinking oversimplifies a complex issue. In reality, a system's security is often only as strong as its weakest link. Effective cybersecurity must take into account the protection of individual privacy as a core component of national resilience.

The EU is infiltrated by spyware. In 2022, the Pegasus Project (The Guardian, 2022) revealed that NSO group (the company that owns Pegasus) has at least 22 clients in twelve different EU countries (Benjakob, 2022). This scandal was dubbed the EU Watergate (Joyner, 2022), which prompted the EU Parliament to establish the PEGA Committee (European Parliament, 2023).

The spyware industry presents a significant threat to both national and European security. By exploiting vulnerabilities and selling these to countries both within and outside the EU (Pruessing, 2022), this industry undermines the security and trust among nations. The unchecked proliferation of such technologies poses a risk not just to privacy but also to the integrity of international relations and the safety of citizens worldwide.

Spyware poses a threat similar to client-side scanning, where devices are scanned for illegal content before it is uploaded to the cloud. While intended to combat illegal activities, this approach fundamentally undermines the security of systems. Client-side scanning can be exploited to create back doors, potentially giving malicious actors and authoritarian regimes access to private data. It threatens the principle of end-to-end encryption, which is crucial for maintaining secure communications (Abelson et al., 2024).

Threats to democracy

Surveillance influences many rights and freedoms of citizens; it affects freedom of speech, association and peaceful assembly, and it has a dire effect on privacy and human rights (OHCHR, 2022). It undermines democracy and its institutions (European Parliament, 2022). Citizens who are spied on tend to abstain from participating in public discourse. Given that many journalists and political opposition leaders, among others, are targets of spyware, the quality of the democratic public sphere and the legitimacy of the electoral process are affected (European Parliament, 2022).

Furthermore, spyware technologies have enabled transnational repression. Dissidents from autocratic regimes who left their countries seeking protection were not safe from the reach of these regimes. This extends the influence of authoritarian regimes beyond their borders, impacting the democratic fabric of other nations (Al-Jizawi et al., 2022).

In the broader context of cybersecurity, these threats to democracy are not limited to spyware alone.

Authoritarian regimes and malicious actors leverage various cyber tools to conduct disinformation campaigns, spread fake news, and exploit societal divisions through divisive populism (Munkøe & Mölder, 2022). These tactics are designed to erode public trust in democratic institutions and processes. We have also seen the alleged targeting of presidents, prime ministers, MEPs, and other officials of liberal democracies from other countries (Richard & Rigaud, 2023).

The interlinkages between defence, internal security, home affairs, the rule of law, migration, and external security policies are critical in addressing these threats. Cybersecurity is a multifaceted issue that intersects with all these areas. Ensuring robust cybersecurity measures is essential to protect not only the integrity of democratic institutions but also the fundamental values of society.

Moreover, the chilling effect of surveillance and cyber threats cannot be understated. When citizens fear that their online activities are being monitored, they are less likely to exercise their freedom of expression, leading to a less vibrant and open democratic society. This suppression of free speech and dissent stifles innovation, critical discourse, and the healthy functioning of a democratic state.

Therefore, new members of the European Parliament must advocate for comprehensive cybersecurity strategies that protect against both internal and external threats. This involves addressing the vulnerabilities exploited by the spyware industry and ensuring that security measures do not infringe upon the privacy and freedoms of individuals. Only through a balanced and holistic approach can the resilience of democracy be maintained in the digital age.

The European single market

Asaf Lubin (2023) argues that spyware companies are not technology companies selling technologies; they are selling vulnerabilities in technologies. He further argues that governments should not allow private actors to hoard vulnerabilities, adding: 'The more we allow commercial actors to possess these tools and make profit from zero-days, the more we corrupt and degenerate the vulnerabilities equity process is'.

Photo by Shahadat Rahman on Unsplash

The abuse of spyware stands as a significant threat to democracy and fundamental rights. This threat is acutely felt in the EU, where spyware companies have established a strong foothold, exploiting the EU's internal market and free movement and, in the process, benefiting from weak enforcement of export regulations. As a result, the trade in spyware has flourished, often under the guise of being 'EU regulated', with the EU's reputation for strict regulation being used as a mark of quality and respectability.

The spyware problem intertwines with other global issues such as migration, commodities, and fund flows. The EU's actions in relation significant spyware clients, are good examples of how human rights and the right to privacy get the hit in international relations with the EU (Richard & Rigaud, 2023).

The European Union is a global beacon of privacy rights policies (Giovanni De Gregorio, 2021). Indirectly or directly supporting the threat of commercial spyware is a breach of the values of privacy rights, whether within the EU, in the EU market and exports, or through EU foreign relations, is an undermining of the idea of the European Union.

Recommendations

The EU must take a more proactive stance in regulating spyware and protecting privacy rights. To achieve this, the EU Commission should assert itself more forcefully in enforcing existing laws on spyware use and export, while balancing its role as treaty guardian with maintaining good relations with Member States. Non-compliance should be prosecuted more rigorously to ensure adherence to regulations.

The PEGA Committee should be established as a permanent body, serving as an ongoing forum for addressing new developments, identifying loopholes, and regularly updating regulations. This continuous dialogue will be crucial in adapting to evolving threats and technologies.

To bridge the gap between enforcement and laws, the EU should consider creating an EU-wide enforcement body for spyware regulations or significantly improve coordination between EU and national enforcement bodies. This approach would address the current disparity between national security competencies and the influence of spyware companies.

The EU single market requires reinforcement of its legal and judicial framework to ensure adherence to market rules. A reassessment of the balance between economic and social rights within the market is also necessary to maintain its integrity and effectiveness.

Increased collaboration between the EU and the US could lead to more effective control of the global spyware industry. This could involve the establishment of joint blacklists or whitelists of spyware companies, a strategy that may significantly disrupt the operations of entities that pose threats to privacy and security.

Export controls need harmonisation across EU countries, particularly for dual-use technologies. Increased transparency in export control licences is crucial, with information shared with the Commission while respecting national security concerns. The EU Commission's capacity for export control should be enhanced, allowing for more proactive investigations into compliance with EU export control laws.

In its international role, the EU must balance short-term and long-term objectives in foreign aid and investments, implementing stronger internal scrutiny mechanisms for fund allocation. Increased transatlantic cooperation on spyware regulation could involve creating joint blacklists or whitelists of spyware companies.

Oversight should be strengthened by expanding the roles of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and EU Ombudsman, particularly in overseeing funding allocation to ensure alignment with human rights objectives.

Finally, there is significant potential in enhancing transatlantic cooperation on spyware regulation. Increased collaboration between the EU and the US could lead to more effective control of the global spyware industry. This could involve the establishment of joint blacklists or whitelists of spyware companies, a strategy that may significantly disrupt the operations of entities that pose threats to privacy and security.

These measures, implemented cohesively, would significantly enhance the EU's ability to protect privacy rights and regulate the spyware industry effectively, both within its borders and in its international relations.

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ARTICLE

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Possibility of a European Army

Experts Comment on the Possibility of an EU army and the EU's Response to a Changing Security Environment

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Citation suggestion: Kostas Mavraganis, KM (2024). The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Possibility of a European Army. Experts Comment on the Possibility of an EU army and the EU's Response to a Changing Security Environment. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 81–86.

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU is facing a war in its 'neighbourhood'. EU countries are increasing defence spending and overhauling their militaries, while questions on European defence and strategic autonomy are again being raised: should/could Europe be more independent/autonomous in its defence, and would it be possible to talk about an EU army?

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israel–Hamas war have shaken the entire world. The prospect of large-scale war looms again and Vladimir Putin's Russia has openly turned into an adversary. At the same time, ties between the EU and the US are being reinforced and NATO seems to have 'awakened'. However, Europe finds itself once again on the back foot, as it seems to be following the lead of the US, while there are disputes among EU countries regarding the appropriate stance towards Russia. The

conversation on strategic autonomy seems more relevant today than ever before – and this includes the military part.

'Juncker calls for an EU army': Initiating the argument

Back in 2015, Jean-Claude Juncker, then EU Commission President, made headlines when he told the newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* that the European Union needed a joint EU army to deter Russia and other threats and reinforce the Union's foreign policy standing around the world. Juncker argued that NATO was not enough and that a common army of the EU would help in forming foreign and security policies and enable the EU take on responsibility around the world and react more credibly to a threat to peace in a member or neighbouring state. Juncker also said that such a force would have been useful during the Ukraine crisis.

Should/could Europe be more independent/ autonomous in its defence, and would it be possible to talk about an EU army?

It is worth mentioning that the current Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, then Defence Minister of Germany, welcomed this proposal, saying to a German radio station that 'our future as Europeans will at some point be with a European army'. Moreover, although Juncker said that he did not want such a force to challenge the role of NATO, there were negative reactions from the UK (a Member State then), with a government spokesman saying that the country's position was that defence is a national and not an EU responsibility (David Cameron, as Prime Minister, had resisted moves to create EU-controlled military forces in the past, too).

Juncker returned to the topic on other occasions, for example in 2016, when he told reporters in Berlin that 'we have a lot to thank the Americans for … but they won't look after Europe's security forever'. However, he emphasised that this had nothing to do with Donald Trump's victory in the US elections.

The current state: Europe 'awakened'

The EU Battlegroups (multinational military units, usually composed of 1,500 personnel each, that form an integral part of the European Union's military rapid reaction capacity to respond to crises and conflicts around the world, but which have never been deployed or used operationally, despite being operational since 2007) have already been formed, and the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) is being developed, which will enable the EU to respond to conflicts with a deployment consisting of up to 5,000 troops. Furthermore, the EU has been very active in assisting Ukraine, and many European countries are increasing their military expenditures and moving forward with rearmament programmes. In addition, the EU undertook Operation Aspides (EUNAVFOR Aspides) for the protection of commercial vessels crossing the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden from Houthi attacks originating from Yemen. It is the biggest operation of its kind in the history of the EU. All in all, it seems that the EU is becoming militarily stronger and more willing to use military assets to protect its interests.

MEP Nathalie Loiseau, chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, points out regarding Ukraine that, together with the US, Canada, Japan, the UK, and others, the EU took a common and united approach based on three pillars: humanitarian support, financial support, and support in terms of military equipment. 'For the first time, the EU is able to deliver arms to a partner country through the European Peace Facility mechanism', she mentioned at the time this piece was written. What makes Ukraine's resistance possible, MEP Loiseau says, is the quality and resilience of its army and the determination of its people, but it is also thanks to the many Western arms supplies, and we are entering a phase where Western countries have to renew their stocks of arms and ammunition. As she points out, all EU Member States have decided to significantly increase the share of their budget dedicated to armaments. More importantly, she adds, there is a need to spend more and better at the European level, because the aim is to have equipment that corresponds to common individual needs and that is compatible with that of others. 'If we put all the European budgets together, we would be the second largest military power in the world. If we are not, it is because we have an extreme fragmentation of our defence industries,

and therefore of our equipment', she points out.

Dr Christos Ziogas, Assistant Professor of International Relations in the Department of the Mediterranean Studies Department at the University of the Aegean, states that the topic of security has been re-examined as a European goal ever since 2017 and the Rome Declaration – adding that it was expected that the war in Ukraine would bring the topic of European defence to the fore. However, he says, up to now the war has been managed within an Atlantic context, mainly on the basis of US/Anglo-Saxon choices: 'It is known that, in foreign policy, defence and security, European policy is still done in an intergovernmental level – the decisions are taken from the European Council, after they have been agreed by the leaders of the Member States.'

On March 2022 the Strategic Compass was approved, which is supposed to show the way towards reinforcing and developing the EU's military arm. There is also a timetable on the goals of the aforementioned EU RDC, which is based on the agreement regarding the EU Battlegroups. The EU RDC would be deployed on operations and missions outside the EU (e.g. search and rescue, peacekeeping, stabilisation).

MEP Loiseau says that the Strategic Compass, as a roadmap, sets the course and objectives for European security and defence policies for the next ten years and identifies the tools to achieve it, including the European Defence Fund and the European Peace Facility. The preparation of the Compass itself has been an unprecedented exercise in the history of the Union, with all European intelligence services putting together their threat analyses, their priorities, and the motivation behind them, 'making it possible to acquire and further develop a common strategic culture', as she says. At the same time, she recognises that the EU Battlegroups have not been a success, so it is therefore better to think together about what sort of attack the Member States may face in the future (e.g. cyberattack, emergency evacuation, conventional attack), instead of solely focusing on troops. As she points out, the Rapid Reaction Capability is not a 'European army' as such, but it is about making European armies capable of training together, coordinating and supporting each other, and, generally speaking, defending their common security. 'We are truly at the start of a new era in European defence', she says.

As well-informed sources mention, full operational capabilities would be required up to 2025 for the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), which – according to these sources – would be the preferred headquarters for the EU RDC while it operates under particular scenarios. That would mean that the MPCC should be fully staffed, with proper facilities in Brussels and modern communication and command and control equipment, allowing combined arms operations, along with operations in space and in cyberspace. Moreover, it should have the means and capabilities to deploy and operate far from the EU's borders, and the EU RDC should train so that it is capable of operating within the parameters of certain scenarios and areas. Beyond these, the concept of European air operations is under development, with the aforementioned sources saying that capabilities for cyber and space operations should be developed in the coming years.

However, commenting on the EU's Strategic Compass and the EU RDC, Dr Dominika Kunertova, Senior Researcher at the Center for Security Studies, points out that replacing the Common Security and Defence Policy to further federalise the EU looks unlikely in the near future, as this would require changes to the treaty to make defence and security more flexible and actionable by introducing qualified majority voting. Furthermore, as she says, the EU RDC of 5,000 troops is hardly an EU army, but rather a rapid reaction force to be deployed in case of crises. As for the EU Battlegroups, she points out that they have never been used, mostly because EU countries 'have an incoherent vision for the EU's mission in the security and defence domain'.

Strategic autonomy

The question of an EU army is linked to the topic of strategic autonomy for the EU in general. Dr Constantinos Filis, director of the ACG Institute of Global Affairs and an associate professor at the American College of Greece, believes that the matter of strategic autonomy belongs more to the realm of theory than to practice:

> One of its prerequisites would be becoming (strategically) autonomous from NATO. Otherwise, it is not autonomy, but complementarity. I believe we're far from something like that. I am not sure at all that NATO and the US would like to see the EU become truly autonomous – it would be completely different, now that NATO has been rejuvenated, to get into a discussion about the EU becoming autonomous.

As Dr Filis points out, most European countries are already NATO members, and there are also economic factors at play. Up to now, the US has carried most of the burden for NATO – 70 per cent of the Alliance's total defence spending, paying for the European nations' security, too. 'I can't say that I realistically see the EU moving towards strategic autonomy – but towards complementarity in regards to NATO, instead'. Dr Filis believes that the events in Ukraine have greatly empowered and reinforced NATO, so strategic autonomy for Europe is a possibility that seems to be receding.

Generally speaking, it seems that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not causing the EU to start becoming more strategically independent or autonomous at all. As Dr Ziogas points out, after many months of bitter fighting in Ukraine, the positions of the Eastern European countries regarding NATO's premier

role in matters of defence and security, with the EU playing a complementary role, seem to have been reinforced, rather than the opposite.

Dr Kunertova, on her part, mentions that Sweden and Finland joining NATO sends a clear signal regarding which institution is in charge of defence in Europe and is the most trusted in the face of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, while also pointing out regional initiatives such as the 'European Sky Shield Initiative'.

Threats to Europe

According to well-informed sources, the greatest threat, which 'not everyone thinks about in the same way', is the encirclement of Europe by revisionist forces, including the 'axis' of Russia and Turkey, extending from the Black Sea to the Caucasus, the Middle East, and Northern Africa – and even trying to expand towards the Sahel and Central Africa. Generally speaking, it is believed that the only states facing military threats are those in the north and in the east, because of Russia and China. They also point out that on a more 'bureaucratic' level, the EU's 'worst nightmare' is the possibility of an attack by a NATO member state against an EU country.

Asked about the threats to Europe, Dr Filis says that the term 'military threats' seems 'traditional/old school' or out of date in our time, as Europe is facing at the same time a military threat, immigration, threats to infrastructure, energy, and hybrid threats, including cyberattacks:

> When we are talking about a military threat, we are talking about an invasion, air attacks, missile attacks, etc. On one hand, I would not think that there would be a real possibility of something like that on Europe, excluding, of course, Greece and Turkey. On the other hand, however, would it be safe to say something like that after Ukraine? However, Russia, Turkey, and other powers – I do not think that they would start a conventional conflict. An unconventional approach would be more possible, for example separatist movements, extreme right and Eurosceptic movements, propaganda, fake news.

