POLICY PAPER

How Should the EU Rethink its Relations with Russia After the War in Ukraine Ends?

VOCAL EUROPE

*This Policy Paper was written by **Inès Gentil**|21 June 2022

Rue de la Loi 155, 1040 Brussels

office@vocaleurope.eu

+ 32 02 588 00 14

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU

TWITTER.COM/THEVOCALEUROPE

FACEBOOK.COM/VOCALEUROPE

YOUTUBE.COM/VOCALEUROPE

INSTAGRAM.COM/VOCALEUROPE

Background

We are now entering "The Age of Encounter" — as argued by Hans Kribbe in *The Strongmen*.[1] In other words, it is an age of encounters with other "great powers" and seemingly irrational and idiosyncratic behaviours, which demands the European Union (EU) to adopt pluralistic thinking. Just as the devastating consequences of World War II paved the way for a new conception of Europe, the shock of the Russian invasion of Ukraine allows for the possibility of strengthening the European security order and reshaping the pattern of confrontation between Russia and "the West".[2] In particular, the ongoing crisis underlined the weakness and inefficiency of the EU's previous 'low politics approach' in its relations with Russia and post-Soviet countries.[3]

"This war is unwinnable," UN secretary-general António Guterres warned in March 2022, "Sooner or later it will have to move from the battlefields to the peace table."[4] In order to mitigate risk and avoid potential further escalations, the EU, NATO, Russia, and other stakeholders will need to keep channels of communication open at all times, to favour a diplomatic approach to any disputes that are arising.[5] An era of sustained confrontation with Russia will require the EU and NATO to rethink their long-term strategy and to prepare for what could be a strategic confrontation lasting decades.[6]

This polarised confrontation will include both military and nonmilitary components to 'contain and deter Russia', but it will also allow for cooperation and engagement when necessary.[7] If the war has revealed vulnerabilities in Russian military capabilities, it has also unveiled that the multilateral institutions at the heart of the "Western" alliance – NATO, the EU, the UN – were not efficiently prepared for prompt crisis response. This means that in the medium to long term, the EU will need to develop more resilient mechanisms to promptly respond to security threats and build the architecture of a common security and defense policy for the entire bloc, in complement to NATO.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked a dramatic escalation of the eight-year-old conflict in the Donbass region and a historic turning point for European security, announcing a major deterioration of the future EU-Russia relations.[8] Russia's continued negative actions in violation of international law and of its human rights commitments have greatly reshaped its relations with the EU, and will also impact lastly its relations with other Arctic nations – Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Canada, and the U.S. – which are members of either the EU or NATO (or both).[9] Both the annexation of Crimea, the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, the subsequent European sanctions and Russian counter-sanctions have arguably deteriorated the EU-Russia relationship to its lowest point since the Cold War.[10]

In addition, new sources of tension have arisen during the past years following Russia's military backing of the Assad regime in Syria, alleged Russian interference in EU politics conducted via large scale disinformation campaigns, as well as Russian mercenaries' acts of violence in Africa and in the Middle East.[11] Hence, the pre-war general assumptions about globalisation, EU members' national defence spending, the climate crisis, international order will now appear in a different light too.[12]

[1] Van Middelaar, Luuk. April 2021 "Europe's Geopolitical Awakening", Groupe d'Etudes Géopolitiques
[2] CEPA (24th May 2022) "What Does Europe Look Like 3-7 Years After Russia's War in Ukraine?"
[3] Dahrendorf Forum (March 2016) "Avoiding a New 'Cold War' The Future of EU-Russia Relations in the Context of the Ukraine Crisis"
[4] Mazower, Mark (March 25th 2022) "Russia, Ukraine and Europe's 200-year quest for peace", Financial Times
[5] CEPA (24th May 2022) "What Does Europe Look Like 3-7 Years After Russia's War in Ukraine?"
[6] Ibid
[7] Ibid
[8] Masters, Jonathan (1st April 2022) "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia" Council on Foreign Relations", Council on Foreign Relations
[9] Kirchner, Stefan, (February 25, 2022). "International Arctic Governance without Russia", SSRN
[10] De Pedro, Nicolás and Viilup, Elina (May 2015) "Misunderstandings and Tensions, a new Normality in EU-Russia Relations?", CIDOB
[11] EPRS (2018) "The EU's Russia policy - Five guiding principles"
[12] Kettle, Martin (10th March 2022) "Rupture is not an option: after this war, the west must learn how to live with Russia", The Guardian

In March 2016, EU foreign ministers and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, agreed on five guiding principles for EU-Russia relations: the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, closer ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbours, strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats, selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism, and support for people-to-people contacts (strengthening of civil society).[13] However, the implementation of these principles has obviously faced major challenges, and will be even more difficult to achieve in the foreseeable future. How will the five principles of the official EU's Russia policy change in the light of recent events?

Moreover, although the game is currently being played out on the Ukrainian ground, the European security order and the validity of the principles enshrined in the Final Helsinki Act of 1975 are directly at stake.[14] Nonetheless, as the main supplier of fossil fuels to the EU, Russia retains a leverage that the EU will have to overcome to become less dependent vis-à-vis Russian energy supplies as well as accelerate its 'green transition' towards renewable energies. More precisely, the European pillar of NATO and the Strategic Compass, defining a new collective security order, will participate to help reduce such dependence while strengthening the European deterrence capabilities.

