


POLICY PAPER

The Ukraine Crisis in the Wake of Russia's Military Build-Up: How Could the EU Respond?



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Background: Flaring Up of a Smouldering Conflict

Dreaming of the end of history, Europe awakened by the return of geopolitics in its direct Neighbourhood. With President Putin's landmark speech at the 43rd MSC in 2007 challenging the post-Cold War world order, the Georgian war in 2008 and more recently with the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, history has returned. Russia broke its commitment made under the Budapest Memorandum¹ and Ukraine plunged into a crisis which has been smouldering for seven years and killing thousands of people.

The Minsk- Agreements of 2014 and 2015, and the ceasefire agreement of 2020, all sought to end the war but have remained unsuccessful. Recently, the conflict has flared up again in the context of Russia's massive troop deployment near Ukraine's borders, the military maneuver on Crimea, and the announcement to block parts of the Black Sea. Adding to this, the former positive trend of declining violence in the wake of the July 2020 ceasefire has reversed since 2021.² The rise of logistics capabilities supporting the troop build-up³ enhanced Russia's threat-posture and intensified the (perceived) risk of conflict escalation before the announced troop-withdrawal at the end of April 2021.⁴

According to US intelligence information however, Moscow retains a lethal force of 80,000 troops and heavy weaponry⁵ which still constitutes the biggest force the Kremlin has ever amassed near Ukraine's borders since the annexation of Crimea. Russia, refusing to implement the provisions of the Vienna Document to enhance transparency and confidence, demonstrates the Kremlin's intention to continue its threat-posture against Ukraine.⁶

This build-up has thus turned into the most severe security crisis in the EU's neighbourhood since 2014 and the Ukraine crisis is far from being resolved. Questions on how to de-escalate, discourage Russia to maintain its threat-posture, and achieve peace are back on the agenda. Both Kyiv and Moscow have not yet fulfilled their obligations made under the Minsk II agreement.

However, political and economic measures stipulated by the agreement can hardly be implemented while Russia and the Russian proxy forces do not implement the security related measures including the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from the line of contact. Hence, the peace negotiations seem to be at a dead-end. The uncertainty about the *finalité* of the Kremlin's actions, the difficulties of implementing the Minsk-Agreements and the prospects of a major military conflict causes serious *inquiétude* in Ukraine.

For the EU, the flaring-up of this conflict brings back on the agenda the question of values, norms and rules, and of the EU's willingness to enforce them.⁷ The democratic choice of the Ukrainian people in their political turn towards the EU and the Russian violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty lies at the heart of the conflict. This makes Ukraine's security Europe's security.

¹ In the 1994 *Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances*, the United States, Russia, and Britain committed "to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine" and "to refrain from the threat or use of force" against the country.

² [OSCE/ SMM](#)

³ Gordon, M.R. & Kantchev, G. (20 April 2021) [Satellite Images Show Russia's Expanding Ukraine Buildup](#), The Wall Street Journal.

⁴ [Announced](#) by Russian Defence Minister Shoigu 22 April 2021.

⁵ Cooper, H. & Barnes, J.E. (5 May 2021) [80,000 Russian Troops Remain at Ukraine Border as U.S. and NATO Hold Exercises](#), The New York Times.

⁶ PR (12.04.2021): [Foreign Ministry Comment on Russia's Non-compliance with Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures](#). Mfa.gov.ua

⁷ Interview conducted with Dr. Susan Stewart, 12. May 2021

Moreover, countries like China are closely following how the West addresses international law violations and seizures of territory by force. In that sense, the Ukraine crisis might have serious repercussions on the international stage.⁸ In order to credibly respond and draw red lines, it is crucial for the EU to engage in the Ukraine crisis in the wake of Russia's military build-up.

Current State of Play

1. Perspective from Ukraine

Ukraine turned West with the Euromaidan revolution, the EU Association Agreement and its constitutionally enshrined aspiration to join NATO. With the war in the Donbass and the illegal annexation of Crimea, Russian assertiveness is perceived to be grounded in Ukraine's free democratic choice to share a political European future. Destabilizing Ukraine allows Moscow to undermine Kyiv's progress in its geo-political shift, positioning Ukraine at the front-line of Russia's war with the West.⁹

Since the beginning of the conflict, the Kremlin has been covertly controlling proxy forces in Eastern Ukraine which have occupied seven percent of Ukraine's territory.¹⁰ Hence, the Russian military build-up constitutes a direct provocation and Kyiv accuses Russia of sending arms and troops to support the pro-Russian separatists.

