



DISCUSSION PAPER

The Ukraine War: New Risks and Opportunities for the EU

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Introduction

Russia's War on Ukraine has completed one year. While the war continues on the ground, it has been a year of intense diplomatic initiatives, tensions, rapprochement, and estrangement for the whole world. One of the actors most in the spotlight because of the war was the European Union. Brussels took a hard line against Moscow in terms of rhetoric. At first glance, the Union seems to have given unconditional support to Ukraine, with the well-recognised yellow and blue flags adorning most European cities today. Almost all European leaders have visited Kyiv under war conditions providing financial aid packages, while economic

sanctions were rapidly placed against Russia. Nevertheless, the reality is more complicated than the image of Russia and its supporters versus the western bloc that opposes them.

To understand the European Union's response to Russia's War on Ukraine, we first need to put things from a historical perspective. It is necessary to remember the European security concept that emerged after World War II and the EU's place in international politics after the Cold War. The situation in which the EU was caught up in this war sheds light on its response to the war and what might happen moving forward.



A view of Nord Stream 2 gas receiving station on Germany's Baltic coast in Lubmin on February 23, 2022. Germany halted the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project after Russia's War on Ukraine. (Abdulhamid Hoşbaş - Anadolu Agency)

European Security After WWII

The popular debate, sparked by Russia's War on Ukraine, on whether there will be a third world war and whether nuclear weapons are likely to be used again reminds us that world wars, and especially the Second World War, are Europe's freshest trauma, one that is still active. When Hitler first invaded Poland and then France, he had his sights set on dominating continental Europe. Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union opposed him. Ultimately, these powers defeated the Nazi forces, and the dream of uniting continental Europe was crushed. In a sense, the cancer that had enveloped the body of Europe was destroyed, but it was unclear what was left of Europe.

In the ensuing years, "two Europes" emerged, divided between the victors of the war, the United States and the USSR. The former controlled Western Europe while the latter exerted an iron grip on Eastern Europe. Countries like East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and others went through a Moscow-oriented post-war reparation process, while West Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and others experienced the Washington-led Marshall Plan to assist in the process of economic recovery and reconstruction. For all these countries, though, this process meant facing new forms of dependency. The US and Britain posed as the saviour of the West, while the Soviet Union postured as the liberator of the East. Meanwhile, each camp developed its political hegemony. Both sides developed support programs to develop the countries under their hegemony. With the Marshall Plan, the US provided \$13.3 billion in financial and infrastructural development support to post-war Europe, supporting the free market economy against the Soviet threat (Runde, 2020). In a relatively short period, the European market and industry developed significantly.

However, Moscow and Washington did not merely assist in post-war reconstruction and economic development. The competition between the free-market economy and the communist economy was the primary justification for this aid. At the same time, the national security of the recovering countries became directly dependent on these two superpowers. Many other countries, primarily European, joined NATO or the Warsaw Pact. The Cold War and the threat of nuclear war ensued as the rivalry between these two groups deepened for decades.

In this context, NATO and the US military protection force became the most fundamental element of European security. Even today, the US nuclear umbrella seems indispensable for European security (Keil & Arts, 2020). In this regard, NATO represents the power of the United States and Western Europe. The latter benefited significantly, especially when considering NATO's Article 5, which considers an attack on one NATO member as an attack on all. Thus, the borders of the United States had the same value as those of Western Europe regarding security.

Alongside all this, the integration of Western Europe first and foremost, but ultimately of Europe as a whole, was always an ideal. The world wars, especially the Second World War, showed how high the costs of a warring Europe could be. After the war, the Council of Europe was founded in 1949. This organisation gradually expanded, reaching 46 members, and paving the way for the first full European political and economic alliance. One of the most important achievements of this alliance was the elimination of the historical rivalry between France and Germany. Both countries engaged in the process of economic interdependence that made an intra-European war unthinkable.

Despite continuous steps towards European integration, the continent's security was still based on US military presence. There were times when European integration and the US military umbrella came into conflict. One of the most important foreign policy goals for the US in the 1950s was the emergence of Western Europe as a third power against the Soviets. This was also the main purpose of the massive financial support for the reconstruction of Europe under the Marshall Plan (Schuessler & Shiffrinson, 2019). On the other hand, another important issue was the containment of West Germany. The emergence of West Germany as an independent military power in the post-World War II period was not preferred, as this could have created a paradox.

President Eisenhower wanted to reduce Europe's military dependence on the United States. He stated that:

"There is no defence for Western Europe that depends exclusively or even materially upon the existence, in



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (C), Finland's Minister of Foreign Affairs Pekka Haavisto (L) and Sweden's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ann Linde (R) give a joint press conference after the signature of the accession protocols to NATO of Finland and Sweden, at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, 05 July 2022. (Dursun Aydemir - Anadolu Agency)

Europe, of strong American units. The spirit must be here, and the strength must be produced here. We cannot be a modern Rome guarding the far frontiers with our legions if for no other reason than that these are not, politically, our frontiers. What we must do is to assist these people [to] regain their confidence and get on their own military feet" (Schuessler & Shiffrinson, 2019).