Moreover, the EU's eastern neighbourhood and post-Soviet space is characterised by an intense geopolitical competition with Russia as the Kremlin aspires to EU recognition of its "sphere of influence".[15] For these reasons, uncertainty surrounds the foundations on which this bilateral relationship could be rebuilt and the possible basis of a new continental status quo that allows coexistence without too many shocks and the looming threat of possible military escalation with the Atlantic Alliance.[16] In this paper, I will evaluate the way the Ukraine crisis affected EU-Russia relations and provides some recommendations on the future of the EU-Russia relationships envisioned after the war in Ukraine ends.

Ultimately, the return of geopolitics to Europe will inevitably force the EU to become a veritable geopolitical actor, with strong institutions.[17] Such geopolitical aspirations will demand European leaders and researchers to think pluralistically on how to develop a 'Grand Strategy' for the EU.[18] Essentially, such transformation require a strategic capacity to define priorities, supported by a common will to act as a European entity. While the EU is enforcing new sanctions against Russia, the implementation of the Minsk agreements remains interrupted (even declared null and void), the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood remains a zone of confrontation and the EU security is hindered by dependence on Russian energy imports.

Consequently, the EU-Russia cooperation on international issues has become a collateral damage of growing tensions between the two blocks where diplomatic tensions are mirrored by mutual distrust.[19] Despite the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and current EU-Russia confrontation, there are still some areas where the two sides have common interests and shared concerns. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and an increasingly influential player in the Middle East and in Africa, Russia will have a key role to play in helping to tackle global challenges.[20] However, in the short term, an easing of tensions seems unlikely and the recovery of a level of trust and normality between the EU and Moscow appears to be particularly complicated to achieve.[21] In a nutshell, the ongoing Ukraine-Russian war will undoubtedly have lasting impacts on the EU's foreign

[13] Altomonte, Carlo and Villafranca, Antonio (2019) "Europe in Identity Crisis. The Future of the EU in the Age of Nationalism.", ISPI
[14] De Pedro, Nicolás and Viilup, Elina (May 2015) "Misunderstandings and Tensions, a new Normality in EU-Russia Relations?", CIDOB
[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid
[17] Raspotnik, Andreas and Østhagen, Andreas (March 2022) "The End of an Exceptional History: Re-Thinking the EU-Russia Arctic Relationship"
[18] Ibid
[19] EPRS (2018) "The EU's Russia policy - Five guiding principles"
[20] Ibid
[21] De Pedro, Nicolás and Viilup, Elina (May 2015) "Misunderstandings and Tensions, a new Normality in EU-Russia Relations?", CIDOB

VOCAL
EUROPE

policy and its approach towards Russia. In that context, how can the EU find the right balance between diplomacy and firmness?

Current State of Play

To many observers, Russia's invasion of Ukraine epitomises the peak of Moscow's growing resentment towards NATO expansion into the former Soviet space.[22] The turning point was President Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, during which he deliberately warned NATO against pursuing its Eastern expansion policy,[23] perceived by the Kremlin as a direct threat to Russian security and to the European order.[24] One should remember that Russia's current nationalism and self-image as a 'great power' was crucial to the construction of the state's national identity and is the result of centuries of Tsarist Russian domination in its neighbourhood.[25]

Consequently, it is extremely important to acknowledge Moscow's view of Russia in relationship to the rest of the world since this "almost messianic perception lies at the heart of its foreign policy".[26] In that context of rising tensions, France's President Macron called for "European sovereignty", while President Ursula von der Leyen wishes to lead a "geopolitical Commission" and the Joseph Borrell, argues that the EU must learn the "language of power".[27] They all believe that Europe must become a "geopolitical actor" in order to avoid becoming the "pawn" of superpowers.[28] From the European perspective, Russia's invasion of Ukraine might announce the start of a historical turning point, including the return of "hard power considerations" on the European soil. It also questions the accepted view that interdependence, specifically inherent to the economic sphere, pacifies the EU's relations with Russia and that the fate of European nations will be determined by a combination of "economic liberalism, interdependence and integration".[29]

Moreover, the ongoing war has already negatively affected Arctic cooperation after the A7 – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the U.S. – paused their participation in meetings of the Arctic Council, which is currently chaired by Russia.[30] Today, the Arctic is often viewed as a fast-evolving strategic region in security terms, as the increased ice melt, the subsequent 'opening up' of the region and regional cooperation efforts are the "main drivers of security dynamics" in the North.[31] As such, the region is confronted with all the relevant security issues – from climate change (both global warming, environmental degradation and natural disasters) to geopolitical rivalries and commercial interests inherent to the maritime security context.[32] Consequently, if the war of aggression by Russia will not end international Arctic governance, it is likely to drastically reshape the current governance landscape in the region.[33]

Conversely, Putin's policy towards the Arctic region encompasses a particular vision for the future of the economic development of the Russian Arctic, emphasising the continued extraction of hydrocarbons that are harmful for the natural environment and human health.[34] This course of action might provide short-term economic benefits, but it will come at a high price in Russia and worldwide, due to the global impact on climate and the natural environment.[35] In addition, on February 2022,