In light of the ongoing Russian- Belarussian negotiations on agreements including a military dimension¹¹ and the retained troop-force near the border, Ukrainian Defense Minister Taran affirmed the serious prospects of conflict escalation and warned that Russia was planning to emulate the *Gleiwitz* incident¹², with Ukraine becoming a country under siege and in need of Western aid. Moreover, the Ukraine crisis has become a "war of civilizations, generations and values"¹³, as President Putin perceives the Ukrainian democratic choice as threat to his regime¹⁴. Thus, the (Russian motive in this) conflict has a domestic as well as an international dimension.

Addressing the US and lately Germany, President Zelenskyy demands military support, especially lethal weaponry, combined with an enhanced diplomatic effort. Even the idea of nuclear deterrence for Ukraine is back on the table.¹⁵ Due to the limited progress in the peace process, President Zelenskyy proposed to revamp the Minsk-Agreements and invited the US, UK and Canada to participate in the diplomatic process.¹⁶ In order to keep international attention on the Ukraine crisis and especially Crimea, the formation of the "Crimean Platform" was announced, too.¹⁷

Since NATO membership and its collective security system plays a central role in Ukraine's

⁸ Farkas, E. referring to the Indo-Pacific, in: "[Russia's Dangerous Military Escalation With Ukraine](#)", Atlantic Council, 14 April 2021.

⁹ Interview conducted with Ambassador Tochytskyi, 27 April 2021.

¹⁰ Approx. 2,500 Russian officers are serving in occupied Donbas providing command and control for Russian proxy forces; Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

¹¹ [Interview](#) with President Zelenskyy, by Konrad Schuller (31 May 2021), FAZ.

¹² An attack under false flag on a German radio station "Sender Gleiwitz", manufactured by the Nazi-regime as a *casus belli* to justify the invasion of Poland.; [The statement of Ukraine's defense minister Andrii Taran](#), 10 April 2021 Mil.gov.ua.

¹³ Interview conducted with Ambassador Tochytskyi, 27 April 2021.

¹⁴ Olga Stefanishyna, the deputy prime minister of Ukraine for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, in: "[Ukraine Needs a Clear Path to NATO Membership](#)", Foreign Policy, 12 April 2021.

¹⁵ Interview with Andriy Melnyk, Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany, conducted by Dirk Müller (15 April 2021): [Ukrainischer Botschafter: „Wir brauchen militärische Unterstützung“](#), Deutschlandfunk.

¹⁶ [President of Ukraine calls for revamp of peace process to end Donbas war](#), President.gov.ua, 26 April 2021.

¹⁷ Samorukov, M. (5 April 2021) [Are Russia and Ukraine Sliding Into War?](#) Carnegie Moscow Center.

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geopolitical shift, Ukrainian authorities were disappointed to not be invited to the NATO summit in Brussels in June 2021 and called for NATO to accelerate the membership process and adhere to its “open door policy commitment”.¹⁸

2. Perspective from Russia

Russia has an interest in presenting the conflict in Eastern Ukraine as a domestic one, provoked by Ukraine's breaking of the ceasefire with the militias of Donetsk and Luhansk. According to such a narrative, the fiction of Russian aggression is used as an excuse to ask for Western support, and thus accelerate Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic agenda.¹⁹ For the Kremlin, President Zelenskyy has attempted to enhance Ukraine's domestic and international standing by “playing the anti-Russian card”.²⁰ Finally, Russia has justified any troop deployment on Ukraine's borders as legitimate readiness checks and maneuvers conducted by the Russian military. Taking into account the NATO- led military maneuver *Defender Europe 2021*- the biggest military maneuver since the end of the cold war-, Russia engages in a military exercise with Serbia and maintains its troops until the massive *Zapad-2021* maneuvers in September with Belarus.²¹

Aiming at maintaining the *status quo* in the Donbas, the Kremlin has been engaging in heavy saber rattling and force demonstration.²² Destabilizing the government and keeping Ukraine involved in territorial conflicts has allowed President Putin to demonstrate strength on the international stage and has hindered Kyiv's attempts to implement the reform agenda or obtain the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP).²³ Forcing concessions from President Zelenskyy or testing the incoming Biden administration are further possible motives for the Kremlin's assertiveness. Russia might want to emphasize the limits of Western support for Kyiv by provoking a reaction “fall(ing) short of the hopes of the Ukrainian government”.²⁴

3. Perspective from the US and NATO

US President Biden declared the United States' “unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty” at the same time as he made clear the United States' desire to prevent conflict escalation. As details of Russia's troop movements emerged, the US European Command raised its alert status to the highest level. Nevertheless, the US does not have the intention to engage militarily, even if this constituted *one* valid option in the context of the Budapest Memorandum.²⁵ Imposed sanctions on Russia follow the principle of proportionality²⁶ and the US eventually refrained from sending two US warships to the Black Sea.