Dr Kunertova classifies Russia as a military threat to Europe, pointing out that nuclear dangers are 'not fiction'. In that vein she points out the need to maintain unity and Western resolve while dealing with the energy crisis and continuing to support Ukraine, along with the need for Europe to strengthen defence and deterrence without giving Putin an excuse to escalate the war. She also stresses that it should be ensured that the supply of energy commodities from Russia is discontinued, that European indigenous military capabilities are built up, and that European supply chains are not vulnerable to external disruptions. Beyond Russia, Dr Kunertova characterises China's infrastructure projects as an economic threat.

However, not everyone agrees on the scale of the actual military threat posed by Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. Dr Ziogas doubts that Russia should be considered a conventional military threat to Europe. The war in Ukraine has revealed unexpected shortcomings in the Russian army, whose prestige has taken a serious hit:

> The Russian Federation has been clearly classified – doubtlessly, after the NATO summit at Vilnius – as a threat to the West, and this will be hard to change while Vladimir Putin remains as a leader of the country. Undoubtedly, the end of the war in Ukraine will redefine the axis that defines the European order – at least in the second quarter of the twenty-first century. The European security architecture will be mainly about the development of the Euro-Atlantic relations and, of course, Russia's role and position.
>
> It is a fact that, in the periphery of the EU, the majority of the sixteen countries included in the European Neighbourhood Policy are facing internal or bilateral problems which undermine regional cooperation and stability. The war between Israel and Hamas is another serious crisis close in proximity to the EU. Obviously there is no direct military threat to the EU, but the problematic conditions affect security in the European space. At the same time Turkey, despite the reduction of tensions during the last months, is promoting its revisionist foreign policy, threatening two EU Member States – Greece and the Republic of Cyprus – with military force. So, the possibility that an EU Member State gets in a military conflict with Turkey has not disappeared.

European army: Views from Greece

Taking all this into account, is it possible to still talk about a 'true' EU army? It is worth mentioning that the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, has talked about a 'mature proposal', and the Minister of Defence, Nikos Dendias, has repeatedly talked about promoting a common defence culture in the EU and calling for an autonomous defence branch that would be compatible with NATO and work with it.

The Greek experts who spoke with the journal Future Europe think there are many hurdles along the way. Apart from the strictly practical/military complications that come with it (integration of units and troops from different militaries, with different equipment, training, etc.), there is the burning question of mandate. For example, would an EU army enter and operate somewhere that NATO does not? Would there be a mandate from another international organisation? As Dr Filis points out, this is something that would happen more on an ad hoc basis – perhaps in the context of an agreement between some

Member States (for example like what was agreed between France and Greece regarding the Sahel):

> This is the kind of agreement I would expect to see, bilateral or multilateral – not in a really European context, but between countries. For example, in a crisis, would the EU army intervene without NATO's knowledge and agreement? Obviously not. So, why would not NATO intervene itself? However, on some occasions it might actually be better to send the EU army instead of NATO. We are always talking about complementarity.

Regarding the rearmament of EU Member States, Dr Ziogas says that France has been expanding and increasing its role and capabilities (especially since Brexit), while Germany and Poland are increasing their military strength. Generally speaking, more or less all EU Member States have decided to improve their defence capabilities. He adds that if the Member States decided to create an EU army, it is Germany that would define, by its stance, the force's main characteristics. Berlin has obviously realised, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that Germany's lack of military strength reduces its capability to exert more serious influence. However, he does not seem certain at all that the war in Ukraine would speed up the procedures for creating an EU army. As he notes, a key point for a potential decision on the creation of an EU army and its structure would be its relation to NATO – and how the US and the UK would accept the transfer of forces from the Atlantic context to the European one, and, in addition to that, independently from NATO:

> If there is a decision to start something like that, it is my belief that there will be disagreements among EU Member States on where its command/headquarters would be, on its staffing and on its funding. The most likely scenario would be the option of complementarity: this would mean that the main Atlantic choices in the fields of defence and security will be preserved, there will be no cases of strategic divergence regarding the position and role held by Germany, and, in terms of a public gesture, the pro-European positions will be satisfied.

However, he clarifies that it is premature to talk about an EU army independent of the Atlantic context if there is no political decision about the defence autonomisation of the EU.

In conclusion, realistically speaking, there does not seem to be a real chance for the creation of a true EU army as an independent, strategically autonomous military force – at least in the foreseeable future. The most prevalent idea within NATO seems to be that the best way to proceed would be the formation of an 'army', without calling it an army, with the EU investing in aligning technical standards and procedures between the armies of the different countries so that, if the need arises, they will be able to 'merge' and act as one powerful military force.

War, common defence, and European societies: Public opinion

Polls show that most Europeans are in favour of common defence – although things are a bit more complicated regarding a common army. In an EU-wide survey carried out in June 2023, the Eurobarometer demonstrated wide support among European citizens for stronger EU defence cooperation and increased defence spending. The support for a common defence and security policy among EU Member States remained steady at 77 per cent. Over the longer term, public support has been relatively stable since spring 2020. The majority of citizens in each Member State are in favour of a common defence and security policy among EU Member States, with support ranging from 92 per cent of respondents in Luxembourg to 56 per cent in Austria, 65 per cent in Malta, and 66 per cent in Bulgaria. Eight in ten Europeans agree that cooperation in defence matters at the EU level should be increased, 77 per cent agree that Member States' coordinated purchases of military equipment should be improved, and two-thirds (66 per cent) of EU citizens agree that more money should be spent on defence in the EU.

The concept of European air operations is under development, with the aforementioned sources saying that capabilities for cyber and space operations should be developed in the coming years.

The fifth edition of the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit's (European Parliament) assembly of surveys on

the war in Ukraine focused on surveys conducted or published from 25 March to 1 April 2022. Among others, in a multi-country survey, on the issue of a common EU army, 60 per cent were in favour, with the greatest support seen in Portugal, Poland, Belgium, Lithuania, Spain, and Romania.

In a YouGov poll conducted with the European University Institute for the 2022 State of the Union conference in Florence, it was shown that support had risen for an integrated European army since the previous year. Of the seventeen countries surveyed, there was net support for an integrated European army in all except Britain, the only non-EU member surveyed, which was split 34 per cent in support and 35 per cent opposed.

The conflict has shown once again that geopolitics and foreign relations and affairs do not evolve or move as we would like, and that war and the use of military force are still included in the 'toolboxes' of nation states – especially the more powerful ones.

However, a research paper (European Public Opinion on the Challenges and Future of EU Foreign and Security Policy – JOINT) illustrating the results of a survey conducted in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Spain reveals a strong demand for more EU Foreign and Security Policy (EUFSP). However, although there is support for greater defence capacities at the EU level, the majority remain unwilling to relinquish national armies for a unified force: 61 per cent of respondents view the coordination of national armies at the EU level as the best possible solution. The concept of an EU army replacing national armies is supported by only 21 per cent in Italy, 19 per cent in Germany, 18 per cent in Spain, 16 per cent in Greece, 16 per cent in France, and 13 per cent in Spain.

Generally, it could be said that there are two tendencies within Europe: the countries that depend on NATO for their security (mainly Eastern European countries, the Baltics, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, and Germany) and the south (France, Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Malta, Cyprus) have a different understanding about security. In that vein, it should be noted that it is the southern European countries that possess both considerable air/naval and land military strength. In general, Europeans perceive threats according to geography: those along the external borders feel the threat from revisionist powers such as Russia and Turkey, while that is not the case for Central Europe.

In addition, the conflict has shown once again that geopolitics and foreign relations and affairs do not evolve or move as we would like, and that war and the use of military force are still included in the 'toolboxes' of nation states – especially the more powerful ones. As Dr Ziogas says, after the Second World War and the Cold War, the West experienced unprecedented prosperity and security – but the situation is evolving. It cannot be said with certainty whether the crises on Europe's periphery and within it will affect European integration/unification in a positive way. As Dr Ziogas notes, 'it cannot be disputed that, when the prosperity and security of the European societies are threatened, the political agenda is redefined. The multiple crises that the EU has experienced during the last decade have brought into light the realities and the true extent of its integration in terms of societies, not declarations or the wishes of the elites. The current res gestae are showing that European societies are still not ready to accept further transfer of powers from nation states to the EU.'

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SECTION 3

Democracy at the Core of European Security

ARTICLE

Security in Peril

Disinformation Challenges to Democratic Stability in the Western Balkans and Kosovo

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Citation suggestion: Valon Kurhasani, VK (2024). Security in Peril. Disinformation Challenges to Democratic Stability in the Western Balkans and Kosovo. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 89–99.

The views expressed here are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of NDI

Abstract

In recent years, a concerning trend has emerged across the Western Balkans: a decline in citizens' valuation of democracy. Despite strong majorities expressing a preference for democracy, growing scepticism about its actual effectiveness is pervasive. This article delves into the factors contributing to this growing threat to democracy, such as the erosion of confidence in government institutions and the prioritisation of quality of life over democratic standards, especially among the youth. Together with the exacerbating influences on these trends of foreign powers such as Russia and China, persistent unresolved ethnic tensions, and political instability, these dynamics directly impact regional security and, ultimately, the defence of Europe.

The article examines a concerning shift in the perception of democracy within the region which has resulted in rising support for strong leaders and the decline of democratic values. External actors, particularly Russia and China, play a significant role in shaping internal factors through aggressive disinformation campaigns, fostering geopolitical alternatives, and challenging democratic ideals. These campaigns manipulate public opinion, escalate ethnic tensions, and erode trust in democratic processes. Addressing these multifaceted threats necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing media literacy initiatives, robust regulatory and self-regulatory frameworks, and strengthened international cooperation. Recognising these challenges as direct threats to European security – and boldly confronting them – is an urgent priority. Kosovo is taken as a case study since it stands at a crossroads where competing narratives collide, epitomising a profound clash between pro-democracy, pro-Western values and the pro-Russian sentiments fostered by Serbia's state-controlled media, particularly influential among Kosovo Serbs.

Introduction

The Western Balkans region, marked by historical complexities, ethnic diversity, and post-conflict transitions, is grappling with growing challenges to democratic institutions. Threats to democracy, such as disinformation campaigns, ethnic tensions, and political instability, have direct implications for not only for regional security but also for that of all of Europe. Recognising this link is crucial for developing sustainable solutions.

To effectively address the security threats emanating from these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the interconnected nature of security and democratic governance. Policy-makers must also recognise that the security of the Western Balkans is intricately linked to European security and its democratic values.

An effective response must tackle three key growing threats. Disinformation campaigns, fuelled by external actors and internal divisions, pose a significant threat to the democratic fabric of the Western Balkans. These campaigns manipulate public opinion, exacerbate ethnic tensions, and undermine trust in democratic processes. As disinformation often targets vulnerable fault lines within societies, countering these threats necessitates a multifaceted strategy that encompasses media literacy, self-regulatory frameworks, and international cooperation.

Moreover, growing ethnic tensions in the region continue to test the resilience of democratic institutions and to offer an entry point for exploitation by external actors. Historical grievances and unresolved conflicts contribute to an environment where democratic principles are undermined through exploitation of these vulnerabilities. Advancing the region's security requires not only fostering inclusivity but also implementing policies that mitigate ethnic divisions, ensuring a more stable and secure environment.

As disinformation often targets vulnerable fault lines within societies, countering these threats necessitates a multifaceted strategy that encompasses media literacy, self-regulatory frameworks, and international cooperation.

Political instability further compounds the security challenges facing the Western Balkans. Weak institutions, corruption, and a lack of transparency hinder the consolidation of democracy. A comprehensive approach demands reforms that strengthen the rule of law, enhance accountability and transparency, and promote effective governance, thereby fostering a stable political environment conducive to regional security. The Kosovo case represents a crossroads where competing narratives collide. On one side, there is a fervent push for sovereignty, human rights, and alignment with Western ideals, while on the other, a narrative emphasising historical ties and cultural affinities with Serbia fuels resistance to Western influence, advocating for closer ties with Russia. This complex dynamic reflects not only geopolitical tensions but also deeper socio-political complexities within Kosovo, with implications for the entire Western Balkans.

Perceptions of democracy: A dangerous retreat

Despite the optimism that democracy would thrive in the newly independent states emerging from the collapse of the Yugoslav Republic in the 1990s, the Western Balkans region has faced significant challenges to democracy in recent years (NDI, 2022c). Strongmen in the region have gained increasing support, while democratic values have seen a decline. This shift can be attributed to economic insecurity and the failure of democracy to deliver. Weak institutions and corrupt governance practices that preserve executive dominance, patronage, and informality have contributed to the decline of democracy in countries including Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania (Kapidžić, 2020). Key factors contributing to the challenges facing democracy in the Western Balkans include the prevalence of corruption, ethnic tensions, and disinformation efforts, which are successfully exploiting divisions within these countries, further complicating efforts to strengthen democratic values.

Although there has been notable progress since the 1990s in consolidating democracy across the six countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – this progress is being


Policia Civil prende três por tráfico
ATIVIDADE DELEGADA tem início na cidade
QUATRO SÃO PRESOS
AFOGAMENTO
GANCA-JORNAL

While the West, especially the United States and the European Union, have traditionally enjoyed popularity in the region, a noticeable decline in support has occurred. Russia and China are actively engaging in aggressive disinformation campaigns that promote anti-Western and anti-democratic narratives, influencing public attitudes.

undermined by several negative factors. The stalled EU and NATO expansion processes undermined European foreign policy in the region, while stagnant economies throughout the region and pervasive corruption are contributing to democratic backsliding and allowing Russia and China to gain influence.[65] Threats to democracy are escalating, with autocracy and nationalism on the rise, supported by Russia and China. Increasing emigration by the youth across the region serves as a poignant indicator of people rejecting corruption, conflict, and the lack of discernible progress.

The failure to integrate the Western Balkans into Europe is made even more damaging by the inability to resolve long-festering conflicts left over from the collapse of the Yugoslav Republic over a generation ago. The spectre of violence is real in Bosnia, fuelled by the Bosnian Serb leadership's pursuit of secessionist policies with the open support of Serbia and Russia (RFE/RL, 2022). North Macedonia, pressured with name and constitutional changes and painful concessions, faces frustration among the population with the slow EU integration process and increasing belief that the EU has never genuinely prioritised the Balkans and has shown little interest in including North Macedonia (Vangelov, 2023). Serbia's departure from pluralism and democratic principles fuels instability, with elections in December 2023 marred by irregularities, the targeting of civil society with smear campaigns, and a system of undermining independent media (Freedom House, 2023b). The failure to conclude the Kosovo–Serbia Dialogue and stalled EU membership negotiations have created vulnerabilities, allowing for increased Russian involvement and regional instability. Alarmingly, Kosovo citizens, especially the youth, are losing faith in democracy, which is especially troubling given the historically strong pro-Western views of the population. The failure to reach an agreement in the stalled 13-year-old EU-mediated Dialogue undermines Kosovo's hopes for economic growth and democratic and social development (Freedom House, 2023a).

Prior to 2022, the initiation of EU accession negotiations with Western Balkan countries faced impediments due to concerns over the EU's capacity to absorb new members and issues related to the rule of law and corruption in potential candidate states. However, the landscape shifted following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, prompting Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to swiftly apply for EU membership. In response, the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova in June 2022 and accelerated the enlargement process for the Western Balkans.[66] Subsequently, accession negotiations were launched with Albania and North Macedonia in July 2022, and Bosnia and Herzegovina attained candidate status in December 2022.[67] Slow progress has been noted in the accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia, particularly regarding Serbia's alignment with EU foreign and security policies, as expected of candidate states.[68]

Public opinion research conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) underscores these worrisome trends in the Western Balkans. For example, the 2021 regional poll revealed uniformly negative trends since the 2018 poll regarding support for democratic norms and citizens' perception of foreign actors. Around two-thirds of the population surveyed believe that democracy in their nations is either worsening or remaining stagnant. While a majority still view democracy as the preferred system of government, as Figure 1 shows, there is a growing scepticism regarding the practical achievement of democratic ideals. Disinformation and foreign illiberal influences ricochet across the region, negatively affecting public attitudes towards democratisation processes (NDI, 2022a).

People also associate democracy with the rule of law and equality under the law, but there is a lack of support for more liberal European values, particularly in terms of minority and LGBTQ+ inclusion (see Figure 2). These trends indicate the fragility of democracy around the region as the rights of minorities are always the first to be attacked on the road to authoritarianism.