---

[22] Masters, Jonathan (1st April 2022) "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia" Council on Foreign Relations", Council on Foreign Relations

[23] Rumer, Eugene and Sokolsky, Richard (30 June 2021) "Grand Illusions: The Impact of Misperceptions About Russia on U.S. Policy"

[24] Putin, Vladimir. February 10, 2007, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security" Policy"

[25] Roger E. Kanet (2022) "Russia's Enhanced role in Eurasia: the 'near abroad' three decades on", European Politics and Society

[26] Ibid

[27] Van Middelaar, Luuk. April 2021 "Europe's Geopolitical Awakening", Groupe d'Etudes Géopolitiques

[28] Ibid

[29] Raspotnik, Andreas and Østhagen, Andreas (March 2022) "The End of an Exceptional History: Re-Thinking the EU-Russia Arctic Relationship"

[30] Ibid

[31] Ibid

[32] Lonas, Lexi (25th February 2022) "Russia threatens 'military and political consequences' if Finland, Sweden try joining NATO", The Hill

[33] Kirchner, Stefan, (February 25, 2022). "International Arctic Governance without Russia", SSRN

[34] Ibid

[35] Ibid

Russian Foreign ministry Sergei Lavrov issued some threats against Finland and Sweden: "Russia threatens 'military and political consequences' if Finland and Sweden decided to try joining NATO", which they did anyway in May 2022.[36] Unfortunately, the just approved Strategic Compass – 'a common strategic culture that contributes to the credibility of the EU as a strategic actor' - pays too little attention to the Arctic and the strategic positioning of the region.

After President Putin referred to the collapse of the USSR as the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century and called for the return of Russia's 'Great Power' status,[37] relations with the 'near abroad' and with numerous other post-Soviet states became more conflictual. If the Kremlin's goal is indeed to extend Russian territory to the former Soviet space, it would constitute a direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of many countries in the region. Preventing these countries from joining NATO and/or the EU is among Russia's top objectives in its relationship with these Central European states, along with support for established Russian-language communities.[38]

The ideological confrontation of Putin's regime with the EU and more generally the "Western camp" is one of the new sources of legitimacy for his regime. The 'conservative values agenda' is constructed in opposition to a "morally decadent and politically dysfunctional Europe".[39] The Kremlin is seeking not only to shatter European unity around the sanctions but to contribute to the moral questioning of the consensus on the liberal democratic values that is leading the process of European integration.[40] Conversely, many post-Soviet countries have viewed EU/NATO membership as a way to secure economic gains while also acting as a deterrent to Russian attempts to increase its influence in the region.

Moreover, the Kremlin's view is that the EU and NATO are attempting to extend Western influence into post-Soviet space and thereby to reduce Russian control over the region.[41] In 2009 the Eastern Partnership, with six of former Soviet 'satellite' states —Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine—was designed to build closer ties with the EU.[42] This led to a significant turning point in Russian policy as it revealed the competition for influence over the former Soviet space.[43] In addition, the Colour revolutions in Russia's so-called "sphere of influence", leading to the relative victory of 'pro-West forces' at the expense of 'pro-Russian ones' also contributed to feed Moscow's feeling of paranoia that the 'West' could back similar movements on its territory.[44]

On the other hand, the Kremlin is increasingly committed to develop a 'nationalist agenda' aimed at re-establishing Russia's dominant role in the post-Soviet space – a "virtual recreation" of the USSR.[45] In the years following Putin's affirmation that Russia must re-establish its 'great power' status, the six eastern neighbours of the EU have struggled to find a balance between Moscow and Brussels, especially since 2013 when the EU signed association agreements (AAs) with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia.[46] The Kremlin saw the aspirations of these countries to closer ties with the EU as a direct threat to its "sphere of influence". Fundamentally, Russia perceives the EU as an entity that does not possess a strategic dimension and believes it to be simply a "platform for U.S. foreign policy" in the region on questions pertaining to trade, defence, sanctions...[47]

[36] Lonas, Lexi (25th February 2022) "Russia threatens 'military and political consequences' if Finland, Sweden try joining NATO" , The Hill
[37] Putin, Vladimir. February 10, 2007, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security"
[38] Roger E. Kanet (2022) "Russia's Enhanced role in Eurasia: the 'near abroad' three decades on", European Politics and Society
[39] De Pedro, Nicolás and Viilup, Elina (May 2015) "Misunderstandings and Tensions, a new Normality in EU-Russia Relations?", CIDOB
[40] Ibid
[41] Roger E. Kanet (2022) "Russia's Enhanced role in Eurasia: the 'near abroad' three decades on", European Politics and Society
[42] Kapoor, Nivedita (11th March 2021) "Russia-EU Relations: The End of a Strategic Partnership", Observer Research Foundation
[43] Dmitri Trenin, February 2021, "Russia and Europe: The Current Impasse and the Way Out" Carnegie Moscow Centre
[44] Kapoor, Nivedita (11th March 2021) "Russia-EU Relations: The End of a Strategic Partnership", Observer Research Foundation
[45] Ibid
[46] Roger E. Kanet (2022) "Russia's Enhanced role in Eurasia: the 'near abroad' three decades on", European Politics and Society
[47] Kapoor, Nivedita (11th March 2021) "Russia-EU Relations: The End of a Strategic Partnership", Observer Research Foundation