Instead, the US strongly engaged in symbolic actions and diplomacy. The Biden-Putin-summit in June 2021 provided an opportunity to exchange views, while reiterating support for Ukraine's free choice and sovereignty. With regards to military support, the Pentagon announced a \$125 million

¹⁸ Euractiv/ AFP (27 May 2021): [Ukraine condemns lack of progress towards NATO membership](#), Euractiv.

¹⁹ [Merkel telefoniert mit Putin wegen Ukraine-Konflikt](#), Deutsche Welle 8 April 2021.

²⁰ Samorukov, M. (5 April 2021) [Are Russia and Ukraine Sliding Into War? Carnegie Moscow Center](#).

²¹ McDermott (30 June 2021): [As Russian Military Prepares for Zapad 2021, Heavy Armed Forces Stay Close to Ukraine](#), The Jamestown Foundation.

²² Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

²³ Pifer, S. (6 June 2019): [NATO's Ukraine Challenge](#), Brookings.

²⁴ Cooper, H. & Barnes, J.E. (5 May 2021) [80,000 Russian Troops Remain at Ukraine Border as U.S. and NATO Hold Exercises](#), The New York Times.

²⁵ When negotiating the security assurances, U.S. officials told their Ukrainian counterparts that, were Russia to violate them, the United States would respond - even if the US did not promise unlimited support. In: Pifer, S. (5 December 2019) [Why care about Ukraine and the Budapest Memorandum](#). Brookings.

²⁶ ml/mak (16 April 2021) [Biden will keine Eskalation mit Russland](#), Deutsche Welle.

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military aid package in March 2021, followed by another \$150 million package in June for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) including training, equipment, and advisory efforts.²⁷

With regards to NATO, the alliance expressed its unwavering support, announced its intention to “make full use” of Ukraine’s status as an *Enhanced Opportunity Partner* and called on Moscow to engage “constructively” at the OSCE on its military activities.²⁸ The North Atlantic Treaty (1949) states that NATO membership is open to any “European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area”.

Additionally, NATO’s enlargement study of 1995 outlined that “states which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, (...) must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance.”²⁹ Taking into account Ukraine’s political, economic, and military shortcomings as well as the still unresolved conflict, obtaining the Membership Action Plan (MAP) soon remains unrealistic. The Article 5 security guarantee and the ambiguity of its application to MAP countries brings in the question of possible direct confrontation with Russia³⁰.

4. Perspective from the EU

The EU regards Ukraine as a European country due to its history, culture, and, increasingly, its economy. This explains why the EU has historically facilitated Kyiv's geopolitical shift from East to West (EaP, Comprehensive Freetrade Agreement, EU- Association Agreement)³¹. The EU has provided extensive economic assistance³² and support for Kyiv’s reform agenda. Since 2014, the EU and its Member States have contributed over €1 billion in humanitarian and early recovery aid to assist Ukraine in the face of its simmering conflict³³. A dedicated Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA) was created as well as the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) to Ukraine - the first EU mission to the Eastern Neighbourhood amid ongoing armed conflict.³⁴

Responding to Russia’s breach of international law, the European Council continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and reiterates its strict non-recognition policy. The EU adopted economic sanctions against sectors of Russian economy, sanctions against individuals and entities, restrictions on business in Crimea and Sevastopol and on economic cooperation, and took diplomatic measures, such as the suspension of the regular EU- Russia Council.³⁵ The sanctions regime is directly linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk-Agreements which have become an essential part of the EU’s Russia policy.³⁶ Supporting a political solution to the conflict,

²⁷ US Dept. of Defense/ PR (11 June 2021) [Defense Department Announces \\$150 Million in Assistance for Ukraine](#).