Shifting allegiances: The West vs Russia and China

While the West, especially the United States and the European Union, have traditionally enjoyed popularity in the region, a noticeable decline in support has occurred. Russia and China are actively engaging in aggressive disinformation campaigns that promote anti-Western and anti-democratic narratives, influencing public attitudes. Public backing for the EU has waned, with increasing favourability towards the Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia (Haddad, 2021). This shift has been triggered in part by aggressive disinformation campaigns by Russia and China (Sunter, 2020).

Figure 1 Opinions on state of democracy

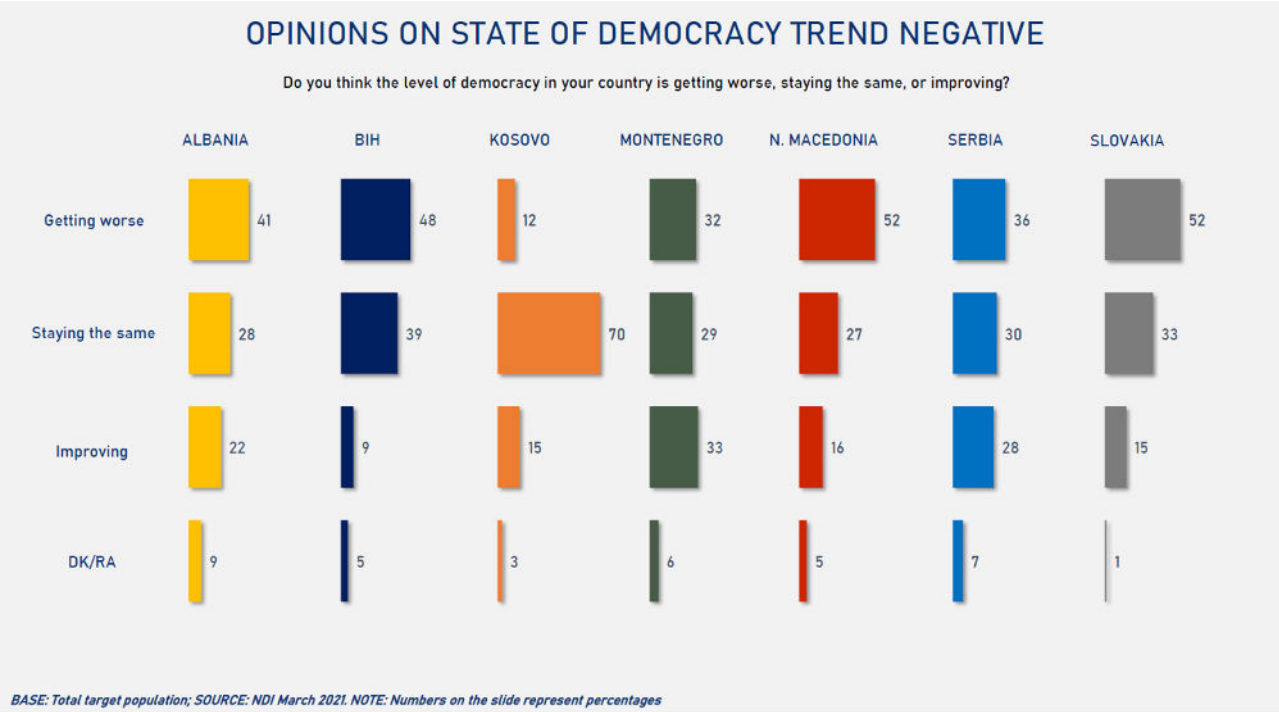


Figure 2 Disinformation on western intentions behind democracy

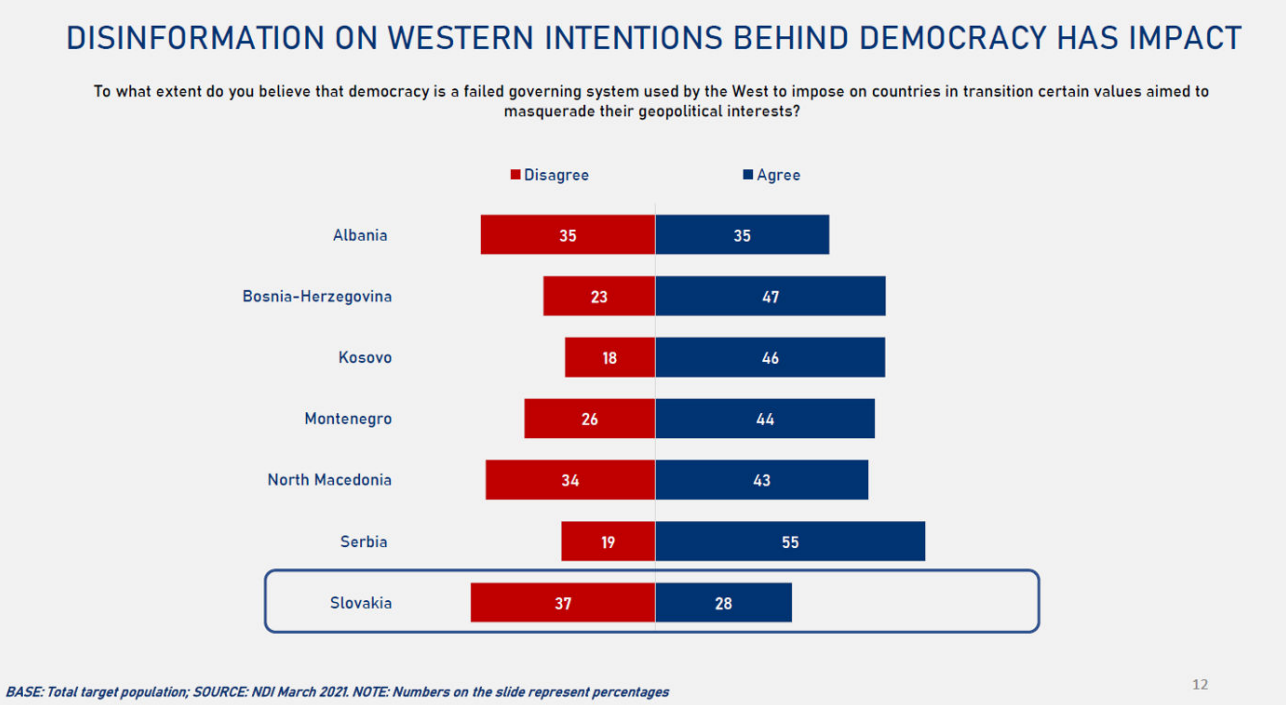


Figure 3 Equal acceptance of democracy and authoritarian governance

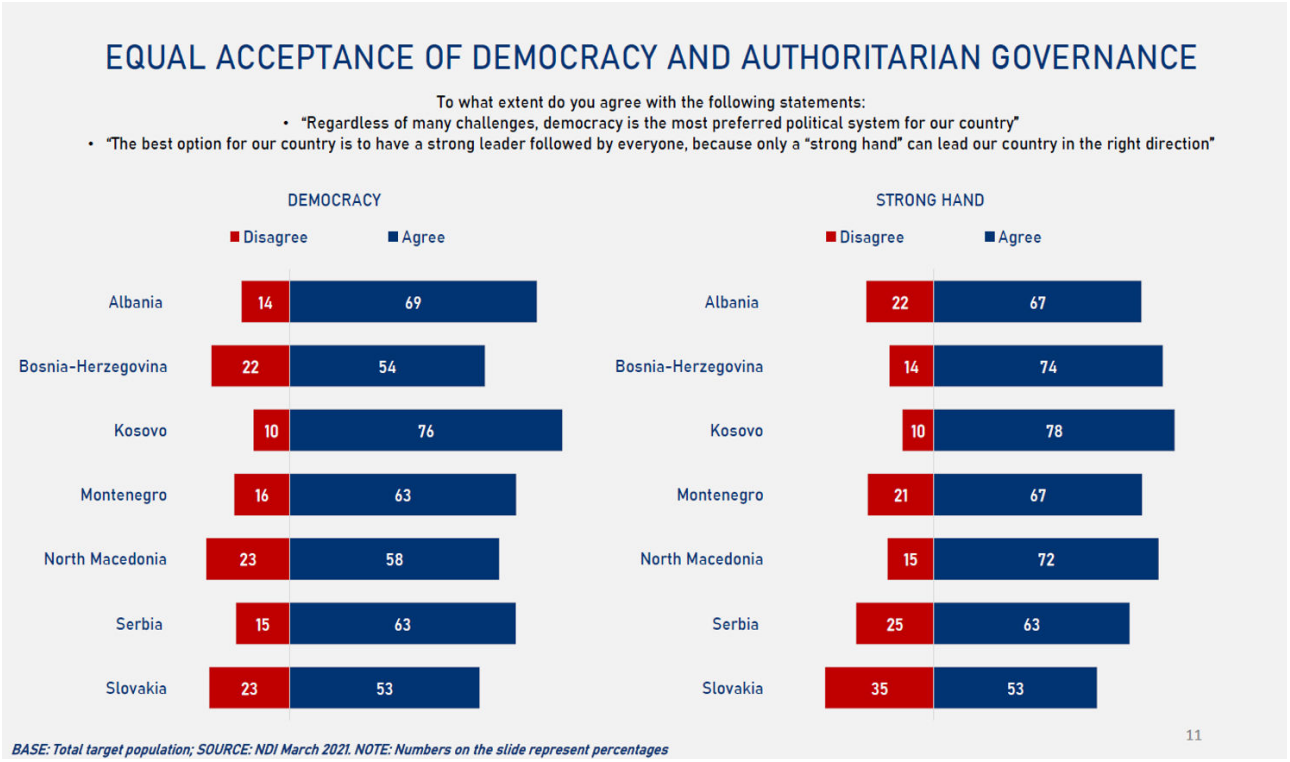


Figure 4 Quality of life over democracy

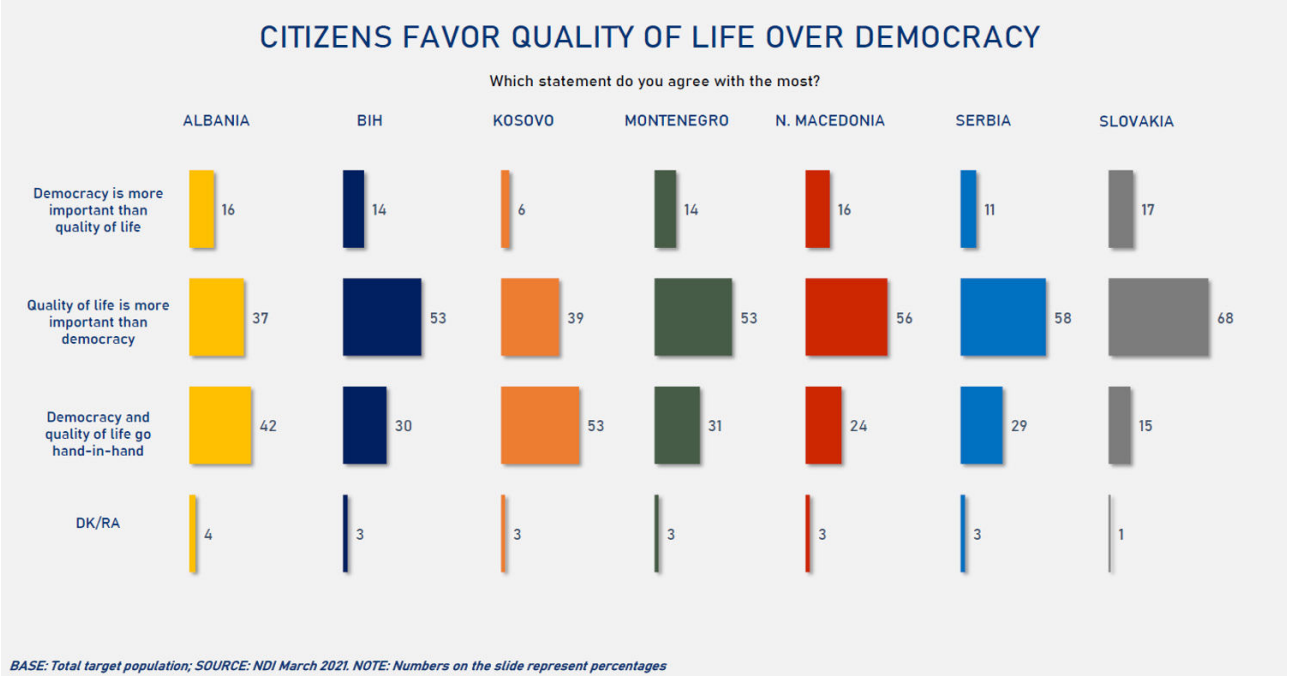


Figure 5 Opinion about European Union

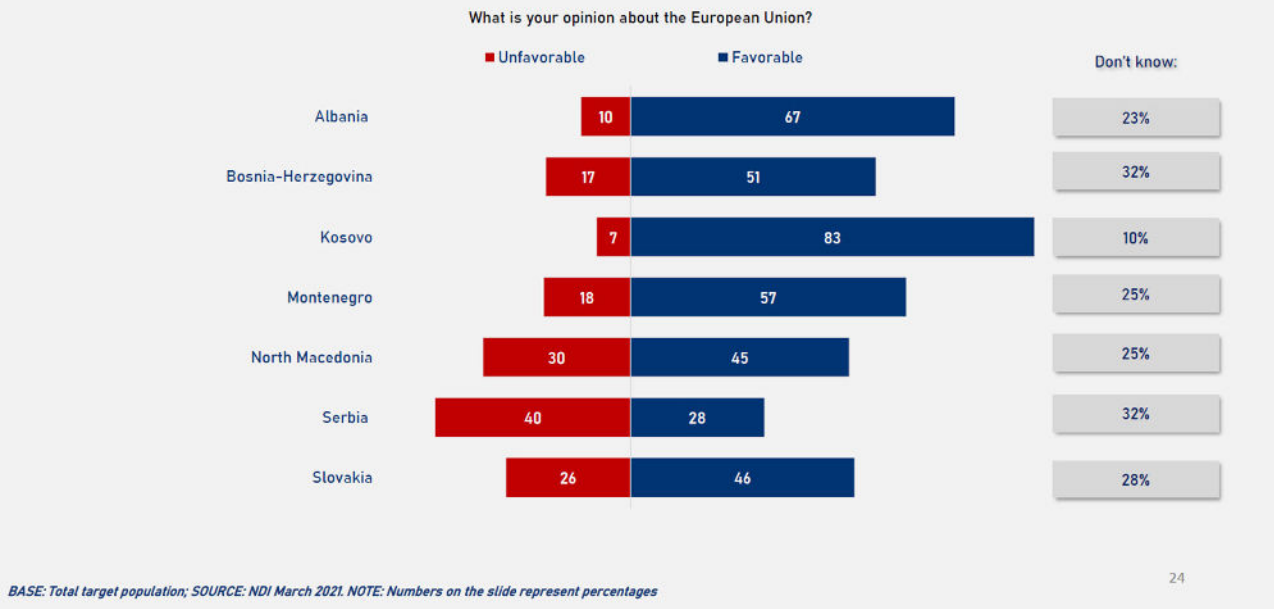


Figure 6 Opinion about Russia

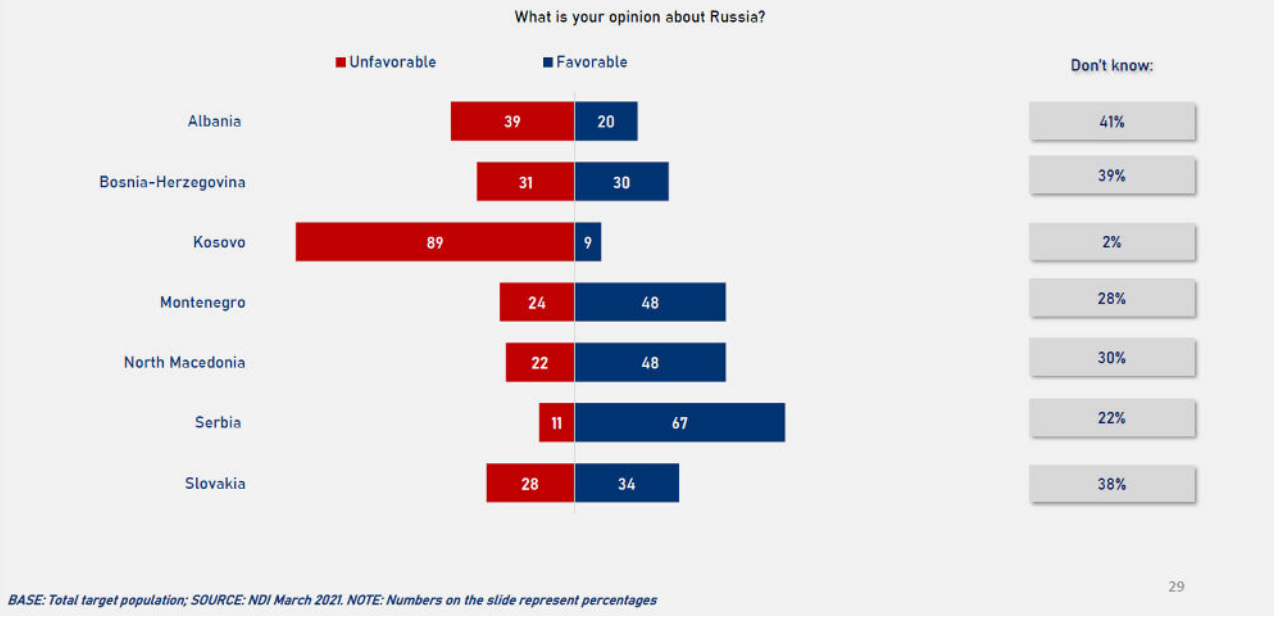


Figure 7 Opinion about China

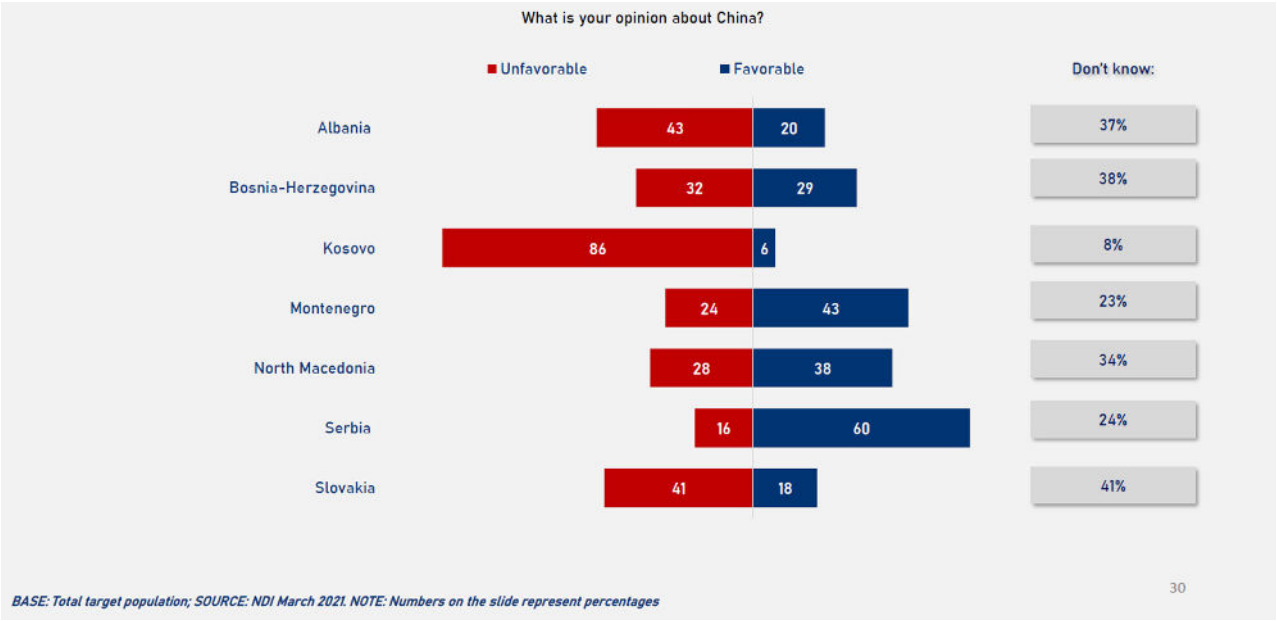
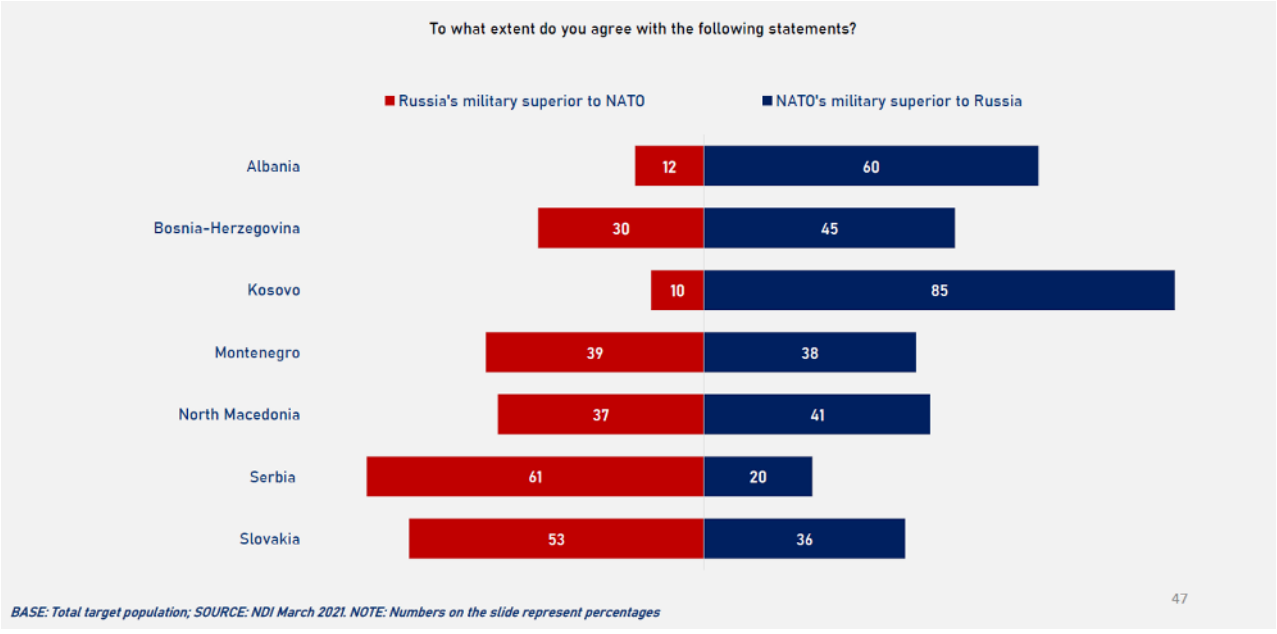


Figure 8 Statements: Russia vs. NATO military superiority



The Western Balkan region has re-emerged on the world stage as a focal point for great-power competition. While China advances its Belt and Road Initiative, featuring a substantial Balkan component, Russia is concurrently establishing itself as a prominent cyber player, exerting disruptive influence through global disinformation and engaging in hacking attacks on governmental and corporate networks (HIR, 2020). Policymakers must not forget that, in the contemporary multipolar global landscape, smaller nations, such as those in the Balkans, can assume a significant strategic role. Should a major global power continue to fail to meet their needs, these smaller countries are prepared to engage with alternative competing forces. We must grasp the critical importance of the Balkans region to major powers due to strategic, political, and economic considerations – and act more boldly to ensure the security of the region.

Consequently, the NDI regional poll (NDI, 2022a) suggests that more individuals are exploring geopolitical alternatives as a 'quick fix' to improve their quality of life, creating space for malign foreign influencers and their disinformation campaigns. Disturbingly, there is now equal support for autocratic leadership and democracy, as people no longer associate quality of life with democratic values or prioritise the European integration process. Ultimately, most people across the region are willing to sacrifice democracy for an improvement in their quality of life, even if it proves unsustainable.

The poll (NDI, 2022a) also indicates that favorability towards the EU is high, though there are some weak spots in Serbia. In contrast, Russia is viewed favorably in most Western Balkans countries, with the exceptions of Albania and Kosovo.

The final Figure (8) comparing views on Russia's military strength vs that of NATO conveys a significant narrative about the disinformation campaigns that have fuelled pro-Russian and anti-Western/anti-NATO sentiments. Notably, negative views of NATO mostly originate from Serbia and Slovakia, the latter of which is a member of both a NATO and the EU member country. Conversely. At the same time, vulnerabilities are evident in North Macedonia and Montenegro despite their NATO membership, although neither is an EU member (NDI, 2022a).

Security challenges intertwined with the intricate tapestry of democratic governance

The need for a comprehensive strategy has become increasingly evident as disinformation campaigns, manipulation of public opinion, and eroding trust in democratic institutions are intertwined and together undermine the very essence of European security. Addressing these issues urgently requires a thoughtful and interconnected response.

The region's historical backdrop, characterised by ethnic and political divides, plays a pivotal role in shaping the challenges that it faces. External actors have sought to exploit these divisions; thus, it is imperative to bridge gaps and foster inter-ethnic dialogue. It is clear that building a resilient democratic environment hinges on mitigating ethnic tensions, acknowledging their potential to compromise national security.

While enduring political principles such as the rule of law, transparency, and anti-corruption serve as essential long-term defences against illegitimate influence, immediate measures to counter hostile foreign interference involve several impactful strategies. These include raising awareness across various levels, dismantling, and exposing the mechanisms employed for spreading manipulative messages, emphasising lessons learned through regional cooperation, engaging in discussions with multi-stakeholder approaches on practices and solutions with diverse audiences, and equipping decision-makers to recognise and counter disinformation efforts (Zamfir, 2020).

Kosovo's media landscape is polarised, with Kosovo Albanians promoting pro-democracy narratives, while Serbia's tightly controlled media delivers the opposite, questioning democratic principles while spewing pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine narratives.

Kosovo: A bellwether of security challenges

Trends in Kosovo provide troubling insights into the challenges faced by the region. Kosovo stands at the crossroads of divergent narratives, as pro-democracy and pro-Western ideals clash with pro-Russian sentiments propagated by Serbia's state-controlled media and consumed by Kosovo Serbs.[69] On this battleground, Kosovo Serbs find themselves trapped in media bubbles, isolated from credible information about European integration, rule of law, and democratic institutions. Rather than fact-checking outside this bubble, Kosovo Serbs largely rely on friends and contacts for reality checks, which simply reinforces distorted news (NDI, 2022b).