VOCAL EUROPE

Practically, this translated into Central European and Baltic countries' adhesion to NATO and/or the EU, but also to the Partnership for Peace agreements with post-Soviet states.[48] However, despite closer EU-central Asia ties, the EU's role in the Central Asian region is still marginal and is mainly driven by economic interests. The evidence indicated that the West had mostly 'lost' the competition for influence in Central Asia already a few years ago, although the weakness of the Western position did not necessarily translate into full Russian dominance in the region because of the progressive expansion of Chinese and Turkish influence.[49] Nonetheless, an important aspect of Russian foreign economic policy is pertaining to the "presence of and access to energy", especially from the countries of Central Asia.[50]

Naturally, as the global 'Pivot to Asia' and Russia's engagement with the West deteriorates, Asia has emerged as the natural interlocutor for the conduct of Russian foreign policy. The China-Europe relationship is now being put to the test by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. At the same time, the EU faces its own internal challenges and has difficulty finding consensus on the new sanction packages against Russia.[51] The overarching philosophy of EU sanctions is that they should hit the third country, in this case Russia, while preventing negative side effects for Member States.

However, sanctions in the field of energy will inevitably cause damage to EU countries, and some member states will be hit more than others. Hungary has repeatedly been accused of "holding the EU hostage" after refusing to impose an oil embargo against Russia.[52] There are also concerns in Europe about the potential use of nuclear weapons, echoing anxieties of the Cold War era.[53] Additionally, the invasion is having harmful humanitarian consequences: to date more than 7 million people have left Ukraine mainly to Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, while around 8 million have been internally displaced.[54] Overall, the EU's response has been swift and unprecedented, with sanction packages including restrictive measures on individuals who have close links to the current regime, severe economic sanctions, diplomatic measures, and the ban on Russian media outlets.[55]

Moreover, Russia has also challenged France's and the EU's foreign policy decisions in Syria and in multiple African countries. Russia's numerous vetoes at the United Nations Security Council and its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime have contributed to prolong the conflict, and impeded humanitarian aid and counter-terrorism operations.[56] In Mali, Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group have interfered with French counter-insurgency operations, and indirectly pushed for the expulsion of the French ambassador to Mali in January 2022.[57] Considering these frustrations, the EU has begun to make necessary adjustments to his foreign policy towards Russia. President Macron has coordinated EU sanctions against Russia and committed more French troops to NATO.

NATO has long struggled to find a *raison d'être* following the collapse of the Soviet Empire, but Russia's willingness to use military force 'rejuvenated' the alliance and catalysed a dramatic increase in European defence spending, such as in Germany.[58] To that extent, the war in Ukraine has enhanced the 'multidimensional nature of security issues' and the 'highly integrated nature of the two main pillars of the Western alliance system: NATO and the EU'.[59]

[48] Ibid
[49] Kapoor, Nivedita (11th March 2021) "Russia-EU Relations: The End of a Strategic Partnership", Observer Research Foundation
[50] Roger E. Kanet (2022) "Russia's Enhanced role in Eurasia: the 'near abroad' three decades on", European Politics and Society
[51] Brzozowski, Alexandra (17th May 2022) "EU reputation at stake as Hungary continues to block Russia sanctions", Euractiv
[52] Ibid
[53] Wunderlich, Uwe (5th April 2022) "Russia's invasion of Ukraine: A turning point for European integration?", LSE
[54] Ibid
[55] Ibid
[56] Staunton, Eglantine (2022) "A Useful Failure: Macron's Overture to Russia", Survival, 64:2, 17-24
[57] Ibid
[58] Wunderlich, Uwe (5th April 2022) "Russia's invasion of Ukraine: A turning point for European integration?", LSE
[59] Ibid

Ultimately, the conflict is marking a major turning point in the European security structure and is announcing the birth of a 'geopolitical' Europe. The European Parliament has voted to set up a European Defence Fund in 2017,[60] and the member states have created the European Peace Facility in 2021 that the EU is currently mobilising to provide weapons to Ukraine.[61] With the Strategic Compass agreed by all Member States, the main challenge is now to implement it quickly and fully. The need for a 'tougher' and 'more pragmatic' approach to Russia is now blatant.