²⁸ [PR/ NATO- Ukraine Commission](#) (13 April 2021) ; NATO Summit [Brussels communiqué](#) (14 June 2021)

²⁹ NATO (1995): [Study on NATO Enlargement](#)

³⁰ Pifer, S. (6 June 2019): [NATO’s Ukraine Challenge](#), Brookings.

³¹ Interview conducted with H.E. Mr. Maasikas, 18 April 2021.

³² Between 2014 and today, the EU and its financial institutions have overall mobilised over € 15 billion in loans and grants to support Ukraine in stabilising its economy, carrying out comprehensive reforms and improving the lives of its citizens. Since 2017, a € 50 million comprehensive support programme for government-controlled parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions is in place. The programme was recently topped-up by € 10 million and expanded to support the Sea of Azov region. Retrieved from: EEAS [“Ukraine and the EU”](#).

³³ EU assistance for 2014-2021: EU emergency and early recovery assistance: €1 billion; EU Member States humanitarian aid: €268.9 million; European Commission humanitarian aid: €190.2 million. Retrieved from: European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/ukraine_en.

³⁴ EEAS [“Ukraine and the EU”](#)

³⁵ Consilium.europa (last updated 25 May 2021): [EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine](#).

³⁶ Five Guiding Principles for the EU’s Russia Policy: 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

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the EU has enhanced its assistance to the OSCE and become, together with its member states, the biggest contributor to the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) which monitors the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

In the wake of the Russian military build-up, the European Council and its President Charles Michel, HR/VP Borell, the EU Member States (also within the G7³⁷ and the transatlantic context), all condemned the collapse of the ceasefire and the military-buildup at Ukraine's borders.³⁸ Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba's participation in the Foreign Affairs Council meeting sent yet another signal of European support.³⁹

Limits and Insufficiencies in the Current Approach

Even if Europeans are concerned, they seem unable and/or unwilling to announce red-lines and make use of the *entire* range of instruments which could be used against the Russian build-up. So far, European actions have been restricted to statements, declarations, and coercive measures through sanctions. While the Minsk Agreements constitute a cornerstone for the EU's sanctions regime and Russia policy, its full implementation remains unrealistic: Russia's and Ukraine's objectives regarding the Donbas and thus their interpretations of the provisions in the Minsk-Agreements are incompatible.

Ukraine perceives the agreements as an instrument with which to re-establish its sovereignty, Russia sees them as tools to break Ukraine's sovereignty by reversing the sequence of actions and by leaving Crimea off the agenda.⁴⁰ Without the implementation of the Agreement's military part and a successful ceasefire, the implementation of the political aspects is difficult.⁴¹ While the EU is not involved in the process, France and Germany have been representing and reporting back to the Union.

Responding to Russia: In contrast to the US, Canada or the UK who are all potent security policy actors, the EU is *not* perceived as a relevant interlocuteur for security policy by the Kremlin. This is grounded in a lack of a consensus among Europeans concerning what the European security order should look like. Without a clearly defined idea or a common understanding concerning which actor the EU wants to be, the union cannot contribute to solving the crisis - neither on a technical, nor on a strategic level. The EU has failed to draw red-lines and to defend the values it holds true when responding to Russia's violations of international law and of its commitments made under the Budapest memorandum. This goes hand in hand with a new EU-Russian Policy. While some still consider the 2016 revised policy to be a "solid"⁴² one, the current situation requires a new approach to Russia, i.e., a policy that goes *beyond* sanctions and coercive measures and that takes into account the many (international) dossiers requiring engagement with Russia⁴³. Engaging and seeking dialogue is key, even if challenging due to distinct dialogue cultures and "moral compasses"⁴⁴ as well as

certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and support for people-to-people contacts. In: EP/ Briefing (February 2018): [The EU's Russia Policy: Five Guiding Principles](#).

³⁷ Since 2014, Russia has been excluded from the G8 summits, hence the framework met as G7.

³⁸ [HR/VP Statement](#) (25 February 2021); [G7 Statement](#) (13 April 2021); [European Council](#) (25 May 2021); [European Council](#) (24 June 2021); [PR/ NATO- Ukraine Commission](#) (13 April 2021); NATO Summit [Brussels communiqué](#) (14 June 2021).

³⁹ [PR/MFA.GOV.UA](#) (19 April 2021).

⁴⁰ Allan, D. (22 May 2020): [The Minsk Conundrum: Western Policy and Russia's War in Eastern Ukraine](#), Chathamhouse.