Kosovo's media landscape is polarised, with Kosovo Albanians promoting pro-democracy narratives, while Serbia's tightly controlled media delivers the opposite, questioning democratic principles while spewing pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine narratives.[70] Kosovo Serbs, who constitute a crucial minority, have limited access to alternative perspectives due to under-resourced domestic Serbian outlets and language barriers. This lack of credible narratives poses a threat to Kosovo's unity and stability, exposing the country to anti-Western, anti-democratic narratives. NDI Kosovo survey findings from 2023 reveal a divided view of democratic systems among Kosovo Serbs, with half preferring a government driven by the will of the people and the other half wanting a single group or leader to be in charge. Despite valuing characteristics such as high living standards and human rights, scepticism towards democracy persists, exacerbated by media content endorsing Russian narratives and amplifying grievances against the EU and NATO.

Kosovo Serbs express sympathy towards Russia and China, assigning a favourable score of four out of five, viewing them as friends, but not as a role model for Kosovo's own governance structure. Misperceptions about Russian power is common, with a substantial 43 per cent believing in the superiority of the Russian military over NATOs, while 23 per cent believe NATO's military is superior to that of Russia. A majority align with Russian narratives on the war in Ukraine, blaming NATO and the US for the consequences. Additionally, there is a notable lack of support for sanctions against Russia, with 75 per cent expressing opposition to such measures.

Proactive and collaborative strategies

The complex interplay of factors, including conflicted views of democracy, the erosion of institutional confidence, economic concerns, and shifting geopolitical alliances, paints a multifaceted picture of the challenges facing countries in the Western Balkans. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced approach that considers both domestic and international dynamics, as well as the role of disinformation campaigns in shaping public opinion, inter-ethnic tensions, and political instability. Key recommendations include:

- **Strengthen democratic institutions**: Enhance the resilience of democratic institutions in the Western Balkans to withstand threats such as disinformation campaigns, ethnic tensions, and political instability. This should involve reforms to strengthen the rule of law, enhance accountability and transparency, and promote effective governance.

- **Enhance regional security**: Recognise that the security of the Western Balkans is intricately linked to Europe's security and its democratic values. Therefore, any threats to democracy in the Western Balkans should be viewed as direct threats to European security. Encourage the Western Balkan countries to enhance collaboration on security and defense matters through existing regional mechanisms. In addition, provide assistance and support to Western Balkan countries in reforming their defense sectors to align with NATO standards and best practices is imperative.

- **Foster international cooperation**: Strengthen international cooperation to confront the challenges posed by external actors such as Russia and China. This could involve diplomatic engagements, strategic partnerships, and collaborative initiatives.

- **Counter disinformation**: Develop a comprehensive strategy to counter disinformation campaigns that manipulate public opinion, exacerbate ethnic tensions, and undermine trust in democratic processes. This strategy could encompass media literacy initiatives, robust regulatory and self-regulatory frameworks, and international cooperation.

- **Address ethnic tensions**: Implement policies that mitigate ethnic divisions and foster inclusivity. Resolving the festering conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and between Serbia and Kosovo is a necessary step. This could help create a more stable and secure environment, reducing the opportunities for external actors to exploit these divisions.

- **Promote democratic values**: Encourage citizens, especially the youth, to value democracy and understand its effectiveness. This could involve education initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and opportunities for civic engagement. It is imperative for the governments and stakeholders in the Western Balkans to prioritise democratic reforms and address the underlying issues that threaten the democratic fabric of the region. By fostering transparent and accountable governance, promoting inclusive political participation, and combating corruption, the countries in the Western Balkans can work towards strengthening their democratic institutions and values.

One crucial aspect is the need to strengthen the rule of law and ensure that legal institutions are independent and free from political interference. This will help in addressing issues of corruption and ensuring fair and impartial justice.

As we reflect on the current situation, it is evident that the U.S. and EU cannot afford to overlook the political and security concerns in the Western Balkans. The challenges faced by the region, fuelled by disinformation, shifting perceptions of democracy, and geopolitical complexities, require a steadfast commitment to proactive and collaborative strategies. Europe will be neither stable nor secure without these steps.

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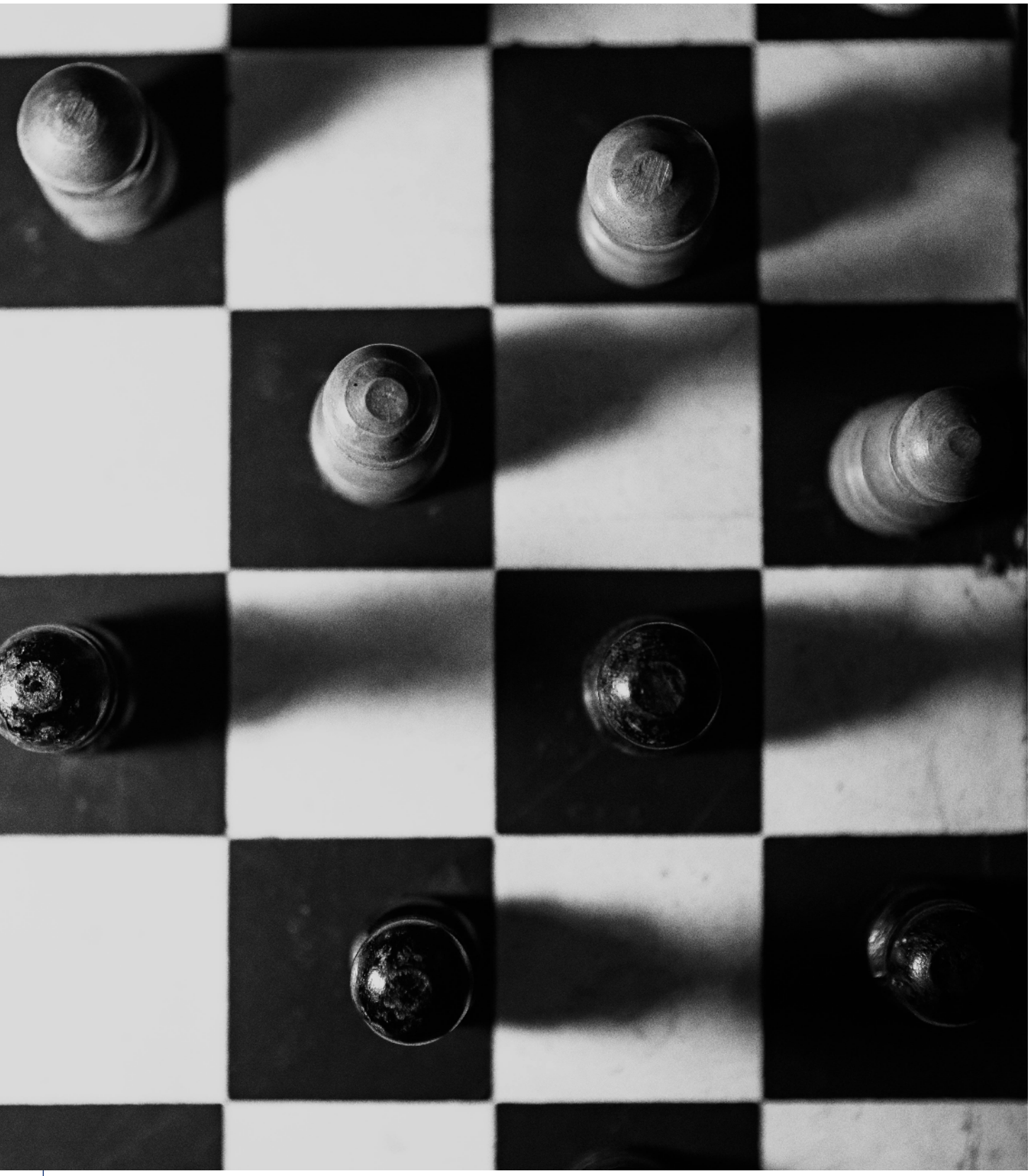

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ARTICLE

Alarming Populist Threats in Europe

The Rise of Far-Right and Far-Left Parties and Lessons from their Competing Positions towards Russia's Aggression War against Ukraine

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Citation suggestion: Silvia Nadjivan, SN (2024). Alarming Populist Threats in Europe. The Rise of Far-Right and Far-Left Parties and Lessons from their Competing Positions towards Russia's Aggression War against Ukraine. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 101–109.