Policy Recommendations

The EU follows a 'principled diplomacy', according to High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) Josep Borrell. Since a couple of years, the Union has been debating whether it should "keep, amend or discard" the five guiding principles for its Russia policy.[62] In the medium term, it will depend on both sides whether the EU-Russia relations have a perspective to improve or descend even further into conflict.[63] Before the invasion, EUREN, an initiative of the EU Delegation to Moscow and the Russian International Affairs Council, was one of the few remaining platforms bringing together experts from the EU and Russia to work at improving mutual understanding and cooperation.[64]

Under this framework, Moscow has proposed new agreements with the U.S. and NATO, demanding a fundamental revision of the European security order.[65] EUREN members believed a "cold partnership" to be the most plausible scenario for the future of the relationship to prevent the negative dynamic between the Washington and Moscow to escalate into a military confrontation. The EU and Russia will most probably not be able to overcome their disagreements in the coming decade, but if they so choose, they can eventually come to a pragmatic partnership that would theoretically safeguards peace and stability in Europe, after the war is over. According to David Cadier, "the French President appears to be pursuing a three-track strategy: demonstrating unity with EU and NATO allies; promoting a European solution to the crisis; pursuing the dialogue initiated with Russia".[66] In the short term, the EU must strengthen its defense capabilities against further hostile actions from Moscow, including the weaponisation of energy.[67]

#1 Tackling Global Challenges and Common Threats: The Necessity of Maintaining Diplomatic Channels Open with Russia

After the war is over, EU member states will gradually have to restart political dialogue at ministerial level to discuss points of convergence, bilateral contests and find a way forward for the future of the EU-Russia relations.[68] Ahead of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, experts and policymakers were discussing the establishment of a new architecture for Russia-EU relations, including their potential future coordination to tackle global challenges such as climate change, counterterrorism, pandemics, illegal migration, and non-traditional security threats like organised crime, human trafficking, drug trafficking and cybercrime.[69]

To many, EU-Russia coordination seems also essential on regional issues like Syria, Libya, Iran, Central Asia, and on 'frozen conflicts' in the former Soviet Union space.[70] According to Kapoor,

---

[60] https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/european-defence-fund-(edf)
[61] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/
[62] Fischer, Sabine and Timofeev, Ivan (9th November 2020) "What future for EU-Russia relations?", Euractiv
[63] Ibid
[64] Ibid
[65] EUREN (4th February 2022) https://eu-russia-expertnetwork.eu/en/military-build-up-and-diplomacy-tensions-in-russia-west-relations/
[66] Ibid
[67] Williams, Michael John and Hodges, Erin (3rd March 2022) "Europe needs to prepare for a future without Russian energy", Atlantic Council
[68] Kapoor, Nivedita (11th March 2021) "Russia-EU Relations: The End of a Strategic Partnership", Observer Research Foundation
[69] Ibid
[70] Ibid

VOCAL EUROPE

"people-to-people contact form other potential sectors of cooperation" and will be necessary to restart to some extent, after the conflict in Ukraine is over.[71] The future challenges will necessitate the EU to adopt a more pragmatic policymaking, where abstract ideas will have to give way to smaller and targeted projects that will rebuild some confidence in the medium term. Moreover, it is essential for the Union to keep lines of communication open and to encourage exchanges on various political levels at every moment, as this would be invaluable in helping comprehend and predict actions of the other to prevent a further escalation of the conflict. Conversely, a key here is to consider this conflict as a long-term issue, not just a brief war. Forward-looking diplomacy seems necessary and means preparing the EU for a conflict situation that could go on for months, even years and could further escalate.[72]

Practically, a task force could be established to identify common interests and global risks inherent to the conflict in Ukraine, as well as to discuss possible options within the framework of the United Nations system.[73] In that context, China and the EU would have to work together to facilitate an immediate ceasefire and to create an international environment favourable for peace talks. Additionally, the EU would need to coordinate on the U.N. level to prepare for the necessary security assurances and arrangements after the war.[74] Nonetheless, as HR/VP Josep Borell argues, Europe must learn to speak the "language of power" to become a more assertive and decisive security provider.[75]

#2 Strengthening the European pillar of NATO and European Strategic Autonomy

The EU needs to become a stronger and more capable actor in the security and defence fields, to be ready to act in crisis situations that are a threat to both EU's values and interests. The war in Ukraine has had the effect of dislodging the "complacency" of EU Member States about European defence.[76] Even reluctant states such as Germany appear to reconsider its position as Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that the country would "overturn its post-WWII defence policy" by spending more than 2% of its GDP on its military.[77] In the meantime, the EU is working to strengthen the European pillar of NATO, so that the Union will be a stronger position to define a new collective security order with Russia while it is looking at ways to reduce its dependence on Russian gas. Gaps need to be bridged between NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass, which should mutually reinforce and complement each other.

For instance, this cooperation between both institutions could encompass bilateral meetings on a regular basis to ensure cohesion and coherence are always maintained. In the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Johannes Polak emphasises the need for a 'comprehensive European strategy on Russia' rather than the current "lowest common denominator" approach, mainly caused by persisting internal divisions between Member States.[78] In the long term, only a dual approach would be truly effective, with Member States acting together under the aegis of the EU as well as through their bilateral relations. For instance, tangible solutions and tools include an 'Hybrid Toolbox and Response Teams', 'Cyber Diplomatic Toolbox' as well as a robust Cyber Defence Policy.[79]

Moreover, some tools to 'boost defence technological innovation to reduce strategic dependencies' as well as a strengthened strategic partnership with NATO and the UN Cooperation with regional