In this context, Eisenhower pinned his hopes on the European Defence Community (EDC) (Schuessler & Shiffrinson, 2019). The EDC envisaged a common military structure between France, West Germany, and the BENELUX countries. However, European states, especially France, saw the US plans to withdraw from the continent and were slow to activate the EDC. There were two reasons for this. First, the European states would be left alone with the Soviet Union on the continent. Secondly, France did not want Germany out of US control. On the other hand, Eisenhower wanted to accelerate the building of Europe's defence capacity by emphasising the threat of leaving the EU.

Under US President Kennedy, things changed. Kennedy recognised that Europe was still too far behind to become a third power. He also increased US influence in NATO and US control over nuclear weapons. The De Gaulle administration in France was not happy about this either. 1963 was a year of heightened tensions between the US and Europe. First, France vetoed Britain's admission to the European Economic Community. The veto was due to Britain's pro-US position and the prediction that Britain would

function as a Trojan horse within Europe. De Gaulle met with his West German counterpart Adenauer in the following days and signed a Franco-German friendship treaty. This coalition could have emerged as an independent bloc. Therefore, the US administration acted by threatening to withdraw its military presence from West Germany (ibid). In other words, the US forced West Germany to take its side.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this picture, which also sheds historical light on the political and military problems in Europe today. The first conclusion is that Europe's political and military situation has always been critical for US foreign policy. In this context, the US military presence in Europe and the security guarantees it offers to Europe are one of the most important building blocks of transatlantic relations.

The second important consequence is that US military power and the military umbrella it offers to Europe is a political instrument that both sides can use in different ways. During the Cold War, the US raised the prospect of withdrawal from Europe while using its security umbrella to shape the European project according to its strategic objectives¹.

Last but not least, it is critical to remember that Russia is one of the most important actors in European politics and security, even if it has been rather dormant politically and militarily between 1990 and 2008 when it recovered following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

¹ Eisenhower's emphasis on the development of an independent European military power and Kennedy's policy of increasing US influence in Europe, on the other hand, can be exemplified as two faces of this strategy.

Post-Soviet Period

The abovementioned continuum persists today:

- 1.** There is still no alternative to the US nuclear umbrella for Europe. European security is still largely dependent on the United States.
- 2.** European integration is still a very important issue, albeit at a very advanced stage compared to the post-war period.
- 3.** Russia is again one of the most important actors in Europe after a two-decade hiatus following the Soviet collapse.

The post-Soviet period is important to understand this legacy. The last years of the Soviet Union were years of constructive dialogue between the US and the USSR. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty (ABM) were two important examples of this dialogue. Both sides took steps to slow down armament and emphasise stability. Another important development was the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), which envisaged restricting nuclear weapons production and destroying some existing nuclear arsenals.

In the following years, it was thought Russia could play a constructive role in European security. Under these circumstances, Europe's internal and transatlantic relations in the context of armaments weakened (Keil & Arts, 2020). However, it is important to remember that the basic assumption of the transatlantic logic was the "end of history" (ibid.). According to this assumption, the democratic liberal order had won, and all that remained was the full globalisation of this victory. While Europe and the US were on the same side of the victory, their attitudes towards globalising it differed significantly. The US did not refrain from pursuing a globally interventionist line. In 2002, the US abandoned the ABM because of the nuclear activities of countries like North Korea and Iran and increased its nuclear weapons activities. Moreover, it intervened militarily in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, despite the disappearance of its most important rival, NATO continued its expansion and spread to include the former Eastern Bloc countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

In his famous speech at the Munich conference in 2007, Russian leader Putin, who had become more politically and economically self-confident, emphasised the need to rethink the international balance. "I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security. And we must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue," he said (Putin, 2007). After a brief hiatus, Russia signalled its intention to become a superpower again. In this context, it attacked Georgia the following year, and in 2014, it annexed Crimea. In the war in Syria, it directly intervened and supported the regime. All the while, accusations of violating the INF were coming in. Eventually, the Trump administration withdrew the United States from the INF in 2019, rendering the treaty obsolete. Today, as we live through the war in Ukraine, it is important to remember that the steps backwards in nuclear armament have stalled. The post-1990 mild climate had already disappeared before the Ukrainian war. The question now is whether the Ukrainian war is a harbinger of winter.

While the US and Russia mutually escalated rivalry and tension, the European Union pursued a policy that prioritised dialogue until the Ukraine war. The Minsk 1 and 2 agreements, which started after the Crimean war, were mediated by Germany and France. These agreements were not very successful, as they were violated in a short time, and their articles were not implemented. However, what should be underlined is the EU's role as a dialogue builder.