Introduction

Recent election results (see Politico n.y.a) across Europe make it clear: populist parties, both right- and left-wing populist, are currently appealing to more voters with simplified, polarising, and even polemical answers to complex problems.[71] Just to name some, the German right-wing populist party AfD gained 10.3 % at the parliamentary elections in 2021, the German Linke (Left) 4.9 % (before its dissolution in 2023). The Austrian right-populist party FPÖ gained 16.2 % at the Austrian parliamentary elections, while in Hungary the ruling right-wing-populist party Fidesz gained 54.1 % at the parliamentary elections in 2022. (Nadjivan et al., 2023) In Poland the long-year ruling right-wing-populist party PiS for the first time lost 8.2 % of votes, compared to 2019. With 35.4 % it is still the party with the most votes, but in opposition due to the finally successful coalition negotiations among the (mostly) liberal-democratic parties (Politico, n.y.b).

However, both right-wing and left-wing populist parties benefit from social dissatisfaction. After left-wing populists profited from the financial and economic crisis since 2007 and the then necessary EU fiscal policy since 2010, it was the migration (policy) crisis with its peak in 2015 right-wing populists could instrumentalise for their nationalist power interests. In government, especially right-wing populists torpedo a common European foreign, security and defence policy as the Fidesz regime in Hungary and former PiS regime in Poland have shown.

Moreover, populist parties, either right or left-wing pose a serious threat not only to liberal democracy, but also to security in whole Europe. Since the start of Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine it has become clear that Russia has for years forged a hybrid war against Europe. This includes disinformation and fake news as well as infiltration by financing anti-democratic populist parties which serve as Putin's mouthpieces within Europe. Depending on their concrete position, either in national government or opposition, or even in European parliament, they are able to influence the public by pro-Russian propaganda, or to block a common foreign, security and defence policy.

Beyond competing ideological orientations three main positions regarding the ongoing war in Europe can be found: the pro-Ukrainian position, the ambivalent one and the pro-Russian position

From the angle of motivation to support Russia, the boundaries between right-wing and left-wing populist parties are blurring, while a new collaboration space among them has emerged. Therefore, beyond competing ideological orientations three main positions regarding the ongoing war in Europe can be found: the pro-Ukrainian position, the ambivalent one and the pro-Russian position.

To gain a Europe-wide overview, the comparative analysis includes 25 right-wing and left-wing populist parties from 13 EU-member countries,[72] and reveals their concrete threat to liberal democracy and security in Europe as well as the necessary steps to take against anti-democratic and anti-European infiltration.

The Populist Self-Legitimation and Polarising Narratives

An *ideal* playground for rising populism is maintained by the current polycrisis, or even "permacrisis" (Schneider, 2022) including the simultaneous raging of several crises such as the so-called refugee crisis since 2015, or migration (policy) crisis (despite different legal regulations), the Corona virus / Covid19 crisis and its aftermath since 2020, and since 2022 the international consequences of the Russian aggression war against Ukraine, the energy supply crisis as well as high inflation rates across Europe. (Prausmüller 2023)

In their orientation and agitation, all the 25 compared parties refer to the same basic populist patterns: 1) They pretend to speak for *the people* and portray those as a homogenous population. 2) They distinguish themselves from an imagined enemy that at the same time serves as a scapegoat for all problems. 3) With such friend-enemy images they ignore complex political, economic and social contexts, and instead promise simple solutions that cannot stand up to real circumstances. The host ideology is usually nationalism and nativism, meaning favouring native inhabitants as opposed to immigrants (Rabinowitz, 2023) on the right and socialism as well as anti-capitalism on the left side (Mudde, 2020, 15). They all share the same linkage to social dissatisfaction and the individual feeling of injustice and being disadvantaged (Möller, 2021: 11).

Nativist Narratives on the Right and Anti-capitalism Narratives on the Left

According to the (far) right-wing populist and nativist self-image, immigrants and refugees would threaten the autochthonous, or native European population, as they would replace them in the long term. The ideological and at the same time scandalous term for such a discriminating discourse has been invented by the French philosopher Renaud Camus with his book "Le Grand Remplacement" ("The Great Replacement"), published in France in 2011 (Camus, 2019). The right-wing populist parties analysed here refer to his paranoid image of the threatening "Islamisation of Europe" (Ekman, 2022).

Apart from those – by right-wing populists perceived – external enemies, internal so-called threats or enemies are social pluralism, multiculturalism, feminism and abortion rights as well as the LGBTIQ+ community. Accompanied by antifeminist mobilisation (Sauer, 2019), EU law violating restrictions on abortion rights and

same-sex partnerships have been introduced in Hungary and especially Poland with tragic consequences (Sauer); Inotai, 2023). In Italy and more recently in Austria, right-wing populists have started to question abortion rights (Straub, 2023; Ruep, 2023).

A Europe-wide comparison shows that there are more right-wing than left-wing populist parties across Europe. They have gained more votes than the left-wing populist forces in recent years, (Ey, 2023). Within left-wing populism, the fundamentally negative attitude towards capitalism often gives rise to a fundamental argumentative criticism of the existing democratic conditions. As with right-wing populism, this is based on a criticism of the entire political and economic elite (Meijers & Zaslove, 2021) and the polemic that democratic institutions are secretly controlled by "the corporations", "the rich" and "international finance capital" so that the interests of the citizens would be betrayed herein (Fücks, 2017: 79), as e.g. the rhetoric of the former German Linke and La France Insoumise clearly show (Nadjivan et al. 2023).

Different Scope of Action through National Positions

In opposition, populist parties often pressure centrist governments with inflammatory rhetoric, as in case of the Austrian FPÖ, German AfD or French Rassemblement National (RN) (Bauer 2023). As coalition partners, they appear overwhelmed by the challenges of complex problems such as financial difficulties and a necessary fiscal policy as in the case of the left-wing populist Italian Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement, M5S), the Spanish Podemos and Greek Syriza (Nadjivan et al. 2023). When in power in national governments, especially right-wing populist parties try to consolidate their power through anti-pluralist and autocratic policies. Having reached such power position, they prove to be a real threat to liberal democracy and the European integration. As the cases of Hungary and previously Poland show, the principles of humans rights, checks and balances as well as media freedom have been eroded by right-wing populist parties (Bauer 2023).

On the European level, against the background of the European parliament elections on 9 June 2024, the far-right political groups of the European parliament, the former Identity and Democracy Group (ID) previously including f.i. the Austrian FPÖ, German AfD, French RN and Dutch PVV, and the European Conservative and Reformists Group (ECR) under the post-fascist Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni threaten the hitherto European integration and prosperity (Nadjivan, Sustala 2024). The same is true for the newly formed far-right patriots for Europe group. All hitherto oppositional European far-right groups plan to reform or reconstruct Europe in the sense of bringing back the decision-making on national levels as a threatening backward step. While the previous ID and now Patriots for Europe group, and especially the Austrian FPÖ propagate a dystopian "Europe of free peoples and fatherlands" (FPÖ n.y.), the Italian PM Giorgia Meloni plans to reconstruct Europe according to the Italian model, which means to "send the left into opposition even in the EU" and to form a centre-right government with a united far-right block (Camut 2024).

Negative Campaigning from Right-wing Opposition

With their high-profile performance and propagandist demands, right-wing populist parties continuously put pressure on those in power, and parallelly prepare for the day (Bauer, 2023; Nadjivan et al., 2023) when they will sit at the levers of power, on national level as well as on the European one. This is the case for right-wing populists in Austria, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Greece and Bulgaria.

As the most popular right-wing populist in France, Marine le Pen from Rassemblement National (RN) exploits the fear of foreign infiltration in the autochthonous, or native society and population by performing as a national mother figure (Decker, 2023, 99; Bernarding, 2019). Her ID Group ally in the Netherlands, the far-right populist Geert Wilders with his primarily one-man party PVV has – with regards to previous opinion polls – surprisingly won the elections in November 2023 (Schaart et al., 2023). According to Politico's Poll of Polls (see Politico n.y.) the German far-right AfD might win more votes than the ruling social-democratic party SPD. In Spain, Greece and Italy, as first Mediterranean arrival countries for many refugees and migrants, far-right parties have been able to capitalise on the migration (policy) crisis. In contrast to Italy, in Spain and Greece, they have for now been kept out of governmental positions. (Kassam, 2023; Papadimitriou, 2023). In Bulgaria, the EU member state with the lowest GDP, the far-right party Vazrazhdane (Rebirth) has been benefiting from a serious political crisis since 2021 (Popiwanow, 2023), but for now remained in opposition.

Divergences in Left-wing Opposition and Government

The most consistent common thread in left-wing populist ideology is primarily a distinctive anti-capitalism, including an offensive anti-Americanism. For instance, the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ and KPÖ plus), Dutch SP, German Linke and French far-left La France Insoumise share the same anti-capitalist and EU-sceptic stance regarding socio-economic inequalities, but they have different views on immigration. (Waschinski, 2022) It is especially the Dutch SP that opposes immigration for the sake of Dutch natives (World Today 2023) – similar to right-wing populist narratives.

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In Italy, the first rising star M5S with an inconsistent immigration policy has soon been involved in coalition governments disputes that several times have led to governmental dissolution (Rüb, 2022) and finally paved the way for the post-fascist government under Giorgia Meloni (ktz & aar & dpa, 2022) with possibly serious consequences for liberal democracy in Europe (Broder 2022).

On the way to Autocracy under Right-wing Populist Governments

Hungary and Poland have experienced the consequences of right-wing populist parties ruling for more than ten years, that rely on connections to the far-right and the extremist fringe of the political spectrum. In the latest Freedom House Reports (2022, 2023) both countries are no longer defined as functioning democracies. In V-Dem's democracy index published in 2023, Poland is - after Kosovo, Colombia and Georgia - ranked at 78th and Hungary even worse at 94th place (V-Dem, 2023; Schwarzer, 2022: 145 f.).

Both countries have faced similar strategies and methods used by populist ruling parties to transform hitherto democracies into autocracies, starting with restrictions against independent judiciary and independent media, and against civil rights such as LGBTIQ+ and women's rights. (Bauer, 2023: 196; Dolna, 2023; Pędziwol, 2023). And in both countries, being also NATO members, the autocratic Fidesz and PiS regimes have for years prevented a common foreign, security and also migration policy, as they prioritised their own national interests opposed to European cohesion (Balfour, Lehne, 2024). Moreover, they used to back each other on the European level. So, the Article 7 proceedings (for violation of EU values), the European Commission has started against both countries, have still been going on due to their joint blocking (Tamma, 2022). In Hungary's case (Lynch, 2024), the EU has even freezed funding due to human rights and rule of law concerns (Hanke Vela, Chiappa, 2024). The fact that the European Commission paid originally frozen money to Hungary without the permission of the European Parliament might have legal consequences for the Commission (ibd.).

Hungary's relation to Poland however changed first due to Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine since 2022 and secondly due to the new liberal-democratic government under Donald Tusk since 2023. As a result, Poland supports a common European security and defence policy, and European military aid to Ukraine. On the contrary, Hungary together with his new ally Slovakia, also a NATO member, neglects any common European approach against the Russian warmonger (Przybylski, 2024). In Slovakia, the former Prime Minister Robert Fico won elections again with his left-wing populist party SMER, establishing a coalition with the ultra-nationalist SNS in October 2023. His government quickly announced new restrictions on independent media (Bayer, 2023), but 2024 changed to a pro-Ukrainian rhetoric. For probably rebuilding his "mafia state" (Allweiss, 2024) without any European interference, he has at least officially adopted the pro-Ukrainian position of EU decisionmakers (ibid.).

The specific relationship with Russia and with Vladimir Putin personally – whether being financially supported or not – determines the respective position of populist parties on the current Russian aggression war against Ukraine.

Competing Positions towards Russia and its War

The specific relationship with Russia and with Vladimir Putin personally – whether being financially supported or not – determines the respective position of populist parties on the current Russian aggression war against Ukraine. Three types of positions can be identified: 1) a clearly pro-Ukrainian, 2) an ambivalent and 3) a pro-Russian position. The latter is a dangerous gateway for the spread of Russian propaganda and disinformation, and thus hybrid war (Bachmann, Gunneriusson, 2015) against Western values and liberal democracies. From the angle of motivations to support Russia, the boundaries between right-wing and left-wing populist parties are blurring.

The pro-Ukrainian Position

Those populist parties and politicians who have not previously maintained any close relationship with Russia or Putin are firmly on the side of attacked Ukraine. These include, above all, the Polish PiS and Finnish party Perussuomalaiset, two parties evolving in countries located in the immediate vicinity of Russia and Ukraine and are therefore directly affected by the acts of war and their consequences. In Poland, a NATO member for several years, everyone unanimously shares the view that Russia is the aggressor and mostly supports assistance to Ukraine (Euronews, 2023). Finland, which was previously neutral, quickly, on 4 April 2023, became a NATO member to avoid the possible danger of being attacked itself (Lahti & Palonen, 2023). In Sweden, the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats also from the beginning supported the NATO accession process, initiated by the Swedish government (Tsp & AFP, 2023). On 7 March 2024, Sweden finally became the 32nd NATO member (Barth, 2024).

Even Giorgia Meloni, despite her post-fascist orientation, has taken a clear pro-Ukrainian stance, however in contrast to both of her coalition partners Lega and Forza Italia (Henneberger, 2022; Wermke, 2022; Kathe, 2023). Solidarity with Ukraine, combined with the willingness to provide financial, humanitarian, and military help, remains unbroken among these right-wing populist parties. However, not all far-right parties share this stance.

The Ambivalent Position

Many more populist parties take an ambivalent position towards the warmonger Putin. These are primarily parties that previously had a good relationship with Russia and Putin personally. Some of them were even financially supported by him, but gradually distanced themselves from Putin due to his aggression war against Ukraine, being a clear infringement of international law. Among these are e.g. the Italian Lega and Forza Italia, the Dutch PVV (Nijhuis et al., 2023), the French RN (Meister, 2023) and the VOX party in Spain (Marcos-Marne 2023).

Most of these parties agreed that measures to give in are necessary, but criticised that the EU sanctions against Russia would do more harm to Europe, or the respective nation-state, than to Russia. On the left, an inconsistent continuum of ambivalent attitudes is emerging within this fraction, along ideological and dogmatic lines. The diverse historical roots of left-wing populists in either pacifism, antimilitarism or nostalgia for the Soviet Union, have translated into various views on the question of arms supply to Ukraine. Apart from the Dutch SP, parts of the German Linke (before its broke-up in November 2023) as well as the Austrian KPÖ plus, the M5S, Syriza and Podemos have viewed arms deliveries with scepticism or rejection. (Kuhn, 2023; Nadjivan, et al. 2023) A deep intergovernmental discontent regarding the delivery of weapons to Ukraine on 21 July 2022 led to the collapse of the Italian government under Mario Draghi, formed together with M5S and Lega (Henneberger, 2022).