⁴¹ Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

⁴² Interview conducted with H.E. Mr. Maasikas, 18 April 2021.

⁴³ The report on EU- Russia relations by the HR/VP. EC (16 June 2021): [Joint communication on EU-Russia relations - Push back, constrain and engage](#).

⁴⁴ Interview conducted with Dr. Susan Stewart, 12 May 2021.

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different narratives and interpretations of the past⁴⁵. Yet, the foreign policy instrument of *dialogue* in the framework of the EU- Russia summit remains suspended, as the Franco- German proposal to re-engage with Russia has been rejected by the other Member States at the European Council in June 2021.⁴⁶

Supporting Ukraine: While the EU's support has been substantial, "hard security" efforts have remained absent. The EU sent a CSDP mission to Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) in 2014, but its "security and defence" component largely disappeared from the mandate to avoid confrontation with Russia and debates on NATO/ EU dichotomy.⁴⁷ Any military dimension (or the announcement of one) in the European support, such as the setting up of a rapid intervention force in case of military escalation, has remained absent - also in the recent military build-up.

While the US supports Kyiv with lethal weapon deliveries, military assistance has been provided on a EU Member States basis only.⁴⁸ With regards to diplomatic and political engagement, the EU has refrained so far from appointing a EU Special Representative (EUSR) to Ukraine and/ or Crimea⁴⁹. EUSRs promote the EU's policies and interests in troubled regions and countries and support efforts to consolidate peace, stability and the rule of law.⁵⁰ In 2005, HR Javier Solana remarked that EUSRs are "the visible expression of the EU's growing engagement in some of the world's most troubled countries and regions" and how "the list of where we have EUSRs is, in part, also a list of where our foreign and security policy priorities lie".⁵¹ Hence, the EU's failure to appoint a EUSR or to provide military assistance gives way to questions on the EU's credibility to act in its Neighbourhood.

Short-and Long-Term Developments

The maintained troop presence around Ukraine's borders suggests the continuation of Russia's power demonstration. This is further vindicated by the *Zapad-2021* military maneuver taking place in the context of *Defender Europe 2021*. While the risk of an offensive operation might be real and the maintained troop strength combined with the logistical support still provide for military readiness, the prospect of a Russia military intervention is low, as the benefits are dubious.⁵² The costs of an

⁴⁵ Dempsey, J. (24 Jun 2021): [Russia-Europe Relations Depend on Moscow Confronting the Past](#), Carnegie Europe.

⁴⁶ Reuters (25 June 2021) [France and Germany drop Russia summit plan after EU's east objects](#).

⁴⁷ The mission distanced itself from any activity which could be interpreted as a direct or indirect contribution to conflict resolution due to the EU's reluctance to send military missions to the Eastern neighbourhood region. In: Litra, L., Medynskyi, I. & K. Zarembo (23 March 2017): [ASSESSING THE EU'S CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING INTERVENTIONS IN UKRAINE](#), Institute of World Politics.

⁴⁸ Lithuania has donated phased-out equipment, such as heavy machine guns and other light weapons. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria have provided spare parts for the Ukrainian army's armoured vehicles. Lithuania, Poland, and Bulgaria have delivered ammunition and other lethal aid. There is also the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade- [the Lublin Triangle](#)- for military maneuvers and training between European and Ukrainian armed forces and the Viségrad- Battlegroups including forces from Georgia and Ukraine. In: Gressel, G. & Nico Popescu (3 November 2020): [The best defence: Why the EU should forge security compacts with its eastern neighbours](#). ECFR.

⁴⁹ The [current 9 EUSRs](#) cover the following: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central Asia, Horn of Africa, Human Rights, Kosovo, Middle East Peace Process, Sahel and South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia.

⁵⁰ The [EP study on the scope and mandate of the EUSRs](#) concluded, that their main tasks are to 1) Provide information about their mandate area; 2) Demonstrate the EU's interest and engagement in the mandate area and strengthen the visibility of the Union in the region; 3) Conflict prevention and conflict resolution; 4) Implement the EU's regional strategies in the mandate area and provide the EEAS and the Commission with input for the formulation of new strategies; 5) Contribute to a better coordination of EU activities in the mandate area and contribute to the unity, consistency and effectiveness of the Union's action; 6) Cooperate closely with international actors; 7) Engage with all relevant actors at local level.