---

[71] Ibid
[72] Dingding Chen, Nadine Godehardt, Maximilian Mayer, and Xin Zhang (29th March 2022) "Europe and China at a Crossroads", The Diplomat
[73] Ibid
[74] Ibid
[75] EEAS (March 2022) "Strategic Compass"
[76] Staunton, Eglantine (2022) "A Useful Failure: Macron's Overture to Russia", Survival, 64:2, 17-24
[77] Ibid
[78] https://www.tepsa.eu/watch-eu-russia-relations-and-the-future-of-europe-johannes-pollak-tepsa-explainers/
[79] EEAS (March 2022) "Strategic Compass"

partners (OSCE, AU, ASEAN) would also reinforce the European Strategic Autonomy.[80] Strong bilateral partnerships and a military assistance to partners through the European Peace Facility are also necessary conditions to reinforce the overall European Strategic Autonomy.[81]

Additionally, NATO will increase its cooperation with Asia-Pacific partners in areas like cyber, new technologies, disinformation, maritime security, climate change, and resilience, "because global challenges demand global solutions," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated.[82] Ministers agreed that NATO's next Strategic Concept, which will be finalised at the Madrid Summit end of June, must take account of NATO's future relations with Russia, and 'China's growing influence on Allied security'.[83] Conversely, since the beginning of the invasion, President Putin has resorted to the strategy of nuclear deterrence to fragment NATO and making it lose some of its deterrence credibility.[84] This is precisely because the war in Ukraine is not just about Europe's future relationships with Ukraine and Russia, but this invasion is just as well about redrawing the map of the post-Cold War era.

#3 Re-Thinking the EU-Russia Arctic Relationship

If the EU is going to become *the* geopolitically relevant security actor in Europe, particular attention to the military security concerns in the Arctic is crucial. To efficiently address Russian realpolitik, the EU needs to better understand the security challenges of the circumpolar North and to assess how EU leaders feel about "selectively engaging with Putin's Russia in the Arctic".[85] Russia's invasion of Ukraine also gives an incentive to the EU to further strengthen its economic interlinkages with countries in the North Atlantic – from Norway and the Faroe Islands to Iceland and Greenland, Canada and the U.S.[86]

According to the Strategic Compass of March 21st 2022, maritime security in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the North Sea, as well as of the Arctic waters, the Atlantic Ocean is primordial to ensure EU's 'security, economic development, free trade, transport and energy security'.[87] If the Arctic is indeed an arena where the EU needs to both "act, secure, invest and partner",[88] the Strategic Compass could have put more emphasis on the essential strategic dimension of the Arctic vis-à-vis European Security. Moreover, regional cooperative forums such as the Arctic Council or the various Barents mechanisms that promote dialogue on a sub-national level and provide recommendations on common issues are of foremost importance.[89] As such, rather technical areas of cooperation would be a good area in which to restart cooperation with Russia once the current level of tensions decreases. Still, foreign relations of the EU with Russia will likely not return to pre-2022 levels, or even to pre-2014 levels, at least as long as Putin has a grip on power.

If the Union's full engagement in Arctic affairs is a geopolitical necessity – as emphasised in the 2021 Joint Communication[90] – it might now be the time to think strategically about the Union's future relationship with Russia in the Arctic. As such, the EU needs to radically change its regional attitude towards Russia, vis-à-vis its energy dependence including imported natural gas stemming from the Russian Arctic, or with the recognition that Russia in the Arctic is a "security threat" for the EU.[91]

---

[80] Ibid
[81] EEAS (March 2022) "Strategic Compass"
[82] NATO (7th April 2022) Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs
[83] Ibid
[84] Leštinská, Silvie (22nd March 2022) "Russia "raised the stakes" in Ukraine and Europe now faces a new test", New Eastern Europe
[85] Raspotnik, Andreas and Østhagen, Andreas (March 2022) "The End of an Exceptional History: Re-Thinking the EU-Russia Arctic Relationship"
[86] Ibid
[87] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf
[88] Ibid
[89] Ibid
[90] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0027&from=EN
[91] Raspotnik, Andreas and Østhagen, Andreas (March 2022) "The End of an Exceptional History: Re-Thinking the EU-Russia Arctic Relationship"

As such, the Arctic might be an example of this EU shift from a "technocratic regulator" to a "geopolitical actor" willing to gain benefit from economic interdependencies, oppose strategic dependencies, and defend its Member States against third-party coercion. [92]

#4 Ending the Reliance on Russia Oil and Gas and the need to improve EU External Energy Security

The EU presented a rather unified position on security and defense issues in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nonetheless, this unity was not visible in the energy policy area, where the Member States' calls to drastically reduce Russian fossil fuel imports did not translate into sanctions immediately due to internal divisions.[93] Yet, on May 18th 2022, the European Commission has presented the REPowerEU Plan, its response to the global energy market disruption caused by the conflict.[94] There are two pressing priorities for transforming Europe's energy system: ending the EU's reliance on Russian energy, which is used as an economic and political weapon, and tackling the climate crisis.[95] Europe would have the resources to reduce its dependency on Russian energy faster, but only if it acts as a Union. More generally, the EU should push to establish an Energy Union that includes a large-scale joint R&D program to "improve existing renewable technology, a transparent joint fossil resource management system, a transparent system of gas storage facilities and a joint management of intermittency issues".[96]

In the medium to long term, such a union might greatly improve relations with Russia while also increasing the EU's bargaining power.[97] Currently, the efficiency and availability of renewable energy sources is still insufficient (because of intermittency) and the EU must significantly intensify its efforts in this area to abide by its climate goals.[98] While the EU is investing heavily in nuclear fusion research (such as ITER), other important aspects would require more attention; such as energy storage and biomass, as well as improving energy efficiency to generate energy savings and economically viable emission reductions.[99] While the ultimate goal is to decarbonise the EU economy by 2050, the process will be long until this objective is achieved and the Union needs to adopt realist thinking during this transition period.