This was not the only example of the EU prioritising dialogue. Germany, in particular, engaged in telephone diplomacy when Belarus used migrants as a threat against the EU by massing them on the Polish border.

It is also worth mentioning the economic ties between Germany and Russia. Especially in the energy field, the Nord Stream 2 project was one of the most important projects expected to provide Europe with energy until the Ukraine war. The fact that it would deepen economic relations with Russia caused some member states to abstain, but it was largely supported. Although the Baltic states and Poland, which feel the Russian threat most closely and have taken today the clearest

stance in the Ukraine war, opposed the project, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Greece supported it. France's abstention turned into opposition over time (Gotev, 8 February 2019).

The US is one of the most disturbed by this project. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (18 March 2021) has called Nord Stream 2 a "potential sanctionable activity". He officially threatened sanctions against the parties involved in Nord Stream 2; "The Department reiterates its warning that any entity involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline risks US sanctions and should immediately abandon work on the pipeline" (ibid.). This warning was a year before the Ukrainian war. With the war, the project was scrapped.

On the other hand, some have accused the EU of being geopolitically passive on issues such as the rise of China and Russia (Blackwill, 2019). This criticism may have some merit in the context of military security policies. On the other hand, it should be underlined that good relations with these countries and an interconnected world economy may well contribute to global stability. In this regard, it is important to remember that the predecessor institution of the European Union was the European Coal and Steel Community. One of the main concerns of the Schuman Declaration, the text that proposed the establishment of this community, was the elimination of tensions between Germany and France. The main objective was that the joint production of these two countries would make war between them impossible. This notion was at the core of the EU's formation. We can say that this idea has been largely successful. We can see a similar idea in the EU's reflexes in many of its tensions. Both the increasing development of economic relations with Russia in the period leading up to the war in Ukraine and the lower level of tension with countries like China and Iran compared to Washington and the prioritisation of trade relations seem to be important elements of the foreign policy of EU countries. While individual member states may have varying policies occasionally, the predominant approach in Brussels is more moderate.

Another issue is the current state of European integration. In 1993, the Treaty of Maastricht established the European Union. In 2002, the transition to a common currency was completed, and in 2004 the Union underwent a major enlargement process. These were the years when European integration peaked, and the European Union achieved a high level of

integration, even though there were challenging global factors such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the 2008 economic crisis. However, especially after the crisis in the Eurozone, tensions within the Union increased. Especially after Brexit, the confrontational behaviour of countries such as Hungary and Poland with Brussels has raised questions about the future of the European Union. Today, the idea of a united Europe is widely accepted, although these questions remain valid.

Even the Hungarian and Polish governments, which have had problems with Brussels, have not given up on this idea of Europe. Nevertheless, how to fulfil the European idea is one of the most important challenges facing the Union.

For example, Polish MEP Dominik Tarczynski (28 May 2020) of the ruling Law and Justice Party stated, "We are trying to keep Europe great and Christian." Similarly, Hungary's Orban portrays migrants as a threat to Christian Europe (Walker, 14 July 2019). On the other hand, this conservative approach is not compatible with Brussels' vision. In addition, the European Union lacks an army to defend against security threats jointly. This function falls to the member states' armies, and France is the only member state with nuclear weapons. As mentioned above, most European countries, in general, are not advanced in terms of armament, and the protective power of the US and NATO remains important for Europe.

The Ukraine War

It was under these circumstances that the EU faced the Ukraine war. The first reaction was perhaps the harshest in the history of the EU. Russia was expelled from the European Council. Then economic sanctions were announced. All EU countries and Brussels took an active stance against Russia except for Hungary, which called for negotiations (RFE/RL, 23 July 2022). Brussels has sided with Ukraine in both rhetoric and action. At the beginning of the war, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (27 February 2022) announced that for the first time, the EU would help to arm a country. During her recent visit to Ukrainian President Zelensky, von der Leyen (2 February 2023) emphasised that Ukraine has the EU's support until the end. This support was not limited to the EU standing behind Ukraine with all its political institutions. The European news broadcasters of Russia's state channels, Russia Today and Sputnik, were suspended (Council of the EU, 2 March 2022). Valery Gergiev, conductor of the Munich Philharmonic and known to be close to Putin, was fired for not condemning the attack on Moscow (Savage, 1 March 2022). In other words, support for Ukraine has been built in the civilian sphere in a way that crushes the alternatives.

Military forces of European states, committed to the EU vision, in both competition and solidarity, can help break US discursive dominance and reduce the lack of alternatives. For global stability and peace, a balance of power seems more realistic than the dominance of one side. In this respect, Europe's constructive characterisation of its internal debates and the emergence of Germany as an alternative armed power could bring a constructive balance in international politics.