⁵¹ Council (29 June 2005), [Opening remarks of the EU High Representative for the CFSP, Seminar with EU Special Representatives](#), Brussels.

⁵² Minzarari, D. (April 2021) : [The Russian Military Escalation around Ukraine's Donbas](#), SWP.

intervention would be higher than in 2014 because the Ukrainian military is better equipped. This makes a “short victorious war” - with the joint aims of occupying a land bridge to connect Crimea with mainland Russia and to seize the water canal to Crimea - very unlikely. As Russian society has grown tired of foreign policy adventurism, an intervention and Russian casualties would hardly help Putin improve his standing in the public opinion before the *Duma* elections in September 2021.⁵³

It is unlikely that the Kremlin would want to endanger the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, or attract negative international attention. Yet, the demonstrated threat posture has made sense and paid off for the Kremlin - and it still does, as nothing serious to counteract its behaviour has happened so far. The Black Sea area will remain a center of attention with the *Sea Breeze* military maneuver in July 2021 and Russia projecting its dominance in the area, as well as in the Sea of Azov, the Kerch Strait.⁵⁴

In the long-term, political and media attention is likely to be drawn to other theatres of interest- such as the Middle East or Belarus, contributing to leaving the crisis and the question of a new European security order unresolved. A frozen conflict and permanent instability is most likely to evolve, which suits Russian aspiration for a prominent status on the international stage. Yet, a simmering conflict will force the local population in the occupied areas to make pragmatic choices to adjust. The longer it lasts, the more they might reorient towards Russia⁵⁵ - a trend furthered by the Russian passport policy.

The passporting and protection of citizens abroad is a classic strategy of Russia's foreign policy in supporting pro-Kremlin separatist movements or allowing *de facto* annexation under the pretext of protecting Russian citizens abroad- not only in Ukraine, but also in other ex-Soviet countries such as Moldova and Georgia.⁵⁶ This approach continues to serve as a destabilizing tool and may foreshadow Russia's plans to incorporate the Donbas, either through annexation or through the sending of peace keeping forces.⁵⁷

Policy Recommendations

The EU's Self Conception. Credibly acting in response to Russian behaviour requires the EU to work internally first, i.e., defining what the Union wishes to become, and how it can achieve it. Coordinating with the US, the EU should make an inventory of instruments and decide on when to use them and by whom- the EU, its Member States, and/ or with NATO.⁵⁸

Symbolic Action. The participation of HR/VP Borell and President Michel at the Crimean summit on August, 23, 2021 is exemplary and could be further supplemented with high-ranking politicians visiting the fighting- line and Kyiv. Extraordinary meetings of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and joint military exercises are mutually beneficial, as they have a deterrence and training dimension, and

⁵³ Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021; Samorukov, M. (5 April 2021) [Are Russia and Ukraine Sliding Into War?](#), Carnegie Moscow Center.

⁵⁴ Interview conducted with Dr. Susan Stewart, 12. May 2021.

⁵⁵ Sasse, G. (22 April 2021): [Putin's Undeclared Red Lines—For Now](#), Carnegie- Europe.

⁵⁶ Since the announcement of the Donbas passport initiative in 2019, Russia is suspected to have issued up to 650 000 passports. ; Dickinson, P. (13 April 2021): [Russian passports: Putin's secret Weapon in the War against Ukraine](#), Atlantic Council.

⁵⁷ Referring to the genocide in Srebrenica, Putin's chief of staff Mr. Kozak compared the situation of ethnic Russians in Donbas with that of Muslims in the Bosnian War: Should the lives of Russians be in danger, then "apparently we will have to step in to defend (them)." In : JS/ MSH (9 April 2021) [Russia, after sending troops to Ukraine border, calls escalation 'unprecedented'](#), Deutsche Welle.

⁵⁸ Interview conducted with Dr. Susan Stewart, 12. May 2021.

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enhance interoperability.⁵⁹ Titles also send strong signals. While obtaining a NATO MAP remains unrealistic for now, NATO and Ukraine should fully exploit the “annual action plans” inciting Kyiv to deepen its practical cooperation with the alliance and make progress without labelling it as “MAP”.⁶⁰

Political Engagement & Dialogue. Diplomacy remains at the heart of EU action and should be coordinated with the USA and the UK⁶¹, as well as supplemented with “private” communication between the Europeans, especially France and Germany, with Russia.⁶² The Biden administration has shown great interest in the relationship with Russia so far, and the Kremlin takes the US more seriously than the EU as a security policy actor. Hence including the US to the Normandy process or having a special representative to coordinate with France and Germany could inject new momentum to the process.