Thus, the EU will expand domestic low-carbon energy production and reduce imports of fossil fuels from other countries, but it will remain heavily reliant on foreign energy supplies.[100] Within Europe, some of the energy exporting countries will have more room to adapt to these changes; for example by innovating the "forms of increased supply flexibility" – including LNG – or adjusting their infrastructure to non-fossil fuels such as hydrogen.[101] Moreover, a common external energy policy is required, as well as a 'common voice' for EU member states. As a unified actor representing the energy demand of 27 countries, the Union would be able to release its economic potential.

Furthermore, this would undermine Russia's 'divide and rule' strategy, which is clearly visible in its approach towards EU member states.[102] The first stage is to improve member states' starting positions in negotiations with their energy suppliers by increasing transparency inside the EU on the pricing of imported energy (for example, "pipeline" natural gas).[103] The current energy crisis can help pave the

---

[92] Ibid
[93] Mišík, Matúš (June 2022) "The EU needs to improve its external energy security" Energy Policy Volume 165
[94] European Commission (18th May 2022) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3131
[95] Ibid
[96] Schubert, S.R., Pollak, J. & Brutschin, E. (2014) "Two futures: EU-Russia relations in the context of Ukraine." Eur J Futures Res 2, 52
[97] Ibid
[98] Ibid
[99] Ibid
[100] Mišík, Matúš (June 2022) "The EU needs to improve its external energy security" Energy Policy Volume 165
[101] Ibid
[102] Karlsen, G.H. (2019) Divide and rule: ten lessons about Russian political influence activities in Europe. Palgrave Commun 5, 19 https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0227-8
[103] Ibid

VOCAL EUROPE

way for change, convincing reluctant member states that a shared strategy to external energy security can help boost decarbonisation by providing a stable transition phase and achieve internal market stability by limiting price volatility.[104] Furthermore, because Moscow lacks a credible alternative to European foreign direct investments (FDI), the EU has a stronger bargaining position than is often believed.[105]

#5 The Construction of a Geopolitical EU: Recalibrating EU Foreign Policy and External Governance

The war in Ukraine will have a lasting impact on EU-Russia-China relations as China's rhetorical balancing act of supporting "security concerns of all countries" and, simultaneously, indicating that the "purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter should be jointly upheld" is seen in Europe as support of Russia.[106] While there is a fear that the Chinese government could undermine sanctions against Russia, EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell has made clear that China is one of the only actors that could effectively mediate in this conflict.[107] Beijing and Brussels have very different views on both human rights issues and economic practices, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine could further jeopardise any future cooperation on these issues.[108] The recent EU-China summit of April 2022 ended "without significant breakthroughs", as the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment remains unsigned.[109] In the most optimistic post-war scenario, the reconstruction of Ukraine would lead to an increased infrastructural cooperation between the EU and China, a diplomatic renewal of the U.N. Charter, and the growth of trade between the two blocks.[110]

To this end, a more geopolitical Europe would require numerous practical measures, as well as massive investments, and an efficient diplomacy. On the other hand, Beijing has constructed and enhanced strategic partnerships with Russia and Iran featuring a shared sentiment against the U.S.[111] Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter, warned in 1998 about the scenario of an 'antihegemonic' coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances.[112] Despite the fact that an anti-American power axis has emerged, these alliances remain mainly transactional, rather than sentimental.[113] Under President Xi Jinping's more assertive leadership in the early 2010s, China's ascension to the world stage accelerated substantially, as shown by ambitious geopolitical programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[114]

More precisely, China views Central Asia as an important cornerstone of its BRI which crystallise economic and geopolitical ambitions altogether. Throughout history, Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – has been an "important crossroads connecting Europe and Asia in terms of energy, trade and infrastructure".[115] Moreover, the U.S.' and its NATO partners' abrupt withdrawal from Afghanistan in late summer 2021 is likely to accelerate this geopolitical transition to Central Asia.[116] Nonetheless, Because of Russia's rapid economic downturn – a decline of 10-15% is expected by 2022 – the EAEU is even less likely to deliver on its economic goals, putting members at risk of secondary sanctions.[117] In this context, according to