The pro-Russian Position

A particularly pronounced anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian stance is represented by the Bulgarian oppositional Vazrazhdane party. (Nikolov, 2023) All the other populist political players either in opposition or government seem to avoid such offensiveness. Among those who are steadfastly sticking to their loyal position to the warmonger Putin are the ruling Hungarian Fidesz, the German AfD, the Spanish VOX and the Austrian FPÖ. This position consists of not openly taking the side of Russia or Putin and thereby acting in an obviously pro-Russian manner, but rather to vehemently reject all sanctions measures against Russia and military aid for Ukraine (OTS, 2023a). These populist forces are trying to avoid the accusation and social ostracism of (explicitly) courting a warmonger and are torpedoing the EU, USA and NATO under the guise of being peacemakers and bridge builders themselves. (OTS, 2023b) Hungary under Orbán still maintains good and economically profitable relations with Russia, and FPÖ politicians have not convincingly distanced themselves from Putin, while Austria still depends on Russian gas (Szelényi, 2023; Lumetsberger, 2023).

In his protest against the military support to Ukraine, Jean-Luc Mélenchon from La France insoumise even collaborated with the far-right populist Eric Zemmour at a "Meeting for Peace" in March 2022 (Pantel, 2022). In their rhetoric, the left-wing populist Sahra Wagenknecht, who has after the breakup of Die Linke formed her new populist party BSW, and the right-wing populist Alice Weidel from AfD appear to even act as Putin's mouthpieces in Germany (Mayer, 2024).

Security Threats by Anti-European Infiltration

Despite political and ideological differences, the war in Ukraine seems to have created a new populist collaborating space, while security and defence issues related to the war in Ukraine are redefining the political spectrum in Europe. Relevant is not only the right- or left-wing orientation, but also the pluralist or autocratic approach of a political party, and its relation to Putin's Russia. In that sense, populist Russian-friendly disinformation and fake news are part of the Russian hybrid war against Europe. As such, the Russian regime has for years financially supported anti-European, populist parties to internally destabilise the European Union. Among those are f.i. the AfD, Dutch PVV, Italian parties such as Lega, Forza Italia and M5S, the French RN and Austrian FPÖ (Ivaldi, Zankina, 2023). Two years after the Russian invasion into Ukraine, Russia's impact on European

security and defence issues is getting more public attention. The French president Emmanuel Macron accused Marine le Pen of being on Putin's payroll (Caulcutt et al., 2022). A spy scandal around the Austrian secret service under the FPÖ ministerial term revealed possibly corrupt relations among some civil servants and the Russian regime (Bell, 2024). Apart from those connections with Russia, there has also been intriguing influence by China as f.i. the case of the AfD EU election candidate Maximilian Krah might show. Before his links to the Chinese secret service were uncovered, MEP Krah attracted attention in the EU parliament for his particularly pro-China position (Geisler, Stark, 2024). The immense danger of corruption the so-called Quatargate of 2022 has shown. Before MEP Eva Kaili was convicted of bribery, she also attracted attention in the EU Parliament through her advocacy in favour of Qatar and Morocco. The sum of 1.5 Million Euro in cash that the Belgian police found in her possession is said to have come from both governments. Kaili has since been charged with several offences relating to corruption, expelled from the S&D Group, released from pre-trial detention in shackles and is still active in the EU Parliament as a non-attached MEP. (ibid.) Particularly brazen is the fact that, with the help of her lawyers, she presents herself as the victim of a conspiracy and by that further polarises the public debate (Wax et al., 2023).

All those cases have made clear that security threats have reached national and European institutions which should instead guarantee human rights, checks and balances and by that liberal democracy in whole Europe.

Conclusion, Learnings and Prospects

Following this fast and inevitably incomplete overview of the role of populist forces in the transformation of the European security context, one question arises: How can populism, as a potential security threat to the EU, be countered without imitating?[73] There are two central points: Instead of remaining paralysed by the rule of mostly right-wing populist parties, one should rather be aware of its finitude (Meyer, 2023). Only in 2023, right-wing populist parties, such as VOX in Spain and PiS in Poland, suffered a setback. Conversely, the cases of Italy, Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Netherlands have shown how much disunity and bickering between liberal-democratic and pluralistic parties further accelerate the success of autocratic, anti-democratic populist parties.

To seriously and sustainably deal with security threatening populism which – as some cases show – goes hand in hand with corruption, a clear, unambiguous legislation (including the abolition of official secrecy) and consistent implementation is needed (Nadjivan, Sustala, 2023: 34). Stronger sanctions should also be considered at the EU level if democratic principles are undermined or attacked, and European standards are ignored (keyword: expand Article 7 and speed up procedures).

Russia's violation of international law by forging a brutal war against Ukraine and a hybrid war against whole Europe have pushed the continent in an unprecedent situation since WWII and the Cold War. What is urgently needed is a common foreign, security and defence policy of the European Union in cooperation with its partner states and organisations. A good practice appears to be the current Sky Shield initiative by some European states, including EU, NATO members and even neutral states like Switzerland and Austria.

Each EU member state has to prevent any unwanted influence, attack or infiltration by third parties. As shown, populists might serve as mouthpieces of third parties, so complete transparency regarding party finance and politician's (further) income are the key. And finally it is high time that the EU in international relations finally speaks with one voice, showing it is not only a generous global payer, but also a serious global player.

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OP-ED

The Romanian Illusion

Supporting Ukraine while Fuelling Domestic Autocracy

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From the day that Vladimir Putin's Russia invaded Ukraine, Europe has been reshaping its geopolitical agenda day by day. The Black Sea region is no exception, and, among its countries, Romania has some lessons to share: while all the Western allies have been focusing their attention on the conflict in neighbouring Ukraine, they have overlooked the current Romanian governance crisis, a mistake that may have high security costs.

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Starting with the bigger picture, for some countries the danger of a widening war in Ukraine has accelerated both governmental decisions and the political and legislative effort to strengthen the country-level framework needed to anticipate more dangerous scenarios. This has been accompanied by new defence strategies and spending. In particular, the countries on Europe's northern flank started to make rapid changes to their national security and defence frameworks as early as 2022. It only took Sweden and Finland a few months, and without a referendum, to decide that they wanted to join NATO (NATO, 2022). If we consider the case of Poland, a couple of months after the Russian invasion, in summer 2022, the country already had a new national defence law and had made the decision to increase its budget for defence to 3 per cent of GDP (Krzysztoszek, 2022). Recently Poland encouraged other NATO members to do the same (Reuters, 2024a), while its defence budget for 2024 is set at 4 per cent of GDP (DW, 2023). Further actions continue to be taken by other countries too. Most recently, Latvia committed to provide defence aid to Ukraine equal to 0.25 per cent of its GDP each year (Reuters, 2024b).

Where does Romania stand? A recent NATO (2024) report shows reasons to worry: despite a planned 2.5 per cent of GDP spending for defence in 2023, Romania actually only spent 1.6 per cent of its GDP (Roman, 2024) below the mandatory 2 per cent. This is not surprising given the current ruling coalition, which does a lot of talking but takes little action, while the state's inefficiency, and its spending, are increasing at a fast pace due to administrative spoils. For instance, the state has significantly increased the number of employees across multiple ministries and has continued to spend money hectically, despite the country already having a budget deficit issue.

There is, however, a certain sense of security that may fool one into believing the country also enjoys stability. As part of NATO, Romania's security is guaranteed. Romania has also contributed alongside the allies since the outbreak of the war with the maritime corridor, the land corridor for cereals, and the brokering of military assistance through Romanian territory.

Meanwhile, the regime in Romania sells itself to citizens as the coalition of stability. They use regional security tensions to emphasise that they – the

socialists and the conservatives – as the two biggest parties, are the only ones capable of ensuring a steady and secure future for the country. Alongside NATO, security may be ensured, yet stability remains an internal challenge, and it is nowhere to be seen – not when it comes to economic, social or political factors. For the latter, they call for stability, but they really mean stagnation – Brezhnev style.

The current regime is mired in budgetary disarray and shows clear evidence of autocratic tendencies. It is worrisome that despite the democratic framework and economic measures Romania put in place together with the EU, the country is now experiencing some Putin-like habits of selective justice, meddling by the secret services in the public sphere, and media capture at unprecedented levels. Just to give a couple of concrete examples, mayors from the opposition are being harassed by public institutions such as the National Anti-Corruption Directorate; there are clear linkages between the money spent by the ruling parties and the mass media; and current secret services agents are placed in high administrative positions, such as the secretary of state initially chosen to work on Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Even more worrisome, immediately after the war in Ukraine broke out, the main secret services agency in the country drafted a proposal to amend its own legislation which would have significantly increased its powers and dismantled any civilian control. After serious public outcry by the opposition and civil society, the subject disappeared into thin air, and nobody claimed authorship of the draft proposal. The secret services continue to function in a vast grey area, with credible testimonies of interference in politics and justice, which is clearly facilitated by the lack of concrete parliamentary control.

Despite not being a pro-Putin government, as in the case of Hungary, the current Bucharest regime is still prompting serious concerns about democracy. In Romania, people live under an anti-Putin putinist-like regime. Those in positions of power talk nice to Brussels, but they copy Putin and Viktor Orbán at home. Commonly used means to avoid sanctions or push back against criticism can be identified: they harass any existing opposition, especially the democratic one. This tendency has already been identified in Romania but has not been criticised: in the name of stability, the right and left are united in the common goal to keep control over the state. Because Romania's support to Ukraine is the priority, the US and EU member states seem to turn a blind eye to how Romania's current ruling system is deviating from the European values and principles that the country adhered to when it became a member of the EU.

Looking ahead to the upcoming rounds of elections in Romania, the country may now have a chance to stop its democratic decay. However, as a result of continuous poor governance, 2025 could bring a budgetary crisis in Romania. The first signs of this have already been seen, even by the European Commission itself: the budgetary deficit it has calculated is actually bigger than the one reported by the ruling coalition. In this context, an increase in mistrust in European mechanisms arises and potentially also a pushback against the EU, one caused by the current political will, mimicking stability for electoral gain instead of actually governing in the interest of the country and its citizens. The risk of a budgetary and political crisis in 2025, as the result of poor governance, is real. It may pave the way for the rise of populism, and that will surely be a more difficult issue on which to intervene.

An indirect effect of the war in Ukraine is that wobbly systems, such as the one in Romania, risk descending into autocracy.

An indirect effect of the war in Ukraine is that wobbly systems, such as the one in Romania, risk descending into autocracy. If the EU and NATO do not intervene now, the country risks bankruptcy and the strengthening of existing anti-European positions, both in government and in society. Brussels might want to stop downplaying it right now, or we may end up with another country in Europe ruled like Orbán's Hungary.

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ARTICLE

Strategic Corruption

Why Democratic Decline Is a Security Threat

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Citation suggestion: Garvan Walshe, GW (2024). Strategic Corruption. Why Democratic Decline Is a Security Threat. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 112–117.

Abstract

Globalisation has opened Western economies to influence and investment by authoritarian states like Russia and China. States with strong legal and democratic institutions are able to defend against them by applying the rule of law, investigating corruption, and limiting the extent to which elected and appointed officials can work for authoritarian governments after they leave office. However, countries that have begun to weaken or dismantle democratic institutions also undermine checks and balances against this foreign-authoritarian, or 'strategic' corruption opening up a new vector for authoritarian influence in the EU. This paper suggests ways EU institutions can be strengthened to mitigate this risk, and argues these should be organised specifically as measures against authoritarian influence rather than foreign influence per se.

Introduction

Across Europe, national populist movements such as Fidesz in Hungary and Law and Justice in Poland have degraded democratic institutions in the countries they rule and put the fundamental rights of EU citizens in danger. They undermine the judiciary, seize control of the media, and intimidate civil society and businesses. It is becoming clear, however, that the threat they pose is not limited to their own citizens, or even EU citizens more broadly, but has begun to affect the national security of Europe as a whole.

Their weakening of domestic restraints on the abuse of power has opened up a gap in our political and institutional defences that hostile authoritarian states, including China and Russia, have been all too eager to exploit through 'strategic corruption'. Moreover, these defensive initiatives, when presented as attempts to resist foreign interference, have often backfired. This framing plays into the hands of nationalist

Photo by Sora Shimazaki on Pexels

leaders, enabling them to evade EU institutions and member states' attempts to defend fundamental rights and democratic institutions from internal attack and external subversion alike.

Strategic corruption differs from ordinary corruption in that it does not necessarily try to make money but aims to influence the target state's foreign policy to serve the interests of the corrupting power. It creates relationships of financial dependency between a foreign authoritarian state and individual politicians or officials in a democracy. They break the law, deviate from publicly announced policy of relevance to the foreign state, or, at their most insidious, advance policies in the interests of the corrupting state at the expense of the interests or values of the country they ostensibly work for or the people they represent.

If the practice is hardly new (covert subsidies to other monarchs were a staple of diplomacy as far back as the Renaissance), the manner in which dictatorships such as China and Russia were given access to the international financial and economic system, giving them access to Western markets governed by the rule of law and anti-corruption legislation without requiring reciprocal regulations to be enforced on their economies and political systems, has caused it to proliferate. And unlike in the Renaissance, when covert subsidies were widely interchanged, modern democracies both lack the means and have often denied themselves the legal instruments required to penetrate Chinese and Russian politics in the way they penetrate ours. Unlike, for instance, Gazprom, our businesses are supposed to operate independently of government,[74] and our government budgets are public, which makes the establishment of slush funds for covert influence difficult. While Western intelligence services maintain activities that are necessarily shielded from detailed public scrutiny, they are subject to oversight and limited in scale compared with the moneys available to the Russian and Chinese intelligence apparatuses. (See Belton, 2020) Moreover, the smaller front organisations our intelligence services may operate must do business in the closed environment of dictatorships, with their employees at risk of brutal retaliation and certain torture if their activity is exposed.

This asymmetry has enabled the Russian and Chinese states to make broad inroads into the Western elite. A former chancellor of Germany served on the board of Gazprom. A former prime minister of Italy, US diplomats believed, received kickbacks on energy contracts with Russia (Evans, Harding, & Hooper, 2010) and was even praised for his 'corruption' in the obituary written for him by the officialist Russian Valdai Club think tank (Barabanov, 2023) under the heading 'Russia's Friend' (though it must be admitted Silvio Berlusconi was also engaged in large amounts of personal, non-strategic corruption). A former contender for the French presidency, known for his Russian links, chose to serve on the board of the Russian state-owned company Zarubezhneft.[75] A former British prime minister allowed a Chinese company to win a nuclear power plant construction contract and, after leaving office, tried to set up a fund that would invest Chinese money in British infrastructure projects (this did not stop David Cameron from returning to politics as foreign secretary). In the United States, it is not only Donald Trump who received money from foreign dictatorships; Democratic Senator Robert Menendez has been indicted for receiving bribes from the Egyptian government.

While the Russian practice of subversion and corruption may be the most well developed,[76] Moscow is hardly the only country whose opaque public finances allow it to deploy this instrument. What has changed recently is the weakening, within certain EU Member States, of the instruments designed to defend against all corruption, both foreign and domestic.

What is corruption?

While it is tempting for liberals to focus on the victims of populists' divisive campaigns (be they non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the queer community, or migrants), smearing them as enemies is just a device to consolidate power.[77] National populists' plan for government is more important.[78] They aim to replace constitutional checks and balances with a fake democracy where prosecutors ignore corruption by the government's allies, the media are prevented from reaching beyond the government's minority of opponents, independent-minded judges are demoted or sacked, and major businesses are brought under the control of the ruling elite. All this is done not by open oppression but by stifling political competition (Walshe, 2020) and applying formal rules unfairly (Sájo, 2021).

Corruption at first brings to mind an official taking bribes or awarding a contract to their brother-in-law, but its scope is actually much wider. It is the misuse of political power by acting against the purpose or beyond the powers of the public office in question, and the main way liberal democracies protect against such abuse is by separating and dividing authority.

Though no single EU Member State practises the full separation of powers developed in the United States, and the EU itself, though possessed of multiple institutions, departs from the US design in making the Commission, an unelected executive, the sole initiator of legislation (notwithstanding a convention that it takes other institutions' wishes into account), the principle is fundamental to liberal democratic society. To the classical theory we should also add that the three branches of government are not unitary bodies but are made of individual people whose roles and powers are also set down in law.[79]

National populists reject the very idea of these restraints, at least insofar as they apply to themselves and their movements: they believe their popular mandate at an election gives them

unbounded power to rule. The administration and its agencies ought, they think, to become subject to immediate political direction. The law offers officials no protection from being forced to act corruptly because it is ignored or can be (and often is) changed on the government's whim through a compliant parliament. 'Independent' boards often flourish in such regimes yet frequently do the executive's bidding. Nor is the judiciary independent, or the prosecutorial system impartial. Justice is selective and advantageous to the politically loyal.