Given that Eastern Ukraine certainly fits the description of a troubled region, the EU should increase the visibility of its policies there and engage to keep the conflict on the international agenda. Hence, the EU should appoint a EUSR to Ukraine/ Crimea to guard and solidify the policies of non-recognition and sanctions, highlight human rights violations and shed light on the continued militarisation and the fragile security situation in the Black Sea.

Moreover, long-term strategic discussions on the (new) European security order are a prerequisite for achieving sustainable peace in Ukraine. While there are existent platforms that could be better exploited, such as the OSCE or the NATO-Russia Council, other options might be worth considering, as well: the Budapest Memorandum Format, the Helsinki II Summit or a new strategic format in the analogy of the Madrid conference in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, replacing the current format and “dropping” the Minsk Agreements would undermine the EU’s sanctions regime and Russia Policy.

Sanctions Escalation. Vocal communication and drawing red-lines with Russia implies, coordinated with the US scheduling to escalate sanctions, used as a deterrent to credibly elevate the price for any (new) Russian violation of international law. Such sanctions could touch upon state owned enterprises, individuals, sovereign debt, and specific sectors.⁶³

Security and Defence Dimension. The West can support Ukraine in building its military tactical resilience. Joint military maneuvers and operations provide Ukrainian military not only with joint experience but increase interoperability for any case of rapid joint defence, too.⁶⁴ EU defence ministers have already started considering a rapid military response force of 5,000 troops. The coalition of the willing as provided by Article 44 TEU⁶⁵, combined with the European Peace Facility⁶⁶ and the Battle Group experience, is an option that should be exploited in case of military escalation.

⁵⁹ South, T: (16 March 2021) [Massive army led nato exercise defender Europe kicks off](#). ArmyTimes.

⁶⁰ Pifer, S. (6 June 2019): [NATO's Ukraine Challenge](#), Brookings; Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

⁶¹ Interview conducted with H.E. Mr. Maasikas 18 April 2021; Interview conducted with Ambassador Tochytskyi, 27 April 2021.

⁶² Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

⁶³ Interview conducted with Ambassador Tochytskyi, 27 April 2021.; Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

⁶⁴ Interview conducted with Ambassador Pifer, 21 April 2021.

⁶⁵ De Langlois, M. & Aras, B. (Nov .2015): [Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union: enhancing efficiency in EU operations](#), Note de recherche stratégique n°26 Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole militaire.

⁶⁶ With € 5 billion in funds over the next seven years (2021–2027), the Euro-pean Peace Facility can cover the costs of EU military missions and operations; provide bilateral military and defence assistance to any EU partner ; EEAS (March 2021) [The European Peace and Facility Fund](#).

Yet, the required mandate by the Council brings back on the agenda debates on diverging Member States views on Russia, on one hand, and on the EU-NATO-dichotomy, on the other.⁶⁷ In general, pursuing a security related dimension in the EaP contributes to rebuilding a strong position in the Eastern Neighbourhood, making the union a relevant interlocutor for Russia. The possibility of Ukraine's participation in PeSCO enables cooperation in the area of CSDP.⁶⁸

Kyiv's Reform Agenda. With limited progress, the reform process in Ukraine should not draw the short straw in the wake of Russia's demonstrated posture of strength.⁶⁹ Implementing an information and communication campaign, the EU should support Kyiv in explaining EU oriented policy and work actively in the occupied parts of the Donbas in order to introduce a different narrative than the Russian one. A continuity in reforms will help to build a successful and democratic country, and eventually to (indirectly) address Russia's passport policy, too.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Brzozowski, A. (10 May .2021) [Portuguese defence minister: We should make better use of 'Coalitions of the Willing'](#), Euractiv.; RND ["Deutschland und andere Staaten für schnelle militärische Eingreiftruppe"](#)

⁶⁸ Interview conducted with Ambassador Tochytskyi, 27 April 2021 ; Interview conducted with H.E. Mr. Maasikas 18 April 2021.

⁶⁹ Interview conducted with Dr. Susan Stewart, 12. May 2021.

⁷⁰ Dickinson, P. (13 April 2021): [Russian passports: Putin's secret Weapon in the War against Ukraine](#), Atlantic Council.

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