[104] Ibid
[105] Schubert, S.R., Pollak, J. & Brutschin, E. (2014) "Two futures: EU-Russia relations in the context of Ukraine." Eur J Futures Res 2, 52
[106] Dingding Chen, Nadine Godehardt, Maximilian Mayer, and Xin Zhang (29th March 2022) "Europe and China at a Crossroads", The Diplomat
[107] Ibid
[108] https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/04/12/china-eu-relations-amid-ukraine-crisis-event-7859
[109] Ibid
[110] Dingding Chen, Nadine Godehardt, Maximilian Mayer, and Xin Zhang (29th March 2022) "Europe and China at a Crossroads", The Diplomat
[111] Li, Cheng (May 2021) "Biden's China strategy: Coalition-driven competition or Cold War-style confrontation?", Brookings
[112] Ibid
[113] Suisheng Zhao (2022) The US–China Rivalry in the Emerging Bipolar World: Hostility, Alignment, and Power Balance, Journal of Contemporary China, 31:134, 169-185, DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2021.1945733
[114] Neil Winn & Stefan Gänzle (2022) Recalibrating EU Foreign Policy Vis-à-vis Central Asia: Towards Principled Pragmatism and Resilience, Geopolitics, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2022.2042260
[115] Ibid
[116] Ibid
[117] Wolczuk, Kataryna and Dragneva, Rilka (3rd May 2022) "Putin's Eurasian dream may soon become a nightmare", Chatham House

Gänzle and Winn, the EU should continue to prioritise forms of external governance based on pragmatic self-promotion of EU material (primarily economic) interests and the protection of European territorial security on matters like borders, migration, and counterterrorism.[118]

Rather than exporting European ideals throughout Central Asia, this more pragmatic and realist approach focuses on negotiating public-private sector partnerships and safeguarding European security through a series of formal agreements and implicit understandings with Russia and China.[119] Gänzle and Winn suggest that the reformulation of EU policy towards Central Asia is pragmatically driven by growing EU foreign policy limitations as well as Chinese and Russian involvement in the region, as it is, in the end, geographic proximity that continues to shape geopolitics in the region.[120] Furthermore, most of the interactions between European and Central Asian states occur bilaterally, which also undermine EU ambitions. As a result, the Union should launch more EU-led initiatives in the region to supplement bilateral accords and provide these nations with an alternative to the prevailing Russian or Chinese models.

Conclusion

According to President Macron, "we are currently experiencing a deep crisis of the Westphalian liberal world order", and as a result, we are witnessing the emergence of an increasingly bipolar and illiberal world.[121] Contrary to what the Kremlin leader might have expected, this war will be a landmark in the consolidation of Ukraine as a sovereign nation and in the reaffirmation of its identity, separated from that of Russia.[122] This conflict will certainly be a decisive moment in Ukraine's development as an independent nation and in the reaffirmation of its distinct identity from Russia. Russia's actions in Ukraine have undoubtedly increased EU Member States' willingness to act together and take unpresented sanctions alongside a tougher stance against Moscow. To this point, the Union is providing Ukraine with substantial financial and humanitarian assistance, as well as contributing to the financing of military equipment supplied by Member States.[123]

Conversely, global challenges awaiting such as climate change, economic development, the fight against pandemics or the maintenance of international peace and security "can only be solved by joining forces" according to HR/VP Josep Borell.[124] Therefore, it is crucial to continue promoting a multilateral order, based on common goals and international law. All countries must actively contribute to defending and strengthening this rules-based international order. In particular, given the importance of China's economic links with the EU and Ukraine, it would seem natural for China to leverage its good relations with Russia to help bring President Putin to a path of law and peace.[125]

Furthermore, a shift is occurring towards a truly geopolitical EU that embraces "Resilience" and "Principled Pragmatism," particularly with regard to third countries like those in Central Asia and the Caucasus.[126] Moreover, half of the Arctic will be apart from the 'Nordic Plus approach' to Arctic governance, at least for the foreseeable future.[127] While this change does not have to be permanent, it is currently difficult to see how exactly Russia will be able to return to international cooperation, in the Arctic and elsewhere, and how this will impact the implementation of the five guiding

[118] Ibid
[119] Neil Winn & Stefan Gänzle (2022) Recalibrating EU Foreign Policy Vis-à-vis Central Asia: Towards Principled Pragmatism and Resilience, Geopolitics, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2022.2042260
[120] Ibid
[121] United Nations General Assembly: Speech by President Emmanuel Macron (25 September 2018)
[122] Eglantine Staunton (2022) 'France is back': Macron's European policy to rescue 'European civilisation' and the liberal international order, Third World Quarterly, 43:1, 18-34, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2021.1994384
[123] EEAS (26th April 2022) "Russia's war against Ukraine: where do we stand and what can the future bring?"
[124] Ibid
[125] Ibid
[126] Neil Winn & Stefan Gänzle (2022) Recalibrating EU Foreign Policy Vis-à-vis Central Asia: Towards Principled Pragmatism and Resilience, Geopolitics, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2022.2042260
[127] Kirchner, Stefan, (February 25, 2022). "International Arctic Governance without Russia", SSRN

VOCAL EUROPE

principles for EU-Russia relations. At the same time, it is necessary to take a broader perspective on the EU-Russia relations by looking at their complex economic, political, and security intricacies, but also by looking at their divergent approaches to various regional and global issues. All in all, the EU must continue to pursue a realist strategy of firmness tempered by a recognition of its own limits and limitations, while considering global powers' overlapping interests.

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU

TWITTER.COM/THEVOCALEUROPE

FACEBOOK.COM/VOCALEUROPE

YOUTUBE.COM/VOCALEUROPE

INSTAGRAM.COM/VOCALEUROPE

VOCAL EUROPE