The direct political, as distinct from legal, control of the administration opens up space for corruption when political loyalty matters more than applying the law. Strategic corruption is when it happens in foreign affairs (Zelkow et al 2020).

Interference and foreign policy

Viktor Orbán's government has passed a new law to create a state institution to investigate and expose foreign involvement in Hungary's politics. It was also caught taking out anti-immigrant YouTube ads in Poland during Poland's election campaign (Szabolcs, 2023). Hypocrisy aside, this serves to illustrate the porous nature of today's political and information environment. I chair Unhack Democracy, an NGO funded by, among others, US organisations, that works on strengthening democracy in Hungary. We are not that bothered by Orbán's new McCarthyite 'defence of national sovereignty bill'. We're proud to show Hungarian democrats that they're not alone.

In reality, all countries get involved in each other's affairs all the time, and this is to be expected in an open society. The question is what should count as permissible interference. We need to make distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate international activity.

Rather than making foreignness the criterion, which plays into the hands of nationalists (however insincere they are in practice), the difference between acceptable and unacceptable foreign influence should be distinguished based on principles of good government and fundamental rights. The problem with strategic corruption is not that it is foreign, it is that it is corrupt. Firstly, it uses illegitimate means: creating relationships of financial dependence that distort the behaviour of government officials. Worse, it advances the interests of hostile undemocratic regimes that want to do us harm.

Strategic corruption should be opposed from a universal, not a national standpoint. Universal because good government principles (codified, for example, in the Fundamentals cluster of the EU's enlargement methodology) and fundamental rights (codified in the EU Charter, but also in international human rights conventions) ought to apply everywhere. Our actions, and insofar as it is possible those of third countries, ought to reflect these principles; cross-border activity consistent with them should be permitted by foreign democratic states; and the EU and its Member States should be permitted to engage in such activity in all countries that have adopted international instruments such as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention Against Corruption.

Strategic corruption differs from ordinary corruption in that it does not necessarily try to make money but aims to influence the target state's foreign policy to serve the interests of the corrupting power. It creates relationships of financial dependency between a foreign authoritarian state and individual politicians or officials in a democracy.

Universality, however, does not mean the principles are neutral. They require us to take action in favour of fundamental rights and against corruption and apply instruments to tackle abuses by our own Member States as well as in third countries.

Thus, it should be perfectly reasonable for us to fund pro-democracy activity in Russia but forbid

Rather than making foreignness the criterion, which plays into the hands of nationalists (however insincere they are in practice), the difference between acceptable and unacceptable foreign influence should be distinguished based on principles of good government and fundamental rights. The problem with strategic corruption is not that it is foreign, it is that it is corrupt.

Russian-backed anti-democracy activity in the EU. We should have no problem with a democratic Russian state supporting activity genuinely aimed at improving human rights in Europe, but that is currently in rather short supply, and Russian democracy is a distant prospect.

Recommendations: Protecting democracy in a porous world

Erecting barriers against foreign political and economic activity in general reinforces national populism rather than protecting us against it. Instead we need to mount a defence in depth by strengthening our institutions and limiting the ability of unscrupulous officials to act outside the law (or change the law to enable them to act outside what the law should be) and reinforcing the law to prevent the creation of ties of financial obligation to foreign states, or entities associated with foreign states.

1. The first step is to make it harder for senior officials and politicians to receive money. A regulation should be passed to enable the Commission, in consultation with the Council, as these things are diplomatically sensitive, even though financial regulation is an exclusive Union competence, to draw up a list of high-risk countries. 'Politically exposed persons' (PEPs, as defined by EC/2015/847 on anti-money laundering) should be forbidden from entering into commercial or employment relationships with government-related entities in these countries, and senior public officials could be forbidden from dealing with them. The procurement directive (EC/2014/24) provides a useful definition of 'government-related' through its concept of 'bodies subject to public law'. Because strategic corruption often takes place through ostensibly independent entities that are inn fact controlled by a country's political leadership, this should be accompanied by an ultimate beneficial ownership test. The initiative could be made stronger still by requiring PEPs to prove that entities related to high-risk countries were actually independent of state control.

2. If more radical action is needed, the companies or individuals found to be sources of strategic corruption should have secondary sanctions applied to them, in a manner similar to the restrictions applied to another national security threat, terrorist organisations. Banks should not be allowed to provide them services, and other entities should not be allowed to have commercial relationships with them. As this measure might have significant economic effects, particularly in the energy sector, care would need to be taken to apply this measure proportionately.

3. Internal defences against democratic decline, which creates opportunities for strategic corruption, should also be strengthened. The EU has numerous tools to counter corruption but has often brought proceedings too slowly, thereby allowing national populist governments plenty of time to damage democracy in their countries. These governments, such as Orbán's in Hungary, are not averse to using political instruments, including vetoes on accession, the multiannual financial framework (MFF), and foreign policy, to deter the Commission from bringing infringement proceedings or seeking interim measures. While the Treaties give the Commission complete discretion in bringing such proceedings, making the establishment of a truly independent European body modelled on the German Verfassungsshutz impossible, an arms-length Rule of Law Enforcement Board could be set up within DGJUST. It could issue recommendations that the Commission would have to follow, unless explicitly overturned by the College; overturning such recommendations would carry a political cost.

4. The European Public Prosecutor's office is new and is already struggling with its workload. It is a vital bulwark against strategic corruption, particularly in Member States with weaker judicial and investigative authorities. Its budget should be increased commensurate with the work.

5. Corruption, strategic or not, is frequently exposed through investigative journalism, and countries with strong independent media, whether private or public

service, are best placed to uncover malfeasance in office. Now that the European Media Freedom Act has been adopted, it must be implemented with urgency.

6. Together with the media, civil society plays a vital role in analysing and investigating corruption and improving government transparency. Yet the EU's Citizens Equality Rights and Values (CERV) programme is unsuited for civil society. Funding is project based, but unlike funding for public works projects, organisations are not allowed to make a margin to defray administrative costs, cover project application risk finance depreciation, or build up reserves. Organisations in the sector struggle to maintain focus and are subject to the whims of foundations (such as the Open Society Foundation's decision to withdraw from the EU). Moreover, the administrative burden is excessive, particularly for many of the smaller, more nimble civil society organisations of which this sector is composed. As well as allowing organisations to make a reasonable margin on their project bids, the right balance between accountability and efficiency should be achieved by using the comparatively straightforward Erasmus+ process for future rounds of civil society funding.

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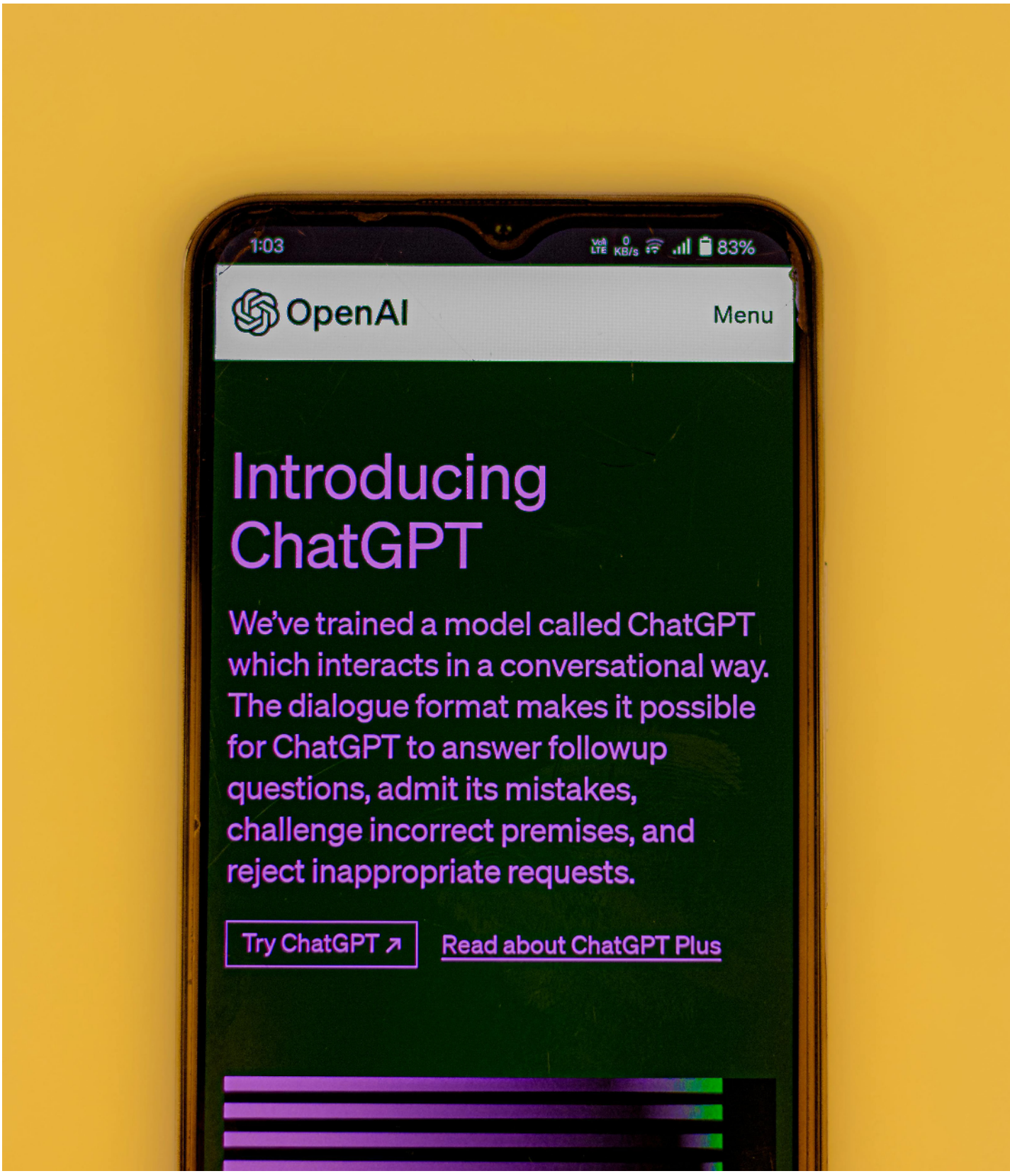
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SHORT ARTICLE

Europe's Fateful 2024 Elections

Under the Sign of War, Populism and Digital Disruption: What to Do?

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MATTHIAS PFEFFER
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Citation suggestion: Matthias Pfeffer, MP (2024). Europe's Fateful 2024 Elections. under the Sign of War, Populism and Digital Disruption: What to Do?. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 119–121.

Europe is at a crossroads. Due to the globademocracy and the current geopolitical shifts, fundamental decisions must be taken in the next legislative period of the future European Parliament and Commission to strengthen democracy and European integration and to fend off attacks from outside and within.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is also directed against Europe: it is a hybrid war in which alongside military weapons the weapons of propaganda, fake news and the manipulation of public opinion are used. These weapons are primarily used in the digital space, which is extremely vulnerable despite the EU's leading role in digital regulation. Disinformation is the biggest hybrid threat to democracies in Europe and European integration. While autocratic systems increasingly seal off their cyberspace, Europe offers the enemies of democracy one of the most vulnerable public spaces in the world.

The classic separation of external and internal security is not practicable in cyberspace due to the borderless nature of attacks. Europe must quickly find appropriate responses to this threat. In addition to increased efforts to protect against external and internal attacks, measures to strengthen trustworthy sources of information must be put in place.

For years, liberal democracy has been under threat worldwide. "Today, about 38 per cent of the world's population lives in countries that are not free, the highest proportion since 1997, and only about 20 per cent live in free countries," is how the American NGO Freedom House describes the global situation in 2023 in its latest Freedom of the World report.[80]

Above all, Europe can use digitalisation for its own purposes by developing and using AI-supported translation software that enables real-time translation into all European languages. Overcoming language barriers with the help of AI-based technology would be a historic step for Europe.

With democracy, freedom is also at risk. Liberal democracies are characterised by free elections, separation of powers, the rule of law, human and civil rights, and civil and political liberties, which are guaranteed by a constitution. And: Liberal democracies are deliberative democracies, borrowed from the Latin *deliberatio* meaning consultation, consideration. The term emphasises that public discourse, public deliberation, the participation of citizens in public communication and the interaction of deliberation and the decision-making process are fundamental to a democracy.

The foundation for this is free access to trustworthy information for all citizens that creates a generally shared reality. On this basis, citizens must be able to form their opinions in free exchange, which only leads to free decisions and therefore democratically legitimised governments in free elections. Plato already recognised the vulnerability of the public to moods and manipulation as the weak point of Attic democracy, which he therefore wanted to replace with the rule of philosophers. With the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere since the Age of Enlightenment, the question of a free, independent, and diverse press became a prerequisite for democratic systems.

Digital structural change in the public sphere

Today, this public sphere is at the mercy of a few globally dominant Big Tech companies, whose algorithms initially direct and "personalise" the flow of information, i.e., decide who receives what information. Since the triumph of generative AI like *ChatGPT,* in addition to distribution even the production of information is also increasingly subject to the intransparent regime of market-dominating platforms.

After twenty years of digital disruption by search engines and social media, both public and privately financed quality journalism has become economically suppressed. The high costs of quality journalism cannot be covered in the same way in the digital world as before. Especially since today over 59% of online advertising revenues worldwide go to two companies that do not employ a single journalist to check facts and generate news: Alphabet and Meta.[81]

Social media used to take no responsibility on their own initiative for the content they disseminate at all for over two decades. The first rules for organizational duty of care for the published content are only beginning to take effect through the European DSA and DMA regulations. But even today there is a big difference to quality media, which take responsibility for the accuracy of each individual article and compliance with all other legal provisions.

Social Media, in contrast, can still be used to provide citizens with false reports. Mis- and disinformation can find their way and destroy public trust. In this situation, the hybrid information war that Russia is waging against Europe acts as an accelerant. The 2024 EU Parliament elections took place under the threat of misinformation and false information, and therefore the rise in power of anti-democratic forces, which has never been greater in Europe since World War Two. In their aftermath, Europe has not only the opportunity, but the duty, to free itself from this self-inflicted digital dependency.

Own designing instead of mere regulation

Instead of always complaining about the market-dominating dominance of a few large platform companies and their often-negative contribution to the creation of the democratic process, it is time for Europe to shape the powerful technology of Artificial Intelligence according to its own core values and ideals and to put it into service of democracy and freedom. **Today, software exercises significant power of opinion by deciding what we learn about the world and that is why a European infrastructure is mandatory.** In the age of digitisation, a public service software infrastructure is needed that offers its own search and recommendation algorithms that do not lead into the narrowness of self-confirmation bubbles[82] but into the breadth of the view for and of others must secure the basic prerequisites of an open society.

Above all, Europe can use digitalisation for its own purposes by developing and using AI-supported translation software that enables real-time translation into all European languages. Overcoming language barriers with the help of AI-based technology would be a historic step for Europe, and it is feasible as a study of the German Research Center for Artificial

Intelligence (DFKI) commissioned by the European Parliament showed last year.[83] For the first time, communication can take place across language barriers throughout Europe. A European Pentecostal miracle of mutual understanding made possible by AI is within reach.

By developing trustworthy and robust translation technologies Europe can first time in history overcome the language borders and create a one-lingual single market, that enables huge new business models not only for media enterprises.

A European perspective for public and private quality media

Although the structural change in the media is also increasingly undermining their financing, Europe still has a strong media sector: Public Service Media alone receive 27 billion euros a year in fees from citizens within the EU in order to fulfil their mission to inform, educate and entertain.[84] However, the resulting news and information programmes are only available in the national media bubbles. They are invisible throughout Europe. Also, the private offers in the media are mostly dressing national audiences.

This news and information programmes could be made accessible to all citizens in Europe at a stroke with a minimal investment in translation technology. This would abruptly increase the diversity of trustworthy media offerings and also improve mutual understanding between neighbours. A side effect is that this investment would create a single multilingual market of 500 million users, which would also open up unimagined new opportunities for private media. And - finally - a single European space would be created for the first time in which public affairs, the "res publica" could be negotiated jointly among all Europeans. The small investment in this technology is a "low hanging fruit" in view of the enormous positive effects for Europe. Everything needed for this already exists, it just needs to be made accessible.