On the other hand, developing economic ties between countries and creating a relationship of dependence, especially between great powers, can also be an important element of international stability. The first foundations of the EU were established with this perspective. The idea of absorbing the historical rivalry between the two great powers of Europe, France, and Germany, through economic interdependence and making a new European civil war impossible is one of the founding ideals of the EU. This prediction became a reality with the formation of the EU.

In addition, the contribution of balancing forces to global stability can be seen in other examples. Turkey's solidarity with Ukraine while maintaining diplomatic relations with Russia creates breathing space in this international crisis. The grain deal could only be possible with such a balance of diplomacy and was vital for millions in need. There is also talk of Turkey being used as a European gas hub. Again, this is directly related to keeping diplomatic relations with Russia alive. In this context, Russian and US intelligence chiefs met in Turkey last November. Although it is difficult for all of this to result in peace without the will of the parties, these initiatives also help keep hope alive for global and regional stability.

Within this context, the US withdrawal strategy in many areas on a global scale, which started with the Obama administration and continued with Trump, seems to have changed with Biden's slogan "America is back" (İlhan, 2022). Today, the US demands more say in the geopolitical vacuum created by its withdrawal in recent years, which other actors, notably Russia and China, are eager to fill. This policy reversal can also explain its tough and active stance in the Ukraine war. On the other hand, this turns out to be transatlantic pressure on the EU countries. For example, the US considers European aid to Ukraine insufficient (Shapiro, 2022). In this context, as a NATO partner, the US's criticism of Germany, particularly regarding armaments, is part of the same pressure. In such a global environment, it is not only Germany whose balancing position is under pressure. The traditionally neutral positions of Finland and Sweden, which are in line for NATO membership today, should be remembered. The destruction of the space of neutrality could also mean the growth of areas of instability.

On the other hand, paradoxically, increasing Germany's armed capacity, even if it is harshly criticised by Russia (France 24, 3 June 2022), could give Germany a relatively independent playing field. Indeed, Germany has long abstained from sending Leopard tanks to Ukraine. This abstention can be explained by "an inherent scepticism against siding overtly with the USA and a subtle hope that the relationship with Russia can be fixed" (McGee, 2023). Moreover, although Paris has taken a tougher stance on the Ukraine war than Berlin, the crisis over the sale of submarines to Australia just

before the Ukraine war should be remembered. Before this crisis, French President Emmanuel Macron (2019) stated that “America is turning its back on the European Project” and “what we are currently experiencing is the

brain death of NATO”. In addition, France has a tradition of pursuing an interventionist foreign policy, as can be seen in examples such as Libya and Mali.

The End of History or A Multipolar World?

In this context, the Ukraine war can potentially affect the EU and transatlantic relations. However, these effects will not be independent of the historical background. Eisenhower’s view of the importance of Europe arming itself, yet also not wanting to lose US control in Europe, has parallels with the problems facing US foreign policy today. Although it is not discussed much, a Germany that has reinforced its armed forces would have a much greater regional and global weight than it does today. France, on the other hand, as the sole nuclear power of the European Union, is already an international player that cannot be ignored. Thus, it would be a mistake to think these two powers would be allied with the United States at all costs. It must be remembered that there were serious tensions between these three states even at the height of the Cold War when the Soviet threat was at its peak.

On the other hand, this does not necessarily mean that the European powers will break their alliance with NATO and the Western bloc. In contrast, Schuessler and Shiffrinson (2019) point out that previous crisis periods have strengthened the NATO institutional framework to overcome new crises. However, such a balance would allow for different perspectives on NATO policies and issues, such as relations with Russia and China.

The defeat of the Soviet Union was seen as a victory for the liberal order. This victory reinforced the thesis of the end of history. On the other hand, the liberal world order implies a set of values. Today, leaders like Putin or Lukashenko are labelled above all as enemies of these values, and support for Ukraine is framed within this narrative. As long as US foreign policy is interventionist and aggressive, it will keep opening new arenas of conflict. However, in a multipolar world, the EU, which is in the same ideological formation as the US and represents the same side of the Cold War, can

pursue a foreign policy that acknowledges the areas of conflict, stabilises these areas, and builds peace, making an active conflict as costly as possible for each side through the intricacies of economic relations. This perspective is traditionally more in line with the logic on which the EU was founded. At the same time, the emergence of Europe as a balancing third power has its place in American foreign policy dreams, even in the current US pressure on the EU over Ukraine.

Another important issue is the future of European integration. Changes in the balance of powers in the international arena, the rival relationship between France and Germany within the EU, and the need to ensure that this relationship does not create a leadership vacuum, have both opportunities and risks for the EU’s current set of problems. The EU’s ability to become a stronger global actor depends on its solutions to these challenges.

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