If Hanna Arendt is right that the ability to take the perspective of the other is the beginning of the political, then Europe today has the historic opportunity to truly become politically capable. It can do so by establishing a news and information network of quality media providers that gives all citizens access to trustworthy information. And that in all 24 official European languages. Therefore: Sapere Aude, Europe, have the courage to free yourself from your self-inflicted digital immaturity.

SHORT ARTICLE

Violent Co-destruction or Peaceful Coexistence?

The Future of the South Caucasus in the EU Security Architecture

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Citation suggestion: Viktorya Muradyan, VM (2024). Violent Co-destruction or Peaceful Coexistence? The Future of the South Caucasus in the EU Security Architecture. *Future Europe*, 5(1), 122–125.

Historically, the South Caucasus has been a battleground for influence among major powers due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. For decades, Russia has maintained a significant presence in the region, wielding considerable political and military influence. As the war in Ukraine is entering its third year, the significance of Europe's eastern neighbourhood in the overall security of the European Union has become more prominent. With bitter lessons learned from Ukraine, having failed to keep Belarus away from Russia's claws, and facing a ticking bomb of Kremlin-fuelled escalation in Moldova, the South Caucasus is currently among the most critical regions for the EU's geopolitical future. But this time, a lot more is at stake.

Everybody wants a piece of the pie

The South Caucasus, encompassing Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, holds a pivotal role in the geopolitical landscape of the European Union's eastern neighbourhood. Since 2020, the region has been in constant turmoil and has undergone a massive transformation. The Nagorno-Karabakh war, the escalation of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as domestic repressions in Azerbaijan and, more recently, in Georgia have proved that the gradual democratisation of the region in the early 2010s (before the Eastern Partnership became a political ghost) was fragile and in fact only superficial.

While in the past five years the South Caucasus has no longer been simply Russia's 'backyard', it has not been fully the EU's either. The European Union has long quietly competed for influence in its eastern

neighbourhood, mostly through exporting its values and soft power to help the ex-Soviet countries catch up with the rest of the continent. While traditionally the competition has been mostly with Russia, in recent years more regions and global actors, such as Iran and Türkiye, have started to take more ownership of the region.

One of the biggest players in the South Caucasus in recent years has been China. Much like in the Western Balkans, China has fully utilised economic and geostrategic opportunities to gradually make its way in without aggressively challenging any of the big or small powers and has even cooperated with them. The South Caucasus is the shortest corridor from China's western Xinjiang province to the EU and a strategic region for connectivity, trade, and energy. Almost a year ago, China and Georgia signed a strategic partnership agreement. In May 2024, China and Azerbaijan revamped their collaboration on the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative. China is also Armenia's second trade partner in terms of trade turnover, and the two countries have very friendly and cooperative relations.

China is not the only country using the weakening of Russia's influence to increase its presence in the region. In the past few years, three South Caucasus countries have strengthened their ties with the broader Middle East region, establishing more diplomatic representations and increasing cooperation on trade, investment, and infrastructure projects. In addition to Türkiye, Israel, and Iran, the list of South Caucasus 'suitors' now includes Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Türkiye seeks to enhance east–west connectivity, bypassing 'traditional Russia-sponsored' routes, and maintains close political and economic ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia. Iran aims to establish robust transport corridors to strengthen regional trade and energy infrastructure. Israel relies on Azerbaijan for significant oil supplies and military cooperation against Iran. Overall, the whole region serves as a vital link for trade, energy, and geopolitical influence for these Middle Eastern powers, with a potential that the EU has not yet fully acknowledged.

Another key aspect of the puzzle is that while the South Caucasus is no longer simply a zone of interest for Russia alone, the Kremlin hovers like the sword of Damocles over the three republics. The massive weeks-long protests against the 'foreign influence' law in Georgia are the most recent demonstration of how Kremlin-friendly oligarchy can strike at the most unexpected moment, threatening to completely alter the domestic and foreign policy course of any of the republics, throwing away years of hard work and consistent relationship-building with the West.

To sum up, the South Caucasus is up for grabs. Once a single-lane road controlled by one driver, it has now become a bustling intersection where each driver is trying to impose his own rules.

In contrast to the period when the South Caucasus was experiencing EU fever on the political and societal levels, the current governments of the three republics are much more pragmatic and are increasingly balancing their foreign policies among multiple powers. This pragmatism often translates to a willingness to engage with multiple players and keep options open to secure economic, security, and political benefits. At the same time, South Caucasus countries finally understand that they do not function in a vacuum, so at last there might be a window of opportunity to adopt a regional approach on top of a bilateral one, which so far has been impossible for the EU.

The stability of the South Caucasus is integral to the security of the European Union. Failing to recognise that right now and adopt a more proactive approach to the region as a whole would be a disastrous foreign policy decision and would cost the EU dearly.

By underestimating the influence and interests of any major actor in the region, the EU will once again reach an impasse in maintaining its sway and fostering stability, thus putting overall European security in danger.

Does Brussels miss the point?

Over the past decade, the European Union has established various partnerships and agreements with South Caucasus countries, aiming to foster stability, democratic governance, economic development, and European integration at a preferred pace. After it became clear that the multilateral Eastern Partnership platform was unable to bridge the major differences between the three countries of the region, the European Union moved to a tailored approach with each of these countries.

This approach worked up until the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, during which the EU's geoeconomic interests clashed directly with the values of democracy and human rights the Union had been trying to export to the region. For policymakers both in Brussels and in the Caucasus, it became apparent that the lack of a coherent regional policy and the inability or unwillingness to use its existing leverage to establish stability was harming the credibility of the EU. The lack of a coherent regional policy from the EU and the mixed signals it has sent are also the reason why motivation for the democratisation of the countries has declined, leaving an open door for foreign actors and more pragmatic, power-focused policies.

In addition, since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022, it has become undeniable that the South Caucasus is a critical region for the EU, particularly in terms of energy security and connectivity. The Southern Gas Corridor, which brings Caspian gas to Europe, reduces the EU's reliance on Russian energy supplies. However, the simple transfer of energy dependence from Russia to Azerbaijan and Türkiye (neither of which has the level of foreign policy alignment with the EU that it did previously) creates another set of challenges. As a prime example, Türkiye helped Russia cash €3 billion through a sanctions loophole, which allowed it to resell Russian oil to Europe by relabelling it.

Besides contributing to the EU's energy security, the region serves as a crucial transit route for goods and energy between Europe and Asia. The EU's loss of influence in the South Caucasus in favour of Russia, China, or even Türkiye would severely undermine the EU's strategic interests, making its eastern flank more vulnerable to external pressures and destabilisation. Ensuring the stability and alignment of the South Caucasus with European values and interests without compromising economic interests is essential for safeguarding the EU's security.

What's next on the agenda?

The EU must now double down on its efforts to engage the region, providing more robust support for political reforms, economic integration, and security cooperation. Initiatives such as increased infrastructure investment, enhanced political dialogue, and targeted assistance programmes can help fortify the region against external influence. However, these exercises will be futile and short-term if the European Union does not put democratisation at the core of its regional policy by maintaining a hard line against authoritarian and hybrid regimes in the region.

Nevertheless, even with robust economic cooperation, what kind of meaningful stability can we talk about if the citizens of these countries cannot benefit from that cooperation because of corruption and massive human rights abuses? Authoritarian governments have no value compass and no loyalties: they wage wars to justify their rule, dragging the whole region into more chaos and instability. To cut through this vicious cycle, the EU should actively engage in conflict resolution efforts and establish a proper cordon sanitaire against any form of aggression and abuse of power, both inside and outside these countries.

The May 2024 Memorandum of Understanding between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which commits to enhancing connectivity between Europe and Asia through the South Caucasus, is proof that policymakers are starting to catch up with the realities of the region.

The stability of the South Caucasus is integral to the security of the European Union. Failing to recognise that right now and adopt a more proactive approach to the region as a whole would be a disastrous foreign policy decision and would cost the EU dearly.

Policy recommendations

If the European Union were to create a regional strategy for the South Caucasus in the next mandate, what would be the cornerstones of the policy?

Firstly, the EU must support democratisation in the region by making economic cooperation and European integration contingent on reforms. This approach can halt Georgia's slide into autocracy, encourage Armenia's momentum to strengthen its institutions and distance itself further from Russia, and pressure Azerbaijan to improve its domestic human rights record.

Secondly, the EU should transform from a passive mediator to an active player in regional security. Using its economic and political leverage to establish peace in the region and showing intolerance towards any form of military escalation

will make the EU a more credible actor and signal the Union's commitment to the region. It is clear that this approach will be difficult, however, considering the composition of the European Council and the good relationship that the countries of the region have established with more right-leaning governments of the EU.

Thirdly, the EU should spearhead economic and investment projects in energy, transport, and connectivity, fostering regional cooperation and inclusivity among the three countries. The region's economic interconnectedness will not only increase the efficiency and scale of the projects, which will be beneficial for the EU, but also encourage cooperation and fill the vacuum which other regional powers could exploit.

Finally, the EU must adopt a new mindset regarding the South Caucasus. Despite being the most distant part of the European neighbourhood, its central location makes it highly sensitive to geopolitical shifts, such as Russia's war in Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East. When talking about Russia and Ukraine, the EU should also talk about the South Caucasus – without singling out Georgia as the only part of the European family in the region.

In conclusion, for the EU's regional policy on the South Caucasus to succeed, democracy, security, and the economy cannot be tackled in isolation. Security requires democratic governments and resilient economies. At the same time, economic growth demands regional peace and cooperation. The new European mandate, as well as the change of leadership in major European institutions, offers an opportunity for a fresh start. And there is no better motivation for the EU to act than for the sake of its own security and economy.

ENDNOTES

Section 3

65 https://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/policy-brief/2021/reviving-european-policy-towards-western-balkans

66 https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9980/#:~:text=In%20July%202022%2C%20the%20EU,negotiations%20with%20Ukraine%20and%20Moldova.

67 https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9980/#:~:text=In%20July%202022%2C%20the%20EU,negotiations%20with%20Ukraine%20and%20Moldova.

68 https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9980/#:~:text=In%20July%202022%2C%20the%20EU,negotiations%20with%20Ukraine%20and%20Moldova.

69 https://politicalcapital.hu/breaking_europe/publications.php?article_read=1&article_id=2677

70 Information Integrity in Kosovo: Assessment of the Political Economy of Disinformation | National Democratic Institute (ndi.org)

71 This paper is based on the NEOS Lab Policy Brief: S. Nadjivan, K. Geißler and W. Gruber (2023), Populistische Gefahren - liberale Gegenstrategien (Wien: NEOS Lab), https://lab.neos.eu/thinktank/publikationen/populistische-gefahren-fuer-europa.

72 The selected countries are structured according to their EU membership such as: Rassemblement National and La France insoumise (Indomitable France) in France, Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) and Die Linke (The Left) in Germany, Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), Lega, Forza Italia and Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement, M5S) in Italy, Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV), BoerBurgerBeweging (Farmer Citizen Movement, BBB) and the Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party, SP) in the Netherlands, Spartiates, Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) and Syriza in Greece, VOX and Podemos in Spain, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ) and Kommunistische Partei plus in Austria, Perussuomalaiset (True Finns) in Finland and Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) in Sweden, Fidesz in Hungary, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS) in Poland, Slovenská národná strana (Slovac National Party, SNS) and SMER (Direction) in Slovakia and Vazrazhdane (Rebirth) in Bulgaria. Worth mentioning is that the comparison at hand reveals more far-right parties than far-left parties in the selected 13 EU member states.

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74 And so they should be. Independent businesses are more competitive and produce greater economic growth.

75 Unlike Gerhard Schröder, François Fillon had enough memory of the concept of shame to resign from his sinecure after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

76 See Belton (2020) for an exhaustive account.

77 Left-wing populists manufacture different enemies: multinational corporations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and so forth. George Soros and Osman Kavala (in Turkey) are convenient targets because, as wealthy businesspeople who then turned to funding civil society, they can be turned into hate figures for people of either a conservative or socialist cast of mind.

78 For a useful definition of populism and national populism, see Pappas, 2019.

79 This is why attacks on liberal democracy in Hungary and Poland involved the reconstruction of the authorities who supervise judges' conduct: change the power structure that rules over judges, and you might be able to change how judges decide cases.

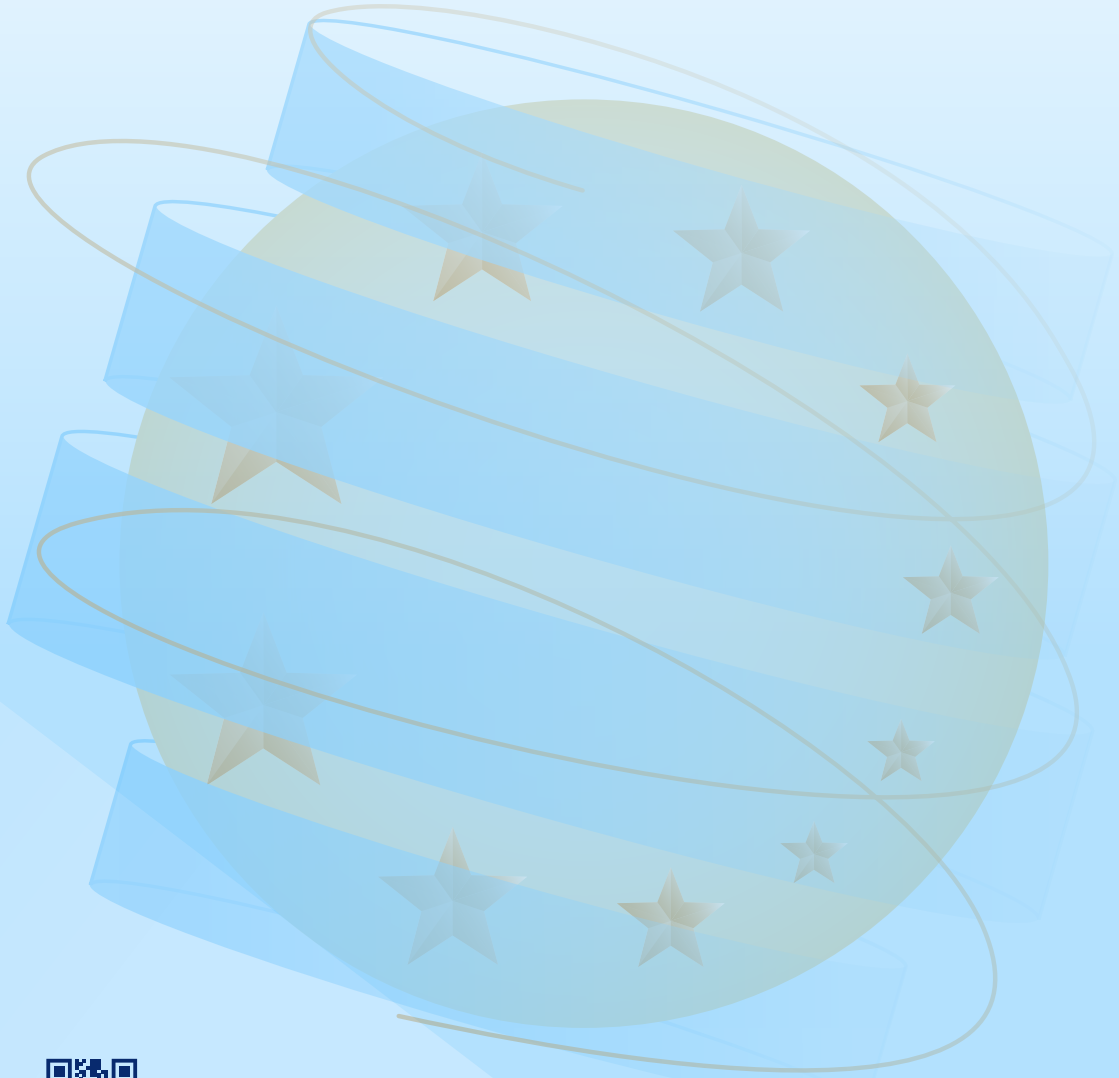
80 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigtalPDF.pdf

81 Source: https://www.adzine.de/2024/01/google-und-meta-dominieren-globalen-digitalwerbemarkt/

82 See Maria Alesina and Francesco Cappelletti: ALGORITHMS VS CULTURE? Freedom of choice and human-centred digitalisation in Europe https://feu-journal.eu/issues/issue-1/algorithms-vs-culture/

83 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/en/document/EPRS_STU(2023)740249

84 source EBU: https://www.ebu.ch/publications/research/membersonly/report/funding-of-public-service-media



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978-2-39067-054-4 9782390670544

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